

OBSCURED GENESIS: LATTER-DAY SAINT SUCCESS IN THE NINETEENTH-
CENTURY AMERICAN SOUTH

by

JONATHAN DAVID HEPWORTH

(Under the Direction of Stephen Berry)

ABSTRACT

Ask anyone who knows something about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the nineteenth-century American South, and you will get variations of the same response: the Saints (often derided as Mormons) faced violence in the region and were never able to make much headway. Most previous scholars have focused on this violence, or if not that, the missionaries themselves who preached in the region. These two entry points—missionaries and murders—have defined much of the scholarship on Saints in the South.

But what if we stop asking why the Saints faced such violence and start asking how, where, and when they succeeded in the nineteenth-century American South? When viewed from this vantage point, it appears that the Saints did best when white conservative southerners were distracted by other threats; that the best missionaries in the region were frequently southerners themselves; and that most violence directed against the Saints was more often to stop success they already had, not to battle some nebulous threat.

By exploring how Saints succeeded in the South, we can see a previously obscured genesis for the religion in the region. Using diaries, newspaper dispatches, congregational

minutes, and mission records, this dissertation argues that while the nineteenth-century American South was a place of opposition for the Latter-day Saints, it was a field of opportunity also.

INDEX WORDS: Latter-day Saints, American South, Southeastern United States, Southern Religion, Mormons, Religious Congregations, Upstate South Carolina, Wiregrass Georgia

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DEDICATION

For my lady, Amy Carruth Hepworth.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I had not planned on writing a dissertation on this subject when I first came to the University of Georgia, but this was in part because I felt I already knew it well enough and doubted anything more could be said. This year (2024) marks twenty years since I first started paying attention to the growth of Latter-day Saints in the South. At the time, I was serving as a missionary of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in what was then the Georgia Macon Mission. While serving in Albany, Georgia, I began looking in a church almanac at the growth of stakes in the South, trying to make sense of any patterns. But a key point came when I was next in Valdosta, Georgia. That summer I read B. H. Roberts's *Comprehensive History of the Church* and got a feel for violent anti-Mormonism in the South. But on 26 July 2004, I visited the genealogical room of the local library and picked up a copy of *Ward's History of Coffee County*, published in 1930. As I thumbed through the pages, I was surprised to see an entry for "Mormon Church," and upon reading it, dumbfounded at how positive it sounded. I knew next to nothing of the South in 1930 (unless you count seeing the movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*), but Warren P. Ward's strangely respectful presentation of the Saints seemed odd.

I didn't do more with the subject until returning to Salt Lake City from my mission a little less than a year later. I began researching here and there. Upon discovering that the Salt Lake City Public Library had a book about the Saints in the South during the nineteenth century, I jumped to check it out and quickly read William Whitridge Hatch's *There Is No Law*. I also began embarking on lengthy bus rides from my home institution, the University of Utah, to browse through old copies of the *LDS Church News* on file at Brigham Young University, taking

note of whenever I found an article about the South. Yet all this research was for personal interest, not with a particular academic end in mind. When I finished my BA by writing an Honors Thesis at the U. (as my alma mater is known locally), I wrote about the University of Utah itself during the turbulent years of its eighth president, James Chipman Fletcher. I soon discovered that I was closely related to two people in my thesis, including one I found out after the fact and who was still living (and who kindly was very positive about my writing). It soon struck me that I might be too closely related to too many Utahns; I figured I might want to start researching in an area that still interested me but had fewer of my ancestors and relatives.

I concluded that having served a mission in the South, perhaps southern history might be a good choice. While at the U., I did have the opportunity to take one course on the history of the South, but it was interrupted when the instructor, John Scott Reed, was called into active duty amid the surge of troops in Iraq. So, while I knew a small bit, I remained largely ignorant of the trends in historiography for the region. Intending to pursue a Master's, I applied to the University of Georgia the year I graduated and was rejected. Disappointed, I remembered that a friend of mine, Tara Helena Williams, had decided to go to Clemson University. Hearing that she loved the place, I looked up the graduate program, felt it was a good fit, and applied. Upon being accepted for Spring 2010, I set off for an institution I had never set foot in (the area was some distance from where I served in southern Georgia).

I arrived at the nearby city of Seneca, South Carolina, on the evening of 4 January 2010 after a lengthy drive from Utah. The next morning, just outside the hotel lobby, I looked over a map to orient myself to the area and figure out how to get to campus. As I scanned the streets of Seneca, I was taken aback when it appeared that Utah had followed me there—my eyes struck a

Mormon Church Road. I did not have time to think anything more of it, but I made a mental note to do some digging into the local history of the church as part of my ongoing hobby.

Of course, pursuing a graduate degree had a new set of stresses, so I occasionally relieved them by visiting any number of libraries, including the local library at Seneca. One evening in March, I found a volume on Oconee County and began looking at it. To my delight, it had a section on the Latter-day Saints in Seneca, but I about dropped the book when I saw who had been one of the missionaries to help organize the congregation: John W. Hepworth. I had somehow thought I was the first to bear my last name in the area, but I quickly realized that escaping relatives of mine was impossible. Although I'm not directly descended from this missionary, the discovery made me realize that you must take caution when thinking you have traveled to a strangely new place, for in the end you might discover that home can travel farther than you could have imagined.

I wrote my Master's Thesis on Coffee County, Georgia, and got to know and appreciate Warren P. Ward better, but had a number of possible subjects for a dissertation. I applied to the University of Georgia a second time and was turned down, but with my wife now a student there, I swallowed my pride and applied a third time. Thankfully I didn't strike out but was accepted. It has now been a decade since my first year as a PhD student. Some of the delay has been troubles of my own making—I'm not the fastest learner. Some were personal but out of my control, like a severe attack of myocarditis that took over a year to recover from. Some were global, like a worldwide shutdown of archives amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet through it all I've had colleagues, friends, and most importantly family to see me through. That I have been blessed with a decade's worth of help necessitates a decade's worth of acknowledgements.

First and foremost, I must thank John C. Inscoe, the dean of generous scholars. I first exchanged emails with him in 2008, but we first met at the Southern Historical Association meeting in Baltimore in 2011. He later visited Clemson that same year, and from that point forward I was almost an unofficial advisee of his—until I could make him my actual advisor when UGA admitted me my third time applying. He was always unfailing in helping me navigate many different issues but firm when it took that to move me forward. He helped me through two of my biggest crises at UGA, the first being the above-mentioned heart issue that nearly killed me. The second one, although not so life threatening, was also challenging. My initial efforts to make my first topic work had proved unsuccessful. Casting about for a topic, I landed on what had largely been my hobby, but when I informed him I was going to look at Latter-day Saints in the South, John was very supportive. As it turned out, another of his students, Mary Ella Engel, had covered the topic to some degree previously. John then joked his students did “Mountains and Mormons,” which although quite alliterative, doesn’t do justice for the breadth of scholarship produced by John and his students. But the most important thing I’ve learned from John Inscoe is that good scholarship and generosity can (and should) go together, and I’ve been a distinct beneficiary of that kindness. I regret that his health did not permit him to remain my advisor, but I hope he can be satisfied in knowing this would not exist without his support.

Stepping into the breach was Stephen Berry, who I also got to meet for the first time at an SHA Conference, this time at Mobile in 2012. I took a class with him my first semester at UGA and have ever since been impressed with his eye for the stark contrasts that characterize the southern past—both its sublimest beauties and deepest terrors. I knew I wanted to have him along for the ride, and much like John’s other students, Steve’s students have been among my closest colleagues here at UGA. He has had a task in and of itself; when John had to step away,

what I had were largely fragments with little organization and even less connection. Steve has worked with me to construct something from these fragments and has always let me know that he believed I could do it, for which I am most grateful.

My first semester at UGA was too busy to take Stephen Mihm's capitalism class, but he kindly let me sit in on it the next time he taught it once my regular coursework was done. He was also unfailingly patient when I was a teaching assistant and research assistant for him right after my heart issue and was not at maximum capacity. I'm grateful for his example of being a parent and a professor, and for his consideration for my particular and peculiar needs. He has helped me think more clearly about the past, but beyond that helped me through particularly difficult and challenging times. I'm grateful he took time from his insanely busy schedule to participate in this venture and for the many times he's helped me on this journey.

I got to attend Scott Nesbit's job talk here at the University of Georgia and I knew this institution would be lucky to have him. His class on Reconstruction was expertly done and has very much influenced how I teach and think about the era. His digital work is also very much an inspiration to me, and I've been grateful he has likewise stayed on this committee all this time. I'm grateful for his courage to tackle hard issues, but also for how well he utilizes the pedagogical toolkit—I've not forgotten the Wade-Davis bill since I had his class.

Orville Vernon Burton and I first met while I was at Clemson, and while my thesis committee was already in place he nevertheless took time to talk with me and get me involved in his research. It was an honor to work with him on the maps for his presidential address for SHA. Since then he has worked to get me into various other projects and places, but most importantly he has been a true example of a historically-informed citizen, ready and willing to bring

knowledge of the past to the issues of today. Since I've been back at Clemson, he has remained a steady colleague and friend, frequently helping out as best he can.

Other professors at Georgia have been no less impactful, even if they do not have a place on this committee. Michael Winship was a demanding professor to be a teaching assistant for, but I soon realized that this was because he wanted his students to learn well, and learning takes effort on the part of teacher and student. When I step into a classroom to teach, I am very much indebted to his example and thoughtful questions.

Brian Drake probably meets more undergraduates than anyone else, and I've probably spent more time in the classroom with him than any other professor. He is the epitome of a scholar who not only writes excellent research and thinks hard about the past but works to teach everyone else about it as well. I cannot count the many times I have been able to come into his office and chat about a particular subject or other and come away better for it. He has very kindly given me my first experiences in front of a college classroom, and I'm thankful for his help.

Claudio Saunt is an expert practitioner of the historical craft, and I have been grateful for his push to include the West a bit more in a university dominated by the East. More than that, he has taught me to think about writing for audiences beyond the academy and how to express ideas cleverly as well as cogently. The fact that I was able to pull off a better title than I might have otherwise is partly thanks to his influence.

Thomas Whigham has been an excellent inspiration in trying to think through cultures and pasts much different than our present. I was fortunate to study colonial Latin America under his guidance. He was also a friendly ear to listen during various other challenges, and he helped guide me through the wringers of my outside field during comprehensives and my sometimes poor efforts to translate from Spanish.

James C. Cobb might not realize it, but this dissertation would likely not have happened without his intervention. His honest critique of a paper I wrote while approaching my previous topic helped me realize it was a lost cause. Beyond this, I have learned a great deal from him on historical thinking and writing, as well as some of the ins and outs of southern history.

The graduate coordinators for the history department have saved me many times. Most recently, I have benefited from the help of Jennifer L. Palmer, who has been very helpful in making this final push to complete this dissertation. I was also aided (twice) by Benjamin Ehlers, both at the start of my time at Georgia and here in the closing days. I also thank him for going out of his way to get a photograph for a presentation I gave on Fort Mudge—quite another story there! Cassia Roth was also very helpful in making sure I didn't slip through the cracks, including when I moved into a job with the New Georgia Encyclopedia. She, aware of my dissertation, took an active interest, but more than that, she is a master of making the past relevant to the people she interacts with. Daniel Rood was helpful in keeping the graduate assistants moving during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was no small feat. Reinaldo Román was present to help me manage the fallout from any number of different crises, including my myocarditis. I especially thank him for his kindness and aid along the way.

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even if it frequently was that I only appreciated and understood what they taught after I had finished my courses with them. I have also appreciated and benefitted from the association and kindness of so many others among the history faculty of Georgia, including (but not limited to) Timothy Cleveland, Tracey Johnson, Kevin Jones, Joseph Kellner, Ari Levine, Nan McMurry, Timothy Yang, Diane Batts Morrow, and John Morrow.

None of this incredible scholarship would be produced without the day-to-day help of the many others that keep the University of Georgia History Department afloat and functioning. I would especially like to thank Laureen Kane, who for the last decade has kept me up with deadlines, forms, but more importantly, taken time to look at pictures of my kids and inquire about family life. We all depend on her help, and I'm grateful for it. Bobbi Snodgrass has helped me many times over with getting reimbursement from an assortment of research ventures, while Cilla Cartwright has been a kind listener and supporter of various projects. Sharon Cabe was also there to help me navigate many new things when starting the program. Throughout it all, Barbara Christopher has been there keeping LeConte clean and functional, and I'm grateful for her longtime interest and best wishes for me.

All through this doctoral odyssey have been several excellent colleagues that I have learned from and benefitted from. I can hardly imagine being at Georgia without Katherine Elizabeth Rohrer, who I had the opportunity to meet early on. We have shared many experiences and many difficulties, and I'm glad to call her a friend. I'm no less grateful to know her husband, Matt Smith, who shares with me the wonderful blessing of a bachelor's in history from the University of Utah. Andrew Fialka was with me throughout most of my early experience at Georgia and has been supportive all along the way. I'm blessed to know him and our colleague (and his wife) Katherine Brackett Fialka, better known to us as Katie. She was frequently a

source of encouragement and a solid example of hard work, and I'm likewise grateful for my association with her. Kate Dahlstrand was with me during some very challenging times; it was in conversation with her when I was casting about for a new topic that I first theorized this one. I'm thankful for her kindness and help. Besides Andrew, I also am grateful for my other colleagues that were part of my PhD cohort: Derrick Angermeier and Matthew Holloway. Derrick was often kind to give me a ride when we lived in the same apartment complex in Athens and generally helped me get my bearings at Georgia. Matthew generally spoke little, but the times I did hear him I always learned something, and still remember a bit of positive feedback he gave me.

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Throughout this long journey, I've had financial support from a number of different places and people, including Greg and Amanda Gregory (who generously have provided fellowships and travel funding), the UGA History Department, the Georgia Colonial Dames, and the UGA College of Engineering. I also have benefitted from work with the New Georgia Encyclopedia alongside Ed Hatfield, managing editor. I would also like to thank my many colleagues at Clemson University who have welcomed me there, including Rod Andrew, Andrew Baker, the late H. Roger Grant, Ryan Hilliard, Stephanie Hassell, Emily Hoge, Jim Jeffries, Douglas Seefeldt, Stephanie Barczewski, Amit Bein, and Caroline Dunn.

Libraries and archives collect, preserve, and share what survives from the past into the present. Over the years I have benefitted from the aid of many, some of whom I can name, many that I cannot, all of whom I'm grateful for. In the Manuscripts Division of Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, I particularly thank the curator Liz Rogers and archivist Betsey Welland. It has been fifteen years since I last worked alongside them, but it has always been a joy to return and catch up while pursuing new research. Also at the Marriott Library I thank Louise Poulton for her kindness and encouragement, as well as her successor in Rare Books, Alison Elbrader, who kindly forwarded me scans of her ancestor's Southern States Mission journal. Many others at the Marriott Library have helped over the years, especially during occasional summers where I've spent weeks at a time in Utah.

The most substantial archive that I utilized for this dissertation was the Church History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City. While I do not know all of the people there by name who have helped me as I do with the Marriott Library, I am no less thankful for their support and professionalism. Two people have stood out here, however, that I do want to thank personally—Jennifer E. Barkdull and Matthew J. Grow, both who have

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I've visited many other libraries and archives for this dissertation. While not all of the research I've done has gone directly into this document, the many hours have helped shape the questions I've asked. I particularly thank the staffs of the University of Georgia's Special Collections Russell Library, the University of South Carolina's Caroliniana Library, Special Collections at Utah State University, L. Tom Perry Special Collections of the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University, the staff of the maps and aerial photographs room of the National Archives at College Park, Maryland, the staff of Special Collections at Yale's Sterling Memorial Library, and a special thanks to the people at the Baker Library Special Collections at Harvard Business School, Boston. Among the Baker staff, I thank especially Melissa Murphy, who worked to answer many questions, haul many heavy volumes, and introduced me to the amazing ability of reading a microfilm from hundreds of miles away.

I have also benefitted from the insights of many scholars and researchers, including professors from all my stages of learning and people who I've interacted with for just a short time. W. Paul Reeve was my Utah history professor at the U. and an excellent scholar I've had the privilege of crossing paths with on a semi-regular basis. I also think highly of his advisor, the late Dean L. May, who took time one evening to talk with me over the phone and convince me to come to the University of Utah—a decision which has surely shaped my career since then. I have also had the pleasure of meeting two of the authorities in this particular field I venture out into, Mary Ella Engel and Patrick Q. Mason, both of whom I thank for moving the narrow field of Latter-day Saints in the South forward. There are many others, some professional scholars and others more amateur researchers, who have helped—I thank especially L. Ray Luce, who I first

met when I was undertaking my Master's at Clemson. Apparently I set him on a path of exploration when he did some research on the history of the Church in Georgia. When I held the position of historian for the Athens Georgia Stake, Ray and his wife Kay were the kind people to help coordinate the efforts among the stakes in this region. I have also benefitted from the research of Ethan Craigue and Joah Fussell, both of whom have explored the Saints in Coffee County, Georgia. As is the case with all of them, while I might disagree with certain aspects of interpretation of the sources, I am no less grateful for their efforts.

On a more personal note, I want to thank the many people who have helped my survive these several years of graduate school, sometimes quite literally. My cardiologist, Catherine Marti, helped me in the recovery from myocarditis. Blake Rackley was also helped me sort out a number of issues that had built up over the years of my long path to completion. A big thanks also goes to the doctors and nurses of the UGA Student Health Center, a group whose expert care I have received and been supported by.

Among the many times I have traveled for various research trips, there has often been someone kind enough to lend me a couch or even a bed. I thank especially Phillip and Kayla Estep, Elizabeth Christensen, John Turner, William and Tracy Smith, and Benjamin and Megan Christensen. I have been blessed with a very supportive family and want to thank especially Sharon and Robert Newbold, Claudia and Jim Gale, Deborah and Vance Mitchell, Michael and Caryn Newbold, and Christopher and Coral Johnson, all of whom have either provided support of time or other means to help me and my family on this lengthy journey.

In writing this dissertation, I have often thought about some of the southern Saints I've known over the years—especially those of my own generation. I am grateful for the kindness of Jessi Gray Fields and her husband Ron. I also think of Lacey Mizell Alexander and her husband

Graham, whose encouraging words have always been helpful. I especially thank Tara Helena Williams and her husband Oswaldo. I think very highly of them and their perseverance amid many challenges in life. Helena has very kindly reached out amid the difficult moments along the way, and I'm grateful for her friendship.

If it has been possible to pray a dissertation to completion, my fellow Saints of the Athens First Ward have certainly done all they could to make that happen. I'm grateful for the kind help of people like Jamie and Amanda Childers, David and Kim Bradley, Matthew Crunk, Greg Perschka, Lena and Scott Starr, Ivan Frazier, Theresa Ruiz, the late Betty and Len Wright, Stephanie Stander, Lowell and Ellen Stander, Rebecca Miller, and Betty Fink, among many others that cannot all be named.

Our not-too-distant friends Theresa Beverly Chafin and her husband Sam have often come over to help us with many different situations. Theresa was a student along with my wife at UGA's School of Music, and I share my birthdate with her. She is the true example of a scholar and friend who has been by our side in many different difficulties. I also thank our many kind neighbors here in Athens.

Frequently supportive has been my wife's family: LaJean Purcell Carruth, Brent Carruth, Nathan Carruth (with his wife, Fiyen), and Celeste Carruth (with her husband Sia Torkzaban). LaJean especially has provided a great deal of help and encouragement over these many years, being a historian herself and one who has literally rewritten the recorded history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a way that helps us better see the people who lived in another, highly distant time from us. I'm grateful for her help.

My father, Karl Chipman Hepworth, has also done a great deal. He often volunteered to look up things for me when I was thousands of miles away and frequently accompanied me to

the Church History Library. He has also been a frequent source of support and help. So has my mother and stepfather, Susan and John Stacey, both of whom have helped with numerous challenges and difficulties. I am blessed to have all of them.

I am likewise blessed to have eight children—Deborah, Esther, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua, Mary, Rachel, and Rebekah. All of them have had to endure a lot of trips and a lot of times when I've been dealing with something or other. They have days when I'm teaching them, but there are also the days when they teach me. They are the ones who truly have helped me keep going, all in the hope that all the effort this has required will one day bless their lives. I am very lucky to have all of them in my life and I could not imagine missing any of them.

My most profound thanks comes here at the last. My wife, my lady, Amy Carruth Hepworth, was not born a southerner but did grow up as one in Kentucky. She took a big chance on me when we started dating at the University of Utah, decided to get engaged to me while I was starting at Clemson, and has endured with me the experience of graduate school of some kind for fourteen years. In every way I am a better and stronger person because of her hard and often exhausting work. She has cared for me when I've been sick, comforted me in sadness, walked by my side where we've traveled, and prayed for me in every crisis. I hope that I can yet be worthy and even repay a fraction of all she has done and been these many years. While I have done the research and the writing for this dissertation, Amy has done the incredible lifting of helping to keep me and eight children alive during it. This has been no small feat, and given all the effort she has put into helping me finish, this achievement is just as much hers as it is mine. She already knows much of its content (having listened to me go on and on about parts of it at various points), and I have always benefitted from her insights. She was also the one who helped me brainstorm the current title, a much better one than my previous working title.

While it will be a privilege to be known by the title of Dr. Hepworth after this, being known as the husband of Amy Carruth Hepworth is the higher honor for me. Given that Amy loves threes, all I can say is:

¡Te quiero!

Je t'aime!

I love you!

At the end of this odyssey, I'm thankful to have my lady with me.

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN LATTER-DAY SAINTS SUCCEEDED IN THE SOUTH

In June 1983, a “Southern Miracle” arrived for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the southern United States—the dedication of the church’s first temple in the region. Located in unincorporated northern Fulton County, Georgia, the Atlanta Temple meant that for the first time in 152 years, no Latter-day Saint would need to leave the South to participate in all the church’s essential rites (called ordinances). For decades, anyone who desired to receive these temple ordinances had to travel to the western United States where most Latter-day Saints lived. This began changing in 1974 when a temple had been dedicated just across the Potomac in Maryland’s Washington suburbs. With the Atlanta Temple in 1983, members of the hundreds of congregations in the southern United States could participate in every ordinance within the region. As Gordon B. Hinckley, one of the three men of the church’s highest governing body, the First Presidency, put it, the Atlanta Temple “was the culmination of a dream that began a century and more ago.”¹

The culmination of this dream was made more significant considering its relatively short distance from one of the faith’s deepest nightmares in the region: the location where Latter-day Saint missionary Joseph Standing had been murdered in 1879. Thanks to the growing Interstate system of highways the site of Standing’s death was readily accessible from the new temple in

¹ The temple was termed a “Southern Miracle” by many, including by Vera Edna Browning Kimball, *The Southern Miracle* (Atlanta, GA: 1984). Latter-day Saint temples are places of religious rites and not weekly worship meetings. The Atlanta Temple was only the second twentieth century temple built east of the Mississippi River, see Deseret Morning News, *2005 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2004), 493. For Hinckley’s remarks, see Gordon B. Hinckley, “God Grant Us Faith,” *Ensign of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (November 1983), 51–52.

1983. Leaving the temple, a traveler would have only needed to hop on the Atlanta Perimeter of I-285, junction onto I-75 northbound, and after about 83 miles of interstate driving, get off at Exit 138 for Varnell, Georgia. Then, after navigating a tangle of backroads, any traveler so adventurous would have arrived at a small but peacefully tended park surrounding a stone monument—a small memorial the church had kept up since the land surrounding Standing’s murder site had been donated to the faith in the 1950s. Even with the 55-mph speed limit of the time, if Atlanta’s notorious traffic cooperated, the trip between the faith’s southern zenith and nadir could be made in about two hours.²

While the sites were relatively close in space, they were light-years apart in time for both the church and the South. Over a century had passed since Standing’s murder, and the last large mob murder of the church’s missionaries had been the “Tennessee Massacre” in 1884—slightly less than a century, but still worlds apart in terms of the South. The region had in the ninety-nine years since experienced Populist discontent, Jim Crow segregation, epidemic lynching, economic hardship, the transformation of the Second World War, and the intensely contested but ultimately hopeful promise of civil rights by the time the church had announced the temple. The church had likewise faced its own racial demons; African Americans had always been able to be members, but their place within the church had been limited for decades. From the 1850s to 1978, the church did not allow anyone of African descent to enter temples or be ordained to priesthood offices. But this policy was halted in June 1978, and five years later the first temple in the South opened with African Americans and whites able to enter on equal terms.³

² See Georgia 1982 Department of Transportation Official Highway and Transportation Map (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Transportation, 1982); the equivalent trip today would use Exit 341 due to Georgia’s renumbering of exit numbers to align with mile markers in 2000. Such a trip today (2024) is complicated by increased traffic around Atlanta and may well take three hours.

³ W. Paul Reeve has written extensively on the history of the priesthood and temple ban for members of African descent. For its nineteenth century origins, see his *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); for the process of ending the ban, see W. Paul Reeve, *Let’s*

The October following the Atlanta Temple’s dedication, Hinckley reflected on the substantial changes that had taken place for members of the church in the South. It had been “in the days of the poverty of our people” that missionaries had first traveled to the South. “A few” had listened to them, but “many more” had fought against and persecuted the missionaries—they were met with robbery, assault, and even murder. “But with faith they persevered. Eventually, thousands upon thousands joined the Church, and today the work is strong and growing in that beautiful part of the nation where we now have hundreds of faithful congregations of Latter-day Saints,” Hinckley concluded. The past had been one of persecution, but that was finally behind the Saints. They could now look forward to a bright future with a rapidly growing number of adherents in the American South.⁴

This hope for a bright future was based on then-current reality—the 1970s and early 1980s saw tremendous growth for the Latter-day Saints in the southern United States. With over 30,000 members in the region in 1930, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints claimed over 193,000 southern Saints fifty years later, with almost a third of that growth taking place within a decade. This rapid growth was reflected in the number and type of congregations that the Saints established in the region. Individual Latter-day Saint congregations are designated as either wards or branches. The Saints have a lay clergy, meaning that no local leader is paid and all assignments in the congregation (known as callings) are done by volunteers. A ward is a healthy, fully functioning congregation with local congregants fill all or most of the callings within it. A branch is a smaller and limited congregation, where sometimes members from outside its bounds fill various callings. Branches can be formed anywhere there is a handful of

Talk About Race and Priesthood (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2023). Dozens of histories have covered the transformation of the South; a good overview that captures the complexity and contradictions of the more recent South is James C. Cobb, *The South and America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴ Hinckley, “God Grant Us Faith,” 51–52.

baptized Latter-day Saints, but it takes more than just a significant number of Saints to form a ward. Wards can only be created within a stake—a supra-congregational unit that requires at least five ward-sized congregations in the vicinity to be established.⁵

The establishment of a stake marks a degree of permanence that a collection of branches does not; the term is taken from Isaiah 54:2 and imagines the church like a tent, strengthened by the stakes that help hold it up. Much like leadership of an American territory is given to local citizens rather than appointed officials when it becomes a state, stakehood meant that there were sufficient trusted local members to lead and manage the congregations within its boundaries. The creation of a stake therefore marked a major change from an area dependent upon headquarters for leadership to manage the day-to-day affairs toward local members providing that leadership. The first stakes in the South had been established in 1947 in Jacksonville, Florida, and Columbia, South Carolina. It then took until 1975—twenty-eight years—to reach forty stakes in the region. It then took just *eight* years—to October 1983—for the church to add another forty stakes in the South. Between the dedication of the temple and the expanding network of stakes, Latter-day Saints predicted great things to come.⁶

Among the many seeing tremendous future growth for the Saints in the South was one western leader assigned to supervise regional affairs for a time, Vaughn J. Featherstone. As part of a time capsule prepared for the Atlanta Temple’s dedication, Featherstone had written a letter to the southern Saints of the twenty-first century, predicting that this future group now enjoyed the presence of Jesus Christ on the earth once again. Stating that the Atlanta Temple was the first

⁵ For Latter-day Saint congregations, see “Church Administration,” in *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 34–37.

⁶ *Ibid.*; for the growth of stakes in the South (defined here as Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), see the state profiles for each in *Deseret Morning News, 2005 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2004).

one built in the South, he predicted that the region would by that point see temples in Birmingham, Charlotte, Columbia, Jackson, Nashville, and in Arkansas and Louisiana as well. Featherstone said that while there were in 1983 about 110,000 members in the area, that he could “see in my mind’s eye great hosts of converts to exceed a million members in the South.” Stating that traditional Catholic and Protestant Christians were being prepared to accept the Saints’ message, the missionaries would soon “be teaching large groups from early morning to late at night,” concluding that those of the future would be witness to the fulfillment of his words.⁷

Yet it wasn’t just Latter-day Saints making bold predictions for the faith. Noting the explosive growth of the church, demographer Rodney Stark stunned many in the academy when a little more than a year after the temple was dedicated, he published an article declaring that the Saints in the 1980s were “on the threshold of becoming the first major faith to appear on earth since the Prophet Mohammed rode out of the desert.” Using straight line projections, Stark predicted that if the Saints maintained a thirty percent increase per decade, they would number over 63 million by 2080; if they maintained a fifty percent increase per decade, they would reach 265 million members by the same year. While admitting that such projections were risky, Stark concluded that based on previous growth rates in the past, the Saints “must lose their conversion capacities very quickly if they are *not* to become a major world faith.”⁸

These predictions were the product of a particular moment—the euphoria of the Saints moving away from the margins of southern and national religious life to becoming recognized as a group and force to be reckoned with. But visibility for a minority religion can also bring fear

⁷ See Vaughn J. Featherstone Letter, dated 6 April 1983, MS 22631, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. Featherstone’s prediction of temple building (if not missionary work) had largely come to pass in the forty years since he wrote his letter. All places he predicted (minus Jackson, Mississippi) have had temples announced or built. Portions of the letter are also in Kimball, *The Southern Miracle*, 197.

⁸ See Rodney Stark, “The Rise of a New World Faith,” in *Review of Religious Research* 26 No. 1 (September 1984), 18–27, emphasis in original.

and opposition. The establishment of a Latter-day Saint temple in the heart of the Protestant Bible Belt goaded evangelical Christians into action. Just as the temple launched in 1983, so did a determined and systematic effort to warn southerners against a religion that many evangelicals believed to be an un-Christian cult. Central to this effort was a film called “The Godmakers,” a documentary-style show that mischaracterized major aspects of Latter-day Saint theology. Yet many evangelicals felt they had few options to blunt the assault by the Saints: “They’ve moving across the Southland. They’re knocking on doors, they’re penetrating,” vented Arthur Criscoe, an officer of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tennessee. This sustained counterattack slowly dragged down the explosive growth of the Saints in the region. Baptisms plateaued, and it took twenty-three years before another forty stakes were added after 1983. Organized opposition to the Latter-day Saints clearly had not been successfully relegated to the nineteenth century.⁹

Of course, no one at the time (or since) would confuse the vocal opposition of the twentieth century with the violence of the nineteenth. The Saints had been a peculiar people in the Bible Belt in both centuries, but violent opposition had apparently passed away with the nineteenth while the twentieth held promise. This was at least the general attitude of the church’s membership, and it was reinforced by scholarship that depicted the Saints and the South as entities at odds in the nineteenth century. The foundation for this scholarship was laid by a former missionary to the southern states, Brigham Henry Roberts. His six-volume *Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1930), while highly

⁹ The best account of this conflict is found in Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 176–208; for the quotation, see Kenneth L. Woodward and Barbara Burgower, “Bible-Belt Confrontation,” in *Newsweek*, 4 March 1985; Deseret Morning News, *2005 Church Almanac*, state profiles; Deseret News, *2010 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2009), state profiles; by my count, the church reached 120 stakes in the region with the creation of the Springdale Arkansas and Gastonia North Carolina stakes on the same day, 4 June 2006.

detailed and far less polemical than previous histories written by members of the faith, only devoted two chapters to events in the South: one covering Standing's murder and the other detailing the 1884 Tennessee Massacre, the gunning down of two missionaries and two members. Roberts saw the aftermath of the second event firsthand, traveling by disguise to where the missionaries had been killed before smuggling the men's corpses back to Utah.¹⁰

Although written over ninety years ago, Roberts's work has generally marked the spot where most subsequent studies of Latter-day Saints and the nineteenth century South have met: the alliterative combination of missionaries and murders. Southern historians have largely ignored Latter-day Saints in the region except when attacks against the group can highlight some aspect of the South's troubled history of violence. For their part, Latter-day Saint scholars (and historians of Mormonism more generally) have largely bypassed the South except for when the region can provide insights into missionary experiences, especially violent incidents. While historians have drawn out important insights from this small territory, the narrow focus on missionaries and murders has also made for sporadic progress on understanding the Latter-day Saints in the South. A monograph or article might wait years before being answered by another. The decade of the 2010s was exceptional in that two book-length studies involving anti-Mormon violence in the South appeared in the same decade: Patrick Q. Mason's *The Mormon Menace* (2011) and Mary Ella Engel's *Praying With One Eye Open* (2019). Both have keen insights while approaching the subject in opposite ways—but they are also rare sorties into a field that could be more expansive than yet another contribution to the same. Why have Latter-day Saint and southern historians not crossed paths in more places than this frequented intersection?¹¹

¹⁰ See Brigham Henry (B. H.) Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, 1930), see 5:558–567 and 6:83–102.

¹¹ See Patrick Q. Mason, *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Mary Ella Engel, *Praying With One Eye Open: Mormons and Murder in*

When it comes to the Latter-day Saints, the South as a region has been peripheral to the major developments of the faith. Not a single headquarters of the church was located south of thirty-nine degrees north latitude; the Saints' most southern center at Independence, Missouri, was still north of the southern tip of New Jersey. The church's most traveled historiographical routes cut through New England (home to much of the early leadership), the Northeast more generally (where the founding events took place), the Midwest (site of the early doctrinal developments), and lastly outward to the Intermountain West—the American epicenter of the Saints from 1847 onward. Latter-day Saint history has usually focused on places where church members have been in a majority, or a prominent minority. Recent scholarship has finally broken

Nineteenth-Century Appalachian Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019). The first major work to build on Roberts's exploration of violence against missionaries in the South was William Whitridge Hatch, *There Is No Law...: A History of Mormon Civil Relations in the Southern States, 1865–1905* (New York: Vantage Press, 1968). Since that point, several others have taken up the theme of violence: Gene A. Sessions, "Myth, Mormonism, and Murder in the South," in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 75 (Spring 1976), 212–225; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982; 25th Anniversary Edition, 2007), 452; Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 255–256; Ken Driggs, "'There is No Law in Georgia for Mormons': The Joseph Standing Murder Cases of 1879," in *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 73 No. 4 (Winter 1989), 745–772. Hatch later republished his original work in two slightly revised versions, see William Whitridge Hatch, *Mormons in the Southern States: A Century of Religious Bigotry, Murder, and Civil Mayhem, 1831–1923* (Huntsville, AR: W. W. Hatch, 2003), and a very close reprint, *When Push Came to Shove: Mormon Martyrs in an Unrelenting Bible Belt, 1831–1923* (Portland, OR: Inkwater Press, 2005). Focus on the missionary side has also been extensive: see LaMar C. Berrett, "History of the Southern States Mission, 1831–1861," (MS Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1960); Ted S. Anderson, "The Southern States Mission and the Administration of Ben E. Rich, 1898–1908, Including a Statistical Study of Church Growth in the Southeastern United States During the Twentieth Century (MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1976); David Buice, "Excerpts from the Diary of Teancum William Heward, Early Mormon Missionary to Georgia," in *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 64 No. 3 (Fall 1980), 317–325; David Buice, "Chattanooga's 'Southern Star': Mormon Window on the South, 1898–1900," in *Brigham Young University Studies* 28 No. 2 (Spring 1988), 5–15; David Buice, "'All Alone and None to Cheer Me': The Southern States Mission Diaries of J. Golden Kimball," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24 No. 1 (Spring 1991), 35–56; Heather M Seferovich, "History of the LDS Southern States Mission, 1875–1898 (MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1996); Reid L. Harper, "Backcountry Missionaries in the Post-Bellum South: Thomas Ephraim Harper's Experience," in *Journal of Mormon History* 34 No. 1 (Winter 2008), 204–232; and Heather M. Seferovich, "Hospitality and Hostility: Missionary Work in the American South, 1875–98," in *Go Ye Into All the World: The Growth and Development of Mormon Missionary Work*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Fred. E. Woods (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012), 317–340. By no means do all works fall into the missionaries and murders intersection, also see Daniel N. Rolph, "Kentucky and Mormonism: An Historical Overview," (MA Thesis, University of Kentucky, 1985); David Buice, "When the Saints Came Marching In: The Mormon Experience in Antebellum New Orleans, 1840–1855," in *Louisiana History* 23 No. 3 (Summer 1982), 221–237; and David Buice, "A Stench in the Nostrils of Honest Men: Southern Democrats and the Edmunds Act of 1882," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24 No. 1 (Spring 1991), 35–56.

free from the confines of these regions but has immediately skipped understudied parts of the United States to instead focus on the church's growing presence internationally. For the average Latter-day Saint, anything they know about the Church of Jesus Christ in the South is that southerners greeted missionaries with violence, at least until the time they didn't.¹²

On the southern side of the historiographical divide, the Latter-day Saints have not come anywhere near challenging the Protestant order of the South. Southern Saints did not share a peculiar cultural or racial background (like African Muslims in the antebellum era) that make them of ethnological interest, nor have the church's small numbers in the South come anywhere near other major religious minorities like Catholics or Jews, at least not until very recently. While their focused nature might provide insights into the interplay between region and religion, Latter-day Saints have generally not challenged the white southern order beyond the times when their practice of polygamy generated deadly opposition. The ability of the Saints to largely blend into the region and their otherwise peripheral nature has essentially meant that only violent clashes have been sufficient to draw the attention of southern historians.¹³

¹² For an example of this neglect, a search through the publications of Brigham Young University's Religious Studies Center turns up precious little about southern Latter-day Saints. This center has published the following volumes as part of their *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History* series: 1. California (1998), 2. Western Canada (2000), 3. New York-Pennsylvania (2002), 4. Europe (2003), 5. The New England States (2004), 6. Ohio and Upper Canada (2006), 7. The British Isles (2007), and 8. The Pacific Isles (2008). Not part of this series but also indicative of the southern states having low priority are (all published by RSC-BYU, Provo, Utah): *Mormon Thoroughfare: A History of the Church in Illinois, 1830–1839* (2006), *Salt Lake City: The Place Which God Prepared* (2011), and *Latter-day Saints in Washington, DC* (2021). This does not include the multitude of books by RSC-BYU that cover international locations like the Pacific Islands and European countries, see <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/rsc> (accessed 22 June 2024) and <https://rsc.byu.edu/books/all> (accessed 22 June 2024). The church's historic sites page lists places in New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, and California (in that order), the Joseph Standing monument in northern Georgia is not part of the listing, see <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/landing/historic-sites?lang=eng> (accessed 22 June 2024). That the average understanding among Latter-day Saints that the South was violently opposed to the faith until at some point it wasn't can be inferred from Hinckley, "God Grant Us Faith," but was also brought home to me when I visited the Columbia, South Carolina Latter-day Saint Institute of Religion in March 2017. A friend of mine introduced me to the director, and upon hearing that I was researching Latter-day Saints in the South, the director said, "Yes, I'm sure you know that there was a lot of violence against the Saints."

¹³ See WPA Writers' Program Georgia, *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1940), for a particular kind of ethnic religious study. There is one exception to this rule, however; the Catawba Nation in South Carolina largely embraced the Church of Jesus Christ

Unfortunately, a historiographical diet of missionaries and murders is unhealthy for our understanding of the religious and regional past. By focusing largely on the missionary efforts in the South, Latter-day Saint scholars have generally spent more time talking about the elders from Zion (a colloquial term for the church's hearth territories) than the people who received their message and braved the disruption to their lives by embracing the Saints. While some scholars have gone farther than others to understand the southern context, it would be fair to say that most Mormon historians pay little attention to southern historiography (and vice versa). One effort that seeks to utilize southern scholarship deploys the framework of hospitality and hostility to understand southern responses to the missionaries. The author argues that both reactions were linked by the concept of honor. Southern honor could demand opposition to the missionaries in some instances but dictate hospitality in others. While this is a helpful framework to consider, it also produces a two-dimensional and static South. Southern honor (whatever that was) becomes overwhelming to all other considerations, and a concept largely developed to explain antebellum behavior is stretched to explain the entire nineteenth century—or even the present (the author notes that “many of these same characteristics are prevalent in the South well into the twenty-first century”).¹⁴

of Latter-day Saints, see Daniel Liestman, ““We Have Found What We Have Been Looking For!”: The Creation of the Mormon Religious Enclave among the Catawba, 1883–1920,” in *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 103 No. 3 (July 2002), 226–246. Arthur Remillard tackles the experiences of minority religions like Catholics and Jews in the Wiregrass South in his *Southern Civil Religions: Imagining the Good Society in the Post-Reconstruction Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), but Latter-day Saints were not prominent enough to figure into Remillard's analysis even though they had some of their best successes in the very region covered by *Southern Civil Religions*. The lack of influence by Saints on broader southern culture may explain their absence from Samuel S. Hill, ed., *Religion: Volume 1, the New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006, although they do make an appearance in Samuel S. Hill and Charles H. Lippy with Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South* 2nd ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), and have entries in some published and online state encyclopedias (including Georgia, Kentucky, and South Carolina).

¹⁴ For an insightful discussion of the problems of focusing only on missionaries while ignoring the people they preached to, see Ardis E. Parshall, “What's Wrong with Mormon History? I'll Tell You What's Wrong...” in keepapitchinin.org, 27 March 2009; for the expanded use of southern honor and suggestion that it still influences the South today, see Seferovich, “Hospitality and Hostility,” 230–232, and 245–246 (quote from note 5).

Few historians since the days of C. Vann Woodward have argued for an unchanging, essentialist South. Of course, southern historians are familiar and friendly with continuity—that some things hardly seem to change from year to year, decade to decade, century to century (although this could well be a function of things changing enough to appear unchanging). And sometimes, within the region, it truly seems that William Faulkner’s pithy saying—the past is never dead, indeed it is not even past—holds water for the historical traveler sweating through one of the region’s hot and humid afternoons. But there is a certain flippancy in an approach that imagines every southern town to be essentially interchangeable with every other southern town, that no state has a peculiar history and context, or that southern culture is a static, unchanging thing. The laser-like focus on missionaries turns a vast region of the United States into mere stage scenery where the actual drama of the missionaries plays out. Southern historians would rightly reject an approach that trivializes the lived experiences of millions across the varied expanse of the Southland.¹⁵

If focus on missionaries by Latter-day Saint scholars creates a flattened South, then focus on violence—or murders—by southern historians makes southern Saints strangers in their own land. In emphasizing violence against the Saints in the South, we tend to picture two opposing groups—western Latter-day Saint missionaries and white southern Protestants. And it is true that these two sides, frequently opposed, clashed with violent heat. Yet some observers have been so completely blinded by the bright flashes of these clashes that they see nothing else; one author subtitled a book detailing these confrontations, “Mormon Martyrs in an Unrelenting Bible Belt.”

¹⁵ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), sought to argue for discontinuity in the southern experience, an explicit challenge to Wilbur Jack Cash’s *The Mind of the South* (1941), which argued for a rather essentialist South. Debate over continuity versus change has long pockmarked the battlefield of southern historiography, although it should more be viewed as a continuum, or as James C. Cobb argues about southern identity, “continuity *within* [change],” see *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

Other historians have taken a more systematic approach to the subject, figuratively putting on welder’s glass to explore these confrontations, tracing the structures found within the sparks. Yet dark glasses also can dull our vision to anything adjacent to these collisions, no matter how important or noteworthy these adjacent items might be.¹⁶

Southern and Latter-day Saint are not—and were not—mutually exclusive identities. Thousands of people in the nineteenth century and later held both identities and imagining that the two sides were always in confrontation essentially erases those who existed in both camps from consideration in history. While most of the missionaries who preached in the South were westerners, a significant number (even if a minority) had been born in the South. Additionally, focusing just on birthplace of missionaries keeps us from considering that some missionaries had southern-born parents or relatives living in the region. When historians only focus on opposition and the reasons behind it, we miss out on points where people agreed or neglect to ask why some southerners felt an unpopular religion was the right choice for them to embrace. The sole focus on missionaries and murders obscures the genesis of the Saints in the South, preventing us from asking why some parts and people in the region were more receptive to the religion than others.¹⁷

This narrow focus has not kept previous researchers from trying to understand how the Latter-day Saints succeeded in individual southern communities. Several studies—some

¹⁶ See Hatch, *When Push Came to Shove*, for the idea that the Bible Belt was unrelenting against the Saints. Southern Latter-day Saints do appear in the more recent books by Mason and Engel, but the amount of attention paid to them varies considerably and has to do with their overall arguments. For Mason, understanding the rationale of anti-Mormonism in the South is key; he therefore highlights the opposition between white southern Protestants and the Latter-day Saint missionaries (primarily westerners) in the region. While converts make an occasional appearance, they are peripheral to Mason’s argument. For Engel, “mob violence against Standing was a *local* event, best understood at the *local* level,” see *Praying With One Eye Open*, 3, emphasis in original. With this emphasis on the locale, Engel spends much more time analyzing the converts to understand their place within the community and why missionary success was so threatening, even devoting an appendix to biographies of converts, see 155–180.

¹⁷ Here again, I will hold up Mary Ella Engel as a major exception to this rule, although her book is nevertheless very much about violence against missionaries in the South (and even uses the term “murder” in the title, hence aiding my case that previous scholars have largely focused on missionaries and murder).

scholarly, some amateur, all devoted—shed light on the particulars of how individuals embraced the Latter-day Saints or how a congregation survived despite tremendous opposition. As rich as many of these stories are in recounting what happened, few explore the broader context to ask whether what they describe is exceptional to that place, or common among many congregations of the same era. Most have not been in conversation with others to compare notes between places. Trying to navigate between the local and the regional is a challenge for any historian, but a comparison might yield increased understanding of why things unfolded as they did than just one story of one congregation.¹⁸

That the Latter-day Saints had succeeded in the South as a region by 1983 is clear—eighty stakes and a temple would be considered a flourishing area of the church in any part of the world today. But why did the Saints eventually succeed in the American South by that year? A group that was once beaten, robbed, and murdered, but that “with faith...persevered” and eventually brought “thousands upon thousands” into their faith makes for a good story, but it lacks explanatory power. No matter how much talent and how much faith any given missionary had, they could not impel any one person to accept the Latter-day message—especially when such acceptance often came at an extraordinarily high cost in terms of family estrangement and

¹⁸ There are several local (and occasionally state) histories by scholars and amateurs that I have either relied on for specifics or found useful for comparison. Among this group are Wallace R. Draughon, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in North Carolina: With a Detailed Record of the Church in Durham* (Durham, NC: Durham Ward, 1974); Kimball, *The Southern Miracle*; Randall J. Bunn, “The Building of the Northcutts Cove Chapel and the Growth of Mormonism in Grundy County, Tennessee, 1896–1916,” unpublished paper written in 1987, Call Number M277.68 B942 1987, Church History Library, see <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/30d538c5-8197-4f7d-a9fecb1a5552dab5/0?view=summary&lang=eng> (accessed: June 29, 2024); Columbia South Carolina Stake, *Columbia South Carolina Stake Fortieth Anniversary, October 19, 1947 to 1987* (Columbia, SC: privately published, 1987); Joel G. Hancock, *Strengthened by the Storm: The Coming of the Mormons to Harkers Island, N.C. 1897–1909* (Morehead City, NC: Campbell and Campbell, 1988); LaVie Moore-Fraser Smallwood, *Salt of the South: The LDS Trail Blazers* ([Jacksonville, FL]: Drummond Press, 1997); Bruce Crow, *Amateur Mormon Historian* (blog); R. Ethan Craigie, Satilla River Saints Project, satillariversaints.org. One local account that is better contextualized is (again) Mary Ella Engel, “‘Full of Danger to the Community’: Driving the Mormons from Brasstown in Late Nineteenth-Century North Carolina,” in Steven E. Nash and Bruce E. Stewart, eds., *Southern Communities: Identity, Conflict, and Memory in the American South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 161–173.

social ostracism. These challenges didn't disappear before the 1980s, and the evangelical counterattack after 1983 again heightened them for any southerner joining the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Yet many southerners still joined the church in the 1980s, even if the rate decreased in consequence of increased opposition by Protestant sects.¹⁹

The church's explosive growth in the South in the early 1980s is a cautionary tale—while the Saints celebrated their increase, opposition nevertheless came and blunted its rapidity. Opportunity and opposition had both been present, two sides of the same coin. Yet bifurcating the South into a nineteenth century of opposition and a twentieth century of opportunity (as most scholars have done with their missionaries and murders approach) has kept us from seeing that just as there was opposition in an era of opportunity in the twentieth century, there might well have been opportunity amid the intense opposition of the nineteenth century.

Historical statistics for the Latter-day Saints in the South lend support for this hypothesis—the South was a fruitful field for the church even before the explosive growth in the 1980s, although this must be seen in relative (not absolute) terms. A 2012 atlas of Latter-day Saint history ran the numbers for church membership across the United States in 1930 and found a result so surprising that distinguished Mormon historian Richard Lyman Bushman drew attention to it: “Some readers may be surprised to learn that the Church was strongest in the early twentieth-century eastern United States in the South, the heartland of the evangelical faiths that have been most critical of the Church.” If the fact that in 1930 there were about twice as many Saints in the South as in the North wasn't surprising enough, Bushman continued, “The

¹⁹ With the last Church Almanac being published in 2009, it is harder to say how many stakes are in nations today, but for comparison, Argentina had 70 stakes and 1 temple in October 2009, see *Deseret News*, *2010 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2009), 420–423. That same year there were 121 stakes in the twelve states I'm discussing, although a third were in two states, Florida and Virginia, see *ibid.*, 184–185; Hinckley, “God Grant Us Faith,” 51–52.

Southeast also stood out for the high percentage of homegrown Latter-day Saints, as contrasted to Utah-born members, who comprised the membership.” Essentially, northern congregations had several Utah transplants, but the large congregations in the South were primarily native-born southerners, dramatically showing the greater success of the religion in the region.²⁰

This relative success could also be seen in the nineteenth century. From available figures, the number of Saints in the southern states in 1890 was about 1,200. By the end of 1895, the Saints had more than doubled to about 2,800. By the end of 1900, the number of Saints in the region had about *quadrupled* to over 11,400, all in the space of five years. Yet this rapid increase could easily be dismissed given that eleven thousand Saints in the region dims when compared with a total southern population of over *nineteen million* the same year—conservatively, only one out of every two thousand southerners. And eleven thousand southern Saints still pales compared to the total 283,765 church members of 1900, although one of every twenty-eight Saints is a better showing than the vanishingly small proportion among southerners. Yet southern states nevertheless proved more receptive to the Saints than corresponding northern states east of the Rockies. The southern state of West Virginia, for example, in 1898–1899 comprised over one-third to almost half of the church membership in the twelve-state Eastern States Mission, which included New England and the Middle Atlantic states. Meanwhile, a northern state, Ohio, in 1900 had less than half of the membership found in any given southern state. Focusing on opposition to the Saints in the South prevents us from questioning why there were also better opportunities there.²¹

²⁰ See “Foreword by Richard Lyman Bushman,” for the quote, G. Wesley and Marina Ashby Johnson, “The Mormon Outmigration, 1919–1970,” and Richard E. Bennett, “Eastern United States and Canada, 1875–present,” in Brandon Plewe, ed., *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2012), 6, 144, 210–213.

²¹ See Appendix A for regional numbers; Table 1: Population of the United States by States and Territories, 1900, in *1900 Census: Volume I, Population, Part I* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), xviii; West Virginia compared with other Eastern States Mission states is found in Statistical Report for the Year Ending

When it comes to the nineteenth century, perhaps it is time to not just ask why there was violent opposition to the Saints in the South, but to ask instead why they had *success* in the region. Of course, personal religious conversion is a private decision and frequently opaque to those of us observing in the present. Additionally, few convert southerners left contemporary accounts of why they were attracted to the Latter-day Saints, making answering the question of why the Saints succeeded frustratingly difficult from the surviving historical record. The people who wrote the most were the missionaries themselves, which accounts for why so many previous historians have made them an essential part of the missionaries and murders duo. While the documentary record I use is not remarkably different from that used by previous scholars, the questions I ask center different priorities. While we might not be able to directly answer why the Saints succeeded, by asking when, where, and how the Saints succeeded in the region instead, we can find clues to answer why the Saints found an opening in the region. Other scholars in Mormon history have argued that a focus on the “demand side” of the religion rather than the “supply side” is long overdue. Despite the gaps in the historical record, by focusing on questions that foreground southerners who accepted the Saints, we can break out of the traditional intersection that has dominated previous studies of the religion in the South.²²

Dec. 31, 1898 and Dec. 31, 1899, Manuscript History of the Eastern States Mission, LR 2475 2, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Ohio and most other southern states come from Statistical Report of the Southern States Mission for the year ending 1900 Dec. 31st, Manuscript History of the Southern States Mission, LR 8557 2, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

²² The terms are used in an enlightening essay by Shinji Takagi, “Monks, Nationalists, and the Emperor: The Mormon Struggle in Japan, 1901–1924,” in Patrick Q. Mason, ed., *Directions for Mormon Studies in the Twenty-First Century* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 49–71. In assessing the miniscule success of the church’s Japanese mission, Takagi argues that to answer why the mission did so poorly, we must “understand the religious, intellectual, and sociopolitical climate of Japan” at the time. “By approaching the experience of the Japan Mission from the ‘demand’ side, so to speak, this study departs from the existing literature on missiology...where focus has too often been placed on the American missionaries and their message. While such ‘supply-side’ analysis is useful, it is only half the story...”, 50. While Takagi’s focus is on foreign missions clashing with western American norms, the same questions can also apply within the United States—especially the South.

Asking new questions of the past is just the beginning. How do we make sense of the answers we get? People trying to navigate a new place will refer to a map of some kind. Every map is to some degree a distortion of the Earth's curved surface, but a good map will keep distortions in shapes and sizes to a minimum while aiding navigation between places. A map projection that works well for one part of the globe might be terribly inappropriate for another, so cartographers will utilize a projection that works best for the part of the world being depicted. In like manner, historians distort the past by crafting order from a chaotic existence by stringing related events together and charting a course through time. The historical lenses they use work best when crafted to bring focus to a particular set of developments over a particular time. But no one lens is perfect for all times and all subjects, for lenses can distort as well as clarify. Multiple ways of looking into the past can minimize the unavoidable distortions of focusing and ordering disparate events that could only be said to be connected in hindsight.

Over the following five chapters, I utilize five different historical lenses to look at the obscured genesis of the Latter-day Saints in the South. Each lens focuses on what kind of developments in the South and in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints affected the relationship between the two and helped the Saints succeed in the region. The reason for the many different lenses is because the Saints and the South were not static groups. In the 1890s especially, Latter-day Saints and southerners experienced rapid change. Accordingly, the 1890s fall into three different chapters to try and make sense of these rapidly moving targets. In crafting these lenses I've had ample help from one of the most cited but least followed studies of the early Latter-day Saints in the American South—a revised paper first presented by Leonard J. Arrington at a meeting of the American Historical Association in Atlanta in 1975.²³

²³ Leonard J. Arrington, "Mormon Beginnings in the American South," *Task Papers in LDS History* (Salt Lake City: Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976).

Arrington's "Mormon Beginnings in the American South" is a scant seventeen pages but conveys a lot of possible directions to explore the genesis of the Saints in the region. Missionaries and murders are present, but so are many other possible avenues to explore. Arrington's main focus is the role that southerners played in building up the Intermountain West, drawing special attention to southern converts that entered the Salt Lake Valley in July 1847: "Since their story complicates the narrative of the first Mormon pioneers of 1847, these 220 Mississippi Saints and some 40 black servants have unfortunately been left in the backwash of Mormon history." Arrington, the son of southern converts and who received a graduate degree from a southern institution (the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), left many insights that have waited for nearly fifty years to receive additional attention. I have followed up and confirmed some of his conclusions (including his depiction of the 1890s as the decade when the religion "took on an appearance of permanency in the South") and challenged others ("Never have natives of the South comprised more than 2 percent of the membership of the Mormon Church," the figures above suggest a healthier 3.5 percent in 1900). I find it notable that it was a scholar who had ancestry and a former residence *in* the region that has offered the best alternative to the approach first utilized by Roberts, a missionary *to* the southern United States. While following Arrington in some aspects, I have traveled different ground in others, trying to fine-tune the lenses I've employed.²⁴

The first chapter, and the first lens, focuses on developments in transportation—what did it take to move a religion through space? Just as Roman roads affected the spread of early Christianity, infrastructure in the United States influenced the growth of the Latter-day Saints—but few historians have asked how. Many scholars have attributed the lack of substantial early

²⁴ *Ibid.*, see 7, 12, and 14 for the quotes (all in the order presented); see Gregory A. Prince, *Leonard Arrington and the Writing of Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 3–40, 49–55.

success in the South to cultural differences, but I argue that the demands of moving a religion through space also played a major role. Developments in early American infrastructure generally unfolded along an east-west axis, and northern states generally linked their improvements into a regional network. Southern states, for their part, jealously guarded against competition from other states, especially in the Atlantic South. The consequence of transportation on early missionary work was that few northern missionaries worked deep in the region. Most southerners were converted as expatriates living in the Midwest during the church's first thirty years; those who were converted *in* the South either lived close to a major path through the region or were usually sought out by *southerners* converted by the first two methods. Focusing on transportation highlights how Saints succeeded in the South for their first thirty years.

The looming sectional conflict disrupted this first paradigm. While there were Latter-day Saints in the South during the Civil War itself, records to tell their stories are absent. But in 1867, the church began to send missionaries back into the region and a documentary trail picks up again. To understand this postwar era, I utilize the lens of Reconstruction, both specific and general. Specifically, the political, economic, and social campaign of Reconstruction in the South gave the returning missionaries cover to work in the region. So long as Republicans, black and white, threatened the white conservative order, the natural opponents of the Saints were distracted by fighting immediate political battles first and foremost. In the meantime, the first missionaries to return were generally southerners who had come to convert friends and relatives and bring them to the West. Yet the Saints were soon forced to undergo a reconstruction of their own at home. Increasing federal pressure on the Saints to give up the practice of polygamy, as well as the coming of the railroad to Utah, pushed the Saints into a defensive posture. New ways of organizing congregations and engaging in missionary work came about in response to a new

and complicated situation. With federal Reconstruction in the South collapsing, the nation arrayed against the Saints, and a newly-organized Southern States Mission sending far more non-southern missionaries to the region, this era of Reconstruction (and re-construction) ended when a mob shot Joseph Standing dead.

The third lens looks at the era that most scholars have explored extensively—the years of extensive and frequently violent opposition against the Saints in the South. Even in this dismal period, the Saints still gained over 3,000 converts in the region, but the organized opposition forced them to look in rural districts of the South. Some previous scholars have questioned why missionaries kept to the countryside in this era, especially given that much of the violence leveled against them took place in the countryside. Using the lens of separation, I argue that the primarily rural focus of the missionaries in the 1880s was because towns and cities in the region were prejudiced against the Saints in consequence of their stronger connection to telegraph and railroad networks that propagated anti-Mormon literature. The separation of urban tastes and lifestyles from rural areas in the South has been documented before, but here I argue that a split in religious opinion developed as well. People in the countryside were less apt to consume large amounts of anti-polygamy literature and were therefore more willing to entertain Latter-day Saint missionaries. But a focus in the countryside was still dangerous—when the Saints had enough success to seemingly threaten the local social order, white conservatives often fought back with violence, frequently blunting the Saints’ advance. Additionally, rural membership was often so scattered that the removal of a stalwart family through emigration to the West, a poor harvest, or loss of employment by an anti-Mormon employer could undercut any congregation in the region.

The Panic of 1893 began to end the Saints' long exile in the rural South, hence the lens I use in this chapter is that of Depression (in the economic sense). The flailing economy pushed many southerners into radical political action—not since Reconstruction was the prevailing society crafted by conservative whites questioned so widely. Meanwhile, the church, also on the ropes financially, took the opportunity to send hundreds of missionaries to the South, literally relying on southern hospitality to feed the missionary force while they preached. With the Populist revolt shattering white unity, anti-Mormon conservatives proved unable to focus on the flood of missionaries into the region, instead placing priority on fighting the region's political battles. During this era of turmoil, the Saints established dozens of congregations and expanded into states they had initially skipped or withdrawn from. Some of the branches established during this era of opportunity would even last into the twenty-first century.

The fifth and final lens is that of disruption. The opportunity posed by the depression did not last; the Populists were defeated, white supremacy enthroned, and African Americans had their rights further curtailed. With the political battles settling, white conservative southerners struck back against the Saints. When polygamy made a comeback in the national conversation due to Utahns sent to Congress, violence again stalked missionaries and members in the southern states. Yet localized political disruption could open other communities to the Saints at the same time they were being attacked across the region. The Saints were also undergoing an assimilation into national norms; this process involved the Saints divesting themselves of polygamy and embracing the racism of the time. By the end of this era, the church had largely positioned itself to look not unlike an average Protestant sect in the region—the Saints still held viewpoints that many white southern Christians could not tolerate, but their outward behavior was nothing like what had prompted the fear and hatred of prior years. Yet the consequences of this assimilation

to national (and to a lesser extent regional) norms would become more burdensome as the twentieth century progressed.

Going back to North Georgia in 1983, it is true that the Atlanta Temple on one side and Standing's monument on the other side marked significant moments for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the South. Yet the two were not bookends, as many people supposed—the one near Varnell marking a century of persecution and poverty with the other near Atlanta marking a new century of progress and prosperity. Instead, both sites marked the close of an era of rapid growth and the start of a new era of opposition, even if the latter site was categorically better than another. The contrast between the two has most often obscured our understanding of the genesis the Saints had in the South. But the two sites also represented something else—that even amid a new era of opposition, an ever-changing world and society might yet offer up new opportunities for when the Saints would again succeed in the South.

* * *

A few words here on terminology. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the institution I focus on in this work. It is the largest subset of the broader Mormon movement, which could include any group that claims divine origins for the Book of Mormon, a scripture that posits a visit by a resurrected Jesus Christ to the ancient Americas. The church has alternatively embraced and rejected the term “Mormon” as an adjective for its membership, preferring instead the phrase “Latter-day Saints,” which I generally employ here. When I refer to the church, I either use the full name, the Church of Jesus Christ, or simply “the church” when there is contextually no other church being mentioned. When employing an adjective for this group, I will usually use “Latter-day Saint,” like “Latter-day Saint doctrine,” but I sometimes shorten it to “Latter-day doctrine,” but only when it carries a capital L. I also often shorten

Latter-day Saints simply to Saints. When it comes to those preaching the church’s message, I usually say “missionaries,” but I will occasionally use the word “elders” for variation.

When it comes to opponents of the church, however, I generally use the term “anti-Mormon,” for this is how opponents of the church would have described themselves. Those who opposed the Latter-day Saints felt they were un-Christian and un-saint-like. “Mormon” was a convenient shorthand for everything these opponents despised, including unique practices like additional scripture (including the Book of Mormon), plural marriage (specifically polygyny, more often called polygamy in the nineteenth century), and a communitarian social structure.

When it comes to the South, southern, or southerner, I am referring in this case to twelve southeastern states and the people born, raised, or otherwise living in them: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. While the South is a distinctive region, its outer boundaries are indefinite. Texas could rightly be called a southern state, sharing the experience of the Confederacy (while Kentucky and West Virginia did not). Missouri, for its part, was a slave state before the Civil War, as were Maryland and Delaware, while the latter two are designated by the Census as southern and Missouri is labeled Midwestern. The Census also places Oklahoma into the camp of southern states. Arguments can be made for an expanded South or a relatively small, core South. My twelve-state definition is largely influenced by the experience of Latter-day Saints in the region, not whether a state is or is not culturally southern.²⁵

²⁵ Different scholars have come to different conclusions about where the South begins and ends. One that has especially engaged with the complexity of this question is John Shelton Reed, see his “The South: What Is It? *Where is It?*” in *My Tears Spoiled My Aim—and Other Reflections on Southern Culture* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1994), 5–28; and Reed with James M. Kohls and Carol Hanchette, “The Incredible Shrinking South,” in John Shelton Reed, *Surveying the South: Studies in Regional Sociology* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 51–65.

My omission of Texas from the South will probably rankle some, but the fact is that the experience of Latter-day Saints in Texas has diverged significantly from other southern states that it makes sense to exclude the Lone Star State from this analysis. I do offer my sincere apologies to my Texas friends and relatives.²⁶

I also do not use Latter-day Saint mission boundaries to define the South, which previous Latter-day Saint scholars have done. This is because the needs of administering an institution do not necessarily equate with lived experience on the ground. In 1900, for instance, Arkansas and Louisiana were part of the Central States Mission, and while these states could be said to share similarities with Missouri and Oklahoma, other states like Kansas make little sense for comparison. Additionally, West Virginia that year was part of the Eastern States Mission and remained a bizarre outlier with the other New England and Middle Atlantic states. The rate of baptisms and pace of missionary work was more like the states of the Southern States Mission, which included the remaining nine I analyze—but also covered Ohio. Yet the Saints’ work in Ohio was also an outlier from the rest of the Southern States Mission, hence I have decided to focus on a relatively consistent South comprised of twelve states, rather than the shifting boundaries of Latter-day Saint missions.

I include developments of the first decade of the twentieth century in my analysis. Historians have long recognized the possibility of a “long nineteenth century” that stretches beyond an even hundred years since processes often don’t end in years ending in double zeroes.²⁷

²⁶ One instance of this difference is the presence of other Mormon splinter groups in the Lone Star State, see Melvin C. Johnson, *Polygamy on the Pedernales: Lyman Wight’s Mormon Villages in Antebellum Texas, 1845 to 1858* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2006).

²⁷ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 45–67.

CHAPTER ONE

TRANSPORTATION: MOVING A RELIGION THROUGH SPACE

The July sun beat down upon the 148 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that had ventured across the Great Plains and now faced the jagged slopes of the Rocky Mountains. This 1847 vanguard group was comprised almost entirely of men (although three women and two children accompanied them) and constituted what the Saints called the “pioneer” company. While later generations would use this term to include all who traveled by foot to the mountain West, in the early nineteenth century, “pioneer” first and foremost referenced those “whose business is to march with or before an army, to repair the road or clear it of obstructions.” In this instance, the first group of Latter-day Saints to make their way into the Valley of the Great Salt Lake were indeed pioneers in the sense of building or clearing a road for those to come after. Yet even within this select group were some who were more skilled at road building than others, including one who received the term as an appellation he would always be known by: “Pioneer” John Brown.¹

Brown traveled extensively and had an eye for terrain and how to move through it; his daily notes, later compiled and published as his autobiography, frequently made mention of the road conditions the wagons of the pioneer company encountered. Once this group of Latter-day exiles had crossed into the northernmost Mexican territory of Alta California, Brown noted on 13 July 1847 that making a road for the wagons had become “very rough.” With the steepest climb

¹ For the members of this pioneer company, see *Deseret News, 1997–98 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1996), 123–159; for an 1828 definition of pioneer that puts the road building definition first, see “pioneer” in Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, Volume II (New York, 1828), online at <https://archive.org/details/americandictionary02websrich/mode/2up>.

still ahead of the company, Brown went with fellow “pilot” Orson Pratt and others to explore the terrain ahead. They soon discovered that they were not the first to have taken a southerly route through the mountains (later called the Wasatch Range) into the valley beyond; a faint trail had been left by a company the year previous, although following it through the thick brush proved difficult. Once this faint trail diverged from a creek and climbed upward, Brown and Pratt decided to climb the adjacent peak they called Big Mountain. From here on 19 July 1847, they looked westward and saw what appeared to be a lake at the edge of a valley beyond. Planning to settle in the area around the Great Salt Lake, Brown and the others took the news back to camp—their home was in sight. The Saints’ leader, Brigham Young, was delayed by illness but sent word to enter the valley and test its soil.²

Accordingly, Brown and several others entered the valley for the first time on 22 July 1847. “We found it covered with rich vegetation in the vicinity of the streams, and the low-lands were green and beautiful,” he reported. Near the foothills drier grasses prevailed, but the mountain streams wove threads of green through them. Having looked around the valley, the next day they followed Young’s instructions and found a creek three miles northward from their entry point before trying to plow the soil. Amid these preparations for planting, Young arrived about noon the following day—24 July 1847. Young told Brown and the others that they had indeed arrived at the spot where the city he had seen in vision should be built. Brown recorded Young arguing, “we might explore the mountains over and over again and each time return to this place as the best.” Praying for success, they put their seeds in the ground.³

² John Brown, *Autobiography of Pioneer John Brown, 1820–1896* (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1941), 77–78. The faint trail Brown and Pratt followed had been carved by the California-bound Donner company the previous year; their journey was made infamous by the starvation they encountered when trapped by snow in the Sierra Nevada further west, see Dean L. May, *Utah: A People’s History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 56–57.

³ Brown, *Autobiography*, 78; Wilford Woodruff’s account of Young’s statement is often quoted: “It is enough. This is the right place,” often shortened simply to “This is the place,” see May, *Utah: A People’s History*, 59.

The Latter-day Saints had come to this remote mountain valley in northernmost Mexico to escape the mobs that had followed them across the United States. In this goal, Brigham Young was correct—this was the best place—for in 1847 it lay in a power vacuum among competing factions. The valley the Saints made their way into that July was used by surrounding indigenous peoples, but the surrounding Ute, Goshute, and Shoshone nations all declined to claim it exclusively. Yet an ongoing war between the republics of Mexico and the United States wrested the region out of Mexican hands the following year. When the country they had fled gained claim over their new homestead, the Saints soon found they had placed themselves at a location that would quickly become the “Crossroads of the West.” Yet the acquisition of the Pacific Southwest proved troublesome for the United States, reopening a debate over slavery’s expansion. In less than fifteen years, the controversy over slavery’s western future would ignite civil war, with northerners and southerners engaged in killing each other.⁴

Sectional differences were noticeably absent from the Great Salt Lake Valley in July 1847. Here, northerners and southerners worked closely together. Tennessean John Brown worked with New Yorker Orson Pratt, and both in turn followed Brigham Young, a native of Vermont. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, they were part of the largest faction that laid claim to Joseph Smith Jr’s restorationist Church of Christ. Among the many innovations Smith had introduced, few were as substantial as his claim for a new book of American scripture: the Book of Mormon. From this belief, the Saints’ detractors referred to the expanding group as “Mormonites” and later still, simply “Mormons.” Smith had alternately

⁴ For the Saints being situated in a neutral zone among Utah’s historic first nations, see Howard A. Christy, “Mormon-Indian Relations, 1847–1890,” in Brandon S. Plewe, ed., *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2011), 98; for discussion of the Mexican-American War and how it led to conflict over slavery, a clear summary can be found in James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 47–77; a solid overview of the war and its political consequences can also be found in Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

embraced and rejected the term for the church he established and its followers, but it was his ideas concerning Christianity and new ways of practicing it that spooked many of his fellow Americans. In 1844, while running for president of the United States, Smith had been assassinated and Young had taken over the largest faction after a struggle for control. Now, Saints from the North and the South found themselves in the West, determined to build a city for themselves and a kingdom of God on the Earth.⁵

Other southerners had entered the valley with Brown, two of whom he had baptized as Latter-day Saints: Green Flake and Hark Lay. A third, Oscar Crosby, had remained aloof from the religion but had been impelled to come, for all three men, unlike the Tennessean pioneer, were enslaved African Americans. Other enslaved southerners would arrive just days later with additional white southerners, including John Holladay, who soon settled his family and their enslaved labor force in the east central Salt Lake Valley. At a place they would call South Cottonwood, Holladay and other southerners would try to reproduce the plantation system they were familiar with on a small scale, highly different from the town and field system that would dominate much of the Latter-day Saint settlement of the Intermountain West. The presence of slaves in the valleys of what would become Utah Territory helped tip it toward legalizing slavery in 1852. For the first five years of the Saints' settlement in the far West, American southerners, black and white, briefly played an outsized role.⁶

This disproportionate influence belied the relatively small number of southern Latter-day Saints. If members of the church were a peculiar people, then southerners within this American

⁵ For the state origins of the early apostles and First Presidency of the church, see *Deseret Morning News, 2005 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Morning News, 2004), 52–53, 57, 59–64.

⁶ Wayne Wahlquist, “Pioneer, Trails, 1847–1869,” and Brian Q. Cannon, “Settling the Salt Lake Valley, 1847–1870,” in Brandon S. Plewe, ed., *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2012), 80–85.

religious movement were a peculiar people within a peculiar people. In the beginning, Smith's movement had largely gained converts from east to west in the northern United States. This east-west alignment spread across the Atlantic in 1837 when Smith sent his loyal followers on a highly successful mission to the British Isles. This founding generation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was therefore dominated by New Englanders and old Englanders. Of the first four presidents of the church, Smith and Young both hailed from Vermont; their successor was Englishman John Taylor, who was in turn followed by Connecticut native Wilford Woodruff. The church's hierarchical structure was overseen by the president and two or more close associates (termed "counselors") in a group called the First Presidency. Only one southerner, Jesse Gause of Virginia, had served in this body. Gause, however, soon abandoned the church and was excommunicated after nine months. The church's next highest leadership council, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, was likewise sparse on southerners. One, William M'Lellin of Tennessee, had also been excommunicated (but this time had lasted three years); the other, Kentuckian Charles Coulson Rich, was appointed after the Saints had made their way to Utah but served in the quorum until his death. Among another early leadership group called the seventy, southerners played a larger role but remained a distinct minority: roughly one of every eight members. While records for the laity are incomplete, it appears that the dearth of southerners extended to the rank-and-file as much as the leadership.⁷

⁷ See the biographical sketches of historic members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in *Deseret Morning News, 2005 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2004), 52–68; the case of Jesse Gause receives mention in Adam Jortner, *No Place for Saints: Mobs and Mormons in Jacksonian America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), 85; Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated compiled demographic details for several of the Nauvoo-era Seventy, and I have made a count of these records for the one of every eight figure, see Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated, "Nauvoo Seventies List," M270 N314 199-? v. 1–3, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Church Historian Leonard Arrington argued that no more than two percent of all Latter-day Saints were southerners, see Leonard J. Arrington, "Mormon Beginnings in the American South," Task Paper in LDS History, No. 9 (Salt Lake City: Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 14.

The early Saints did not purposefully exclude southerners from their ranks, but the lack of southerners was in no small measure the consequence of changes in transportation that reinforced existing differences in culture. Smith's original Church of Christ was established among a colony of enterprising New Englanders in upstate New York in a zone being transformed by that era's most significant east-west transportation routes. The following year, Smith would move out of New York and establish a new headquarters in another New England colony in northeastern Ohio. A second church center would be established in western Missouri, culturally dominated by southerners but geographically a northern outpost of slavery. Operating these simultaneous church centers separated by hundreds of miles proved challenging, but Latter-day Saint missionaries made the most of the situation, often preaching at points between the two locations. By the end of the 1830s, the Saints would be forced to abandon both the Missouri and Ohio centers and instead congregate along the banks of the Mississippi River in Illinois at a place they called Nauvoo. This city would be their greatest and grandest experiment in the United States east of the Rocky Mountains before their exodus westward. Significantly, no church headquarters was ever established south of thirty-nine degrees north latitude. Of the southern states, only the northern tip of Kentucky and portions of the Virginias reach north of this line; Washington, D.C. and the southernmost part of New Jersey are south of it. Culturally in its membership and geographically in its development, the Saints skewed to the North.⁸

Yet southerners still joined the movement. As evidenced by their strong showing in the valleys of the Intermountain West in 1847, southerners did not shun the Latter-day Saints to the degree that the church bypassed the region. How, then, did this religion attract any southern

⁸ For more specific references for these developments, see later notes in this chapter; for an overview of particular corridors that developed within the early church, see David J. Whittaker, "Early Missions, 1831–1844," in Plewe, *Mapping Mormonism*, 40–43.

adherents? Most of the church's earliest southern converts shared one of two characteristics: they either lived in the Northwest (today's Midwest) in the intense zone of Latter-day proselytizing, or they lived close to a major transportation route, like the Ohio River. These earliest encounters built up a small group of southern converts, even if they lived outside or on the peripheries of the region. Cultural differences and poor transportation options inhibited most New Englanders and New Yorkers from preaching in the deeper South, minus some notable exceptions. When it came to the backcountry South, proselytizing was frequently done by expatriate and border southerners who had already been baptized as Latter-day Saints and who were anxious to take the message to their family and friends. Even in these instances, however, success for the Saints tended to fall along the lines of major transportation routes through and out of the region. Just as the quality of the roads into the mountains was a prime concern of Saints emigrating westward, the ability to move a religion through space shaped the earliest growth of the Saints in the southern states.⁹

While easier transportation could benefit the Saints in some parts of the South, this peculiar pattern of growth also worked against the religion in the region. The rapid development of the Saints along an east-west axis fueled suspicions among some southerners that this religion was one of the North's many dangerous "-isms" that threatened to infect and undermine southern society. This initial distrust intensified when the Saints removed themselves to the Rocky Mountains, increasing the physical, social, and spiritual distance between themselves and the competing northern and southern incarnations of American society. When the Saints publicly announced their practice of polygamy in 1852, the distance between them and the Protestant South widened into a chasm. Yet up to the Civil War, scattered groups of Latter-day Saints

⁹ Ibid.; also see LaMar C. Berrett, "History of the Southern States Mission, 1831–1861," (MS Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1960), Berrett extensively maps the early work in the South which tends to follow major transportation routes through the region.

worked to build small congregations in the region. These outposts of the church would prove important centers of support when, during Reconstruction, missionaries labored to resurrect the church's presence in the southern United States.¹⁰

* * *

On 6 April 1830, Joseph Smith, Jr., established the Church of Christ in Fayette, New York, with six original members as mandated by state law. For the decade previous, Smith had reported visitations from heavenly beings, including God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. He also talked of visiting with ancient American prophets, including an angel named Moroni (pronounced more-OH-nye) that directed Smith to unearth a record upon metal plates buried some distance from his home in a hill between Palmyra and Manchester, New York. Claiming he had received the spiritual gift of translation, Smith produced a manuscript he then had published as the Book of Mormon just days before organizing the church. Smith's claim to have seen visions of deity and angels, or to have found an ancient American record provoked a great deal of opposition, especially from ministers in town that jealously labored to grow their flock. Yet their opposition, as one historian noted, came "not because of the strangeness of Joseph's story but because of its familiarity." Even so, Joseph Smith had an advantage that many others who proclaimed similar experiences didn't—his proximity to the Erie Canal.¹¹

In most accounts of the rise of the Latter-day Saints, the Erie Canal's presence has been noted but never considered notable. Indeed, the construction of the canal through nearby Palmyra village had little direct impact on the Smith family initially. The best roads in the area previously

¹⁰ Michael F. Conlin, "The Dangerous *Isms* and the Fanatical *Ists*: Antebellum Conservatives in the South and the North Confront the Modernity Conspiracy," in *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4 No. 2 (June 2014), 205–233.

¹¹ See Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 30–126, quote on 41; different stories about ancient American civilizations were especially popular in Joseph Smith's day, see R. Tripp Evans, *Romancing the Maya: Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination, 1820–1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); the pronunciation of Moroni is what is currently common among English-speaking church members.

ran north and south, and it was southward that Smith had gone to get the plates from a hill he later called Cumorah, and further south again to Harmony, Pennsylvania, where he first met and then lived with his wife, Emma Hale. Once the Book of Mormon was printed, it seems that the earliest missionaries for the faith likely followed these familiar north-south routes. Yet the canal was already reshaping life in Smith's part of upstate New York. That Palmyra could support a printer with a modern press and supply it with the paper needed to fulfill Smith's order of 5,000 copies for the Book of Mormon's initial run was improbable without the canal's presence. That Joseph Smith had met with publishers further west in Rochester (another canal town) to consider printing the book there when Palmyra publisher E. B. Grandin initially declined was also a product of the canal's transforming presence. Reduced shipping rates and improved communication and transportation soon transformed society in upstate New York, which was roiled by rapid economic changes and cultural fervor.¹²

Part of this cultural churn was a new awakening in religion that had been accelerating in the young republic. With states disestablishing religions, Americans pursued worship in new and innovative ways. Revivals that began in the backwoods of Kentucky were soon mimicked in other parts of the country with sectarians battling one another for adherents. While fires of religiosity burned across the country, they blazed with white heat in New York's "burnt-over-district," which unsurprisingly, followed the Erie Canal. The ease of transportation brought more than one preacher through the region, even as the canal zone in turn threw out sparks to places now economically and culturally tied to it by virtue of the canal itself.¹³

¹² Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 31. Bushman downplays the impact of the canal on the early movement, but this is in part due to his focus on the Smith family. For Smith's efforts to get the Book of Mormon published, see *ibid.*, 80–83.

¹³ While Latter-day Saint historians downplay the canal's impact on religion, other historians have produced a wide body of work on its influence; for an excellent summary of this work, see Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 164–202, 216–218, 312–319.

One preacher drawn through the Erie Canal in 1830 was New York native Parley Parker Pratt (older brother of Orson Pratt). For many years he had worked on a farmstead in the Western Reserve of northeastern Ohio, so named for being the last part of the old Northwest Territory that Connecticut had reserved for its western land claim (finally ceded in 1800 and incorporated into Ohio three years later). Due to its early political connection to New England, the Western Reserve drew a substantial number of settlers from it, leading to cultural collisions with upland southerners that dominated in central and southern Ohio. Pratt fit well within this northeastern part of Ohio and united with a new religious group, the Disciples of Christ. After a few years of living there, however, he felt impelled to sell his farmstead and preach in his native state. While making the eastward journey on the Erie Canal with his wife toward Albany, Pratt suddenly felt the urge to get off the boat and travel through the countryside. Sending his wife eastward to their friends, Pratt began making preaching appointments in the countryside. While here, Pratt first examined a copy of the Book of Mormon, which he later called “that book of books.”¹⁴

The Book of Mormon enthralled Pratt, who found it difficult to eat or sleep while he read it. Within weeks he would be baptized into Smith’s recently organized Church of Christ and making his way back to the Western Reserve to take the book and its message to his former co-religionists. Unnoticed by Pratt (and skipped by many historians since) was appreciation of how Pratt’s journey and experience was guided not simply by inspiration but by the demands of moving across the countryside. Pratt had sold everything to finance his initial journey and had to work extra to secure enough money to first get from Cleveland to Buffalo, and then pay the fare

¹⁴ For the context of Pratt, see Terryl L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow, *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21–36; for the “book of books” quote, see Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, Parley P. Pratt Jr. ed., (Chicago, 1888), 37–38; for the cultural rivalry between southerners and New Englanders, see Nicole Etcheson, *The Emerging Midwest: Upland Southerners and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1787–1861* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 1–14.

for the canal. If the fare had cost Pratt and his wife, Thankful, essentially all they had, it is unlikely they could have afforded a more expensive overland stagecoach—or faced the far lengthier journey of dragging the few possessions they had by foot. The canal eased both the cost and efficiency of transportation, just as it made possible the supplies and printing press used to publish the Book of Mormon in an obscure village in upstate New York. This cheaper and more efficient transportation benefitted other preachers of small means and drove the revivals that sparked Joseph Smith’s questioning attitude to religion in the first place. Quietly, the canal had worked a religious revolution.¹⁵

The canal also aided the escape of three small congregations (called branches) out of New York amid increasing opposition in the Empire State. With Pratt’s efforts in the Western Reserve, many of the Disciples of Christ that followed Pratt’s former religious leader, Sidney Rigdon, had accepted the message of the Book of Mormon and the church that had been organized from it. With this opening in Ohio, Smith soon directed the membership of the church to gather with this new group of converts in the Western Reserve. By the early spring of 1831, most of the branches were on the move down the Erie Canal but soon faced the delays caused by ice floes that trapped barges for weeks at a time—one of the major hinderances of northern canals that would not be overcome until railroads came into wider use. Despite these delays, by the summer, the center of the Saints had jolted westward to the town of Kirtland, a village in Geauga (said “jee-ah-gah”) County, Ohio, east of Cleveland.¹⁶

Throughout this time, Smith’s new religious establishment had primarily thrived in areas characterized by heavy New England influence. The part of western New York where he had

¹⁵ Givens and Grow, *Parley P. Pratt*, 26–27.

¹⁶ For an overview of developments in Kirtland, see Jortner, *No Place for Saints*, 56–89; for railroads superseding canals, see Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 218–220; for the correct pronunciation of Geauga County, I’m indebted to my fellow Clemson MA colleague and Cleveland native Matthew D. Hintz.

first had his own religious awakening was substantially populated by Vermont expatriates. They (among others) had fled the rocky soil and difficult farming conditions that were intensified when a volcanic eruption produced a “year without a summer” that destroyed crops. Manmade forces had also contributed to the migration: a high British tariff on American wheat made growing the crop in New England unprofitable for wider markets, but in western New York, wheat could be moved across Lake Erie and into Canada—where the wheat then faced no tariff crossing the Atlantic. The disruptions of the Panic of 1819 had been the final push necessary for some to make the journey westward. Now, Smith had moved west yet again, this time to a still sparsely occupied area of northern Ohio, but again in an area heavily populated by New Englanders. While Smith intended his religious message for all, it spread most easily among kin and friends that shared the same cultural attitudes and social assumptions.¹⁷

Yet Smith still looked westward. The Book of Mormon told the story of how a group of ancient Israelites had reached the Americas and established a Christian civilization. After being visited by a resurrected Christ and a few centuries of peace, the people had eventually rejected their spiritual roots and were destroyed in a series of civil wars. Only the heathen Lamanite faction survived, and the new book of scripture suggested that they were the ancestors of the American Indians of the nineteenth century. The primary narrator of the book, Mormon himself, had pled with his readers to take the message of Christianity to the descendants of the Lamanites, a directive that Smith took seriously. Shortly after Parley P. Pratt had been baptized, Smith sent

¹⁷ The volcanic aspects of Smith’s move have primacy in the church’s own published histories; for the clearest recent example, see The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days, Volume 1: The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018), 3–11; for a more secular consideration of the volcano’s impact on North America and the westward migration of New Englanders in the 1810s United States, see Andrew H. Browning, *The Panic of 1819: The First Great Depression* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2019), 74–101; for the specific impact of British tariffs and the particular draw of the Lake Erie region to bypass them, see Scott Reynolds Nelson, *A Nation of Deadbeats: An Uncommon History of America’s Financial Disasters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 66–75.

him and three others on a mission to preach to American Indian peoples. After converting several in the Western Reserve, Pratt and his fellows had traveled down the Ohio River before turning north and following the Missouri River westward into lands populated by indigenous nations. Having failed to secure government permission, however, the four men's time was cut short, and the mission failed to baptize any of its intended auditors.¹⁸

Despite the lack of short-term gains, the mission of the four proved highly consequential. Smith directed the Saints to purchase land in and around the settlement of Independence in Jackson County, Missouri. Here, situated on the western border of the United States with the territory reserved for dispossessed indigenous nations, these Saints living in the end times would build a New Jerusalem that would shine as a beacon to both peoples—the indigenous North American nations and the white “Gentiles” of the United States. This city of Zion would therefore prepare the world for the Second Coming of Christ. While ambitious, this project faced practical challenges from the start—a colony of Northeasterners (primarily from New England) was taking root amid a belt of southern-dominated plantation slavery along the Missouri River, all at a time and place where Joseph Smith's pro-Indian stance raised eyebrows and visceral fears. The cultural clash between New Englanders in northern Ohio and upland southerners in southern Ohio was already intense—what would happen when the two groups lived side by side? Additionally, this meant that the young church was developing two major centers separated by hundreds of miles. Administering a religion across this expanse proved challenging, but it was this very distance that brought the first convert southerners to the Church of Christ.¹⁹

¹⁸ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 314; Givens and Grow, *Parley P. Pratt*, 37–48; Jortner, *No Place For Saints*, 90–96; W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 55–59.

¹⁹ Jortner, *No Place For Saints*, 90–124; Max Perry Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 60–91; Etcheson, *Emerging Midwest*.

One natural route to get from Kirtland, Ohio to Independence, Missouri, was to take the new Erie and Ohio Canal south to the Ohio River and then take that river west toward Missouri. Using this route in 1831, some missionaries stopped briefly on the Kentucky side on their way to Missouri. Joseph Smith and a party of others did much the same when they spent three days waiting for a St. Louis-bound steamboat at Louisville later that year. Yet the cultural difference between upland southerners and New Englanders (generally called the East at this time) meant that most missionaries and other church officials were laser focused on getting between the two points quickly. Perhaps sensing a missed opportunity, Smith spoke a revelation in 1831 where the Lord chided the missionaries moving down the Ohio River for “moving swiftly upon the waters, whilst the inhabitants on either side are perishing in unbelief.” Even more direct measures seemed to produce foot-dragging—in 1832, four missionaries were assigned to preach in the “south countries.” Three of them interpreted this as preaching in southern Ohio, with just one, Luke Johnson, crossing the Ohio River into Cabell County, Virginia (now West Virginia). Taking another willing missionary, Seymour Brunson, the two made some one hundred converts and organized a small congregation, called a branch, in Cabell County by spring 1833.²⁰

Yet Cabell County was the border of the border South, located right on the Ohio River. It would take actual southerners who were willing to preach to their friends and family before the Latter-day Saints entered the deeper South, or at least missionaries who were willing to go further than the southern tip of the old Northwestern states. This reticence to even set foot in any of the slave states accelerated once an armed conflict broke out between the Latter-day Saints

²⁰ Alexander L. Baugh, “Travel Between Ohio and Missouri, 1831–1838,” in Plewe, *Mapping Mormonism*, 38–39; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 369; Joseph Smith revelation, 12 August 1831 [published as Doctrine and Covenants Section 61], Revelation Book 1, p. 101, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed 25 May 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-book-1/87#facts>; Berrett, “Southern States Mission, 1831–1861,” 47–58.

and the slave-owning settlers of western Missouri. Most of these settlers had come from Virginia, the Carolinas, Kentucky, and Tennessee, with several bringing enslaved laborers with them to take advantage of the rich soil bordering the Missouri River. While New Englanders and southerners had shared a wary coexistence in states like Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois peacefully, in Missouri the stakes were higher. Admitting Missouri as a slave state had produced a sectional crisis over the expansion of the institution, and Missourians especially feared interference from the racially transgressive Saints who willingly associated with American Indians and free African Americans. The Saints also embraced their settlement with unnerving zeal, but it was the demographics that worried southern enslavers the most. With the multiplying Saints filling the area, they would soon be able to control the local government and shape it according to their religious and racial ideas.²¹

The rumbling conflict exploded in November 1833. Using threats and violence, anti-Mormon mobs in Jackson County expelled the Saints from their lands there. Most of the refugees fled to neighboring Clay County north of the Missouri River. Because the Saints still owned their lands in Jackson County, a sympathetic Missouri Governor Daniel Dunklin offered to legally restore the Saints to their lands provided they provided their own guards. Accordingly, Joseph Smith, who had been involved with directing the church from its primary eastern base in Ohio, raised a small paramilitary force to march west and guard the Saints against further mob action in Jackson County. Known as the Camp of Israel (and called by later historians Zion's Camp), a force of just over 200 had assembled in Missouri by 8 June 1834. Fearing that armed Latter-day Saints would provoke a civil conflict with anti-Mormon mobs, however, Dunklin backed off and suggested that the Saints seek redress through court action. Smith accordingly dismissed the

²¹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 147–160; Jortner, *No Place for Saints*, 112–117; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 59–64.

force, but not before directing several of its members to take different routes back—a course that would lead to some of the earliest substantial missionary work in southern states when some of the men discharged made extended visits into the South before returning to Kirtland.²²

Any cultural reluctance to travel in the South was further amplified when the Saints were expelled from Missouri in the 1838–1839 “Mormon War.” When a church-supported bank, the Kirtland Safety Society, collapsed in the wake of the Panic of 1837, Joseph Smith and many of his circle abandoned Ohio and led his most loyal followers to Missouri. In the wake of the Jackson County fiasco, the Missouri legislature had set up Caldwell County as a kind of “Mormon reservation,” but the flood of new members from Ohio soon caused Saints to start buying land in adjoining Daviess County. Over time, a similar conflict over political control developed there and the two sides began bringing weapons to disputes. Taking note of the armed clashes was Jackson County resident (and now Missouri Governor) Lilburn W. Boggs, who used the spiraling conflict as justification for an extreme executive order: the Mormons must leave the state of Missouri or face legalized extermination.²³

Over the winter months, Joseph Smith was imprisoned in several Missouri jails while anti-Mormon groups struggled to figure out what charges to prosecute him on. Meanwhile, Brigham Young, now the senior figure in the second-tier Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, executed an evacuation of the Saints from the state of Missouri. The group fled across the Mississippi River to Quincy, Adams County, Illinois. There, shocked and sympathetic residents offered food and shelter to the massive group of religious refugees. As spring came in 1839,

²² Jortner, *No Place for Saints*, 116–146; Berrett, “Southern States Mission, 1831–1861,” 59–65.

²³ Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 64–70 (“Mormon reservation” quote on 67); Alexander L. Baugh, “Settling Northern Missouri, 1836–1838,” and Sean Cannon, “The Mormon-Missouri War, 1838–1839,” in Plewe, *Mapping Mormonism*, 48–51; Boggs didn’t just target Latter-day Saints with extermination, but also the nearby Osage people, see Jeremy Neely, *The Border Between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 9–10.

holding Joseph Smith had become an embarrassment to Missouri officials, who allowed him and those jailed with him to escape. Soon after he arrived in Illinois, Smith decided it would be best to set up a new city at a bend of the Mississippi River north of Quincy. Within a matter of years, literal swamp-draining, and a flood of migrants, Smith's grand city of Nauvoo was rapidly becoming one of the largest settlements in the state. But most importantly from the perspective of bringing southerners into the movement, it placed the church's center on a major river highway that led into the heart of the western South.²⁴

In the first decade of the church's organization, a combination of cultural difference and transportation needs largely kept the Latter-day Saints a northern-oriented religion. The high preponderance of New Englanders in the new faith, the increasing trade across the Great Lakes prompted by the Erie Canal, and the demands of crossing between two church centers that were north of most of the South all worked to keep most of the Saints out of the older and deeper southern states. Despite moving in circles dominated by New Englanders, Smith also preached a message that he felt should be heard by all, north, south, east, and west. And while the earliest conversions of southerners were often missionary work of convenience—done while passing from one church center to another or by taking a more extensive detour into the slave states east of the Mississippi—some southerners did listen, believe, and were baptized into this new American faith.²⁵

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²⁴ See Sean Cannon, "Mormon-Missouri War," as well as Donald Q. Cannon and Brandon S. Plewe, "Commerce, Illinois, 1824–1839," "Buying Nauvoo, 1839–1843," and "Building Nauvoo, 1839–1846," in Plewe, *Mapping Mormonism*, 50–57; for two differing perspectives on the Nauvoo period, see Benjamin E. Park, *Kingdom of Nauvoo: The Rise and Fall of a Religious Empire on the American Frontier* (New York: Liverlight Publishing, 2020); Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002).

²⁵ Some early converts from New England sought to limit their former championship of abolitionism to limit friction with southern converts, although most likewise held the racist views common to the time, see Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 120–126.

The Ohio River Valley and the area around the Great Lakes might well be the most pivotal region in United States history. This may sound like heresy coming from a southern historian, but regions like the South never form in a vacuum—they emerge in relationships relative to other regions. The territory that is today’s Midwest was heavily contested long before the American Revolution, with the French terming it the *pays d’en haut* (or upper country) in the colony of New France. Their construction of forts in the region spurred the British to conquer the area, then battle with their previous colonists over its disposition. After the American colonists won control over the region, it was first developed as the Northwest Territory, and then after a process of many years, it became the states of the Old Northwest, the present-day Midwest. Politics in this region could make or break a political coalition, especially as settlers moved into the area and increased its representation in Congress. For its first forty to fifty years, this region was economically tied to points south—the Mississippi River flowed southward to the Gulf, not eastward to the Atlantic. Old Northwestern politics often imagined a unified West that battled a distant East and made common cause with a likewise rural South. But it must also be understood that many native-born southerners migrated into the region, especially poorer whites. When the Confederation Congress banned slavery in the Northwest Territory, it set the western regions of the country on two separate courses—the area north of the Ohio River would develop an economy without plantation slavery while points south would accelerate their dependence on this “peculiar institution.”²⁶

²⁶ In the words of Daniel Walker Howe, while some historians use counterfactuals to highlight what really happened, “In the case of the trans-Appalachian West...we do not have to invent cases for comparison; two examples from real life illuminate each other. The Old Southwest was built around cotton and slavery. The Old Northwest grew up differently.” Comparing the two helps us understand “how much difference cotton and slavery made in shaping the America of the nineteenth century.” Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 136. For the French struggle for dominance in the region, see Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); for American designs on the territory, see Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016), 55–89, 251–278; for the stakes in establishing the dominance of the United States over native peoples in the region, see

It was this distinction between an egalitarian society north of the Ohio River versus the economically polarized society that developed south of it that prompted thousands of upland southerners—primarily from Virginia and Kentucky, but also Tennessee—to cross to the Northwest. These settlers, as Nichole Etcheson observed, “saw themselves as dispossessed by the expanding plantation system. In the Midwest, they no longer needed to be deferential, but they continued to be resentful.” One family that grew to despise the institution of slavery and the inequality it introduced into white life was that of Thomas Lincoln. Having toiled for many years in Kentucky to gain some land of his own (he inherited none from his father because Kentucky, then part of Virginia, at the time had primogeniture laws where the oldest son inherited the entire estate), Thomas Lincoln ran into the problem of poor land surveys and was at a disadvantage to those who could afford better legal means. When Lincoln failed to win a land dispute, he decided to move north of the Ohio River into Indiana, where federal surveys made land more secure. He took his Kentuckian-born son, Abraham, with him.²⁷

Lincoln was far from alone. Also moving north from Kentucky into Indiana was Elisha Hurd Groves, one of the earliest southerners to be baptized into Joseph Smith’s new Church of Christ. Born in 1797, Groves moved into Indiana with his wife Sarah Hogue in 1819. He never explained what brought him into Indiana, but he later recounted that having lived there for seven years, he decided to join a nearby Presbyterian Church. He remained a faithful member there until things changed dramatically in September 1831 when a pair of Latter-day missionaries

Colin G. Calloway, *The Victory With No Name: The Native American Defeat of the First American Army* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). The region also played a major role in American politics and culture following the Civil War, see Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865–1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 16–17.

²⁷ Etcheson, *The Emerging Midwest*, quote on page 6; for the story of the Lincolns, see Heather Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free: A History of the Republican Party* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 1–6; that southern expatriates often maintained a distinctive southern identity even in the Midwest, see the example of Abraham Lincoln in Orville Vernon Burton, *The Age of Lincoln* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 106–110.

were passing through his neighborhood. Hearing them preach about the Book of Mormon, Groves was intrigued and began studying the new religion in earnest. Believing that the message they preached was true, Groves began sharing it with his family and friends in the area before being baptized on 11 March 1832. This action concerned many of his friends, who now feared for Groves's well-being and felt he was deranged. To try and sway him away from Mormonism, they sent Groves copies of minutes from other church meetings to make the Saints look worse by comparison. Unimpressed by these documents, Groves then put his friends "to flight by the truth," but this only deepened the rift between him and them. Before long, Groves reported his "Life was threatened on every Hand," and his wife, Sarah (who did not share his new religion) filed for a divorce. Taking most of their property for herself, Groves left on foot for the church's western center at Independence, Missouri, in 1833.²⁸

Unknown to Groves, another Kentuckian in the Northwest had also run into Latter-day Saint missionaries passing through and was baptized just a few weeks later. Born in Kentucky in 1809 (same as Abraham Lincoln), Charles Coleson Rich had first settled in Indiana before moving west to Illinois (also paralleling the Lincolns). It was in Illinois that Rich first heard the Latter-day Saint missionaries preaching in 1831. Mulling their words over, he waited longer than Groves, but then committed to the new church through baptism on 1 April 1832. Rich did not encounter the immediate multitude of trials and threats that Groves did—or at least he did not recount them. Rich was soon on his way to Kirtland, the eastern of the church's two centers, and preached along the way. He then began a pattern of working interspersed with preaching, which could be challenging in the fickle economy of the Latter-day boomtown in Ohio. In 1834, Rich headed back to Illinois, but did not stay there long. When the northern division of the Camp of

²⁸ See Elisha H. Groves autobiographical sketch, dated April 1866, quote on page one, in *Obituary Notices and Biographies, 1854–1877*, MS 4760, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

Israel marched through his area under Joseph Smith's brother, Hyrum, Rich fell in with them and became part of the group that hoped to restore the Missouri Saints back to Jackson County.²⁹

The two divisions of the Camp of Israel met up at Salt River Branch in eastern Missouri. Waiting for them was Elisha Hurd Groves, who had a harrowing experience since moving to Independence. He had been among the group that mobs had expelled in November 1833—just months after he had arrived in the frontier settlement. Rather than join the main group of Saints that fled northward to Clay County across the Missouri, Groves had gone with about sixteen families southward to nearby Van Buren (now Cass) County. Perhaps seeing no agreeable future in Missouri at that point, Groves crossed into Illinois to preach, but as the bitter winter gave way to the spring in 1834, he did not know what to do next. After asking for advice on where to go, a letter in reply informed him that he should meet up with the main group of Missouri Saints in Clay County. If, however, he had a good rifle, he was advised to remain on a mission. Since he did have a rifle, Groves continued preaching until May when he traveled to Salt River Branch to meet up with the combined Camp of Israel.³⁰

As mentioned, the Camp of Israel failed to bring the Saints back to their lands in Jackson County. But other historians have noted that the fact a group of men had put their lives at risk for the cause of their religion served to strengthen their individual commitment to the church Smith had established. Most of the first members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (organized after the march) had been part of the Camp of Israel. Rich himself would later become an apostle in the Twelve, while Groves would later become a patriarch, a special position where a man would give blessings similar to those given by the patriarchs of the Old Testament. Both men

²⁹ See volumes 1–2 of Diaries, 1833–1862, in Charles C. Rich Collection, 1832–1908, MS 889, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

³⁰ Groves autobiographical sketch, April 1866, page two, MS 4760, CHL.

would also engage in substantial other preaching, including occasional visits to the South. Both men were southerners by birth and culture, and both had been converted by missionaries passing through between the two church centers.³¹

Others followed similar paths. Chronologically later than the two Kentuckians were two natives of Sumner County, Tennessee, both with the same initials, but born at different times and who encountered the church in different ways: John Brown and Jonathan Browning. Browning was the older of the two by fifteen years, born in 1805. He married Elizabeth Stalcup when he was in his early twenties and moved his family to White's Chapel in Davidson County, Tennessee, just outside of Nashville. Here he worked as a blacksmith and gunsmith until 1834 when he moved the family yet again, this time to the state of Illinois, settling in the southeastern part of Hancock County, before relocating again to northeastern Adams County just to the south. Browning may have moved with others; the 1880 Census found a surprisingly high concentration of Tennessee natives that lived in southeastern Hancock and northeastern Adams counties in Illinois. According to his son, James, Browning invested heavily in land and stock raising, and perhaps other Tennesseans were among his clients. The biggest nearby port city was Quincy, and it is likely here that Browning first met the Latter-day Saints when they flooded the city as refugees from Missouri's extermination order.³²

Browning seems to have been uncertain about this new group at first; James Browning reported that his father "was well to do when 'Mormonism' came to him, which he finally

³¹ For analyses of the Camp of Israel, see Jortner, *No Place for Saints*, 125–146; Givens and Grow, *Parley P. Pratt*, 68–70; *Saints, Volume 1: The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846*, 194–211.

³² Jonathan Browning has often been overshadowed by his more famous son and gunmaker John Moses Browning. Many published biographies that focus on J.M. are horrifically anachronistic when discussing Jonathan. For this summary, I have used only pre-1890s sources; see first two text pages (images 8–9) of James A. Browning *Autobiography*, Circa 1851–1883, MS 1073, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; "Autobiography of Jonathan Browning," [transcribed from an 1845 record] in Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated, "Seventies' Autobiographies," M270 2497 199-?, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Joseph Hall, "The Late Elder Jonathan Browning," in *Deseret News*, 23 July 1879, page 3.

embraced,” suggesting that it had taken some time before he accepted it. Later family lore says he first traveled to Nauvoo to meet Joseph Smith himself before he embraced the church, but there is no sign of this meeting either in Browning’s own (very few) writings or the biographical overview given by his son, James. More likely, Browning converted after attending the meetings of the Mount Hope Branch in Columbus—a town in the east-central part of Adams County and not far from the Brownings’ homestead. The president of the branch, Abel Lamb, was the one who subsequently baptized Browning and his wife, Elizabeth in August 1840. Once the branch had grown enough to become a stake (the definition of which, at this time, was highly fluid), Browning was given permission to run a branch closer to home. Persecution against the Saints, however, ended the practice of extensive branch-stakes outside Nauvoo, and in 1842 Browning moved into the city itself, building a small shop on Main Street (and at which point it more certain he was personally acquainted with Joseph Smith). Retaining his farm in Adams County, however, he moved back to it on 5 July 1844, just days after Joseph Smith was killed, and offered his Nauvoo property for use by the church in the wake of Smith’s death.³³

In the meantime, another native of Sumner County had encountered the Latter-day Saints, but this time at Perry County in southern Illinois, some distance southeast of St. Louis. John Brown was born in 1820 and his family moved to Illinois when he was nine years old. Looking for a church during his adolescence, he rejected his Tennessee family’s Presbyterianism when he concluded that the Baptist mode of baptism by immersion was correct; he accordingly joined a Missionary Baptist sect. When nineteen, Brown first heard about “some very strange men” that were causing a commotion in his community: “They were called Mormons, which I thought the

³³ Ibid.; see also Abel Lamb under “Died,” *Deseret News*, 6 May 1874, page 11; Mount Hope Branch (Illinois) Record, 1839–1845 (bulk 1839–1841), LR 5762 22; Donald Q. Cannon and Brandon S. Plewe, “Greater Nauvoo Region, 1839–1846,” in Plewe, *Mapping Mormonism*, 58–59.

most hideous name I ever heard.” While teaching at a school, however, one missionary began delivering a series of lectures at the same school. Since he was “compelled by circumstances to be in his company,” Brown steadily heard more and more of what this missionary, George P. Dykes, taught. Although he resisted, Brown stated “at last I was forced by the truth and sound argument, to believe.” Even though he knew he would lose several friends over it, Brown chose to be baptized by Dykes in the later part of July 1841. In the opposition that followed, Brown’s experience was more akin to Groves’s than Rich’s or Browning’s. He soon moved north to Nauvoo and labored on construction for a time before being called on a mission to the South. But by the time he departed, several other missionaries had made forays into the region itself, even as the Old Northwest remained a good place to bring native-born southerners into the Church of Jesus Christ.³⁴

* * *

In April 1834—the same month that the Camp of Israel was marching westward to Missouri—two families that had been baptized in Shelby County, Indiana, moved to Campbell County, Kentucky. Over several months, they baptized others there and established a branch in the Bluegrass State. This is among the earliest documented incidents of southerners who were baptized in the old Northwest taking the initiative to take the Latter-day message to points further south. Yet the branch at Campbell County, just like the one in Cabell County, Virginia, was on the border of the border South, located right on the Ohio River. Yet this same year, a new entry would be made into the South that would go beyond the border of the border. Missionaries would make deeper detours through the southern states while traveling between Missouri and Ohio. Because transit between the church centers remained the priority, missionaries largely kept

³⁴ Brown, *Autobiography of Pioneer John Brown*, 21–38.

to areas along major transportation paths. In doing so, they solidified the church's presence in the region while setting the stage for later and more ambitious work in the deep South.³⁵

As the Camp of Israel was being dismissed in Missouri, two men, David W. Patten and Warren Parrish, dispensed with the most direct route back to Kirtland, Ohio. In September 1834, they traveled to the mouth of the Ohio River and landed on the Kentucky side. They then made their way up the Tennessee River and preached in counties along it. At the county seat of Paris in Henry County, Tennessee Patten and Parish baptized seven people. Over the next several months and into the new year, they baptized another twenty people—a small number, but nevertheless substantial for Latter-day Saints in the South and at a time when the entire church had just under 4,400 members. By the middle of 1835, Parrish was laboring by himself, with David Patten having been called back to Kirtland (where he was soon ordained an apostle). Among those that were baptized by Parrish was Abraham Owen Smoot—the first of a major Latter-day Saint family with southern roots.³⁶

Another man who had traveled with the Camp of Israel was Wilford Woodruff. Having remained several months longer in Missouri, he wished to serve a mission before returning to Kirtland. Praying for an opportunity, he was soon presented one. After being ordained a priest, Woodruff was told by the local bishop in Missouri, Edward Partridge, to “go into the Southern States, through Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky, and if I could find any body who had faith enough to go with me, for it would be a dangerous country to travel in, in consequence of the Missouri persecution, to take him.” When Woodruff asked Partridge if he should pass through Jackson County (which was logically the quickest route to Arkansas), he got a jarring reply: “it would be at the risk of life, and he [Partridge] had not faith enough to undertake it; if I had, I

³⁵ Berrett, “Southern States Mission, 1831–1861,” 59–65.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 62–100.

might try it.” Woodruff found a willing partner in Henry Brown, and in mid-January 1835 they passed through Independence and swiftly traveled south into Arkansas. Along Petit Jean Creek they discovered a disaffected family from the church, the Akemans. After encouraging his neighbors to attack the missionaries, the father, Alexander, soon died, but the Akeman sons and daughter treated Woodruff and Brown well and the pair baptized two others in the area.³⁷

Taking the river down to Little Rock, the pair then departed eastward on a military road toward Tennessee. Getting very sick, Woodruff stopped to recuperate, at which point Brown decided to press on, leaving Woodruff alone. According to Woodruff, after praying for help, he felt better to resume his journey on the muddy and swampy road, and on 27 March 1835 he made it to Memphis, Tennessee. He was hosted by a Josiah Jackson, who disbelieved that the mud-spattered Woodruff was any kind of preacher. But Jackson was surprised when Woodruff preached a well-spoken sermon; the missionary later reflected that he thought such a group would never again assemble to hear a Latter-day missionary “for they would not like again to have their sins and abominations revealed to each other as pointedly as I told them that night.” According to Woodruff, the people there were “glad to get rid of me upon almost any terms.” Several days later, Woodruff reached Benton County, Tennessee (a Tennessee River county) and met up with Warren Parrish; the two then worked together for three months and baptized twenty people during that time.³⁸

Parrish was soon called away to Kirtland, leaving Woodruff the lone missionary in the area for most of the rest of 1835, although in 1836 he began working with Abraham Owen

³⁷ Woodruff did not always fully report the names of people and places accurately, so here I have followed Berrett’s account in “Southern States Mission, 1831–1861,” 68–100; but all of the quotes come from “History of Wilford Woodruff (From His Own Pen),” in *Deseret News*, 7 July 1858, pages 1–2.

³⁸ For quotations, see “History of Wilford Woodruff (From His Own Pen),” *Deseret News*, 14 July 1858, pages 1–2; Berrett, “Southern States Mission, 1831–1861,” 84–90.

Smoot, one of the people baptized by Parrish. Woodruff and those with him had established enough branches in the area along the Tennessee River to organize a “conference”—a group of branches that met together at a large conference meeting. The first of these meetings for the Tennessee Conference took place in Calloway County, Kentucky (likely called the Tennessee Conference either because more branches were there than in Kentucky or called such because so many of branches were located near the Tennessee River). The second meeting of the Tennessee Conference, held in Benton County, Tennessee this time, was held just three months later in May 1836. By this point there were enough members for passing missionaries to detour great lengths to visit the Tennessee Conference; both Patten and Parrish visited the area for the second conference and were soon accused of being abolitionists (although Woodruff denied the charge). Another missionary that passed through the area was Elisha Hurd Groves, then working with senior-most apostle Thomas B. Marsh to collect funds to help the Missouri Saints move to the “Mormon Reservation” of Caldwell County.³⁹

By June 1836, Smoot and Woodruff were expanding their narrow field into counties beyond those adjacent to the Tennessee River, including Weakley County in Tennessee. There, the pair taught and baptized Emanuel and Nancy Murphy, a family that had originally lived in South Carolina but had moved to Tennessee just two years previously. If the Murphys had not moved to the area between the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers, it is unlikely they would have heard the message of the missionaries for several years to come. By the time Smoot and Woodruff left Tennessee in October 1836, the eight branches of the Tennessee Conference were flourishing, but some disappeared when several of the members there (including the Murphys) joined the gathering of Saints to Missouri. When viewed in a regional context, most early

³⁹ Berrett, “Southern States Mission, 1831–1861,” 88–124.

southern branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints first emerged along major transportation pathways—rivers like the Ohio and Tennessee, or close to the main pathways through the area.⁴⁰

The demands of moving a religion through space—or in this case, of moving its messengers through the country—therefore shaped to a large extent where congregations of Saints flourished and where they never had much opportunity to start. With the church’s two centers being in what we currently call the Midwest, it was the accessible rivers of the Mississippi Valley that enabled missionaries and members alike to travel through the western South with relative ease. East of the Appalachian Mountains, however, easy transportation options were fewer—even two decades later. In a memorable thought experiment, historian William Freehling traced a hypothetical route across the 1850s South from St. Louis to New Orleans, New Orleans to Charleston, Charleston to Baltimore, and Baltimore back to St. Louis. The Mississippi River made the journey from St. Louis to New Orleans easy enough; good railroads likewise made a trip from Baltimore to St. Louis quick work. Going from the Gulf South to the Atlantic South overland, however, was a painful, uncertain, and bumpy journey. So was going north along the Atlantic seaboard. Why? Most states in the Antebellum built their transportation improvements to ship cotton from key inland areas to state-owned ports. When it came to the Atlantic South, states jealously guarded against any improvement that might lead to business traveling out of the state. Connections between each were far and few.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid., 110–124; Whittaker, “Early Missions,” *Mapping Mormonism*, 42; Eastes W. Murphy and Don E. Norton, Jr., *Emanuel Masters Murphy: 1809–1871, Ancestry, Life, Children* (Provo, UT: Stevenson’s Genealogical Center, 1980), 5, 11–14.

⁴¹ Freehling’s main focus is looking at the differing cultural attitudes between western and eastern parts of the South, as well as north to south variations, but it is still a revealing account of the region’s transportation network. See William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Volume 1: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 13–36. Another excellent summary of the fragmented nature of the southern railroad network can be found in Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 11–26.

Missionaries to the Atlantic South were also far and few, but some did journey east of the Appalachians. The foremost among these was Jedediah Grant, who likewise served in the Camp of Israel in 1834. He preached extensively in the eastern states over the following years, and for reasons unclear, he departed into the Atlantic South from Harrison County, Virginia (now in West Virginia) in the fall of 1837. He traveled until he began preaching in Stokes County, North Carolina, and nearby Virginia counties. He remained there until later in 1838 but returned after the summer of 1839. A charismatic preacher, his most dramatic act came when a clergyman in Virginia asked Grant to give a sermon on a provided text. When the Latter-day Saint agreed, he was given a blank piece of paper. Grant then went on to preach a lengthy sermon, decrying the mainstream Christian creeds. According to one account, an audience member exclaimed that if Grant was not already a lawyer, he should become one. Between his two trips to the North Carolina-Virginia border, Grant baptized several people and impressed many others. Even in the hardest times for southern Latter-day Saints in the 1880s, the area surrounding Stokes County, North Carolina, remained relatively friendly—potentially due to fond remembrance of Grant’s skilled preaching.⁴²

Yet missionaries like Grant remained an exception rather than the rule (at least one reason why Grant proved to be so legendary in North Carolina and Virginia). For every Wilford Woodruff that put all his effort into preaching, there was a Henry Brown: willing to serve, but not willing to go into the most remote places and potentially uncomfortable in dealing with a culture and people very different from his own background. The easiest options for getting in and out of the South generally determined where missionaries went, and the fact that most of these

⁴² See Gene A. Sessions, *Mormon Thunder: A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 16–32; Berrett, “Southern States Mission, 1831–1861,” 143–146, 151–153, 173–177.

areas were along well-worn transportation routes potentially made Latter-day Saints a little less exotic. Indeed, in an era dominated by overland correspondence, Nashville was one of the nation's information hubs long before telegraph lines began to change the equation. With few missionaries matching Grant's charisma or Woodruff's dedication, most stuck to well-worn routes. Preaching to people in more isolated areas, culturally and geographically, would depend on a different group of missionaries already attuned to the terrain: southerners themselves.⁴³

* * *

All Latter-day Saints, northern and southern alike, were targeted by Missouri's extermination order. Several of the Saints that had moved out of Tennessee in 1837 were fleeing the state by the end of 1838. While most ended up in Illinois and eventually settled in the Nauvoo area, at least one thought entirely differently about where to go. Emanuel Masters Murphy, a South Carolina native, secured a visit with Joseph Smith, then jailed in Liberty, Missouri. Understanding that Murphy was from South Carolina, Joseph Smith encouraged him to return to his native state and warn the people of an impending war. During the 1832 Nullification Crisis when South Carolina challenged the federal government's authority over tariffs the state felt unfair, Smith had recorded a prophesy that declared a war between the southern and northern states would take place "at the rebellion of South Carolina." While the crisis in 1832–33 had been resolved peaceably, Smith continued to insist even into late in life that the war prophecy would yet be fulfilled. When being visited by Murphy in late 1838 or early 1839, Smith convinced Murphy to return to South Carolina and warn his family and neighbors.⁴⁴

⁴³ Nashville's central part in the pre-telegraph networks of news exchanges is the conclusion of the Viral Texts project of Northeastern University, see viraltxts.org (accessed 1 June 2024); Greg Miller, "Here's How Memes Went Viral—In the 1800s," *Wired*, 4 November 2013.

⁴⁴ See Murphy and Norton, *Emanuel Masters Murphy*, 16–17; the only primary source that documents this account is a mention of Murphy relating the story in 1860, see entry for 30 December 1860, Wilford Woodruff Journal, 1860 January–1865 October, image 100, in Wilford Woodruff Journals and Papers, 1828–1898, MS 1352, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; an extensive summary of the Nullification Crisis with its causes and

Murphy took this charge very seriously, for by the time an assigned missionary, Lysander M. Davis, arrived in South Carolina, he found a group of people in the state near Cross Keys, Union District, that had already accepted the gospel, being convinced by Murphy himself. The small group of kin and friends that Murphy preached to was the first Latter-day Saint congregation in the Palmetto State. It would not be the last time Murphy managed to build up a branch largely of his own actions in a southern state; he would repeat the process less than a decade later in neighboring Georgia. What really stands out, however, is Murphy's relative success in an area that normally was quite hostile toward perceived outsiders. The Latter-day preachers that had the best success in the region were southerners.⁴⁵

Southern converts as missionaries had many advantages their northern fellow-Saints did not. First, being born in the region, they often grasped cultural nuances and social mores better than those in an increasingly different North. Second, if serving in their native communities, southerners already knew many of the people they preached to—in most cases an extreme advantage over strangers preaching a strange doctrine. Even if family and friends felt the Saints deluded or staunchly oppose Latter-day doctrine, few would resort to coercive means or violence

consequences can be found in Freehling, *Road to Disunion 1*, 211–286; Joseph Smith's prophecy on war was first recorded on 25 December 1832 and is currently Section 87 in the Doctrine and Covenants, see Revelation Book 2, pgs 32–33, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-book-2/42>; this prophecy mostly circulated through copies of the original manuscript but was published in 1851, see Joseph Smith, *The Pearl of Great Price: Being a Choice Selection from the Revelations, Translations, and Narrations of Joseph Smith*, ed. Franklin D. Richards (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1851), 35; Smith repeated his belief that a war would begin at South Carolina on 2 April 1843, now published as Doctrine and Covenants 130:12–13, see Instruction, 2 April 1843, as Reported by Willard Richards, p. 39, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed 3 June 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/instruction-2-april-1843-as-reported-by-willard-richards/3>; for an overview of how Latter-day Saints have utilized the 1832 prophecy on war, see Scott C. Esplin, “‘Have We Not Had a Prophet Among Us?’: Joseph Smith's Civil War Prophecy,” in Kenneth L. Alford, ed., *Civil War Saints* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012), 40–59.

⁴⁵ Murphy and Norton, *Emanuel Masters Murphy*, 16–17; also see Berrett, “Southern States Mission, 1831–1861,” 167–168. It should be noted here that Berrett turns Emanuel Murphy into two people by accident, distinguishing between a “Brother E. M. Murphy” and an “Elder E. M. Murray.” Previous works have noted the mistake, but others have perpetuated it. See Columbia South Carolina Stake, *Columbia South Carolina Stake Fortieth Anniversary, October 19, 1947 to 1987* (Columbia, SC: privately published, 1987), 4–5; for upcountry South Carolina nervousness about outsiders, see Stephen A. West, *From Yeoman to Redneck in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1850–1915* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 46–65.

to attack a messenger they were related to or expel kin from the community. Familiarity with the physical environment was another advantage southern missionaries had over their northern counterparts. While missionary work in the old Northwest proved to be an efficient method of gaining southern converts and following major transportation routes helped the Saints become established in the region, it was the work of southerners brought into the church through the first two methods that helped spread the message of the Saints through most places in the South.⁴⁶

Once the church headquarters had been established at Nauvoo, Illinois, on the Mississippi River, easier river transportation combined with a cadre of southern-born missionaries to produce an era of rapid expansion for the Saints in the South. While Emanuel Murphy was never an officially commissioned missionary, there were many southern-born missionaries that were called during the Nauvoo area, among them John Brown. The soon-to-be named “Pioneer” first started by preaching to his kin in Tennessee. Many received him coolly; his uncle urged him to “quit preaching such foolish doctrine.” Brown was undeterred. After spending several weeks with little success, however, Brown took the Tennessee River further south and began working in Alabama. By 1844, Brown and other missionaries had established a group of branches in northwestern Alabama and northeastern Mississippi, with Monroe County in the latter state being a fruitful field for baptisms. Brown was also distinctive (but not unique) in being ready and willing to preach to black and white southerners alike. Many enslaved people embraced Brown’s message, even though the Latter-day Saints overall were increasingly accepting of racial slavery and making racial distinctions.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ As Bertram Wyatt-Brown has argued, family ties could keep even incompetent young men from consequences, see *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982; 25th Anniversary Edition, 2007), 183–187; southern-born missionaries received similar allowances.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Autobiography*, 38–49, quote on 39, for examples of African Americans baptized by Brown, see 46; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 140–170.

In this era of expanding southern congregations during the Nauvoo Era, even New Orleans was the site of a branch. But in this case the necessities of transportation proved key to its establishment, not the work of convert southerners in the area. Since 1837, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had sent missionaries to Great Britain, where they had tremendous success in the country. Notably, while missionary work in the South was frequently done by convenience and dictated by well-worn routes, missionary work in Britain received great priority from the highest ranks of the church; in the 1840s a majority of the twelve apostles were working in the country. With the push to gather all the Saints to a central place in America, several British converts made their way to the United States. With railroads through Illinois from the east still sparse, the most efficient way to get British Saints to Nauvoo was up the Mississippi River. Accordingly, most British Saints during this era entered the United States at New Orleans. To supervise this immigration, a branch was organized there.⁴⁸

Unlike many branches in the antebellum United States (and especially in the South), the minutes of the New Orleans Branch are tightly organized and carefully written. This was due to most of the members of the branch being from Britain itself, not from New Orleans or the surrounding hinterlands. The New Orleans Branch of the church was in the South, but its membership was not of the South. Instead, it reflects again the concerns of moving a religion through space—in this case its adherents.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ David Buice, “When the Saints Came Marching In: The Mormon Experience in Antebellum New Orleans, 1840–1855,” in *Louisiana History* 23 No. 3 (Summer 1982), 221–237; a helpful summary of how the early Latter-day apostles essentially bypassed the South can be found in David J. Whittaker, “The Twelve Apostles, 1835–1846,” in Plewe, *Mapping Mormonism*, 46–47, it shows they paid highest attention to the Northeast United States, Britain, and even various parts of Europe and the Mediterranean, although Orson Hyde returned from Europe and the Ottoman Empire through New Orleans; for the all-out effort of preaching in the British Isles, see James B. Allen et al., *Men with a Mission, 1837–1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992); and Matthew Lyman Rasmussen, *Mormonism and the Making of a British Zion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016).

⁴⁹ See New Orleans Lafayette Branch Record, 1849–1850, LR 1872 21, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; for additional context, see Buice, “When the Saints Came Marching In.”

In 1844, fed up with the dominant American political parties of the time, Democrats and Whigs, Joseph Smith decided to declare his candidacy for president of the United States. Having survived the intense experiences in Missouri, by the time he was living in Illinois, Smith had become more radically anti-slavery than before. By no means an abolitionist, one of the platforms Smith advanced as part of his candidacy was a program of gradual and compensated emancipation that would rid the United States of slavery over several years. To boost his campaign across the country, several missionaries were assigned to specific states, including most states in the South (although fewer missionaries were assigned there when compared to a much larger contingent of missionaries being sent to northern states). Smith's assassination on 27 June 1844 at Carthage, Illinois, caused many missionaries to return home early now that the candidate they were boosting was dead.⁵⁰

After Smith's death a succession crisis ensued. Emerging with the confidence of the largest group of Saints was Brigham Young, now the senior apostle of the Quorum of the Twelve. After a year of relative calm after Smith's death, intense and violent opposition began again in Illinois once it became apparent that the Latter-day Saint movement would continue after Smith's death. Young and the apostles therefore began exploring the possibility of fleeing with the Saints to the Rocky Mountains. Others suggested more southerly locations, including Texas (an idea abandoned once U.S. annexation of Texas was approved). By 1846, missionary work in the United States and overseas was beginning to draw down for a period while the Saints focused on moving their religious center westward to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake.⁵¹

⁵⁰ For the missionary efforts of those advertising Smith's candidacy, see Berrett, "Southern States Mission, 1831–1861," 219–222; David J. Whittaker, "Early Missions," in Plewe, *Mapping Mormonism*, 43; for Smith's political campaign, see Spencer W. McBride, *Joseph Smith for President: The Prophet, the Assassins, and the Fight for American Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), for southern opposition to Smith's gradual emancipation platform, see 126–128.

⁵¹ See Steven L. Shields, "The Succession Crisis, 1844–1865," and William G. Hartley, "Planning the Exodus, 1842–1846," in Plewe, *Mapping Mormonism*, 64–69.

The Saints of Monroe County, Mississippi, joined this westward movement with some enthusiasm. Indeed, in 1846 most of them had traveled onto the Great Plains with hopes to meet up with Brigham Young’s vanguard company that year. But after several days of traveling westward, they discovered that the Nauvoo Saints were struggling to get through Iowa and would not make it further than the western bank of the Missouri River (near present-day Omaha, Nebraska) before that winter. The Mississippi Saints accordingly wintered near Pueblo, Colorado, while John Brown traveled to Winter Quarters to meet with Young. Early the next year, he was part of the vanguard group that entered the valley for the first time in July 1847. Sending word for the Mississippi Saints at Pueblo to come, they departed some days later and arrived in the valley before the end of July the same year. For a very brief moment, southern Latter-day Saints made up the largest contingent of the faithful in the Salt Lake Valley.⁵²

* * *

The traditional narrative crafted by LaMar Berrett and others is that southern Latter-day Saints (at least apart from Texas) essentially ceased to exist after the westward migration. Given the limited sources he and other previous historians had to work with, this is understandable, but the reality is that even amid the upheaval of the westward migration, branches of the church across the world continued to function. In Britain, for example, there were several times the number of baptized Latter-day Saints there than were present in the United States. The church continued to function there from day to day without trouble despite the drama going on in North America in 1847. Joseph Beecroft, a Bradford, England, resident, was assigned to serve as branch president for the village of Drighlington some miles off. His diary reports holding

⁵² Wahlquist, “Pioneer Trails,” in Plewe, *Mapping Mormonism*, 80–83; also see David F. Boone, “The Mississippi Saints: A Unique Odyssey of Southern Pioneers,” in Scott C. Esplin et al., *Far Away in the West: Reflections on the Mormon Pioneer Trail* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 161–186.

frequent meetings with the Saints, and he ended up baptizing a coal mining family there—Joseph and Mary Hirst Hepworth.⁵³

In much the same way, branches scattered across the South did not necessarily all fold once missionaries from the hearth regions of the church no longer visited them as often. Indeed, in at least one instance, a new branch was established during what might otherwise count as a hiatus in the church's efforts in the South. Emanuel Masters Murphy, who had helped establish the first branch of Saints in South Carolina, had since moved to Fayette County, Georgia, in 1842. Over a period of seven years, Murphy began to interest kin and neighbors with his religion. At some point he baptized his cousin, Jesse Murphy Jeans, who became the first Latter-day Saint convert in the state of Georgia. He also baptized at least another couple, Thomas and Sarah Dye of Fayette County, in 1849. That same year it appears that Murphy organized a branch somewhere in the county, making it the very first branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints established in the state of Georgia. As was so often the case, native-born southerners typically made the best missionaries in the region.⁵⁴

But new trouble was brewing, and again it revolved around transportation issues. The Saints had moved to the Rocky Mountains to be free from the persecution and violence that had dogged them in New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. What they had not counted on when fleeing to Mexico's territory of Alta California was that the United States would gain the entire

⁵³ Berrett, "Southern States Mission, 1831–1861," 263–291; Joseph Beecroft Journal Volume 1, 1844–1847, in Beecroft Family Papers, 1842–1907, MS 1915, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; the couple mentioned here are the author's third great-grandparents.

⁵⁴ The clearest indication that this branch existed is George White, *Statistics of the State of Georgia: Including an Account of its Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical History* (Savannah, GA: 1849), 104; also see Murphy and Norton, *Emanuel Masters Murphy*, 5–14; an 1880s missionary record of Saints in Georgia likewise confirms this branch, see lines 24 and 25 of pages 6–9, Thomas Dye and Sarah Dye of Fayette County, Georgia, baptized in 1849, Georgia Baptismal Record #6731, Microfilm 1912, Family History Library, Salt Lake City; Jesse Murphy Jeanes being the first person baptized in Georgia (~1847) by Emanuel Masters Murphy can be found in "From Georgia," *Deseret News*, 10 February 1869, page 5, column 3; by act of the Utah Territorial Legislature, Jesse changed his name to Jesse Jeanes Murphy, see "The Legislative Assembly," *Deseret News*, 16 February 1876, page 1, column 2.

area by 1848. The Saints again had to deal with the government of the United States. With a bewildering expansion in territory and not nearly enough boots on the ground to shape it according to Washington's whims, the Saints were largely left alone for their first several years in the valleys of what became known as Utah Territory. But the massive distance that the Saints had placed between themselves and other white Americans, meant to be a protection, also served as a challenge. Messages took long amounts of time to go between the West and Washington, making the possibility—or even the probability—of a clash due to misunderstanding ever more likely. The Saints clearly contributed to the misunderstanding, but it is also true that their opponents were likewise ready to take advantage of the new situation.⁵⁵

Two years in the 1850s, five years apart, did much to shape the trajectory of the church in the late antebellum South. Missionaries still continued to visit the eastern states, and even some in the South, through the 1850s. The missionary effort was not as substantial as the Nauvoo Era and was largely focused on maintaining the faith of the few who remained in the East. But in 1852, two portentous events began. First, Utah legalized a form of slavery. The laws embraced here differed from the slave laws that characterized much of the South; slavery for African Americans in Utah was made closer to indentured servitude than enslaved people being chattel property. In the debate over this measure, Brigham Young also articulated a full priesthood ban for Latter-day Saints of African descent, something which was becoming a policy but had previously not been fully announced or implemented. While these actions would have not contradicted the prevailing political economy of the South of this time, another action by the Saints heavily offended southern sensibilities. In 1852, the Saints publicly announced for the first

⁵⁵ Perhaps the best concise statement of how distance from the rest of the United States compounded the Saints' problems comes from Dean L. May: "In the Great Basin they had hoped to distance themselves from American society. That very distance created serious problems of its own, however, and in the end they found America, having let them leave, would nonetheless not leave them alone." May, *Utah: A People's History*, 93–94.

time that they believed in and practiced plural marriage—frequently called polygamy (or more technically, polygyny, the marriage of multiple wives to one man).⁵⁶

White southerners were aghast at the announcement. Polygamy had long been despised by many Christian Americans as being uncivilized and barbaric. For many Protestants in the South, rejecting biblical inerrancy was already a point of contention with the Latter-day Saints. With polygamy, the Saints now didn't just threaten biblical doctrines, but their very conception of family relations and society itself. Being highly isolated from the rest of the nation, Utah soon became the place where the imagined fears of primarily white men were actualized, even though much of what was reported from Utah remained distorted or untrue. Yet polygamy was indeed practiced by the Saints in Utah, and while the practice as imagined and as it was realized could be quite different, after 1852, white southerners especially began fretting over a new Mormon threat to society.⁵⁷

“Spiritualism, Mormonism, Millerism, Transcendentalism, Teetotalism, Free Lovism, Socialism, Naturalism, Abolitionism, and all the Kindred isms and paltries of the North are surveyed by Southern people generally with indifference, or disgust,” spat Natchez, Mississippi politician William Henry Holcombe. Pro-slavery writer George Fitzhugh lumped “Mormons” with “free lovers,” “geologists”(!), “fish-women,” “cannibals,” and many other -isms found in the North, concluding, “Indeed sir, half the North is partially insane, worse than France during the Reign of Terror.” That the Latter-day Saint movement was seen as but one of many cultural products of the North was no accident. The earliest Saints had come from New England or the

⁵⁶ See Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 140–170; a more thorough exploration of how slavery was established in Utah, see the forthcoming book by W. Paul Reeve, Christopher B. Rich, Jr., and LaJean Purcell Carruth, *This Abominable Slavery: Race, Religion, and the Battle Over Human Bondage in Antebellum Utah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024); May, *Utah: A People's History*, 95.

⁵⁷ For the deep roots of anti-polygamy in the United States, even before the Latter-day Saints, see Sarah M. S. Pearsall, *Polygamy: An Early American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

Northeast more generally. And while the development of a “Lake Economy” that was influenced heavily by transportation improvements in the North was still in progress by the time the Saints fled to the West, better transportation across the northern states worked with cultural differences to reinforce the church’s limited exposure in the South. Now, the public announcement of polygamy served to drive home the divide further between Saints and the southern states.⁵⁸

The demands of transportation also steadily reduced personal interactions between white southerners and Latter-day Saints. With the massive number of Latter-day converts in Britain (estimated to be three times as many in the British Isles as in Utah at the start of the 1850s), immigration across the ocean and crossing plains and mountains to the Great Basin was the dominant story of how the Saints built up a “Mormon Corridor” in the Intermountain West. Traditionally, British Saints had entered the United States at New Orleans and taken a steamboat up the Mississippi River, first to Nauvoo, but then later to a trailhead that they would depart for the West from. Once east-west railroads consistently crossed through Illinois to the Mississippi River, however, or even points further west, church leaders began encouraging immigrating Saints to land at an eastern port like Boston or New York. A series of steamboat accidents, which were common on the Mississippi, as well as an outbreak of Yellow Fever in and around New Orleans, confirmed the change in transportation routes. One more point of contact between the Latter-day Saints and the South had been cut.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ See William Henry Holcombe Diary Typed Transcription, page 152 (scan 153), in the William H. Holcombe Diary and Autobiography #1113-z, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; the foregoing was introduced to me by Conlin, “The Dangerous *Isms*,” 205; Fitzhugh quoted in William W. Frechling, *The Road to Disunion, Volume 2: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854–1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37; Marc Egnal, *Clash of Extremes: The Economic Origins of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), Egnal dubs the increasing unity of the North a “Lake Economy” in his fourth chapter, see pages 101–122.

⁵⁹ See Buice, “When the Saints Came Marching In,” 232–234; also see Fred E. Woods, “East to West Through North and South: Mormon Immigration During the Civil War,” in *Brigham Young University Studies* 39 No. 1 (2000), 10; also see Rasmussen, *Making of a British Zion*.

The next most important year for Latter-day Saint-southern relations in the last decade before the Civil War was 1857. In this year, blood was shed by both sides: a southerner in Arkansas killed an apostle for polygamy, while Latter-day Saints shot down southern emigrants from Arkansas passing through Utah Territory. The two were not closely related (some have sought to make a connection, but most southern Utahns that participated in the killing later thought they had targeted Missourians, not Arkansans). The massacre of Arkansan emigrants at Mountain Meadows in Utah prejudiced far more many southerners against the Latter-day Saints than vice-versa, potentially bleeding into popular memory as just one of many instances of sectional violence like the contemporary troubles of bleeding Kansas.⁶⁰

If any one thread did connect the two incidents, polygamy was the fiber holding them together. Southern revulsion of polygamy was an abstract (but strong) principle for most southerners, but for Hector McLean of Arkansas, its practice proved all too personal. McLean and his wife, Eleanor, had moved from Arkansas to San Francisco and begun raising a family there. Parley P. Pratt, the preacher who had found the Book of Mormon after a trip along the Erie Canal, had participated in the Camp of Israel, and who had preached in Britain as an apostle, was now (1854) overseeing the church's Pacific missionary work from the city. Eleanor soon embraced the message of the Latter-day Saints and was baptized with Hector's permission, but his alcoholism and occasional abuse drove her deeper into her new faith; she was soon often a visitor at the Pratt household. Suspicious of Pratt and the Saints generally, Hector McLean sent his children to New Orleans, whereupon Eleanor left him.⁶¹

⁶⁰ David R. Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 103–127, draws intriguing connections between the earlier Missouri violence against the Latter-day Saints and the conflicts that rent Kansas.

⁶¹ A brief summary of Pratt's murder at the hands of McLean can be found in Patrick Q. Mason, *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–6; for a much fuller account, see Givens and Grow, *Parley P. Pratt*, 366–391.

In 1855, having moved to Utah, Eleanor wed Parley P. Pratt as the apostle's twelfth wife. She then proceeded to sneak back to New Orleans to recover her children as Parley was setting forth on a new mission. McLean, alerted by Eleanor's parents, rushed to catch up with the group and narrowly missed Pratt in St. Louis. Pratt then sought to meet up with Eleanor, but McLean arrived first, grabbed the children, and rode off. Parley and Eleanor then sought to make an escape from Hector but were intercepted near Van Buren, Arkansas. There, a judge, hearing Eleanor's story, dismissed charges against her. McLean, also in the courtroom, attempted to kill Pratt on the spot but was restrained. The judge, however, decided to allow Pratt to escape the next morning, but it was not enough. McLean, discovering that Pratt was on the loose, got some local citizens to help him. After several attempts of shooting at Pratt, McLean resorted to a knife, then after incapacitating the apostle, the assassin utilized a firearm at point-blank range for good measure. Pratt yet lived for a few hours, using his last strength to bear testimony of the Latter-day Saints' message to the crowd that had gathered to hear him, proclaiming that he was "dying a martyr to the faith."⁶²

Southern newspapers disagreed. Most upheld the need for McLean to reclaim his honor, especially after his wife—a woman he was supposed to have charge over and control—had left him for another man. With the Latter-day practice of polygamy, most white southerners assumed that Pratt had received what was coming for him: death for having violated sacred laws governing the relationships between men and women.⁶³

Polygamy also generated another violent clash, one that can only be understood in the context of what became known as the Utah War. With the new Republican Party in 1856 campaigning against those "twin relics of barbarism" in the territories, "polygamy and slavery,"

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., for a more general discussion of southern conceptions of honor, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*.

new Democratic President James Buchanan sought to diffuse both issues. His pressure on the Supreme Court to resolve slavery ended up inflaming it further once the *Dred Scott* decision was issued. For the issue of polygamy, Buchanan seized on reports that the Saints in Utah were not respecting federal authority to send one-third of the army overland to Utah Territory. He also appointed a Georgian, Alfred Cumming, as the new territorial governor to replace Brigham Young. Crucially, Buchanan never informed Young about the impending change.⁶⁴

With little communication from Washington, Young treated the coming army as just another extension of the semi-legalized violence that other governments in Missouri and Illinois had waged against the Saints. He hoped to use his supposed influence over the nearby Indian nations as a bargaining chip with the U.S. government and counseled Utes, Paiutes, and Goshutes to attack passing emigrant trains. By closing down the transportation routes through the mountain West, Young would negotiate a withdrawal of the army. Yet the indigenous peoples of Utah Territory were not Young's puppets, indeed, some first declined to participate with the Saints in any kind of confrontation with white America. Having said that, some did start raiding passing companies in and around Utah, giving the Saints exactly the reputation they were trying to avoid—that they were menaces to the United States by controlling the trails through large stretches of the western countryside.⁶⁵

There was one wagon train, however specifically targeted by the Latter-day Saints in southern Utah for attack. Some of the people in southern Utah, especially the stake president of Cedar City, Isaac Haight, had taken some clashes with the Fancher Party from Arkansas quite

⁶⁴ Goldfield, *America Aflame*, 137–143; William P. MacKinnon, “A Georgian Among Mormons: Alfred Cumming as Governor of Utah Territory, 1857–1861,” in *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 106 No. 3 (2022), 228–268.

⁶⁵ For the most recent consideration of Young's actions amid the Utah War and encouraging attacks on wagon trains, see Richard E. Turley and Barbara J. Brown, *Vengeance Is Mine: The Mountain Meadows Massacre and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 18–32.

personally. He wanted the local southern Paiute to stage a raid to give the train a scare, and if someone happened to die in the attack, Haight could accept the loss. But after the local Saints drummed the Paiutes into an attack, the Fancher Party dug in for a siege that lasted several days. Becoming fearful that the Arkansans suspected complicity on the part of the southern Utah settlers, Haight argued that the whole group must be killed. On 11 September 1857, militiamen from Cedar City and other communities pretended to liberate the Fancher Party from the siege by the Paiute, only to turn on emigrants just minutes later with their own weapons. By the time the massacre was over, more than 120 men, women, and children were dead in the Mountain Meadows. Two days later, a rider from Salt Lake City arrived with a message from Brigham Young—that the Saints themselves were not to harm the emigrants. “Too late,” Haight sobbed.⁶⁶

Not participating in the massacre but likewise caught up in the war fever that had infected southern Utah was Kentucky-born Elisha Hurd Groves, who now served as patriarch for the congregations in southern Utah. Visiting Haight’s congregation the same day Haight read Young’s message, Groves delivered remarks referring to the surrounding Indian nations as “the battle axe of the Lord.” While Young had certainly sought to encourage the indigenous peoples to act as this battle axe, once actual people had died, he soon rejected his previous course. The early reports of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, brought by white Saints from southern Utah, blamed the atrocity on the southern Paiute. Young immediately worked to take back his plan to keep further attacks from happening. But the rumor (indeed fact) that Latter-day Saints had gunned down an unarmed group of white southerners would stain Latter-day Saint-southern relations for decades to come.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley, and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 116–226.

⁶⁷ Turley and Brown, *Vengeance Is Mine*, 376–384; Brian D. Reeves, ““Divert the Minds of the People’: Mountain Meadows Massacre Recitals and Missionary Work,” in Reid L. Neilson and Fred E. Woods, eds., *Go Ye*

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Sometime between 1850 and 1854, Emanuel Murphy moved his family back to Weakley County, Tennessee, from Fayette County, Georgia. It was here that the Murphys lived when in 1857 relations between the Saints and the federal government collapsed. As part of an effort to bring as much strength to bear for the coming conflict as possible, Young dismissed all missionaries from their missions and encouraged Saints, no matter where they lived, to come to Utah. Emanuel and Nancy, along with their ten children, prepared to make their way from the South to the West. By the time they set off for Utah in the summer of 1860, the conflict had been resolved peacefully. Georgian Alfred Cumming had been installed as Utah's governor without any conquests by the army; General Alfred Sidney Johnston's army, harassed through Echo Canyon, marched through the empty streets of an evacuated Salt Lake City and off to an isolated fort in a valley to the south beyond. Aside from the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the whole Utah War looked almost entirely bloodless.⁶⁸

But the Utah War also proved how fragile the union of states appeared to be. Increasing political battles and the emergence of a northern-only political party that took the polls by storm increased the chances of a fatal clash between sections. Arriving in the Salt Lake Valley on 30 August 1860, the Murphys had fortuitously escaped Tennessee in the nick of time. One year later, the state was a battlefield, and within a year and a half Union armies would be fighting to secure the western part of the state that the Murphys had left from. The spiraling conflict would leave over 750,000 Americans dead before it ended.

Into All the World: The Growth and Development of Mormon Missionary Work (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012), 291–315.

⁶⁸ Murphy and Norton, *Emanuel Masters Murphy*, 6–8, 18; MacKinnon, “A Georgian Among Mormons,” 229–237. Also see May, *Utah: A People's History*, 96–101.

The war also closed the first phase of Latter-day Saint interactions with the South as a region. The particulars of transportation—moving a religion through space—had been, along with cultural factors, a deterrent to proselytizing in the region. The earliest southern converts were frequently from missions of convenience, secured by preachers passing through the old Northwest between church centers in Ohio and Missouri. Later on, early efforts to preach in the South followed well-worn transportation routes through the region, and while there were exceptions, most of the region visited by missionaries were areas that were more readily accessible. It was southerners themselves, usually converted from these first two methods, that took the Latter-day message further into the South—especially converts like John Brown (converted in the old Northwest) and Emanuel Murphy (converted not too distant from the Tennessee River corridor). Even so, because so much of the early Latter-day Saint effort was focused in the North, many Saints got a reputation among southerners as being one of the North’s many dangerous -isms that threatened southern society, a position reified when the Saints moved to the mountain West and announced their practice of polygamy.

Yet some southern converts felt to rejoice at coming to the West. At a meeting in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Emanuel Masters Murphy spoke on the morning of 30 December 1860. Shooting had not yet started, but Murphy related his visit with Joseph Smith in prison and “the advice of Joseph the Prophet to him to go to South Carolina and Georgia and warn his friends of the war and desolation impending on the people in that country, and to gather his friends to Zion, for the rebellion and war would break out in South Carolina.” As the year 1860 came to a close, it looked like the day of judgement had arrived.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Murphy and Norton, *Emanuel Masters Murphy*, 16–17; 30 December 1860, Wilford Woodruff Journal, 1860 January–1865 October, image 100, in Wilford Woodruff Journals and Papers, 1828–1898, MS 1352, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

CHAPTER TWO

RECONSTRUCTION: ORGANIZING AND REORGANIZING IN THE SOUTH

In 1867, Jesse E. Murphy and William Cochran Adkinson Smoot, sons of Tennessee converts Emanuel Masters Murphy and Abraham Owen Smoot, arrived in the state of Georgia to preach. The two men had been called as missionaries to serve with John Brown and others in the southern United States. The mission they served had no headquarters, minimal contact with the president (Brown), and no specified field to labor in. After first visiting relatives in Tennessee, the pair traveled southward to Clayton County, Georgia, just south of Atlanta. They found few people willing to talk about the gospel but many up in arms over Union troops occupying the region amid radical Reconstruction. Smoot reported the following April, “The people are very much divided in this country, politically, religiously, and socially, and it would take but little to create another war. In fact they are fighting in some places now, I understand, and all that keeps it down is, that soldiers are stationed all over the State.”¹

Latter-day Saints had been little surprised by the war that engulfed the United States in 1861, riving the country into two hostile nation-states. What did surprise them was how quickly it seemed to pass. This millennium-minded people believed that the war was the opening salvo that would first bring the collapse of the United States; with that accomplished, the Saints in Utah would build up the kingdom of God on the Earth and usher in Christ’s Second Coming. When the United States defeated the Confederate States, the Saints seemed slightly disappointed. Clearly the latter days were going to be lengthier than they first thought. Still expecting war to

¹ “From Georgia” under “Items From Tuesday’s Daily,” *Deseret News*, 20 May 1868, page 3, column 3.

break out again, many watched and waited for a second round of fighting. They did not have to wait long to find evidence that the war seemed far from over as riots, murders, and other violence flared across the South. Letters like Smoot's confirmed their suspicions that the war truly wasn't over. Indeed, while the secession war had ended in a costly Union victory, the crisis of legitimacy that brought secession about still smoldered.²

The victory of a still young political party, the Republicans, had brought about this crisis in the first place. With the departure of southern Democrats during secession, the Republicans had wasted no time in passing an agenda to transform the country, and especially the beckoning West. Ignoring the Supreme Court's *Dred Scott* decision, the anti-slavery Republicans had outlawed slavery in the territories. Aiming at the second of the "twin relics of barbarism," Republicans also passed the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act to end polygamy, but President Abraham Lincoln declined to enforce it amid the struggle with the Confederacy. The Union, which now acted as a Republican party-state, also passed legislation for a Pacific railway and the Homestead Act to aid westward-moving family farmers. With the end of the Confederacy, the den of secession and slavery had been vanquished, while the peculiar institution of slavery was heading to extinction. Yet with polygamy still alive and well in the West, Republicans determined to take it down—if only they could secure the territories once in rebellion to the South.³

White southerners were troubled that the Confederacy had lost, but many maintained that their cause had been just, even if that cause required some imaginative reinventing in the postwar years. The overthrow of slavery and a flood of northerners into the region produced a religious

² Christopher James Blythe, *Terrible Revolution: Latter-day Saints and the American Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 144–145; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 228–280.

³ Heather Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free: A History of the Republican Party* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 25–54; Orville Vernon Burton, *The Age of Lincoln* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 228–229; Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 55–83.

revolution that paralleled political, economic, and social struggles ongoing in the South. The kaleidoscope of religious factions spinning through the region often fought across the politics of Reconstruction, a topic that the Latter-day Saints carefully stepped around when returning to the southern states. Indeed, in the first several years of resumed missionary work in the South (from 1867 onwards), most men who served were native-born southerners. While many they preached to distrusted (and even despised) “Mormonism,” the ongoing battles of the Reconstruction era kept would-be anti-Mormons at bay to fight political and social threats closer to home. Between the familiarity of the preachers and the turmoil of the time, the few missionaries engaged in preaching across the Southland had tremendous success.⁴

Part of that success involved bringing convert southerners to the West. This was a difficult process in 1867, but when the Pacific railroad the Republicans demanded came to fruition in 1869, travel to Utah quickly became easier. Latter-day Saint southerners accordingly began moving westward via rail. New railroads being built made navigation across the East easier also; southern states that had jealously guarded their frontiers were now united by a confederacy of iron. But the railroads stoked division even as they unified large parts of a reuniting country. When the economy crashed (due in no small measure to overbuilding of railroads), Republican efforts in the South began losing steam as well; their failed promises of prosperity further undermined their scant legitimacy in the face of white conservative terrorism. By 1877, the Republican attempt to Reconstruct the South was foundering.⁵

⁴ For the religious disagreements that characterized the South in this era, see Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863–1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and the essays in Edward J. Blum and W. Scott Poole, eds., *Vale of Tears: New Essays on Religion and Reconstruction* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005).

⁵ The historical debates over Reconstruction cannot be reasonably covered in one note, but a foundational work in the modern understanding of the era is still Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), who seeks to understand why northern officials gave up on securing rights for black freedpeople. More recent scholars have viewed the era as incredible for how much it changed American society despite opposition. Mark Wahlgren Summers has especially noted that most Americans hoped to

The Latter-day Saints did not face anything like Reconstruction as it took place in the postwar South, although a federal army occupied a spot just east of Salt Lake City since 1862. With Republicans making compromises with a resurgent Democratic South, the Saints found themselves under siege at home by emigrants of other faiths coming by railroad, a Republican Party now focused on the West and determined to take down the second “twin relic,” and by a Supreme Court uninterested in arguments that wed polygamy with religious liberty. In facing this siege, the Saints re-constructed themselves to face the challenge, rebuilding many congregations in the West from the ground up. They also began a systematic approach to missionary work, rejecting the ad hoc efforts of previous years. The drawback was that this newly organized effort now frequently sent missionaries to the South that had no connection to the region.⁶

Sending missionaries unfamiliar with the South to the region had severe consequences. While white southerners may have disdained fellow southerners that embraced the Latter-day Saints, they recognized them as cultural (if not literal) kin. Non-southern missionaries were

avoid further revolution, an argument he first put forward in *A Dangerous Stir: Fear, Paranoia, and the Making of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2009), and developed further in his substantial *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). Gregory P. Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), contributes a new understanding of how brute military force created a space where black rights could exist amid a racist and embittered former Confederacy; this argument is especially adapted into Richard White’s more general history of the post-Civil War generation, *The Republic For Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865–1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 23–337. For a detailed analysis of how occupation worked from month to month, see Gregory P. Downs and Scott Nesbit, *Mapping Occupation: Force, Freedom, and the Army in Reconstruction*, <http://mappingoccupation.org>, published March 2015. The fast pace of railroad building in the Reconstruction South has also drawn attention in differing ways, see Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity: Aid Under the Radical Republicans, 1865–1877* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁶ A helpful series of essays that frame discussion of the post-Civil War era in Utah and other Latter-day Saint-dominated areas is found in Clyde A. Milner and Brian Q. Cannon, eds., *Reconstruction and Mormon America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019); David Walker, *Railroading Religion: Mormons, Tourists, and the Corporate Spirit of the West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); and W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 193–202; as I will detail later in this chapter, the development of an institutional “Southern States Mission” was a product of re-constructing church organizations and lines of authority, see William G. Hartley, “The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877: Brigham Young’s Last Achievement,” in *Brigham Young University Studies* 20, No. 1 (Fall 1979), 3–36.

another matter. Having spent most of a decade to rid the region of control by northern Republicans and their black and white southern allies, few conservative southern whites were about to listen to “spiritual carpetbaggers.” With southern converts that accepted the missionaries’ message typically leaving the region, any potential gains by the Saints equated to a loss of people from southern communities. This loss stoked resentment and fear, especially when a newly empowered national campaign against the Saints’ polygamy accelerated. Reconstruction proved to help the Saints in the South, but re-construction of missionary work hindered it.⁷

* * *

While the United States crumpled under the greatest constitutional crisis it had yet faced and families were split by loyalty to the United States or the Confederate States, the Saints in Utah largely completed a withdrawal from American society first started during the Utah War. They still maintained emigration agents in the East to help the flow of immigrants from Europe, most of which now arrived at Boston and New York. Minus occasional threats from raiding Confederate privateers in the Atlantic and guerilla raiders along railroads in Missouri, most immigrant Latter-day Saints gathered to Utah without incident beyond crowded conditions and a dearth of supplies brought by the expediency of war. Upon reaching Utah, however, all the Saints living in its valleys could celebrate their splendid isolation from a conflict that Joseph Smith had warned them about. Indeed, to Brigham Young and many of the Saints, the war was divine justice being poured out upon the nation for Smith’s murder and the poor treatment the

⁷ “Spiritual carpetbaggers” is a term apparently first coined by David Buice in “‘All Alone and None to Cheer Me’: The Southern States Mission Diaries of J. Golden Kimball,” in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24 No. 1 (Spring 1991), 38; Heather M. Seferovich also uses it in her “Hospitality and Hostility: Missionary Work in the American South, 1875–98,” in Reid L. Nielson and Fred E. Woods, eds., *Go Ye Into All the World: The Growth and Development of Mormon Missionary Work* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012), 230; for the impact that outmigration had on southern attitudes toward the Saints, see Mary Ella Engel, *Praying With One Eye Open: Mormons and Murder in Nineteenth-Century Appalachian Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), esp. 43–65.

Saints had received. Many waited for the fall of the federal government that would leave the church the only remaining power left standing in the shattered nation.⁸

More immediately beneficial for the Saints had been surplus government supplies when Camp Floyd had been closed amid a rush of soldiers to the east—some leaving to serve the Union, and others to fight for the Confederacy. For several months, the Saints enjoyed little interference from outside influences. The fastest communication at the time with other parts of the fractured country came through the Pony Express. Yet an information revolution was moving forward as workers labored to construct a transcontinental telegraph. Moving from the Plains westward and from California eastward, the two lines finally joined together at Great Salt Lake City in 1861. As one of the first people to use it, Brigham Young telegraphed that Utah had not seceded, but mourned the number of people dying in the conflict. This new telegraph line represented a vital link for the Union, and while Young pledged that the Saints would guard it against attack or damage, federal officials, now largely Republicans, distrusted these promises. Indeed, it was clear to several observers that many Utahns could care less about the national ordeal unfolding, with some in the territory openly sympathetic to the South.⁹

Indeed, Utah had been a slave territory for decade by early 1862, but now that an anti-slavery party held control in Washington, Republicans used legislative fiat to end bondage in the western territories by abolishing slavery in all of them on 19 July 1862. Having ended one of the twin relics of barbarism by quashing the doctrine of “popular sovereignty,” the Republicans also

⁸ Fred E. Woods, “East to West Through North and South: Mormon Immigration During the Civil War,” in *Brigham Young University Studies* 39 No. 1 (2000), 6–29; George C. Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 53–54; Blythe, *Terrible Revolution*, 132–145.

⁹ See E. B. Long, *The Saints and the Union: Utah Territory During the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Arthur King Peters, *Seven Trails West* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996), 173–193; James Schwoch, *Wired Into Nature: The Telegraph and the North American Frontier* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 40–81.

targeted the other relic: polygamy. For this, the newly empowered party passed the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act, and President Abraham Lincoln signed it. Yet given the pressure of the war, Lincoln neglected to enforce it; indeed, with most military units engaged in the east, there was little that could be done. That is, until several California volunteers, anxious to find glory in the battles back east, were given the relatively mundane assignment of guarding the telegraph line. Marching to Utah, their commander, Patrick Edward Conner, decided to skip Camp Floyd as too isolated and instead directed his men to the eastern foothills of the Salt Lake Valley. From the new Camp Douglas, Conner could keep a watchful eye on Brigham Young and the Saints. Just as the Confederacy would become, Utah was now under federal military occupation. No one knew it at the time, but a standoff lasting nearly thirty years was just beginning.¹⁰

* * *

Some six years after the arrival of the transcontinental telegraph and about two years after the Confederacy's collapse, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1867 again assigned missionaries to the southern United States. Given the tense situation in the east and the continued belief among the Saints that the war might be renewed at any time, mostly native southerners were called to go there. One previous missionary to the South argued that "unexperienced Boys would do but litle good" and that "men of experiance" would be better instead. These missionaries would largely work informally among family and friends. Despite the loose structure of this mission, church leaders needed someone to take the lead in supervising the many missionaries, seeking out "a man well acquainted with the character of the Southern people, and otherwise qualified to take charge of the mission to the Southern States." While John Brown claimed that church officials had "settled upon" him, many others had previously

¹⁰ Dean L. May, *Utah: A People's History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1987), 114–118; Gustive O. Larson, *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1971), 32–33.

recommended the Tennessean to lead the missionaries back to the South. He was given a field greater than the southland to supervise, however, with responsibility over all Saints south and west of Philadelphia and east of the Rocky Mountains. Having received his assignment at the April 1867 General Conference of the church, Brown set out eastward in mid-May.¹¹

While the transcontinental telegraph made for quick communication, it had done nothing to improve transportation, which Brown and the other missionaries soon found out. Storms dogged Brown and his company as they made their way into the Wasatch Mountains. Six inches of snow fell in a matter of hours; the teams conveying the missionaries had to search far and wide in the whited canyons for grass to eat. Trudging through snow over barely passable roads gave Brown ample time to think about his mission, and when considering that he would be returning to a people “severely chastened with the effects of the Civil War,” he wept. Once out of the mountains and onto the high plains, snow continued to plague the group, but raids by nearby American Indians also kept the men on constant alert. The monotonous and wearisome trip began to change in tempo when on 21 June Brown related seeing men cutting pines for railroad ties that would be used in building the advancing Union Pacific. Signs of the approaching railroad increased over the next six days until the group made it to Julesburg, the furthest point west they could then catch a train. They had spent a month travelling some 580 miles from Salt Lake City to get there. Once on the train, it took just less than twenty-four hours

¹¹ See Heather M. Seferovich, “History of the LDS Southern States Mission, 1875–1898,” (MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1996), 13–32; as early as 1855, John Brown was being suggested for leadership in a mission to the South: “I would suggest to you the name of John Brown, I mean our Miss[issippi] John, as our very suitable to send him as he understands the Southern Character well,” Preston Thomas to George A. Smith, 17 April 1855, Folder 10, Box 5, George A. Smith Correspondence, MS 1322, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; the former southern missionary who argued for men of experience was John Doyle Lee, when asked by Brigham Young if his sons should serve in the South, Lee suggested they should not and that more experienced men be sent, see John D. Lee, *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848–1876*, Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, eds. (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1955), Vol. 2, 69; John Brown, *Autobiography of Pioneer John Brown, 1820–1896* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1941), 252–254, quote on 252.

to cover the next 350 miles to Omaha, the Union Pacific's eastern terminus. Yet while the iron horse sped their journey, it did not make it much safer—five hours into their ride they were delayed two hours while workers repaired the track after a freight car derailed.¹²

Brown and his fellow missionaries then began to scatter to different directions. After spending some time in Illinois, Brown traveled to Smithland, Kentucky, to catch a ship up the Cumberland River. Drought made this impossible, so he then walked to nearby Paducah on the Tennessee River where the water was higher.¹³

Traveling into his native Tennessee for the first time since the Civil War in September 1867, Brown was struck by the unintentional monuments the war had left behind. The burnt wreckage of boats and transports used in the fighting littered the Tennessee River. While traveling from the river to Nashville by rail, he saw the ruins of stockades used by soldiers to protect the line from raids. Journeying northward to his hometown of Gallatin, he visited his cousin's homestead along the Cumberland River and found that occupying Union troops had emptied the property of its valuable timber, leaving empty fields behind. Brown found other jarring changes not related to the war—the house he was born in had been demolished, leaving a plowed field in its place. Moving on to another house he grew up in, only the ruins of the chimney remained, but some of the trees he once played under still stretched tall. As he looked around, "I was carried back to my childhood."¹⁴

Yet Brown soon snapped back into the present. The postwar South was a wholly different place than the one he grew up in. The ruins of war and the parched landscape simply mirrored another and uglier reality—the burning resentment the local whites had kindled against the

¹² Brown, *Autobiography*, 254–258, quote on 254.

¹³ Brown, *Autobiography*, 254–279.

¹⁴ Brown, *Autobiography*, 266–268, quote on 268.

Federal Government and the area's freed African Americans. "This country is, politically, in a very peculiar condition," Brown wrote back to Salt Lake City. The increasingly radical nature of Reconstruction, even in a state not under military government, had effected a social revolution—the state's blacks were "enfranchised and the great mass of the whites are disfranchised," giving Radical Republicans "the entire control of the State." Brown agreed with his racist former neighbors that blacks had been unready for the vote but was still shocked that most people believed "a war of races" was "inevitable," and that the result would be the "extermination" of the area's African Americans. Brown was appalled that some whites used scripture to justify their belief that blacks did "not belong to the human race," making it "no harm in killing them off," and observed that many "pretend to believe it."¹⁵

Brown considered that the war and its aftermath had engendered a "deep-seated hatred and revenge" in the minds of the people, producing a corresponding spiritual drought among the populace. He observed, "the conduct of ministers and religionists, during the late conflict," had destroyed "all confidence with regard to religion" for many whites in the region. Accordingly, some whites had given up religion altogether, while many more held "a spirit of seeming indifference" to Brown and his religious message. Yet Brown had at least one reason for optimism, stating that despite the lack of inquiry, the Latter-day Saint missionaries in the South had thus far "met with no opposition" to their preaching.¹⁶

With the responsibility to manage Latter-day Saint affairs across the Midwest as well as the South, Brown preached for a time in Mississippi before heading to St. Louis for a season. Among the missionaries Brown met with while traveling back from St. Louis toward Mississippi in February 1868 were Jesse Murphy and his companion, William C. A. Smoot. The two had

¹⁵ John Brown letter dated 26 September 1867, in "Correspondence," *Deseret News*, 20 November 1867.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

initially gone to Tennessee where both men had relatives to visit and preach to. The pair preached in Weakley County where Murphy's family had lived just prior to moving west in 1860, and Smoot reported to Wilford Woodruff that some people still remembered Woodruff's preaching as a missionary there thirty years prior. When Brown arrived, however, the reception given to Murphy and Smoot turned cold, with the missionaries being informed that they would need to leave the house where they had been staying immediately. Brown told the pair that they should accordingly leave the people of that area, "for they had rejected the good word, and we would turn to other people." Brown resumed his journey to Mississippi, and Murphy and Smoot pushed southward into Georgia, another one of Emanuel Murphy's former homes.¹⁷

The turbulence in the region's politics and society gave the Latter-day Saints an opportunity to begin anew in the South, a point driven home by a "singular dream" that Brown awoke from while laboring in Monroe County, Mississippi, where many of the antebellum Mississippi Saints had come from. Brown dreamt that he was with a fellow missionary in a field with large watermelons. A heavy frost had come upon the patch, and many were rotting as the vines shriveled. There were some smaller ones, however, that appeared to be ripe and still good to eat. While looking through the field, Brown noticed something protruding from one of the melons. Having his missionary companion investigate, the companion pulled up a venomous snake that was two and a half feet long, but because of the heavy frost it was "torpid"—senseless. Now alerted to possible danger, Brown looked around the watermelons again and found several of them, all dazed, before he awakened from the dream.¹⁸

¹⁷ See letter from Wm. C. A. Smoot to Wilford Woodruff from Jonesboro, Georgia, dated 16 March 1868 under "Correspondence," in *Deseret Evening News*, 14 May 1868, page 2, columns 4–5; the poor quality of the surviving page is remedied by a transcription of this letter found in Eastes W. Murphy and Don E. Norton, Jr., *Emanuel Masters Murphy, 1809–1871: Ancestry, Life, Children* (Provo, UT: Stevenson's Genealogical Center, 1980), 151, the quote above is found here; Brown, *Autobiography*, 279.

¹⁸ Brown, *Autobiography*, 284.

Pondering on his dream that following morning, Brown ascertained that the field he was in with his companion represented the United States, and the watermelons were its people. The small but good melons were those who were honest in heart and ready to hear the missionaries' message—in other words, truly ready for the harvest. The snakes among the watermelons, however, represented those who opposed the progress of the church. Yet the cold had rendered them unable to do anything—why? “The heavy frost is the late civil war and its consequences,” Brown continued, and just as the frost had immobilized the snakes, the war and its aftermath currently held the church's opponents “in restraint, hence we have liberty to preach unmolested at present.”¹⁹

At present. Brown's dream suggested that while the missionaries were enjoying relative latitude in preaching their doctrine, this would not always be the case. With the “deep-seated hatred and revenge” harbored by southern whites being directed at political threats posed by African Americans and radical Republicans, southern whites might distrust the missionaries but take few actions against them. The most effective method of preaching in the South before the war remained the most successful afterward, and southerners who had converted through the earliest efforts by the Saints in the region frequently returned to preach among friends and relatives after the war.²⁰

Just as southerner Emanuel Murphy had good success preaching among his kin, his son, Jesse, contacted Emanuel's brother, L. M. Murphy, upon reaching Georgia. According to Smoot, the uncle received the two kindly, relating “He had been warned by his brother, E. M. Murphy,

¹⁹ Brown, *Autobiography*, 284.

²⁰ I am not alone nor the first to make an argument like this. See Heather M. Seferovich, “History of the LDS Southern States Mission, 1875–1898,” (MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1996). Despite the temporal confines of her title, she devotes an early chapter to postwar missionary work from 1867 to 1874 on pages 13–32. She points out that these early missionaries baptized 170 people in eighteen months. Two missionaries in particular, Henry G. Boyle and Howard K. Coray, baptized nearly 200 on their own over twenty-six months, see pages 21–22. Seferovich also documents the cost of emigration, indicating that 260 of these Saints left the South.

years ago, and he felt that we had come for the same purpose, and listened with deep interest to what we told him.” Yet Smoot observed that conditions there were troubled: “Many of these people seem to be afraid to converse on the doctrine of Christ. I attend their meetings and have heard more absurdities than I ever did in my life before. However, religion with them only lasts a short time on the Sabbath, and then the rest of their time is occupied with the negro and reconstruction.” After two months of going between the Georgia counties of Clayton and Fayette, the pair of missionaries had managed to gain a little bit of interest in the church, but Reconstruction issues still predominated most interactions.²¹

By the time Smoot wrote in April 1868, the number of Union soldiers stationed in Georgia had declined from their postwar maximum, but writing from Clayton County, he and Murphy were between the two largest concentrations of federal troops in the state at Atlanta (654 troops, including 109 cavalry) and Macon (579, including 60 African American soldiers). With Clayton and Fayette counties located on a rail line, any kind of overt violence on the part of southern whites against black or white Republicans could be met by military force within hours. Political tensions were already high during the year due to the coming presidential election. With partisan divisions blazing and troops stationed close by, it is little surprise that the white residents Murphy and Smoot visited were preoccupied by Reconstruction and little interested in religious discussion. In other parts of the state, like southwest Georgia where no troops were stationed, fighting did occur, most notably when several white residents of Camilla gunned down African Americans participating in a Republican political rally in that city later in the year.²²

²¹ See transcript of Jesse Murphy’s diary in Murphy and Norton, *Emanuel Masters Murphy*, 159–160, as well as transcriptions of William C. A. Smoot’s letters, 151–152; “From Georgia” under “Items From Tuesday’s Daily,” *Deseret News*, 20 May 1868, page 3, column 3.

²² See Gregory P. Downs and Scott Nesbit, *Mapping Occupation: Force, Freedom, and the Army in Reconstruction*, <http://mappingoccupation.org>, published March 2015, accessed, 4 June 2024, see data for April 1868 under “Exploratory Map”; Downs, *After Appomattox*, 179–210; the best summary of the major difficulties African Americans experienced in southwestern Georgia where no military help was nearby is found in Susan E.

Reconstruction often refracted religion in the South through political and social developments. Throughout the antebellum, African American Christians had been supervised by whites. With the end of slavery, the black churches moved to cut ties with their white counterparts and set off on their own. With government still largely in the hands of white southerners and politics being a realm of high contention, religion was one of the first places where newly freed people could assert their own independence. Also competing in the religious sphere in the South were white northerners, many of whom hoped to welcome penitent southerners back into the fold of once-national churches. As it turned out, few white southerners were willing to oblige—they felt that secession and the attempt to build an independent Confederacy had been a righteous cause, and while they had suffered God’s chastisement, it was simply preparation for something more glorious. Given the continuation of the war in religion, Smoot’s comment about southerners being reluctant to talk about the Gospel of Christ should be understood in the sense that from his perspective, politics was far too intertwined in religious conversations going on in the Reconstruction South.²³

Yet the distractions of politics benefitted the Saints by keeping whites who would be leading anti-Mormons engaged in other battles. Brown intended to do all he could to harvest before those serpents he dreamed of awakened, but his responsibilities for overseeing the emigration of immigrants through the Midwest meant that just as he was opening some interest in Mississippi, he again had to retreat from there and back to St. Louis again to manage things. With the spring coming in 1868, overland trails into Utah had opened and in St. Louis several

O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), see pages 208–263 for the immediate context of the Camilla Massacre.

²³ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 65–99, 179–186; Paul Harvey, “‘This Was about Equalization after Freedom’: Southern Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reconstruction and Redemption, 1861–1900,” in Blum and Scott, *Vale of Tears*, 73–92.

companies of Saints were arriving from Europe to start their journey west. Much as it had been before the war, transportation issues continued to press upon missionary work. Even though the Union Pacific was getting closer to Utah, which improved the reliability of crossing the Plains, the train could be vexing in its own right. A pricing dispute with the railroad forced Brown to leave St. Louis and travel to Omaha. Here, in the summer heat, Brown suffered a nearly fatal heatstroke which incapacitated him for weeks. He never fully recovered his previous health, but after a lengthy convalescence he returned to St. Louis to again manage the missionary work in the southern states.²⁴

* * *

Despite the ongoing challenges of Reconstruction in the South, an increasing number of Republicans were becoming insistent on confronting the other “twin relic of barbarism” that still festered in Utah Territory. Debate over how to do this, and how to vanquish the power of the Latter-day hierarchy along with polygamy, became a topic of intense national interest. Proposals ranging from military action to dividing up Utah were entertained, while others hoped the forthcoming transcontinental railroad would fix the problem. Disagreement over how to handle the “Mormon Question,” however, drew ridicule and defiance from the Saints themselves, who mocked the seeming inability of their opponents to settle on a single course of action. In mid-January 1867, a writer in Salt Lake City penned a little song that was soon set to the tune of “Marching Through Georgia” and titled, “All Are Talking of Utah”:

Who’d ever think that Utah
Would stir the world so much?
Who’d ever think the Mormons
Were widely known as such?
I hardly dare to scribble,

²⁴ Brown, *Autobiography*, 279–300; for the changing dynamics of the journey west with the expanding railroad, see Wayne Wahlquist, “Pioneer Trails, 1847–1869,” in Brandon S. Plewe, ed., *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2012), 83.

Or such a subject touch;
For all are talking of Utah.

Chorus:
Hurrah! hurrah!
The Mormons have a name;
Hurrah! hurrah!
They're on the road to fame:
Don't matter what they style us,
It's all about the same;
For all are talking of Utah.

'Tis Utah and the Mormons
In Congress, pulpit, press;
'Tis Utah and the Mormons
In every place, I guess:
We must be growing greater—
We can't be growing less,
For all are talking of Utah.

They say they'll send an army,
To set the Mormons right,
Regenerate all Utah,
And show us Christian light,
Release our wives and daughters,
And put us men to flight;
For all are talking of Utah.

They say that Utah cannot
Be numbered as a State;
They wished our lands divided.
But left it rather late:
'Tis hard to tell of Mormons,
What yet may be their fate;
For all are talking of Utah.

Whatever may be coming,
We cannot well foresee.
For it may be the railroad,
Or some great prodigy:
At least the noted Mormons
Are watching what's to be,
For all are talking of Utah.

I now will tell you something
You never thought of yet;

We bees are nearly filling
The hive of Deseret:
If hurt, we'll sting together,
And gather all we get;
For all are talking of Utah.

First published in the *Deseret News* on 30 January 1867, the song became well known enough to make its way into the journal of Jesse Murphy, then laboring as a missionary in Fayette and Clayton counties south of Atlanta. Whether he dared sing it to a tune used to glorify General William T. Sherman's devastating march through the state he was in is left unnoted.²⁵

While the writer clearly exaggerated for comic effect, his claim that “We bees are nearly filling / The hive of Deseret” was no empty claim—Deseret was a Book of Mormon term for honeybee and the name Brigham Young had hoped to establish a state under. Young promoted the image of united and industrious Saints in the Mountain West through the constant presence of the beehive in many territorial symbols. Of more importance to the South, however, was the line, “If hurt, we'll sting together, / and gather all we get.” Ever since a church center was established at Kirtland and a second one in Missouri, Latter-day Saints had been counseled to gather together as much as possible. The idea was to leave the corrupt world behind and enjoy a new society with the Saints where all could be united.²⁶

²⁵ For the renewed discussion of polygamy in the Reconstruction era, see Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 85–116; also Christine Talbot, “Constructing a National Marital and Sexual Culture: Reconsidering the ‘Twin Relics of Barbarism,’” in Milner and Cannon, *Reconstruction and Mormon America*, 52–87; for the proposal to split Utah to dilute Mormon power, see W. Paul Reeve, *Making Space on the Western Frontier: Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 33–62; the idea that the transcontinental railroad would fundamentally end the power of Mormons is discussed in Walker, *Railroading Religion*, 11–45; the song is reproduced from “All Are Talking of Utah,” in *Deseret News*, 30 January 1867, page 7, column 2; for its presence in Jesse Murphy's diary, see Murphy and Norton, *Emanuel Masters Murphy*, 165.

²⁶ The term comes from one use in Ether 2:3 in the Book of Mormon but became applied to any number of institutions among the Latter-day Saints in the West, including the *Deseret News* (not a misspelling of Desert News), the Deseret Alphabet (an alternative set of phonetic symbols for English), and the University of Deseret (now University of Utah); for a consideration of how the doctrine of gathering influenced cultural and demographic patterns (in this case those of British converts), see Matthew Lyman Rasmussen, *Mormonism and the Making of a British Zion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 18–43.

This idea to gather especially animated the man who was arguably the most successful of the missionaries under Pioneer John Brown's charge: Henry Green Boyle. A native Virginian from Tazewell County, Boyle had been baptized in 1843, not far from the area that Jedediah Grant had opened along the North Carolina-Virginia border. Just months after being baptized, Boyle was enlisted as one of the missionaries for Joseph Smith's presidential campaign, an assignment that ended quickly once the candidate had been assassinated. Afterward, Boyle began the westward trek with the Saints out of Nauvoo, but soon joined a group of other men that became part of the Mormon Battalion, a force of 500 created in 1846 to help the United States in its war against Mexico. Having seen no combat, Boyle led a group of veterans to the Salt Lake Valley from San Diego in 1848. He subsequently served missions to California and managed some overland migrants. The same time John Brown was assigned as president over the missionaries serving in the southern states, Boyle was assigned the field as well.²⁷

Boyle generally kept a regular diary, but if he kept one for the first year of his mission in the southern states, it has since been lost. One of the volumes that is extant gives a list of baptisms before picking up the narrative on 19 March 1868, where from Mount Airy, North Carolina, Boyle had set out to head to Burkes Garden in Virginia. Boyle and his missionary companion, Howard K. Coray, frequently traveled between the two points straddling Virginia and North Carolina, and over the slightly more than two years they were in the area, reportedly baptized 200 people—a substantially high number—later records indicate it was rare for the missionaries in North Carolina to baptize even ninety over a three-year duration. Meanwhile, Boyle remained an interested observer, noting the changes taking place in the region after the

²⁷ An overview of Boyle's life can be found in the Church History Biographical Database, see <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/chd/individual/henry-green-boyle-1824?lang=eng&timelineTabs=allTabs>, accessed 5 June 2024, also Brian A. Warburton, "Henry Green Boyle," in *Mormon Missionary Diaries*, <https://lib.byu.edu/collections/mormon-missionary-diaries/about/diarists/henry-green-boyle/>, accessed 5 June 2024.

war and discussing the desires of the Saints in the area. He observed on 5 August 1868 that “Many are wanting to go to Utah but are too poor,” and on the following day, “people here have to work hard to make a living, the land is poor and farmers are poor.” Even people that had once belonged to the area’s “aristocracy” were living in increasingly dilapidated houses.²⁸

In general, the handful of missionaries sent to labor in the South after the war found a people concerned with Reconstruction, impoverished by the wrenching economic changes, and distracted by political battles. Most missionaries visited places they were familiar with or where there had been success before the Civil War: Smoot went to the area of Tennessee his parents had been baptized in; Murphy visited counties in Georgia that he and his father had once lived in and where a handful of believers already existed; Brown worked in parts of Tennessee and Mississippi he had known well and baptized in before the war (when he wasn’t managing immigration traffic across the country); and Boyle visited his native Tazewell County as well as areas that had first been visited in the antebellum by Jedediah Grant. This early missionary work, as halting and ad hoc as it was, nevertheless marked a determined effort to reach out to previously baptized Saints in the South and their unconverted family and friends.²⁹

From the perspective of these first missionaries to return, however, their work would be vain if they did not get as many as possible to gather with the Saints. As the year 1869 began,

²⁸ Scans of Boyle’s original diaries as well as transcripts are available through Brigham Young University’s Mormon Missionary Diaries collection (see above URL); quotes here come from 5–6 August 1868 in Volume 5, and 16 February 1869 in Volume 6, Henry Green Boyle Diaries, MSS 156, Brigham Young University L. Tom Perry Special Collections; for the lack of baptisms in North Carolina, see North Carolina Conference Records, LR 8557 56 Vol. 1 (#6803), in North Carolina Conference Missionary Records, 1895–1944, LR 8557 56, Church History Library. This low number of baptisms would end after 1895.

²⁹ Outside of Seferovich, “Southern States Mission, 1875–1898,” 13–32, very little attention has been paid regarding the church’s efforts in the South during Reconstruction, this despite the fact that as seen above, several sources (some readily available) exist to construct the narrative. Patrick Q. Mason indicates that missionary work immediately following the Civil War resumed “only in limited fashion,” see Patrick Q. Mason, *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11. While accurate compared to later efforts, relative to the small number of missionaries sent immediately following the Civil War, the small number of Reconstruction-era missionaries was a bold move for the time.

many of the missionaries in the southern states—John Brown included—made preparations to move converts to the West. By this point, the Union Pacific was pushing into Utah Territory itself and was actively building in the canyons of the Wasatch Range. It would therefore be possible for new converts to travel to Utah largely by railroad. In mid-January, Jesse Murphy traveled to Atlanta to arrange travel with the relatives that were coming west with him; he was soon joined by William Smoot, and the company of twenty-one people took the train to Chattanooga and then on to Memphis. From there, they traveled by boat to East St. Louis, where on 23 January 1869, John Brown met the group and arranged travel for them to Omaha, eastern terminus of the Union Pacific. From there, they took the Union Pacific to its westernmost terminus in Summit County, still amid the peaks of the Wasatch Range. Several miles from Salt Lake City, Jesse Murphy and William Smoot hurried ahead and arrived the evening of 1 February. Jesse then had his father send wagon teams to pick up the nineteen remaining in the mountains. On 3 February 1869, James D. Murphy, as well as James Murphy Jeanes, who had been baptized around 1847 and was the first known convert in Georgia, visited the *Deseret News* office and reported their arrival. The first fruit from this mission to the southern states had been safely gathered in.³⁰

While John Brown may have been glad to see Smoot and Murphy home safely, it is likely he had more foreboding for Henry Boyle. Back in December 1868, he had another memorable dream. He reported, “I went into a harvest field with my brethren to labor.” They were searching after the wheat, which in many places was highly mixed with grass—useless for their harvest. Some places were almost all grass, but “In that portion of the field where Brother Boyle was at

³⁰ See Jesse Murphy diary transcription, in Murphy and Norton, *Emanuel Masters Murphy*, 164; Brown, *Autobiography*, 310; “From Georgia” and “Got Home,” in *Deseret Evening News*, 4 February 1869, pg 2, column 3 for the former, and page 3, column 1 for the latter.

work, there appeared to be the most wheat.” Indeed, Boyle and his companion, Coray, had made the largest single contribution to the number of baptisms in these first years of missionary work in the postwar South. But not all was well: “While looking over the extensive field, the fire broke out to the left and north of where Brother Boyle was at work, somewhere in the vicinity of Washington City, and soon all that part of the field was enveloped in a dense cloud of smoke.” This time, Brown made no further comments on the dream, perhaps because it seemed clear enough—dangerous opposition was coming, and it was time to gather as many converts out while still safe to do so.³¹

Coming back from a trip to the Northeast and arriving in St. Louis on 27 April 1869, Brown discovered the next day that Abraham Owen Smoot had just left there by boat for Omaha with several stock animals to take to Utah. Brown determined he would accompany Smoot home and caught up with him. While arranging transportation for the livestock, Brown wrote to Boyle on 2 May 1869 that he and Howard Coray should gather up the Saints from there and head to Utah. Two days later, Smoot and Brown set off from Omaha on a memorable journey westward that turned into a comedy of errors. He related on 9 May that “we ran very slow, the track being new and very uneven.” Getting past Evanston, a new Wyoming station just outside Utah’s borders, things got worse: “We then started on over a little of the roughest road I ever traveled on, being very uneven, some of the ties hung by the rails not touching the earth.” Almost inevitably, their train derailed, and it took an hour to get it on track again. By this point, a passenger train to the west had departed, but a signal was sent out for it to stop for the freight Brown was managing. But once the combined train started off, the cargo car again derailed. The impatient conductor had the cargo (with the livestock) unloaded, then rashly threw the cargo car

³¹ Brown, *Autobiography*, 307.

“off the track, smashing it up.” Brown was left stranded with cattle, some freight, and his luggage.³²

The next day, 10 May 1869, was a historic one for the country. In a ceremony at the town of Promontory, a golden spike was driven, symbolically uniting the Union Pacific with the Central Pacific. For the first time, it was possible to take the train all the way from the Missouri River to the Pacific slope. For an exhausted Brown, however, just east of the Wasatch Range, the workmanship of the railroad left much to be desired. It took another two days to get through the mountains and over to Salt Lake City, partly due to further miscommunications and derailments (“It began to look like the fates were against us,” he lamented after an additional run off the rails). Despite this, the amount of time it had taken to get from Omaha to Salt Lake City had been reduced to eight days, with four of them taken up by an unlucky series of accidents. This was much faster than the five weeks it had taken to journey the opposite direction two years prior. Having been part of Brigham Young’s vanguard company that were the first Latter-day Saints to enter the Salt Lake Valley in July 1847, Brown had also unwittingly participated in the next transformation of travel to Utah. His two journeys west in 1847 and 1869—one by foot, the other (largely) by rail—encapsulated an era. On 13 May 1869, he reported to Brigham Young’s office, with Young receiving Brown “with open arms and welcomed me home.” Brown then started off for Pleasant Grove in the valley south of Salt Lake, reaching his home at ten that night. He had little time to rest, being elected mayor the previous February.³³

Two days before Brown reached his home, Boyle received the letter releasing him and Coray from their missionary service and recommending that they “gather up the Saints in this part of the country & Virginia and bring them home.” Boyle accordingly began preparing to pay

³² Brown, *Autobiography*, 319–322.

³³ Brown, *Autobiography*, 322–324.

the railroad fares for the over 100 people that hoped to go west. It took two months of heavy logistics planning, but on 12 July 1869, the group of 160 emigrants left Virginia from Wytheville and pulled into New York City. From there, they caught a series of trains to Omaha, and then took the Union Pacific into Ogden in Utah, arriving on 26 July 1869. Either the Union Pacific fixed the rough patches by the time Boyle made his trip, or Boyle was too busy managing the large group to comment much about the trip westward. Yet even as Brown and Boyle returned to Utah, other missionaries continued to labor in the South. The work in the southern states was ongoing and had not stopped even if the laborers remained few.³⁴

* * *

While the transcontinental railroad generated the most publicity during the postwar era, several railroads were also built across the South during Reconstruction. Alongside the major political changes that gave citizenship and voting rights to formerly enslaved people, the new railroads across the southern states likewise altered the region's economy and society. Lack of connections between states had hampered the Confederacy's war effort; now, railroad tycoons moved to tie states together as never before. Places once far from any kind of efficient transportation suddenly found themselves on the new webs of parallel steel beams being woven across the region. Isolated farmland became respectably sized railroad cities almost overnight; indeed, railroad construction helped spur an urbanization in the South that had scarcely been known before.³⁵

One county that was unevenly impacted by new railroads was Coffee County, Georgia. Formed just seven years before the outbreak of the Civil War, the massive county extended south

³⁴ See entry for 12 May 1869 in Volume 6, and entries for 12–26 July 1869 in Volume 7, Henry Green Boyle diaries, MSS 156, Mormon Missionary Diaries, Brigham Young University.

³⁵ See Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity*; and Nelson, *Iron Confederacies*, 47–94.

of a bend in the Ocmulgee River. The northernmost districts of the new county were easily serviced by steamboats on the Ocmulgee, which sailed downstream to where the river met up with the Oconee, forming the Altamaha, and out to the Atlantic. The interior districts of the county, however, and the new county courthouse, Douglas, were highly isolated from everywhere else. This suited many of the early white settlers in the area, who disdained the expanding plantation belts across the western half of southern Georgia. The sparsely populated southeastern part of Georgia had poorer soil but grew a particular vegetation that gave the pine woods region its most common name: the Wiregrass region.³⁶

The interior districts of Coffee County were an inland island amid a sea of wiregrass and pine forests, and such was the case before a Reconstruction-era railroad began to change life south of the Ocmulgee's bend. Businessmen in Albany, the southwestern plantation belt's largest city, desired a more direct route to the Atlantic trade. By building an "air line" railroad—so named for the direct path it took, sometimes regardless of terrain—Albany could begin moving products out to the Georgia port of Brunswick on the coast. By 1871 the tracks of the new railroad passed through the southernmost districts of Coffee County, placing them in a new world of connections. The railroad brought along a population boom for the southernmost parts of the county, while economically the northern districts, once prosperous through the river trade,

³⁶ The foremost scholar of the Wiregrass region, Mark V. Wetherington, has two excellent books on the subject. The first, *The New South Comes to Wiregrass Georgia, 1860–1910* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), does not address Coffee County specifically but is influenced by its history and helps provide context for things specific to the county. His second book, *Plain Folk's Fight: The Civil War and Reconstruction in Piney Woods Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), does include Coffee County in its analysis. Both books pioneered the examination of militia districts to look at changes on the intra-county level in Georgia. See Wetherington, *Plain Folk's Fight*, 11–43, for a discussion of the importance of the Ocmulgee River districts and their greater reliance on plantation agriculture in a largely white area of southern Georgia. Another important source to explore is the work of late scholar, and resident of Coffee County, C. T. Trowell, "Douglas Before Memory, 1854–1905: A Study of Everyday Life in a South Georgia Town," (first serialized in *Douglas Enterprise*, 1995, then revised 1996), see 5–9. The author has also written at some length on Coffee County's history; for parts of his Master's thesis that are relevant here, see Jonathan D. Hepworth, "Through a Glass, Darkly: The Changing Past of Coffee County, Georgia," (MA Thesis, Clemson University, 2012), 4–6, 13–19, 137–139.

stagnated. The central districts of the county, including Douglas, felt the strong tug exerted by the railroad; residents of the new towns wanted the county courthouse moved to the central Coffee station on the line, Pearson. The pressures brought by the railroad made it appear that the center of the county would soon be hollowed out.³⁷

As disruptive as the railroad was for Coffee County, other railroads were more intense in their creative destruction. To the north, a different air line railroad was built—one that connected the large cities of Atlanta, Georgia, and Charlotte, North Carolina. This railroad proved to be a crucial link in a new system, for with additional connections to the west and northeast, it would now be possible to catch a train in New York City, pass through Washington, Richmond, and then to Charlotte, Atlanta, and eventually, New Orleans. If lack of railroad connections had previously hampered the development of the South as a region, the postwar confederacy of iron had done what a wartime Confederacy of states could not—connect the southern states as one.³⁸

Dozens of new towns sprang up along this new railroad line, but particularly transformed by the new order were several isolated areas of upstate South Carolina. In the Palmetto State's northwesternmost corner, anchored by the Blue Ridge, was a region that could (with some creativity) be called an inland peninsula. The western edge of the peninsula was a crescent that notched into northeastern Georgia, formed by the southwest-flowing Chattooga and the southeast-flowing Tugaloo Rivers. The eastern edge was straighter, formed by the southward-flowing Toxaway, Keowee, and Seneca Rivers. At the southern edge of this inland peninsula, the Tugaloo and the Seneca rivers combined to form the Savannah River, demarcating South

³⁷ Railroad construction is considered in Wetherington, *New South Comes to Wiregrass Georgia*, 48–62, 219–262, 265, 276, and *Plain Folk's Fight*, 297–298; for the particular line across Coffee County, see Trowell, “Douglas Before Memory,” 10–16; C. T. Trowell and Lorraine Fussell, “Exploring the Okefenokee: Railroads of the Okefenokee Realm,” (Douglas: Occasional Paper from South Georgia, Number 8, 1998), 16–19; Hepworth, “Through a Glass, Darkly,” 46–48.

³⁸ Nelson, *Iron Confederacies*, 27–94.

Carolina from Georgia out to the Atlantic. A previous rail line, the Blue Ridge Railroad, had been constructed before the Civil War, linking the mountain-adjacent community of Walhalla to points south and out toward Charleston. For years, one resident just across from the peninsula—senator from South Carolina and occasional vice-president of the United States, John C. Calhoun—had hoped to see infrastructure improvements that would enable residents of the upstate to export their cotton more efficiently to Charleston. Calhoun himself lay in a cold grave in Charleston before it was possible to take a rail journey from there to near his former Fort Hill plantation, but by 1860 it could be done.³⁹

While upstate South Carolina avoided the destruction wrought by General Sherman’s vengeful soldiers, the region was swallowed by a social, political, and economic revolution after the war. Emancipation overturned the sureties of the old order in the upstate. The South Carolina legislature in 1868 divided the old Pickens District, separating the peninsula half from the rest. The new county on the west became known as Oconee, a Cherokee name sometimes translated as “land beside the water”—an appropriate term for an inland peninsula. Walhalla, the terminus of the old Blue Ridge Railroad, became the new county seat. This new Oconee County was divided into townships. Along the county’s eastern border was Keowee Township in the north, and Seneca Township in the south, the two being named for the adjacent rivers that marked the

³⁹ The concept of an inland peninsula is admittedly a poetic adaptation on my part, but see W. E. McLendon and W. J. Latimer, *Soil Survey Map of Oconee County, South Carolina*, 1:63,360, (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, 1907), and W. E. McLendon, *Soil Survey Map of Anderson County, South Carolina*, 1:63,360, (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, 1909). The peninsula-like nature of the area has since been amplified by the Army Corps of Engineers’ Hartwell Dam that has flooded the Seneca and Tugaloo Rivers, as well as dams by Duke Energy as part of their Keowee-Toxaway Project that have flooded those respective rivers. For the troubled history of the Blue Ridge Railroad, see Betty L. Plisco, *The Rocky Road to Nowhere: A History of the Blue Ridge Railroad in South Carolina, 1850–1861* (Salem, SC: Blue Granite Books, 2002). Lacy K. Ford recounts one incident where John C. Calhoun had tremendous difficulty getting his cotton to port from his Fort Hill plantation, see Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 61–62; for a recent overview of Calhoun’s life and career, see Robert Elder, *Calhoun: American Heretic* (New York: Basic Books, 2021).

eastern edge of both. The rivers, in turn, had been named for two Cherokee towns that once served as major trading points among the Lower Cherokee nation. But the Cherokee here had been expelled shortly after the American Revolution; a very different group of people now claimed the inland peninsula and called it home. But the area itself was reoriented by new railroads away from the Carolina coast and toward points to the northeast and southwest, for the demands of an iron confederacy necessitated connections across states.⁴⁰

The Atlanta and Charlotte Air Line Railway laid its tracks across the southern part of the Oconee peninsula in 1873. Walhalla residents hoped that the new railroad would give their courthouse city a boost, but Air Line officials instead created a new city where they could sell the land around it. They build the rails across the southern townships of Oconee County, and at the place where the new tracks met up with the old Blue Ridge Railway in Seneca Township, they established a town they called, unimaginatively, Seneca City (hardly a city, but named to distinguish it from the township and river of the same appellation). This upstart railroad stop would soon, much as Pearson with Douglas, challenge the centrality of the county seat, although in both cases it remained in the same spot.⁴¹

Other people besides those in Walhalla were displeased with the new Air Line railroad. New trading patterns established by the railroad doomed some businesses and boosted others.

The social disruption brought by the rails, combined with ongoing political battles in South

⁴⁰ An instructive overview of the social changes in the South Carolina Upstate is Stephen A. West, *From Yeoman to Redneck in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1850–1915* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008); the exact translation of Oconee into its English equivalent is usually rendered as above for visitors to Oconee County today (2024), but an alternate translation from Cherokee renders the meaning as “water eyes of the hills,” see Hurley E. Badders, “Oconee County,” in *South Carolina Encyclopedia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 679–680; see map of Oconee County in “South Carolina, County Maps, 1939, containing 46 maps,” in South Caroliniana Map Collection, <https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/sclmaps/id/386/rec/5> (accessed 10 June 2024); also see Michael Hembree and Dot Jackson, *Keowee: The Story of the Keowee River Valley in Upstate South Carolina* (Greenville, SC: M. Hembree, 1997); Nelson, *Iron Confederacies*, 71–162.

⁴¹ Louise Matheson Bell, *Seneca: Visions of Yesterday* (Seneca, SC: L. M. Bell, 2005).

Carolina, helped feed a series of violent clashes in the upstate. Many conservative whites felt that the troubles they were experiencing were the fault of the new Republican governments that had been established in the South. The Republican coalitions often depended on Unionist white southerners, emigrant northerners, and African Americans. Conservative white southerners accordingly began organizing terrorist groups to undermine support for Republicans in the region—or if possible, eliminate them. One of these terrorist groups that gained the most notoriety was the Ku Klux Klan, whose night riders (imagined to be the ghosts of dead Confederate soldiers) sought to harm and if necessary, kill their Republican opponents, primarily African Americans. By 1870, regular battles were taking place in York and Spartanburg—two counties along the new railroad.⁴²

One Yorkville resident who felt that the Republican regime was corrupt and that African Americans were being used as pawns in the new order against whites was nineteen-year-old James Allen Smith. Living with his wife, Hannah Caroline, and her family, the Roarks, Smith determined that given the corruption of the regime in charge and the threat to local society that he intended to drive African Americans (at least the Republican ones) out of the county. Smith accordingly joined with the local Ku Klux Klan and embarked on a series of terrorist acts meant to undermine the Republicans' standing in the region.⁴³

But terrorism was a dangerous game, especially once Republicans in Congress and the presidency passed legislation that would enable the government to protect black and Republican

⁴² Scott Reynolds Nelson ties Klan violence closest to the construction of Reconstruction-era railroads, especially the Atlanta and Charlotte Air Line Railway, see Nelson, *Iron Confederacies*, 95–138; a different take on Klan violence as just one of many manifestations to reassert white supremacy in South Carolina is the conclusion of Richard Zuczek, *State of Rebellion: Reconstruction in South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), see especially 47–87.

⁴³ See 1870 U.S. census, York County, South Carolina, Subdivision 103, Yorkville Post Office, page 72, dwelling 504, family 495, James Smith (line 18), NARA microfilm publication M593, roll 1512; James Allen Smith, “Reformatory Power of the Truth,” in *Deseret Evening News*, 3 January 1887, page 2, column 3.

voters. By virtue of one of these new enforcement acts, President Ulysses S. Grant suspended civil government in a handful of upstate South Carolina counties (including York and Spartanburg) and then sent in the troops to restore order. The primary ringleaders of the Klan, at least those who had enough money, managed to flee the area and evaded capture. By contrast, many of the rank and file were arrested and trials were arranged. The federal prosecutors in the Klan trials secured an enviable conviction rate, but a lack of judges and lawyers also meant that after dozens of trials, there were still far too many cases on docket to try. After several months, prosecutors called it good and the remainder not tried were pardoned. Even if the trials had momentarily disrupted the Klan, they had not destroyed it. Most of the people involved remained out of prison, and terror networks were soon built up under different names by the same people. Smith never said whether he was among those arrested, but he continued to hold distrust toward the elements of the new order in the South.⁴⁴

* * *

The transcontinental railroad, at least the Union Pacific part, dramatically changed things for Utah, and by extension, for the core of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The growing networks of steam-powered machines over rail and water were finally melting away the transportation challenges that for so long had shaped much of the early development of the church. In 1871, Jonathan Browning, another Sumner County, Tennessee native, took the train on an informal mission to visit kin and friends in Tennessee. Leaving his home in Ogden, where the Union Pacific had its main western depot, Browning made it to Omaha by 17 November, just

⁴⁴ Historians disagree as to how effective the campaign waged against the Ku Klux Klan actually was. For a more positive take (within limits), see Lou Falkner Williams, *The Great South Carolina Ku Klux Klan Trials, 1871–1872* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996). Williams argues that the prosecutors managed an enviable conviction rate in the trials and helped to break up the operations of the Klan. Zuczek, *State of Rebellion*, 88–117, argues that most of the ringleaders of the Klan managed to evade capture and prosecution and that rather than weakening the Klan, the limited number of prosecutions exposed federal weakness instead.

two days after he left. He then spent much of the rest of the year in various parts of Illinois, visiting family and friends there. On 8 January 1872, Brown departed east to Indianapolis, and then south to Louisville. From there, it was just a nine-hour journey to Gallatin, county seat of Sumner County, Tennessee, and after spending the night, Browning went to his old home in Brushy Fork of Bledsoe's Creek. He preached a few times between visiting family and friends.⁴⁵

After visiting around his old home in Sumner County, Browning journeyed to Nashville and caught a train further south to the stop of Smyrna in Rutherford County. He then walked into the backcountry to see some relatives along the border of Rutherford and Wilson counties, although snow hampered his travel—he reported that trying to cross Stones River took him two hours, possibly due to ice making fording the river difficult. While there, Browning preached to various people in the vicinity, and when visiting a missionary Baptist church called Fellowship Church on 28 January 1872, some members of the congregation wanted to hear Browning speak and asked their minister, one Mr. Weber, to send out an announcement for the Utahn. Noting that the preacher was standing by him, Browning reported, “He said, ‘I will make no such announcement, for if I bid them God speed or receive them into my home I partake of their evil deeds, and any one that believes in Brigham Young does that a man may have a dozen or 40 wives I have no fellowship for, for the scriptures says that a man shall have but one wife.’” Browning then decided to give the minister a little trouble and asked if the Baptist would show him the scripture that proved his statement. Perhaps caught off guard, Weber, according to Browning, replied “he had not time, but if I would read the scriptures I would find it, as tho’ I

⁴⁵ See Jonathan Browning Notebook, 1870–1872, MS 40, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. Given that the condition of this original is variable and the handwriting not fully consistent, I rely on the copied account found in Jonathan's son's autobiography, see “Jonathan Browning's Journal of Travels,” scanned images 65–75 in James A. Browning Autobiography, Circa 1851–1883, MS 1073, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

had not read the scriptures, and went off indignant.” Seeing that preaching at Fellowship Church was a lost cause, Browning held a meeting at a nearby schoolhouse instead.⁴⁶

Browning’s meeting was rather poorly attended due to the cold weather, but at least one person, called by Browning simply as Mr. Cook, was intrigued and wanted to hear more. So Browning spent the night with Cook as well as his wife, daughter, and sister-in-law, all Baptists. “Mr. Cook took the lead & interogated me first on poligamy, whether I believed it.” Given that by this point Browning himself had two wives, he unhesitatingly declared that he did believe in it. Browning then proceeded to give many instances of polygamy in the Bible, which seemed to surprise Cook: “At last he said, ‘Well, that old book is a curious thing any how,’ rather disbelieving it; and the women would laugh at him some times.” Browning then wished to read to Cook some of Joseph Smith’s revelations, but Cook replied that he could not ““swallow any of Joe Smith’s visions,”” and decided to retire to bed. Before doing so, however, he took Browning’s hand and expressed his hope that the two would meet in heaven. Browning replied quite starkly that unless the two of them agreed there, they would not likely meet on the other side, “for there are many mansions there.” Seeming disappointed, Cook left the room and Browning went to other places to preach the next few days.⁴⁷

Stopping by and preaching with some of his relatives, Browning said they “seemed well pleased, and I am satisfied that, by the help of God our Father, I have corrected the public mind and allayed prejudice, this Feby. 1st.” After another four days in the area, Browning traveled to Nashville on 5 February 1872 and then spent the rest of the month preaching in and around Sumner and Robertson counties north of Tennessee’s capital. Hoping for a chance to preach at a Methodist Church, Browning was perturbed when one, Thomas Hunter, blocked the

⁴⁶ All quotes *ibid*.

⁴⁷ “Jonathan Browning’s Journal,” James A. Browning Autobiography, MS 1073.

appointment: “many were disappointed & blamed Hunter for his illiberality.” After preaching at the courthouse in Gallatin to a sizeable crowd, Browning left Tennessee for Illinois on 29 February 1872. After visiting some people in Illinois again, Browning took a boat to Omaha, caught the Union Pacific westward, and was back in Ogden at 6pm, 12 March 1872.⁴⁸

Browning had been gone for just under four months. He had traveled during wintertime and had preached at a handful of places in Tennessee and Illinois, largely among relatives and old friends. A few things stand out about Browning’s short mission: first, it would have been impossible without the railroad. Thanks to the Union Pacific, it was now feasible to take a train through the mountain canyons and plains even during the winter and reasonably expect to reach the destination in safety. Browning had also benefitted from railroads in getting around Illinois and Tennessee, and these had helped him cover more ground than was possible by foot. The challenges of transportation, which had so much shaped the geographic contours of how the church expanded during its first forty years, were now falling away. As was much the case with developments in the nineteenth century, a spirit of boundlessness was taking over—people from an increasing number of places could use the enhancements of steam power to get to an increasing number of other places. While short, Browning’s mission showed what could be done thanks to these additional improvements.⁴⁹

While Browning’s mission showcased the power of improvements, it also showed the continuing power of regional differences. Browning had confidently and straightforwardly proclaimed his belief in polygamy as practiced by the Latter-day Saints. While some people were clearly scandalized, no one went so far as to threaten Browning because of his belief. Indeed, in

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 74.

noting the reaction of Cook's wife, daughter, and sister-in-law as laughing when Cook was speechless in the face of biblical polygamy, it appeared to Browning that even those who might be expected to object most to the Saints' peculiar institution could reasonably have a chuckle over it rather than blindly condemn it. Browning faced disdain for his belief, but never faced down death, as later missionaries would, for "the principle."⁵⁰

Given that what Browning experienced in 1872 was wholly unlike what later missionaries encountered in the South, it must be asked: why was this the case? What changed? As discussed above, Reconstruction proved a major distraction to many southerners. The Republican regimes that utilized a coalition of African Americans, northerners, and white southern dissidents remained highly vilified in the region and outshone other potential threats to white conservatism in the region. But while John Brown could observe that radicals held control of the Volunteer State in 1867, this was no longer the case by 1872, with the radical regime being overthrown in 1869. And while Reconstruction continued on in other parts of the South, this did not mean that the movement elsewhere dictated day-to-day responses to a missionary working in Tennessee.⁵¹

As will be seen, the national mood was much fiercer against the Saints by the end of the 1870s than it was at their beginning—although there were many religious and racial minorities that also lost ground during the decade. Yet it seems that the biggest difference between Browning's short mission in 1872 and the troubles that took place later was the simple fact that Browning was a native southerner, often visiting places he knew or was known in. Browning was also largely working with his relatives and their neighbors; the ties of kinship therefore gave

⁵⁰ "Jonathan Browning's Journal," James A. Browning Autobiography, MS 1073; Mason, *Mormon Menace*, 57–78.

⁵¹ See Summers, *Ordeal of the Reunion*, 161–163.

him additional respect and deference than might be given to an absolute stranger to the region. As an older southern man (about sixty-six that year), Browning also might be less subject to the accusations that flew against other Latter-day Saint missionaries: that they were in the region to find new wives to marry (although age would not always hold protection in this line of argument). Whatever the explanation is, that Browning was able to say what he did and do it with extraordinary liberty was not to be the case with later missionaries in the region.⁵²

* * *

Improvements in transportation did not always result in safe travels nor secure societies. Such was the experience of some 510 Saints taking passage on the steamship *Wyoming* from Liverpool in England to the United States. While on the journey to New York City, the ship ran aground on a sandbar off Sable Island—a place known for many previous shipwrecks. Ensnared, the *Wyoming* blew its horn at regular times as a distress signal while the crew began throwing off cargo (including passenger belongings) to try to lighten the ship as the tide came in. At least one man in the group, nervous about sinking, tied himself to his wife and infant son, figuring that if the ship went down, they would at least go down together. After several hours of work, however, the *Wyoming* was freed and continued its journey to New York. Arriving at port on 19 September 1873 and disembarking the next day at Castle Garden (a one-time opera house that had been turned into a receiving entrepot for immigrants until Ellis Island replaced it), the Latter-day Saint immigrants could hardly imagine what was going on just blocks away amid the city's financial district on Wall Street.⁵³

⁵² “Jonathan Browning’s Journal,” James A. Browning Autobiography, MS 1073.

⁵³ For the number of Saints aboard the *Wyoming*, see “Mormon Emigrants on Ships from Foreign Ports to U.S. Ports, 1840–1890,” in *Deseret News, 1997–98 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1996), 164; for the dangers posed by Sable Island, see “Wrecks Around Sable Island,” *Douglas Breeze*, 17 June 1899, page 6, column 3; for the report of what happened to the *Wyoming* in September 1873, see “Narrow Escape from Shipwreck,” *New York Herald*, 20 September 1873, page 7, column 4; for the story of the man tying himself to his wife and son, see

The very day that the 510 Saints were being processed into the United States, the New York Stock Exchange closed. This was not out of deference to the new arrivals; indeed, Latter-day immigration to the United States became increasingly controversial through the 1870s and 1880s. Instead, the stock exchange was closed to try and staunch the financial bloodletting going on after a major bank, that of Jay Cooke, had failed just two days prior. Most of the bank failures plaguing the United States were connected to underperforming railroads and risky credit ventures, prompting the press to describe the economic fallout as a “railroad depression.” They were right to—twenty-five railroads defaulted on their loans before the year’s end, with another ninety-six failing in the next two years. If railroads had once been the boiler driving the nation’s booming postwar economy, when the boiler blew, the American economy foundered.⁵⁴

Debate over how to measure the aftermath has persisted among historians and economists, but the consensus is that sixty-five months of economic contraction followed on the heels of the panic in September 1873—the longest contraction in American history. The consequences of such a downturn were severe. Already failing to win the hearts of most southern whites, Republican regimes in southern states that had at least promised prosperity for the region now lost what little legitimacy they had left. In the North, Republicans that had once supported military aid to embattled southern Republicans now began to question the cost—and came to wonder if the experiment of Reconstruction had been a mistake. With the economic downturn fueling unrest in the expanding cities of the nation, fewer northerners were willing to aid freed African Americans against abuses by their employers, coming to see all laborers as a potentially

pages 3–4 of “History of Joseph Hepworth and Mary Ann Green,”
<http://www.familysearch.org/library/books/ldurl/1/784086> (accessed 2 July 2024).

⁵⁴ See White, *The Republic for Which It Stands*, 265–268; also see M. John Lubetkin, *Jay Cooke’s Gamble: The Northern Pacific Railroad, the Sioux, and the Panic of 1873* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).

dangerous class of people. As a policy pursued by the federal government in the South, Reconstruction was now on the verge of being abandoned.⁵⁵

Yet other kinds of re-construction remained. While the railroads aided the church in sending missionaries like Jonathan Browning out, they more dramatically helped gather many more people (like the fortunate immigrants aboard the *Wyoming*) in. From the beginning of 1869 to the end of 1873, some 680 missionaries were commissioned. By contrast, over 8,900 Latter-day Saint immigrants arrived in New York City during the same time, most of which then rode a series of railroads into the Intermountain West. They were not the only people coming to Utah; the railroad also made viable the mining industries that non-Latter-day Saints hoped to grow within the territory. The onrush of people put extraordinary pressures on land, especially among the Saints who largely farmed for a living amid the desert.⁵⁶

Leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints increasingly looked to places outside of Utah where the swelling number of immigrants could settle instead. They also confronted the need of reforming the hierarchies that existed between congregations and church leadership. For much of the church's history, the concept of a "stake"—a unit that comprised multiple congregations and was thought an important part in building up the church—had been discussed, but how one functioned remained somewhat a mystery. Indeed, for nearly forty-five years, one stake had generally been thought of as higher than the others, a center stake. While Kirtland and Nauvoo had previously been center stakes, ever since 1847, the Salt Lake Stake had

⁵⁵ White, *Republic For Which It Stands*, 267; for the Panic of 1873, also see Scott Reynolds Nelson, *A Nation of Deadbeats: An Uncommon History of America's Financial Disasters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 159–179; and Hannah Catherine Davies, *Transatlantic Speculations: Globalization and the Panics of 1873* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). For the political fallout from the resulting "Long Depression," see Foner, *Reconstruction*, 512–563; Summers, *Ordeal of the Reunion*, 322–346; for how labor unrest helped convince northerners to reduce their support for Reconstruction policies, see Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the post-Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁵⁶ Deseret News, *1997–98 Church Almanac*, 163–164, 532.

acted as a center stake, with apparent jurisdiction over others. In 1876, with settlements expanding rapidly beyond Utah’s borders and a need to clarify how stakes functioned, the church leadership removed the concept of one center stake to rule them all. With the dedication of a new temple in St. George, Utah, the need to clarify lines of priesthood authority pushed Brigham Young to further arrange a thoroughgoing reorganization of priesthood quorums and local congregations. The difficulty of such a re-construction taxed Young’s health; he would be dead before the year’s end. But the substantial clarity given the church’s organization would be long-lasting, with many of the principles applied continuing into the twenty-first century.⁵⁷

Usually not discussed in this era of congregational and priesthood reorganization was any kind of impact it had on the church’s missionary efforts across the globe. In 2024, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints operated a few hundred missions throughout the world. All missions have specific boundaries, a mission president in a headquarters city, and in places where stakes have not been established, the mission president exercises ecclesiastical authority over the local members as well as the missionaries in the mission. In the 1870s, it is not clear whether the church had even a dozen organized missions, although most generally consider that this is the decade that a “Southern States Mission” came into existence for the first time. Yet differing sources disagree over exactly how and when this organization happened, even if there is consensus that Henry G. Boyle was the first president.⁵⁸

One of the more recent (2012) overviews of the mission states:

The Southern States Mission was formally organized by Brigham Young during the October 1875 General Conference. Eight men—Henry G. Boyle, George

⁵⁷ William G. Hartley, “The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877: Brigham Young’s Last Achievement,” in *Brigham Young University Studies* 20 No. 1 (1980), 3–36.

⁵⁸ “Church Administration,” in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 34–37; as of 1 July 2024, the church had 450 missions across the world, see “The Church of Jesus Christ Will Create 36 New Missions in 2024,” <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/36-new-missions-church-of-jesus-christ> (accessed 1 July 2024).

Teasdale, D. P. Rainey, Joseph Standing, John Morgan, John D. H. McCallister, David H. Perry, and John Winder—were assigned to fulfill missions to the South. By the next summer, the mission encompassed six states: Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Virginia.⁵⁹

The notes for this account include three sources. The most substantial of these comes from the Southern States Mission’s *Southern Star* which began publication on 3 December 1898:

The early history of this Mission is somewhat obscure from the fact that when the church first sent out missionaries into the various parts of the world, they had no definite idea of locating headquarters. It was during the year of 1875 that Elder Henry G. Boyle, of Pima, Graham county, Arizona, succeeded in establishing a branch at Shady Grove, Hickman county, Tenn., at which the initial move looking to establishing a permanent headquarters was begun.

At the October Conference, 1875, Salt Lake City, Utah, Elders George Teasdale, D. P. Rainey, Joseph Standing, John Morgan, John D. H. McCallister, David H. Perry and John Winder were called to labor in the Southern States Mission, all of whom reported to Elder Boyle, and at the first meeting elected him to preside over them.⁶⁰

At first glance, the accounts might not seem particularly different—same people, same time frame—but upon closer inspection, they say very different things. The first has Brigham Young organizing the Southern States Mission during the October 1875 General Conference and calling Boyle in that conference with the other seven. The second and earlier account is more hesitant in its claims but argues that the mission really gained organization when Boyle, already in the South, sought to establish a mission headquarters. At the following General Conference, seven missionaries were then appointed to assist him and then “elected him to preside over them”—something that is not done in Latter-day Saint missions today. A curious thing about both is that one says it took until the following summer to include the six states in the mission, while the earlier one in the *Southern Star* likewise suggests that it was a year before “Six states were then

⁵⁹ Seferovich, “Hospitality and Hostility,” 232.

⁶⁰ “History of the Southern States Mission,” *Latter-day Saints Southern Star*, 3 December 1898.

selected to labor in,” raising the question: what did the Southern States Mission cover before Summer 1876 if it was organized the previous year?

Both accounts were written long after the fact—the earliest coming a full twenty-three years after the events described. Historians of Civil War memory have documented vast changes in how the war was memorialized and remembered by its participants in even just twenty years; it is highly likely that memories of the origins of the Southern States Mission likewise shifted over the same amount of time. The Latter-day Saints in the South had also faced tremendous challenges and persecution in the intervening years, likely coloring previous memories before they were written down and published in 1898.⁶¹

If accounts long after the fact are suspect, what can be found in contemporary sources? The 2012 account does cite two sources in 1875, but upon examination there is very little that can specifically support the description as presented. The first source refers to a report of the General Conference and published in the 9 October 1875 *Deseret Evening News*, and while it does list missionaries being called on missions, it does not specify which mission they were called to—nor does it indicate that Brigham Young had officially organized a Southern States Mission. Notably, Henry G. Boyle is not part of the list in this source, and Joseph Standing’s name is mistakenly rendered as “James Standing,” unless a different Standing was called on this day and Joseph Standing was called later. The other 1875 source references a brief mention of the “Departure of Missionaries,” but this says little as well: “A large company of missionaries left this morning for their fields of labor, mostly in the eastern, and some in the southern states. A number of their friends were at the depot to see them off, and some accompanied them as far

⁶¹ For two of the many studies on Civil War memory, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); and Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

as Ogden.” While this lists the destination of some of the missionaries as the South, it does not specify which ones were going there, nor mention an organized Southern States Mission.⁶²

A lot of the coming and going of missionaries can be found in the pages of the *Deseret News* and its more-frequent sister paper, the *Deseret Evening News*. When do these sources first use the phrase, “Southern States Mission”? Up until 1878, nearly all mentions of missionaries serving in the South used the phrase that so-and-so missionary recently left for or returned from a “mission to [or in] the Southern States.” Nowhere was there an entity called the Southern States Mission, but a group of missionaries laboring with the assignment to serve under a president in a general part of the country, the southern states. The first actual use of the phrase “Southern States Mission” came in the form of a headline on 12 June 1878, but the accompanying article still used the phrase, “a mission to the Southern States.” In subsequent articles, the previous phrasing continued to be used until three months later when under the headline “Southern States Conference” was John Morgan listed as “president of the Southern States Mission.” From this point forward, the phrase became increasingly common and it appears that Morgan, not Boyle, popularized the idea of a Southern States Mission as its own entity, rather than a group of missionaries serving in a particular region.⁶³

⁶² “Called on Missions” under “Fourth Day,” in *Deseret Evening News*, 9 October 1875, page 2, column 5; “Departure of Missionaries,” *Deseret Evening News*, 1 November 1875, page 3, column 3.

⁶³ Examples of the previous “mission to the Southern States” abound, for an example before the supposed organization of the Southern States Mission, see “Need Elders,” *Deseret News*, 28 October 1874, page 12, column 3; other examples include (but are not limited to) “In Tennessee,” *Deseret News*, 24 November 1875, page 8, column 4; “In the South,” *Deseret News*, 13 September 1876, page 8, column 4; “For the Southern States,” *Deseret News*, 22 November 1876, page 9, column 1; “Returned Missionary,” *Deseret News*, 8 August 1877, page 9, column 3; “Returned Missionary,” *Deseret News*, 12 December 1877, page 9, column 2; and “Local and Other Matters; Missionary,” *Deseret News*, 13 March 1878, page 6, column 5. The first break with the pattern is “Correspondence: Southern States Mission,” *Deseret News*, 12 June 1876, page 6, column 5; but “From Alabama,” *Deseret News*, 3 July 1878, page 7, column 5; “For the South,” *Deseret News*, 4 September 1878, page 9, column 1; and “For the East,” *Deseret News*, 11 September 1878, page 1, column 1, again use some variation of the phrase “mission to the Southern States.” In 4 September 1878, Morgan is called “President of the Southern mission,” but the full phrase does not appear until “Southern States Conference,” *Deseret News*, 11 September 1878, page 7, columns 2–5.

This might strike the reader as an exercise in pedantry—excessive concern with minor details and rules. After all, what is in a name? Was there not an organized missionary effort in the South whether it had a particular name to describe it? And given that many things in the nineteenth century were reported with less than stellar accuracy, perhaps the distinction I draw here is one without a difference.

Yet the problem is that this distinction does matter—at least enough for southern states missionaries to point to October 1875 as the genesis of the mission they were serving in. And it has mattered to modern scholars who have sought to understand the origins of the church’s missionary efforts in the southern states after the Civil War. That the church did have an organized mission with a name, a president, a headquarters, and particular boundaries was well established by the 1890s, and has been the case for missions of the church in the region ever since. That the church moved from ad hoc missionary efforts to an organized approach to the region did indeed happen, and it can be said that it started in this decade, the 1870s—a time when the mechanisms of the church were being re-constructed to function more harmoniously and smoothly. The creation of a Southern States Mission was an important step for the Latter-day Saints and their work in the American South. But it appears that based on how people of the time thought of the issue, there was no sudden creation of a Southern States Mission in 1875, but a renewed dedication to preaching in the southern states.

And names do matter—one describes working in a particular location, another describes working for a particular entity. During the time that Virginian Henry Green Boyle supervised missionaries, they were serving in a location—a mission to the southern states. They were going to the South and were guests of the region, there to teach the gospel to the people of a part of the country. After John Morgan took over presiding over missionaries to the South, he began calling

it a Southern States Mission. Missionaries were no longer simply serving in a particular region but were working for and within a particular entity that claimed jurisdiction over the region. That Morgan himself had once served as a Union soldier during the Civil War might have influenced his conception of the South as a place to move across and occupy, rather than a place to share the gospel with kin and neighbors like native southerner Boyle conceived it. The change was subtle and evolved over time, but it was nevertheless momentous. The missionaries in the southern states in 1875 and 1876 worked under a paradigm that held more continuity with 1869 than with 1879. Reading an organized Southern States Mission back to an imagined organizational date blinds us to what came before and the very important changes after.⁶⁴

* * *

Focusing the work in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Virginia belied that the work being done in 1876 was terribly new. Antebellum missionaries had visited all six of these states and built-up congregations in many of them; so had missionaries in the 1860s. If any field was particularly new at this time, Arkansas was likely the newest in the group. Generally, these states were wise places to start, but nearly all of them were places where a foundation of some kind had already been laid. They were also states that, according to white conservative southerners, had been “redeemed”—their term for the overthrow of biracial Republican regimes in the region. Late in 1876, electoral disputes would shake three southern states where missionaries had not yet entered: Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina, with all three sending two sets of presidential electors to Washington. After partisan negotiation, Republican electors from all three disputed states were accepted and handed Rutherford B. Hayes the presidency of the United States. But in playing to win the presidential game,

⁶⁴ Engel, *Praying With One Eye Open*, 8–42.

Republicans had used the last political capital they had in the South. The political and social Reconstruction of the South was over. Economically, the region remained trapped by the deflating economy, with black and white southerners alike becoming increasingly desperate in the decades to come.⁶⁵

Religiously, the years following the Civil War and up to the political end of Reconstruction in the South had been tumultuous to say the least. White congregations that had split before the war over slavery did not heal in the aftermath of war, while newly freed African Americans worked to establish their own congregations under their own supervision. Religion did not separate from politics in the era but remained stubbornly fused with it while religion for its part infused politics. The battle for control of each state was one fought with religious fervor; hence the reason why religious terms like “redemption” bled into justifying hellish acts like racial massacres; indeed, many white evangelicals had joined the terrorist organizations that had attacked Republicans. Yet because religion and politics were so connected during this era, most southern Protestants paid little attention to battling Latter-day Saints in the region—most that came were already southerners, and the few who weren’t had not come to uphold the hated Republican regimes in the region. For southern white conservatives, the Latter-day Saints hardly ranked as a top threat during the Reconstruction years.⁶⁶

Yet a different kind of re-construction continued—the formation of an organized Southern States Mission. While this was for the church a step forward in terms of the number of missionaries sent to the southern states, the missionaries increasingly were not native southerners nor familiar with the region. A study by Heather Seferovich suggests that during John Brown’s

⁶⁵ Burton, *Age of Lincoln*, 300–322; Summers, *Ordeal of the Reunion*, 347–393; White, *Republic for Which It Stands*, 325–333.

⁶⁶ See Daniel W. Stowell, “Why ‘Redemption’?: Religion and the End of Reconstruction, 1869–1877,” Blum and Poole, *Vale of Tears*, 133–146.

presidency, as many as 62 percent of the missionaries serving in the South were southern born. Under the three years Boyle acted as president of the missionaries, about thirteen percent had been born in the South. Under John Morgan's lengthy tenure as president of the Southern States Mission, the proportion of southern born missionaries halved to just less than seven percent of those serving. By contrast, the majority of Morgan's missionary force was born in Utah (although further study might show that some of these had parents born in the South, a potential connection to explore further). While Morgan did open up new parts of Georgia, especially among unionist southerners, in general the new missionaries of an organized Southern States Mission were distinctly separate from those they served among.⁶⁷

An increasing separation between Latter-day Saints and southerners was also apparent as the federal government, especially under the Republicans, sought to construct federal power in the western territories. Groups like indigenous nations and Mexican Americans faced an increasingly hostile and powerful national apparatus. Yet while Reconstruction had attempted and then failed in beginning southern society anew, a different kind of re-construction of the Mormon West would see all branches of the federal government, as well as both major political parties, substantially united to see the project through. The unique marriage system of the Latter-day Saints, derided with slavery as the "twin relics of barbarism," was going to be extirpated from the country just as chattel slavery before it. While the Saints sued against anti-polygamy laws and argued for religious liberty, the United States Supreme Court ruled against the church in *Reynolds v. United States*, a decision handed down in January 1879, arguing that the government couldn't legislate religious belief but could regulate practice.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Seferovich, "Southern States Mission, 1875–1898," Table 3.1, Birthplaces of Southern States Missionaries by Mission President, 1867–1898, 38a.

⁶⁸ Gordon, *The Mormon Question*, 119–145.

Southerners were already scandalized by polygamy even before the Civil War. Now that the federal government was launching a crusade against it and federal troops were no longer stationed in their territory, southerners generally clamored for the Saints to end their own peculiar institution. When a Latter-day Saint missionary in northern Georgia indicated that he was the product of a polygamous marriage in 1879, he was met with such disdain that he was nearly knocked down by an onrush of people leaving the room he was preaching in. With missionaries increasingly separated from the region by birth, by a new mission organization, and Saints themselves being deemed an “other,” subject to a different kind of re-construction and separate from national and southern society, a new kind of paradigm was taking over for Latter-day Saints in the region.⁶⁹

Local circumstances combined with regional and national trends to produce situations where tensions between the two groups could come to a violent collision. In northern Georgia, Joseph Standing, who had followed in John Morgan’s footsteps in northern Georgia, had been able to secure tremendous success, but it was uneven. Some women converted more quickly than men and then emigrated west. Others remained behind and staffed positions in the church’s auxiliary women’s organization, the Relief Society, but this distinction was lost on many white southern men who increasingly feared the presence of the missionaries.⁷⁰

On a sultry day in July 1879, a group on horseback stopped Joseph Standing with his companion, Rudger Clawson, on a road in Whitfield County, Georgia. Asked by Standing what authority they had to detain the missionaries on a public highway, one of the riders dismounted and brandished his weapon in Standing’s face. “The government of the United States is against

⁶⁹ Mason, *Mormon Menace*, 100–101; Engel, *Praying With One Eye Open*, 66–100.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

you, and there is no law in Georgia for Mormons.” In a matter of hours, Standing would be dead, ushering in an era where the Saints struggled as strangers on the margins of southern society.⁷¹

The torpid serpents dreamed of by John Brown had awakened.

⁷¹ Engel, *Praying With One Eye Open*, 101–127.

CHAPTER THREE

SEPARATION: SAINTS ON THE MARGINS OF THE NEW SOUTH

Standing's murder opened a nightmarish era of violence against the Latter-day Saints in the South. While real or threatened violence had followed missionaries and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the region before 1879, over the next fifteen years it became disturbingly frequent and intense. This wave of violence heightened the stakes for any southerner who chose to be baptized due to the widening spiritual and social distance between them and their Protestant neighbors. With this heightened opposition, many convert southerners increased their physical distance as well, separating themselves from their native region to join their new co-religionists in the West. While this westward movement shielded individual Saints from threatened violence, it also hampered the ability of the church to establish and maintain stable congregations in the region. The few branches founded during this era were ephemeral, collapsing when the most devoted families moved away. The removal of neighbors or kin to the West also provoked additional distrust among remaining Protestant southerners who accused missionaries of drawing away women for nefarious purposes.¹

Previous historians of the Latter-day sojourn in the southern states have largely focused on this era of violent opposition, seeking to both recount cruel acts and explain the motivation of

¹ Patrick Q. Mason has a graph showing the varying number of violent acts against the Saints in his *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 131, notably the highest average of yearly incidents was in the 1880s, also see 25, 70–71; the impact of outmigration from the region is especially well documented by Mary Ella Engel, *Praying With One Eye Open: Mormons and Murder in Nineteenth-Century Appalachian Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), especially 43–100, for the number of branches, see “Conference Reports Since Opening of Mission, 1880–1893,” in “J. Golden Kimball Letters, Jan. 1894,” Folder 19, Box 72, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Ms 36, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

those who engaged in them. Yet even if the fifteen years after Standing's murder represented the nadir of civil relations between the Saints and their southern neighbors, missionaries still baptized over 3,500 during this era of fierce opposition. While not diminishing the suffering of those caught in the tide of violence, this tally of baptisms nevertheless poses a historical problem: why did over three thousand southerners commit to the Saints despite such intense and violent reactions against them?²

From the perspective of most contemporary anti-Mormon commentators, the answer was obvious: only those "ignorant" or "deluded" would embrace Latter-day Saint doctrine and membership. Indeed, the Saints during this era had their best success preaching in the backwoods and rural districts of the few counties the missionaries labored in. When it came to the rapidly growing towns and cities of the postwar South, the elders consciously and consistently avoided them. To many white Protestants, this was a clear indication that missionaries were unable to offer an educated and thoughtful defense of their religion. Only the unschooled were at risk of being seduced by "Mormon" doctrine, with at least one newspaper suggesting that those so persuaded to leave for the West "can well be spared."³

While modern scholars have sometimes noted the missionaries' devotion to the countryside and lack of preaching in cities, few have asked why this was the case. Those that have usually explain it by the nineteenth century practice of Latter-day missionaries traveling without "purse or scrip," in other words, without money (although most missionaries carried at least some). This practice could work well in the countryside when missionaries asked individuals to let them stay the night with no other options available nearby. In towns and cities,

² Baptismal figures from 1880 to 1893 can be found in "Conference Reports Since Opening of Mission, 1880–1893," Folder 19, Box 72, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Ms 36, UU.

³ "The Mormon Preachers," *Yorkville Enquirer*, 23 February 1882, page 2, 6th column; for a more general discussion of the ignorant trope used to dismiss southern converts, see Mason, *The Mormon Menace*, 121–123.

travelers were likely expected to stay at hotels or boarding houses, and by traveling without money no missionary could afford them. Other scholars have even critiqued the missionaries for eschewing more populated areas in favor of rural districts for it was *also* in the countryside where most violence against the missionaries took place. Arguing that the missionaries had some nebulous fear of towns—an apparent echo of the Jeffersonian praise of the countryside—one scholar concluded that the missionaries’ failure to preach in more urban areas was a lost opportunity since urban places eventually proved to be the most fruitful areas for the Saints in the South.⁴

Yet Latter-day Saint missionaries were not rejecting a beckoning opportunity nor were they stubbornly holding onto some vague Jeffersonian notion of countryside virtues and urban vices. Indeed, most missionaries from the West at this point came from a town or city of their own. The Saints frequently built central communities surrounded by fields to grow crops in rather than establish isolated farmsteads like those that characterized the South. The missionaries also knew that violence in country districts was always possible, if not probable. So why did they focus their efforts on the countryside during this era of maximum opposition? It was because the towns and cities of the South were, to use the language of the missionaries, “prejudiced.” Country districts always offered some potential for success, but more urban places almost universally proved reflexively hostile toward the missionaries to the point that none could manage to get a hearing in them—the people were, quite literally, prejudiced.⁵

⁴ For a positive view of missionaries traveling without purse or scrip, see Heather M. Seferovich, “Hospitality and Hostility: Missionary Work in the American South, 1875–98,” in Reid L. Neilson and Fred E. Woods, eds., *Go Ye Into All the World: The Growth and Development of Mormon Missionary Work* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012), 232–234, 246. The critique comes from Reid L. Harper, “Backcountry Missionaries in the Post-Bellum South: Thomas Ephraim Harper’s Experience,” in *Journal of Mormon History* 34 No. 1 (Winter 2008), especially see his arguments on pages 214–218, and 232.

⁵ For Latter-day Saint settlement patterns in the West, see Charles S. Peterson, “Imprint of Agricultural Systems on the Utah Landscape,” in Richard H. Jackson, ed., *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 91–106; see entry for September 1879, page 15, in LR 8557 11 Vol. 1

This situation spoke to a different kind of separation developing between countryside and town in the post-Reconstruction South. While the fate of southern towns was inseparably connected with that of the surrounding countryside, the talk of the town, the pace of life, and the credit that underwrote the postwar economy all connected to growing regional and national networks for information and commerce. The two main networks of the nineteenth century, that of rail (the expanding railroad system) and that of wire (the telegraph lines that frequently paralleled the tracks) were slowly but surely influencing more of what urban southerners thought and bought. Unsurprisingly, anti-Mormonism in the national and regional press became its most bitter and vile during the 1880s as the polygamy practiced by some members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints became one of the biggest scandals of the decade. If the railroad improvements during Reconstruction enabled Latter-day preachers to reach the South efficiently and quickly, they could still not outpace the lightning-fast anti-Mormonism that poured into towns over the wires. Missionaries that showed up in areas dominated by this national conversation accordingly could make no headway because of the prejudice of the people.⁶

The cry of anti-Mormonism likewise echoed across the rural landscape, but here its shrillness was muffled by the pressing concerns of day-to-day living in a deflating agrarian economy. While justifications for violence against Latter-day emissaries were theorized in southern newspapers, those who carried it out often had more immediate motivations. As Mary Ella Engel concluded regarding the killing of Joseph Standing, the murder of the missionary was

(#2098), Georgia Atlanta Mission General Minutes, 1875–1970, LR 8557 11; entry for 3 July 1887, page 8, in LR 8468 11 Vol. 2 (#6825), South Carolina District General Minutes, 1881–1968, LR 8468 11, both in Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

⁶ That the 1880s were an especially bitter era of anti-Mormonism in the national press is the conclusion of Jan Shipps, “From Satyr to Saint: American Perceptions of the Mormons, 1860–1960,” in *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 51–97, esp. 64. Shipps also notes that most people were likely to hear a story about the Saints rather than meet a living one: “ordinary association between Mormons and non-Mormons was statistically unlikely. Being approached by an LDS missionary would have been a reasonably novel experience,” 56.

“a *local* event, best understood at the *local* level.” Certainly, each violent act could not be divorced from then context of the anti-polygamy campaigns of the time, but each act also addressed specific local concerns and fears. Most often, violent acts followed Latter-day success in a specific community. Generally, it was the danger that the Saints might secure a foothold in a locale that led area residents to act. Yet there were also occasions where the missionaries offered a message that addressed specific local concerns and fears, therefore in the countryside some individual southerners were willing to hear them out.⁷

Rural preaching thus represented the best bargain the Latter-day Saints could strike in the South of this era, but this constricted range had many undesirable consequences. Even if families that converted chose to stay in the South rather than move to the West, vagaries of the New South economy made rural families especially vulnerable. A poor harvest, an anti-Mormon landlord or employer, or a series of other unfortunate events could prompt a move elsewhere or undercut the beginnings of faith. When rural branches rested so heavily on individual families as Latter-day Saint congregations did in the 1880s, a family crisis could prove the end for the church in a particular community. So long as southern Latter-day Saint congregations remained ephemeral, an enduring presence in the South proved impossible, for who could build a foundation on air? Until the Saints could build congregations among larger groups in larger communities, the religion would continue to limp along in the region—a separate faith that divided even the marginal peoples who embraced it amid the postwar order.

* * *

From the perspective of the rest of the country (including the Mormon corridor of the Intermountain West), the South remained overwhelmingly rural through the late nineteenth

⁷ Quote from Mary Ella Engel, *Praying With One Eye Open: Mormons and Murder in Nineteenth-Century Appalachian Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 2.

century. Even so, towns and cities became increasingly central to life in the post-Reconstruction South. While this growth ebbed and flowed—accelerating in the 1880s before dropping in the 1890s—in the thirty years spanning 1880 and 1910 the urban South added five million people. Although miniscule compared to the explosive urban growth of northern states, when compared with the South of the Civil War era, the region had experienced a clear and important change by the start of the twentieth century. Even though most towns and cities essentially served as entrepôts for the products of the surrounding countryside, moving raw material from one place to the next, their combined impact shaped much of southern life in the postwar years.⁸

Given the cash-strapped southern economy, these urban nodes were often only as good as the investment and capital they could draw on from outside the South. The winners in this race for resources were usually communities that were well-connected to the accelerating improvements in transportation and communication that continually reshaped late-nineteenth century America. The webs of rail and wire, steadily woven across the South, influenced attitudes about fashion, politics, and even religion. Yet these new networks were not spread evenly across the region; even in the rapidly urbanizing 1880s many towns were dozens of miles from the nearest railroad and even fewer had an actual telegraph station. Counting up the many communities listed in an 1883 guide to shipping would indicate that just one of every ten southern communities had an operating telegraph station. Yet these telegraphic communities often had larger and faster-growing populations than places without these connections, perhaps because it was easier to monitor financial investments in a community with a telegraph station or on a railroad line than an isolated backcountry trading post.⁹

⁸ Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; 15th Anniversary Edition, 2007), 55–56.

⁹ Based on a review of 15,000+ listings in the twelve states studied; see *Bullinger's Postal and Shippers Guide* (New York, 1883), available through Hathi Trust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015071130473>.

These southern towns and cities connected to the rest of the country by these larger networks of wire and rail became qualitatively different in the 1880s, increasingly separate from the patterns of life that had dominated the southern countryside. Although their sense of being part of the South was never in question (and perhaps consciously constructed by the growth of Lost Cause voluntary organizations), residents of towns and cities increasingly viewed the countryside with disdain. This sense that their identity separated their interests from that of rural districts was still very small in the 1880s, but it would find full flower by the 1910s. The road that urban residents took in separating from the countryside of the region was subtle. Perhaps it started with an innocent joke about how a country relative did things differently. It might be aided by an observation that a particular style of clothing pervading the rural districts had become dated compared with new fashions being sold in urban stores. The divide grew wider when town dwellers were shocked by the manners and mannerisms of rural residents coming to town for politics or business. Whatever the catalyst was, the growing separation between rural and urban, city and country, farmer and merchant, became increasingly visible to those on either side of the divide during the 1880s.¹⁰

These cities and towns were central to the creation of a postwar vision—the concept of a “New South.” This new order, however, promised much and delivered little. Its boosters argued that the next set of tracks, the next investment in manufacturing, the next Democratic victory at the polls—all of these would bring the hoped-for prosperity and peace that the region yearned for in the aftermath of war and Reconstruction’s overthrow. Yet prosperity remained illusory. The

¹⁰ See Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 213. Also see Stephen A. West, *From Yeoman to Redneck in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1850–1915* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 101–195 for a consideration of diverging country and urban interests, especially pages 102–103. Also note the growing divide between towns and cities versus the countryside in Altina L. Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 117–123, 246–248. The increasing economic and cultural divide is also tackled by Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 109–110.

hard reality was that only so much wealth could be generated in an economy grounded in growing, collecting, and shipping one agricultural staple: cotton. The new railroad lines, the handful of factories that opened, and the Democratic overthrow of Republicans in state legislatures simply failed to correct fundamental imbalances in the region. Peace likewise remained a pipe dream—the South was an impoverished region where prewar prosperity in human property had been stripped away, leaving the husk of depleted soil and bitter racism behind. Rich laborlords of yesteryear were now landlords of a ruined region; regaining any kind of status impelled them to bully their freed labor force into submission as often as possible. Even while urban New South boosters tried to skirt the issue, the fate of the region was tied to the southern countryside. The fate of the southern countryside, in turn, rested on the continued restriction and repression of the region’s increasingly restless labor force.¹¹

The prophets of the New South, however, kept their vision squarely on what mattered most: securing northern finance for the region’s redemption. If political redemption—Reconstruction’s overthrow—had required expelling northerners from power, economic redemption required brining northern money back in. Getting that capital required engineering a union of interests between those with finances and the South. Across the fifty years following Appomattox, southern whites argued for a reconciliation based on the threat of non-white races to the American character. Yet race and reunion was just one of the many avenues pursued in achieving reconciliation between the regions. Southern Protestants and newspaper editors also joined hands with northern Republicans to war against the remaining twin of the two relics of

¹¹ Aspects of this draw on Ayers’s retrospective essay found in the 15th Anniversary edition of *Promise of the New South*, 443 especially; and Edward L. Ayers, “Telling the Story of the New South,” in *What Caused the Civil War?: Reflections on the South and Southern History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 178–180. On the transition from “laborlords” to landlords, see Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 17–80.

barbarism that Republicans had first vowed in 1856 to defeat: polygamy. A crusade against the western Latter-day Saints that openly practiced plural marriage served as yet another common cause found uniting North and South.¹²

Getting behind this crusade required an uncomfortable shift on the part of some southerners, especially those who had previously opposed antebellum federal efforts to interfere with a domestic institution like polygamy; these same powers could be thrown against slavery itself. With slavery's demise, however, more white southerners shifted to supporting federal intervention in stamping out the Saints' practice of allowing some men to take multiple wives. Debates over how to best strike down the institution mixed with previous concerns over the "Mormon Question" and generalized fears about the Latter-day Saints to make the five years from 1881 to 1885 the most bitter anti-Mormon period found in the national press. Reprinting many of these articles and penning their own, southern newspaper editors crafted a regional variant of national anti-Mormonism. This villainizing literature circulated most widely in communities located on the webs of wire and rail through the region, making these urban centers among the most rabidly anti-Mormon in the South. Missionaries might stop in town for supplies or to pick up mail, but they found that most people there had already made up their minds—the Saints were a threat to the nation and should not be entertained for a moment. In contrast, the southern countryside represented a terrain of both opportunity and danger for the missionaries.¹³

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¹² David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), details how white racism served as an avenue of reconciliation. For the use of anti-polygamy for the same end, see Mason, *The Mormon Menace*, 58–59.

¹³ Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 110–111, 153–154; David Buice, "A Stench in the Nostrils of Honest Men: Southern Democrats and the Edmunds Act of 1882," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21 No. 3 (Autumn 1988), 100–113; Shipps, "From Satyr to Saint," 64.

At the start of 1880, just thirty missionaries were assigned to the southern states. With an increase in hostility in the nation and region, the missionaries had to be discriminating with where they preached. The first to return to the South after the war had largely visited relatives or places that had proved receptive to the Saints in antebellum years. Early mission president Henry G. Boyle's home of Tazewell County, Virginia, was therefore a popular place for missionaries working in the Old Dominion State. Northeastern Mississippi, the home of the large number of Mississippi Saints that had entered Utah in 1847, was likewise the first center of work in the Magnolia State. Other missionaries visited places due to other forms of familiarity; John Morgan began his work in Georgia by essentially following the paths he had taken as part of the Union Army in 1864. Whatever the method of introduction, be it by sacred preaching or secular military marching, the earliest missionaries might spend their entire time in a relatively small area. This was partly a matter of safety—with so much working against them, the Saints needed to stay among friends as much as possible. But it was also a very practical arrangement; when Boyle returned from a mission in 1877 to Utah, the *Deseret News* commented that he had met with “unvarying success” by “concentrating his personal labors to a comparatively small field instead of scattering them over a wide extent of country.”¹⁴

While this concentrated work proved successful in many instances, Standing's murder also showed its pitfalls—missionaries might gain a murderous set of antagonists by focusing their efforts in the same area. But with just fifteen pairs of missionaries to work across the vast Southland, trying to harvest in well-known areas seemed safest, especially when considering the

¹⁴ See Biographical Sketch of Henry G. Boyle, dated 16 November 1858, in Obituary Notices and Biographies, MS 4760, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Diaries of Henry G. Boyle, Mormon Missionary Diaries, <https://lib.byu.edu/collections/mormon-missionary-diaries/about/diarists/henry-green-boyle/>, accessed 5 June 2024; John Brown, *Autobiography*, 270–286; Engel, *Praying With One Eye Open*, 8–42; for quote, see “Missionary Matters,” *Deseret News*, 21 November 1877, page 3, columns 4–5.

recent violence in Reconstruction's overthrow (missionaries throughout the 1870s and into the 1880s had skipped Louisiana and South Carolina, two states that had major political violence in the 1876 election). This manpower shortage (women missionaries would be assigned only much later and very infrequently in the South) changed in 1881 when the force available in the southern states doubled to sixty missionaries. This meant that twice the number of pairs (or companionships) could preach, some in places not yet visited. The elders referred to this as "opening up new fields." The expanding number of missionaries also prompted new mission president John Morgan to start delegating responsibility to other missionaries in the South. Morgan began calling some regular missionaries in the mission as presidents of "conferences," or groups of congregations in a particular area that met for an annual conference. The term conference was soon applied to a geographic area where missionaries supervised by a conference president preached. By the early 1880s, many conferences were largely coterminous with state boundaries (although there were some exceptions), and conference presidents had become the main leader and point of contact with individual missionaries serving in areas within a state.¹⁵

In 1881, James Henry Moyle had been appointed by Morgan to serve as president of the North Carolina Conference, essentially a mini-mission president of the handful of elders in the Old North State. That fall, he journeyed with elders Willard C. Burton and Charles John Brain in Burke County before laboring in the mountainous counties of Mitchell and Yancey along the Tennessee border. Burton apparently showed great promise to Moyle, who soon charged Burton with finding another missionary to take with him to South Carolina and start up the work there. Burton accordingly selected another North Carolina missionary, John Miller Easton, and the two

¹⁵ For the number of missionaries serving, see "Conference Reports Since Opening of Mission, 1880–1893," in "J. Golden Kimball Letters, Jan. 1894," Folder 19, Box 72, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Ms 36, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

departed from Burke County, North Carolina, on 19 November 1881 (incidentally the same day Moyle returned to Utah from his mission). This move into South Carolina would prove successful, but also show the extent to which a bad reputation could sink the Saints' chances.¹⁶

After traveling some sixty miles, Burton and Easton entered South Carolina and preached at the community of Gowensville along the border of Greenville and Spartanburg counties. With the area being mostly rural, the missionaries were able to at first deal with a population not yet prejudiced against them. A Baptist minister was sufficiently impressed by the pair that he planned on inviting the two to preach at his church. But once he discovered the missionaries were commonly called Mormons, he quickly withdrew the invitation. This pattern of interaction frequently repeated itself throughout the South—missionaries would introduce themselves as Christian preachers using the full name of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Indeed, both in the records they kept and in their personal journals, the missionaries shunned the name “Mormon” or put it within quotation marks. Using the term Mormon was dangerous; the opponents of the Latter-day Saints used it as shorthand to tie the Saints to practices and beliefs that most southern Protestants found abhorrent, whether it be belief in the Book of Mormon itself or the practice of polygamy. “Mormon” could shut down conversation before any fruitful exchange could start, hence the missionaries avoided using it.¹⁷

Once it became noised in Gowensville that an apparent “Mormon menace” was in town, Burton and Easton realized they had to leave. They eventually took a train to Gaffney, South Carolina, a vital stop along the Atlanta and Charlotte Air Line Railroad, the major railway link that connected Richmond and points northeast to major southern cities to the west like Atlanta

¹⁶ See letter by James H. Moyle to *Deseret Evening News*, 4 August 1881, published in *Deseret Evening News*, 16 August 1881; LR 8557 2 2A: 88, 116, 186; *Deseret Evening News*, 4 April 1882, 3 January 1883.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* While polygamy was clearly the most controversial doctrine repelling southerners, other aspects of the Latter-day Saints' beliefs proved controversial. See Seferovich, “Hospitality and Hostility,” 239–240.

and New Orleans. Despite its important location on these networks of wire and rail, the growing anti-Mormon campaign had not fully prejudiced all of Gaffney's citizens. Some hoped to have the missionaries preach, while a Baptist deacon also planned on opening his church. But once the true identity of the missionaries' religion was discovered, a crowd formed to stop them. One demanded to know why Burton and Easton "had come to break up their family ties and carry their fair daughters off to Utah," while another claimed to have been part of Johnston's Army in the Utah War. Seeing they had kicked up a hornet's nest of opposition, the two picked up their bags and traveled again, this time east into York County. They stayed in rural districts.¹⁸

* * *

The accusation voiced in Gaffney that the missionaries had come to break up families and "carry their fair daughters off to Utah" was a frequently parroted concern on the part of white southerners. Within years of establishing the church, Joseph Smith had initiated a policy of gathering the believers together, often into one community. With Latter-day Saints in the 1880s numbering several thousand, a single place was no longer an option, but the Intermountain West region now served as the gathering place. Indeed, the Reconstruction-era missionaries had not focused at all on establishing the church in the South but moved as many believers out of the region as possible. This outmigration had continued once Boyle became the president of missionaries serving in the southern states and moved forward especially once his successor, John Morgan, found a new location for westward-moving Saints: the San Luis Valley of Colorado Territory. Moving converts out of the region could consume a great deal of the missionaries' time. For instance, the minutes of the Georgia Conference for March 1882 reported

¹⁸ LR 8557 2 A:88, 116, 186; *Deseret Evening News*, 4 April 1882, 3 January 1883; quote from Burton letter to *Deseret Evening News* published 4 April 1882.

that, “The time During the month was taken up in making preparation for the coming Emigration that left Chattanooga on the 22nd.”¹⁹

It was the breaking of these family ties that had precipitated the violence against Joseph Standing and Rudger Clawson in northern Georgia. Yet from the Latter-day Saints’ perspective, the violence had been occasioned as part of the opposition the righteous were to face at the hands of the wicked. They did not consider that a geographical dispersal of kin could be the underlying motivation for murder. That not even three years after Standing’s murder, emigration continued in Georgia testifies to the popular hold this practice had among southern states missionaries.²⁰

While the rural splitting of kinship ties could produce rural violence, urban-based commentators opined that the outflow, while tragic, was the predictable result when rural low-lives were duped by cunning missionaries from Utah. York County, South Carolina’s *Yorkville Enquirer* had largely said little about “Mormons” outside of telegraphed national news discussing anti-polygamy legislation and its impact on Utah. This changed on 16 February 1882 when the *Enquirer* gasped that “emmissaries [sic] of the Mormon church have been recently advocating their doctrines in the western part of the county.” (As it was, the newspaper was behind in its reporting—Willard Burton and John Easton had been in the county since the previous December and on 27 January 1882 they had baptized three couples, with a handful of others in later weeks.) On 23 February 1882, the *Enquirer* updated its report to specify that missionaries had preached in the area around King’s Mountain and near the railroad stop of Whitaker. Noting that the *Greenville News* advocated violence against the pair, the editor of the *Enquirer* argued that a more effective remedy would be “if the people would entirely ignore their

¹⁹ See page 6, Record of Georgia Conference, LR 3163 11 Vol. 1, (#6732), Georgia District General Minutes, 1882–1971, LR 3163 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

²⁰ See Engel, *Praying With One Eye Open*, 43–100; and Mason, *The Mormon Menace*, 149–170.

presence.” Attacking the missionaries would only give them “sympathy among a certain class,” and any people the missionaries duped “can well be spared.”²¹

Unmentioned by the *Enquirer* was that the first three couples—Edward M. M. Green with his wife, Martha; John Alonzo Gordon and his wife, Mary; and David Z. Wells and his wife, Susan, were no ignoramuses but had instead been prominent members of Kings Mountain Baptist Church. The six had previously known each other with Green serving as the congregation’s secretary, Gordon as its chorister, and Wells as one of the deacons. The outraged pastor of the congregation, Thomas Mullinar, fearing further loss of his flock, had tried to get local officers to arrest Burton and Easton, or failing that, have residents lynch the missionaries. He failed on both accounts, and by the end of February yet another eight members of his congregation had been baptized by Burton and Easton. By the third of March, enough had been baptized for the missionaries to organize a congregation known as the King’s Mountain Branch. Given his previous experience as secretary in the Baptist congregation, the missionaries appointed Green to preside over this new group of Saints.²²

Seemingly overnight, the perceived Mormon threat had morphed from a theoretical problem that could be dismissed with contempt to a clear and present danger to the community’s morals—and its women. Just days following the branch’s organization, the *Enquirer* sent a correspondent to attend a Latter-day Saint meeting. Wondering what a living “saint” might look like, the correspondent was disappointed to find the two “not in the emblematic vestments of apostleship,” but men “of trampish appearance...not over well dressed in ordinary citizen’s

²¹ See “Mormon Propagandists,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, 16 February 1882, page 2, 6th column; “The Mormon Preachers,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, 23 February 1882, page 2, 6th column.

²² See pages 88–89, South Carolina Conference Record, LR 8468 11 vol. 1, (6844), South Carolina District General Minutes, 1881–1968, LR 8468 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; letter from Willard C. Burton to James H. Moyle published in *Deseret Evening News* 11 February 1882; Burton letter dated 22 March 1882 to *Deseret Evening News*, published 4 April 1882.

clothes.” More disturbing than the missionaries’ pathetic wardrobes, however, was sitting near the elders “within easy reach a—carpetbag!” With the Republican regime in South Carolina having been overthrown just five years previously, the correspondent clearly tied this symbol of northern avarice to the preachers and painted the missionaries as merely the latest group of meddlesome outsiders to invade the South after the Civil War.²³

Yet if history produced tragedy first and then farce second, these spiritual carpetbaggers were pale imitations compared to the dangerous political carpetbaggers of the former Reconstruction regime. Deriding the missionaries as “St. Burton” and “St. Easton,” he ridiculed the pair for having their preaching interrupted by a barking dog and said the two put grammar to scorn with Easton’s enunciation being “rapid and faulty.” The correspondent’s outline of what the pair discussed mirrored the notes of the missionaries, but the correspondent found points to critique throughout. He dismissed the elder’s claims of persecution as “grievances,” their presentation of the gospel as “not sufficiently careful,” pronounced the missionaries as “uncouth,” “illiterate,” and “tramping vagabonds,” and concluded that the meeting held was more “blasphemy” than worship.²⁴

The *Enquirer* correspondent then addressed what surely was the question of the hour: “it may be asked if these fellows have a following.” He dolefully informed readers that in western York County “there are some converts to their pretended faith,” but reassured that most of the crowd at the meeting were present “merely through curiosity.” Demurring that he was not trying to “combat any religious sect or denomination,” but to give the public “a fair exposition,” the correspondent warned that “converting sinners and saving souls” was not the missionaries’ true goal. Instead, having swarmed through Georgia and North Carolina, the missionaries were now

²³ “The Latter Day Saints,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, 9 March 1882, page 2, columns 5–6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

in South Carolina to “induce emigration to Utah.” Rather than repeat the trope that missionaries had come to find new wives, however, the *Enquirer* correspondent predicted that a “conflict between the Mormons and the United States Government is inevitable,” and that the emigration was to make certain the Saints would “have men for the emergency” when the crisis arrived.²⁵

From the perspective of the *Enquirer*, however, the crisis had already come to York County. The missionaries must be stopped. From this article forward, the newspaper published unflattering stories about the Latter-day Saints nearly every issue, including some on the front page. Given Yorkville’s position on a telegraph line, the *Enquirer* had quick access to the latest anti-Mormon tales and news about the anti-polygamy campaign in Utah. The paper likewise began a series of breathless reports on where the missionaries had been seen in York County, a task more challenging at the end of March 1882 when John Morgan separated Burton and Easton into a new South Carolina Conference and sent another pair of missionaries to join them. From the perspective of the paper, the missionaries were a new invasion, even as they disclaimed violence against them. When the missionaries were arrested when preaching near Bethany Church, the *Enquirer* curiously mentioned the preaching but not the arrest. What it did cover, two columns over, was York County’s first lynching of an African American man.²⁶

The *Enquirer*’s anti-Mormon media blitz proved effective in at least one way—it convinced the new leader of the branch at King’s Mountain that he had made a mistake. When Edward M. M. Green had encountered the missionaries, he had met them without preconceived notions, having lived in a rural part of York County where anti-Mormon stories did not circulate

²⁵ “The Latter Day Saints,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, 9 March 1882, page 2, columns 5–6.

²⁶ See “Letter from Black’s Station,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, 20 April 1882, page 2, column 7; “The Mormons,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, 15 June 1882, page 2, columns 5–6; *Deseret Evening News*, 3 January 1883 for Burton’s account of their arrest; “Diabolical Outrage,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, 15 June 1882, page 2, column 7; “Mormonism in Kentucky,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, 6 July 1882, page 1, columns 4–5.

as widely. With the *Enquirer* trying to stop every potential convert in the county, Green became aware (apparently for the first time) that the Saints believed in and practiced polygamy. The missionaries generally did not teach this point given polygamy's controversial nature and the fact that relatively few rank-and-file Saints entered plural marriages. To the Greens, however, the failure to address this head on felt like deception, and soon both Edward and Martha began attacking the church. Just one day after the South Carolina Conference held its first meeting in July 1882, Green was terminated as leader of the branch and William N. Gordon took his place. By the following year, the Greens had completely withdrawn from the church.²⁷

* * *

Between Green's defection and the *Enquirer's* anti-Mormon campaign, the Latter-day Saints in York County faced an increasing number of threats. Residents of the town of Whitaker joined with others from neighboring Cleveland County in North Carolina to demand the missionaries leave or face bodily injury. They also demanded their Latter-day Saint neighbors reconsider their allegiance, saying that those who joined with the Saints would "probably meet with persecution and trouble. Remember that the evil has become so great that the U.S. government has taken steps to suppress it." With the growing pressure, fewer people came forward to be baptized, but the missionaries still managed to add another five people from York County between October and the end of the year.²⁸

Determined to stop further inroads by the missionaries was Yorkville native James Allen Smith. Having heard many "bad tales" about the Latter-day Saints, Smith decided that vague

²⁷ For missionary silence on polygamy, see Mason, *The Mormon Menace*, 68–69; for the case of Edward and Martha Green, see LR 8557 2 2A:142, 149, 155; pages 14, 88–89 of South Carolina Conference Record 6844; for Green's reasons for leaving, see "Renouncing the Mormon Faith," *Yorkville Enquirer*, 13 July 1882.

²⁸ "The Mormon Question," *Yorkville Enquirer*, 24 August 1882, page 2, column 7; South Carolina Conference Record 6844, p. 14, 88–89.

threats were insufficient—it was time to “drive them out.” He began gathering men of like mind to attack the missionaries toward the end of 1882, declaring that “I had driven many a negro out of the country when I was connected with the Ku-Klux, and now I meant to do the same by the Mormons.” But Smith hit a snag when one of his friends declined until Smith had investigated whether the rumors had merit. If so, the friend would join Smith and his group, but if not, he told Smith “I will not have anything to do with the matter.” Taking up his friend’s challenge, Smith called upon John M. Easton and Angus McKay (who had since replaced Willard C. Burton). After talking with the pair for two days and hosting them two nights, Smith concluded that the rumors were false. Smith then took up the literature the missionaries had left with him and soon became “convinced that Mormonism had been revealed by a higher power than man.”²⁹

After about six weeks of thinking it over, on 11 March 1883, James Allen Smith—the one-time hard drinking, chain smoking Klansman—was baptized by John Easton. He thus became the first convert in South Carolina for the year, ending a hiatus in baptisms that had lasted since mid-December. Within a year, James also brought into the church through baptism his father, Robert S. Smith, his brother, John, and his wife, Hannah Caroline Smith. Smith’s baptism marked a turning point in the area; just months later, missionaries would begin preaching among the Catawba people in eastern York County. By the end of the year, a second branch had been organized at their reservation, and the South Carolina Conference had 48 members between the two rural branches on either side of York County. These made up part of the 25 congregations scattered across the Southern States Mission and the 891 Saints that lived in it. Despite persecution, it appeared the Saints were succeeding at least in the rural districts of the

²⁹ “Reformatory Power of the Truth,” *Deseret Evening News*, 3 January 1887; LR 8557 2 3A:194–195.

South not prejudiced by the webs of rail and wire. But these gains rested on shaky ground. In 1884, the ground gave way.³⁰

* * *

Missionary John Henry Gibbs had a difficult assignment: push back against the anti-Mormon literature swirling through southern cities. Well-regarded as an excellent speaker, mission leaders hoped Gibbs's oratorical skills would help lessen prejudice against the missionaries in Tennessee and Mississippi, allaying any fears southerners had about polygamy. In this, the speaking tour was a failure. As Patrick Q. Mason observed, Gibbs and his fellows had "walked straight into the lion's den," with the crowds of people uninterested in hearing their message but anxious to see the missionaries "eaten alive." The lone voice of Gibbs, however talented, proved no match against the torrent of anti-Mormon stories circulating over the wires that connected the South's main urban centers. Having spent weeks in urban areas with minimal success, funds ran out to continue the tour and Gibbs happily returned to the northwest Tennessee countryside. Little did he know things were about to get worse.³¹

On Sunday morning, 10 August 1884, Gibbs and three other missionaries had gathered at the home of James Conder to hold meetings for the branch established along Cane Creek, Lewis County, Tennessee. Before it got underway, a mob armed with shotguns assailed the house. When the attack ended, two of the missionaries—Gibbs and William Berry—as well as Conder's son Martin and stepson J. R. Hutson, were dead. Before being killed, however, Hutson had

³⁰ Ibid., South Carolina Conference Record 6844, 88–91, and paper slip microfilmed with the same volume, "Southern States Mission, South Carolina Conference Report, for the Six Months Ending February 29, 1884"; see Daniel Liestman, "'We Have Found What We Have Been Looking For!': The Creation of the Mormon Religious Enclave among the Catawba, 1883–1920," in *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 103 No. 3 (July 2002), 226–246, for a summary of missionary success among the Catawba people; for mission totals, see "Conference Reports Since Opening of Mission, 1880–1893," in "J. Golden Kimball Letters, Jan. 1894," Folder 19, Box 72, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Ms 36, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah

³¹ Mason, *Mormon Menace*, 37.

managed to kill the leader of the mob, David Hinson. Not wishing the bodies of the missionaries to be desecrated, assistant mission president Brigham Henry Roberts entered Lewis County in disguise and retrieved the bodies of Gibbs and Berry for shipment to Utah. This time, the mobsters were not even brought to trial. Regional newspapers justified the violence.³²

The effects of this “Tennessee Massacre” rippled out across the South. The same day the mob struck the Conder home, another menacing group had hoped to disrupt a missionary meeting in Mississippi. They had failed in that effort, but the missionaries were forced to keep on the move. Eventually they received word from Roberts to withdraw from their appointments and stay with friends until the excitement over the massacre subsided. In South Carolina, missionary efforts among the Catawba become so dangerous that the elders had to stop preaching on the reservation. Meetings halted completely until a non-Latter-day Saint man in Spartanburg County allowed part of his farm to be used to resettle the Catawba Congregation near Thickety Mountain in eastern Spartanburg County. Other Saints moved further away, including the survivors of the attack on the Conder home who soon left Lewis County, Tennessee, scattering to points beyond. Others left the region entirely, making their home with expatriates in the West.³³

While organized emigration from the South to points west had been going on since 1847, the number of southerners who left the region rarely exceeded the number who were baptized. Six-month statistical reports issued each February and August show that in the three years leading up to the end of August 1884 (just after the Tennessee Massacre but too close to be substantially affected by it) there were 959 baptisms and 425 emigrating to Utah. The following

³² Ibid., 38–50.

³³ Pages 92–95, Mississippi Conference Record No. 6778, LR 3286 11 Vol. 1, Mississippi Conference Records, LR 3286 11, Church History Library; Liestman, “Mormon Religious Enclave Among the Catawba,” 232–233; E. H. Mccollough, *Map of the County of Spartanburg [South Carolina]* (New York: The South Publishing Co., 1887), Map.

six months reversed this pattern—only 91 were baptized while 98 left the region, the highest number since 101 left in 1880 in the aftermath of Standing’s murder. In the long run, however, even a horrid event like the Tennessee Massacre didn’t influence baptism and emigration patterns too drastically; the three years following had 790 baptisms and 395 departures for points west. Some southerners found life in the West more difficult than expected and returned to the region; in the process some renounced their membership completely. These dissidents hampered missionary work to some extent but did not substantially disrupt it.³⁴

More dramatic than the ebb and flow of baptisms and emigrations was the number of active branches the church had in the South. At the end of August 1883, the church had 26 congregations in the region, the highest up to that point. But by the same time one year later the number had been halved with most of the drop taking place between February and August 1884. The church steadily made up the ground lost and by the end of August 1887, the Saints had 33 congregations in the region. But this number again plunged to 13 by the end of August 1889 and bottomed out at just seven by the end of February 1892. Rural congregations were the norm as long as anti-Mormonism flourished in parts of the South where information and population were concentrated. The few branches established in this era generally represented small pockets of rural tolerance, but these were always vulnerable to changes of opinion. Outright murders like that at Cane Creek, Tennessee, remained thankfully rare, but other forms of pressure could be brought against the Saints. As farm tenancy increased, some members could be evicted from land they worked. Others might lose jobs. Threatened violence was also effective in a region where the line between potential and actual violence was paper-thin. More durable congregations

³⁴ “Conference Reports Since Opening of Mission, 1880–1893,” item in “J. Golden Kimball Letters, Jan. 1894,” Folder 19, Box 72, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Ms 36, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah; Mason, *Mormon Menace*, 116–117.

formed where larger numbers of Saints could gather, but unless an entire area of the countryside was baptized or otherwise friendly, these were rare. Most congregations remained ephemeral, blossoming for a few months or years before a gust of opposition scattered them to the wind.³⁵

* * *

After a hiatus caused by reaction to the Tennessee Massacre, things were looking up for missionaries in upstate South Carolina. Although they had tried to expand their field beyond York County since 1883, the missionaries had little success until non-Latter-day Saint John S. Black opened his farm near Thickety Mountain in Spartanburg County for Catawba Saints to stay at. By October 1885, missionary Heber Jedediah Wright reported from the post office at Paris, some seven and a half miles west of Black's farm, that "Proselyting here, to use a southern phrase, is 'just sorta,' but the mobocratic spirit has abated 'right smart'..." Feeling this abatement offered a new opportunity, Wright set out westward with his companion, Wiley Gidoni Cragun, to try and expand the operations of the South Carolina Conference further. They soon found a receptive blacksmith living in Glassy Mountain Township of Greenville County named Jesse Calvin Farmer, who allowed the missionaries to stay with him and invited neighbors to hear them speak. One neighbor, Joseph McKinney, opened his larger house for the missionaries the next evening, and by the end of that meeting some residents had arranged for the missionaries to speak at a nearby Baptist church the next afternoon.³⁶

In the meantime, Farmer had traveled to Gowensville for business, the same Greenville County town that had been visited by Burton and Easton four years previous and which still had

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Heber Wright's report of the South Carolina Conference Meeting, *Deseret Evening News*, 17 October 1885 for the quotations. The meeting took place on 4 October 1885 and the two missionaries left on 8 October, but further dates are unclear. See LR 8557 2 3A:87, letter by Heber Wright dated 13 November 1885 to *Ogden Daily Herald*, published 20 November 1885; details on J. C. Farmer and Joseph McKinney are found in the 1880 US Census, Greenville County, South Carolina, population schedule, Glassy Mountain Township, page 23, dwellings 214 and 215, families 227 and 228, NARA publication T9, roll 1231.

a reputation for being a real “Mormon-eating town.” Farmer soon encountered the heavily anti-Mormon attitudes there and now feared he could be a target for violence against the missionaries. While he hurried back, the preacher of the Glassy Mountain Baptist church had gathered a group opposed to the missionaries speaking at the church. Thinking it best to avoid a confrontation, Wright and Cragun cancelled their appointment but found upon returning to Farmer’s house that he was now too afraid to keep them for the night. After asking for some quilts to sleep on, Farmer obliged, and the pair left the area the next day for points west before turning around and heading back to their friendlier base of operations in Spartanburg County.³⁷

Although no actual violence occurred in this instance, reports of the missionaries’ appointment and later cancellation soon spread across the rails and wires with local newspapers turning it into an anti-Mormon propaganda coup. The *Keowee Courier* of Walhalla, Oconee County, South Carolina, portrayed the missionaries as weak-willed if cunning adversaries in a November 1885 article about the Glassy Mountain incident. Stating that when missionaries had made their appointment, two groups had shown up: a “host of ignorant auditors” ready to hear sultry details of polygamy that “every part of their true nature was yearning to imbibe” versus the “resolute band of defenders of morality.” In this case, the “good citizens” who “determined to prevent the spread of the Latter-day Saints doctrine in that neighborhood” prevailed. Seeing the large group of opponents, the “meek Elders” soon “became completely unnerved and dismissed the congregation without ceremony,” seeking “a more congenial clime” in North Carolina. Just in case the *Courier* was not strong enough in castigating the missionaries’ lack of manhood and courage, the *Greenville Weekly News* editorialized that the people of Glassy Mountain “did exactly what they should have done. The Mormon Elder must go from this region; he must go in

³⁷ Ibid.

a hurry. If he insists on staying his visit will be made very permanent, excessively quiet, and satisfactory to everybody except the Elder.”³⁸

Determined to expand their field of labor to South Carolina’s northwesternmost corner, Heber Wright took fellow missionary William H. Gardner with him onto the inland peninsula of Oconee in December 1885. While stopping at the post office in the town of Danville in Keowee Township, Wright encountered the unflattering portrayal of the missionaries in Walhalla’s *Keowee Courier*. Concerned that unless this account was rebutted that it could hinder further progress in the Upstate, Wright clarified to the *Deseret Evening News* that the missionaries had not made the appointment, but rather some members of the Baptist church who had attended their first two evening meetings in the area. Emphasizing that they had acted in good faith to hold the meeting, they only withdrew once they suspected it could be a “trap” set by the Baptist preacher with a mob. Given rumors that at least one preacher had participated in the Tennessee Massacre less than a year and a half before, Wright’s concerns had some basis. He denied the charge that they had fled into North Carolina, stating they had held additional meetings further west in Greenville County itself. Wright claimed that one night they had stayed with a member of the county board of commissioners, who apparently admitted that several county officials were laboring to keep quiet adulterous affairs. Musing on the opposition they had encountered due to polygamy, Wright spat, “God grant that my posterity may be reared in ‘immoral’ Utah rather than in the midst of such ‘defenders of morality.’”³⁹

³⁸ The original *Keowee Courier* for this issue has been lost, but the quotations from it were reported by Heber Wright in a 15 December 1885 letter to the *Deseret Evening News*, published 22 December 1885, while the *Greenville Weekly News* was quoted in a 31 December 1885 letter by Wiley G. Cragun and Joseph Thorup to the *Deseret Evening News*, published 8 January 1886.

³⁹ Heber Wright, 15 December 1885 to *Deseret Evening News*, published 22 December 1885; there is no non-Latter-day Saint evidence that indicates preachers were involved in the Tennessee Massacre, but whether true or not the rumors still must have given missionaries pause, see Mason, *Mormon Menace*, 53–54.

Even as Wright felt the need to rebut unflattering portrayals of missionaries in the local press, rural districts continued to be relatively open for the missionaries to preach in. Even before Wright penned his snappy response to the *Courier's* article from the Danville post office, he and Gardner had held two successful meetings at the nearby Falls Creek Church. The pair also found others willing to open their homes for preaching and described their audiences as giving good attention except for some Methodists that had “not much interest.” Although they clashed with Baptist preachers the following January, the rural townships of Oconee County offered the missionaries chances to preach, even as the well-connected railroad and telegraph towns of Seneca and Westminster in the southern part of the county and Walhalla in the central part remained too hostile to proselytize in. This separation between rural and more urban areas was noted by another upstate South Carolina missionary, William N. Anderson. He wrote on 15 September 1886 to the *Deseret Evening News* that “Prejudice amongst the farming districts is not so rife, but in the cities and towns it is so great that the Elders have to set them aside as far as preaching the Gospel to them is concerned.” He further noted that the only time missionaries dared enter towns was for mail, purchasing items, or passing through on their way to somewhere else. This pattern applied not just in Upstate South Carolina, but throughout the South. Yet as the experience of missionaries on the Oconee peninsula would show, this era of separation—both between rural and urban southerners as well as converts separating to the west through emigration—hampered the ability of the Latter-day Saints to build a presence in the South.⁴⁰

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⁴⁰ See pages 3–5 of South Carolina Conference Minutes, LR 8468 11 v. 2, (#6825), in South Carolina District General Minutes, 1881–1968, LR 8468 11, Church History Library; for quote about Methodist disinterest, see entry for 11 December 1885; for Anderson’s analysis of the rural-urban divide, see LR 8557 2 3A:157, William N. Anderson on 15 September 1886 to *Deseret Evening News*, published 22 September 1886.

From the time Wright and Gardner first entered Oconee County to just over a year later, the various missionaries who rotated through the inland peninsula managed to baptize four people, three of them women—almost certainly confirming for white southerners their suspicion that the elders were out to steal ladies off to Utah. But things began changing when Gardner, now in Oconee for a second time, was joined by John Elbert Wilcox. The two, while working in the backcountry district of Keowee Township, were allowed to preach at the home of one Nathaniel Wilson with forty people attending. Soon enough, other Wilson brothers began opening their homes throughout March 1887 and on 17 April 1887, Nathaniel Wilson was baptized with his wife, Mary. Along with another couple, Major H. and Harriet M. Todd, baptized days later, the number of Saints in the area had doubled with the newer converts equally divided between men and women.⁴¹

Opposition was soon in coming. National anti-Mormonism reached a new intensity with debate over the Edmunds-Tucker Bill, federal legislation that aimed to break up the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints unless the Saints gave up polygamy. The bitter atmosphere made it dangerous for missionaries to even set foot in places where the wires hummed with anti-Mormon rhetoric—while Wilcox was visiting Seneca to transact some business, he narrowly escaped a crowd of residents determined to tar and feather him. In July, when Wilcox was again away on business, newly arrived missionary Joseph Thorup tried to rebut comments made by a Methodist preacher, John Wright, who he felt had spoken falsely against the Saints. Although Thorup waited until Wright was finished, Thorup was assaulted when speaking and that evening was arrested with the charge of conspiring to break up a public meeting. Thorup then spent three days and two nights at the Walhalla jail before being released on the condition that he leave the

⁴¹ South Carolina Conference Record, #6825.

area. If those who had thrown Thorup in prison had hoped to intimidate the missionaries and their friends, the jailing had the opposite effect. On 9 July 1887, Thorup personally baptized thirteen people after a meeting at Nathaniel Wilson's place, most of them relatives of the Wilson and Todd families. Then, according to agreement, Thorup left South Carolina the next day.⁴²

John Wilcox remained in Oconee County and baptized another ten people in the three days following Thorup's departure. Why so many chose baptism after one of the missionaries was jailed remains unclear; the missionaries themselves left few clues, instead focusing on the opposition they had faced and the suffering of Thorup in prison. It does appear that those who chose baptism in July had attended missionary meetings for months, so the turn toward forceful opposition might have jolted them toward making a more substantial commitment. Whatever the case was, by 12 July 1887, over thirty residents of Oconee County, most of them in the rural Keowee Township, had been baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Two days later, after holding one last meeting, Wilcox left for Spartanburg County. Inexplicably, missionaries would not return to Oconee County for three months. Perhaps they hoped that the excitement engendered by Thorup's imprisonment would die down and not harm the fledgling congregation they had built up on the inland peninsula.⁴³

During this hiatus, the Saints that lived in Oconee spent time every Sunday in singing practice since none had been ordained to the priesthood and could not hold regular worship meetings. This changed in October when Moroni D. Ferrin, then the president of the South Carolina Conference, concluded that irregular services in the area had been a mistake. On 16 October 1887 he organized a Sunday School for the Saints of the inland peninsula with local

⁴² For a discussion on the Edmunds-Tucker Bill (later Act), see Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 147–181; pages 6–10, No. 6825, LR 8468 11 v. 2, CHL.

⁴³ Ibid.

member John Wilson being ordained a priest to run the meetings. This congregation was smaller than a branch, but still an improvement over nothing, and thirty-seven Saints enrolled in the Sunday School that now met on Taylor Wilson's property in Keowee Township. After baptizing an additional two people, Ferrin left for Spartanburg County and nearly another month would pass before John Wilcox returned to the Saints of Oconee County again.⁴⁴

The Saints of the Oconee peninsula held regular Sunday services up to the time that Wilcox returned, and then an additional missionary, Newman H. Barker, arrived in the area. The meetings were generally well attended until on Christmas Eve when twenty men showed up and ordered Wilcox and Barker to leave in three days. Instead of leaving, the missionaries laid low and the members suspended their meetings until 8 January 1888. In February, when Ferrin had been released from his mission, he stopped in at the Sunday School for a few days before taking a train back home from Seneca. Shortly after this point, the activities of the congregation expanded into those of a branch with the missionaries administering the sacrament of the Lord's supper for the first time among the congregation—an essential part of weekly worship among the Latter-day Saints. By the end of March 1888, the congregation was flourishing.⁴⁵

Despite these improvements, the push to emigrate West still led the actions of the missionaries. Some of the Wilsons hoped to emigrate in April, and Wilcox and Barker spent much of the end of March going around with Taylor Wilson into North Carolina to say goodbye to relatives he would probably never see again. Upon returning, they helped gather a party of emigrants that would leave Seneca on the morning of 2 April 1888. Taking notice of the preparations of the Wilsons to leave were “some strangers come to see the Saints for the last time.” Within a few hours, the missionaries received threats against them should they decide to

⁴⁴ Pages 10–12, No. 6825, LR 8468 11 v. 2, CHL.

⁴⁵ Pages 12–15, No. 6825, LR 8468 11 v. 2, CHL.

set foot in Seneca to see the emigrating group of Saints off. The missionaries decided to travel to the rail station anyway.⁴⁶

Upon reaching Seneca on the day of departure, Wilcox and Barker received disturbing news—the preacher who had been fulminating against them, John Wright, was in town, aiming to get a mob together to attack the missionaries. Deciding it would be unwise to stay around in Seneca after the crowd at the station had departed, once they had helped the sixteen departing Saints aboard the train, the missionaries stepped on as well and blended in the best they could. As the train pulled from the Seneca station, Wilcox and Barker looked back to see the crowd “all looking after us, like they had lost something.” Having narrowly escaped the attack, the pair got off at the next stop and made their way through the countryside back to Keowee Township. Not long after their return, they got the chilling message that “if we ever came into Seneca any more they would not give us any warning, but would just go to putting lead in us.” While the missionaries were relieved to have gotten the company on their way to the West, the departure of sixteen devoted Saints left “this branch quite slim.”⁴⁷

The reduction in devoted members proved difficult for the branch to manage; for the next several months sometimes as few as six members showed up. In the meantime, preachers of other denominations debated and threatened the missionaries. Yet the biggest problems came from within—an emigrant company slated to depart in October 1888 failed to leave when one of the branch members defrauded several of his fellow religionists of their money, slipping out of town rather than paying his debts. When the missionaries tracked him down in December, he refused to discuss the issue and he was dropped from the branch membership. In the aftermath of the fiasco, attendance fell even further despite the efforts of the missionaries and visitors from

⁴⁶ Ibid., 15–17, quote on 17.

⁴⁷ Pages 17–18, No. 6825, LR 8468 11 v. 2, CHL, quotes from same pages.

the South Carolina Conference. Another ten Saints emigrated to the West in March 1889, further limiting the branch's numbers.⁴⁸

After the emigration, a small bit of hope appeared when the minutes mentioned the attendance of "Bro James A Smith and wife from Seneca." In the years since his baptism in York County, James Allen Smith had traveled around and by 1889 had employment in the city. He and Caroline traveled north to Keowee Township for church services on a regular basis, at least for a time, and apparently bore a powerful expression of his belief on 5 May 1889. Yet Smith and his wife eventually disappeared from the minutes and appearing in their place were some of the former members of the branch who found life in the West rougher than expected and who had returned to South Carolina disaffected from the church. The missionaries found "some of the Saints on the eve of apostacy" in November and some were excommunicated by the year's end. Despite this, some people, including Taylor Wilson, remained friendly to the missionaries. But the overall situation was dismal—several rounds of emigration had weakened the branch, with the whole process backfiring once people, now disaffected, returned.⁴⁹

On 13 March 1890, the missionaries then serving in Seneca held one last meeting at Taylor Wilson's house. The next day, the pair left the area, one joining another emigration of Saints at Chattanooga and the other returning to the missionaries' main base of operations in Spartanburg County, "thus ending the work in the upper part of Oconee Co." The difficulties the Saints had in building and maintaining for a time a congregation on the Oconee peninsula were in microcosm the same problems the church faced in congregations all across the South during this era of separation. Urban areas, heavily prejudiced by anti-Mormon stories floating through

⁴⁸ Ibid., 18–33.

⁴⁹ Pages 33–37, 33 for mention of James A. Smith quote, 34 for statement of belief, and 36 for "eve of apostacy", No. 6825, LR 8468 11 v. 2, CHL.

the webs of rail and wire, were too dangerous to sometimes set foot in—as several near misses in Seneca showed. Preaching in rural districts showed more promise, but Saints in the countryside were vulnerable to any number of pressures from armed gangs to other kinds of coercion. And even when congregations had survived against all odds, the constant separation of Saints through emigration undercut these efforts, sometimes fatally weakening the branches. The Oconee Branch, once full of potential, proved as ephemeral as dozens of others in the region.⁵⁰

* * *

The same month that missionaries left the Oconee peninsula, they also evacuated from the entire state of Georgia. Ever since John Morgan had come into the state in the 1870s, much of the missionary work in the South's Empire State had focused on counties in the state's northwestern corner. Around 1886, missionary William Spry had been appointed the president of the Georgia Conference, and during his brief tenure, the missionaries worked on expanding their field beyond these original areas. They found receptive audiences especially in and around Augusta and its hinterland. Accordingly, the bulk of the missionaries began to work in the northeastern parts of the state. Opposition in Augusta itself was frequent, but missionaries had better success in the country parts of the county in a place called Pinetucky, as well the country around the small railroad stop of Grovetown. Two rural counties nearby, Glascock and Warren, also proved to be hospitable to the missionaries.⁵¹

In 1888, Spry received surprising news from John Morgan—Morgan was being released as president of the Southern States Mission and Spry would become the new president. After

⁵⁰ Ibid., 38 for quote.

⁵¹ Pages 67–120, Record of Georgia Conference, LR 3163 11 Vol. 1, (#6732), Georgia District General Minutes, 1882–1971, LR 3163 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; also see William L. Roper and Leonard J. Arrington, *William Spry: Man of Firmness, Governor of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society and University of Utah Press, 1971), 23–30.

offering his willingness to serve, Spry took up residence at the mission's headquarters in Chattanooga and kept in touch with his former missionary fellows in Georgia. But in 1889, all of the reports from Georgia discussed both the potential as well as the pitfalls of working in the state. Despite some openings in various counties, there was also an increasing amount of opposition. Despite this, the missionaries continued to make extensive efforts in Richmond, Glascock, and Warren counties in northeastern Georgia. Toward the end of the year, however, mob violence and the threat of physical harm stalked most of the companionships laboring in the region. By October, opposition to the missionaries was so intense that the elders of the Georgia Conference skipped having their annual meeting in the state itself and joined with the South Carolina Conference meeting being held in Spartanburg County.⁵²

Across the Southern States Mission, emigration to the west took up a great deal of resources, including removing from the South people friendly to the missionaries. But other problems arose, especially when a missionary in Alabama went missing. The presumption was that he was robbed for the little bit of money he had and then thrown onto railroad tracks to make his death appear an accident. On top of this, Spry himself was arrested on a false charge. Beyond the Southern States Mission, the church itself seemed under siege. The Edmunds-Tucker Act, having passed in 1887, steadily chipped away at the land holdings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; when the church contested its constitutionality, the Supreme Court found in favor of the government. The number of missionaries that had been serving in February 1889, 110, soon dropped to just 65 by a year later. With the extinction of the church seeming possible and missionaries hard to come by, any place where preaching was lagging had to be abandoned.

⁵² Pages 100–120, No. 6732/LR 3163 11 Vol. 1, CHL; Roper and Arrington, *William Spry*, 31–36.

On 21 March 1890, Spry called D. F. LeBaron to be the president of the South Carolina Conference. He took a 7:30 train for Spartanburg, “the last Elder to leave Ga.”⁵³

Some Saints believed that the Second Coming of Christ would take place that year, or if not in 1890, then the next year. With the entire legal weight of the United States government arrayed against the church, only a miracle could possibly save the Saints from extinction. Instead, the president of the church, Wilford Woodruff, who had his first missionary experience preaching in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky, decided to encourage the Saints to abandon polygamy. Penning a manifesto on 24 September 1890, he offered that he would publicly declare that his advice was to “refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land.” A nearly forty-year battle over plural marriage was finally over—Protestant America had won. Unraveling the church from polygamy itself would be a far more complex process than a simple declaration that the Saints would no longer practice it. And getting people to look beyond polygamy now that the church no longer officially sanctioned the practice—at least not in the United States anyway—would take a new approach completely.⁵⁴

The drop in missionaries to the South, as well as the Saints’ final showdown with the government in Utah, did more than any single other thing to hinder the work in the region. Importantly, however, there was a corresponding drop in the number of violent incidents against the missionaries; in 1890, only five attacks were reported. Clearly, white conservative

⁵³ Ibid., quote from page 120, No. 6732/LR 3163 11 Vol. 1, CHL; “Conference Reports Since Opening of Mission, 1880–1893,” item in “J. Golden Kimball Letters, Jan. 1894,” Folder 19, Box 72, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Ms 36, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

⁵⁴ For Latter-day beliefs about the Second Coming in 1890 or 1891, see Christopher James Blythe, *Terrible Revolution: Latter-day Saints and the American Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 182–183; for Woodruff’s manifesto, see Wilford Woodruff, *Official Declaration* (Salt Lake City, 1890), digitized by Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/63c30a72-e098-4291-af16-c276790a9d6c/0?view=summary&lang=eng> (accessed: February 25, 2024).

southerners felt no need to resort to violence when it looked like their Mormon enemies might be floundering in the region.⁵⁵

* * *

Around 15 April 1891, J. Golden Kimball, who had served previously in the Southern States Mission in the Virginia Conference, received a most unwelcome letter. He had been appointed president of the mission to succeed William Spry. “I felt very badly about being called to such a mission as I was fearfull of the results,” reflecting that the time he spent in Virginia had been very bad for his health. Even so, he reported for duty in Salt Lake City and in August he was on a train heading for Chattanooga, like so many other missionaries to the South. After Kimball got acquainted with the mission and discussed the situation with Spry, the latter left for Salt Lake City on the evening of 18 August 1891. “I felt the weight of my responsibilities [sic] as soon as he departed, but trust I will be equal to the emergency.”⁵⁶

In many ways, Kimball was entering into an emergency. At the end of August 1887, the mission then had 33 congregations across the region covered by the Southern States Mission. By the time Kimball took over in August 1891, the mission had just ten branch congregations and would lose three more by the following February. The number of missionaries serving had also fluctuated dramatically, bottoming out at 64 in February 1891 but increasing to 71 by the time Kimball’s presidency began. Despite the organizational difficulties, the mission counted just over 1400 Latter-day Saints scattered throughout the South. Yet maintaining their loyalty to the faith required visits by missionaries and more consistent church meetings, both of which were hard to come by with the lack of organized congregations and fewer missionaries. And even

⁵⁵ Mason, *Mormon Menace*, 131.

⁵⁶ J. Golden Kimball Diary, entries for April 1891 (page 1) for first quote and entry for 18 August 1891 (page 5) for second quote, Folder 1, Box 5, J. Golden Kimball Papers, Ms 662, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

though the anti-polygamy campaign was winding down with the Saints' capitulation to American demands to surrender the practice, few southerners forgot the Saints had practiced it. Sporadic violence continued against the Saints and continued to plague them in urban areas, even as the decline in missionary work also meant that overall violence declined as well, especially in rural areas—the Saints were too weak to pose a threat.⁵⁷

After two years as president, J. Golden Kimball determined to test whether hostility against the Saints still blazed in the towns and cities of the South. After the regular conference meetings of the Middle Tennessee Conference finished in the countryside of De Kalb County, the missionaries secured the county's courthouse in Smithville for another meeting. Kimball later recounted, "Up to that time we had always kept out of cities... We had no money. The only place they could secure was the court house. I told the Elders: 'I will do the preaching, and if they kill me you need not bother any further.' The people were very prejudiced." About eight missionaries traveled along to get a group photo taken in Smithville but were disappointed since "the camera could hardly cover one good sized Mormon Elder," according to Kimball. They arrived in Smithville at 4pm, with the speaking appointment scheduled for 7pm. If Kimball was already nervous about how preaching in town would go (he had been in the mission when elders Gibbs and Berry had been killed, one of them fresh off a tour of cities in Mississippi and Tennessee), he froze when he walked in the courthouse: there were only men in the audience. "When there are no women there is a great deal of danger. It is dangerous enough when they are

⁵⁷ See "Conference Reports Since Opening of Mission, 1880–1893," item in "J. Golden Kimball Letters, Jan. 1894," Folder 19, Box 72, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Ms 36, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah; Mason, *Mormon Menace*, 131.

present,” he later quipped. Sizing up the tough crowd, Kimball fully expected that the eight missionaries, his assistant George Albert Smith, and himself would be taken by a mob.⁵⁸

Working to calm himself, Kimball made his way up in front of the crowd of 75 that had gathered to hear him, later stating that “I made up my mind to deliver my message as fervently and humbly as ever a president of a mission preached.” He initially planned on speaking on the principles of the gospel, but perhaps felt that given the poor treatment the Saints had received in the press these words would fall on deaf ears. As he later reported, “something came over me” and Kimball soon found himself thundering, “Gentlemen, you have not come here to listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I know what you have come for. You have come to find out about the Mountain Meadows Massacre and polygamy, and God being my helper I will tell you the truth.” He then spoke for one hour. George Albert Smith, his assistant in the mission, also spoke about the history of the Saints and the persecution they had endured. The people present listened attentively during both talks by Kimball and Smith. Later recalling the meeting, Kimball said that when it was out “you could hear a pin drop. There was no comment; there was no noise or confusion, and we went to the hotel.”⁵⁹

After retiring to a private boarding house that Kimball described as “cheap,” the group heard melodies being played outside. Fearing that it meant trouble, Kimball sent the conference president, Willard Bean, to investigate the issue. Bean found out that some musicians had come

⁵⁸ Most of this account and quotes come from remarks given 9 April 1932 by J. Golden Kimball in *One-Hundred and Second Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932), 78–79; the quote on photography comes from the 16 October 1893 entry, pages 148–149, of J. Golden Kimball’s Diary, Ms 662, University of Utah; a third source is Henry C. Iverson, “Middle Tennessee Conference,” in *Deseret Evening News*, 1 November 1893, see SSMMH 4B:189.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Kimball’s 1932 conference remarks. This incident and the larger impacts of the Mountain Meadows Massacre on missionary work in general (including in the South) are discussed by Brian D. Reeves, “‘Divert the Minds of the People’: Mountain Meadows Massacre Recitals and Missionary Work,” in Reid L. Neilson and Fred E. Woods, *Go Ye Into All the World: The Growth and Development of Mormon Missionary Work* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012), 291–315.

to serenade Kimball and the others. The group of players were accordingly invited into the missionaries' room, "and they played many beautiful tunes." Henry C. Iverson, one of the missionaries involved, wrote to the *Deseret News* that this gesture was "unexpected, and therefore the more highly appreciated." Kimball was blunter in his diary: "When we preach in such places we are usually visited with a mob." And while he was grateful for this kind moment where musicians had played music after one of his talks, he remained wary. The next day the missionaries returned to the countryside and in meeting with them in the woods, Kimball warned them against letting their guard down—"I said to those Elders: 'Don't one of you dare preach that sermon; it will cost you your life.'"⁶⁰

Kimball later recounted this story (albeit stripped of some details and others altered) before a crowd of Saints in Salt Lake City during the church's General Conference in 1932. By the time he gave that talk, the church had dozens of flourishing congregations in southern towns and cities. Yet Kimball's point had been to address one question: "Was I moved upon by the right spirit?" He prefaced the story by saying that "we never know, if we listen to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit, just what it will do for us." Kimball felt that his sermon had been an improbable blessing—that when walking into an audience that was ready to mob the elders that he had received direction to speak on a different subject and spoke with the power of God to pacify (and even move to sympathy) a hostile crowd.⁶¹

Yet J. Golden Kimball's foray into town had been brief, fleeting, and filled with terror. And Smithville was not exactly a center of urban growth either, with Kimball reporting that it was "a city of 800" (the 1890 Census called it "Smithville village" and reported the population as

⁶⁰ Ibid., "cheap" and "Don't one of you dare" from conference remarks; "beautiful tunes" and "visited with a mob" from Kimball diary; "unexpected" from Iverson article in *Deseret Evening News*.

⁶¹ Kimball Conference Remarks, 1932.

572). Because of the ruinous press and the webs of rail and wire to carry it, urban southerners had remained prejudiced against the Latter-day Saints throughout the 1880s and into the 1890s. That the president of the Southern States Mission felt he risked his life to preach in what the Census Bureau called a village reflects the power that urban prejudice carried. The increasing separation between rural and more urbanized spaces in the South dictated where missionaries could find success in the region. But even separate rural spaces held their dangers, with some southerners willing to beat back the missionaries with violence, if necessary. And the instability of isolated pockets of rural Saints often meant that the most devout families often separated themselves in turn from the region, undercutting the ability of the church to establish a firm foundation in the South.⁶²

Yet a tide of change was coming. Although Kimball did not realize it when he spoke in Smithville on the evening of 16 October 1893, a series of crises were converging to shake the old order of the first New South. It was this series of crises that would enable the Saints to finally establish some long-lasting congregations in the region. This moment of Latter-day Saint success would be brief, but as in Reconstruction, divided and distracted anti-Mormons gave missionaries and members room to flourish.⁶³

⁶² “City of 800” from Kimball Diary, 16 October 1893, page 149, Marriott Library, University of Utah; 1890 population of Smithville given in Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), 319.

⁶³ The term “New South” is used in many different historical contexts, so here I use Howard Rabinowitz’s clarification of “first,” see Howard N. Rabinowitz, *The First New South, 1865–1920* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1992).

CHAPTER FOUR

DEPRESSION: PARLAYING CRISIS INTO RESPECTABILITY

After forty years of struggle, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints dedicated its most ornate, complex, and largest temple in Salt Lake City on the morning of 6 April 1893. The construction had been delayed by the slow process of moving the massive granite stones from quarries in the canyons east of the valley into the city; by the brief but disruptive Utah War and the burial of the foundation to disguise the site from U.S. troops; by the cracking of the original footings which had to be replaced; and by the anti-polygamy prosecutions and the seizure of the church's assets under the Edmunds-Tucker Act. The temple may never have been finished if the Saints had refused to give up polygamy, but in 1890 church president Wilford Woodruff had decided the survival of the sect required it. The divestment of polygamy seemed to soften some opposition to the Saints; when the exterior walls of the temple were finished in April 1892, the entire city gathered around to celebrate. Now, just one year later, the church at last had a temple in its center city, a situation not seen since the days of Nauvoo.¹

But the dedication of the long-hoped for temple did not guarantee smooth sailing for the Saints. Indeed, the very day Woodruff dedicated the structure, a storm burst across the city. West winds of 36 mph were measured with gusts as high as 60 mph. The savage weather was recalled by many as they remembered the dedication day, but other storms likewise buffeted the faithful. Just months after the dedication, a financial panic sweeping the nation placed the church at the

¹ See Mark Henshaw, *Forty Years: The Sage of Building the Salt Lake Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020); also C. Mark Hamilton and C. Nina Cutrubus, *The Salt Lake Temple: A Monument to a People* (Salt Lake City: University Services Corporation, 1983).

brink of bankruptcy. Frightened creditors demanded payment; with the church impoverished from the aftermath of seized assets and real property under the Edmunds-Tucker Act, Woodruff sent apostle Heber J. Grant, a banker by profession, to obtain any kind of short-term loan to keep the church afloat. Given the general freeze in credit, Grant managed to buy only a few months of postponement at high cost. Entrapped in a tangle of debt, the church temporarily struggled to even pay the train fares for missionaries. No one was spared the strident financial straits; Southern States Mission president J. Golden Kimball had been in Utah when the financial crisis hit and was unable to return to the mission for several months due to lack of money.²

This financial crisis, later called the Panic of 1893, heralded a longer and severe economic depression that crippled Utah Territory. Despite being at the edge of a fiscal abyss, the church doubled down on its missionary efforts as soon as it could do so again. After a sharp decline in sending out missionaries in 1893, the next year the church sent out 200 more than the year before the crisis. In 1898, some 1,059 missionaries were called to labor, a higher number than any previous year and not matched again for another twenty-one years. At various points as many as a quarter of these new missionaries were assigned to the Southern States Mission; many others went to adjacent missions that shared parts of the South. Managing this surge of missionaries in the region was Golden's brother Elias S. Kimball, who succeeded him as the mission president in 1894. As the depression continued into 1895, Kimball informed the missionaries in the South that they were "a thousand times better off here than you would be at home" due to the Saints being in a "very depressed condition financially."³

² U.S. Daily Weather Map for 6 April 1893, NOAA Central Library, U.S. Daily Weather Maps, <https://libguides.library.noaa.gov/weather-climate/daily-weather-maps>, file 18930406.pdf, page last updated 30 January 2024; Henshaw, *Forty Years*, 453–456; Ronald W. Walker, "Crisis in Zion: Heber J. Grant and the Panic of 1893," in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 43 No. 1 (2004), 115–142, esp. 130.

³ "Missionary Statistics," *Deseret Morning News*, 2005 *Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News), 635; Notes from Council Meeting held 26 August 1895, 8:15am, pages 121–122, in North Carolina Conference Minutes, Book #6802, Folder 2, North Carolina District Minutes, LR 8557 56, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

Yet the South was likewise in a very depressed financial condition, a situation that Kimball failed to mention. Much like the Panic of 1873, the catastrophe twenty years later also had major political as well as economic consequences for the region. While the previous depression had accelerated the end of Reconstruction, this new crisis brought to boiling unresolved tensions that had simmered in the South ever since the overthrow of the Republican regimes. The Panic of 1893 cracked open the ornate, gilded shell of the first New South, exposing its hollow interior for all to see. The region's inhabitants, especially its farmers made desperate by plunging cotton prices and mounting debt, resolved upon drastic action. In multiple southern states, rural whites broke with the Democratic Party to establish a new political party, one that transgressed racial lines. A decade of political and social chaos followed and threatened the legitimacy of the post-Reconstruction order. Not since the 1870s, and not again until the debates of the twentieth-century civil rights era, would the fundamentals of southern life be so thoroughly criticized and questioned.⁴

It was in this decade of depression that the Saints gained something resembling a permanent presence in the American South—a handful of congregations established during this era would survive into the twenty-first century. The depressed conditions in Utah pushed the church to discourage emigration to the Mountain West even as it pulled an increased number of

⁴ That the 1890s represented a peculiar crisis in the South is reflected in chapter titles found in general histories of the region, for example, see “The South and the Crisis of the 1890s” in William J. Cooper Jr., Thomas E. Terrell, and Christopher Childers, *The American South, A History, Volume II: From Reconstruction to the Present* 5th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 553–592, or “The Crisis of the 1890s” in William A. Link, *Southern Crucible: The Making of an American Region* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 341–363; see also Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; 15th Anniversary Edition, 2007); Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement: Ballots and Bigotry in the New South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), esp. 1–89; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); also useful (although dated; it is 102 years old at the time of this writing) is Alex M. Arnett, *The Populist Movement in Georgia: A View of the “Agrarian Crusade” in the Light of Solid-South Politics* (New York: Columbia University, 1922).

men out of the region into missionary ranks. The swelling number of missionaries, however hesitantly at first, began moving into southern towns and cities and soon managed to establish several congregations adjacent to urban areas in the region. These new congregations were usually more diversified and more resilient in the face of upheaval, a major change from the ephemeral nature of the church's southern congregations in the 1880s. Membership in the region also solidified; with about 1,200 in the region in 1890, the number of Saints more than doubled to 2,800 in 1895. By the end of 1900, the Saints had quadrupled to over 11,400. While the official end of polygamy surely removed one of the main controversies against the Saints in the South, this did not mean that southerners or Protestant preachers had forgotten about it. The western peculiar institution (or relic of barbarism, depending on who was referencing it), though vanquished, reminded Americans that the Latter-day Saints had defied the federal government and white Protestantism for nearly thirty years. The end of mass emigration to the West from the South, the sharp increase in the missionary force, and the end of polygamy all helped the Saints increase their numbers in the region, but they were not sufficient to account for the stunning success the Saints achieved in the South in the 1890s.⁵

This success would not have happened without the crisis enveloping the New South. Desperate economic straits that aided the Saints in the countryside in the 1880s now expanded into the urban South. The political turmoil that followed shook the region and divided the region's elites, breaking the once united front against the Latter-day Saints. Missionaries still faced anti-Mormon rhetoric and violence, but they no longer ranked in the region's imagination as the biggest threats. Political enemies and racial minorities became the new obsession in the South. The Saints for their part likewise sought to portray themselves as a safe Christian sect that

⁵ For the statistics mentioned here, see Appendix A.

could appeal to the more conservative elements of southern society. Elias Kimball as mission president encouraged missionaries to befriend those with high positions in society, to dress well, and to appear less like a rabble from the countryside. If the separation between urban and rural Souths in the 1880s became political warfare by the 1890s, the Saints clearly picked the urban side to woo, a major change from the 1880s when they bypassed urban areas as hopelessly prejudiced. Yet this shift could only take place once the urban hostility toward the Saints and the missionaries decreased. In the turmoil of the 1890s, a once-radical Christian sect that had been stripped of its most extreme elements no longer seemed as dangerous when compared to political foes and “strange” blacks. Even places that had once threatened to lynch the missionaries became important church centers. The violence that usually came on the heels of missionary successes was redirected toward political and social enemies.⁶

At the end of this turbulent era, white Democrats managed to seize control over the region’s politics once more and the South would become a one-party area for decades to come. The clearest losers in this were African Americans. Even after Reconstruction’s overthrow, glimmers of hope had remained. With the overthrow of the third-party Populist challenge in the 1890s, however, institutional racism became the norm, punctuated by frequent lynching when the coercive power of Jim Crow failed to guarantee Black submission. As this process moved forward, the church’s growth was also aided, if indirectly, by the Saints taking steps to associate themselves on the white side of an increasingly fraught and brightly drawn color line being fortified across the region and country. While no African American was denied baptism, mission leaders increasingly discouraged missionaries from actively seeking them out. Lay members also

⁶ Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 156–158; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 109–323.

contributed to this drift by enunciating and elaborating rationales for the priesthood ban against members of African descent first promulgated by Brigham Young.⁷

This Latter-day moment of success proved fleeting, however. The mid-decade's tailwinds which blew the Saints into a more favorable position soon changed course. While the Saints had parlayed the crisis into presenting themselves as a respectable religious sect, the white Protestant South let its guard down only temporarily. Once the dust settled from intense political turmoil, race lines hardened into place, white southern culture ossified, and the Latter-day Saints were no longer so readily embraced. By the end of the 1890s, the once scattered opponents of the Saints fought back against the sect's success.

* * *

The growing crisis of the New South was on display for Utahns when in November 1894, the *Deseret Evening News* published a letter from James Allen Smith written from Seneca, South Carolina the previous week. Smith felt that “a few lines from the Palmetto state would not be out of place,” so he concluded to “pen you a few.” He related that some missionaries had become sick during the hot weather of the summer, but that the brisker fall weather had improved their health. He lamented that two of them had died from apparent illness in South Carolina, but concluded “who knows but that they would have died if they had remained at home? We regret to give up such men as these missionaries, but there is no way to remedy it.” Also worrisome to Smith was the depressed state of agriculture in the region: “The crops are good in this county, but cotton is only worth 5 to 5¼ cents per pound here this fall; it usually sells for 7½ to 8 cents.”

⁷ W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 188–214; Max Perry Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), epilogue.

Given the low price and the current indebtedness of farmers, Smith predicted that cotton growing was a losing proposition: “I believe farmers get further behind every year that they work at it.”⁸

By the time Smith penned his dispatch, five years had passed since he had last written a published letter from Seneca. This five-year gap was significant, for it seems that Smith had lost his first wife, traveled west, got remarried, and returned to the South. The historical record is vague when it comes to James Allen Smith, but based on what has survived, he clearly was important to developing the church in South Carolina and never shy about discussing his faith. His actions laid the foundation for a congregation at Seneca, a town that had threatened to lynch the missionaries less than a decade prior. But the former Klansman turned staunch Latter-day Saint was no stranger to tackling confrontation head on—and winning even when losing.

Having first been baptized in his native York County in South Carolina, Smith and his wife, Hannah Caroline, had traveled across the Carolina Piedmont doing odd jobs. While working on a literal foundation as a bricklayer in Asheville, North Carolina, Smith had frequently opened his home to missionaries working in the area. On 17 May 1887, Elders Edward Crowther and Anthony Heiner baptized three people in Asheville, including Hannah C. Crosby, the niece of James’s wife. Smith’s involvement in helping the Latter-day Saint cause in the area provoked consternation and the next day, the foreman for the job told Smith that despite his solid contributions, “you can’t work here any longer.” Upon asking the reason for his discharge, the foreman told Smith that the contractor, John Hart, would not allow any Mormons to work for him. Saying that he had belonged to the church for nearly five years already, Smith rejoined that firing him was “a poor way to convince me that I was wrong.”⁹

⁸ See “The Palmetto State,” in *Deseret Evening News*, 5 November 1894, page 2.

⁹ See “Helped By An Enemy,” in *Deseret Evening News*, 27 May 1887, page 3; also see lines 328–330 on pages 40–41, Volume 6803, “Record of the North Carolina Conference from Aug. 30, 1887 to Dec. 31, 1894” in Folder 1, North Carolina Conference Missionary Records, LR 8557 56, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

Smith soon had a conversation with Hart directly. The contractor told the Latter-day Saint that while he liked Smith, he felt sorry for “most of the contractors say they would not give you a lick of work to do on account of your belief, and you will have to leave town.” Smith responded that because he had done nothing wrong, God would “raise up a man that will give me work in this town, and you may write that down.” Annoyed by this certitude, Hart advised Smith to get on the next train to Utah and take his family with him. Smith then turned Hart’s logic back on him by responding, “I came here to try and make money enough to go there, but now you have discharged me and how am I to go without money?” Stunned by the rejoinder and trapped by his own statements, Hart agreed to keep Smith on the job so long as he pledged to leave Asheville as soon as he had enough money to go to Utah; he also demanded that Smith warn the missionaries to skip town or be whipped. Smith did warn Crowther and Heiner, who prepared to leave immediately. In the meantime, Smith continued his employment, musing that “God raised up a friend for me, and Mr. Hart was the man, and my words came to pass, but he can’t see it.” It seems that James Allen Smith did save enough money for his niece Hannah Crosby to travel to Utah; she was soon living in the territory. But James and his wife, Hannah Caroline, continued in the South, soon leaving North Carolina and settling at the town of Piedmont on the border of Anderson and Greenville counties in South Carolina.¹⁰

At Piedmont, with a different employer, Smith’s religion again became a source of controversy. Following a Baptist revival there, Smith’s coworkers pressured their employer to discharge the Latter-day Saint among them. While eventually relenting to their demands, the sympathetic employer paid the railroad fare for James and Hannah Caroline to travel to nearby Seneca, the rapidly expanding railroad crossing on the Oconee peninsula. By 1889 the couple

¹⁰ Ibid., also “Religious Intolerance,” *Deseret Evening News*, 23 August 1888, page 2.

regularly attended the growing branch the missionaries had established in Keowee Township to the north. That February, Smith wrote to another western periodical, the *Deseret Weekly*, and reflected on the power of faith. He argued that faith was a principle of action—you wouldn't do anything like plant a crop or go to the mill to "get our grinding (as we call it) done"—unless you first believed and had faith that you could succeed. He considered his own background and found it nothing short of miraculous that his life had changed for the better: "I was raised a very wicked man. I have swallowed 17 inches of solid steel (a sword) for a living. But I don't follow that now." He then asked if his readers could remove a mountain. "If they can't, they have not learned faith. There is something to learn about faith as long as we can't remove mountains, and we may study on the principle of faith until we get a grain as large as a mustard seed."¹¹

Smith's fierce devotion to the cause he embraced was frequently welcomed by the missionaries in the area, and his attendance from Seneca is noted in their minutes of the meetings in Keowee Township. In May 1889, they recorded that, "Bro. James A Smith and wife of Seneca were up on the 5th and Bro. Smith bore his testimony to the truth of the Gospel as revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith." This entry marks the last time any document references Smith in South Carolina until 1893. What happened in the next four years is muddled, especially given the destruction of the 1890 Census. James Allen Smith did reappear in the documentary record in 1891, but this time thousands of miles away in Utah. One of the people he left behind was his wife, Hannah Caroline. She disappeared from the historical record sometime after May 1889 and before 1891. No known obituary or gravesite exists for her, but if she died, given the

¹¹ "Comments on Faith," in *Deseret Weekly*, 16 March 1889, volume page 374–375.

association of the Smiths with the Latter-day Saints, it is highly probable that prejudice kept any mention of her death from entering into the historical record.¹²

Either due to grief or a desire to join the Saints in the West, James Allen Smith made his way to Utah and took up residence at the railroad junction of Ogden. We know this thanks to a marriage record drawn up in Logan, Cache County, Utah, where Smith married his previous wife's niece, Hannah C. Crosby, on 7 January 1891. Twenty years separated the newlyweds, but they apparently did not remain in Ogden for very long since another record dated 24 September 1892 lists their residence as Salt Lake City. This document was a list of missionaries called by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the notation for Smith indicated that he was called to serve in the Southern States Mission with the specific assignment to do genealogical research. After just three years of being away from South Carolina (if even that much), James Allen Smith was returning. If his purpose was to collect genealogical information, however, the logical place would have been his home county of York, but by 1893 Smith had clearly relocated to Seneca—the last place he lived before going to Utah. Why?¹³

Smith's reasoning remains opaque to observers in the twenty-first century. He left no explicit reasoning for his decision to return to a town that in 1887 had been hostile enough toward the missionaries as to threaten to lynch them. Back in 1889 when Smith had last resided there, he had not been an officially sanctioned missionary of the church; by 1893 he was. Yet it was only two years later that Smith established a branch of the church at Seneca. He clearly decided to ditch his official assignment to collect genealogical information to become a

¹² See notes for May 1889 on page 34, LR 8468 11 v. 2, (#6825), in South Carolina District General Minutes, 1881–1968, LR 8468 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

¹³ Cache County, Utah, marriage license for James Allen Smith and Hannah C. Crosby, dated 6–7 January 1891, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:X2B5-FMF>; entry 232, James Allen Smith, page 124 (image 133) of Book A, 1860 April 24–1894 April 27, in Missionary Department Missionary Registers, 1860–1959, CR 301 22, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

proselytizing missionary. What had changed in Seneca to enable Smith and others to establish a foothold in this once virulent den of anti-Mormonism?

* * *

By the time James Allen Smith wrote from Seneca in October 1894, this piedmont town of South Carolina was severely down on its luck. The shock of the financial panic the previous year had been devastating, but it had simply accelerated depressing trends afflicting this railroad junction. After a promising start to the 1880s, by the end of the decade the town was struggling. Businesses closed and the once highly ambitious visions for the community faded when faced with the reality that Seneca truly at best forwarded business elsewhere.

Finding localized economic data for the United States prior to the twentieth century is an uneven task at best. The loss of the 1890 manuscript census especially makes it difficult to find granular information for specific communities in that decade. In the case of Seneca, even the published 1890 Census fails to help for the population of the town was not returned separately from the surrounding Seneca Township. Historians cannot therefore use population as a measuring stick to trace the fortunes of the town before 1900, at which point Seneca had 920 residents—barely larger than the nearby rail stop of Westminster with 857 people and smaller than the Oconee County seat of Walhalla with 1,307.¹⁴

While government statistics fail in this case, private records can shed some light. With its important location on the main trunk line of the Southern Railway, Seneca was strategically positioned on the webs of wire and rail that had come to define the New South. This placement helped inflame anti-Mormonism in the town, but it also put Seneca in the position of being

¹⁴ See Table 5, Population of States and Territories by Minor Civil Divisions: 1890 and 1900, Oconee County, South Carolina, 1900 Census: Volume 1, Population, Part 1, page 354; <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1901/dec/vol-01-population.html>.

judged as well. Far off investors (largely in the North) needed rankings for what businesses might be worth extending credit to, and one company that met this need was R. G. Dun's Mercantile Agency. With a vast network of informants that sent information to its New York offices, the agency systematized its wealth of data into a series of credit ratings. A1 was considered the safest, while a score of 4 meant fair or poor credit. For historians interested in communities, however, the reference volumes published by the Dun Mercantile Agency also included the names of proprietors and the kind of business they engaged in. Later volumes even introduced a population estimate for each community and the nearest place with a bank, effectively mapping out the invisible lines of finance that spread across the country.¹⁵

Seneca first appeared in the Mercantile Agency's reference volume in 1873, the same year the nearly completed Atlanta and Charlotte Airline Railway founded the town. That year mentioned two general stores, but as would be expected with a brand-new community, both were small ventures having no more than \$2,000 in capital. Both received a score of 3½, the lowest score given in the 1870s. Despite the depression that stalked the nation after the Panic of 1873, Seneca's place on the railroad boosted its fortunes for in 1874 seventeen businesses in the town were mentioned. Seven general stores, two hotels, a saddler, tannery, livery, saw mill, millwright, wheelwright, a physician, and to top it off, a "Barroom, &c.," showed that Seneca had developed a diversified business class. Five received no credit rating, and another six sat at the dismal 3½. Four businesses, however, made their way to receiving a 3 rating, while two—a

¹⁵ The *Mercantile Agency Reference Volume* had a key in the front that indicated what the ratings stood for. An additional discussion of the rating's impact on southern communities can be found in Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 86.

general store and the tannery—got scores of 2½, indicating that they had “good” credit in the eyes of Dun’s Mercantile Agency.¹⁶

The listings for Seneca varied little for the remainder of the 1870s, but in 1880 the volume introduced a population estimate for the town of 400 and indicated that the nearest place with a bank was Walhalla. That year, Seneca had an average of twenty-two businesses meriting attention and the two with good credit were M. W. Coleman and Company’s hotel and a general store run by a “Dr. John Hopkins.” The situation had changed dramatically by 1883, when that year’s volume expanded its rating to 4 for poor credit and revised its population estimate for Seneca downward to 382 people. In terms of banking, Seneca was still in the orbit of Walhalla, but this railroad junction now had thirty-four businesses worth mentioning. While a third were the generic general stores, a diverse set of others had moved in, including druggists, a blacksmith, an undertaker, a few confectioners, and even a jeweler (although he received a 4 rating, with poor credit). One business managed to get a coveted 1½ rating indicating “high” credit: J. B. Sitton’s Flour Mill and Gin was the only business in Seneca to get the honor.

This trust may have been misplaced, for within two years Sitton’s Mill and Gin was no longer listed for Seneca. The average rating for businesses in the town also dropped. Yet business activity continued to flourish and the railroad junction in 1886 was listed as a town of 600, and most importantly it had its own bank. This year indicated that Seneca had forty-four businesses worth mentioning, including fourteen general stores, two blacksmiths, several mills and drugstores, the still persevering (and poorly rated) jeweler, and perhaps most significantly, the town had its own newspaper, the *Seneca Free Press*. Never previously, and never again in

¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all these volumes I viewed at the Baker Library’s Special Collections, Harvard Business School, Boston. All volumes were published by the R. G. Dun and Company Mercantile Agency based in New York City; the year indicated in the text was the publication date listed on each volume. No volume had page numbers, but entries were listed by states and then communities—in this case, South Carolina, Seneca.

the nineteenth century, would Seneca, South Carolina, have such a diverse and ambitious array of businesses, including two owned and operated by African Americans. Yet this diverse lot apparently rested on uncertain financial foundations for nearly half received the dreaded 4 rating, indicating the euphemistic “limited” credit worthiness.¹⁷

This skepticism appears to have been merited for in 1889, only thirty businesses were listed for Seneca. The two Black-owned businesses held on as well as the *Seneca Free Press*, but the town’s two blacksmiths had disappeared—as did the ever-struggling jeweler. This year was the first time we have any record of James Allen Smith living there; by the time we have his next surviving letter from Seneca in 1894, only twenty-three businesses were listed for Seneca, just half of the peak from only eight years before in 1886. The next year, another three businesses disappeared from the town’s listing, despite the town’s increased population estimate of 800. The twenty businesses in Seneca in 1895 marked the bottoming out of the town’s listing, its lowest point since the 1870s. After that year the number would expand again, but by this point Smith had organized a branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the area. A highly prosperous town in the 1880s had been ready to lynch the missionaries, but a more chastened town in the 1890s at least tolerated their presence. Yet the entire South was in economic trouble in the 1890s; why did a successful congregation take root in Seneca at this time while the Saints yet remained a suspect and peripheral sect for most of the region?

* * *

For a town to lose over half its businesses in less than a decade (1886 to 1895) was a grim statistic. The economic reality in the countryside at the same time was worse. As James Allen Smith had reported from Seneca, the price cotton from the surrounding farms fetched in

¹⁷ This 1886 volume was provided by the Sterling Memorial Library of Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, but the publication information and the organization of the book are the same as the others.

1894 was three cents less than usual, and farmers were rapidly falling into debt. While the distressed towns would eventually make a recovery and even improve their lot heading into the twentieth century, the southern countryside continued to hold the poorest farmers in the United States. If economic distress guaranteed missionary success, then surely the sensible route to build a foundation for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the South was to build it up in the rural districts of the region. This did not happen.¹⁸

The separation of town and country in the South enabled missionaries to make some gains in the South even when being shut out of towns and cities by the highly anti-Mormon press of the 1880s. In the depressed 1890s, however, the Saints' missionary efforts no longer focused so heavily on the countryside alone. The western-born leadership of the church's Southern States Mission began to emphasize the need to preach in towns and cities, and rather than simply preach gospel sermons, the missionaries began allaying prejudice by attempting to shape how they were presented in the region's press. J. Golden Kimball's one-time decision to skip preaching "the gospel of Jesus Christ" to discuss southern concerns about "the Mountain Meadows Massacre and polygamy," while not absolutely repeated, did signal a shift toward dealing with public relations and public perception to a degree not emphasized before.¹⁹

This was partly an institutional move by the church. During the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, representatives from Utah (including several non-Latter-day Saints) were able

¹⁸ See Stephen A. West, *From Yeoman to Redneck in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1850–1915* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008); Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 109; Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 187–213.

¹⁹ An educated meditation on why missionaries waited so long to enter southern cities can be found in Reid L. Harper, "Backcountry Missionaries in the Post-Bellum South: Thomas Ephraim Harper's Experience," *Journal of Mormon History* 34 No. 1 (Winter 2008), 214–218. Here, Harper collects many previous reasons offered as to why missionaries stayed away from the cities and worked in the backcountry. He concludes, however, that violence was rare in the city and that working the backcountry represented preaching in "high-risk locales" (216). Harper generally does not examine the southern context, however, and based on the evidence I have utilized, I argue instead that city residents were already often prejudiced by anti-Mormon stories. Potential violence appeared more likely in cities to the missionaries, hence they stayed in the rural districts where actual violence was more infrequent.

to secure a prime location to exhibit the culture and industry of the territory. Given that Latter-day Saints made up the largest single group in the territory, Utahns of all faiths worked to boost public perceptions of the territory by effectively improving public perceptions of the Latter-day Saints. The Saints participated in many different aspects of this world's fair, even if the World's Parliament of Religions snubbed the church's representative, former Southern States missionary B. H. Roberts. In general, attendees learned to appreciate the culture (if not necessarily the doctrine) of the Latter-day Saints. From this point forward, the church began to take more active measures to improve public perceptions, and by a 1915 fair held in San Francisco, the church operated its own independent booth.²⁰

But for all practical purposes, the man who did more to manage the church's public relations in the South during this early era was Elias S. Kimball, who took over as president of the Southern States Mission from his brother, J. Golden Kimball, in 1894. Like his brother, Elias was no stranger to the South, also having previously served as a missionary there in the 1880s. He was first asked to leave a complex series of legal matters aside to travel back to the South as a missionary; only after he agreed to do so was he informed that he would be taking his brother's place as the mission's president. During his tenure, he would constantly encourage missionaries to target the "better classes" in the region, and in so doing he somewhat unconsciously sought to parlay the crisis of the New South into becoming a respectable Christian sect.²¹

The story of how a once-radical Christian sect gave up its soul for cultural conformity and respectability in the South has been told so many times that historians have rightly critiqued

²⁰ This is the essential argument of Reid L. Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism: The Latter-day Saints and the 1893 Chicago World's Fair* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), see especially 3–48 and 176–207.

²¹ See entry for 8 June 1894, Elias Kimball Journal Volume 6, Elias S. Kimball Papers, 1883–1933, MS 13348, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. The entry here provides the phrasing quoted here, but Kimball conveyed the idea of preaching to the more elite people of the South in several other contexts.

what has become a well-worn trope. Yet there are indications that the Latter-day Saints did indeed work to decrease the friction between them and middle-class white southern society. As one scholar has described this era, the religious tradition of the Saints was “in transition.” For their first sixty years, the Saints had represented a dissident strain of American life. After being impelled to give up polygamy, the Saints reversed course and within a generation became viewed as the most American of American institutions. This march toward conservatism could be seen by the change in social groups that Southern States missionaries targeted. In the 1880s, the missionaries focused mostly on rural districts. By the 1890s, many of these rural districts turned toward Populism, yet there is no indication that the Latter-day Saints as a whole had much sympathy for this movement. Instead, the church in the 1890s spoke in a language that sounded more like the later Progressives than the Populists.²²

While the depression destroyed old sureties, it created new opportunities. The information centers on the webs of wire and rail that had once been so prejudiced against the Saints now focused on other threats—the agrarian discontent remaking southern politics and the rural movement’s flirtation with transgressing racial boundaries. In the meantime, the depression in the West meant that jobless men might more readily be called to missionary service. The number of missionaries called by the church between 1893 and 1898 exceeded the number called over the previous *fifteen* years. Starting with just 111 missionaries to work with by the end of 1894, Elias S. Kimball had as many as 303 by the end of the next year and 501 by the end of 1897. With so many more missionaries in the region, the Latter-day Saints could now try

²² An insightful critique of the above-mentioned trope comes from Bath Barton Schweiger, “Max Weber in Mount Airy, Or, Revivals and Social Theory in the Early South,” in Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews, eds., *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 31–66; for the Latter-day Saints being a people “in transition,” see the arguments made by Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986; Third Edition, Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012).

numerous areas that had never been proselytized before—areas that as the crisis of the New South in the 1890s unfolded were more receptive to alternative viewpoints. The church therefore had greater success in the 1890s due to both an increased ability to try out new areas, as well as a change in opinion in areas the missionaries had previously worked in but had no success. That this success could take place without quick and violent action against the Saints came about because of the distracted opposition to the Saints. As long as anti-Mormons were divided, congregations could be established, and some that would last into the twenty-first century were established in this window of opportunity.²³

* * *

When James Allen Smith and his then-current companion, John William Hepworth, organized the Seneca Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on 15 December 1895, there were present several residents of the Oconee peninsula that had previously been baptized. The existing records clearly indicate that in 1890, the branch that had been established in neighboring Keowee Township was unproductive enough that missionaries assigned to South Carolina soon turned their attention to other parts of the state. What brought them back to Oconee County? When did they return? And what was James Allen Smith's role in it all?²⁴

For most of 1892, the missionaries in South Carolina focused their attention on the easternmost counties of the state and just across the border into North Carolina. Among the

²³ Deseret News, *2005 Church Almanac*, 635; Leonard J. Arrington, "Mormon Beginnings in the American South," *Task Papers in LDS History* (Salt Lake City: Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 10; "Conference Reports Since Opening of Mission, 1880–1893," Folder 19, Box 72, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Ms 36, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

²⁴ See entries detailing 13–18 March 1890, pgs 37–38 of South Carolina Conference Book B, LR 8468 11 Vol. 2 (Book # 6825), in South Carolina District General Minutes, 1881–1968, LR 8468 11, Church History Library; for the organization of the Seneca Branch, see entry detailing 15 December 1895, page 1 of LR 8227 11 Vol. 1 (Book #10591), Seneca Branch General Minutes, 1895–1973, LR 8227 11, Church History Library; for those curious about the relationship between John William Hepworth and the author, the South Carolina missionary's grandfather was the same man (Joseph Hepworth Sr.) as the author's great-great-great grandfather, making the relationship between the author and the missionary, first cousins, thrice removed.

missionaries serving there was one from Kanosh, Millard County, Utah: Dennis Samuel Dorrity. He traveled and preached extensively with other missionaries in the North Carolina counties bordering Horry County, South Carolina. In October, the previous president of the South Carolina Conference returned home, and Dorrity was appointed to take over. He then traveled more widely across the missionary fields in the state. While Dorrity kept the missionaries focused on the newer areas of labor along the Atlantic coast and Carolina's Pee Dee country, he felt that an occasional visit into older fields of labor was necessary. Accordingly, in February 1893, missionaries E. O. Taylor and Henry Wallace traveled into both Spartanburg and Oconee counties and held five meetings. No details were given other than "they had a good time and a good spirit prevailed in each meeting." Indeed, Henry Wallace had baptized a man from Oconee County, Robert D. Hicks, the previous December.²⁵

Also left unmentioned by the missionaries was the arrival of James Allen Smith. He had received his commission in November 1892, but his arrival in South Carolina went unnoted in the South Carolina Conference records. This is possibly due to Smith's assignment to do genealogical research rather than actively proselytize for the church. Again, the reasoning that impelled Smith to return to the last town he lived in South Carolina before moving west has been lost to the historical record. If he was to do genealogical research, his target should have been York County, not Oconee County. If Smith's first wife had indeed died and was buried near Seneca (there are no records that can confirm or refute this), then it is possible he returned to Seneca Township to visit the gravesite on a regular basis. That Smith was indeed a resident of Seneca by September 1893 and was operating as a proselytizing missionary is clear; on 24

²⁵ For activities in eastern South Carolina, see entries covering 1892–1894, pages 78–80 of South Carolina Conference Book C, LR 8468 11 Vol. 4 (#6821), for quote on meetings in Spartanburg and Oconee counties, see Report for February 1893, p. 55, South Carolina Conference Book RB, LR 8468 11 Vol. 2 (#6825), both in South Carolina District General Minutes, 1881–1968, LR 8468 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

September 1893 he baptized twenty-four-year-old Eli J. Cleveland—one week ahead of when the South Carolina Conference record indicates that missionaries returned to Oconee.²⁶

At the annual meeting held by the South Carolina Conference on 30 September and 1 October 1893, this time in Clarendon County, the missionaries were assigned various counties to target. Nearly every pair was assigned to the eastern part of South Carolina, while another pair was to open work in Richland County where the capital city of Columbia was. The northern and western parts of the state were left untouched with one exception: conference president Dorrity and his companion, R. M. Wright, had become ill with “chills and fever.” A cooler area was thought best to recuperate in. Given that James Allen Smith had reestablished himself in the area, his place would have worked well for Dorrity and Wright to convalesce in. That Smith had an actual place he lived at in Seneca also explains why that city became the entry and exit point for missionaries in the South Carolina Conference—every missionary coming to South Carolina from October 1893 through February 1895 entered the state at Seneca. Additionally, many missionaries leaving for home during that time (although not all) left from Seneca. The town’s position on a major rail line surely played a role but given that most of the missionary work at the time was on the opposite side of the state, only a safe and expense-free place to stay would have logically tipped the scales in favor of such a remote point.²⁷

Smith subsequently baptized a handful of others, largely members of the Cleveland and Moore families living in Seneca Township. But not even a dozen new converts were baptized before Smith organized the Seneca Branch—a very small number to base a new congregation on. Yet it was not just the new converts that made up the new branch, but a handful of Saints from

²⁶ For Eli H. Cleveland’s baptism, see pages 210–211 of South Carolina Conference Book B, LR 8468 11 Vol. 3 (#6842), South Carolina District General Minutes, 1881–1968, LR 8468 11, Church History Library.

²⁷ See pages 56–63, 108–109, 138–139, SC Conference Minutes #6825; pages 114–115, SC Conference Minutes # 6842; pages 96–99, SC Conference Minutes #6821.

the old branch near Salem in Keowee Township. Although it was some distance away, it appears that old stalwarts like Taylor Wilson, who likely knew Smith from the times he visited the Keowee Branch, began attending again. The baptismal records for Oconee County indicate that children of Taylor and Sarah Melinda Wilson who were too young to be baptized in the previous branch now received the rite within the new Seneca Branch. At the heart of it all was Smith himself, giving missionaries a place to stay because he had a homestead and was himself a commissioned elder.²⁸

James Allen Smith continued his frantic pace even after an organized branch had been established in Seneca. The minutes of the branch indicate that there were few times that Smith did not speak or oversee the meetings in some fashion. Yet Smith was not alone in managing the affairs of the congregation for he ordained several men in Seneca to the priesthood. Smith and D. S. Dorrity ordained recent convert Eli J. Cleveland a priest as early as November 1893; Smith and subsequent missionary O. H. Shumway had likewise ordained Robert Cleveland a priest in February 1895. When the Seneca Branch was organized, William E. Moore and Eli A. Moore were also ordained priests by Smith, and just a couple of months later Smith ordained Robert Cleveland an elder to work by his side. For the most part, priesthood ordinations were rare for southern male converts; missionaries usually waited months or years before entrusting such authority to any man. To have four recent converts ordained in the same branch was unique to Seneca at the start of 1896. Given that missionaries frequently changed locations, the constant churn probably made them reluctant to trust men who they had little supervision over. With James Allen Smith safely stationed at Seneca and a member for over a decade, it was easier to

²⁸ See entries for Ida Wilson and David Z. Wilson, children of Taylor and Melinda Wilson, pages 8–9 of South Carolina Conference Book E, LR 8468 11 Vol. 6 (#6820), South Carolina District General Minutes, 1881–1968, LR 8468 11, Church History Library.

justify him building up a cadre of ordained priesthood holders since he was consistently able to oversee their training and development.²⁹

Whatever compelled Smith to skip out on genealogical research to actively proselytizing in Oconee County is unclear, but his centrality to the successful Seneca Branch is certain. Smith turned the town into a major entry and exit point for missionaries serving in the state; Smith baptized several people in the town and helped bring back into active worship those from the previous branch; Smith ordained a group of men at a scale uncommon to this era. It might be that Smith had returned to Seneca to honor the memory of his first wife; that he missed her as well as his second wife occasionally bleeds into the sparse notes made of the preaching done in the Seneca Branch. On at least two occasions, Smith dispensed with his usual remarks on faith, repentance, baptism, receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost, and other such topics to emphasize that husband and wife were meant to be one. This was likely a tough topic to address given the death of Hannah Caroline Roark and his then-current separation from Hannah Crosby. Yet Smith's devotion to the cause of the church was respected by friend and foe alike and could even almost persuade the most hardened skeptics. On 30 May 1896, Smith witnessed the sister of his first wife and the mother of his second, Mary "Mollie" Roark, enter baptism and become a member of the Seneca Branch. Another family that was divided by faith was becoming unified.³⁰

* * *

Yet talent and determination did not mean that any one man could successfully establish the church in just any one place in the South. The social, cultural, and political environment mattered, and so did the background of the person who embraced the church. Due south of

²⁹ Pages 88 and 91, SC Conference Minutes #6821; also see LR 8227 11 vol. 1 (#10591), Seneca Branch General Minutes, 1895–1973, LR 8227 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

³⁰ Pages 24–25, South Carolina Conference Minutes #6821.

Seneca, near where the panhandle of Florida meets the peninsula, another talented man embraced the missionaries' message and would have become the central figure there that James Allen Smith was to Seneca. This did not happen, however, for just a handful of months would pass before this man, George Paul Canova, was felled by a bullet. Even in this era of depression and crisis, there were still limits to where the Saints could succeed in the South.

The story of how Canova encountered the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, joined it, became a local leader within it, and then died for it, begins at roughly the same time James Allen Smith was preparing to organize a branch in Seneca. With the number of missionaries assigned to the Southern States Mission ballooning, President Elias S. Kimball knew that the old approach of working only in areas where missionaries had friends was becoming impossible to maintain. Supporting a pair of missionaries in an area was a sacrifice for local Saints but manageable; supporting two or more pairs was highly problematic. Kimball determined that the best approach was therefore to expand the territories missionaries preached in. Yet few people would listen to ministers of slovenly appearance; indeed, one of the critiques made by the *Yorkville Enquirer* had been that the missionaries there looked “trampish.” Kimball demanded that the elders avoid becoming “indifferent in your appearance” but that their deportment should win the “respect and reverence” of the people they were preaching to.³¹

Kimball also emphasized the need to blunt the kinds of attacks that had previously prejudiced towns and cities against the missionaries for so many years—a problem that Kimball himself knew well, having labored in the Southern States Mission in the 1880s. With the church learning that good public relations sometimes did more to allay bitter feeling than outright

³¹ Minutes of meeting held 1 June 1896 at Woodruff, Suwanee County, Florida, page 34 of Book One of the Florida Conference, LR 2899 11 Vol. 1 (#2103), in Florida Conference General Minutes, LR 2899 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; for the trampish comment, see Chapter 3.

preaching, Kimball directed the missionaries in new areas to travel “to [the] county seat & speak with prominent men. Call at once upon [the] newspaper editor, & subscribe to his paper.” When it came to confrontations with preachers of other denominations, the president repeated Joseph Smith’s advice to never contend with people over their religion, then commanded, “Do not argue. You cannot convert a man if you antagonize him. You cannot convert a man in ten million years if you anger him.” Telling the missionaries that they had nothing to be ashamed of in their message, Kimball pushed for conference presidents to have their missionaries go into new areas, set up branches and Sunday Schools, and devote fewer resources to places already canvassed.³²

This campaign of expansion was evident at the state level. For the early 1890s, missionaries actively preached in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, the Carolinas, the Virginias, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Florida, Georgia, and Louisiana all had no assigned missionaries—Florida had never really been assigned missionaries since the church was organized; Louisiana had not been proselytized since before the Civil War; and Georgia had been closed to missionary work since previous mission president William Spry had withdrawn the elders in 1890. But with a substantial number of missionaries, Elias Kimball intended to commence work in all three. Since 1888, the South Alabama Conference had included a few of the westernmost counties of the Florida panhandle; now, on 1 November 1895, Kimball broke these counties off into a new conference—the Florida Conference—with instructions to begin preaching throughout the state. Ten months later, on 1 September 1896, Kimball also established the Louisiana Conference with missionaries arriving at East Baton Rouge Parish ten days after. Georgia proved more

³² While Kimball repeated much the same message throughout the mission, these specific quotes come from Notes from Council Meeting held 26 August 1895, 8:15am, pages 124–126, in North Carolina Conference Minutes, Book #6802, Folder 2, North Carolina District Minutes, LR 8557 56, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; for an interesting comparison of missionaries who took Kimball’s counsel to heart versus those that did not in the same state, see Ardis E. Parshall, “Obeying Counsel: Proselyting in Louisiana, 1897,” in Keepapitchinin.org, posted 20 April 2018.

complicated with bitter opposition around Augusta deterring a return. But in 1897 several Florida Conference missionaries were crossing into southern Georgia counties to preach, and South Carolina missionaries had likewise started to work in a few Georgia counties that bordered the Palmetto State. With success in these locations, Kimball determined that the time had come to open the rest of the state, and on 28 February 1898 he appointed forty-two missionaries from across the mission to travel to assigned counties in Georgia. This rapid expansion would have been impossible without the substantial increase in missionaries, which in turn was prompted by the lack work opportunities in Utah amid the ongoing depression.³³

When it came to Florida, the mission had been forced to start out small since in 1895 the peak number of missionaries was still two to three years away. Within the first six months of the new conference, missionaries began working in eight counties on the eastern end of the panhandle that had never previously been visited by Latter-day Saint elders. In most places they had rapid success, but the easternmost of these newly opened counties, Baker, proved a tough nut to crack. Eleven months passed without missionaries baptizing any person in this heavily rural county that bordered Georgia. Finally, on 10 October 1896, the first person to accept the Saints' message in Baker County, Bellona Dinkins, was baptized. Nearly six months would pass before the county's next two people, Jane Elizabeth and Daniel W. Manning, would be baptized. All three were residents of the railroad town of Sanderson—a station established in the antebellum and that in the postwar years had been heavily influenced by the webs of wire and rail. This cold initial reception continued for another two months until April 1897 when the dam began to

³³ See note on organization of Florida Conference, 1 November 1895, on page 5, (#2103), Florida Conference, LR 2899 11; note on organization of the Louisiana Conference, 1 September 1896, on page 3, "History of the Louisiana Conference," LR 5065 11 Vol. 1 (#A387), Louisiana Conference General Minutes, 1896–1939, LR 5065 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; and pages 1–4 of "History of the Georgia Conference," LR 3163 11 Vol. 2 (#6733), Georgia District General Minutes, 1882–1971, LR 3163 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

break. By 1901, Baker County had more baptisms in the Florida Conference than all but two other counties, both of which bordered Baker.³⁴

One of the residents of Sanderson that eventually accepted the missionaries' message was George Paul Canova, a prominent businessman and a member of the county Board of Commissioners. Canova was Catholic, but had married a Baptist, Dianna Greene, and had raised their thirteen children (a fourteenth died in infancy) as Christians but unattached to a specific denomination (although he sent his girls to school at a Catholic Convent). Canova's father, Paul Bartola, held land in the city of Jacksonville and invested in lands in Baker County, acquiring property around the railroad stop of Sanderson which initially served as the county seat. George therefore had business both in Sanderson (which was his primary residence when he married Baker-native Dianna) and Jacksonville, and was accordingly well-connected to the wider world of news and information when missionaries first began preaching in the county. Consequently, Canova, who had heard many rumors concerning Latter-day Saint missionaries, advised his neighbors, friends, and sharecroppers that worked on his properties to stay away from the missionaries due to their uncertain reputation.³⁵

It must have therefore jarred Canova when he received word that his sister-in-law, Margaret M. Greene Hill, and her husband, Thaddeus Hill, had been baptized by those very same missionaries on 25 July 1897. Family tradition holds that Thaddeus had been looking for a church with prophets and apostles and that the Latter-day Saints fit the description; his wife, Margaret, a staunch Primitive Baptist, took longer to convince. Still, George Canova held aloof

³⁴ Lists of baptisms from LR 2899 11 Vol. 1 (#2103), LR 2899 11 Vol. 2 (#2104), and LR 2899 11 Vol. 3 (#2105), Florida Conference General Minutes, 1895–1947, LR 2899 11, Church History Library.

³⁵ This paragraph and the following paragraphs come from the following sources: "Southern States Mission," "Sanderson Diary," "The Canova Family," and "Thomas Raymond Canova," in LaVie Moore-Fraser Smallwood, comp., *Salt of the South: The LDS Trail Blazers* (Jacksonville, FL: Drummond Press, 1997), 19–31, 157–173, and "Canova Family Connections," in LaVie Moore-Fraser Smallwood, comp., *Salt of the South: The Converts, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Volume 2* (Jacksonville, FL: Drummond Press, 1999), 212–215.

for the present—but what he didn't know was that one of his own sons, 17-year-old George Walter Canova, had arranged for the missionaries to hold a meeting at one of his father's vacant tenant cabins. Impressed by the well-spoken missionaries, George Walter then encouraged his mother, Dianna, to listen to a later missionary meeting. She came away impressed. When George Paul, who had been away in Jacksonville for business, returned to Sanderson, he was surprised to learn his wife had attended a Latter-day Saint meeting considering their poor reputation. With his namesake son and wife enthusiastic about the religion, George Paul Canova arranged to hear the missionaries himself and after hearing their message, committed to baptism. On 8 September 1897, George Paul Canova, his wife Dianna, and two of their daughters were baptized on the South Prong of the Little St. Mary's River.³⁶

Almost immediately, the Canova home became an important place for missionaries and church meetings. George Paul Canova donated an organ for worship services and missionaries were frequented their house. At the start of 1898, a meeting for the Florida Conference was held at Sanderson and the Canova family busied themselves with providing food and lodging for all the visiting missionaries, as well as the Southern States Mission president and two visiting apostles from Salt Lake City. Perceiving a wealth of talent and dedication, one of the apostles, Francis M. Lyman, decided to appoint Canova to be the president of the Sanderson Branch. On 3 January 1898, Lyman and fellow apostle Matthias Cowley (who had served in the Southern States Mission himself) ordained Canova an elder and officially commissioned him as the head of the rapidly growing congregation. The minutes for the branch are sparse at best, but all accounts agree that Canova led the Sanderson Branch well. Another six residents of Baker County were baptized into the branch, while Canova worked to help the missionaries not just in

³⁶ Ibid., also see pages 164–167, Florida Conference Minutes #2103.

Baker but the surrounding counties as well. Yet signs occasionally emerged that fierce opposition was coming—an anonymous note delivered to the Conference President at Sanderson warned, “We have notified you dam rascals once to vacate this county and you haven’t done so.” The note, apparently authored by a “committee of 8” warned the missionaries that if they did not leave the county by 28 March 1898, they would travel to Sanderson and “cow hide every one of you especially a certain man that is encouragin [sic] and feeding you dogs.”³⁷

That “certain man”—George Paul Canova—was not deterred. The 28th of March passed without incident. The missionaries stayed, and the Canovas continued to support them. On 5 June 1898, Canova and his brother-in-law, Thaddeus Hill, traveled with Florida Conference President Frank H. Cutler to a meeting being held at a branch in Bradford County, directly south of Baker. The business of the branch was such that it detained Cutler, who had originally planned to return to Sanderson with Canova and Hill. Yet Canova’s position with the Baker County Board of Commissioners impelled his return to Sanderson that night. About eight miles from town, Canova and Hill came to a gate. While opening it, Hill heard a few shots being fired. After taking cover, Hill ran to Sanderson for help. The Canova family arrived and found George Paul on the ground with a hole in his derby hat; part of his skull had been blasted away. While the family had suspicions as far as suspects, and a collective \$2,500 reward was offered for the apprehension and conviction of the murderer or murderers, there was never enough evidence to even prosecute, much less convict, any suspects. The missionaries, members, and even the apostle who had ordained Canova were all dumbfounded by the violence.³⁸

Even today, this brazen murder defies easy answers. It was one thing to threaten to whip a man and quite another to blow his head off. For all the success the Latter-day Saints had in

³⁷ Ibid., pages 156–163, Florida Conference Minutes #2104.

³⁸ Ibid.

northern Florida in the mid-1890s, there were also notable incidents of opposition and violence, of which Canova's assassination was the most extreme. Sometimes the violence was merely threatened, and such threats appear to have been common the previous year when in 1897 Florida Conference missionaries worked to expand their reach into new areas. Early that year (before the Canovas were baptized), missionary pairs began preaching in five Georgia counties that bordered Florida. In one county, coastal Camden, they managed to gain a hearing and baptized people. Most other counties they struggled in, preaching for months without clear success in Brooks, Charlton, Clinch, and Echols counties. But they might have pushed even further north, at least if one newspaper article could be believed.³⁹

On 8 December 1897, the Savannah *Morning News* published a terse report from Douglas, the county seat of Coffee County, Georgia, under the title, "Mormons Not Wanted." Dated from Douglas on 6 December, it stated baldly that "The two Mormon elders that struck Douglas did not find this a congenial climate to operate in. In fact, it was so much warmer than their native health they concluded to go where their reception, at least, would be cooler." No further information was given about this incident before the article went on to cover other events going on in Coffee County. As local scholar Ethan Craigie has pointed out, this is the first mention in the historical record of missionaries in Coffee County, Georgia. Yet in the historical context it makes little sense—the Georgia Conference had not yet been reestablished, so there were no regularly assigned missionaries in Georgia. The closest group of missionaries at this date would have been those serving in Florida, and it is clear that by the date of this report, a few missionaries had worked in five of the Georgia counties that bordered Florida. This included Clinch, which directly bordered Coffee County itself. Yet southern Coffee County was crossed

³⁹ Pages 43–44, 265, Florida Conference Minutes, #2103; page 97, Florida Conference Minutes #2104.

by a major rail line that ran through the southern Coffee communities of Willacoochee, Kirkland, Pearson, and McDonald's Mills. In 1897, the only rail link to Douglas was through a small tram line built from McDonald's Mills. While missionaries might often go to remote locations to pick up their mail, the probability that missionaries serving in Clinch County would go so many miles out of their way (and past a half-dozen other, more accessible post offices) to show up in Douglas is highly improbable, although not impossible. If they were there to preach, as the *Morning News* dispatch suggested, this would have had some mention in the records of the Florida Conference. Yet the Savannah article is the only record of Latter-day Saint missionaries entering Douglas in 1897—how do we explain it?⁴⁰

False reports constantly swirled through nineteenth-century society, and with the telegraph to carry them they could reach many more people than ever before. With rapid changes taking place in southern society, rumors about perceived dangers flashed through the region, but it also appears possible that an increasingly mobile population could detach specific events from their original geographic location. For instance, with missionaries working in Clinch County and a high number of interrelated families spread between it and Coffee County, the report of an experience in Clinch could easily make its way through familial networks until a correspondent in Douglas heard about it and thought it took place there. Or this cryptic article could be something more akin to the note left by the “committee of 8” for the missionaries and Canova family in Sanderson—a warning to stop propagating Mormonism in the area. Given the anti-Mormon attitude of the city's newspaper editor (as will be seen in the following chapter), it is conceivable that an editor or correspondent might publicize a report of phantom missionaries

⁴⁰ “Mormons Not Wanted,” in Savannah *Morning News*, 8 December 1897, page 9, column 2; Ethan Craigie, a scholar in Douglas, brought this article to my attention, see the timeline for the Satilla River Saints Project, satillariversaints.org.

being threatened to deter the coming of real Latter-day Saint missionaries. Whatever the case was, Douglas and Coffee County were clearly inhospitable to the Saints in 1897.⁴¹

The historical record is vague on this incident, but this article and Canova's murder serve as important constraints when evaluating how this era of depression affected the success of the Saints in the South. Economic desperation and political turmoil might give the Latter-day Saints more opportunities than the decade before, but these opportunities were spread unevenly through the region. The local context always mattered. The church grew best when it was perceived as a lesser threat than before, or at least relative to other groups. The Saints also did best if they managed to secure a key leader who was a native southerner; in the case of Seneca this was James Allen Smith. In the case of Sanderson, it was George Paul Canova. But the surrounding community had to at least allow these developments—in the case of Sanderson, a local resident (or residents) tried to sabotage the branch's growth by killing the most prominent man involved. Yet other contexts mattered too. The crisis of the New South hit unevenly both temporally and geographically. The opportunities for the Saints varied with time, and as Seneca showed, a place that was ready to lynch missionaries at one time might be ready to receive them at another time. Such would also be the case with Coffee County, Georgia.

* * *

The Latter-day work on the Oconee peninsula was in full force through the latter part of the 1890s. The Seneca Branch, organized in 1895, was neither the first, nor the largest, nor even the most prominent of the congregations the Saints established in the Palmetto State. What is striking about this branch in the northwestern corner of South Carolina is its consistency. Although it cannot be said for sure that the branch never faltered in its eighty-nine years of

⁴¹ See pages 97–98, Florida Conference Minutes #2104, for the specific counties in Georgia that Florida Conference missionaries worked in; for a more extensive consideration of telegraphic rumors, see Chapter 5.

existence (at which point in 1984 it was expanded to a larger congregation called a ward), there were always enough devoted members present to quickly bring back an organized branch if it ever did lapse into disorganization. For historians, however, Seneca is significant in another way—it is one of few Latter-day Saint congregations in the South that left detailed meeting minutes during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴²

Three aged volumes, already in poor condition when they were microfilmed, contain the early record of the Saints of the Seneca Branch. The first consists of general minutes for the congregation; written on a tall and narrow notebook, it begins with the organization of the branch in December 1895 and contains entries up through 1901. Heavy soiling of the pages and occasional tearing make the loopy writing a challenge to decipher; so does the randomized spelling of words, bizarre abbreviations, and nonsensical grammar. The second book, the same shape and largely written by the same hand as the first, runs concurrently but focuses more on the activities of the Sunday School that was organized in tandem with the branch in Seneca. This volume, however, runs longer, going all the way to 1908. A third volume, wider in shape and hardbound, copies several of the entries from the second volume (although not all) and is overall better persevered with more legible writing.⁴³

If the Seneca Branch was forged amid a crisis in the fortunes of the town, there is boundless optimism found in the notes taken of the congregation's meetings. The most frequent speakers were the men who had been ordained to a priesthood office in the branch, with Smith often speaking, but Robert Cleveland, Eli A. Moore, and J. J. Cleveland also frequently making

⁴² A brief history of the Seneca Branch and later ward was written by Ceytru B. Garner in September 2007 for an "Upstate South Carolina Centennial Celebration." A copy of this history was given by Garner to the author in April 2010, which forms the basis for this paragraph.

⁴³ See Seneca Branch Minutes, LR 8227 11 Vol. 1 (#10591), Seneca Branch General Minutes, 1895–1973, LR 8227 11, Church History Library; and Seneca Branch Sunday School Minute Book, LR 8227 15 vol. 1 (#10592) and Seneca Sunday School Minutes, LR 8227 15 vol. 2 (#Q8068), both in Seneca Branch Sunday School Minutes and Records, 1895–1973, LR 8227 15, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

appearances. These men were often accompanied by a regular variety of missionaries that moved through the area. The majority of the speakers discussed topics that would be very familiar by any Latter-day Saint: the restored gospel, faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost by authorized priesthood holders through the laying on of hands. While men generally did most of the talking, women's voices also made it into the minutes for the branch. In an early meeting on 2 January 1896, less than a month after the congregation had started, Mollie Cleveland stepped forward to testify of her belief that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was indeed "the true church." Over two years later, on 16 March 1897, Cleveland again asserted her belief that the Saints had the correct doctrine. That same meeting, another woman, Mary Graham, asked for the Saints to fast and pray for her health, with a notation made, "we fasted for her the next day."⁴⁴

James Allen Smith remained in these first several years the workhorse of the branch; while he was not part of the branch presidency, his call as a missionary often meant that he (along with other missionaries from out west) had considerable influence on what was said and done in the congregation. Smith was genuinely an optimist; he declared less than a month after the branch's organization that because the Latter-day Saints had true and good doctrine, that "all of the people of this naborhood would see it and come out and Join." Smith also preached about the importance of partaking in temple ordinances. Given that there were just four operating temples in the entire church at this time (and none of them in the South), his comments that young men who got married should raise their families "in the admination of the Lord & the princibles of sealing in the temple" suggests that Smith highly valued his temple ordinances. This did not mean that Smith faced no opposition; in February 1896, members of the branch

⁴⁴ See entry for 2 January 1896 on page 3 and entry for 16 March 1897 on page 24, quotes from both, Seneca Branch General Minutes #10591.

were disturbed when one Newton Brown swore that he would kill Smith for baptizing his daughter, Essie Brown Moore, as a member of the church the previous day. In this case, however, Smith did not meet the same fate as George Canova did—the threat proved to be empty—or perhaps Brown had second thoughts of trying to take on an ex-Klansman.⁴⁵

* * *

By the end of 1897, the missionaries of the Florida Conference had added yet another two counties of Georgia that bordered Florida to their preaching, Lowndes and Thomas. They had also begun work six additional counties in Florida, including Duval, home of Jacksonville, the state's largest city. The visit of apostles Lyman and Cowley had infused a new spirit of excitement among the missionaries and President Cutler of the Florida Conference now gave the missionaries assignments that would take them further south onto the peninsula part of the state. With at least forty-two missionaries in the conference, the missionaries could now cover twenty-one different locations concurrently. Before sending them off, and just the day after the last meeting with the apostles, Cutler gave the missionaries a series of directives to aid them in their work. Much of the counsel focused on record keeping and maintaining a proper attitude toward their work, but in the middle of this a curious comment slipped in: "Have not right to refuse colored people Baptism. Be careful. Is not wise to preach to them."⁴⁶

This meeting among the missionaries was not attended by the mission president or the two apostles that had been visiting the mission. As such, it is uncertain whether Cutler was giving his own opinion in terms of preaching to African Americans in the conference, or if he

⁴⁵ See entry for 5 January 1896, page 4, for Smith's prediction, entry for 20 June 1896, page 11, for Smith's comments on the temple, and 16 February 1896, page 6, for Brown's threat, Seneca Branch Minutes, #10591; entry for baptism of Essie Brown Moore, 15 February 1896, pages 22–23, South Carolina Conference Minutes #6821.

⁴⁶ See Minutes of Priesthood Meeting held 4 January 1898, page 12, Record of the Florida Conference, Book B, LR 2899 11 Vol. 2 (#2104), Florida Conference General Minutes, 1895–1947, LR 2899 11, CHL.

was discreetly conveying the wishes of his mission superiors. The racial restrictions on Latter-day Saints with African ancestry had already established that the restriction was on holding the priesthood and entering the temple, not a restriction in terms of membership or baptism. Indeed, in the coming years a handful of African Americans would choose to be baptized within the Florida Conference, notwithstanding the restrictions on their membership. Yet Cutler was doing more than reminding the missionaries of limits that already existed—he was softly discouraging missionaries from proselytizing black southerners. Given the political winds of the time, with white southerners increasingly hostile toward black participation in politics and a near allergic reaction to anything that hinted at racial equality, Cutler’s caution was attuned to the times. Yet his discouragement to missionaries from preaching among African Americans represented potentially the first time that a church leader had not just voiced a restriction on black membership, but a suggestion to keep them out of the church itself.⁴⁷

One week after Cutler counseled the missionaries on steps they should take while preaching, missionaries L. A. Stephenson and W. F. Tanner organized the Cumorah Sunday School in Columbia County, Florida at a so-called “Ebenezer Settlement.” The address given for the members involved was Lulu. While branches were usually identified by the geographic location where they were established (but not always), Sunday School names might be more esoteric and subject to personal preferences. For instance, while the Seneca Branch was clearly the congregation located at Seneca, the Reedy Fork Sunday School was the name of the accompanying Sunday School, named for a nearby creek. Not all congregations were blessed to have both; in the initial stages of working in an area a Sunday School was usually established first before an actual branch of the church was organized. Sunday School names in Florida

⁴⁷ Ibid. For a longer discussion of race relations and restrictions in the church, see W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Mormonism and the Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014?), 188–214.

ranged from Westville (named in honor of Florida Conference President Joseph A. West) to Lorenzo (named after the then-current church president, Lorenzo Snow) to Ammon (a figure from the Book of Mormon). In the case of the Sunday School established in Columbia County, Florida, Cumorah was a Book of Mormon place name, as well as the name Joseph Smith used to refer to the hill in upstate New York where he retrieved the golden plates from. It would not be the last time that members in the Florida Conference utilized the name.⁴⁸

Midway through 1898, with the organization of the Georgia Conference, it now became necessary to determine which South Georgia counties would be in which conference. Accordingly, on 13 June 1898, the previous counties in Georgia that Florida missionaries had already worked were parceled to the Florida Conference with an additional eleven counties added as well, including Georgia's Coffee County. Yet work in these northernmost counties of the Florida Conference remained sporadic through the remainder of 1898; peninsular Florida was the primary target for the missionaries in the winter and spring of 1899. As summer approached, however, the conference leadership determined to have the missionaries decisively focus their efforts on counties in southern Georgia. Given the start of hurricane season, this movement north was potentially safer; if the purpose of the move was to travel to a cooler place for the summer, the missionaries had certainly not reckoned with the intensely high temperatures of southern Georgia versus the more tempered heat of the ocean-lapped peninsula. Whatever the precise motivation, on 9 May 1899, another seventeen Georgia counties were added to the Florida Conference, and beginning that same month, Florida missionaries started north into eighteen counties in southern Georgia.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See page 291, #2103, and pages 110, 113–114, #2104, Florida Conference General Minutes.

⁴⁹ Pages 96–99, #2104, Florida Conference General Minutes.

Among the missionaries heading north that May were two assigned to open the work in Coffee County, Georgia: Joseph R. Sellers and Nephi United States Centennial Jensen. The two missionaries had already worked together in Hillsboro County in Florida (home to Tampa), and their new assignment required a lengthy walk north that took several days. The journey was monotonous for Jensen, who kept a fairly regular diary and occasionally talked about “pounding sand” (typical soil for the coastal plain in which the missionaries worked) and at times following railroad tracks (they rode the train only briefly on part of their route). Finally, on the evening of 9 June 1899, Jensen and Sellers stayed at a home that they found out the next day was within their destination—they had finally arrived at Coffee County. Since they had previously arranged for their mail to be forwarded to Douglas, the county seat, they excitedly made their way into town, only to discover that their mail had inexplicably been forwarded to yet a different post office six miles to the northeast, so the missionaries hurried there. After catching up on news from home and the mission, Sellers and Jensen swung through the eastern districts of Coffee before heading back in toward Douglas.⁵⁰

In town was a man that the two missionaries were anxious to meet: Warren Preston Ward, a lawyer and future judge in Coffee County. “The reason we had hopes of spending the night at this place was owing to the fact that Mrs. Ward’s Mother was a member of The Church—being a daughter of Sister Canova,” related Jensen. Indeed, Ward had been an active participant in trying to bring justice to the murderers of George Paul Canova the year prior, with a flyer asking for information listing him as a potential contact as well as Dianna Canova herself. Ward was also well-connected in Coffee County society; his cousin had recently served as mayor of Douglas and Warren himself had once edited a newspaper in the southern Coffee community

⁵⁰ Jensen diaries, April–June 1899, quote on 22 May 1899.

of Pearson, which for years had exceeded Douglas in population. Jensen and Sellers must surely have felt that Ward would be sympathetic and willing to lodge the missionaries for the evening, thus avoiding a potential night in the woods.⁵¹

Dusk was falling when the two missionaries arrived at the gate of Ward's property. His new house on Gaskin Avenue was still in the process of being finished and Ward at first ignored the greetings from the pair of preachers at his gate. When the two asked for a drink of water, however, Ward let the two come back to his well and the missionaries began to engage him in conversation. It did not go as Sellers and Jensen had hoped: "Mr. Ward soon shewed his colors. From his lips could be heard such expressions as I dont like the 'Mormon Church.'" Jensen pressed Ward to explain his opposition; Ward replied that the Saints believed in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants and "other things that were wrong." Upon learning this, Jensen offered a full-throated defense of the Book of Mormon. Seeing that the missionaries were unimpressed with his objection to Latter-day scripture, Ward turned to another subject: polygamy. Calling the subject a whip which Ward "now tried to lash us" with, Jensen said he took that same subject and "lashed our legal friend till he had a sufficiency."⁵²

The twilight was now disappearing and the conversation was going nowhere. Realizing that they would not be staying with Ward for the night, Jensen wrote, "Those circumstances necsted fast talking. I assumed the aggressive. With the sword of the Spirit I cut our frind to the heart." Jensen then declared his witness that he knew that the Saints had the truth, and at the end of it related that "tears commenced to gather on the eyelids of the man of law." We do not have a contemporary viewpoint from Ward at this time in 1899, so if Jensen's description is accurate,

⁵¹ Jensen diaries, 15 June 1899; also see C. T. Trowell, "Douglas Before Memory: Everyday Life in a South Georgia Town," (serialized in the *Douglas Enterprise* in 1995, then revised 1996), 82–83.

⁵² Ibid.

we can only guess why Ward might have shed tears. From Jensen’s perspective it was obvious—the lawyer had been uncharacteristically moved by “the sword of the Spirit.” Given the loss of his wife’s father, a man who quite literally was killed because of his participation in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, however, it is possible that Ward was tearful when considering that George Paul Canova probably once had the same strong conviction that the missionaries now had. Listening to the missionaries defend what Ward believed to be wrong perhaps moved him to tears when he considered that his father-in-law had died supporting so poor a cause. Rather than be sympathetic toward the elders and their religion, Ward likely blamed both for the untimely death of a father figure—the only one he had really known since his own father had died in the Civil War when Warren was a toddler.⁵³

Sellers and Jensen had followed Elias Kimball’s directive to seek out the elite of a particular community and make friends with them. In this case, however, Ward’s familiarity with the church worked against the missionaries. Some days later they would call upon the editor of the *Douglas Breeze*, the main newspaper in town. But they were too late to make a good impression; the editor, James Freeman, was decidedly anti-Mormon and had already published a handful of hostile editorials castigating the Latter-day Saints. The playbook that the missionaries had begun following to success in the 1890s amid the depression was starting to fall apart. Even so, the missionaries would manage to make some friends with important figures, not least Ben Peterson, the man who had given land for the Coffee County courthouse in Douglas. The missionaries secured his permission and of the County Board of Commissioners to preach there. Despite the setbacks with Ward and Freeman, the battle for the hearts and minds of the people of

⁵³ Ibid.; Warren P. Ward, *Ward’s History of Coffee County* (Atlanta, GA: Foote and Davies, 1930), 127–132. In this part of Ward’s history, Ward recounts the experience of a war widow during one of the later years of the Civil War. It becomes apparent through subsequent revelations that he was talking about his own mother.

Coffee County was just beginning. But this narrow window of opportunity did not come from the shock of the depression like many other openings in the region, but from the disruption of an ongoing political contest over the future of Coffee County.⁵⁴

But the success the Saints had built up through much of the 1890s was also prone to disruptions. The polygamy issue resurfaced once more in 1898 and then again more seriously in 1904 and yet remained an issue that deterred many southerners (as seen by Ward's comments). Additionally, as southern society began to harden after the political disruptions of the decade and the region's whites agreed to keep African American southerners out of politics completely, the possibilities for the Saints in the South began to evaporate. The Saints had gained a measure of respectability amid the depression, but this respectability was disrupted once again, and the Saints found themselves on the defensive and treading water in the region.

⁵⁴ See the details in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISRUPTION: WHITE CONSERVATIVE SOUTHERNERS STRIKE BACK

What white southerners had predicted since the days of Reconstruction had finally come to pass—at least if newspapers in Salt Lake City could be believed. Readers of the 17 October 1906 *Deseret Evening News* opened their afternoon papers to find information about the trial of a local police chief, but anyone skimming the first page of the newspaper would have found another alarming article: “Seneca, S.C., Reduced to Ashes.” The accompanying report stated that a fire had swept through the business part of Seneca, and in desperation dynamite had been used to create firebreaks to stop the advancing inferno. But the most troubling part was not the disastrous fire—towns and cities across the country were regularly visited by major conflagrations. Instead, this fire was spiteful arson: “The work is alleged to be that of incendiary negroes seeking revenge for the dynamiting of the negro college here last Friday night.” This report was brought by the superintendent of the Seneca cotton mills who apparently said, “it is a matter of common belief that the town was fired by negroes.” Coming just three weeks after a disastrous racial clash in Atlanta, it seemed only too believable that African Americans were ready to torch towns in revenge.¹

Reports of this apparent race riot—or race war, if you consulted some newspapers—could be found across the country. The actual news report varied little from place to place; the networks of wire that spanned the country had given uniformity to many articles. What differed substantially was how each paper dressed up the text for their readers. The *Deseret Evening*

¹ “Seneca, S.C., Reduced to Ashes,” *Deseret Evening News*, 17 October 1906; the Atlanta race massacre (or race riot) occurred on 21–24 September 1906.

News's in-town rival, the *Salt Lake Tribune*, buried the report on the fifth page with the bald headline, "Negroes Burn Town," but underneath was the same report, essentially word for word, that had appeared in their rival's paper the previous afternoon. Most sensational was the *Minneapolis Journal*, which decided that the small dispatch from South Carolina necessitated a banner headline that screamed "Vengeful Carolina Negroes Set Town Afire." A headline-sized subheading then added: "Meet Dynamite with Torch; Seneca, S.C., In Ashes." Despite the higher profile given by the *Journal* to this story, the wording was substantially the same as it was in Utah with a few additional details about who escaped the flames and the hour when the fire had been contained. Newspapers in state after state repeated the same stories, even if not as sensationally presented as by the editor in Minneapolis.²

This report did not stay within the confines of the United States proper but radiated out beyond North America. In the Hawaiian Islands, annexed by the United States less than a decade earlier, nervous white Americans perhaps shuddered when Honolulu's two major newspapers made mention of the catastrophe. The *Hawaiian Star*, which boasted of its journalistic integrity by proclaiming "The Star is a Newspaper—Not a Political Organ," had a headline that was no bigger than the type beneath: "Race War On Again." While most mainland newspapers had published a few paragraphs, the article here was just two sentences: "Seneca, S.C., October 17.—The race war has been resumed. The business section of this city has been burned." Similar language appeared in the Honolulu *Evening Bulletin*, which ran a column headline three times larger than the report itself, shouting, "Race War Riots." While the second sentence of the report was similar to the one in the *Star*, the *Bulletin* used less extreme language in the first, saying "Race troubles resulted in riots here today." Perhaps cognizant of having recently seized a

² "Negroes Burn Town," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 October 1906; "Vengeful Carolina Negroes Set Town Afire," *Minneapolis Journal*, 17 October 1906.

foreign kingdom and yet being a minority within the Hawaiian Islands, the white Americans there were anxiously awaiting word of any potential race war—one that had been predicted by the white Tennesseans who had interacted with John Brown during the days of Reconstruction.³

On the same front page of the *Evening Bulletin*, two columns to the left of “Race War Riots,” was another bizarre headline: “Chinese Mormon is Being Tried.” The “Chinaman” involved, Goo Akuna, was not a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but in this case the use of “Mormon” denoted a man practicing polygamy. Akuna, who lived in Maui, had been married to two women at once and had taken an additional (and extra-legal) third wife; between the three of them he had eighteen children plus another four from his third wife that he adopted. Seeing that his three wives were being compelled to testify against him and fearing for the safety of his children who would have no caregiver, Akuna decided to confess his polygyny to the Federal Grand Jury in Honolulu rather than have his wives make the journey to Oahu. The *Bulletin* reported further that the man faced six months in prison or a fine as high as \$1,000, but that Akuna planned to ask President Theodore Roosevelt for a pardon “on the grounds that he is an exponent of the Executive’s policy in regard to race suicide.”⁴

Race suicide. Race riots. Race war. It sometimes seemed that white Americans feared nothing more than a concerted effort by non-whites to roll back the former’s prestige and power. If this white civilization was to be saved, however, it must be done through Christian (Protestant, really) values and practices. And nothing seemed further from Protestant Christianity than the practice of polygamy. The Saints’ agreement to halt new polygamous marriages, the admission

³ “Race War On Again,” *Hawaiian Star*, 17 October 1906; “Race War Riots,” Honolulu *Evening Bulletin*, 17 October 1906; see chapter two for reports by John Brown of white southerners predicting a race war.

⁴ “Chinese Mormon is Being Tried,” Honolulu *Evening Bulletin*, 17 October 1906. W. Paul Reeve discusses how the term “Mormon” was applied to men of other races who were thought to be promiscuous, see W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 183–185. In his conclusion, Reeve also mentions the example of Akuna specifically, see 251–252.

of Utah as a state in the Union, and in the southern states particularly, the crisis of the New South had all propelled the Saints into becoming a more respectable religious sect. In the last five years of the nineteenth century, the Latter-day Saints had quadrupled their numbers in the region and appeared to be well on their way to establishing a solid foundation in the South for the first time. But it was at this moment that their efforts to lay a foundation were disrupted once again by the webs of wire and rail that had penetrated ever deeper into the fabric of southern society.⁵

In 1899–1900, the polygamy issue had blown up again when former assistant mission president of the Southern States Mission, Brigham Henry Roberts, had been elected as Utah’s congressman in the House of Representatives. Roberts had two wives, so the House had voted to keep him from taking office. The news had been detrimental for the Saints and sparked a new round of violence against them. Roberts was excluded from Congress, but controversy returned in 1904 when Utah’s legislature had appointed Latter-day Saint apostle Reed Smoot, grandson of Kentuckian Abraham Owen Smoot, as one of Utah’s senators. Smoot was not a polygamist, but the election of an apostle in the church to the United States Senate provoked consternation, and a series of hearings was held to decide whether Smoot would be allowed to take his seat for Utah. In the process of investigation, it was revealed that the Saints had secretly contracted additional plural marriages even after 1890. The Saints’ public perception was again jeopardized and the church’s growth in the South was disrupted. Official church statistics for the region are hard to come by after 1900, but the U.S. religious census figures from 1906 suggested that the Saints had flatlined or even slightly decreased their numbers in the South.⁶

⁵ See chapter 4.

⁶ Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986; Third Edition, Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 8–9, 63–78; see Appendix A for membership figures.

For their part, the Latter-day Saints responded with several policy changes to reaffirm their new commitment to monogamy. While polygamous marriages made before 1890 were still considered valid and the men in them could hold leadership positions, men who had taken additional wives after 1890 were steadily released from high profile roles in the church. Any Latter-day Saint from this point forward that sought to marry additional wives could be excommunicated. Two apostles, Matthias Cowley and John W. Taylor, both of whom had served in the Southern States Mission, could not swallow the strident new policy. The two were dropped from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and Taylor was eventually excommunicated. The Saints also undertook a reevaluation of what doctrines were emphasized and what past events were celebrated, quietly working to let the transformative doctrinal innovations in Nauvoo recede from popular memory. Other changes were more subtle but no less significant; in 1908, the First Presidency further tightened the racial restrictions on Black Latter-day Saints.⁷

During this era of disruption, the sizeable number of congregations established during the crisis of the New South faced renewed opposition. A winnowing process occurred where some branches completely disappeared before the resurgent anti-Mormonism in the region. Others faced extreme challenges but survived. Others were cut down for a time before flowing again when the climate in the region proved more favorable. A small handful even weathered this storm and remain today as some of the longest-lasting congregations in the South. Yet one thing is certain—racial restrictions among the Latter-day Saints hardened during these years, mirroring the increasingly strident nature of Jim Crow in the South. At the start of the era, both African

⁷ The best overall history of the Reed Smoot crisis is Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); for the struggle to end the polygamy issue and the dropping of two apostles from the Quorum of the Twelve, see Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 60–73; for the increasing racial restrictions adopted by the church, see Max Perry Muller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 149–152; and Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 188–214.

Americans and Latter-day Saints were viewed by most white southerners as threats to their society. By the end of this era, African Americans were increasingly viewed as the most dangerous group in the country; a group that must be segregated legally or bludgeoned violently into submission. In whatever case, African Americans witnessed their rights alarmingly eroded over the first decade of the twentieth century. In contrast, the Saints who likewise battled for their rights would eventually emerge as a still suspect yet tolerable sectarian group that could be allowed to operate in the region. During this era of disruption, the attitudes of white southerners toward both groups began to diverge with one securing grudging acquiescence and the other facing hateful derision.⁸

The Saints, after this renaissance of anti-Mormonism, also began to do better than their fellow (but more established) religious minorities in the South, Catholics and Jews. After the 1900 murder of a Latter-day missionary in West Virginia, while other missionaries died in the southern states, these deaths were due to natural causes. For Jews in the region, substantial trouble lay ahead, including the lynching of Leo Frank in Georgia. Both Jews and Catholics would be targeted by a reborn Ku Klux Klan. While the western Klan in Utah actively opposed Latter-day Saints (and burned crosses on Ensign Peak north of Salt Lake City during Latter-day Saint General Conference; Salt Lake City soon passed a strict anti-mask ordinance), there is no indication that the southern Klan fought members of the church. Outwardly, there was little to distinguish southern Latter-day Saints from their white Protestant neighbors by the end of nineteen-ought's.⁹

⁸ C. Vann Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* once argued with very thin evidence that segregation was a late development in the South, see James C. Cobb, *C. Vann Woodward: America's Historian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 154–206, for a discussion of how cherry-picked evidence produced a misleading construction of the origins of segregation. Even if the Woodward thesis no longer holds the same sway, it is generally accepted that racism became more strident after the 1890s.

⁹ Mason, *Mormon Menace*, 171–194; Arthur Remillard, *Southern Civil Religions: Imagining the Good Society in the Post-Reconstruction Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); William Whitridge Hatch, *There Is No*

The tired trope in southern religious historiography of once-radical Christian sects that eventually submitting at the altar of white supremacy has been rightly critiqued by historians. This declension narrative where one-time opportunities for equality in religion sell out to southern racism obscures the truth that developments of the past were always complex and muddled, often making it hard for those in the present to trace how changes happened and why. The Latter-day Saints did embrace a more strident view of white supremacy, but this was not so much a result of selling away their initial egalitarian approach for *southern* success. Instead, the Saints, trying to move toward the national mainstream, increased in racism because the entire country was likewise increasing in racism. Religious movements can hardly exist beyond what their host society is willing to tolerate. The United States had declared war against polygamy; the Saints lost and were forced to give it up. The United States steadily embraced violent white supremacy in the 1890s through the 1910s; the politically humbled Saints strove to fit in with the times. Southern Saints did not lead out in this respect, but their fellow southern Christians, often white Protestants, were at the forefront of building and advocating for a lily-white Christianity in the United States of America.¹⁰

This era of disruption brought back many of the violent acts the Saints had faced in previous years, but it was both a reflection of their recent success and the fact that organized

Law...: A History of Mormon Civil Relations in the Southern States, 1865–1905 (New York: Vantage Press, 1968), 93; Thomas G. Alexander and James B. Allen, *Mormons and Gentiles: A History of Salt Lake City* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing, 1984), 185–186.

¹⁰ Bath Barton Schweiger, “Max Weber in Mount Airy, Or, Revivals and Social Theory in the Early South,” in Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews, eds., *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 31–66; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 247–272; Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle With Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 3–32; also see W. Scott Poole, “Confederate Apocalypse: Theology and Violence in the White Reconstruction South” (36–52), Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., ““One Fold and One Chief Shepherd””: The Sewanee Conference of 1883 and the Beginnings of Racial Segregation in the Episcopal Church” (53–72), and Laura J. Veltman, “(Re)producing White Supremacy: Race, the Protestant Church, and the American Family in the Works of Thomas Dixon, Jr.” (235–256), all in Edward J. Blum and W. Scott Poole, *Vale of Tears: New Essays on Religion and Reconstruction* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005).

opposition had regained balance after being tripped up by the crisis of the first New South. The violence destroyed some congregations and halted others, but in the process the Saints largely buried the taint of polygamy. The sect also embraced white supremacy to a degree previously unseen. By the 1910s, the church had successfully navigated the disruption and moved to the more powerful side of the many divides that cleaved the South.

* * *

The editorial, coming just days after the Fourth of July, started off with a patriotic flourish: “The United States of America is a great country. Possibly we are the Stone Kingdom of prophecy. Who knows?” To the Bible-reading Christians of the time, the “Stone Kingdom” was part of a prophecy interpreted by the Old Testament prophet Daniel, where a stone “cut out of the mountain without hands” would break in pieces all other earthly kingdoms. Latter-day Saints frequently used the prophecy to refer to the church, but others, including white American Protestants, might—as in this case—use it to refer to a more political entity: the United States. But even if the United States was this stone kingdom, it was in danger: “But what are we doing with Mormonism in this country?” Recounting that progress had been made toward stamping out yellow fever and other contagious diseases, the editorial warned that the nation was neglecting “the black pestilence in Utah which is diffusing itself like a consuming cancer through the body social, and the body politic, and sapping the very foundations of society.” Now that Utah had been admitted to the Union as a state, the Federal government no longer had as much control over the West to battle this “cancer.” At the same time, the church was sending out “an army of missionaries” that were “knocking at your doors” or “sponging upon your hospitality, claiming to be humble missionaries of the cross.” Critiquing the elders’ practice of staying the night with

families, the editorial claimed that that they came “at night to save hotel bills, and get the best opportunity to gain your ear, then they feed you” with “the poison of death.”¹¹

This strident editorial, which had first appeared in the *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, was reprinted on the *front* page of the newspaper that acted as the legal organ of Coffee County, Georgia—the *Douglas Breeze*. At its head was editor James M. Freeman, a native of southwestern Georgia that had made his name and fame by moving eastward to Coffee County. A staunch Baptist, the *Breeze* editor was determined to not let Mormonism gain a foothold in his adopted home. Just days after Nephi United States Centennial Jensen and Joseph R. Sellers had arrived in the county, Freeman ran an editorial against them, going so far as to claim that one of the pair already had three wives and might be trying to find others in Coffee County. This earned him a quick visit from Jensen and Sellers on 3 July 1899 when they were in town to secure permission to preach at the courthouse. Jensen was not impressed with the editor, relating, “we came to the *Breeze* office, where is published a little blade [a nickname by Jensen for a newspaper] by a man who is an enemy to God’s grace.”¹²

The two missionaries, looking outwardly like young and upcoming businessmen, at first attracted no special notice from Freeman, who was constantly getting correspondence and meeting with various members of the community. Jensen introduced himself and Sellers, and

¹¹ See “Mormonism,” *Douglas Breeze*, 8 July 1899, page 1; Daniel 2:31–45.

¹² Entry for 3 July 1899, page 90 of Volume 3 of Nephi USC Jensen Diaries, MSS SC 688, Mormon Missionary Diaries, Brigham Young University Library Digital Collections, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MMD/; the original “slimy editorial” is mentioned by Jensen as being before 3 July 1899 and is referred to by Freeman in the 15 July 1899 issue of the *Breeze* as being published “Some issues ago,” but no mention of Mormons in the newspaper can be found before the 8 July 1899 issue. Given that the 17 June and 1 July 1899 issues have eight pages and the 24 June 1899 issue has just four pages, it appears that the original editorial may have been printed that date and subsequently lost before issues of the *Breeze* were preserved (and many that do survive are in poor condition). Jensen’s use of “blade” for a newspaper may betray the Scandinavian origins of his family, see Micheal Adams, “The American *Blade*: Etymologies of a Newspaper Name,” in *Names* 61 No. 3 (September 2013), 143–148; for background on James M. Freeman, see Jonathan D. Hepworth, “Through a Glass, Darkly: The Changing Past of Coffee County, Georgia,” (MA Thesis: Clemson University, 2012), 28–32.

asked if Freeman wasn't too busy to talk with them. After replying that he was not busy and offering the two a seat, Jensen got right to business: "ascertain whether or not he would grant me space to make a reply to his slimy editorial." It steadily dawned on Freeman that the two visitors were not businessmen, but the very two missionaries he had disparaged just days before. "This knowledge shocked his nerves, and he shook as an aspen leaf—hardly knowing what to do or say," reported Jensen. Seeing that Freeman was temporarily speechless, Jensen proceeded to talk in "a Christian spirit" and apparently "melted the once obstinate heart of the editor." Freeman declined to give space in his paper for the missionaries to write a rebuttal but took down their names and supposedly "promised us that he would recall what he had said in opposition to our cause." Jensen and Sellers then left, satisfied they had secured the respect of the local newspaper, and turned to preaching in the town.¹³

Yet Freeman, perhaps humiliated by being caught off-guard by the elders, was not about to give up the fight. Rather than retracting any anti-Mormonism in his paper, he doubled down on it. The very next issue of the *Breeze*, published just five days after Jensen and Sellers made their visit, carried the above-mentioned editorial in a very public slap against the missionaries. Sellers and Jensen soon returned to the *Breeze* office to demand an explanation and to refute the new editorial; Freeman went ahead and published it again the next week. After this second visit by the missionaries, Freeman admitted that he had erred when he said the missionaries in Coffee County had multiple wives; neither of the two was married to one woman, much less many. Yet Freeman warned that the people of Coffee County should be on guard against "wolves in sheep's clothing," in this case, "the misleading doctrines and tracts of these mormons."¹⁴

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Mormonism," *Douglas Breeze*, 8 July 1899, page 1; "Some More About Mormons," *Douglas Breeze*, 15 July 1899.

Freeman was hardly alone in his personal crusade against the Latter-day Saints. The crisis of the New South, which had manifested itself in economics and politics had also thrown the press and southern religious establishments off-balance as well. And for the space of about three to four years, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had moved to invest as much as a quarter of its missionary force in the region, potentially figuring that unemployed men could be more productive in serving the missionary cause than wasting away without work at home. Given that missionaries in the South traditionally stayed at people's homes and worked without "purse or scrip," the *Wesleyan Christian Advocate's* editorial was not wrong when it accused the missionaries of saving on hotel bills. Besides the region's low cost of living, its proximity and access via railroads that were now struggling for business offered the Latter-day Saints a prime moment for action in the southern states.¹⁵

As the immediate economic and political crisis waned, however, and white southern culture plunged towards reaction against anything that smacked of major social change, the Protestant old guard of the South launched a counterattack across multiple fronts. While the fight against this western faith was just one of many efforts to restore conservatism to the region, the webs of rail and wire nevertheless burned again with anti-Mormon stories and accusations. Given the growth of both networks during the 1890s and the entry of Latter-day Saints into multiple towns and cities the same decade, the two sides were in direct contact as never before. Already the region was leading out in extralegal killings, especially lynchings of African Americans. As long as the Saints remained more a theoretical threat than an actual one, mobs

¹⁵ See chapter 4 and its accompanying notes. Interestingly, Latter-day Saint historians have made note of the benefits of southern missionary work that match the criticisms of the editorial, including its cost effectiveness due to staying with individuals and not hotels. See Heather M. Seferovich, "Hospitality and Hostility: Missionary Work in the American South, 1875–98," in Reid L. Neilson and Fred E. Woods, eds., *Go Ye Into All the World: The Growth and Development of Mormon Missionary Work* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012), 232–233, 246, especially the discussion in endnote 11.

intent on murder remained rare—those opposed to Mormons used vague threats or carefully staged shows of force. But as was the case with Joseph Standing or the Tennessee murders, places where the Saints were succeeding and where an opposition force could be quickly mustered was most often where violence erupted.¹⁶

This pattern was seen with renewed intensity when missionaries again began returning to Georgia. With the declining missionary force at the end of the 1880s, the intense crusade against polygamy, and active and fierce opposition to the missionaries in the area around Augusta (which itself became a hotbed of political violence as the Populist revolt took shape), then-mission president William Spry had closed Georgia as a field for active missionary proselytizing. It is likely that given the increasing threats against missionaries there, Spry decided to focus the diminishing missionary force in places that had greater promise. But this did not mean that missionaries never set foot in the state again after 1890. Members of the church still living in the state were overseen by missionaries in the South Carolina Conference, and in the later part of the 1890s some elders even ventured into Georgia counties bordering the Palmetto State. By the late 1890s, missionaries of the newly established Florida Conference also began working in Georgia counties located on its southern border. With preaching being done on the edges of the state and a surge of new missionaries, mission president Elias S. Kimball decided in 1898 that the time had come to officially reopen Georgia as a field for proselytizing work.¹⁷

¹⁶ That violent opposition often followed Latter-day Saint success is a point made by Patrick Q. Mason, *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 127–148, where Mason notes that a combination of success and concerns over polygamy caused violence to spike against the missionaries. Yet I would agree with Mary Ella Engel, *Praying With One Eye Open: Mormons and Murder in Nineteenth-Century Appalachian Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 2, that opposition was often a local event best understood at the local level. For a regional analysis of lynching that tries to pay attention to local contexts, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), esp. 103–139 on Georgia. Brundage concludes that no clear pattern can be found amid Georgia’s lynchings that explains why some happened and others did not.

¹⁷ There is a persistent myth perpetuated in many histories that Georgia was closed as a field for missionaries after Joseph Standing’s murder, or that if missionaries did stay, they were substantially limited. The minutes of the

Kimball's plan to return to the Empire State of the South was nothing if not carefully planned. Selecting several counties in northern Georgia (and skewing to the western part of the state; missionaries were to actively avoid the area around Augusta), Kimball appointed twenty-one missionary pairs from across the mission to begin their journey into Georgia during the spring of 1898. Much as their counterparts in the Florida Conference, missionaries would work in their assigned areas for a period of time, and then move on to other fields to work in. If a particular place proved fruitful, a pair of missionaries was usually assigned to travel around to "Saints in old fields" to help maintain and build up the church in those areas. Often the pair assigned to do this was assigned to oversee any of the Sunday Schools organized in a particular conference. This touring Sunday School Superintendent would thereby strengthen and maintain contact among new members in each conference.¹⁸

Two missionaries assigned to oversee Sunday Schools in the Georgia Conference accordingly visited Jasper County in July 1899. Located in northern central Georgia, Jasper County had been called on by missionaries as one of the initial twenty-some counties first contacted. With the county showing promise (and the consequent rumblings of opposition because of it), Smith Doolittle Rogers, who was acting as the conference Sunday School Superintendent, took George Myron Porter with him to build up the local Sunday School north of Monticello. Missionaries often preferred to establish Sunday Schools first. They were generally smaller than branches and frequently did not administer ceremonies like the sacrament of the

Southern States Mission and Georgia Conference indicate otherwise. See "Record of Georgia Conference, Historical Record 1882–1889," LR 3163 11 Vol. 1 (#6732), and pages 1–8 of "History of the Georgia Conference From Feb. 28, 1898 to June 10, 1909," LR 3163 11 Vol. 2 (#6733), both in Georgia District General Minutes, 1882–1971, LR 3163 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

¹⁸ Pages 1–8, #6733, Georgia Conference Minutes; #2103 and #2104, Florida Conference Minutes; the specific phrase "Saints in old fields" or some variation of it is from entry for 20 September 1891, page 141, and entry for 20 July 1894, page 180, in Volume LR 8557 56 Vol. 1 (#6803), North Carolina Conference Missionary Records, 1895–1944, LR 8557 56, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

Lord's supper. They did, however, give local members an opportunity to exercise some responsibility without being ordained to a particular priesthood office. With previous incidents where a man had been ordained to the priesthood and then became disaffected soon after, the missionaries perhaps hoped that extra time running a Sunday School might weed out anyone prone to defecting. Successful Sunday Schools could (and often did) grow into full-fledged branches, as had been the case in Florida.¹⁹

Given the amount of interest shown in Jasper County and the number of people baptized, establishing a Sunday School there was a step forward with the hope that the county would prove a flourishing area. But it was this very success, combined with the ongoing controversy over recently elected polygamist B. H. Roberts as the congressman from Utah, that made the situation in the county highly charged. A determined group of anti-Mormons in Jasper County was committed to cutting out the cancer in their community. While it is not clear that they intended murder, their carrying shotguns did suggest they embraced the possibility of deadly force. It was this resort to violent means, however, that often led to unanticipated consequences. In plotting to seize the pair of missionaries, they had not planned on the resistance by fellow county residents, including women. When the posse sought to capture the missionaries and haul them off, Emily Cunard fought back and yelled out the name of one in the disguised group. The named man turned his gun and shot the woman, blasting away much of her jaw. Although not expected to live at first, her condition stabilized, and she eventually outlived her husband.²⁰

Perhaps taken aback by this unexpected casualty, the group beat the missionaries but did not kill them. Reports of the attack, however, soon swirled outward and were picked up by the

¹⁹ This incident was brought to my attention by W. Ray Luce, much of the narrative here follows his book, see W. Ray Luce, *Missionaries' Brush With Death in Rural Georgia: A Forgotten Episode in the Southern States Mission* (no place given: W. Ray Luce, 2022), see 1–23 for the missionaries' background.

²⁰ Luce, *Brush With Death*, 24–37, 63–64.

webs of wire and rail. Within hours, false reports that missionaries had been lynched in Georgia were being published by newspapers across the country, even making the front page of the *New York Times*. As was often the case in this era, while the telegraphic reports were generally standardized (even when frequently contradictory), individual newspapers varied in how they dressed up the report and what priority they gave it. The false report also bled into the editorial pages, crashing into the broader debate over lynching and its place in the southern and national order. As commentators across the country debated the implications of confused reports, the violence stunted the momentum of the Saints in Jasper County. The Cunards decided to move to Rockdale County, about twenty-five miles away, within the year. The promising Sunday School, recently organized in Jasper County, lapsed.²¹

The *Douglas Breeze* gleefully published not just one but two reports about the incident in Jasper County, with one on the front page. “Our friends, the Mormons, are not having an easy time in upper Georgia,” Freeman exulted. “If they must have a field to work in we suggest that they are needed in the Philippine Islands,” then the site of a brutal insurrectionary war fought against American control over the archipelago. Reprinting a brief comment from the nearby *Fitzgerald Leader* that Douglas was suffering too much from Mormonism and gasping that the missionaries had stopped by to talk with Freeman, the *Breeze* editor mused that any part of the country “visited by these wandering proselyters will suffer from too much mormonism. Their oily tongues will deceive those not posted.” With so much space devoted to the missionaries, Freeman jumped to justify giving so much space in the paper to the religious visitors: “The *Breeze* has had a good deal to say about the mormons, and it does so, purely to remind the

²¹ Ibid., 33–53, 64–67.

peoplo that these proselyters won't do te depend on." (It seems that Freeman could have said the same about his typesetters.)²²

While Freeman personally held a bitter distaste toward the Latter-day Saints, he adopted a mocking rather than murderous tone toward them in the *Breeze*. When it came to the area's African Americans, however, he was deadly serious. Freeman came of age in southwestern Georgia where black political organizing among Republicans in the area was strong and federal troops were far away, resulting in a high amount of racial and political violence. Having moved to Coffee in the 1880s where whites were more predominant, Freeman was highly disturbed by the changing racial makeup of the county. Between 1880 and 1900, the black population of Coffee had expanded from one of every five residents to two of every five—but in the area around Douglas, the increase was more dramatic, leaping from one of every ten of the area's residents in 1880 to over one of every three in 1900. Worse still for Freeman was their impact on the county's politics. If local whites divided on an issue, the increased power of African American voters could swing the election. In 1896, a local fusion of African American Republicans and white Populists in Coffee had given Republican presidential candidate William McKinley a victory in the county amid a sea of Democratic victories, while Populists had won many of the local county offices. The race-crossing alliance was condemned by other Populists in Georgia, notably Thomas E. Watson, but this may have been a function of Coffee County's high number of North Carolinian emigrants where coalitions between black Republicans and white Populists were common.²³

²² All quotes (including typos) are scattered across the first two columns of page 4 of the *Douglas Breeze*, 5 August 1899, for the news reports on the Jasper County incident, see "The Mormons in Trouble" on page 1, and "Story of Mormons" on page 2, same issue.

²³ For post-emancipation racial tensions in southwestern Georgia, see Susan E. O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); for the changing demographics of Coffee County, see Table A3, "Percent African-American in Greater Coffee County," in Hepworth, "Through a Glass, Darkly," 143, also 21–32 for the demographic shifts and the political battles they helped produce; also see Barton

Hard feelings between Coffee's white Populists and white Democrats came to a head with county elections in 1898. The close results were disputed, and the ballots were locked up in the county courthouse in Douglas for the evening. Before the night was over and before a recount, the courthouse burned. Some suspected arson given the suspicious timing. Democrats, for their part, quickly seized control of the local political offices and dared the Populist-Republican alliance to stop them. That same year a coup was staged by Democrats in Wilmington, North Carolina, that did much the same thing. As the coalition government in North Carolina fell to Democratic terrorism, white Democrats in Douglas marched by torchlight through town with a banner exulting, "North Carolina and Coffee County Redeemed." Cheering the Democrats on was the editor of the *Breeze* who two years later agreed with another resident who fumed that, "Coffee county should repent in sack-cloth and ashes for helping to elect McKinley." Surprisingly, the Republican-Populist alliance in the county still had enough force to again haul Coffee into McKinley's camp in 1900.²⁴

Freeman was not so much troubled by Populists themselves; indeed, he frequently made overtures to the whites of that party. Instead, Freeman was most opposed to Republicans and the rights they championed for African Americans (which by 1899 were on the wane). The Baptist editor on several occasions wrote favorably of lynching, especially after the brutal mass lynching of African American laborer Sam Hose earlier that year in 1899. In one of the many "squibs" (short text inserted by a newspaper editor) penned by Freeman, he justified lynching for African Americans by arguing that brutish acts required brutish consequences. A Dawson, Georgia

Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 194–195; and Edgar Eugene Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896–1932* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 164.

²⁴ Hepworth, "Through a Glass, Darkly," 26–28; C. T. Trowell, "Douglas Before Memory: Everyday Life in a South Georgia Town," (serialized in the *Douglas Enterprise* in 1995, then revised 1996), 52; David Zucchini, *Wilmington's Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2020); "Torchlight Procession," *Macon Telegraph*, 13 November 1898; "Our Local Affairs," *Douglas Breeze*, 6 October 1900, page 5, column 3; Robinson, *Presidential Vote*, 164.

newspaper had seemed surprised at Freeman's strong stance in favor of lynching, so Freeman confirmed that he indeed supported it. While the surviving squib has been heavily damaged and some of the text is missing, Freeman apparently said no more courtesy "should be shown a scoundrel" than "a sheep-killing dog." If this fragmented text is insufficient to convict Freeman for his support of lynching, his front-page editorial in the very same issue leaves no doubt about the editor's stance. Commenting on a trial in nearby Baxley where an African American man, Will Ables, was accused of raping a Mrs. Edgerton and was sentenced to death after conviction, Freeman spat, "the black scoundrel got what he didn't deserve and that was a fair trial. He should have been first hanged, and then tried and this poor woman would have been spared the humiliation of standing up before that court room of people and admitting her disgrace."²⁵

Yet as outraged as Freeman was with black criminality, he was at least as incensed by black political power. Illustrative of this was a later column he wrote titled "Good Old Slavery Days," recounting a visit with an African American couple that had been enslaved by Freeman's parents. Freeman mentioned that the couple had two sons: Ishmal Lonon and Samuel Lonon. Samuel, their oldest, was described by Freeman as "the meanest negro that ever lived." Apparently, Samuel ran away quite often and frequently avoided recapture. One rainy night he came to a farmstead in Sumter County and demanded a white woman give him something to eat. When the woman refused, he began breaking down the door and managed to get his hand through a hole, and then his head. In graphic manner, Freeman described how the woman, later revealed to be his aunt, Mrs. Kimmey, had then taken a hatchet and killed the man. In talking about the brother, Ishmal Lonon, Freeman simply said that he was "a notorious republican, of the Bullock regime, who was elected to the legislature in 1868." At the end of his story, Freeman

²⁵ See *Douglas Breeze*, 17 June 1899, page 8 column 2 for first quote (page damaged), and page 1, "Lynch Law and the Courts," column 2 for the second quote.

compared the lives of the two brothers, saying that after being killed by his aunt, “Sam’s career was ended and his spirit was where bad niggers go. The other brother, you remember, went to the legislature. Which went to the best place?” From Freeman’s perspective, African American political participation was on par with theft and attempted assault.²⁶

Based on the tone of Freeman’s editorials, the *Breeze* editor was a staunch anti-Mormon who believed the missionaries were “oily” deceivers. He agreed with the *Wesleyan Christian Advocate* that the United States needed to do more to end Mormonism in the country. He celebrated the times that missionaries were harmed, including the incident in Jasper County. But Freeman saved his most savage and ghastly rhetoric for African Americans and anyone who, as in “the day of ‘so-called reconstruction,’” “patted the negro on the back” and taught them “social equality.” That a coalition of black Republicans and white Populists had controlled Coffee County just the previous year was of greater concern, otherwise those “dark days [that] covered our country with gloom” during Reconstruction might return. Even though the political dust had settled from the Populist revolt across the state of Georgia in 1899, Coffee County remained an exception where the fiery coals of political warfare still burned hot.²⁷

* * *

Attacks against members and missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continued in intensity through 1899, again with unanticipated consequences. One attack in September, like that in Jasper County, Georgia, hurt another white southern female, this time killing a twelve-year-old girl. Six missionaries were holding a meeting in Pine Bluff, Tennessee, when an armed mob of about 100 men came up and began firing around the schoolhouse as well as tossing eggs and rocks through windows to flush the missionaries and their audience out. May

²⁶ James M. Freeman, “Good Old Slavery Days,” in *Douglas Enterprise*, 28 January 1911, page 13.

²⁷ See “The Honorable Judge Speer,” *Douglas Breeze*, 24 June 1899, page 1, column 4.

Harden, the girl, decided to help two of the missionaries try to escape. Unknown to them was that some of the vigilantes had set up an ambush for the missionaries as they exited. As the girl and pair of missionaries fled the building, Baxter Vinson, superintendent of a Protestant Sunday School, opened fire. His shot felled Harden instead. Highly remorseful he had killed the girl, Vinson wrote a confession that her killing had been an accident, and before he was apprehended, committed suicide. According to a tally by Patrick Q. Mason, 1899 represented the most violent year for the Latter-day Saints in the South since 1887 with at least twenty-six acts of violence against the faith, two of which had directly hurt white women—the ostensible group that white southern men were claiming to protect from polygamous Mormons.²⁸

Given the fierce opposition across the mission in 1899, how did the missionaries gain any kind of entry, especially in Coffee County, Georgia? For one, the primary missionary that worked in the county for most of the year was highly talented. Nephi United States Centennial Jensen had a quick wit and spoke well. Reading his diaries, it is clear he was a keen observer of places and people (even if he had very strong opinions of those very people and places). Quite notably, decades in the future, Jensen would be the first president of a newly organized Canadian Mission, clearly reflective of his talent. Yet that success was in the future—was the 1899 version of Nephi Jensen good enough to break through the opposition in Coffee County? While Jensen was persuasive and his preaching helpful in Coffee County, it was not sufficient. Indeed, his quick wit could sometimes land him in trouble, as seen in instances that year and the following spring. Indeed, Jensen’s calling upon prominent men in town and working to gain their trust was common practice under the previous mission president, Elias Kimball.²⁹

²⁸ Mason, *Mormon Menace*, 7–8, 131.

²⁹ Ethan Craigue has written an excellent account of the early beginnings of the Latter-day Saint congregations of Coffee County, see his unpublished paper, R. Ethan Craigue, “Satilla River Saints: The Origins and Development of an Early Mormon Stronghold in the Wiregrass South,” (Second edition, 6 August 2019), obtained via his website,

If any one factor was highly unique to Coffee County, it was not a missionary with a memorable middle name—and after all, Jensen served in other places without the same level of success. The thing that made Coffee County distinctive in this era of increased opposition was the late-unfolding political turmoil in the county. No other county in Wiregrass Georgia had such a successful fusion between Republicans and Populists; no other county in the area had a disputed election be disrupted by the courthouse burning down. While white Democrats had often fought back to gain control of areas once held by Populists, and were not reluctant to use violence, if necessary, the late timing of the turmoil perhaps helped the missionaries. After all, if missionaries had indeed come into Coffee County in 1897, the people were clearly ready to make their sojourn there too hot to handle, as suggested by the article in the Savannah *Daily News*. But 1899 was different from 1897, if only because between the two years had been the vicious battles of 1898. Those most concerned about Mormons were advocates for white conservative rule and keeping African Americans down as second-class citizens. When taking care of the latter was the priority, they had less focus to organize a united front to push anti-Mormonism. The postponed political turmoil gave Jensen and his companions a window of entry.³⁰

Even so, this was a very narrow window. Pastors of various sects in the county maintained a steady drumbeat against the Saints, as did editor Freeman. And it was clear that Jensen and his companions were never far from danger. When stopping by the post office at Pearson in southern Coffee County, the postmaster began shouting at Jensen and his new companion, Adam R. Brewer, about some items that Jensen identified as coming from an anti-

<https://www.satillariversaints.org/> (accessed 13 June 2024). While I agree with many of Craigue’s insights, I break with him on Jensen being the primary driver of success in Coffee County, see pages 13–23.

³⁰ Ethan Craigue brought this article to my attention and is noted on his website under “Timeline”; for the original, see “Mormons Not Wanted,” Savannah *Morning News*, 8 December 1897, page 1 column 2; for the discussion of Coffee County’s political battles, see Hepworth, “Through a Glass, Darkly,” 21–32.

Mormon tract sitting on the counter. Challenging the pair on the Saints' previous practice of polygamy, the postmaster "catalogued" the deviant marital practice "with sin." Jensen, who by this point was becoming impatient with constantly responding to the polygamy issue, decided to engage in theological warfare: "In a few clear cut remarks—I made apparent the fact that the anti 'Mormon' had made God a sinner and Jesus a Bastard." Infuriated, the postmaster then spat "that it was a wonder that we were not shot before we got out of town." At this point it is possible to imagine Jensen rolling his eyes; the pair proceeded to a schoolhouse they were to speak at.³¹

While at the schoolhouse in Pearson, Jensen was making ready to preach at the rostrum when he noticed Brewer preoccupied at the teacher's desk. Making his way over, he saw what had caught his companion's attention: a note written in a "scauley hand" that said if the pair wanted to get out of town without scarred skin and broken bones, "Dont let the next sun set on you here." The note bore the day's date and indicated that it has been written at Pearson by a committee of six. Jensen concluded, "We paid bu little attention to the polite (?) note before us; but whent right on with the meeting persuant to appoitmnt." After spending the night in town, however, they considered, "Realizing the danger of remaing in a towm composed partially of savages we determned to take our leave." Once they were two miles out of Pearson, the elders, now sweltering in the August South Georgia sun, asked a Mr. Henderson if they could cool down at his veranda. Just after sitting down, they heard yelling from the road they had just been on and saw a wagon with six "intoxicated men" passing by. "They were on the road which we intended to travel: so we assured ourselvs that we had narroily escaped a mob."³²

³¹ Entry for 23 August 1899 in Volume 3, Jensen Diary; for a brief length of time, we have the fortune of also utilizing the diary of Jensen's companion, Adam R. Brewer, see entry for 23 August 1899, Volume 1, Adam R. Brewer Journals, 1899–1908, MS 11971, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. For the incident at the post office, Brewer laconically writes, "My companion talked to them at some lenth and explaining the scripture to them."

³² Entries for 23–24 August 1899, Vol. 3, Jensen Diary; entries for 23–24 August 1899, Vol. 1, Brewer Journals. Interestingly, Brewer almost reproduced as much as possible the way the threatening note was written but said nothing about avoiding a mob the following day.

Jensen wrote of many other times where the two missionaries landed in a heated discussion with a preacher of some denomination or another—frequently Primitive Baptists, Methodists, and missionary Baptists. They even sparred with people of the Holiness movement. But working in Coffee County from week to week and month to month appears to have given some people cause to doubt bad reports of the elders, for when the local pastors excoriated the missionaries, others who had witnessed their preaching disagreed. After another change in companions, Jensen related in mid-October that three people had chosen to get baptized, and “The news that the ‘Mormons’ were going to Baptize had spread like wild fire.” The afternoon of 15 October 1899, Jensen’s temporary companion, Richard Marcellus Robinson, baptized three men that the missionaries had visited frequently: Dan P. Lott, Richard Jewell, and Levy Jewell. Flush off this success, Jensen felt confident in being bolder, although at some points he could push too far.³³

This was the case when on 23 October 1899—eight days after the baptisms—Jensen and his new companion, Ezra Baird, made their way to a “fanatic” farmer. Seemingly not wishing to be bothered, the farmer flatly stated that “I want to inform you that I do not believe the doctrine.” Jensen asked how he could disbelieve a doctrine that he had never heard of before. The man quickly added that “I have read all about you. The bible you use is not like ours.” After a series of attempts to convince the man that the Latter-day Saints used the King James Bible much as other Christians did, Jensen decided to cut the conversation short, and the pair started leaving. But after the missionaries mentioned they would preach at the nearby schoolhouse that evening and the man countered with, “No, you won’t,” Jensen lost all patience. He asked the “cotton growr” if he believed the Bible, and upon hearing yes, Jensen

³³ Entries for 13 August, 20 September, and 13–15 October 1899 (quotes from 15 October 1899), Vol. 3, Jensen diary.

went for the jugular: “Then said I, you have contradicted yourself, for the bible says ‘do unto others as you would like to have them do unto you.’” With that Jensen declared that the man had lied. “Right here I must say that I became a little vile, and closed up the loop too tight,” Jensen later admitted. Infuriated by the missionaries that had not left him alone and that were now calling him a liar, the farmer seized a club and chased them away for some distance.³⁴

* * *

Trying to protect missionaries and members in the South amid these violent attacks was Benjamin Erastus Rich, the new president of the Southern States Mission who took over from Elias S. Kimball in mid-1898. Rich, who often went by “Ben. E. Rich,” was born in the west but was the son of Kentucky-born apostle Charles Coulson Rich. Yet Ben himself never had much exposure to the South beyond anything his distant father gave him; the younger Rich had served in the British mission as a young man and otherwise spent much of his time in Utah and Idaho. By the time he was appointed president of the Southern States Mission, he was an up-and-coming figure within the circles of the (still-small) Idaho Republican Party; this set him at odds with many Latter-day Saints of the time who tended to vote Democratic. Yet Rich himself was highly eloquent and talented; he established a brief-lived newspaper for the mission, the *Southern Star*, as a way of countering the increasing hostility to the Saints in southern and national media.³⁵

³⁴ Entry for 23 October 1899, Vol. 3, Jensen diary.

³⁵ For a brief introduction to Rich, see Kenneth L. Alford, “Ben E. Rich: Sharing the Gospel Creatively,” in Reid L. Neilson and Fred E. Woods, eds., *Go Yet Into All the World: The Growth and Development of Mormon Missionary Work* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012), 341–363; for a more substantial consideration of his role as president over the Southern States Mission, see Ted S. Anderson, “The Southern States Mission and the Administration of Ben E. Rich, 1898–1908, Including a Statistical Study of Church Growth in the Southeastern United States During the Twentieth Century,” (MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1976); for the *Southern Star*, see David Buice, “Chattanooga’s ‘Southern Star’: Mormon Window on the South, 1898–1900,” in *Brigham Young University Studies* 28 No. 2 (Spring 1988), 5–15.

If Elias Kimball's writings showed confidence that the missionaries could move into any community, and with the right attitude and right introductions, make themselves respected and known, Rich brought a more belligerent tone to work in the region. Rich's writings generally showed an impatience with southern politicians and the region's elites; his communications were often filled with demands that the rights of Latter-day Saints to religious freedom be respected and defended. It seems some southerners responded in kind toward Rich; when told that people in Yazoo, Mississippi, would greet Rich with open arms, Rich retorted after his visit, "They met me with arms all right, but they were the kind that shoot bullets." At a conference meeting in Virginia, a missionary decided to take Rich to a different house than previously planned—the next day, it became apparent that a mob had gathered at the original house to beat up the mission president. Rich took his infamy in the region with humor: "The people of the south are a good people. As a rule, they are a religious people. They are not a hypocritical people. If they are your enemy, they let you know it." He then joked, "I believe I have three invitations there now to be killed, but I have been so busy that I have not had time to fill any of them yet."³⁶

While intelligent and bold, Rich had to use his every talent to make the best he could with an increasingly weak hand—controversy because of B. H. Roberts's election, a rapid expansion of violence against the Saints in the region, and most seriously for the mission, a reduction in the number of missionaries serving. As an institution, the Southern States Mission now no longer

³⁶ Two documents that capture Rich's style are two journal/scrapbooks he kept as president of the Southern States Mission. The first, covering his first year and a half in the mission, is the Ben E. Rich Journal, 1898 May–1899 December, MS 6411, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; the second volume, from 1900 forward, is the Ben E. Rich Southern States Mission Scrapbook, 1899–1902, Accn 38, Manuscripts, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah. Since the time I consulted this source, I've been informed by the curator that the volume has been misplaced and cannot be located. I am willing to share my research photographs until the original can be found again. The story of Rich's narrow escape, as well as the quotes used here, come from Alford, "Ben E. Rich," 344–345, 353. While it is impossible to know whether the group that planned to attack Rich knew his political affiliation, the prospect of a partisan divide between the Republican Rich and the largely Democratic South seems another possible contributor to the antipathy between the two.

fully covered the region—in 1895, West Virginia had been incorporated with very dissimilar northeastern states in the Eastern States Mission, while a couple of years later, Arkansas and Louisiana were moved into what became known as the Central States Mission. In the meantime, Rich petitioned for (and received) jurisdiction over Ohio as a place where ill missionaries could recuperate in a cooler climate. For a brief period, Rich convinced the church to split the mission into an upper South (Middle States) and a lower South (Southern States) pair of missions. This experiment ended within two years when the new president of the reduced Southern States Mission, Ephraim H. Nye, died, and Rich accordingly returned as president of the reunited mission.³⁷

Little mentioned in mission records was James Allen Smith, who when compared to some missionaries, kept a more even temper in his dealings while proselytizing in and around Seneca. Indeed, while many missionary records and diaries talk about clashes with ministers and debate over the Bible, Smith (at least in the few writings we have of his) always strove to not contend with other people over points of doctrine. This did not mean he could not bring forth an array of scriptures to support the Latter-day viewpoint; indeed, the scriptural references that are sprinkled through his comments suggest he was highly familiar with the Bible. Yet Smith had something that many of the western missionaries serving in the South did not have—the experience of having once served in one of the region’s racial terrorist groups and then having been “born again” as a thoroughgoing Christian devoted to a gospel of peace. Smith had a compelling story to tell, and when he did, people listened, even if they didn’t care for his choice in religion. Above all, Smith had clearly made himself part of the community; by 1900, the US

³⁷ See Mason, *Mormon Menace*, 131; Alford, “Ben E. Rich,” 344; Anderson, “Administration of Ben E. Rich,” 76–81.

Census had him living in Seneca township with his wife, Caroline, and his mother-in-law (and technically his sister-in-law), Mollie.³⁸

With people like the Smiths participating in the Seneca Branch, and many others who were likewise highly committed, the congregation survived this particular era of disruption. The branch continued to hold regular meetings; if not weekly, the minutes record a meeting generally once every month. The affiliated Sunday School also had a faithful attendance. People like the Clevelands and the Moores, people who were not going to travel west to Utah or Colorado, helped lend stability to the congregation. Although it is impossible to say, it might also be that Smith's broadly known status as a former Klansman might have given anyone who thought about committing violence against the congregation some pause. Whatever the exact case was, amid the storm of the controversy over Utah electing a polygamist to Congress, the Seneca Branch continued onward.³⁹

Other congregations were not so fortunate. As mentioned above, the newly organized Sunday School in Jasper County, Georgia, which looked to expand healthily, was cut short by violence against it. Another congregation, this time in Kentucky, was attacked twice. Their first meetinghouse was burned, so the Saints accordingly purchased fire insurance for a new building. In response, an angry mob used clubs and saws to tear down the building rather than burn it to keep the Saints from collecting insurance to rebuild again. By this point, the mission's statistical reports no longer counted the number of organized branches or Sunday Schools, so it is impossible to quickly say how many congregations were dissolved, destroyed, or forced

³⁸ Articles by James Allen Smith (see chapter 4), 1900 U.S. Census, Oconee County, South Carolina, population schedule, Seneca Township, enumeration district 73, page A 22 (146 printed), dwelling 404, family 417, James Smith, Hannah C. Smith, and Mollie Parker.

³⁹ See LR 8227 11 Volume 1, (#10591), Seneca Branch General Minutes, 1875–1973, LR 8227 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; and LR 8227 15 Vols. 1–2, Seneca Branch Sunday School Minutes and Records, 1895–1973, LR 8227 15, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

underground for a time in this era of disruption. Given the pages of new Sunday Schools found in missionary record books during the mid-1890s and the relative lack of them at the turn of the century, it appears that the anti-Mormon campaigns waged in 1898–1900 were effective in blunting the rapid expansion of the church in the South. Yet disruption could work both ways, for a divided Coffee County, Georgia, would soon prove an oasis of success.⁴⁰

* * *

In December 1899, Nephi Jensen reflected that, “For six months I have labored in capacity of traveling Elder in Coffee Co, Ga.” Several other missionaries had come and gone, but Jensen had remained in the county and tried to get people to listen to their message. Jensen frequently sprinkled his accounts with exchanges he had with opponents of the church. One memorable encounter came the previous month when the missionaries had been scheduled to preach at Mount Zion Church. While walking there with Ezra Baird, Jensen wondered aloud about a man within the congregation who had opposed them speaking at the church. “Just as I had finished my sentence. I glanced up the road and caught sight of a vehicle coming toward us. A quiet feeling came over me,” Jensen related. “As the vehicle approached us I caught the driver’s eye. I no longer had any idea that he was a friend. for the sparkle of his eyes gave expression to the words—‘I hate you.’” The driver inquired whether the pair were those scheduled to preach at the church; upon hearing the affirmative, the man told them they were not allowed. Jensen countered that there were some within the church who wanted to hear them, at which point the driver became agitated and demanded “us to explain why we were in, the South preaching the Gospel—justifying himself in demanding his information by so informing us that the people

⁴⁰ Mason, *Mormon Menace*, 138; Leonard J. Arrington, “Mormon Beginnings in the American South,” *Task Papers in LDS History* (Salt Lake City: Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 10.

there had the Bible.” Baird and Jensen continued to the church and with the congregation divided on excluding them, managed to preach to those most interested.⁴¹

Jensen’s bold actions apparently impressed enough people for on 9 January 1900, he baptized six people in Coffee County. Soon after, however, he was moved out to work in Ware County to the southeast. Hearing that smallpox was in circulation in the county seat of Waycross, the missionaries worked in and around Waresboro, a nearby community that had once been the courthouse site. Here replayed a similar set of issues that had plagued the missionaries in Coffee County—inability to find a suitable place to preach at, especially given the cold and rainy weather of the season. A Dr. Spence who had charge of a local schoolhouse told Jensen that they didn’t want anything to do with Mormonism, arguing that anyone who advocated polygamy was embracing sin. Jensen took his usual tack of defending polygamy through examples in the Bible; after being taken aback, Spence resumed, ““Every state in the Union ought to pass laws to have the Mormons run out.”” Jensen then questioned whether the man was truly an American citizen, accusing Spence of wanting “to tramp the constitution of the U.S. into the ground.” Then the schoolmaster accused the missionaries of only trying to preach to the uneducated of the region: “this time he accused us of preaching in the rural districts. I brought this allegation to the ground with a crash; I asked:—Is it not you that is preventing us from preaching in the towns—Did you not refuse to let us preach in the academy?”⁴²

Jensen’s time in Ware County did not reach the same degree of success he had experienced in Coffee, even though by this point he had even more experience than before and had his usual supply of deft rejoinders. In February, the missionaries of the Florida Conference

⁴¹ Jensen Diary, 10 December 1899 (first quote), 12 November 1899 (all other quotes).

⁴² See pages 200–203, #2105, Florida Conference Minutes; Jensen diary, 11–12 January 1900, quotes from 12 January 1900.

gathered in Jacksonville for their annual meeting with the mission president; Rich arrived a little late but spoke to a large crowd in a local opera house. After the meetings were over, most missionaries left the city, but Jensen and a companion remained to preach there. They could not easily secure a place to preach at in the city, however; both the mayor and chief of police were evasive and only allowed them to street preach if a local property owner was willing to let them meet in front of their business. While working to get a place where they could preach near the street (but out of traffic), William Jennings Bryan paid a visit to Jacksonville and Jensen listened to “the great apostle of Democracy.” The missionary was quite taken by the Nebraska orator: “he talked slow and to the point. He was very witty,” a high complement coming from Jensen.⁴³

While Bryan had captivated his audience, Jensen doubted he could do the same when it came time for the missionaries to hold their first street meeting in Jacksonville. While nervous, he was benefitted by the fact that President Rich’s own son, Ben L. Rich, was in town with another missionary, George Maycock, and that the two “were old hands at street preaches.” In this first instance, an interested crowd gathered, and the meeting went off without any major trouble. Jensen recounted being grateful for the extra help. A later street meeting did not go so well, for during a meeting in Jacksonville on the corner of Hogan and Bay streets near the center of town, a crowd began gathering after a heckler questioned Jensen about the Saints’ belief in polygamy. Jensen reported that soon a crowd of 500 was around the missionaries and that once he could get silence, he again used the same scriptures from the Bible to justify the Saints having practiced plural marriage. At this point, “A middle aged man. half intoxicated, was sent through the crowd to call me to question for something I had not said.” The man demanded to know whether Jensen was saying that not all southern women were pure. Jensen replied that not all of

⁴³ Jensen diary, 9–21 February 1900, quote from 21 February 1900.

them were, and when asked again, he repeated it, whereupon the man punched Jensen in the face and then ran off into the crowd. With the crowd now boisterous, the police declined to try to make an arrest and had the missionaries withdraw from the scene.⁴⁴

In this case, Jensen's sharp tongue had landed the elders in serious trouble. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, a strange brew of Victorian cultural expectations, heightened racism, the expansion of rapid communications, economic desperation, and political opportunism had mixed together to produce a persistent fear that white southern women's purity was in danger from any number of minority groups. In the antebellum and through the postwar years, white southern men had styled themselves as the defenders of everyone under their charge, especially their wives and daughters. Many southerners (like James M. Freeman, as seen earlier) were willing to embrace outright lynching of African Americans *accused* of raping a white woman to spare the woman the trial of reliving the assault. While African American activists that investigated lynching realized that accusations of rape were responsible for a minority of lynchings, the cultural idea that ending slavery had freed African Americans to regress toward savagery (as expressed through the rape of white women) had an especially powerful hold in the minds of many white southerners. Jensen's rash remark had effectively suggested that if not all southern women were pure, then southern men were asleep at the job.⁴⁵

Outrage abounded on both sides. The Southern States Mission's new newspaper, the *Southern Star*, ran an editorial decrying the assault on Jensen. But it was little use; the local and soon the regional press excoriated Jensen for his insult to white southern women—and their male protectors. Jacksonville's police chief, for his part, now had the necessary excuse to cancel

⁴⁴ Jensen diary, 22 February–6 March 1900, first quote from 22 February 1900, second from 6 March 1900.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that when the Saints had practiced polygamy, they had also transgressed this Victorian sense of female purity. See Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 111–323.

additional street preaching by the missionaries. With the city increasingly hostile, again because of the resurrection of polygamy and the networks of wire and rail spreading stories that hammered the issue constantly, mission leaders spirited Jensen away from Jacksonville. After a brief sojourn in rural Florida and then Valdosta, Georgia, Jensen returned to Coffee County again that May and June, which is where the U.S. Census found him. He also baptized another four people there before the end of his mission, which he returned from that summer. Other missionaries followed up on the entry in Coffee County; by the end of 1900, thirty residents had been baptized, a dramatically different reception than the missionaries had in Jacksonville.⁴⁶

Rich, for his part, was not much a fan of the countryside. He felt that the focus of missionary efforts should be in the long-avoided urban centers of the South where an increasing number of southerners lived. Yet to make a breakthrough in the cities, Rich knew the mission must be able to counter the anti-Mormon stories circulating in them. Fighting bad press with positive press, however, required money—something in very short supply for a church that remained heavily indebted from the Panic of 1893. Rich wrote Lorenzo Snow, the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints since Woodruff's death in 1898, to explain why the Southern States Mission was now using so much more money: "In order to defend ourselves and gain prestige, we have found it necessary to use some money in preaching the Gospel through the Press, and in various other ways, and this is one of the items that enters into the above mentioned expense." Rich then recounted that "no real aggressive work has been done in the large cities of the South, and we have found it necessary to spend some money in them in order to break down the barrier of prejudice created in these centers of population, on account of

⁴⁶ Jensen diary, March–June 1900; "Bigotry in Jacksonville," *Latter-day Saints Southern Star*, 17 March 1900, page 124; 1900 U.S. Census, Coffee County, Georgia, Pearson Georgia Militia District 1130, enumeration district 23, page 8B, residence 144, family 145, Nephi Jensen; pages 204–211, #2105, Florida Conference Minutes.

the opening up anew of old time stories.” These circulating stories had produced “more mobs, increased prejudice, stronger opposition, and heavier expenses than usual, and quite a falling off in the number of converts is noticeable.”⁴⁷

While Rich did not record any answer he received from Snow, the actions of the church spoke loudly enough—by the end of 1900, the mission had been forced to close down the *Southern Star* and the number of missionaries assigned to the South dropped relative to other missions of the church. Rich was soon begging for more missionaries to cover the large territory of the Southern States Mission, but either there were not enough being commissioned (perhaps due to the improving economy in Utah) or church leaders determined other areas were better investments of the church’s small resources. While it is impossible to know the exact motivations of the church’s leadership in the West, it might be that they felt that it was better to wait for the storm of bad press to blow over than to spend nonexistent money in countering it and placing missionaries (like Jensen and others) in harm’s way.⁴⁸

With fewer resources than before, Rich then did his best to make bricks without straw. In this he had some success, partly due to his political connections. At a meeting later in 1900 among Republicans in Idaho, Republican Vice-Presidential candidate Theodore Roosevelt was visiting that state at the same time Rich happened to be out west for the church’s General Conference and visiting Rexburg where the rally took place. Being a prominent Idaho Republican, Rich was asked to introduce Roosevelt, then campaigning for McKinley, and Rich in his introduction predicted that Roosevelt would soon be president himself. Quite flattered, Roosevelt invited Rich to travel with him back to Salt Lake City and on the evening train ride the candidate peppered the mission president with questions about the Latter-day Saints. Roosevelt

⁴⁷ Rich to Lorenzo Snow, 18 January 1900, in Ben E. Rich Southern States Scrapbook, Accn 38, UU.

⁴⁸ Anderson, “Southern States Mission During Ben E. Rich,” 41–45, 48–53.

never forgot Rich or his prediction; in 1902, after he had indeed become president after McKinley's assassination, Roosevelt visited Chattanooga, Tennessee—incidentally, the place where the Southern States Mission was headquartered. While on a parade through the city, Rich called out to Roosevelt, saying, "How do you do, Mr. President?" The president of the United States stopped the parade and walked over to the president of the mission and asked if any more missionaries had been mobbed in the region. After a brief conversation, Roosevelt said, "I think now by this recognition, you will have more friends in the South." It is improbable that such a recognition from a Republican president did much to allay prejudice in the Democratic South, but it perhaps gave some opponents pause to know the Saints had friends in high places.⁴⁹

* * *

The polygamy issue in national politics surfaced once again when Utah's legislature sent Reed Smoot, a descendant of southern converts, to the U.S. Senate. Smoot, unlike Roberts, was not a practicing polygamist. But unlike Roberts, Smoot held a more senior rank in the church's hierarchy, being part of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The election of one of the church's head leaders to a political post again awakened largely white Protestant fears of the nation's politics being swayed by a seemingly un-democratic religion. For the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an institution, the Senate hearings convened by the question of Smoot's worthiness to be a senator were far more arduous than the fallout from Roberts's election. Every aspect of the church was investigated; its leaders were grilled by committees in Washington. It became apparent that the Saints had not totally disavowed further plural marriages—they had simply tended to move new ones out of the country into Canada or Mexico. The end result was

⁴⁹ Alford, "Ben E. Rich," 349.

that the church instituted a hard ban on polygamy and those who continued to practice it would be excommunicated.⁵⁰

From the standpoint of the South, the Smoot hearings certainly brought controversy to the Saints in the region. Violence once again slammed the missionaries and members, but often not to the same degree as in 1899 and 1900 with the Roberts affair. Why? As had often been the case previously, much of the violence against the Saints took place in areas where they were having success or where there were valid fears that they could have success. The era of disruption that followed the success the Saints had in the 1890s knocked the church off course; having quadrupled its numbers in five years, the Saints barely budged by a few hundred over the next five. White conservative southerners struck back with force (sometimes literally as in the case of Jensen), and it proved effective, at least if their efforts prompted church leaders to assign more missionaries elsewhere. With fewer missionaries on the ground and little ability to combat the bad press that more than ever flowed through the region at lightning speed, it would take a major shift for the Saints to once again succeed in the area as they had just years before.⁵¹

No one knew it at the time, but in the second decade of the twentieth century, the Saints would again succeed tremendously in the South. Between the U.S. religious census of 1906 and 1916, the federal government documented an increase of nearly another 10,000 Saints in the southern states—a rapid expansion in a decade. The reasoning behind this second surge of southern Saints will have to be addressed in future research. After the stunning success between 1895 and 1900, the missions of the church in the region—the Southern States Mission especially—stopped reporting statistics as clearly as in the past. They documented many other things—the number of miles walked, the number of people visited by missionaries, the number

⁵⁰ Flake, *Politics of Religious Identity*; Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 60–73.

⁵¹ Anderson, “Southern States Mission Under Ben E. Rich,” 25–37.

of tracts distributed, the number of testimonies rejected. All these were to demonstrate the hard work of the missionaries. But the key indicators for how they were received—the number of baptisms, the number of congregations, the number of Saints in the region—many of these were no longer published. The Latter-day Saints saw themselves as the stone kingdom of Old Testament prophecy—how could they not succeed with greater success over time? Perhaps the lack of success after 1900 was as much a trial of faith for the church in the region as was the violent opposition of previous decades.⁵²

In the years between 1906 and 1908, the church and the South, as well as the church in the South, encountered a handful of issues and an assortment of incidents. The decisions made in response to these, seemingly small and unnoticed at the time, and the changes made so very subtly, proved an important inflection point for the faith in the region. Much as Edward L. Ayers said of the South after the Atlanta racial clash of 1906, “The end of the New South era was nowhere in sight as the nineteenth century blurred into the twentieth.” In much the same way, the status of the Saints in the South remained much the same in 1908 as it had in 1906; it was only years later that the decisions made during this time would manifest their profound impact on the fate of the Saints in the South.⁵³

The year 1906 started out violently enough for the Latter-day Saints: a series of mobs first drove off missionaries from Harkers Island in North Carolina and then burned the meeting place where Saints also operated a school—for the second time in as many months. Rich appealed to the governor of North Carolina for help, but government action against the mob was not forthcoming. The Saints on the island then started holding meetings outdoors to prevent

⁵² See Appendix A for specific figures; this shift in reporting is most noticeable in the Manuscript History of the Southern States Mission, see statistical reports from 1898–1908, LR 8557 2, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

⁵³ Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 437.

another building from being targeted, but with the silence from the governor, the mob began threatening members' homes and boasting that "There is no law in North Carolina for Mormons"—a haunting callback to how Joseph Standing and Rudger Clawson had been taunted in Georgia before Standing's murder. Church leaders advised the Saints on the island to practice their religion in private and stop holding meetings for the time being. Missionaries had first come to the area during the rapid increase of missionaries under Elias S. Kimball; now they were being driven off even as the following era of reaction and disruption was itself coming to a close, although no one would have imagined it at the time.⁵⁴

Miles away from coastal North Carolina, the Latter-day Saint success in Coffee County had proved steadier, but not without substantial opposition. In 1902, a group of anti-Mormons had come together in southern Coffee County to hang the missionaries serving there. One of the local members, Calvin W. Williams, suspected that the missionaries were in danger and got together a group of people who had been pulling fodder and chased the mob away. Williams did more than just save a couple of the missionaries; he gave some of his land near McDonald Mills in the southern part of the county for a Latter-day Saint church and cemetery. While the building was crude by any standards, the large number of Saints that met there provoked neighbors to nickname the building (which also served as a school) "Little Utah." While meant as an insult, the local Saints embraced the name, and several years later they moved the old building off and built a more substantial chapel of the same name in its place.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Anderson, "Southern States Mission Under Ben E. Rich," 21–25; also see Joel G. Hancock, *Strengthened By the Storm: The Coming of the Mormons to Harkers Island, NC, 1897–1909* (Morehead City, NC: Campbell and Campbell, 1988).

⁵⁵ See pages 1–5, LR 10891 11 (#B3749), Axson Ward General Minutes, 1899–1977, LR 10891 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; also Craigue, "Satilla River Saints."

Many of the early converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had been in the southern districts of Coffee County, but a major storm and consequent loss of crops spelled financial hardship for Daniel P. Lott and Joseph Adams, both of whom had joined the new faith. Late in 1900 they decided to try anew on some land about three miles south of Douglas, and from that point forward the small initial congregation in Coffee County began to split into two distinct groups, one in central Coffee County and the other in the southern part of the county. Sometime in the summer of 1907, missionary George L. Tate asked Lott and Adams about the possibility of constructing an actual meetinghouse. Tate himself contributed the first dollar, Adams provided some land, and Lott provided the timber. After about five weeks of work, much of the timber coming from nearby sawmills in Coffee County's rapidly disappearing pine forests, the new building was ready to use. Tate named the building Cumorah, the name Joseph Smith gave to the hill he said he took the metal plates from which he produced the Book of Mormon. Nephi Jensen, called back temporarily on a mission to the southern states to act as mission secretary, happened to be visiting the area and was given the opportunity to be the first missionary to preach in the new building.⁵⁶

Coffee County was not the first nor the last in having congregations build places to worship in. Missionaries in 1904 had built a building for the Saints in and around Jacksonville, Florida, to meet at. In 1909, the isolated community of Northcutts Cove in Grundy County, Tennessee, was also the site of a church building constructed by the Saints. Yet few places had the high concentration of membership in the same place as Coffee County, Georgia, and it might have been unique in that by 1907 there were two congregations with their own buildings in the same county (although Little Utah would be within the new Atkinson County when it was

⁵⁶ Frances Vickers Wilkes, "Coffee County's Cumorah Chapel," *Douglas Enterprise*, 13 September 1989, 1-B; Craigie, "Satilla River Saints," 20-23.

formed in 1918). Coffee County also became the epicenter for the Latter-day Saints in southern Georgia; by 1930, many of the Saints across southern Georgia seemed to have some connection by blood or marriage to the area. Even Warren Preston Ward, the lawyer who had bitterly rejected the missionaries in 1899, had to admit in his 1930 *History of Coffee County* that “Coffee County has been a fruitful field for the Mormon Church,” although he heavily overestimated the number of adherents at more than 700 (the 1926 religious census forms for the two congregations put the figure closer to 202). While admitting that some residents believed that the first missionaries had been “emissaries of the devil,” Ward concluded that “The church and elders have grown more in favor with the people as the years have gone by,” a remarkably positive assessment even for 1930.⁵⁷

This assessment is even more remarkable when considering that the Saints now had successfully blended in with the broader Protestant South in terms of culture, even if their doctrines remained stubbornly outside the region’s mainstream. The years of the 1910s and 1920s, especially in the Wiregrass region, were filled with continued growth for the Latter-day Saints. For other religious minorities like Catholics and Jews, the same decades were filled with intense scrutiny and occasional persecution, especially in the Wiregrass. While much additional research remains to be done, it appears that the Saints ultimately succeeded in the South by adopting many of the folkways and worship practices of their Protestant neighbors, much as the main body of Saints in Utah embraced Americanization. Their construction of countryside churches was but the most concrete manifestation of this approach. Not every attempt was successful at first—as made clear by the attacks on buildings built in Kentucky and at Harkers

⁵⁷ Warren P. Ward, *Ward’s History of Coffee County* (Atlanta, GA: Foote and Davies, 1930), 105–106; for the 1926 religious census returns, see Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Schedule 131 (Atkinson, Georgia) and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Schedule 134 (Coffee, Georgia), in “The 1926 U.S. Census of Religious Bodies,” American Religious Ecologies, <https://religiousecologies.org/>.

Island in North Carolina—but the Latter-day Saints had become indistinguishable enough from other churches as to not provoke the kind of hatred they had previously.⁵⁸

* * *

Among the congregations that built a structure to worship in was the Seneca Branch. The approximate location for where it stood is clear enough—a section of road today is called Mormon Church Road—even if the exact address along the stretch has been lost to the present-day observer (perhaps the location is where a small dead end Mormon Street splits off from the road). Even the details of when the building was built remain murky and it would almost seem to be an amorphous legend outside the fact that other evidence survives of its existence: photographs of the congregation pictured alongside it passed among members, and a property sketch lodged in the records of the Southern States Mission. By the end of 1905, the Seneca Branch had lasted for a decade and survived the era of disruption that had undermined many other congregations in the region. Yet the branch would not be free from difficulty.⁵⁹

More or less consistent minutes of the branch had been kept since 1895. The general meeting minutes were kept up to 1901 before lapsing, but the records for the branch's associated Sunday School continued for longer. Like many other Latter-day Sunday Schools in the South, Seneca's had a unique name—Reedy Fork Sunday School—until 1905 when it was reorganized as the Sunday School of the Seneca Branch. While the record had also lapsed in 1901, the reorganization gave new impetus to keep minutes, and the Saints kept regular notes for the next

⁵⁸ One thing that H. Parker Blount argues in his “A Place Called Little Utah,” *Sunstone*, March 2004, 12, is that many southern Latter-day Saint churches in the mid-twentieth century were much like other southern country churches. See also Remillard, *Southern Civil Religions*, for discussion of the continued alienation of Jews and Catholics from the dominant Protestant culture in the South. For the Americanization process of the Latter-day Saints, see the insights in Ethan R. Yorgason, *Transformation of the Mormon Culture Region* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

⁵⁹ Ceytru B. Garner, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Seneca and Surrounding Areas,” September 2007, in possession of author; “A Tract of Land 60 feet square, Being Situate About 2 Miles South From Seneca,” in Southern States Mission Policy Book, 1908–1937, LR 8557 34, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

several years to come, at least minus a bizarre gap. While several months might lapse between meeting notes, after a meeting held on 13 October 1906, no minutes were taken until just over a year later, 20 October 1907. It is almost tempting to think that someone simply wrote the wrong year on one of the dates, given that it is just a week between a 13th and a 20th of the month. And perhaps this is the case, but there is also evidence of torn pages between the two entries. Even if the year was labeled wrong for 13 October, the page before gives a date of 30 September 1906, completely in line with previous entries.⁶⁰

The gap itself would not be worth mentioning if not for the perplexing account given in the minutes of the South Carolina Conference for the same period. The cryptic notation follows: “Elders R.R. Siepert and Jas. E. Adams finished canvassing Seneca (Oct 11th/06) a town in Oconee Co. they found the people very bitter toward the Gospel taught by them and couldnt leave a book in the town and only left 90 tracts.” Missionaries often faced bitterness in southern towns, especially those aligned with the railroad and telegraph like Seneca was, but the prospect that a long-standing congregation had fallen apart was sobering indeed. There is no indication that one of the most stalwart members of the branch, James Allen Smith, was still around by this point—the 1910 Census would have Smith and his wife Caroline living in Independence, Missouri. Perhaps in the intervening years, the branch had collapsed—yet minutes for the very same time survive for Seneca, whatever the reception the missionaries received. But the cryptic account continued: “And will say in a week after they had got through bearing there testimoneys a fire burnt half the town down.” The unnamed scribe clearly saw the fire that swept through

⁶⁰ See Seneca Branch Sunday School Minute Book, LR 8227 15 Vol. 1 (#10592), Seneca Branch Sunday School Minutes and Records, 1895–1973, LR 8227 15, Church History Library.

Seneca the morning of 17 October 1906 as God’s judgement upon the city for rejecting the message of the missionaries.⁶¹

As seen at the start of the chapter, the scribe for the South Carolina Conference was not the only one to see a particular cause behind the town’s conflagration. Just a few days before the fire broke out, reports that an African American school had been dynamited had spread across the webs of wire and landed in newspapers across the country. Few details were given outside a report that the leader of the African American college (although some said it was more of a high school) had been acting in a way that raised the ire of Seneca’s white population. After repeated calls for the schoolmaster to leave the town, the building had been dynamited. Given this context, the *Atlanta Journal* had quickly reported the subsequent fire as an incendiary act of vengeance on the part of African Americans in the town. This report was picked up and published quite widely. Few paused to consider that Atlanta newspapers had less than a month before stoked a fires of a racial massacre in the city with their own sensational and incendiary articles regarding black crime.⁶²

Yet newspapers across the country ran the story and never gave a second thought about its accuracy—including in Utah. One of the unfortunate byproducts of the Latter-day Saints moving toward American norms was that they did so during a time when American racism was at its zenith and race relations were at their nadir. A universal gospel that was preached by Joseph Smith when president of the church had become a white gospel by the time Smith’s

⁶¹ Page 13, Conference History, South Carolina Conference, LR 8468 11 Vol. 8 (#6826), South Carolina District General Minutes, 1881–1968, LR 8468 11, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

⁶² The most detailed account of the dynamiting can be found in “Seneca Negro College Dynamited,” *Keowee Courier*, 17 October 1906; a much shorter version representative of the limited reports circulating through the country can be found in “Blown Up With Dynamite,” *Salt Lake Herald*, 14 October 1906; for the initial false report, see “Seneca Burned to Ground; Negro Firebugs Blamed,” *Atlanta Journal*, 17 October 1906; also see David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

nephew, Joseph F. Smith, took the same office more than a half-century later. While a popular view holds that white southern Latter-day Saints pulled the church toward stricter white supremacy, it remains that the primary movers of the priesthood and temple ban for members of African descent were men primarily from New England and old England. Indeed, as a region, the South provided more African American converts than general church leaders that executed these policies, even if missionaries assigned to the South began expressing hesitation in preaching to black people as early as 1898.⁶³

This is not to say that white southern converts were racial egalitarians; most believed in white supremacy as much as any of their contemporaries. But as a group, southern Saints usually rejected the vilest of viewpoints that held that slavery had only freed blacks to regress toward barbarism. After all, most of the people who actively espoused these views were anti-Mormons themselves. They saw the Saints as simply plodding along a road to racial and moral degeneracy that emancipated African Americans were speeding down. Prominent religious figures, including Baptist preacher and popular novelist Thomas Dixon, Jr., freely mixed religion and racism in a way that little bothered many American Christians, and whose consequences still shadow white American Christianity today. People like Dixon went to the extreme to suggest that African Americans were not even human, but a lower species entirely—that one drop of black blood would poison the American nation and bring about the fall of the United States.⁶⁴

Latter-day Saints never went that far and generally rejected the idea of polygenesis—the idea that whites and blacks were completely separate creations with one being human, and the other not. Despite this, the Saints still accepted a great deal of racist thinking, a lot of it coming from white Protestant southerners who would have opposed the Saints themselves. Brigham

⁶³ See *Century of Black Mormons*, <https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/welcome>.

⁶⁴ Veltman, “(Re)producing White Supremacy.”

Henry Roberts, the polygamist politician whose election had been rejected by the House of Representatives, eventually turned toward scholarly pursuits to systematize and document Latter-day Saint doctrine and history. In a series of lessons he developed for the church's Seventy, he outlined a plan of study first and foremost of the church's canonized scripture: the Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. But in a curious break with his previous reliance on Latter-day Saint scripture, the eighth lesson of the fourth part, focusing on the last two canonized works, included a curious detour: "The Law of the Lord in Ancient and Modern Revelation Applied to the American Negro Race Problem." Beyond the readings to be found in the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price were readings from former Vice-President of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens, as well as William Benjamin Smith's *The Color Line*, both of which supported white supremacy.⁶⁵

Roberts published his study course in 1907, the year after the incidents in Atlanta and Seneca. The year following that, one of the earliest African Americans to have joined the church, Jane Manning James, passed away. In a meeting of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles held in August 1908, just months after James's death, the question of what place African Americans had within the church was discussed. Feeling that the matter had not been given enough clarity, the quorum passed a unanimous motion that "if negroes or people tainted with negro blood apply for baptism themselves they might be admitted to Church membership in the understanding that nothing further can be done for them." From this point forward, the church embarked on a policy that specifically discouraged seeking out converts of

⁶⁵ See B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy's Course in Theology: First Year—Outline History of the Seventy and A Survey of the Books of Holy Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907), 163–166; Roberts's use of "Confederate history" for the church's understanding of race was brought to my attention by Joanna Brooks, *Mormonism and White Supremacy: American Religion and the Problem of Racial Innocence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 68–72. While most of Brooks's analysis is well-argued, her use of some historical evidence borders on careless generalizations.

African ancestry. Any black converts would be denied admission to temples and black men ordination to the priesthood. While this stronger stance in favor of white supremacy surely eased the task of obtaining further white southern converts over the next decade, the discussion was not prompted by issues in the southern states, but consideration of African American members in Utah itself.⁶⁶

Like the many racist ideas circulating in the United States, the report that African Americans had committed arson in Seneca was false. Anyone who was present could see that the black residents of Seneca worked alongside whites to stop the inferno. The nearest operating newspaper to Seneca itself—Walhalla’s *Keowee Courier*—reported that the fire had been accidental and that rumors of African Americans vengefully torching the town were mistaken. Slowly, a different telegraph report from Columbia, South Carolina, began to spread over the webs of wire to challenge the account produced out of Atlanta. Within a day, many newspapers that had published the stories accusing black residents of Seneca as arsonists retracted their previous statements—even if they buried the retractions in subsequent pages like the *Deseret Evening News* or published it in small print like the *Minneapolis Journal*. But these two newspapers that had printed the false report on their front page *did* issue retractions—the *Salt Lake Tribune* declined to do so.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, at the Church Historian’s office in Salt Lake City, a project to document the history of the church and its progress—the “Journal History,” essentially scrapbooks of clippings from various sources—took the original but false report from the *Deseret Evening News* that reported African American vengeance. Whether historian Andrew Jenson never saw the

⁶⁶ See analysis and quote in Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, 151.

⁶⁷ “\$75,000 Fire,” in *Keowee Courier*, 17 October 1906, page 1; “Negroes Did Not Burn Town of Seneca, S.C.,” *Deseret Evening News*, 18 October 1906, column 2; “Negroes Fought Flames,” *Minneapolis Journal*, 18 October 1906, page 1, column 1

retraction, or whether he simply felt that a report of black crime was all too believable, the clipping stayed in the scrapbook. In future years, as part of the church's preservation efforts, it would be indexed, microfilmed, and eventually digitized. For decades, the Journal History was first given to visitors to the church's archives to utilize before asking for any other collections. And so it was that for decades, any person wanting to know about the Latter-day Saints in Seneca would find nothing about the *actual* congregation established there but find instead a fabricated report of black criminality. Just like the rumor and innuendo that hampered the Saints in the South, false ideas that were frequently repeated and carefully preserved would prove as troublesome within the church as without.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ See Page 2 of Journal History for 17 October 1906 (image 284 of 1906 October), Historical Department Journal History of the Church, 1830–2008, CR 100 137, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; “About the Collection,” <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/3ffad93a-5200-4a7e-9d68-2f4e42a13188/0?view=summary> (accessed: June 24, 2024).

CONCLUSION

AN AMERICAN RELIGION IN A REGION AT ODDS

Less than three months after the Atlanta Temple was dedicated in June 1983, and just when it seemed the Latter-day Saints were succeeding as never before in the South, a member of the Seneca Branch was killed. James H. Burgess was a prominent businessman in Seneca and a Boy Scout leader in the congregation; his killing shocked all who knew him. Yet Burgess did not die as a missionary like Joseph Standing, nor as a branch president like George Paul Canova. The weapon used by the killer was not a bullet, but a missile, and Burgess died less because he was a Latter-day Saint, but more because he was an American—in this case, an American aboard the ill-fated Korean Airlines Flight 007 that had strayed over Soviet territory. His death, along with his fellow passengers, sharply increased boiling tensions between the two Cold War adversaries. Within weeks, the superpowers would stumble to the brink of thermonuclear war, the closest the sides had come since the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹

Newspapers across the country covered the incident, but Burgess, like most of the passengers, received little individual attention outside of communities he was known in. The *Seneca Journal* and *Keowee Courier* addressed his death, as did a nearby Greenville newspaper. A very terse statement also appeared in the *LDS Church News* on 2 October 1983—the day before Gordon B. Hinckley would wax eloquent about the dedication of the Atlanta Temple in the church’s General Conference. The statement read, “James H. Burgess, 54, a member of the

¹ The seriousness of this confrontation has only recently been discovered with the opening of once-closed archives from both sides. See Taylor Downing, *1983: Reagan, Andropov, and a World on the Brink* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2018), 149–188; and Marc Ambinder, *The Brink: President Reagan and the Nuclear War Scare of 1983* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 167–175.

Seneca Branch, Greenville South Carolina Stake, and a Boy Scout leader, was aboard Korean Airline flight 007, shot down over the Sea of Japan Aug. 31.” Given that no other names were listed with Burgess in the *Church News*, it appears that he was the lone Latter-day Saint to die aboard the flight. That his religion in most newspapers received passing mention showed that Burgess’s faith no longer provoked the kind of consternation it had one hundred years before. Many Latter-day Saints (in the South and elsewhere) were now at least as affected by their identity as American citizens as their religion.²

In the twentieth century, the Latter-day Saints had made the incredible leap from being a supposed threat to the United States to becoming the most American of religions. The Mormon culture region of the Intermountain West had become thoroughly Americanized in its culture, economy, and politics with Americans of other faiths flocking to Utah—at least until the Great Depression and the Second World War. After these titanic crises, the percentage of Latter-day Saints in Utah began to climb upward again. By 1970, just short of three of every four Utahns was a Latter-day Saint, a percentage not seen since the early days of the railroad’s arrival in Utah. By the 1980s, while the Latter-day Saints in the West were indeed very American, they also remained a peculiar kind of citizen with a peculiar kind of culture. Debate over how American or Mormon the Latter-day Saints were in the 1980s remained an open question.³

In the 1980s the South was also shedding some of its peculiar characteristics. The previous decade, observer John Egerton had suggested that Dixie, like the Saints in previous years, was becoming Americanized. But it also seemed that the United States might also be

² “‘Angry, Angry, Angry:’ Family, Friends Eulogize Crash Victim,” *Seneca Journal and Tugaloo Tribune*, 7 September 1983, page 1; “Services for Plane Victim Were Held,” *Keowee Courier*, 7 September 1983, page 1; “Deaths,” *LDS Church News*, 2 October 1983, page 14.

³ Dean L. May, *Utah: A People’s History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 195–196; Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

moving toward the region—he called it “The Southernization of America.” With the increasing power of two parties in the South and the decline of the old New Deal Democrats, plus migration into the region with a booming southern economy, the region held greater prestige and respect than it had in several generations. Yet southern distinctiveness, despite many epitaphs written for it, failed to go away. As historian Dewey Grantham observed, even in modern America, the South nevertheless remained “a region at odds” with the rest of the nation. Rather than try to understand southerners on their own terms, many Americans continued to compare how the region seemed to deviate from national norms.⁴

Southern Latter-day Saints in the 1980s therefore faced new challenges. They followed an American religion that remained distinctive while living in a region that was distinctive in other ways. For most of the twentieth century, this peculiar people amid a peculiar people never had to worry much about their identity as southerners conflicting with their identity as Latter-day Saints. They had carved out a small space for themselves within a heavily white Protestant South but blended in better than other religious minorities like Jews and Catholics and could in many ways pass as any active group of Protestants in the region. Yet it was at the very time that the Atlanta Temple was dedicated and that southern Saints no longer had to leave the region to fully participate in their faith that the two identities came more into conflict.

Perhaps it was that an increasing number of Latter-day Saints felt they had become too American and not distinctive enough. Perhaps the increased proportion of Latter-day Saints in the church’s headquarters state had produced an echo chamber where contrasting opinions were never considered because they were never seen. Perhaps the rapid expansion of interstate

⁴ See John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: the Southernization of America* (New York: Harper’s Magazine Press, 1974); Dewey W. Grantham, *The South in Modern America: A Region At Odds* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

highways across the United States or the advent of jet travel made people fear (or desire) a coming future where everything was the same, everywhere. Perhaps the social tumult of the 1960s stirred a need for religious conservatives to proclaim a divorce from the wider culture of the country. Whatever the case was, starting in the 1960s and accelerating through the 1970s and 1980s, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints embarked on a program to centralize, formalize, and standardize both its buildings and worship across the global church.

This retrenchment, often called “correlation,” had peculiar impacts across the South. One Latter-day Saint who had grown up with the Little Utah church at Axson, Atkinson County (formerly McDonald’s Mill in Coffee County), H. Parker Blount, felt that the changes removed all soul from the church. “In our little congregation, our allegiance and loyalty was to the LDS Church, but we could no more escape being Southerners than the coastal rivers can escape the rise and fall of the tides,” Blount recounted. “I didn’t realize that by choosing to be Mormon, we would, in time, have our indigenous Southern culture supplanted by a stronger Utah Mormon culture.” Arguing that the fate of “Little Utah is also the story of the loss of place in the modern LDS Church,” Blount intoned that the problem of correlation was that even small congregations like the one in Atkinson County faced heavier demands “because the prescribed Church jobs remain constant regardless of the numbers available to fill them.” From his perspective, a distant Salt Lake City was now dictating ways to practice religion that made little sense on the ground in the South. Churches in the South were rooted in place; the new centralization of the church was anything but: “leaders’ work and the kinds of direction they give generally follow the guidelines of a framework generated elsewhere.”⁵

⁵ H. Parker Blount, “A Place Called Little Utah,” *Sunstone*, March 2004, 12–18, quotes on pages 12, 13, and 16.

Perhaps fearing that his critiques would be thought of as going too far, Blount quickly demurred, “None of us would accuse the Church leaders of establishing such a strong, centralized Church government for economic gain, or even for personal gratification. But we might rightly ask how it has occurred. Or why. It is fair to ask what was gained.” Blount then gave two possibilities: the first, “the Lord revealed it to the prophet.” He quickly dismissed that idea, saying that “if I thought that, I would not be writing this essay.” Instead, Blount believed, the true reason for this centralization was that “most General Authorities come from corporate or management backgrounds.” Such corporate spirit was going to be the end of spirituality in the new order; new buildings built by the church had “no windows” and were “lighted artificially.” The church as an institution had traded a humble building built by the local Saints for a soulless, cookie cutter monstrosity: “The LDS congregation moved to a new standard-issue building in town. There they do all they can to accomplish the tasks that others set for them. The meeting place in town is not called Little Utah, but the Pearson Ward.” But wrapping up his critique of a centralizing Utah church, Blount opined, “Little Utah Church was never a little Utah; however, the church in town is more Utah in culture than Southern, drawl aside, and could easily be known as a little Utah, as could the other wards of the stake.”⁶

There was substance to Blount’s claims. As mentioned at the start, stakehood marked a time where the Latter-day Saints had a new permanence in a place, a transition where local Saints were trusted enough to take care of day-to-day affairs. The first stakes had come to the South starting in 1947—but by that year, and especially in the decades to come, so were Utahns and other Americans. The *LDS Church News* frequently published biographies of the three men that made up stake presidencies—a president and two counselors. Based on the inconsistently

⁶ Blount, “Place Called Little Utah,” 17, 18.

given biographies between 1947 and 1977, out of sixty-six stake presidencies where the origins of the men can be identified, the South had a plurality over Utah: about 39 percent of the men were from states in the South, versus the 28 percent who came from Utah. If other states of the Mormon Culture Region of the Intermountain West were included, however, western Latter-day Saints came out on top with a 42 percent plurality.⁷

Indeed, during the 1980s, the church made substantial efforts to make as many wards in the region as possible, frequently shutting down rural congregations and combining them into geographically massive wards. Saints that had worshipped at Axson, as mentioned above, were moved to Pearson around 1980. The important Empire Branch in central Georgia was closed; the membership was moved to the nearby county seat of Cochran with a new building. The longstanding branch in Quitman, Georgia, was closed when a new building opened in Valdosta. The Gibson Branch in Glascock County, Georgia—site of Latter-day Saint success in the 1880s and again in the early twentieth century—was one of the original branches of the Atlanta Stake created in 1957. It lasted in the Macon Stake as late as 1988, but shortly after being placed into the new Augusta Stake, was discontinued, merged with a ward at the outskirts of Augusta. In eastern South Carolina, three historic branches were merged into a new, slightly central building at Cheraw. There are likely other examples as well.⁸

In the meantime, southerners did collect personal stories and write congregational histories, but a centralized church kept the focus on the early years of the church's history temporally and near the core areas of the church spatially. When it came to trying to figure out the larger context of the church in the South, it was largely subsumed in discussing the missionary experience. Yet it was hardly noted when missionaries from the region were called to

⁷ Based on a survey of Stake Presidency biographies found in the *LDS Church News*, 1947–1977.

⁸ The examples above are ones I am aware of personally, although I am still pinning down the closure dates.

be missionaries in the region since missionary calls usually gave just the place the missionary was called from—most often in the West.

In the meantime, a new generation of southern Saints, born in a time when the church was moving away from its rural roots and toward a more centralized, Utah-based religion, increasingly dealt with hostility from their evangelical southern neighbors. With the Saints' obvious success in the region, the retrenchment toward western norms simply heightened the differences between southern Latter-day Saints and their Protestant neighbors. In some ways, the late twentieth century looked like the nineteenth but largely divorced from violent acts.

The genesis of the Latter-day Saints in the American South was obscured in the nineteenth century. The earliest missionaries of the church generally avoided working in the area when possible, while most of the converting of southerners took place outside the region. It generally fell on southerners to take the gospel of the Saints to the deeper, off beaten South. Southerners did the best work in the antebellum and the best work during Reconstruction, even if later historians have disdained their efforts. The converts made by subsequent western missionaries largely came from rural districts of the region where anti-Mormon propaganda was less prominent, but violence always a possibility if the church seemed to challenge society too quickly. When southern society entered a second time of turbulence in the 1890s, however, the Saints were able to make an entry into the region, but this window of opportunity was cut short when southern society ossified after a brief moment of possibility. Only by assimilating to national norms and blending in with the larger white culture of the South were the Saints able to establish more congregations in the region.

Yet the Saints eventually broke away from the steepest cost of assimilation—that of relegating fellow-citizens into second-class servitude. This burden did not come exclusively from

the South, even if some justifications for it were forged there. But the key thing always was that southern individuals—black, white, or other—were those who decided whether to accept or reject the Saints’ message, scriptures, and baptism. While southern Saints might be impacted by decisions made by others in faraway places, they were the ones who had to judge whether the message was worth changing their life for.

James Allen Smith was one who judged the message of the missionaries to be worth everything. He gave up employment, homes, and years of his life in devotion to a cause he believed had changed him for the better. At the age of sixty-two, Smith was called yet again to serve as a missionary in the Southern States Mission. He accordingly reported once more for missionary service. Records are sparse on what he did on this mission, but it appears he died while serving; a death certificate records his passing near Gaffney, South Carolina on 2 October 1917. Smith could not escape anti-Mormonism in death; the registrar labeled his marital status as “divorced” even though his wife, Hannah, would call herself James’s widow for the rest of her life. The death certificate also listed Smith’s burial as a “Black Grave Yard,” despite his race being listed as white. Given the context of a reawakened Ku Klux Klan and heightened racism across the country, this was likely meant as a final insult to the Latter-day Saint missionary. Yet as Smith often said, he had given up his old life in the Klan a long time ago.⁹

If the message was powerful enough to move a Klansman to set aside his robes and hate, then perhaps that, rather than numbers alone, should indicate the Saints succeeded in the South.

⁹ Entry 827, James Allen Smith, page 163 (image 169) of Book D, 1906 October 23–1919 July 15, in Missionary Department Missionary Registers, 1860–1959, CR 301 22, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; South Carolina Death Certificate, Cherokee County, Gaffney City, James A. Smith, date of death 2 October 1917, certificate dated 5 October 1917; obituary for Hannah C. Smith, *Salt Lake Telegram*, 22 July 1935, page 22.

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APPENDIX A

LATTER-DAY SAINT MEMBERSHIP FIGURES FOR THE SOUTHERN STATES

Table A.1: Latter-day Saint Membership in Southern States, 1880–1900¹

Area	1880	1885	1890	1895	1900
Alabama		92	156	496	2,009
Arkansas		12	–	–	–
Florida		–	–	56	1,392
Georgia		117	164	[~120]	309
Kentucky		46	188	113	1,356
Louisiana		–	–	–	[~150]
Mississippi		96	112	350	1,121
North Carolina		170	97	179	768
South Carolina		136	193	334	1,590
Tennessee		221	134	690	1,048
Virginia		177	127	336	1,238
West Virginia		–	59	210	[~500]
Total	410	1,093	~1,230	~2,884	~11,481

¹ For 1880, see “Conference Reports Since Opening of Mission, 1880–1893,” in “J. Golden Kimball Letters, Jan. 1894,” Folder 19, Box 72, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Ms 36, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah; for 1885, see Report of the Southern States Mission for the Six Months Ending 31 August 1885, in Manuscript History of the Southern States Mission, LR 8557 2, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; for 1890, see Report of Southern States Mission, Statistics of Religious Bodies, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, Items 9–12, CR 4 98, CHL; for 1895, see Statistical Report of the Southern States Mission, The Year Ending December 31, 1895, signed by Elias S. Kimball, Georgia estimated to be a fifth less than 1894, in LR 8557 2, CHL; for 1900, see Statistical Report of the Southern States Mission for the year ending 1900 Dec 31st, LR 8557 2; West Virginia estimate from Statistical Report of the Eastern States Mission, 31 December 1899, in Eastern States Mission Manuscript History, LR 2475 2.

Table A.2: Latter-day Saint Membership in Southern States, 1906–1936²

Area	1906	1916	1926	1930	1936
Alabama	1,052	2,137	1,809	2,516	570
Arkansas	248	454	389	944	179
Florida	1,384	2,608	2,554	3,164	2,100
Georgia	386	2,615	3,335	4,311	1,819
Kentucky	1,150	1,553	2,074	2,879	949
Louisiana	455	968	1,127	1,538	243
Mississippi	1,018	1,622	1,508	2,170	1,272
North Carolina	976	2,802	1,983	2,725	1,864
South Carolina	1,101	2,509	3,090	3,343	2,088
Tennessee	841	1,572	2,187	2,832	1,177
Virginia	988	1,540	1,760	2,267	1,428
West Virginia	785	1,732	1,398	2,285	1,170
Total	10,384	22,112	23,214	30,974	14,859

² For 1906–1926, see Table 4.—Number and Membership of Churches, 1906 to 1926...by States: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in U.S. Census Bureau, *Religious Bodies: 1926, Volume II—Separate Denominations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1929), 671; for 1930, see Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1941), 7, 30–31, 130, 135, 204, 262–263, 279–280, 397–398, 450, 498, 516, 586, 812, 815, 822, 917, 943–944; for 1936, see Table 4.—Number and Membership of Churches, 1906 to 1936...by States (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), in U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Religious Bodies 1936, Bulletin No. 16: Latter-day Saints—Statistics, Denominational History, Doctrine, and Organization* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), 7.

Table A.3: Latter-day Saint Membership in the Southern States, 1970–1983³

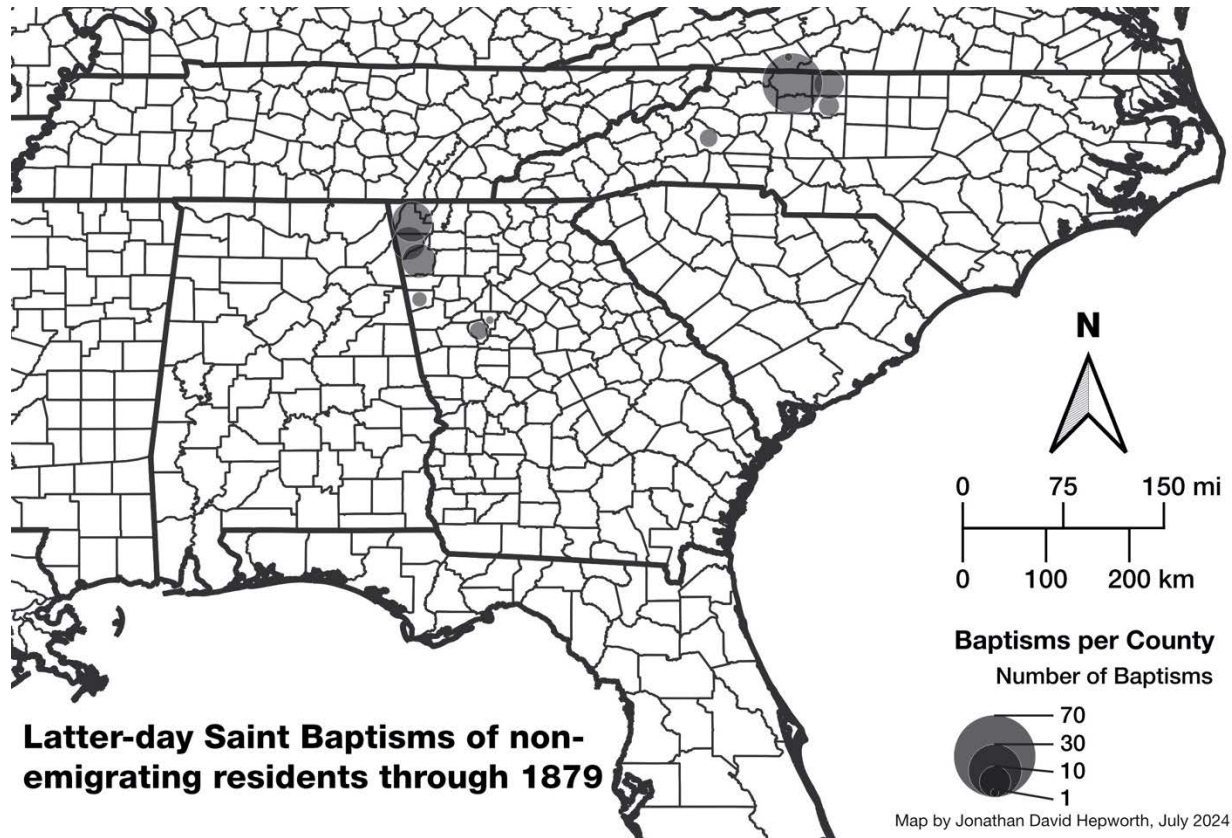
Area	1970	1975	1978	1980	1983
Alabama	7,540	8,680	10,100	11,163	12,063
Arkansas	4,325	5,691	7,111	7,541	8,408
Florida	22,672	29,927	33,630	38,411	43,672
Georgia	13,457	15,410	19,239	20,931	23,087
Kentucky	8,474	9,551	11,059	11,356	12,281
Louisiana	8,162	9,099	11,103	12,530	14,035
Mississippi	6,527	6,919	7,591	8,305	8,899
North Carolina	15,753	17,782	20,414	22,725	26,171
South Carolina	9,540	11,403	11,975	13,137	14,147
Tennessee	8,163	9,792	10,811	11,715	13,143
Virginia	19,326	22,225	25,156	27,485	31,357
West Virginia	8,633	8,883	8,982	8,394	8,304
Total	132,572	155,362	177,171	193,693	215,567

³ 1970 and 1980 figures come from Deseret News, *1983 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1982), 264–265; 1975 figures come from Deseret News, *1977 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1976), 209–210; 1978 figures come from Deseret News, *1980 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1979), 247–248; 1983 figures come from Deseret News, *1985 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1984), 251–253.

APPENDIX B

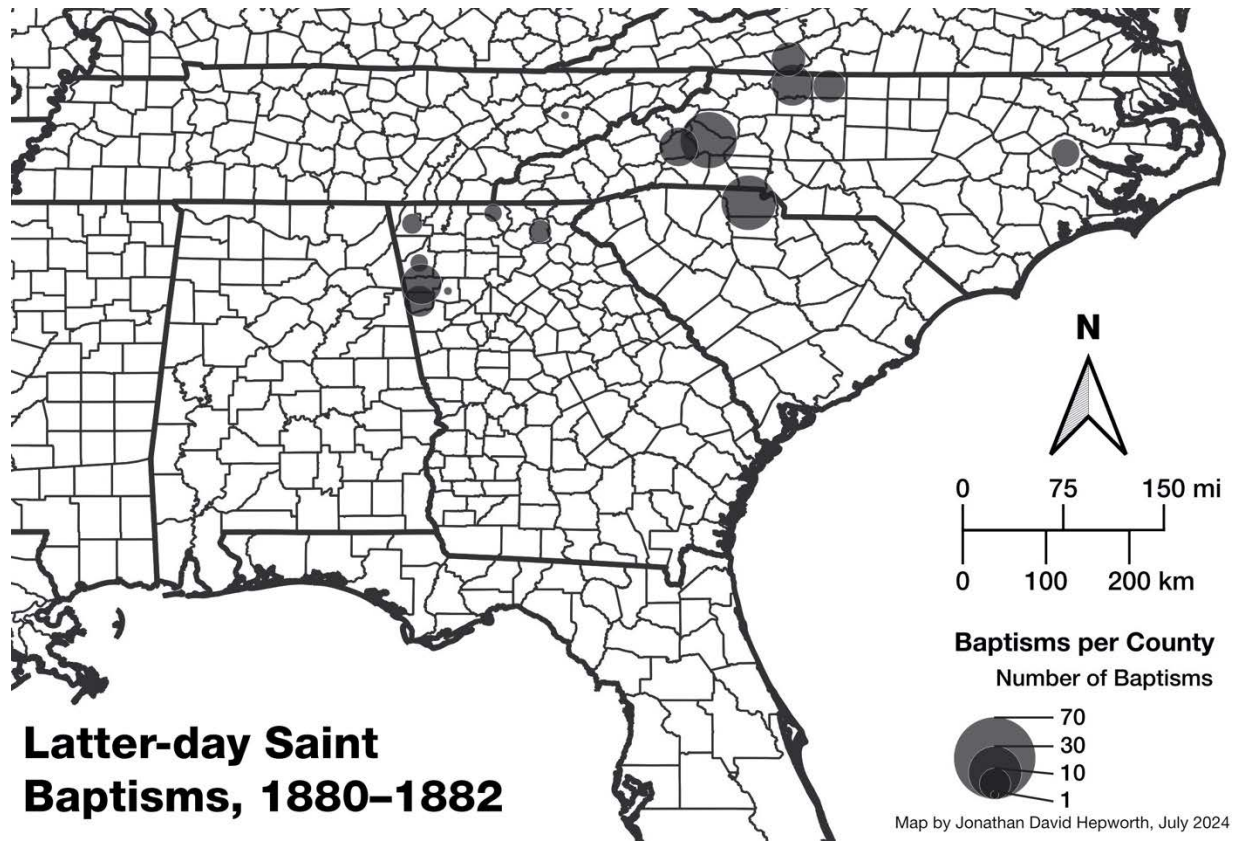
MAPS OF LATTER-DAY SAINT GROWTH IN SELECTED STATES

Map B.1 Latter-day Saint Baptisms in Georgia and North Carolina, 1849–1879



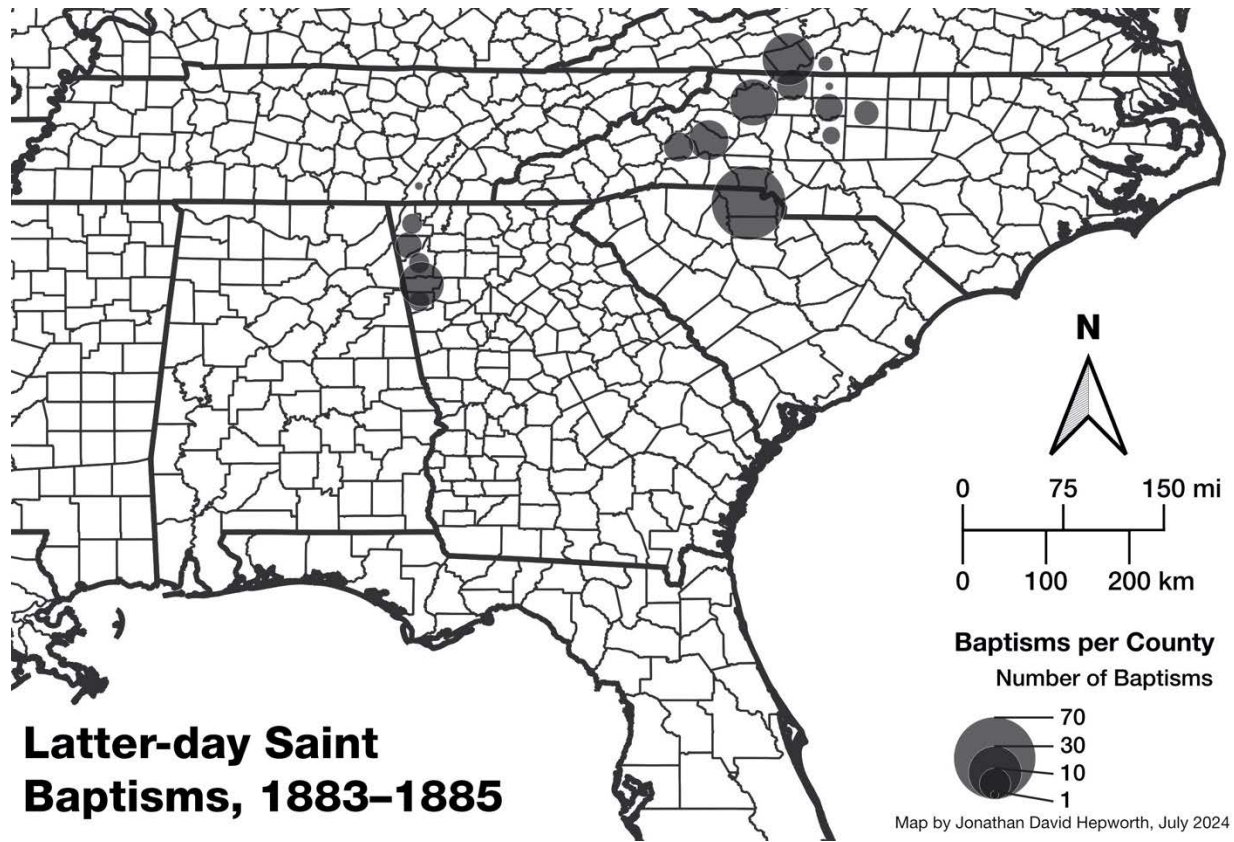
This map is based on baptismal mentions from the Georgia and North Carolina Conferences. It is certain that it does not include every baptism from about 1847 to 1879 given that members that emigrated to the Intermountain West are not included (they would be listed in the records of whatever congregation they were at in the West in the 1880s. Even so, this still gives some sense of centers of Latter-day Saint strength at the end of the Reconstruction era.

Map B.2 Latter-day Saint Baptisms in Selected Conferences, 1880–1882



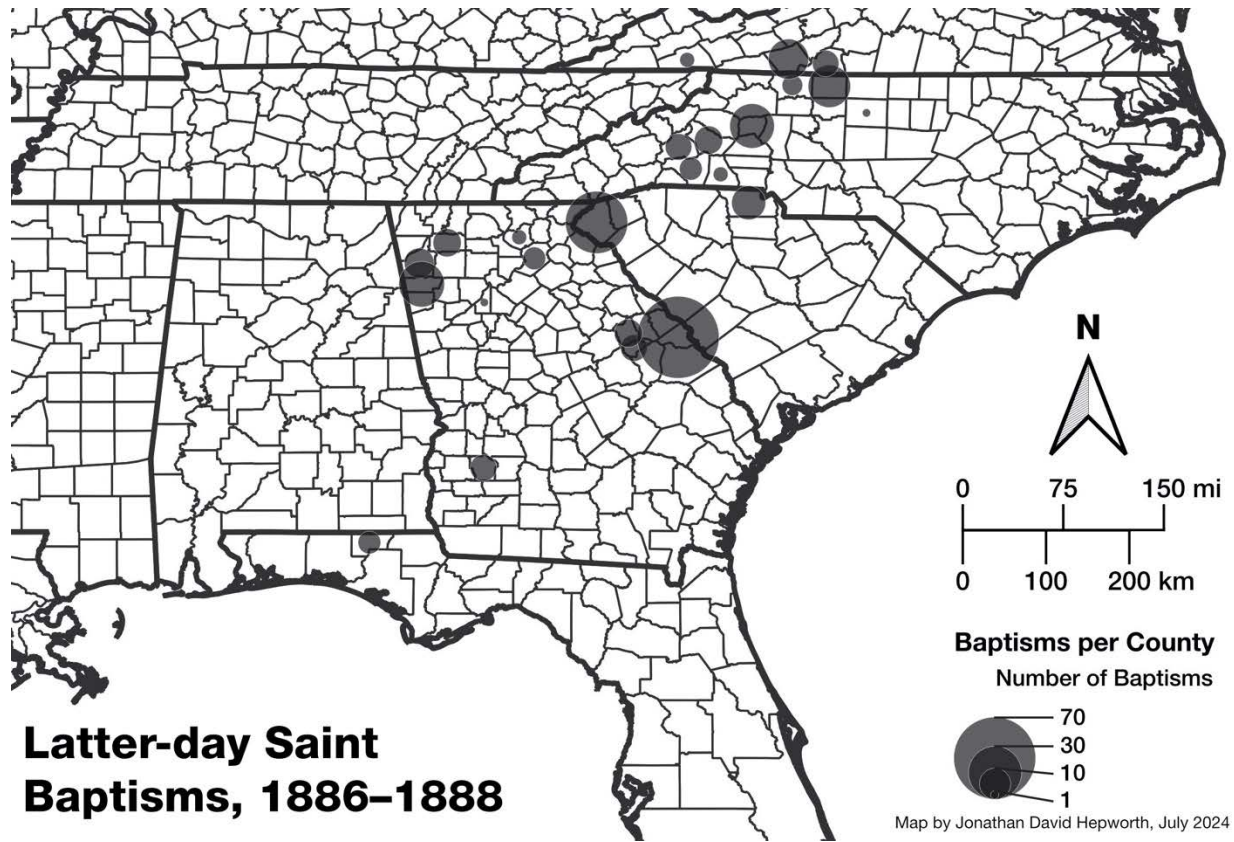
This map is based on baptisms in the Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina conferences across 1880, 1881, and 1882. Note the large numbers in Burke County, North Carolina and York County, South Carolina, while the church remained growing in northwestern Georgia and the area of Surry County, North Carolina—places that had success during Reconstruction. The growth in South Carolina is quite substantial given that missionaries first entered the state at the end of 1881 and all of the baptisms in York County were in 1882.

Map B.3 Latter-day Saint Baptisms in Selected Conferences, 1883–1885



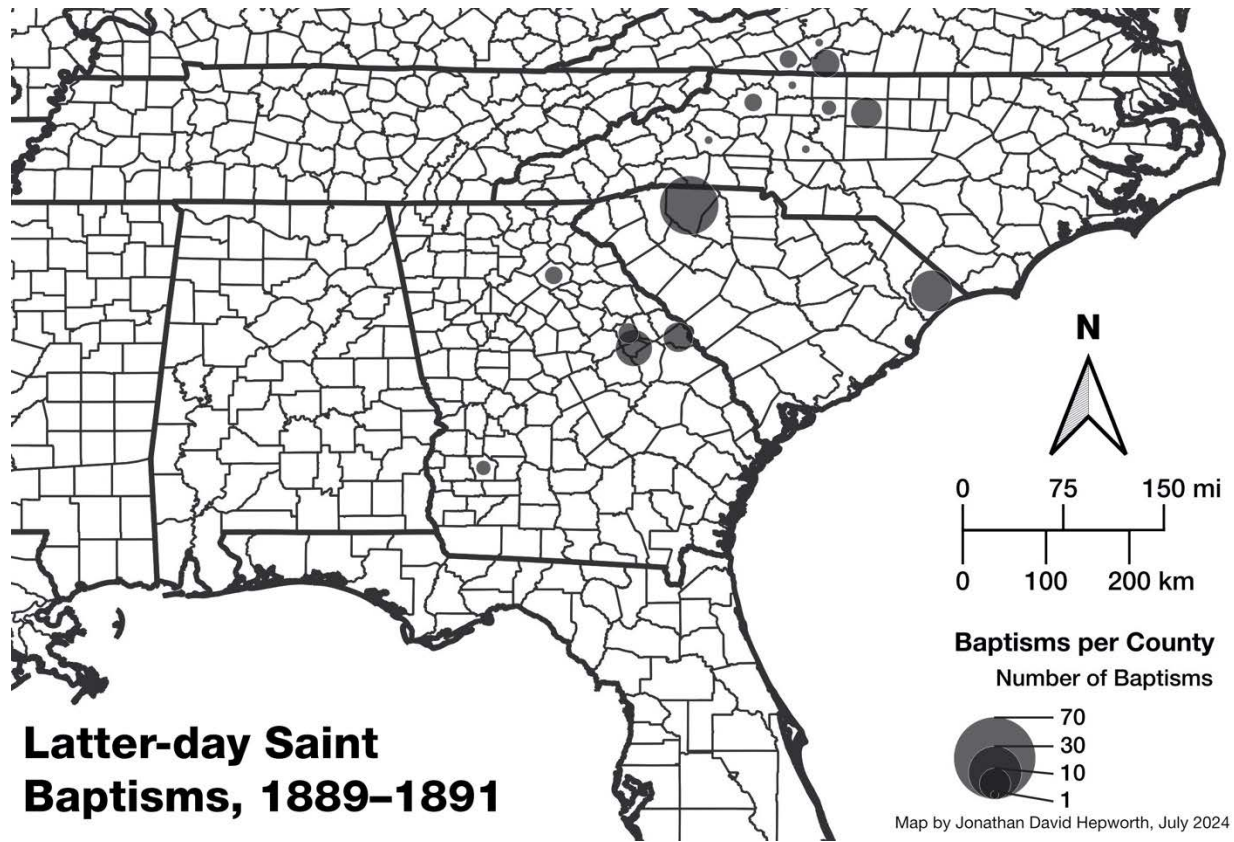
Baptisms in the Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina conferences show little change across 1883, 1884, and 1885 from the previous map. The 58 baptisms in York County, South Carolina, over these three years made it the largest single county in these three states for this era, and included the baptisms of James Allen Smith and family as well as members of the Catawba Nation. The Saints still made a strong showing along the North Carolina-Virginia border, as well as the area of northwestern Georgia.

Map B.4 Latter-day Saint Baptisms in Selected Conferences, 1886–1888



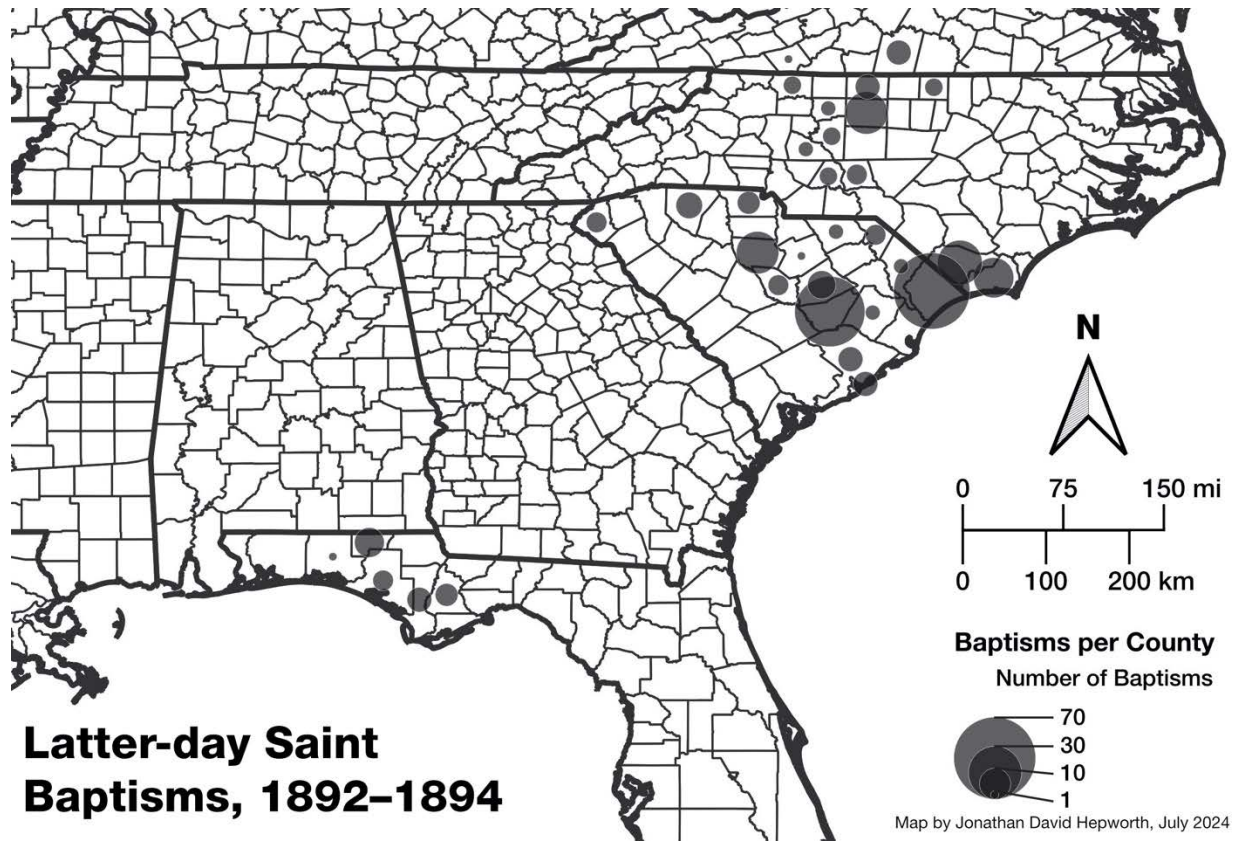
Baptisms for Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas showed new patterns emerging from 1886 to 1888. Richmond County, home of Augusta, Georgia, saw many in the rural districts being baptized in this three-year period—70. Oconee County in South Carolina also proved to be a very fruitful field at the same time with 41 baptisms. The beginnings of work in northwestern Florida can also be seen here, with additional success in the old fields of northwestern Georgia, York County, South Carolina, and the North Carolina-Virginia border.

Map B.5 Latter-day Saint Baptisms in Selected Conferences, 1889–1891



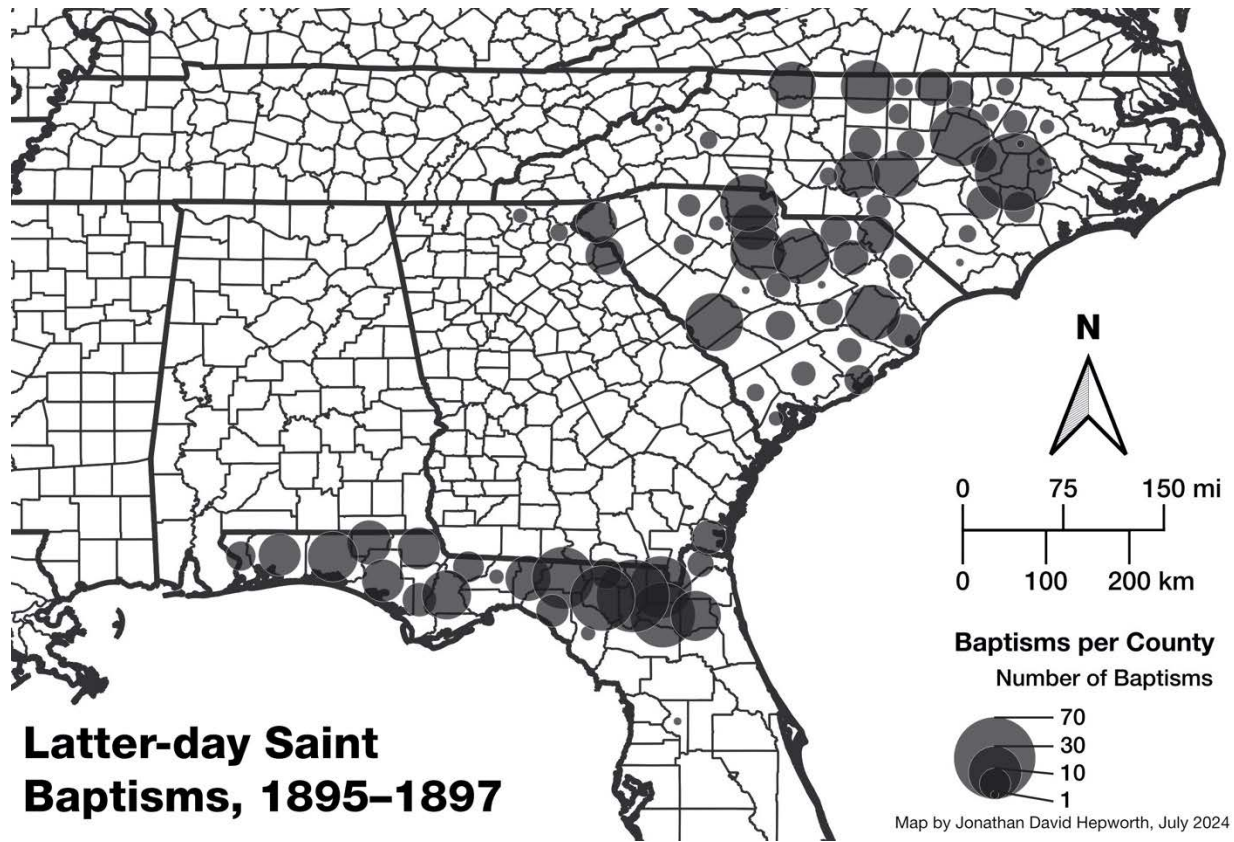
The three years represented by this map mark the nadir of Latter-day fortunes in the region after the Civil War. The old field along the North Carolina-Virginia border had thin success, while the Saints largely abandoned northwestern Georgia at this point. Georgia was closed to active missionary work in 1890, but not before fourteen people were baptized in Glascock County in the Augusta hinterlands, as well as seven in Richmond County itself. Spartanburg County in South Carolina saw as many as 37 baptisms during this time, largely migrants from York County. The beginning of substantial success in Horry County at the eastern end of South Carolina is captured here with eighteen baptisms in 1891 alone.

Map B.6 Latter-day Saint Baptisms in Selected Conferences, 1892–1894



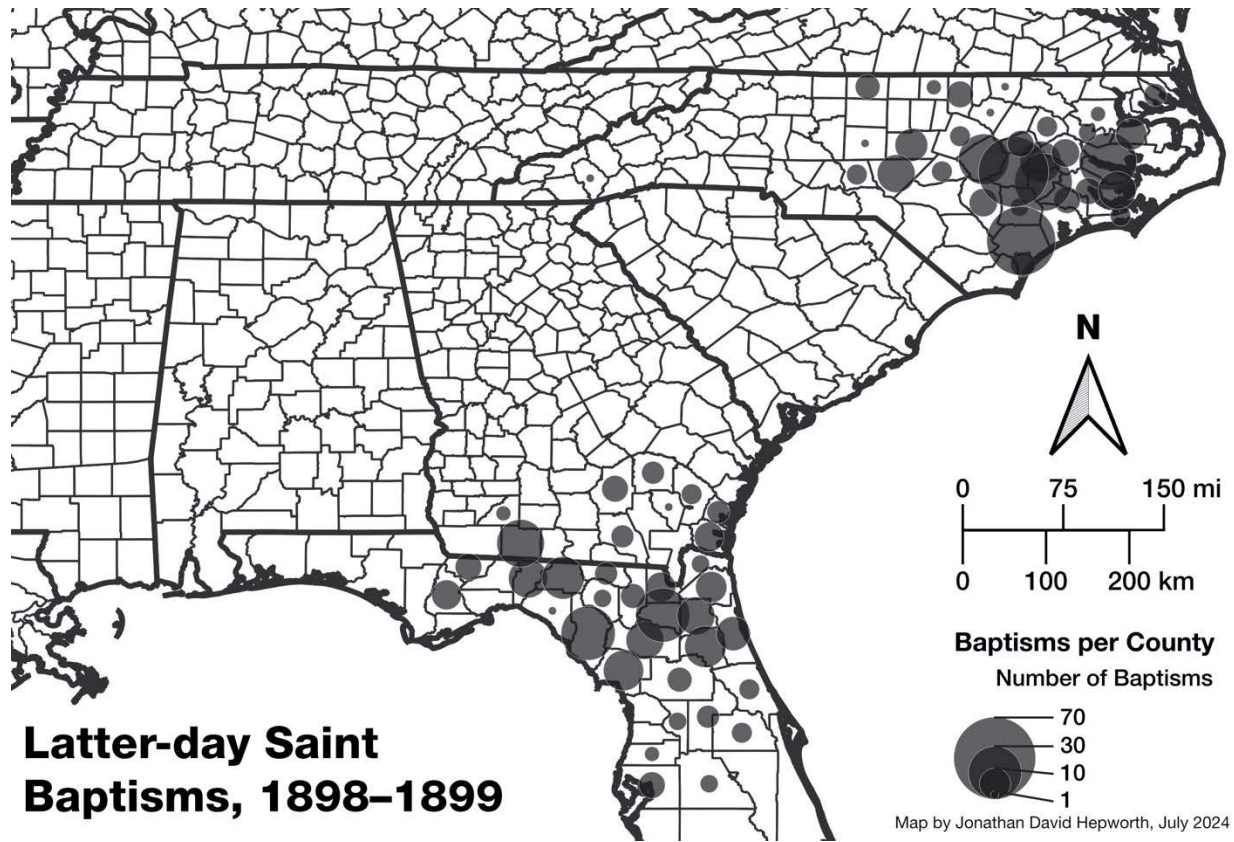
Missionaries shifted their focus to the North Carolina Piedmont and the eastern counties of South Carolina during the mission presidency of J. Golden Kimball. Horry (with 61) and Clarendon (with 52) counties in South Carolina stand out as areas of largest success at this time. Coastal North Carolina counties near South Carolina and Guilford County in the Piedmont mark the greatest successes there, while a cluster of baptisms can be seen in northwestern Florida, at this point included in the Alabama Conference. Four baptisms mark the renewal of work in Oconee County, South Carolina, with the return of James Allen Smith from Utah.

Map B.7 Latter-day Saint Baptisms in Selected Conferences, 1895–1897



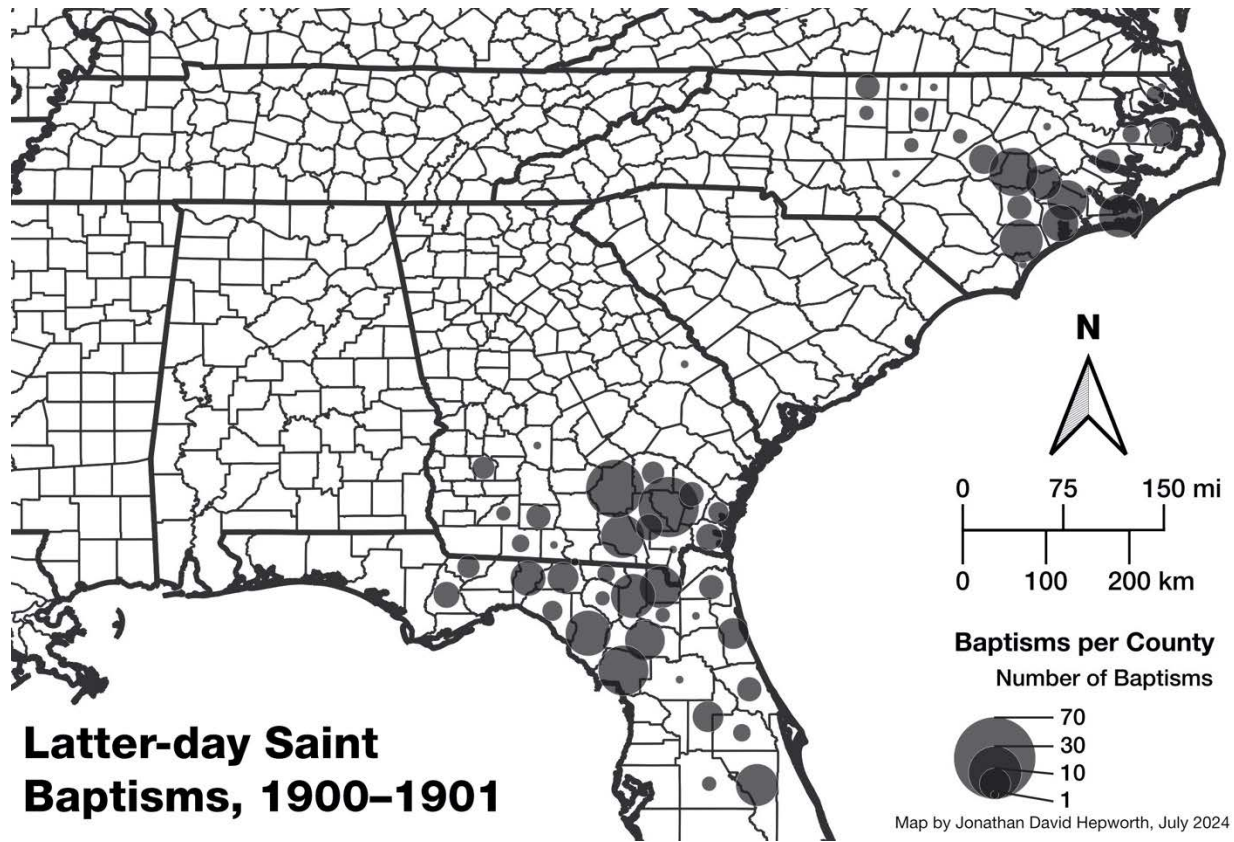
The baptisms in Florida and the Carolinas for this three year span show an explosion of activity. The newly-opened Florida Conference had tremendous success, especially in the counties bordering Georgia along the eastern panhandle. The Midlands of South Carolina as well as the Piedmont and eastern counties of North Carolina also saw substantial success. Georgia remained closed as a field, but given entries into Camden (next to Florida) and Union, Habersham, and Hart counties (by South Carolina), new mission president Elias S. Kimball resolved to reopen the state in 1898. Meanwhile, Oconee County in South Carolina had eighteen additional baptisms as well as the establishment of a branch and Sunday School at Seneca, once a virulent den of anti-Mormon attitudes.

Map B.8 Latter-day Saint Baptisms in Selected Conferences, 1898–1899



Consistent records for South Carolina drop off in early 1898, so this map shows just the success of the Florida and North Carolina Conferences, as well as covering just two years. Despite the shortened time, coastal North Carolina had tremendous success, as well as a notable expansion of Florida missionaries into southern Georgia. Coffee County, site of two major branches in the coming years, had seven baptisms in 1899.

Map B.9 Latter-day Saint Baptisms in Selected Conferences, 1900–1901



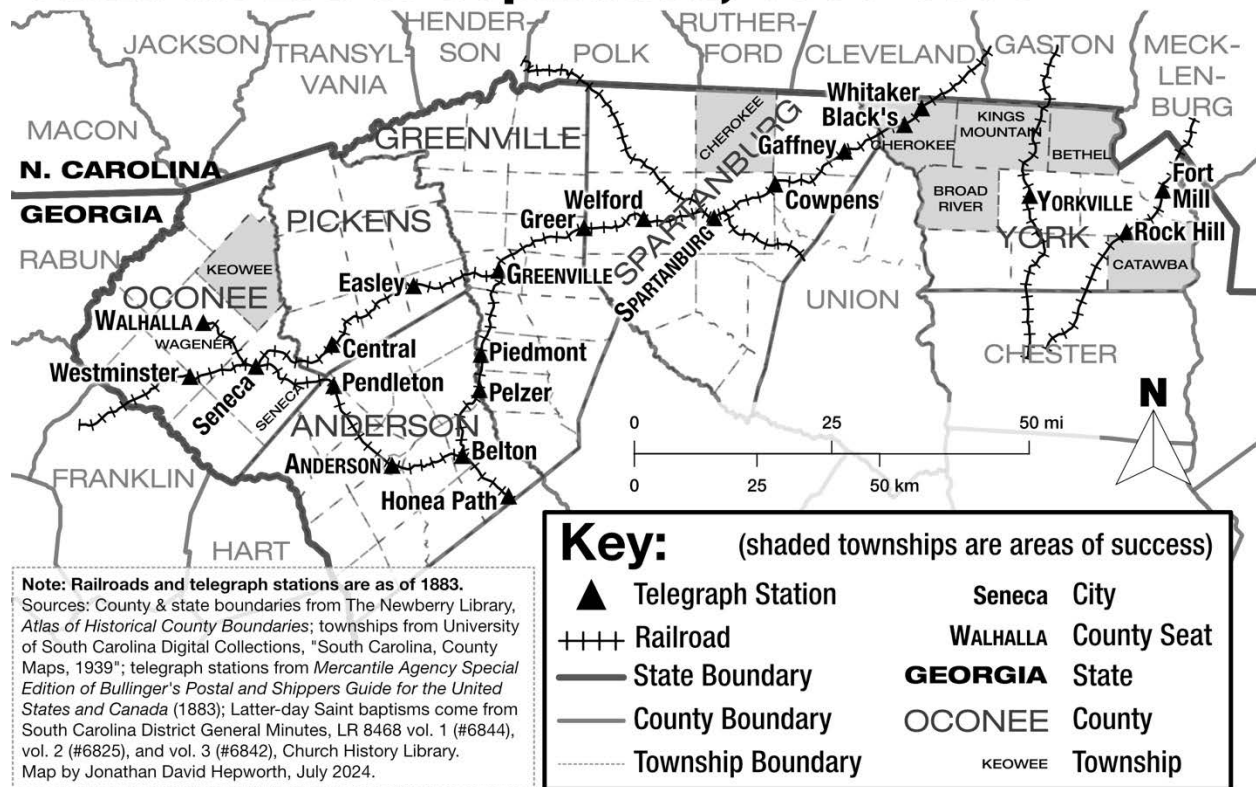
Amid increased opposition due to unfavorable press with polygamy and a decrease in political turmoil, anti-Mormon conservatives blunted the growth of the Saints for a time, especially slowing the pace of baptisms in eastern North Carolina and Florida. Southeastern Georgia, however, and Coffee County, especially, saw tremendous growth with 36 baptisms in these two years. Nearby Pierce County had slightly more—39—while Clinch County to the immediate south had 20. In 1901, the Southern States Mission began using a different method of tracking baptisms and will require additional research to plot the growth for subsequent years.

APPENDIX C

MAP OF RURAL SUCCESS OUTSIDE WEBS OF RAIL AND WIRE

Map C.1 The Latter-day Saints in the South Carolina Upstate

Latter-day Saint Success in South Carolina Amid an Era of Separation, 1881–1890



Note that the areas of most substantial Latter-day Saint success were in townships largely outside of the immediate range of telegraph stations (pictured here as they existed in 1883).