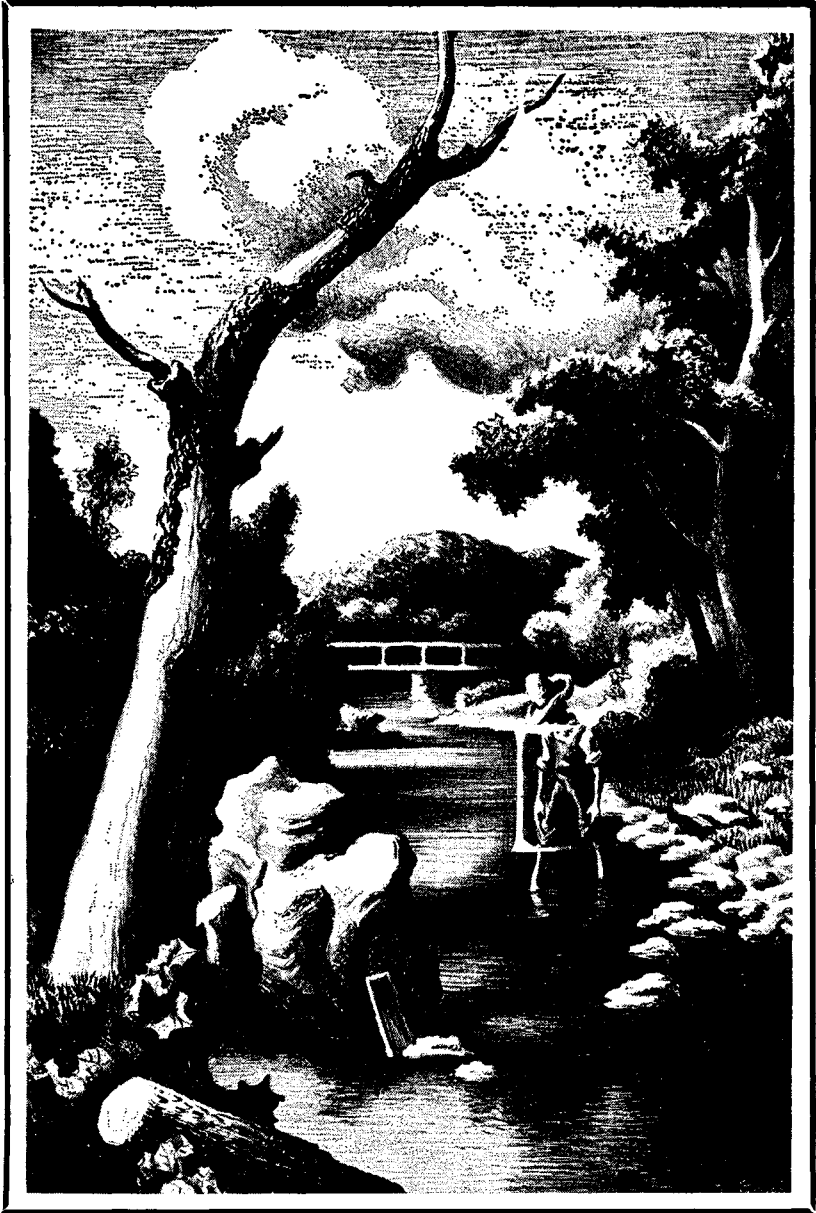


MISSOURI

Historical Review



The State Historical Society
of Missouri

COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW

*Published Quarterly
by*

**THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF MISSOURI
COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**

RICHARD S. BROWNLEE
EDITOR

DOROTHY CALDWELL
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

JAMES W. GOODRICH
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW is owned by the State Historical Society of Missouri and is published quarterly at 201 South Eighth Street, Columbia, Missouri 65201. Send communications, business and editorial correspondence and change of address to The State Historical Society of Missouri, corner of Hitt and Lowry Streets, Columbia, Missouri 65201. Second class postage is paid at Columbia, Missouri.

The REVIEW is sent free to all members of The State Historical Society of Missouri. Membership dues in the Society are \$2.00 a year or \$40 for an individual life membership. The Society assumes responsibility for statements made by contributors to the magazine.

VOLUME LXV
NUMBER 3
APRIL, 1971



Jackson County in Early Mormon Descriptions

BY RICHARD LLOYD ANDERSON*

Latter-day Saints (LDS) contributed to pioneer history in ten states, including Missouri. This presents a rich set of sources to the historians of these regions. To some extent Missouri historians have utilized the official LDS history, since its basic formulation is "documentary," not merely interpretive.¹ However, relatively unused sources are numerous: minute books, official and private

* Richard L. Anderson is professor of History and Religion, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Dr. Anderson holds the A.B. and M.A. degrees from Brigham Young University, a J.D. from Harvard University and a Ph.D. in Ancient History from the University of California, Berkeley.

¹ In dictating his history, Joseph Smith (and secretaries) included letters and statements pertinent to Mormon history from both members and non-members of the Church. It is therefore rather widely nicknamed "Documentary History of the Church," though its proper citation is Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. The history of the early Missouri period was first published in 1842 in the church periodical *Times and Seasons* but is found more conveniently in the above work, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, 1902).

correspondence, little-known publications (newspapers and pamphlets) and scores of important private journals. Since most of the prominent leaders and the great majority of members from the Missouri period emigrated westward, LDS collections in Utah should not be overlooked as a significant resource for early Missouri history.² From a study of those sources it is evident that Mormon history transcends Mormonism. Early Latter-day Saints were convinced of the importance of their activity; therefore a number became chroniclers and historians, and some of them very good ones.

The travel narrative remains one of the most readable forms of history, and often has descriptions of the countryside and insights into social history taken for granted by native writers.³ Here early Latter-day Saint editors, letter writers and diarists have an interesting advantage. The traveller in early Northwest Missouri was frequently oblivious to the area in his haste to get at the ultimate attraction of far places and Indian ways. But early Mormons focused on Missouri as their land of promise, and they described the farther Far West incidental to their settlement of Missouri soil. One may vividly see the countryside (and to some extent the people) of pioneer Jackson County through their contemporary eyes. The quantity of these LDS "travel descriptions" is noteworthy, and the leading ones now known will be presented in an approximate chronological order. After arrival, many LDS visitors became residents, and their contemporary self-portraits will be included because of their own role in early Jackson County.

The most concise statement of why the Latter-day Saints came to Jackson County was given by Joseph Smith in recalling the events of early 1831:

Having received, by an heavenly vision, a commandment, in June following, to take my journey to the western boundaries of the State of Missouri, and there designate

² An example of the use of published LDS materials is the series of articles in *MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW* by Professor Warren Jennings on the Mormon persecutions, appearing in Vols. LXI, LXII and LXIV. New avenues to utilizing complex sources are developing, with the careful reclassification of manuscripts at the LDS Historian's Office, the near-publication of a union list of all printed materials on Mormonism (a cooperative project edited by Chad Flake, Brigham Young University Special Collections Librarian), and development of a union list of all known Mormon journals (by University of Utah Professor Davis Bitton).

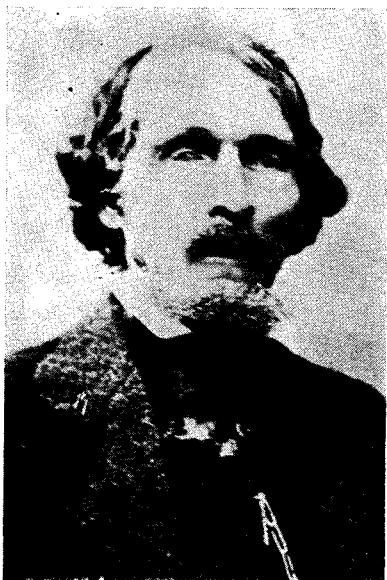
³ See the perceptive preface to T. D. Seymour Bassett, *Outsiders Inside Vermont* (Brattleboro, Vt., 1967), vii: "Some things are so familiar to the resident they 'go without saying.' Some things can't be seen except against a background of living in another part of the world."

the very spot which was to be the central spot, for the commencement of the gathering together of those who embrace the fulness of the everlasting gospel—I accordingly undertook the journey with certain ones of my brethren, and after a long and tedious journey, suffering many privations and hardships, I arrived in Jackson County, Missouri; and after viewing the country, seeking diligently at the hand of God, he manifested himself unto me, and designated to me and others, the very spot upon which he designed to commence the work of the gathering, and the upbuilding of an holy city, which should be called Zion: Zion because it is to be a place of righteousness, and all who build thereon, are to worship the true and living God—and all believe in one doctrine, even the doctrine of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.⁴

The vigor of the new faith was evident in this frontier thrust. In late 1830 the restored Church of Christ consisted of a handful of families in western New York who believed in the revelations appointing Joseph Smith a modern prophet. That fall Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt and three others began a mission to bring their restored Christianity and the Book of Mormon to Indian tribes resettled west of Jackson County. Rebuffed in this goal, their disappointment was intensified by the lack of converts at Independence and Lexington. The winter had been rigorous, their Missouri success indifferent, and their final reports anything but enthusiastic. In the meantime, Joseph Smith followed in the wake of their earlier impact near Cleveland, Ohio, where some 100 converts left in late 1830 had expanded to some 1,000 by mid-1831. Yet from Kirtland, Ohio, the Mormon leader reiterated that the center of the Church was to be in “land of Missouri”, and commissioned some thirty missionaries to preach on the way and to meet him in Jackson County.⁵ His route (as he described it) was from Cleveland to Cincinnati “by waggon, canal boats, and stages,” then by steamboat to Louisville and St. Louis.

⁴ *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, 1 (September, 18.), 179. For the sake of clarity, minor changes in punctuation have been made in this quote and others in the article, and minor changes in capitalization. Spelling follows the original documents.

⁵ The place of gathering was stressed in the early revelations of 1830. The *Book of Commandments*, published in 1833 in “Zion,” actually Independence, contains these details: 1) A September 1830 revelation to Oliver Cowdery, calling him to preach to the Indian peoples (called “Lamanites” in the Book of Mormon), and indicating generally that “the city shall be built. . . on the borders by the Lamanites” (*B. of C.*, section [chapter] 30: verses 8-9). 2) A series of revelations in June 1831 commanding the missionary rendezvous in Missouri and promising to make known “the land of your inheritance” to them while in Jackson County (*B. of C.*, 34:2-4).



William Wines Phelps
1792-1872

Church of Jesus Christ of LDS

At St. Louis, myself, brother Harris, Phelps, Partridge, and Coe went on foot by land, to Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, where we arrived about the middle of July—and the residue of the company came by water a few days after.⁶

The travel narrative of his companion Phelps has recently been discovered, and in this first reprinting it appears without omissions largely because of its historical significance in describing the exact route of one of Smith's most important journeys. William W. Phelps had been only recently converted, influenced by conversations with the Book of Mormon witness Martin Harris (who accompanied the leaders' group to Missouri). An educated man of almost 40, Phelps sacrificed his editorship of the *Ontario Phoenix*, an anti-Masonic paper at Canandaigua, New York. Partly to account respectably for Phelps's departure, the succeeding editor published the narrative portion of the communication. In the printed "extract of a letter," the religious sections were evidently deleted, for in Phelps's perception far more than an interesting

⁶ *Times and Seasons*, V (1844), 434, also in the current printing (1946) of the *History of the Church*, I, 188. Those who continued by steamboat to Independence were the merchant A. S. Gilbert, his wife and Sidney Rigdon, older than most of the party and perhaps less physically vigorous.

journey was experienced. Only a few years later he summarized travelling "to the western boundaries of Missouri, to seek the Land of Zion, for the gathering of the saints in the last days. . . ."⁷ With that correction of perspective, the letter, dated July 23, 1831, speaks for itself:

After I left Canandaigua, on the 9th of June, I went on board a canal-boat the same evening for Buffalo, where I arrived the 12th. Started for Cleveland on the 18th. Passed from thence to Newark, 176 miles on the Ohio canal; found it superior to the Erie canal in point of better locks, and wider excavation. From thence to Dayton, 101 miles. I passed through Columbus, the capital of the state, an ordinary town about as large as Geneva; and from thence to Cincinnati, 65 miles by water on the Miami Canal. Cincinnati is a thriving place, as large as Albany, but not so handsome. Took steamboat for Louisville, 165 miles (deck passage) and was roused in the night by the cry of wood! wood!—the common practice among southern boats to replenish the stock of fuel. Arrived at Louisville on the 25th. This is a considerable southern city, with daily newspapers, hacks, and draymen (cartmen) thick as southern musketoos [*sic*]; passed down 1½ miles to Shippingport (or Shavingport), and tarried three days in wait for a passage to St. Louis. Viewed the Grand Canal round the falls of Ohio—a magnificent display of human skill, which cost \$900,000. Three superb locks of hewn stone, the largest of which, for high water, is 60 feet wide, 43 feet deep, and 300 feet long. Saw the Franklin, a boat of the largest size, mount through in a kind of "dreadful splendor." On the 27th, left for St. Louis in the steamboat, Don Juan. On the 29th I passed the mouth of the Ohio, where three states were in sight, in the 37th degree of north latitude, and the sun nearly over head. 30th saw mills on the Mississippi propelled by current wheels: constructed like cidermill screws, 100 feet long; halted at Cape Gerardeau [*sic*], and saw Frenchmen using oxen to draw by the horns; lead piled up like cord wood; broke the boat wheels on Devil Island. July 1st, stopped at Genevieve, saw large quantities of lead and white sand. Arrived at St. Louis same day, and quite a city, with the small pox in it. July 2d started for the west part of Missouri, and saw in the first graveyard Roman Catholic crosses sprawled over the dead. From this time until the 14th, I passed through patches of timber, and fields of prairies, till I arrived at Independence, 12 miles from the west line of the United States, containing the last, or outside post-office.

The heavy sounding boat-horns, used by the stage-

⁷ *Times and Seasons*, I (1840), 190.

drivers in Ohio, with the common term "smart," applied to everything—as a *smart* man, *smart* land, and *smart* rain, etc., was nothing compared to the customs below Louisville. Men go armed with a pocket dirk, or pistol; a sixpence is called a "piccaoon"; a schilling a "*bit*," and the word "*mighty*" is an indefinite adjective and qualifies all things, good, bad and indifferent—as a mighty man, mighty land, mighty big, mighty little, mighty much, etc.

The Ohio, opposite Indiana and Illinois, is a beautiful sheet of water, quite clear and studded with cotton wood, sycamore, locust, etc., and streaked with steamboats from one end to the other. The Mississippi is a serpentine stream, rily below St. Louis; guarded on the west, or Missouri shore, by huge bluffs, capt ever and anon with daring shot towers. It is said to be clear above the Missouri. The Mississippi is the grand middle feeder of the Atlantic Ocean, and already steams and smokes with the commerce of nine states. The Missouri is the capsheaf—it is always rily and bubbly, and receives its "mountain rise" the last of June. It is said to possess mineral qualities, among which is magnesia. An uncommon heavy shower on the night of the 4th of July raised this stream in 24 hours, 8 feet!

The state of Missouri is *sui generis*—containing two-thirds rolling prairies, and the rest patches of timber. The upland: oak, hickory, walnut, etc.—and the bottoms: bas wood, cotton wood, locust, coffee, bean, etc., etc. The soil, especially in the western part of the state, and generally upon the prairies, is a rich black mould, bedded on clay, from 3 to 8 feet deep. The prairies are beautiful beyond description, yielding prairie grass, wild sun flowers, small flowers in great variety and color, and continually presenting, or "keeping up appearances" of a highly cultivated country without inhabitants. Meadow peeps o'er meadow, and prairie on prairies rise like the rolling waves on the ocean. Prairie pluffers [plovers], prairie hens, wild turkies, rabbits, gray squirrels, prairie dogs, wolves, rattlesnakes (the big breed), prairie rattlesnakes, copperheads, panthers, deer, etc., go when they have a mind to and come when they please.

With the exception of some of the western counties, the state is under a remediless want of water and water privileges. Few mills are in the state, except for horse ones. At the capital of Montgomery county, there are four little log huts on the summit of a dry prairie; the people live on what little rain water can be saved from the eaves. Education sings small, and few schools are kept, a common occurrence in southern and new states. No danger need be feared from *secret societies*, or any other.

It is a great grazing country on account of the prairie chance; cattle, horses, hogs (which by the bye are long nosed and mean), and sheep raise themselves almost; corn, in good seasons, does well; wheat, tolerable, but nothing like York state. Cotton, sweet potatoes, wild honey, wild grapes, wild roses, strawberries, dew berries, black berries and rasberries are common. The milk on the bottoms is sometimes found to be poison, in which case those using it and the cows die. The consequent diseases are the cold plague in the spring, and the ague and fever in the fall. The cash trade is carried on with Santa Fee, a Spanish port on the Pacific, in 36 degrees north latitude, and about 900 miles distant, across the prairie, where there is not a tree. The fur trade is to the Rocky and Shining Mountains, 800 miles distant, where is said to exist a kind of frog, with hard sharp scales, which he hoists and lowers at pleasure, and when swallowed by a snake *cuts out* in great agony. The weather is warmer than in York state, and when it grows cold at night with the wind from an easterly direction, depend upon a deluging rain before morning, and then it clears off hot enough to roast eggs. The inhabitants are emigrants from Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and the Carolinas, etc., with customs, manners, modes of living and a climate entirely different from the northerners, and they hate yankees worse than snakes, because they have cheated them or speculated on their credulity, with so many Connecticut wooden clocks, and New England notions. The people are proverbially idle or lazy, and mostly ignorant; reckoning nobody equal to themselves in many respects, and as it is a slave holding state, Japheth will make Canaan serve him, while he dwells in the tents of Shem.⁸

Many early travellers noted the shot towers on the Mississippi River⁹ and the southern ways, including the coinage of picayunes and bits. However, Phelps's first-hand descriptions of the land over which he walked from St. Louis, and the bounty of the prairie landscape, furnish valuable details. In addition, his social comments reveal the conflict of eastern ways with frontier Missouri "customs, manners, modes of living," a highly relevant point in studying the Mormon expulsion from Jackson County just two

⁸ Canandaigua [New York] *Ontario Phoenix*, September 7, 1831. I am indebted to Ontario County Historian Clyde Maffin for his personal courtesy in procuring a photograph of the article, in possession of the County Historical Society at Canandaigua. The letter terminates, "I am, W. W. PHELPS" and is introduced as follows: "Extract of a Letter from the late Editor of this paper, dated STATE OF MISSOURI, INDEPENDENCE, JACKSON CO. July 23, 1831."

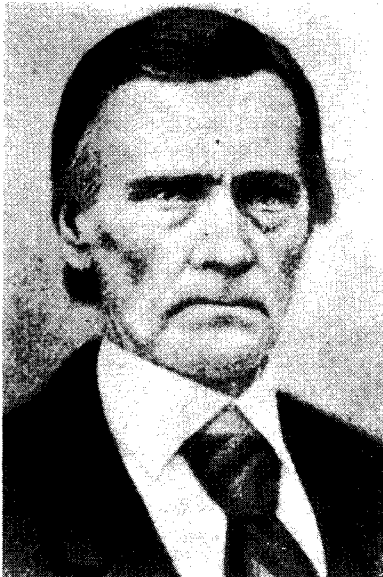
⁹ See Floyd C. Shoemaker, "Herculeum Shot Tower," *MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XX (January, 1926), 214-216.

years later. Phelps showed fairness in declining to blame Missourians for their antagonism towards easterners, since unprincipled Yankee peddlers had sowed enmity. His epithets of “proverbially idle” and “mostly ignorant” must be examined in relationship to both Mormon writings and other contemporary sources.

Phelps certainly meant his social evaluation to apply to western Missouri, since he wrote from Independence, where he had been for a week, and referred to the Santa Fe and the fur trade. Contemporary Mormon journals were similarly oriented. One of the missionaries who joined other Jackson County Mormons that fall was Levi Hancock, of the New England John Hancock family. In mid-January he left Jackson County with Parley P. Pratt as his assigned companion, though the two alternated companions with another set of missionaries. Hancock’s journal incidentally mentions their reception in travelling south of the Missouri toward St. Louis:

The houses was so scattered that we could not do any better than to preach by the firesides. We were treated well sometimes and other times not so friendly.

Church of Jesus Christ of LDS



Levi Ward Hancock
1803-1882

Some places we stayed they would ask pay and sometimes not.¹⁰

Hancock definitely distinguished between eastern and western Missouri in 1831-1832. By February he passed the Gasconade River and teamed up with Lyman Wight: "We started to St. Louis together. The towns and farms we pass look like living."¹¹ Prior to that time, however, Hancock generalized on western Missouri and its style of life:

We travelled slowly and continued to preach to the people whenever we got a chance. The people we met were good livers if they were a mind to be, but the way they managed was more like beasts than like humans. They had dogs, horses, cows, and pigs, and chickens in abundance around the house and in the house and mixed together. In the cold weather doors were open night and day, snow flying and wind blowing through. The cracks were not chinked. They used rags for beds, ground for floors. The children were ragged and dirty. They had corn pudding and dogger to eat, with a little bacon and sasafra tea, is the people's living here. When they have an abundance of horses, cattle, and cows they might spare and make themselves and family comfortable. Land is all they want.¹²

These LDS accounts are generally from men who were artisans and farmers themselves, most with previous experience taming the forest in either New York or Ohio and the intrinsic poverty of getting a start on new land. So they do not reflect a class cleavage, but a difference of cultures, of which religion is a major aspect. Leaving Independence with Levi Hancock was Parley P. Pratt, a twenty-four-year-old former frontier settler and Campbellite lay preacher, moderately well educated through his own industrious reading. Some fifteen miles east they traded companions, and Pratt recorded his own generalization of western Missouri in early 1832:

We passed down the south side of the Missouri river, among a thin settlement of people—mostly very ignorant but extremely hospitable. Some families were entirely dressed in skins, without any other clothing, including ladies young and old. Buildings were generally without

¹⁰ Clara E. H. Lloyd, ed., *Journal of Levi W. Hancock* [n.d., n.p.] 45 (typescript).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹² *Ibid.*

glass windows, and the door open in winter for a light. We preached, and warned the people, and taught them as well as we could.¹³

Another missionary account deserves to be associated with Hancock-Pratt for insight into the combination of hostility and hospitality often extended to Mormon missionaries on the frontier. In January 1835, after the unsuccessful LDS attempt to repossess Jackson County lands, the young missionary Wilford Woodruff, later fourth President of the Church, passed with caution through Jackson County southerly toward Greene County, teaching "from house to house as we journeyed."¹⁴ Famished by a wet 72-mile walk without food, the missionaries happened on to the home of a Mr. Connor, who had lived in Jackson County at the time of the Mormon banishment in 1833. Although the contemporary journal merely noted "took breakfast with him," Woodruff later recorded the details of a vivid experience:

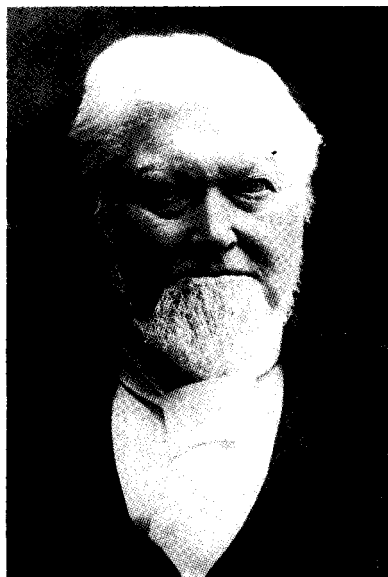
He knew we were "Mormons," and as soon as we began to eat, he began to swear about the "Mormons." He had a large platter of bacon and eggs, and plenty of bread on the table, and his swearing did not hinder our eating, for the harder he swore the harder we ate, until we got our stomachs full; then we arose from the table, took our hats, and thanked him for our breakfast, and the last we heard of him he was still swearing. I trust the Lord will reward him for our breakfast.¹⁵

The tragic side of the cultural conflict with the Mormons in Jackson County was their forcible banishment in 1833. The clashing backgrounds are seen through LDS eyes in Joseph Smith's account of his first Missouri visit, the August 1831 reunion with Cowdery and the missionaries who had wintered at Independence.

¹³ Parley P. Pratt, Jr., ed., *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (New York, 1874), 78-79.

¹⁴ "History of Wilford Woodruff," in Salt Lake City *Deseret News*, July 7, 1858.

¹⁵ Wilford Woodruff, *Leaves from My Journal* (Salt Lake City, 1881), 12. Although Woodruff is perhaps the most significant LDS diarist, his early entries (cited in the text for this incident) are sketchy. The episode appeared in his autobiography, published in 1858, as follows: "In the morning we arose, and went on in the rain twelve miles to a Mr. Conner's, who was also in the Jackson County mob. He gave us breakfast, but damned us while we were eating because we were 'Mormons'." When we had finished a hearty breakfast, we thanked him very politely, and went on our way, leaving him swearing. We felt thankful for breakfast, for we had walked seventy-two miles without eating food." Salt Lake City *Deseret News*, July 7, 1858. The name of the swearing host is "Bemon" in the 1882 publication, evidently poor transcription of handwriting, whereas it is "Conner" in the 1858 printing and "Connor" in the 1835 handwritten journal.



Church of Jesus Christ of LDS

Wilford Woodruff
1807-1898

Although dictated some eight years later, the Mormon leader's history no doubt gave accurate impressions of the New York-Ohio Mormons upon first arriving in Jackson County:

It seemed good and pleasant for brethren to meet together in unity. But our reflections were great, coming as we had from a highly cultivated state of society in the east, and standing now upon the confines or western limits of the United States. . . . [H]ow natural it was to observe the degradation, leanness of intellect, ferocity and jealousy of the people that were nearly a century behind the time. . . .¹⁶

At his return to Ohio a few weeks later, the Mormon leader was specific on the reality of social conflict and its consequences. The Church must totally marshal its resources for massive purchases in Jackson County, that its inhabitants "may not be stirred up unto anger":

Wherefore, the land of Zion shall not be obtained but

¹⁶ *Times and Seasons*, V (1844), 434, also *History of the Church*, I, 189. Phrases are omitted that obviously refer to Indian, not western Missouri society, although this quotation is not always carefully used in this respect.

by purchase or by blood. . . . And if by purchase, behold you are blessed. And if by blood, as you are forbidden to shed blood, lo, your enemies are upon you, and ye shall be scourged from city to city, and from synagogue to synagogue, and but few shall stand to receive an inheritance.¹⁷

Joseph Smith made detailed criticisms of Jackson County mores. In 1842 the LDS leader reviewed the attempt to settle there through "large purchases of land":

But as we could not associate with our neighbors (who were many of them of the basest of men and had fled from the face of civilized society, to the frontier country to escape the hand of justice) in their midnight revels, their sabbath breaking, horseracing, and gambling, they commenced at first [to] ridicule, then to persecute. . . .¹⁸

While this opinion indicts only a portion of the neighbors as frontier delinquents, society in the "frontier country" is described as violating Christian standards on drinking, Sabbath-keeping and gambling, hardly a proposition needing proof for anyone who has examined settlers' letters, ministers' memoirs, or general travellers' reports.¹⁹

Joseph Smith's impressions of Jackson County society were in large part gained from its county seat and main settlement, Independence, where he spent time in his summer visits of 1831 and 1832. His views were similar to those of other travellers. Later in 1832 Washington Irving and party journeyed nine days on horseback from St. Louis to Independence, stopping for bed and board at log cabins, and finding, "rough but wholesome and abundant fare, and very civil treatment."²⁰ From Independence Irving wrote

¹⁷ *Book of Commandments*, 64:30-32, published first in *Evening and the Morning Star*, I (February, 1833).

¹⁸ *Times and Seasons*, III (1842), 708, also in *History of the Church*, IV, 538.

¹⁹ Compare the caustic reaction of the capable Edward Ellsworth to western Missouri in 1833: "[A]fter passing the Mountains the only indications of its being Sunday is the unusual Gambling & noise, & assemblies around taverns . . . Farming & every thing goes on as usual . . . indeed there was an altercation between some persons as we came along whether it was Sunday or not." Letter of E. A. Ellsworth to Chauncey Goodrich, Jr., Fort Leavenworth, August 8, 1833, in John Francis McDermott, ed., *Indian Sketches by John Treat Irving, Jr.* (Norman, Okla., 1955), xxii. Similar source materials may be sampled in Hattie M. Anderson, "The Evolution of a Frontier Society in Missouri, 1815-1828, Part II," *MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XXXII (July, 1938), 458-483.

²⁰ Letter of Washington Irving to his sister, Mrs. Paris, Independence, Mo., September 26, 1832, in Pierre M. Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving* (New York, 1867), III, 38. Compare Irving's journal impression of the "farmers beyond Independence": "they are content to raise food enough for themselves—get wild honey to sell for clothes, etc.—lead a lazy life in this

lavish praise of the countryside, but rather impersonally reported the settlers in lesser terms: "We have gradually been advancing, however, toward rougher and rougher life, and are now at a little straggling frontier village, that has only been five years in existence."²¹ Irving's English companion Charles Latrobe expressed his view of cultural primitiveness in a physical description:

The town of Independence was full of promise, like most of the innumerable towns springing up in the midst of the forests in the West, many of which, though dignified by high-sounding epithets, consist of nothing but a ragged congeries of five or six rough log huts, two or three clapboard houses, two or three so-called hotels, alias grogshops; a few stores, a bank, printing office, and barn-looking church. It lacked at the time I commemorate, the three last edifices, but was nevertheless a thriving and aspiring place, in its way. . . .²²

Washington Irving's nephew added another eastern view of Independence the following year: "a small town on the Missouri river, containing about twenty or thirty houses, a court-house, and a nondescript population of trappers, Indian traders, and frontiersmen," an apparent but interesting social exaggeration.²³ In 1834, the year after the Mormon expulsion, Independence was evaluated by John Townsend, distinguished ornithologist of Quaker background, a member of the Wyeth expedition:

The site of the town is beautiful, and very well selected, standing on a high point of land, and overlooking the surrounding country, but the town itself is very indifferent. The houses (about fifty) are very much scattered, composed of logs and clay, and are low and inconvenient. There are six or eight stores here, two taverns, and a few tip[p]ling houses. As we did not fancy the town, nor the society that we saw there, we concluded to take up our residence at the house on the landing until the time of starting on our journey.²⁴

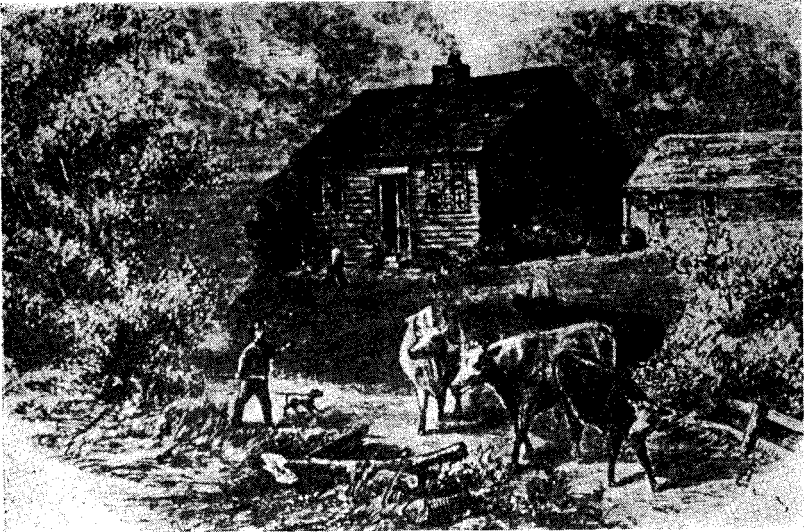
easily cultivated & prolific country." John Francis McDermott, ed., *The Western Journals of Washington Irving* (Norman, Okla., 1944), 104.

²¹ Irving to Mrs. Paris, September 26, 1832.

²² Charles Joseph Latrobe, *The Rambler in North America* (New York, 1835), I, 104. Latrobe evidently did not see W. W. Phelps's "printing office" (in the upper story of a home near the square), which had already printed several issues of *The Evening and the Morning Star*, the official Mormon newspaper.

²³ John Treat Irving, Jr., *Indian Sketches*. The quote does not appear in the 1835 edition, but in that of 1888, cited by McDermott, in *Western Journals of Washington Irving*, 89.

²⁴ John K. Townsend, *Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains* (Philadelphia, 1839), reprinted in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western*



A Pioneer Missouri Home

If there is lack of empathy in the foregoing estimates of Independence, that is quite the point. Repulsion was at least mutual, as the highly aware Jackson Countian Alexander Majors shows. He was strongly convinced that prejudice against new revelation was the cause of Mormon expulsion, and just as convinced that the Mormons had been “good citizens” and perfectly law-abiding. Yet he remembered his late teen-age impressions of the personal distinctness of their appearance:

They, of course, were clannish, traded together, worked together, and carried with them a melancholy look that one acquainted with them could tell a Mormon when he met him by the look upon his face almost as well as if he had been of different color.²⁵

Ezra Booth, Mormon missionary who apostatized after his 1831 visit to Jackson County, would not have completely agreed, since he felt that Joseph Smith was too quick to jest. It is not material whether Joseph Smith overstated the “midnight revels” of the old settlers or whether Alexander Majors overstated the “melancholy

Travels, 1748-1846, XXI (Cleveland, 1905), 135-136. For descriptions of Independence in the post-Mormon period, see Eugene T. Wells, “The Growth of Independence, Missouri, 1827-1850,” *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society*, XVI (October, 1959), 33-46.

²⁵ Alexander Majors, *Seventy Years on the Frontier* (Denver, 1893), 45.

look” of each Mormon.²⁶ A serious difference of manner and life is at stake, and the above strictures of the Mormon leader are accurate in that specific differences first brought ridicule, and then persecution. In fact, the fear of Mormon intolerance as they rapidly approached numerical equality led the non-Mormon population to evict the Mormons.

In purely descriptive terms, Mormon sources produce one of the best pictures of early Independence to supplement the foregoing survey of eastern portrayals of the frontier village. This comes from the pen of Ezra Booth, who after defecting wrote to explain to Ohioans how he became involved with Mormonism. Jackson County must take some blame for his apostasy, for the promised Zion was not as promising as Ohio to the already contented Booth: “fifteen acres upon an average here, are worth thirty there.”²⁷ Accusing Sidney Rigdon of overstating Jackson County’s virtues, he depicted the Independence of August 1831, with restrained objectivity:

As Independence is the place of general rendezvous and headquarters of the Mormonites, it may not be amiss to notice it. It is a new town, containing a courthouse built of brick, two or three merchant stores, and fifteen or twenty dwelling houses, built mostly of logs hewed on both sides; and is situated on a handsome rise of ground, about three miles south of the Missouri River, and about twelve miles east of the dividing line between the U. S. and the Indian Reserve, and is the county seat of Jackson County.²⁸

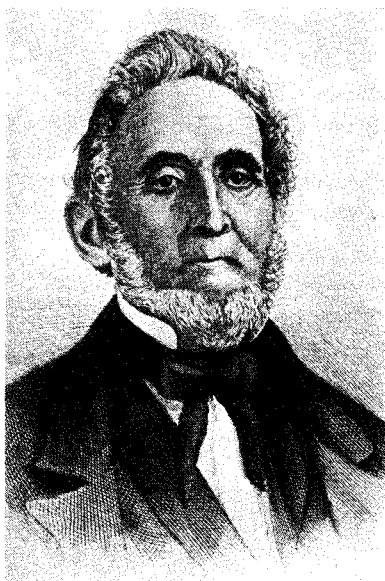
Booth’s sarcasm against Rigdon is a valuable piece of history, for it confirms Joseph Smith’s later introduction to the most celebrated Latter-day Saint description of Jackson County, thereby proving its 1831 origin: “As we had received a commandment for Elder Rigdon to write a description of the land of Zion, we sought for all the information necessary to accomplish so desirable an object.”²⁹ Sidney Rigdon was known through the Western Reserve

²⁶ A revelation of August 1831 gave the following command on Sabbath demeanor: “[D]o these things with thanksgiving, with cheerful hearts and countenances, not with much laughter, for this is sin, but with a glad heart, and a cheerful countenance. . . .” *Book of Commandments*, 60:24.

²⁷ Letter of Ezra Booth to Rev. I. Eddy, Nelson, Ohio, November 7, 1831, in *Ravenna Ohio Star*, November 10, 1831.

²⁸ Letter of Booth to Eddy, November 14, 1831, in *ibid.*, November 17, 1831. The brick courthouse was not yet completed.

²⁹ *Times and Seasons*, V (1844), 450, also in *History of the Church*, I, 197. The command referred to the revelation of August 1, 1831, in *Missouri. Book of Commandments*, 59:63: “And I give unto my servant Sidney a command-



Church of Jesus Christ of LDS

Sidney Rigdon

for his eloquence prior to his 1830 conversion, and the wording must be considered his, but Joseph Smith approved of it from the fact that he published the account in Illinois at a time when Rigdon's influence was seriously waning. The following description has a corporate significance, catching the first excitement of the Mormon immigrants at the spectacular beauty of the native landscape:

Unlike the timbered states in the east (except upon the rivers and water courses, which were verdantly dotted with trees from one to three miles wide), as far as the eye can glance the beautiful rolling prairies lay spread around like a sea of meadows. The timber is a mixture of oak, hickory, black walnut, elm, cherry, honey locust, mulberry, coffee bean, hackberry, box elder and bass wood, together with the addition of cotton wood, button wood, pecon [*sic*], soft and hard maple, upon the bottoms. The shrub-

ment, that he shall write a description of the land of Zion. . . ." Booth's letter to Eddy dated November 21, 1831, quotes from a September 20, 1831, letter of Booth to Edward Partridge, which fixes the Rigdon description as written by then: "Sidney, since his return, has written a description of the land of Zion. But it differs essentially from that which you wrote. . . ." *Ravenna Ohio Star*, November 24, 1831.

bery was beautiful; and consisted in part of plumbs, grapes, crab apples, and parsimmons [*sic*]. The prairies were decorated with a growth of flowers that seemed as gorgeous and grand as the brilliancy of stars in the heavens, and exceed description. The soil is rich and fertile (from three to ten feet deep) and generally composed of a rich black mould, intermingled with clay and sand. It produces in abundance, wheat, corn, and many other commodities, together with sweet potatoes and cotton. Horses, cattle, and hogs, though of an inferior breed, are tolerable plenty, and seem nearly to raise themselves by grazing in the vast prairie range in summer, and feeding upon the bottoms in winter. The wild game is less plenty where man has commenced the cultivation of the soil, than it is a little distance farther in the wild prairies. Buffaloe, elk, deer, bear, wolves, beaver, and many lesser animals roam at pleasure. Turkeys, geese, swans, ducks, yea, a variety of the feathered race are among the rich abundance that graces the delightful regions of this goodly land of the heritage of the children of God. Nothing is more fruitful, or a richer stockholder in the blooming prairies, than the honey bee; honey is but about twenty-five cents per gallon.

The season is mild and delightful nearly three quarters of the year, and as the land of Zion, situated at about equal distances from the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, as well as from the Alleghany and Rocky mountains, in the thirty-ninth degree of north latitude, and between the tenth and seventeenth degrees of west longitude—it bids fair to become one of the most blessed places on the globe, when the curse is taken from the land, if not before. The winters are milder than in the Atlantic states, of the same parallel of latitude; and the weather is more agreeable, so that were the virtues of the inhabitants only equal to the blessings of the Lord (which he permits to crown the industry and efforts of those inhabitants) there would be a measure of the good things of life for the benefit of the saints, full, pressed down and running over, even an hundred fold. The disadvantages here, like all new counties, are self-evident; lack of mills and schools, together with the natural privations and inconveniences which the hand of industry and the refinement of society with the polish of science overcome. But all these impediments vanished, when it is recollected that the prophets have said concerning Zion in the last days: how the glory of Lebanon is to come upon her; the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of his sanctuary, that he may make the place of his feet glorious; where for brass he will bring gold, and for iron he will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron; and where the

feast of fat things will be given to the just; yea, when the splendor of the Lord is brought to one consideration, for the good of his people: the calculations of men and the vain glory of the world vanishes; and we exclaim: God will shine—the perfection of beauty out of Zion.³⁰

If the Rigdon-Smith reaction to Jackson County is filled with the wonder of new love, it does not wholly differ from that of other travellers who saw ultimate beauty in the prairie landscape.³¹ A year later, at the same season as the Mormon arrivals, the New York City-bred nephew of Washington Irving marvelled at the magnificent western environs of Jackson County:

It was late upon a fine glowing afternoon in July, that we first crossed the Indian frontier and issued from the forest, upon a beautiful prairie, spreading out as far as the eye could reach an undulating carpet of green, enamelled with a thousand flowers, and lighted up by the golden rays of the setting sun. Occasionally a grouse, frightened at our approach, would bustle from among the high grass and fly whirring over the tops of the neighboring hills.³²

In autumn of the year before, world traveller Washington Irving matched the Mormon enthusiasm in his private letter from Independence:

Many parts of these prairies of the Missouri are extremely beautiful, resembling cultivated countries, embellished with parks and groves, rather than the savage rudeness of the wilderness. Yesterday I was out on a deer hunt in the vicinity of this place, which led me through some scenery that only wanted a castle, or a gentleman's seat here and there interspersed, to have equalled some of the most celebrated park scenery of England. The fertility of all this western country is truly astonishing. The soil is like that of a garden, and the luxuriance and beauty of the forests exceed any that I have seen.³³

Irving's companion in 1832, the traveller and botanic collector Latrobe, was overwhelmed at the open countryside approaching Jackson County:

³⁰ *Times and Seasons*, V (1844), 450; cf. Canandaigua *Ontario Phoenix*, September 7, 1831. Because of many similar descriptive phrases, the Phelps letter from Independence, July 23, 1831, and the Rigdon-Smith statement have an obvious interrelationship; common source-notes may account for the similarities.

³¹ See Donald Christisen, "A Vignette of Missouri's Native Prairie," *MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW*, LXI (January, 1967), 166-186.

³² McDermott, *Indian Sketches*, 11.

³³ Irving to Paris, September 26, 1832.

I should despair of being able to convey any idea to your mind of the glories of the autumnal Flora, covering these immense natural meadows like a rich carpet. God has here, with prodigal hand, scattered the seeds of thousands of beautiful plants, each suited to its season, where there are no hands to pluck and but few eyes to admire.³⁴

A decade after Latrobe's comments, the prairies "enamelled with a thousand flowers" made the same impression on a young newspaper man from Ohio, Rufus B. Sage. Bewitched by the environs of Jackson County in late spring, he wrote his mother in Connecticut:

Their pararie lands are like a perfect paradise, covered with a verdure [*sic*] unknown to the east, and wild flowers—Oh, some of the most beautiful I ever beheld—you have none such in your Atlantic flower-gardens. A pararie scene is perfectly enchanting.³⁵

Long bills of particulars were given on the beauty of the western borderlands by both Latrobe and Sage, and the latter afterward recounted the wildland panorama that inspired the above letter:

The scenery of this neighborhood is truly delightful. It seems indeed like one of Nature's favored spots. . . . I shall never forget the pleasing sensations produced by my first visit to the border-prairies. . . . The buttercup, tulip, pink violet, and daisy, with a variety of other beauties, unknown to the choicest collections of civilized life, on every side captivated the eye and delighted the fancy.³⁶

Analyzing the 1831 descriptions of Phelps and of Rigdon-Smith, one is struck by the similarity of tone and details from educated travellers and Latter-day Saint pilgrims. These raptures are authentic. Mormon portrayals are also characterized by a reverential content. The above reactions show why one of Phelps's

³⁴ Latrobe, *Rambler in North America*, I, 102. Another companion on the trip, Count de Pourtalès, wrote from Independence, September 26, 1832, as follows: "The state of Missouri is completely different from Europe. It is here for the first time that I have traveled over those immense prairies, those oceans of enameled greenery with their enormous flowers and their flowing, expansive, monotonous grandeur. . . . Even in this season this area is a limitless mine for a botanist. Latrobe has gathered more flowers here in a week than in the rest of America in five months." George F. Spaulding, *On the Western Tour with Washington Irving: The Journal and Letters of Count de Pourtalès*, trans., Seymour Feiler (Norman, Okla., 1968), 34.

³⁵ Letter of Rufus B. Sage to his mother, Independence, May 30, 1841, in LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Rufus B. Sage, His Letters and Papers, 1836-1847* (Glendale, Calif., 1956), I, 85.

³⁶ Rufus B. Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains* (Philadelphia, 1846), reprinted in Hafen and Hafen, *Rufus B. Sage*, 119-120.

hymns, first published in Jackson County and popular today, begins with the phrase "earth with her ten thousand flowers."³⁷

But the blessings of the land were not automatic, according to the understanding of the Mormons present at the formal dedications of 1831. One of these, Newell Knight, spoke with the combination of thanksgiving and commitment to labor that characterizes all LDS writing of that period:

But our feelings can be better imagined than described, when we found ourselves upon the Western frontiers. The country itself presented a pleasant aspect with its rich forests bordering its beautiful streams, and its deep rolling prairies spreading far and wide, inviting the hand of industry to establish for itself homes upon its broad bosom. And this was the place where . . . Zion should be, and our hearts went forth unto the Lord, desiring the fulfillment, that we might know where to bestow our labors profitably.³⁸

Subsequent Mormon public descriptions of Jackson County are tempered by realities of settlement. These appeared in *The Evening and the Morning Star*, edited by William W. Phelps, who had stayed in Missouri after his 1831 letter, and Oliver Cowdery, the prominent "second elder" and Book of Mormon witness, who had led the first mission to Jackson County in the winter of 1830-1831. The *Star* published revelations and prophecies on the gathering, but rhetoric on the specific virtues of Jackson County is moderate. In the entire career of the *Star* at Independence (June 1832, through July 1833), there is but one major article on material advantages, "The Far West." This term included Missouri ("the land where the saints of the living God are to be gathered together and sanctified . . ."); however, the "country from the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains" was also chosen Zion. No obvious richness made it so, for "the world will never value" its plains "for more than hunting ground, for want of timber and mill seats." The editors admitted the muddiness of the Missouri, and then briefly noticed the grandeur of the "large scope of clear field, or extensive plains," broken only by "the skirts of timber upon the streams of water." In their eyes God's providence would reveal resources not then apparent to the world, but the geographic ad-

³⁷ *Evening and the Morning Star*, I (September, 1832).

³⁸ "Newell Knight's Journal," in Geo. Q. Cannon, ed., *Scraps of Biography* (Salt Lake City, 1883), 71.

vantage was reiterated for administration of a world-wide church: "This place may be called the centre of America. . . and about the middle of the continent. . . ."³⁹

An incidental physical description of Jackson County appeared June 1, 1833. Not realizing that forcible exile was some eight weeks away, the editors commented on the harvest of 1833 more from the motive of thanksgiving than advertising:

With little exception the inhabitants of this section of country have had the pleasure of improving one of the most glorious seasons known for a long time Wheat is fine and will begin to be harvested by the middle of this month. Much corn has been planted, and it has seldom looked better.⁴⁰

Latter-day Saint leaders in Missouri did not fan enthusiasm for migration. The second number of the *Star* (July 1832) published a cautionary report, "The Elders in the Land of Zion to the Church of Christ Scattered Abroad," discussing what was stressed more

³⁹ *Evening and the Morning Star*, I (October, 1832).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II (June, 1833).



than any other message in the fourteen issues of the *Star* at Independence. They quoted from the initial revelation on how the gathering to Zion was to be accomplished. In August 1831, Joseph Smith had written: "And let the work of the gathering be not in haste, nor by flight; but let it be done as it shall be counseled by the elders of the church at the conferences. . . ."41 This first published counsel of the Jackson County leaders was as follows:

It is about one year since the work of the gathering commenced, in which time between three and four hundred have arrived here and are mostly located upon their inheritances, and are generally in good health and spirits and are doing well [A]lthough Zion, according to the prophets, is to become like Eden or the garden of the Lord, yet at present it is as it were but a wilderness and desert, and the disadvantages of settling in a new country, you know, are many and great. Therefore, prudence would dictate at present the churches abroad, come not up to Zion, until preparations can be made for them42

Time and again, the *Star* stressed the need to be financially ready to come to Missouri. This meant earning a recommend (from the Ohio bishop or three elders) that one was morally trustworthy and financially responsible for acceptance into fellowship and full economic privileges. This policy meant less printed descriptions of the land and more warnings for "not hurrying up to Zion" without paying one's past debts and being prepared to shoulder future ones there: "The Lord is never in a hurry, but gives every thing its proper proportion of time."43

The effectiveness of plans for the gathering triggered Jackson County opposition to further migration, and destruction of the hated newspaper that communicated directions. The press was pitched out of the second story of Phelps's residence, and the type pied on July 20, 1833. Earlier that month a long article on immigration depicted Mormon society in Jackson County better than any other single account. "The Elders Stationed in Zion" gave a second annual report, which reflected both the slender LDS resources and an increase of economic strength over the prior year. The leaders estimated the total Mormon population to be "more than twelve hundred souls," but their cooperative order

41 *Book of Commandments*, 59:69.

42 *Evening and the Morning Star*, I (July, 1832).

43 *Ibid.*, I (January, 1833).

could not yet reach the goal of assigning productive land to every family. In the absence of farm ownership, day-labor had been necessary for many of both sexes, but non-Mormon and Mormon were apparently satisfied:

[T]he situation in which many have come up here. has brought them under the necessity of seeking employment from those who do not belong to the church; yet we can say, as far as our knowledge extends, that they have been honorably compensated.⁴⁴

All in all, Mormon society in this document is aggressively self-reliant. Since Mormons constituted about a third of Jackson County's population, their self-descriptions belong both to Missouri history and also explain subsequent achievements of building cities from bare fields, first in Caldwell County, Missouri, then in Hancock County, Illinois (both obliterated by persecution)—and their ultimate cooperative success in the arid West.⁴⁵ With marginal total resources, the Missouri leaders nevertheless worked with determination to upgrade the material condition of their people, a definite welfare program which has continued to the present. Certain details of the current welfare program are first observable in Missouri, including the stress on survival provisions for an emergency—the “year's supply” is a current religious obligation which (unknown to most Mormons) has its roots in the gathering to Jackson County.

All of these features are found in the remarkable document under discussion, the second annual report of “The Elders Stationed in Zion.” The momentum of their cooperative economics is evident. “Many” had improved their initial farm-grants, “where, blessed with a fruitful soil, and healthy climate, they are beginning to enjoy some of the comforts of life . . .”⁴⁶ Yet crop and stock improvement was imperative. The leaders expressed “some surprise” that anyone should arrive “without bringing garden seeds, and even seeds of all kinds.” Newcomers should import “the best breeds” of stock (some of which were specified), and thus “lay a foundation for improvement.” Nor did plans stop there, for the stress on manufacturing that characterized Utah was already a plan in Missouri: “As soon as wool and flax are had among the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, II (July, 1833), 110.

⁴⁵ See Leonard Arrington, *The Great Basin Kingdom, an Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958).

⁴⁶ *Evening and the Morning Star*, II (July, 1833), 110.

brethren, sufficient for the purpose, they will manufacture cloth for their own use in the church."⁴⁷ In the Mormon descriptions of Jackson County, their self-image is most significant, for the blend of visionary and pragmatic that characterized Rocky Mountain Zion was clearly displayed in their first planned colonization movement to western Missouri in 1831-1833. The borders of time diminish as one measures the Mormon leaders there, for their words could easily be from Brigham Young in the tabernacle pulpit two to four decades later:

To see numbers of disciples come to this land destitute of means to procure an inheritance, and much less the necessaries of life, awakens a sympathy in our bosoms of no ordinary feeling

For the disciples to suppose that they can come to this land without ought to eat, or to drink, or to wear, or any thing to purchase these necessaries with, is a vain thought. For them to suppose that the Lord will open the windows of heaven, and rain down angel's food for them by the way, when their whole journey lies through a fertile country, stored with the blessings of life from his own hand for them to subsist upon, is also vain

The disciples of Christ, blessed with immediate revelations from him, should be wise and not take the way of the world, nor build air-castles, but consider that when they have been gathered to Zion, means will be needed to purchase their inheritances, and means will be needed to purchase food and raiment for at least one year; or, at any rate, food

And notwithstanding the fulness of the earth is for the saints, they can never expect it unless they use the means put into their hands to obtain the same in the manner provided by our Lord. When you flee to Zion, we enjoin the word, prepare all things, that you may be ready to labor for a living, for the Lord has promised to take the curse off the land of Zion in his own due time, and the willing and the obedient, will eat the good of the same: not the idle, for they are to be had in remembrance before the Lord.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* The closing phraseology (concerning the "willing and obedient" and the "idle") incorporates quotations from two revelations that had already been published in *ibid.*

A Fleeting Victory

Sedalia *Bazoo* Monthly Magazine, February 1921.

Let every defeated candidate remember that his successful opponent will have a hard time holding the job till he loses it.

