

Men, Motives, and Misunderstandings: A New Look at the Morrisite War of 1862**

by G. M. Howard *

As the United States was struggling for its very existence on the Civil War battlefields, the territory of Utah faced an internal crisis of its own. Though small in comparison to the national strife, it nevertheless resulted in great anguish, bloodshed, and lasting scars. Ostensibly, the issue was enforcement of the law. Given the church–state union in Utah at the time, however, legal controversy was certain to be political and religious as well. At stake in this instance was nothing less than the unity and leadership of the territory itself. Reflecting the spirit of the times, it too was decided by force of arms—with the final chapter unfolding at Kingston Fort near the mouth of Weber Canyon in the spring of 1862. For want of a more accurate term, the tragedy is known as the Morrisite War.

Joseph Morris, after whom the incident took its name, was the fifth child in a family of eight children. He was born in Burswardly, Cheshire, England, in 1824 and as a young man worked as a farmland and a coal miner. Small in stature, he stood not more than five feet six inches tall, but his frame was well knit and muscular. His dark eyes and long dark hair, which tended to hang in ringlets, stood in remarkable contrast to his fair skin which was almost feminine in its whiteness and texture. Although generally timid and reserved, Morris could become passionate and outspoken when expressing deep personal beliefs. At age twenty–three he was converted by Mormon missionaries and baptized into the church. Not long afterward he married Mary Thorpe and both left England for Utah.

The Morrisites did not proceed directly to the Great Basin. Instead, they tarried in Saint Louis for two years where Joseph worked as a fireman on a boat plying the Mississippi River. From there they moved to Pittsburgh where Joseph served for a time as branch president of the Mormon congregation there. Upon being relieved of that assignment, apparently due to the congregation's dissatisfaction with his teachings, Joseph brought his wife and child to Utah, arriving at Salt Lake City in the fall of 1853.[1]

For their first six months in Utah, the Joseph Morris family lived with Joseph's brother, George Morris, in Salt Lake City. From there they moved to Sanpete County and took up residence with Mary's brother at Ephraim. Within a few months, Mary, at the urging of the ward bishop, left Joseph, taking with her their one child and all their belongings;. In 1855 Joseph remarried, but this union was not successful either. Within six months his new wife, the widow Elizabeth Mills, had initiated divorce proceedings.[2]

Conflicts With Church Authorities

In the early spring of 1857 Morris removed to Provo and married again, this time to Elizabeth Jones. This was the time of the impassioned religious revival in Utah generally known as the Reformation. Speaking of blood atonement and calling for repentance and rebaptism, the church leaders sought to promote among the Saints a renewed loyalty to themselves and the church teachings. There was an evangelism, even a frenzy, in the air which Joseph Morris found irresistible. Being rebaptized and set apart as a special teacher, he dedicated himself to the Reformation and began proclaiming passionately against the evils he saw around him.

Before very long, however, Joseph's preaching ran him afoul of local church authorities. Apparently, the issue was polygamy. Morris had received no inkling of the plural marriage practice until his arrival in Salt Lake City in 1853, and he had never been able to reconcile himself to it. To him it was nothing less than adultery, and his Reformation rhetoric probably reflected that conviction.

Whatever the cause, Morris soon came to feel abused by his stake president, James C. Snow. Snow summarily relieved Morris of his teaching assignment, turned his back on him, and had no further conversation or dealing with him. The local bishop and ward members also withdrew their friendship. His wife then left him, for which he blamed the direct

counsel of President Snow, and his ostracism was complete.[3]

Utterly cast down, Morris sought solace in prayer. He had prayed many times before and had in fact won the nickname "Praying Joe" in Provo and Springville. But this experience was special; it resulted in a revelation. There in Provo in 1857 it was revealed to Joseph Morris that he was chosen "from before the foundation of the world to be a mighty man, yea, to be a prophet in Israel." [4]

Greatly buoyed by this experience, Morris sent a letter to Brigham Young, president of the church, informing him of this calling. He proposed a type of dual presidency for the church in which he and Young would share administrative responsibilities but he (Morris) would hold the keys of prophet, seer, and revelator. This and succeeding letters of a similar nature were apparently not answered.

Morris soon left Provo, drifting north to American Fork for a time and then, in 1858, taking up brief residence in Salt Lake City. Spring of 1860 found him in Slaterville, just north of Ogden, where he lingered for six months. He continued to preach of his divine commission and to seek further guidance in prayer. In 1859 he received his second revelation, taking from it the full keys of the kingdom. By August 1860 he had received two more revelations; in September he received thirteen. From that point they became a regular occurrence, and the outline of his ministry became increasingly well defined.

The revelations of 1860 confirmed Morris in his initial belief that the Mormon hierarchy had become vitiated and that the whole church was in a state of apostasy through the treachery of one of its members. The Judas, specifically, was Brigham Young's first counselor, George A. Smith. He, in fact, was revealed to Morris as a fallen angel who fell with Lucifer in the first estate. Using satanic guile, he had succeeded in preempting Brigham Young as the real leader of the church and from that position was rushing the church headlong to destruction. Among the many wicked deeds Smith had already instigated, according to Morris, was the Mountain Meadow Massacre. [5]

It was during his sojourn to Slaterville in 1860 that Joseph began to earn a following. Hired as a farm laborer, he asked his employer, a Mr. Jones, "Do you know who I am." "Yes," replied Jones, "I do know that you are a prophet of God, for the spirit has told me so." [6] This was the first expression of testimony Morris had ever received and it must have been immensely gratifying to him. It may have been responsible for the flood of revelations he then began to have. One of these revelations, in September 1860, occurred immediately after the appearance of a comet and explained the significance of this celestial phenomenon in terms of Joseph's own calling:

It is the seventh Star spoken of by John the Revelator, representing the seventh angel that has come forth; and the tail that was attached to it is a representation of the army of heaven that was to follow the seventh angel. Behold, I am Jesus Christ, and I testify unto all men that dwell upon the face of the earth that I have sent forth the seventh angel to preside over my Church upon the earth, and it will be woe unto them if they do not humble themselves and obey my gospel, for I will cut them off until there is none left upon the earth to cumber it. [7]

This was the most explicit statement of Joseph's mission yet articulated, and its impact on the Slaterville ward was profound. A congregation began to form around him immediately. Following his exodus from the community that fall—under pressure from the ward bishopric—his entire following of thirty-one persons was excommunicated for apostasy.

Morris left Slaterville carrying two letters which he had written to Brigham Young and which he intended to deliver in person. At Warm Springs, northwest of Ogden, he met John Cook and entered into conversation with him. Cook was sufficiently intrigued with Joseph's message to invite him to his home in South Weber. There he introduced him to his brother, Richard Cook, the ward bishop. Bishop Cook listened to Joseph's preaching and was soon convinced of its truthfulness. The radius of belief spread quickly through the ward. News of a new faith taking root in South Weber was not long in reaching the General Authorities in Salt Lake City, and they responded by notifying Bishop Cook that two apostles, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff, were being dispatched to South Weber for an inquiry into the state of affairs there.

The meeting was held February 11, 1861. Among the many people who crowded the little adobe schoolhouse that evening, in addition to Cook, Morris, Woodruff, and Taylor, were Lorin Farr, stake president and mayor of Ogden, and

James Brown and Abraham Palmer, his counselors in the Ogden stake presidency. The inquiry generally proceeded with little acrimony; when a Mr. Watts shouted that the Morrisites should be "cut off below the chin and laid behind the bushes," he was rebuked by Apostle Taylor. Bishop Cook, when asked to define his conviction, asserted his belief that Joseph Morris was a prophet and that Brigham Young was not. Nine men and seven women followed with similar testimonies. They, Cook, and Morris were promptly excommunicated for apostasy.[8]

The meeting closed with a vigorous denunciation of Morris by Wilford Woodruff, a denunciation that included a prophecy that Morris's influence would rapidly diminish. Later, in reflecting upon this prophecy, Joseph Morris penned: "Since that time, however, the spirit of the Lord has rested upon the people, and they have come from almost all parts of the Territory to inquire after these strange things that have so mysteriously been brought about." [9] That the Morrisite star suddenly began rising to new heights was due in no small measure to the remarkable influence of a frustrated Pleasant Grove farmer, John Banks.

A journeyman stonecutter by trade, Banks was one of England's first converts to Mormonism. Baptized by Parley P. Pratt, he was soon ordained a high priest and set apart as a missionary. He did not labor in that capacity long before being appointed president of the London Conference of the British Mission. Not only was Banks an intelligent man but an inspirational and gifted speaker as well. According to Andrew Jenson, Banks was "one of the ablest and most eloquent" missionaries to serve in the British Mission.[10] He converted scores of people to Mormonism.

Upon his release from the British Mission, John Banks and his family emigrated to Utah and were part of the original seven families that established Pleasant Grove in September 1850. After building a home and getting his family situated, Banks journeyed to Salt Lake City and met with Brigham Young. His specific purpose was to request appointment as presiding bishop of the church.

He left the meeting with the understanding that upon completing a two-year mission to Ohio the office would be his. Banks soon left for the eastern mission where he labored with much the same success that he had enjoyed in England. Upon completion of the mission he returned to Utah with a new broadcloth Prince Albert suit, a new wagon, two yoke of oxen, and a large stock of household furniture, all of which had been given him by the Saints of Cleveland.

Calling upon Brigham Young to claim the office of presiding bishop, John Banks was chagrined to learn that the office was no longer available. Words were exchanged between these two men. The exchange grew heated and physical jostling ensued. In the melee the church president was severely choked by his larger and stronger antagonist. A few days [p.118] later Banks was excommunicated for "unchristian-like conduct." A frustrated and despondent man, he returned to Pleasant Grove and began farming, an occupation for which he was ill-fitted by both temperament and experience.[11]

John Banks became acquainted with Joseph Morris during the latter's stay in nearby American Fork in 1857–58. They came together frequently to discuss their mutual problems with the church hierarchy. Each considered himself a devout Mormon at the time, disillusioned less with the doctrine than with leadership of the church. In 1858 Morris moved to Salt Lake City, and Banks was rebaptized into the church.

It was not until the spring of 1861, shortly after the Slaterville excommunications, that Banks and Morris came together again. The prelude to this reunion was Morris's revelation of September 6, 1860:

Behold! Verily I say unto you, my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as I have chosen you to stand at the head of my Church as the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator of the same, you shall take my servant Brigham to be your first counselor, and place upon him the presidency of my Church; under your direction.... As concerning my servant Heber [C. Kimball], I, the Lord, am not well pleased with him, for he has committed a grievous [sic] sin against me.... I, the Lord, have ordained that another shall act in his place—even my servant John Banks.[12]

Hearing of this revelation sometime later, Banks left his children and adamant wife in Pleasant Grove and joined the excommunicate Morris at South Weber in the spring of 1861.

Morris Founds His Church

The Morris schism was consummated on April 6, 1861—the thirty-first anniversary of the founding of the Mormon church—when Joseph Morris officially organized his church. Like the parent organization, this sect also began with six members. Joseph stood at its head as prophet, seer, and revelator; his first and second counselors were, respectively, Richard Cook and John Banks. A quorum of twelve apostles, which the prophet began naming almost immediately, completed the organizational hierarchy.[13]

The dominating feature of Morris's theology was millennialism. The earth was just one of many millions such worlds in the universe, each presided over by a god. Christ was the god of this earth, and despite opposition from the devil He would soon reign supreme. The Second Coming was imminent. As it occurred, the Morrisites would assume ownership of the homes, meetinghouses, and other property of the Mormons. The righteous Mormons would take their rightful place as servants of the Morrisites; the unrighteous Mormons would be slain by the hosts of heaven.

Other Morrisite tenets rejected polygamy, condemned racial discrimination, opened the priesthood to women, and called for the consecration of all personal property to the Lord with stewardship left to the individual until needed by the group. Morris also held a notion of reincarnation, though he seems never to have clarified its exact implications for his theology.[14] Regardless, the growth of the Morrisite church was phenomenal. Within a week of its organization the church claimed fifty-three members; within three months, two hundred members. At the time of the Morrisite War fourteen months later the following approached a thousand, although only about half that number were baptized members. For the Mormons generally, not yet reconciled to the concept of a pluralistic society and greatly relieved at the recent exodus of federal troops from the territory, this was a most unwelcome development. Almost immediately the Morrisite congregation began to be harrassed and victimized by the rowdier element of Mormonism's rank and file.

Joseph Morris established his following in South Weber, two and a half miles west of the mouth of Weber Canyon. Sitting on the county line, most of the encampment was in Davis County but a portion of it extended into Weber County. The site was the original Kingston Fort, established in 1853 when the church authorities issued the order to "fort up." Named after the local bishop, James Kingston, the fort was a ten-acre square with a number of small log cabins built around the perimeter. It was not completely enclosed and when the Saints there evacuated at the approach of Johnston's Army in 1858, a number of gaps still remained between the perimeter cabins. A large tent was set up inside the fort for public meetings, and in 1856 a large adobe schoolhouse was added. During the early phases of the fort's development a bowery was also built—this being just west of the fort in a small grove of trees. On both the north and the south the fort was rimmed by low-rising hills.

The original Kingston settlement was small, consisting of twenty-five families in late 1854. The evacuation of 1858 seriously retarded the community's prosperity, and when Joseph Morris made his appearance there in 1860 he was struck by the fact that the people were as destitute of clothing and provisions as he. Most of these settlers later joined the Morrisite congregation as it burgeoned in 1861 and 1862, and even those that did not join generally remained in the community.

As Morrisite converts poured into Kingston Fort they were forced to make temporary quarters in tents, wagon boxes, and jerry-built hovels until adequate permanent dwellings could be constructed. An energetic building program did begin almost immediately, with the building materials being primarily willows and dirt. In most cases the new dwellings consisted of an outer and inner wall of woven willow reeds; secured to posts in each of the four corners, the reed walls had a space of nearly a foot between them which was then filled with loose dirt for strength and insulation. Some of the homes had walls made of only one row of woven willows, plastered on both sides with mud. The roofs in either case were made of boughs set on a supporting timber frame and covered with earth. The floors were also earthen. Provisions were made for small windows and doors.

In the spring of 1862, when attack from his enemies seemed imminent, Morris directed his following to fill gaps between the buildings with a heavy wall, thereby enclosing the community entirely. The wall was to be six feet high and eighteen inches thick, again dirt supported by two rows of woven willow forms. Apparently this work was not completed by the time of the ultimate confrontation.

Difficulties between the Morrisites and their Mormon neighbors began immediately after the establishment of the congregation at Kingston Fort. The instances seldom involved gunplay and resulted in no deaths or serious injuries. Their nature, rather, was one of tedious harrassment wherein the Morrisites were subjected to obscene threats,

physical humiliation, disruption of their religious services, and pilfering of their livestock by a small group of rowdy neighbors. As a result of these forays the Morrisites became increasingly defensive and grew steadily more disenchanted with established agencies of civil government.[15] William Kendall, bearded man holding child, was among the first to join Morris's church and was one of its more affluent members.

Typical of the situation was the instance in the summer of 1861 when several horses were stolen from the Kingston encampment. Scouting parties soon discovered them in the custody of familiar antagonists some two miles from the camp. When voices were raised in favor of forming a posse to recover the stock, Morris himself demurred. It had just been revealed to him, he advised the agitated men, that such precipitous action would bring an unfortunate collision with the authorities.[16] Shortly afterward the thieves rode into Kingston Fort on the stolen animals, flourished their revolvers, and sought to provoke a fight. The Morrisites did not react, instead facing their tormentors with silence. But as these incidents became increasingly frequent, the Morrisites placed their stock under continuous armed guard and posted sentries around the camp each night. These precautions were well taken. Not long afterward, two would-be rustlers—later identified as escaped convict Delos Johnson and a local troublemaker named Watts—were repelled by the guards.

Less serious, but deeply annoying to the Morrisites, were the numerous instances of rowdiness which their detractors staged in their midst. These disturbances took various forms, sometimes consisting of nothing more than visitors attending the Morrisite meetings with their guns and knives in plain view. At other times the rowdies would ride into camp and announce their intent to disrupt or destroy the Morrisites' food supply, forcing them into starvation or subsistence living on "boiled wheat." Still other incidents involved obscene language and physical scuffles. In November 1861 a half-dozen well-armed young toughs burst into the adobe schoolhouse and began to insult and jostle Alonzo Brown and his wife, who were living there temporarily, and their guest, a Mrs. Moss. After several long minutes of uncouth merriment, the intruders left, snatching Brown's hat on their way out. Upon exiting the schoolhouse they were confronted by a group of residents who had come to investigate the disturbance. Overpowering the rowdies through sheer force of number, the group retrieved the hat and hastened the departure of their unwelcome visitors.[17]

The hat incident did not end in the schoolyard. On December 8, 1861, two of the original group of intruders, Amos Hawkes and George T. Peay, swore out a complaint against Alonzo Brown, James Cook, Peter I. Moss, and eight other Morrisites involved in the fray. Davis County sheriff Lot Smith thereupon issued a warrant "for the apprehension of A. Brown and others." Peter I. Moss was the only one taken into custody. Tried in March 1862, he was convicted of assault and sentenced to imprisonment at hard labor for forty days and fined fifty dollars plus court costs.[18] The verdict was a momentous one. It served to strengthen the growing suspicion among the Utah public that the Morrisites were a band of religious fanatics who drew no distinction between right and wrong and who fully deserved the name, suggested by the *Deseret Evening News*) of "the Davis County bandits." Conversely, the judgment confirmed the Morrisites in their fear that they would find no justice in court. From then on, they would accept no more warrants, writs, or other legal orders from civil authorities. When, in April 1862, Weber County deputy sheriff William Brown attempted to serve an execution against John Banks, he was intercepted by two guards at the camp entrance and escorted to Banks who immediately ordered, "take him out." Brown's simple summation, "I went home unsuccessful," was studiously modest. The last word was far from being written.

Armed Confrontation

Conflict with intolerant neighbors was only part of Joseph Morris's difficulties. Equally troublesome was the problem of restlessness and dissension within his own ranks. Several men in the organizational hierarchy, including John Banks and Richard Cook, became increasingly insistent about advancing their own views on matters of policy and administration. In turn, Morris's revelations began reflecting increasingly dire predictions of disaster if his counsel were not obeyed explicitly. Following each such revelation the prophet's lieutenants were quieted for a time, but the problem of restless ambition among them continued to simmer just below the surface.

To add to his other worries, Morris again experienced connubial turbulence within his household. In August 1861 he had remarried, this time to the Danish convert Mary Olsen, and signs of discord were visible from the beginning. To deal with this embarrassing situation he employed the same tactic as that used with his hierarchy, divine injunction. According to one of his revelations of September 1861:

You wish to know my will concerning your companion. You are in trouble concerning her. What can I do with her, if she will not stand by you and take your counsel? If she fights against you, she fights against me. If she refuses to hearken to you and obey you, she has no part with me, for I shall cast her off.[19]

Although Morris managed a tenuous grip on the allegiance of his wife and his first echelon subordinates, instances of apostasy began to occur within the congregation. The general cause seems to have been disillusionment with Morris's prescience as a seer. Several times his congregation had witnessed him designate a certain day for the Second Coming, only to see that day come and go uneventfully. Each time this happened a number of people gathered their belongings and quietly left the congregation.

As the pace of apostasy quickened, however, more and more questions arose over the matter of property entitlement. Typically, those who stayed felt that those who left were taking better quality stock than they had originally consecrated to the community. Accordingly, the custodians of the herd, under Morris's counsel, became increasingly penurious, and friction began to characterize these reckonings. When, in early 1862, William Jones, John Jensen, and Louis C. Gurtson left the community with bitter feelings of having been cheated on their property settlement, they vowed revenge.[20] Not long afterward they hijacked a wagonload of wheat being transported from Kingston Fort to Kaysville for milling. The Morrisites responded by dispatching a group of men, under the direction of Peter Klemgard, to apprehend the men and recover the wheat. This done, the group returned to the encampment and confined the three men in a cabin.

In a daring escape attempt, Gurtson managed to gain his freedom, but Jones and Jensen were less successful and remained in custody. Their wives, learning of the detention, appealed to the legal authorities for assistance. On May 24, 1862, Deputy United States Marshal Judson Stoddard obtained a writ of habeas corpus from Territorial Chief Justice John J. Kinney. He proceeded to Kingston Fort where he was allowed to read the writ to Morris, Banks, and Klemgard. These men were not willing to receive the document, however, and let it fall to the ground in their midst. Another writ was similarly dishonored three weeks later. With that, Chief Justice Kinney asked the acting territorial governor, Frank Fuller, to activate the territorial militia as a posse comitatus "for the arrest of the offenders." Fuller complied, and on June 12 an armed posse of five hundred men departed Salt Lake City for South Weber.[21]

At the head of the posse rode Robert T. Burton. Although he held the rank of colonel in the territorial militia, it was not in that capacity that he directed the posse; rather, he rode as deputy territorial marshal. Territorial Marshal Henry W. Lawrence expressed opposition to such an armed confrontation with the Morrisites and left the territory rather than be a part of it. Responsibility then devolved to his deputies, Burton and Theodore McKean.

No stranger to military forays, Burton noted in his journal: "The proper arrangements having been made, I left Salt Lake with an ample force on the 12th of June." [22] His artillerymen and infantrymen were augmented by numerous Davis County volunteers as the force moved northward toward South Weber. Arriving there on the morning of June 13, Burton had approximately a thousand armed men at his command. He deployed them generally on the high ground overlooking the encampment on the southwest, also positioning contingents to flats on the east and west. With militiamen from Ogden to the north, Kingston Fort was surrounded. Satisfied that this show of force would awe Morris into submission, Burton then dispatched a proclamation to the encampment demanding surrender within thirty minutes.

Immediately upon receiving the proclamation, Joseph Morris retired to privacy and inquired of the Lord as to the proper course of action. He emerged with another revelation, this one similar to a number of previous ones, promising absolute safety to his people and destruction of their enemies. "The enemies shall go so far, and then I will stop them they have almost gone far enough—I will stop them at the right time," Morris was assured.[23]

Morris and his counselors then decided to assemble their congregation and read them the revelation and the surrender proclamation. Accordingly, the bugle was sounded and the Morrisites hurried from their homes to the bowery. The meeting was opened with a brief prayer. John Parsons, who had a voice remarkably suited for the occasion, read the revelation. As he finished, Richard Cook stood and began expounding on the significance of the revelation. His remarks were suddenly interrupted by the thunder of cannon fire from the distant hillside and then screams and bedlam within the bowery as the ball crashed into the congregation, just a few feet from where Cook stood, killing two women and shattering the lower jaw of a third. Perceiving what had happened, Cook shouted above the din and

confusion for the people to return to their homes and use every possible means to defend themselves. Within a few short minutes the bowery was virtually empty, its silence broken only by the voices and sobs of those evacuating the dead and wounded.[24]

The Morrisites were not well armed; only a few of the men owned rifles and shotguns. Within their fragile cabins they clutched these short-range weapons desperately and waited in fear throughout the rest of the day as intermittent cannon fire shook the area around them. Rain began falling that afternoon and continued throughout the night and the next day, heightening the mood of desperation among the Morrisites as they awaited deliverance with the Second Coming.

The third day of the siege, Sunday, June 15, broke bright and clear. It was also quiet, the militia having expended its cannon ball the previous day. If ever the moment seemed right to the beleaguered Morrisites for the Second Coming, it must have been that peaceful Sabbath morning. But as the morning hours passed and the sun moved into the afternoon sky, the quiet of the day was broken by the sound of rifle fire and shouts. Streaming toward the encampment was a wagon chassis, covered by brush and boards, carrying a half-dozen riflemen and being pushed by a number of foot soldiers. This had the desired effect. The Morrisites, dispirited by the long siege, raised the white flag of surrender. At that sign, Burton rode forward at the head of a group of men and entered the encampment.

Typical of such events, details of the skirmish that followed are muddled. Only a few salient points are known with some certainty. Burton commanded Morris to surrender to his custody, Morris refused, and gunplay ensued, leaving Joseph Morris and two women dead and John Banks mortally wounded. Confusion then reigned for several long minutes as the panicky crowd dashed for cover amid the screams of women and children. Only after bringing forward a cannon was Burton able to restore order. He then took ninety men prisoner, fed them and let them rest that night, and then started the two-day march back to Salt Lake City the next morning.

Months later, in March 1863, seven of the prisoners would be convicted in Judge Kinney's court of second degree murder, in conjunction with the death of two posse members, and sentenced to prison terms ranging from five to fifteen years. Sixty-six others would be tried for resisting arrest and fined \$100 each. Gov. Stephen S. Harding, sensing an injustice, would grant them all pardon three days after the conviction and drive another wedge in the widening gulf between him and the Mormon community. But for Joseph Morris and John Banks there would be no more legal technicalities. Their bodies were loaded on a wagon and dispatched to Salt Lake City for a brief public viewing and quiet burial.[25]

In Retrospect

Just as controversy surrounded Joseph Morris during his lifetime, so it has continued these many years after his death. Many people, then and later, viewed him as a true prophet of the Lord, and several sects in various places have worshiped in his name through the years. But historian Orson Whitney showed little liking or sympathy for Morris, viewing him and his followers as militant and lawless. Richard W. Young held similar views, as did B.H. Roberts, who added the charge of insanity to Morris. Stenhouse, on the other hand, saw Morris as a rather pitiable character driven to distraction by an unfeeling Mormon hierarchy. Modern scholarship, though limited in volume, tends toward a militant posture for Morris and suggests that bloodshed was made inevitable by his intransigence.[26]

Exactly what happened as Burton entered Kingston Fort that fateful day in 1862 may never be known—even though the incident was aired twice in court and has been scrutinized in various historical accounts. It is unfortunate that Mark H. Forscutt, Morris's scribe, was not present to observe the event. His Morrisite experience, written sometime later, is a relatively dispassionate and credible record heretofore neglected in historical inquiry. But sensing the hopelessness of the Morrisite situation during the second day of the siege, he slipped quietly from the encampment that night.

The classic first-hand account of the surrender scene is that of Alexander Dow. His deposition to Associate Justice Charles B. Waite on April 18, 1863, is quoted as follows:

In the spring of 1861, I joined the Morrisites, and was present when Joseph Morris was killed. The Morrisites had surrendered, a white flag was flying, and the arms were all grounded and guarded by a large number of the posse. Robert T. Burton and Judson L. Stoddard rode in among the Morrisites. Burton was much excited. He said, "Where is the man? I don't know him." Stoddard replied, "That's him,"

pointing to Morris. Burton rode his horse upon Morris, and commanded him to give himself up, in the name of the Lord. Morris replied "No, never, never!" Morris said he wanted to speak to the people. Burton said, "Be d-----d quick about it." Morris said, "Brethren, I've taught you true principles." He had scarcely got the words out of his mouth before Burton fired his revolver. The ball passed in his neck or shoulder. Burton exclaimed: "There's your prophet." He fired again, saying: "What do you think of your prophet now?" Burton then turned suddenly and shot Banks, who was standing five or six paces distant. Banks fell. Mrs. Bowman, wife of James Bowman, came running up crying, "Oh! You blood-thirsty wretch." Burton said, "No one shall tell me that and live," and shot her dead. A Danish woman then came running up to Morris, crying, and Burton shot her dead also. Burton could easily have taken Morris and Banks prisoners, if he had tried. I was standing but a few feet from Burton all this time.[27]

On the basis of this statement, Burton was indicted in 1870 for the murder of Bella Bowman. Owing to a number of legal technicalities, however, the trial was not held until 1879, nearly seventeen years after the event. It lasted two weeks. The jury, composed of a like number of Mormons and non-Mormons, deliberated two days and returned a verdict of not guilty.

Burton's account of the event, presented at the trial, differed from Dow's in a number of important particulars. He testified that upon entering the encampment he positioned himself and his small contingent of men between the congregation of Morrisites and their stacked arms. He then announced his intention of taking into custody all those who had borne arms in resistance to his authority. Upon request that Morris be allowed to speak, he assented. With that, Morris stepped forward and called his followers to arms. The crowd immediately charged toward their weapons. Burton gave the command to halt, then fired his revolver twice at Morris. Additional posse members rushed in from all directions and quickly established control. "I did not see any women when I fired at Morris, and shot only at him," Burton testified. "No woman addressed me, nor did I see one. Every shot I fired was aimed at Mr. Morris." [28]

Even though details of the Morrisite tragedy will probably always be in controversy, a number of generalizations are nevertheless possible. They should provide some illumination of this complex and little-understood incident in Utah history. Whatever else may be said about Robert T. Burton, it seems certain at this distance that he was guilty of overreaction. At the time of his march upon Kingston Fort, the Morrisites were destitute and demoralized. Defections were becoming increasingly common and the leadership echelon was feeling the stress of dissension. Under these circumstances it is altogether conceivable that the siege would have been successful without cannon fire. Furthermore, the one or two initial shots fired from the militia cannon and falling on the camp were not interpreted by the Morrisites as a warning. At that point, of course, the Morrisites felt they had to resist by force of arms. Regardless, a possibility exists—and was given implicit voice in Burton's testimony—that the cannon ball which ricocheted into the bowery was actually a warning shot.

Robert T. Burton was a man accustomed to thinking in terms of military solutions. He had been a member of the Nauvoo Legion since 1844 and had participated in skirmishes during Nauvoo's turbulent last months. Within his first three years in Salt Lake Valley he took part in six campaigns against Indians and quickly distinguished himself as being aggressive in battle. Promoted to major in 1855 and to colonel in 1857, he was also one of the principals in the guerrilla activity against Johnston's Army. Early in May 1862 he led a contingent of militiamen on another foray against the Indians, this time proceeding as far east as the Green River in Wyoming.

Joseph Morris, on the other hand, was not a militant man. He suffered abuse without complaint and continually counseled his congregation to do the same. Members of his congregation did scuffle with rowdy neighbors on occasion, but their actions were defensive only and followed serious provocation. Even the apprehension and detention of Gurtson, Jones, and Jensen was of that nature. Morris did not form his army until May 16, 1862, just one month before the siege, and its ranks never exceeded one hundred fifty poorly armed men. It is immediately obvious from a perusal of Joseph Morris's many revelations that he saw his war as being fought by the Lord and the hosts of heaven. Even during the last few days at Kingston Fort he was assured by revelation that the Lord expected the Morrisite congregation to present only a show of resistance; when their ammunition was gone He would come to their rescue.[29]

Burton, of course, did not know these things, but the essential point is that he seemed not to care. Deeply committed to a religious point of view, his zeal having been tempered in the fires of persecution, he had strong notions about

who were friends, who were enemies, and how each should be treated.

To what extent Burton's actions were motivated by sectarian commitment is difficult to determine exactly, but it may be presumed substantial. Mormon authorities took a hard line toward apostate groups at that time, and Burton was close to Brigham Young and the heartbeat of Mormon orthodoxy. Young himself, traditionally uncharitable toward his enemies, publicly equated the Morrisites with the devil, directed that they be ostracized, and forbade their reentry into Mormonism. "Let them wait a thousand years," he enjoined the Saints from the pulpit of the Salt Lake bowery shortly after the siege.[30]

One team of scholars has argued with persuasive effect that Brigham Young figured prominently in the decision to send a military expedition against the Morrisites,[31] but the evidence remains circumstantial. It seems beyond dispute, however, that Young chafed at the spectacular success enjoyed initially by Joseph Morris. Almost all of the thousand followers, of course, came from Mormonism's ranks. Yet, in the ultimate analysis, the number of Morrisites is less significant than their ethnic background. Most of them were Scandinavians,[32] especially Danes, generally unschooled in the English language, unfamiliar with American customs and legal procedures, and disenchanted with Mormon orthodoxy.

The source of disillusionment among these Danish converts was not with religious dogma—though many of them seem to have been poorly prepared for the shock of polygamy—as much as with the practical matter of how one wore the mantle of prophet. Unlike his predecessor, Joseph Smith, who founded Mormonism upon a series of revelations, Brigham Young was not a visionary man. He did sometimes find divine messages in dreams, but he did not profess to walk and talk with heavenly hosts or to proclaim direct revelation. Was this a proper way for a prophet of God to act? Particularly one who claimed to be the spiritual heir of Joseph Smith? Joseph Morris, on the other hand, projected great confidence in his own ability to converse directly with God. "I am Jesus Christ. Even so. Amen and Amen," was asserted at the conclusion of each missive. These words were a balm to many troubled souls and explain why Morris was able to command such powerful allegiance from so many people under such desperate circumstances.

The makeup of the Morrisite congregation also explains why this group has been burdened with the historical judgment of lawlessness. They simply did not understand that the army that marched upon them, demanded unconditional surrender, and opened fire with cannon was a federal posse. Rather, they saw it as a force of Mormons carrying the offensive in a religious war. Time and time again their prophet had told them it would be this way. This, surely, was Armageddon, the final battle between the forces of good and evil. The Lord had commanded them, through his prophet, to do battle for a time. Then He would come. Writs of habeas corpus, writs of attachments, warrants for arrests, federal judges, federal marshals—these abstractions had neither meaning nor relevance to people charged with the task of ushering in the Second Coming.

That Judge Kinney, Acting Governor Fuller, Marshal Burton and the other principals did not understand this about the Morrisites is the tragedy of the event. More than a dozen people died needlessly, and scores of others were uprooted and scarred as a result of their precipitous action. Some of these scars are still evident today among third- and fourth-generation descendants. They are visible reminders of a national era, now thankfully past, when groups were quick to resort to force of arms in the ongoing clash of ideas and wills.

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(1) John Banks, "A Document History of the Morrisites in Utah" (Master's thesis, University of Utah, 1909), pp. 3–5.

(2) George Morris Diary, Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo.

(3) *The Spirit Prevails, Containing the Revelations, Articles, and Letters Written by Joseph Morris* (San Francisco, 1886), pp. 1–3. The first eight pages of this volume consist of an introduction penned by George S. Dove, a disciple of Morris.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 9.

(5) *Ibid.*, p 12, and Mark H. Forscutt Manuscript, Archives Division, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereinafter cited as LDS Archives). Forscutt was one of Morris's twelve apostles, his

handwritten account of the Morrisite incident, penned several years afterward, is detailed and generally judicious.

(6) Banks, "A Document History," p. 12. See also H. Orvil Holley, "The History and Effect of Apostasy on a Small Mormon Community" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University 1966), pp. 21–28. According to Holley, many Slaterville families were then experimenting with a form of spiritualism and were therefore receptive to a new religious experience.

(7) *The Spirit Prevails*, pp. 18–19.

(8) Forscutt manuscript. Minutes of the meeting are included in "History of Brigham Young," pp. 58–72, manuscript, LDS Archives, and also in Wilford Woodruff Journal, holograph, LDS Archives.

(9) Morris to George Leslie, July 9, 1861, reproduced in *The Spirit Prevails*, pp. 670–74.

(10) Andrew Jenson, *Latter-Day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Andrew Jenson History Co., 1901–36), 2:590.

(11) Karl Banks, "A Brief History of John Banks and the Morrisite Movement," manuscript pp. 2–3, Utah State Historical Society.

(12) *The Spirit Prevails*, p. 17.

(13) *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 672.

(14) *Ibid.*, *passim*.

(15) Forscutt Manuscript, pp. 30–32.

(16) *The Spirit Prevails*, p. 112.

(17) Forscutt Manuscript, p. 39

(18) Davis County, Probate Court Records, Davis County Courthouse, Farmington, Utah.

(19) *The Spirit Prevails*, p. 149.

(20) Forscutt Manuscript, p. 46. William Jones was the same who had recognized Morris as a prophet at Slaterville in 1860.

(21) Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1892–1904), 2:53.

(22) Robert T. Burton Journal, holograph, LDS Archives.

(23) *The Spirit Prevails*, p. 627.

(24) Forscutt Manuscript.

(25) Richard W. Young, "The Morrisite War" *The Contributor* 11 (1889–90): 466–70. In a letter to J. H. Beadle, Harding explained the tragedy as "the old story over again: 'There is not room in the Roman Empire for two Caesars.'" This may have his rationale in granting the pardons. See J. H. Beadle, *Brigham's Destroying Angel* . . . Bill Hickman (New York, 1872), p. 212.

(26) Whitney, *History of Utah*, 2:48–57 and 3:35–44, Young, "The Morrisite War" pp. 466ff., Brigham H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), 5:3943. T.B.H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (Salt Lake City: Shephard Book Company 1904), pp. 591–601. For the recent view see M. Hamlin Cannon "The Morrisite War," *The American West* 7 (November 1970): 4–9, 62–63, and C. LeRoy Anderson and Larry J. Halford, "The Mormons and the Morrisite War," *Montana, the Magazine of Western History* 24 (October 1974): 42–53.

(27) Quoted in Young, "The Morrisite War," pp. 470–71, and in Stenhouse, *Rocky Mountain Saints*, p. 598.

(28) Whitney, History of Utah, 3 :42.

(29) Eli Smith claimed in a letter to Brigham Young that on January 24, 1862, he heard John Banks publicly read a revelation from Joseph Morris directing that Morrisite apostates be killed. But such a position was clearly inconsistent with Morris's published revelations as well as his subsequent actions. Other reports from Smith to Young are marked by serious errors and exaggerations, suggesting that he simply was not a credible source. See Brigham Young Papers, file 16-17, LDS Archives.

(30) Charles L. Walker Diary, pp. 377-78, LDS Archives. After the 1863 trial and pardon the Morrisites scattered, mainly in the western states. At least two returned to England. A few "lost themselves" among the Mormons in Davis and Salt Lake counties. Only one lived on in South Weber.

(31) Anderson and Halford, "The Mormons and the Morrisite War."

(32) Lars Christian Christensen, "A Short Sketch of My Life," p. 11, manuscript, LDS Archives. William James Adams Jr., and Ray T. Matheny, "Archaeological and Cryptological Analyses of the Manti Inscriptions," pp. 133-140

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