



Mormon Colonization of San Bernardino

First of all I like to thank The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints' (referred to as "LDS" and "Mormon" in the rest of this paper) Historical Department. They opened their doors to me, allowing me to view records in their archives. They have an extensive collection of information relating to the Mormon settlement of San Bernardino. I had thought 5 days would be more than enough time to research what I wanted, but of course my research led to more questions and research data. Someday I'll head back for some more intensive researching there.

I liberally took much out of the thesis by Joseph Wood ("The Mormon Settlement in San Bernardino 1851-1857"), the dissertation by Eugene Edward Campbell ("A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints"), and a essay by Edward Leo Lyman ("The Rise and Decline of Mormon San Bernardino). These three works motivated me to expand my research further.

If you are really into this subject, I suggest you purchase the book "San Bernardino. The Rise and Fall of a California Community" by Edward Leo Lyman (published 1996, Signature Books). I enjoyed the book immensely. You can order it online at [Amazon books](#) or [Barnes and Noble](#).

I apologize for any grammatical and/or spelling mistakes. If you find any, [please inform me](#) so I can correct them.

Here is an article about the [settlement of Rialto](#) (a community in San Bernardino). Loma Linda (Ca) 3rd Graders study about the history of their community (which includes this settlement). Here is a link to the site that is about the "[Mormon Era](#)". Make sure you click "go to the next page" for more information and at the end, make sure you click "[how big were their footprint \(or just click this link\)?](#)" It's a list of what the colonists did and what the results were. Also, if you can obtain a copy of February 2003 issue of the "Ensign", a magazine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, there is an article titled "[True Community: Latter-Day Saints in San Bernardino, 1851-1857](#)", but for the record, this article of mine came out in 1993 and has been modified continuously since (I guess we all have egos that need stroking occasionally!). And last, but not least, [here is another site about the early Mormon Colony](#).

My Introduction

My wife and I traveled to Salt Lake City for the October 1993 conference. While there, I spent 5 days in the Church's Historical Department and their Archives researching the 1850's LDS settlement in San Bernardino. The reason for this research was not just for my curiosity, but also for the preparation of the talk I would be giving at the annual Bemis, Hancock, Roberds family reunion the following May (These 3 families traveled from Salt Lake City to the San Bernardino area. The descendants of these 3 families still gather once a year in the San Bernardino area. I was serving as an officer of the family organization at that time). [If you're interested in some of the handouts that have been given at the these reunions, then click this sentence!](#)

My great-great grand mother Jerusha Guernsey-Bemis ([go to my genealogy website link from my home page to know more](#)) was born in Ellisburg, New York on 11 June 1799. She met and later married my great-great grandfather Alvin Bemis (Born 1797 in Brattleboro, Vermont) in 1824 in Wardwell, New York. Family history and records point to Alvin being a very faithful believer of the early Church. Jerusha was not a strong believer in the faith, but supported and followed Alvin. Early Church records point to them being baptized on 8 September 1844, but other records show them active in the church in the early 1830's.

While crossing the plains to Utah (During the Mormon exodus from Missouri), Alvin, along with a baby daughter, died while at Winter Quarters, Nebraska (Alvin died 9 Nov 1847). Jerusha, along with her surviving 10 children, pushed on with the rest of the Saints to Utah.

Upon arrival in Utah, she established a home in Ogden and soon found many suitors courting her. She wanted to have nothing to do with them. At one point, she informed her children to tell these suitors that she was sick.

In 1854, she and her family (less one daughter who had married and stayed in Utah) joined other colonists, among them the Borens, Joseph Thorn and family, and Captain Bell and family for the journey to San Bernardino. Their wagon train arrived in San Bernardino on 5 June 1854. She settled on 240 acres of land near Lytle Creek.

That is the short history of how my great-great grandmother made it to San Bernardino.

A postscript to my family history above-When Brigham Young called the San Bernardino Saints back to Utah (you'll read why below), my great great grand mother was one of the members that decided that they had enough and decided to stay in San Bernardino. A few years later, when The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Now know as the "Community of Christ", but for this paper will be referred to as "RLDS") was doing missionary work in this area ([head down near the end of the article to learn more about this](#)), she and several other LDS families made the switch to this Church.

Jumping ahead many years, my father was raised in the RLDS Church. When he married my mother, he became a member of her faith (Presbyterian). And that was the faith that I was raised in. In December 1976, I became a member of the LDS Church.

Why San Bernardino

The first Mormons to appear in southern California were a hardened band of soldiers who comprised the Mormon Battalion. They had enlisted in the US Army from the Mormon settlement near Council Bluffs, Iowa, in June of 1846. They were to be a part of a force that was to march to Santa Fe and then to San Diego under the command of Colonel Stephen Kearney. It was intended to coordinate sea power with their overland approach so that a strong pressure could be placed upon the Mexican forces in California. This Battalion played a key role in the success of the Mormon migration to the Great Basin by authorizing their army pay to be sent to the main body of the Church. It was used to help cover the expenses of many of the migrating Saints. These fund became available at the darkest moment in Mormon history.⁽¹⁾ Another by-product of the Battalion was to dispel, at least partially, a great deal of the prejudice against the Mormon people.⁽²⁾ Their loyalty to the government was vindicated though it had been such a short time since their accusers had charged them with treason.

By 1847, a good portion of the Mormon Battalion had been sent to Los Angeles for garrison duty. Because of the request of Isaac Williams, a small contingent of soldiers was assigned to be stationed at the Chino Rancho. Another group was stationed at Cajon Pass to ward off any potential Indian attacks.⁽³⁾

Isaac Williams had desperately wanted the soldiers. While he was held prisoner during the Battle of Chino, angry Californians pilfered all of his household goods away in Williams' own carts and wagons that had not been destroyed. Also 255 saddle horses were driven from his property. He claimed that when he returned to his house with his 3 motherless children, there was no change of clothes, no bed or blankets, nor a mouthful of food. It was reported that during the period of the Mexican War, he had 1200 horses taken from his rancho. By 1847 he had lost his affection for the Mexican people.⁽⁴⁾

During the summer months of 1847, many of the Mormon soldiers, while on furlough, worked for Williams at his ranch. It was a fine arrangement for everyone concerned. Williams had about 1000 acres of wheat to cut and the crop was a good one. The Mormons were eager to earn provisions for their anticipated journey to Salt Lake Valley. Although wheat was his major cultivated crop, he also raised barley, beans and peas and had a good sized vineyard.⁽⁵⁾ Another part of the rancho operation included a small soap factory.

The Mormon interest in California really took shape when Williams actually offered to sell his rancho to the Mormons. The offer involved eight square leagues of land, eight thousand head of cattle and a great number of horses. He told them that they could put \$500 down and take their time to pay the remainder of a total cost of \$200,000.⁽⁶⁾

Why did Isaac Williams want to sell his excellent Rancho? The most probably answer is that he was discouraged and ill. The death of his wife and the scars of the Battle of Chino were still deep. The theft of so much of his personal property had hurt him further.

The thoughts of a Mormon settlement would have never materialized without the pleasant impression that the area made upon the members of the Mormon Battalion. These men had been exposed to the charm of southern California and wanted to return to this fertile valley after they had spent a few years in the Salt Lake Valley.

The location of San Bernardino was ideal. Los Angeles was about sixty-five miles to the west and San Diego one hundred and ten miles to the south. It was a natural gateway city for trade to the interior and yet far enough away from the sea coast so that the riff-raff of coastal towns would not be a problem. The climate was so pleasant that it made thoughts of wintertime in Utah almost unbearable.⁽⁷⁾

A strong LDS colony in San Bernardino could be of enormous value to the Latter Day Saints for two strong reasons. First it could be used as the main trading point for goods and converts coming to Utah. Finally it would give the Church a second "Salt Lake Valley" in the rich lands of California.

Brigham Young and the Saints in the Great Basin

At this very time, Brigham Young was leading the first group of Mormon Pioneers into Salt Lake Valley. The major problem in Salt Lake was their complete isolation and the necessity of providing sufficient food and supplies to maintain themselves. The harvest of 1848 had not been as good as expected and the winter of 1848-49 was quite severe.⁽⁸⁾

Their struggle for survival brought a different but equally difficult problem for Brigham Young to solve. The

severity of the winter, the constant hunger, and the pessimism over the future harvest seemed to spur a feeling of discontent which have been called "California Fever."⁽⁹⁾ Many felt that the Saints should move to California as a group before the rigors of Great Basin living destroyed them.

Brigham Young at this time had strong reservations against migration of Saints to California. That however did not mean he wanted all his people within the protective rim of the mountains around the Great Salt Lake. Soon after arriving in the Valley, explorations were made of nearby possibilities for settlements. There were two phases of the colonization plan. The first phase was called the "inner cordon" of settlements. The second phase was an expansion beyond the valleys that were relatively close to Salt Lake first phase of the colonization.⁽¹⁰⁾ These areas included: Carson Valley, Nevada (1849); Fort Supply and Fort Bridger, Wyoming (1853; Las Vegas (1855); Moab (1855); Lemhi, Idaho (1855); and of course, San Bernardino in 1851. These "outposts" formed a perimeter around an area of 1000 miles from north to south and 800 miles from east to west.⁽¹¹⁾ Within a ten year period after their arrival in Salt Lake, the Mormons had founded a total of ninety-six settlements.⁽¹²⁾

The Selection and Journey

In 1850, Robert Clift, a veteran of the Battalion, wrote a letter to Young. Like earlier letters from four of the Battalion Officers, he enthusiastically told of the advantages of Williams' rancho.⁽¹³⁾ Apparently this letter convinced Young that Williams offer was worth considering. On 19 December 1850, Williams had written to C. C. Rich, and again offered the Mormons an opportunity to buy his property. This time he quoted a price of \$150,000, with one half to be paid of the 1st of March 1851, and the remainder on time with an interest rate that could be agreed upon.⁽¹⁴⁾

In his own journal, Young gave "permission" to "Elders Amasa Lyman and C.C. Rich, with some 20 others, having received my approbation in going to southern California, they were instructed by letter to select a site for a city or station, as a nucleus for a settlement, near Cajon Pass."⁽¹⁵⁾ This "permission" did not mean that the Church was subsidizing or pledging its capital for whatever land purchase might be made. The purchase of land would be a personal contract and the individual colonists-not the Church-would be the contracting party.⁽¹⁶⁾

On 28 Feb 1851, in the office of Brigham Young, a number of men were blessed and set apart by the First Presidency of the Church for missionary purposes. Among them were Elders Lyman and Rich who were set apart to lead the company and to establish a stronghold for the Saints there.⁽¹⁷⁾

Lyman and Rich personally selected families they wished to take to California. Sometimes, as in the case of William D. Kartchner, extra incentive was asserted. Kartchner claimed that when he initially declined to be a part of the California colony, Apostle Lyman "Said that if I refused to go he would cause me to have a worst mission."⁽¹⁸⁾

Brigham Young's Manuscript History, written by clerks close to him, states that his original plan intended for some twenty families to accompany his designated agents.⁽¹⁹⁾ Young was very surprised and disturbed when he learned of the large size of the company that was planning the expedition. He had always feared that a California colony would be severely tempted by worldliness and yet he could see the obvious need of such a colony. He would have preferred that it be a relatively small settlement. His journal states:

"Elders Lyman and Rich's company, however, had swelled to above 570 persons and 152 wagons, most of

who had become so enamored of the California "paradise" that they had determined to try their fortune there. I was so sick at the sight of so many of the saints running to California, chiefly after the God of this world, and was unable to address them." [\(20\)](#)

An interesting note here. One place that this company stayed at for a few days was the infamous (In Mormon and Western States History) Mountain Meadow. [\(21\)](#) The events that would later expire in this meadow would later play a part in the Mormon abandonment of San Bernardino.

The Site of the Settlement

As the company ventured into the Mojave, four of the leaders, Elders Lyman and Rich, among with Captain Jefferson Hunt (Of Mormon Battalion fame) and Joseph Mathew, went ahead of the rest of the wagon train on horse-back so they could finalize the purchase with Isaac Williams. [\(22\)](#) The four were cordially received by Williams. They made him an offer for his entire rancho and stock but were shocked with disappointment when he refused their offer. His eagerness to sell in earlier years, Williams claimed, was due to his ill health. Now he was feeling much better and seemed to have no desire to dispose of his property. Perhaps the recent booming prosperity in the cattle business, due to the growing demand for beef in the gold fields of northern California had been a recuperative influence on William's health. [\(23\)](#)

The four Mormon leaders rode in disappointed silence back to the Mormon camp at the spot now known as Sycamore Grove. A group of the leaders held a meeting to decide the future course of action. It was decided to send a party to visit an ex-captain of the Mormon Battalion named J.D. Hunter who had remained in the area after his discharge and had recently been appointed US Indian Agent in southern California. It was hoped that Hunter could help them in finding another possibility for a land purchase. [\(24\)](#)

One of the first residents they called upon was Jose de Carmen Lugo, the oldest of three brothers who owned the San Bernardino Rancho. He showed a mild interest in a possible sale, but in usual Spanish fashion, seemed very slow to act. The Lugo property seemed the best of the possible acquisitions, but progress was slow. Meanwhile, the large camp of settlers remained at Sycamore Grove all summer. [\(25\)](#)

However, the Mormons did not stay idle. Almost immediately, three separate schools were organized. The men tried their best to keep busy by repairing equipment and exploring the surrounding areas. On Sunday, July 5th, the first conference of the Church in California was held at Sycamore Grove. At this time the General Authorities of the Church were sustained as well as a Stake Presidency, High Council and Bishopric for their own settlement. **Stake Presidency** David Seeley, President Samuel Rolfe, 1st Counselor Simeon Andrews, 2nd Counselor **High Council** Theodore Turley, William Mathews, Alfred Bybee, Jefferson Hunt, Joseph Matthews, Andrew Lytle, Benjamin Taylor, Sidney Tanner, William J. Cox, Charles Crisman, Dan M. Thomas and James Rollins. **Bishopric:** William J. Crosby, Bishop. Robert W. Smith, 1st Counselor. Albert W. Collins, 2nd Counselor [\(26\)](#)

Amasa Lyman and Charles C. Rich, being Apostles, had presiding power over all of the local officers.

It was not until September 22, 1851, that Lyman and Rich, with a few of the other leading men of the colony, finally concluded the negotiations with the Lugo brothers for the purchase of the San Bernardino Rancho. The sum agreed upon was \$77,500. [\(27\)](#) The interest rate was at 30% a year, which seems incredibly high now, but back then, these rates of interest were not uncommon. [\(28\)](#)

Lyman and Rich received a deed to the San Bernardino Rancho. It was their plan to dispose of the land in parcels to the colonists. The colonists would pay for their property from profits that would accrue from their agriculture crops. The Lugo property, unlike the Williams offer, did not include any cattle in the purchase. The only immediate method of gaining any return on the property was to cultivate crops that could be sold.

A note here. During this time, the church had sent a small contingent of men to the gold fields of northern California to attempt to increase the supply of gold for the Salt Lake economy. This was a little-known program and represented a reversal of the strong stand that Brigham Young had maintained about California gold. This assignment was referred to as the "Gold Mission" and involved only a small group of men that were considered to be very loyal members. The Gold Mission was not successful in bringing any sizable quantity of new wealth. [\(29\)](#)

At the time the rancho was purchased by the Mormons, the Los Angeles Star said "San Bernardino contains within its boundaries 80,000 acres of excellent land." [\(30\)](#) It was generally understood throughout Los Angeles County that the Lugo brothers controlled approximately that much property. It is true that the Lugo brothers and their cousin Diego Sepulveda, had used this entire tract but the original Mexican grant of 1842 specified that the grantees were gaining title to only 8 leagues, or a little more than 35,000 acres. They were given the right to choose the particular eight leagues that they desired. The papers and documents connected with the grants were in Spanish and were not fully understood by the Mormons. Lyman and Rich had undoubtedly been negligent in not having the fine print of the document examined by someone more competent in Spanish than William Stout, one of their brethren. This disappointing discovery was not made for almost a year after the purchase had been made when Lyman and Rich hired an attorney in order to verify the authenticity of the title held by the Mormons. The US Land Commission decreed that the Mormon claim was sound and valid but only to the extent of eight square leagues. [\(31\)](#) This gave the two apostles less than half of the land they supposed they were buying and must have been a jolting blow to them. Anything outside the eight square leagues would now become public land and anyone locating on it would have no obligation to purchase it from the Mormons. However, the exact location of the 8 square leagues was not decided for sometime and this complicated the efforts of people to settle on public lands. This single fact--the reduction of acreage from 80,000 to 35,000 acres--and the complicated and bitter entanglements that resulted, played a heavy part in the eventual conflicts that tore at the unity of the colonial effort. [\(32\)](#)

The Tale of the Arrowhead and the Mormon connection to it

There is a natural arrowhead landmark which is emblazoned on the mountainside of Arrowhead Mountain on the north rim of the valley. The area of this landmark is in excess of 7 acres with a length of 1376 feet and a width of 479 feet. This arrowhead, nearly perfect in form, points downward directly towards some hot springs at its base. [\(33\)](#) This unusual landmark was a focal point of interest for the early Mormon settlers.

Various stories have been published with regards to the nature and origin of this formation. For instance, many have believed that the mark was caused by an outcropping of gray granite. Others felt that erosion or a slip in the surface soil of the mountain might have been the cause. [\(34\)](#) Some writers have suggested that the Indians might have carried light colored gravel from the Santa Ana and Cajon washes to form the arrowhead--and that it was intended as a prehistoric directional sign for the hot springs below. Actually, the surface of the Arrowhead is covered with a mellow loam which seems identical with the soil on the surrounding slopes. Yet there is a decided difference in the species and color between the vegetation growing on the surface of the landmark and that of adjoining areas. The arrowhead coverage is so light in hue that it stands out in sharp contrast against the darker background. Although the entire face of the mountain has been

frequently burned, the vegetation always grow back in exactly the same manner. It is the difference in vegetation that causes the line of demarcation.⁽³⁵⁾

Legend has it that in the dim and distant past the Indians that lived far to the east were driven from their homes by fierce and war-like tribes. After many moons of wandering, the Good Spirit had mercy on his people and guided them to new hunting grounds with an arrow of fire. The guiding arrow at last came to rest on a mountainside with its head pointing downward toward the fertile valley and boiling springs.⁽³⁶⁾

There is another frequently told among the San Bernardino residents towards the end of the 19th century relates that Brigham Young, in 1851, had a vision depicting the site which should be chosen for a Mormon California settlement. This vision revealed to him the view of a huge arrowhead on a mountainside pointing down to a rich and fertile valley below. He was reported to have chosen a group of his disciples to search for this divinely chosen spot with instructions that regardless of the difficulty of their quest, they must continue until their goal was found.⁽³⁷⁾

Indian Problems

At about the time the Mormons moved their wagons away from Sycamore Grove to the newly acquired property in the valley below, an Indian scare covered the entire area of southern California. An Indian Chief named Antonio Garra was attempting to unite all of the Indians west of the Colorado River in a massive attack against all white people from San Diego to Santa Barbara.⁽³⁸⁾ If the Indian union were successful they could have a tremendous numerical superiority. Fear was so rampant that San Diego County enlisted every bodied citizen in a force of defense.⁽³⁹⁾ Los Angeles County organized a large volunteer group and stationed it at Chino Rancho.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The Mormons sent a group of men to represent them in this force. The Mormon leaders quickly decided that it would be best to build a large fort and to have their families live within it until the Indian problems could be eliminated. The men worked every night until midnight. Work continued on the fort even on the Sabbath-which indicates the urgency these religious people placed upon a speedy completion.⁽⁴¹⁾

Just as the fort was finished, Garra, the Indian Chief was captured and executed. This solved most of the unrest.

A Temple Site and Town Layout in San Bernardino

In laying out their city, Lyman and Rich chose the center block to be the site of a future temple and designated it as Temple Block.⁽⁴²⁾ There is no record of any effort to erect a temple during their relatively short stay in San Bernardino. Amasa Lyman wrote a lengthy letter to another Mormon Apostle, Franklin D. Richards, who in 1852 was president of the Church missionary activities in Great Britain. Lyman wrote in this letter:

"In March we commenced the survey of our city, and on the 8th day Brother Rich and myself planted the center stake upon Temple Block"⁽⁴³⁾

The town site, as laid out early in spring of 1852, was very similar to that of Salt Lake City. The town was one mile square, laid out in blocks containing eight acres with side streets running at right angles. Each street was to be bordered by a zanja, or irrigation ditch. A public park was planned for the center of the town.⁽⁴⁴⁾ The streets running north and south were given appropriate Mormon names which in later decades were

changed.

By October conference of 1853, the official Church membership in the area was just over one thousand, with new additions coming in regularly.

The government had been the most honest and effective of any of the cities of California. It was a city noted for its lack of drunkenness and loitering. The Mormon people that made up the bulk of the population had exhibited an aggressive industriousness and an emphasis on education that was not to be found elsewhere in southern California. They had brought a new and productive type of agriculture to this area by cultivating large areas for the growing of wheat, barley and corn. Before they came, no one thought of using this land for anything other than grazing large herds of cattle. The Mormon people had come to San Bernardino with a respected and admired reputation already won. It had been developed when the Mormon Battalion came to southern California in 1847.

Polygamy

Polygamy did exist among the Mormons in San Bernardino. Circuit Court Judge Benjamin Hayes always seemed to enjoy his stays in the settlement and his amiable and warm manner made him a welcome visitor. He wrote the following:

"At this time the Mormons are in the hey-day of their prosperity; with good crops, their lumber mills are profitable, and there is plenty of comfort around them. The leaders of most note are Pres. Amasa Lyman and Gen. Chas. C. Rich. Other prominent men are Capt. Jefferson Hunt, Rollins, Judge Thomas, Richard Hopkins, David Seeley and Bishop William Crosby. The two first named have more than one wife, and the third also."⁽⁴⁵⁾

Perhaps the very best answer for the Mormon of today as to the reason for this doctrine is that suggested by Robert Mullen, a non Mormon author. After thorough study he puts forth the thought that the Mormon people practiced plural marriage for one reason—they felt that the Lord commanded it. They knew not the details behind it any more than they completely understood the reasons for many Old Testament occasions of sanctioned polygamy. Nevertheless, they practiced it because they believed the Lord commanded it. ⁽⁴⁶⁾

A Sunday Service

During the eight year period of the colony's active existence, only one Sunday service is mentioned at which a non member was permitted to address them. This occasion was on 17 May 1857, when Mr. Bailey, a Methodist preacher addressed the afternoon meeting. He preached a discourse against polygamy, and said that he considered the Mormons to be a deluded people and that he wanted to "sweep the error from before them."⁽⁴⁷⁾

The Reformation

In late 1856, Lyman and Rich encourage all of the members of the Church to be rebaptized. President Lyman began by baptizing the members of the stake presidency, the bishopric, and some of the members of the high council. ⁽⁴⁸⁾ This movement began on 15 December 1856 and by the end of two months nearly 500 members had renewed their covenants by baptism. ⁽⁴⁹⁾ This was called a reformation movement and was intended for the purpose of renewing the promises and covenants made at the time of baptism. The two apostles felt that the outward sign of rebaptism would be a healthy cleansing effect upon the personal lives of the local Saints.

This reformation movement was not a spectacular thing, but was carried on quietly among the loyal Church members. It is difficult to judge the effectiveness of the effort, but apparently it did not reach the majority of the people. Yet as it is often the case, the very people at which the reformation plan was aimed, were reluctant to abide by it. Those that held bitter feelings towards the Church or its leaders were not about to be baptized again. In fact, the reformation program probably widened the gulf between the faithful and those that were wavering in the faith. [\(50\)](#)

The News

On 1 September 1857, a jolting piece of news reached the settlement from Salt Lake. It had been learned that the US was sending a large expedition of soldiers to Utah to suppress the Mormon people. [\(51\)](#) This was a severe blow to the fading morale of those that counted themselves as loyal Latter Day Saints. The Saints were planning to resist, and needed the help of every able-bodied man. [\(52\)](#)

On October 1, 1857, another bit of news reached the settlement that was almost as shocking as the news of the approaching government army had just one month earlier. The news was that of the infamous Mountain Meadow Massacre. The victims of the massacre were members of the Fancher party of emigrants, most of whom were from Arkansas and Missouri. Hundreds of companies of emigrants had passed through the Mormon area of Utah on their way to California in the preceding decade but the Fancher party came in the late summer of 1857, just a few weeks after the Saints had received word of the approaching federal troops. This was unfortunate, for the Mormon people throughout the territory had become exceedingly excited and fearful about the impending entry of the troops. They refused to sell any food to the Fancher party because Brigham Young had warned them that they themselves might need every morsel of food they could save if they were to be driven from their homes. This angered the emigrants and when Charles C. Rich advised them to take the northern route along the Humbolt River to California, they coldly ignored him. The details of the Donner party of 1846 was still fresh in the minds of all who contemplated an early fall crossing of the Sierras and so the Fancher party headed due south. Thus it was that the memories of one tragedy helped set the stage for another. [\(53\)](#)

The Fancher party was like a torch to a tinder-dry field. As they passed through the small Mormon villages on their southward journey, they found little willingness to sell them supplies or a helping hand. The Saints were intent on other thoughts. The Fanchers were accused of naming their oxen Brigham Young and Heber Kimball and shouting curses at them; of insulting the Mormons by bragging that they were the ones who had killed Joseph Smith; of poisoning wells after using them and of wantonly destroying Mormon property. [\(54\)](#) They attempted to satisfy their anger by taunting each community they passed on the trail. A corresponding set of circumstances was being formed at the same time by Apostle George A. Smith in southern Utah as he repeatedly and eloquently reminded the Saints of the cruel persecutions of Missouri and Illinois. He was successful in arousing the Saints. As the Fancher party rolled into Cedar City it was as through the very last piece of a jig-saw puzzle had fallen into place. Men's emotions had broken over the dike and their ability to think wisely was choked off by the tension of the hour. [\(55\)](#)

As the Fancher party stopped at Mountain Meadows for a few days, a few of the leading Mormons at nearby Cedar City quietly urged that steps be taken to arranged an Indian attack on the party. This was evil enough, but the developing events of the next few days plunged lower and lower on the scale of human decency. The Indians attack proved inadequate to drive the emigrants from their dug-in defenses. The original plan did not call for killing but rather for the Indians to steal the emigrants' cattle and give them a scare by chasing them from the area. But the evil of the day was compounded to such a degree that eventually it was decided that all

but the youngest children of the party must die to prevent word reaching the outside world of the shameful deeds already performed.⁽⁵⁶⁾

This regrettable incident occurred on September 10th and without question this must be ranked as the darkest moment of all Mormon history. To hope that such an act could be kept secret was preposterous and as the news reached California, the Mormons were immediately linked with the crime. Some of the San Bernardino Anti Mormons were instrumental in inspiring a mass meeting in Los Angeles on October 12.

Departure

Just thirty days after the first report of the massacre reached San Bernardino, another important message was received by William J. Cox, the Stake President. Brigham Young, in a letter from Salt Lake, had issued a call for all Latter Day Saints in San Bernardino to come back to the valleys of the Rocky Mountains in Utah and to dispose of their property in California.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Richard Hopkins, the faithful Stake Clerk, wrote the final line of six and one-half years of life in San Bernardino, California. His record says simply, "Tuesday, December 15, 1857. Left San Bernardino for Utah."⁽⁵⁸⁾

It is not known exactly how many Latter Day Saints left the City. A. Harvey Collins estimated that about six hundred Mormons left out of a total of "even hundred", obeyed Brigham Young's call and left California.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Others estimate that slight over fifty percent returned to Utah. It is quite certain that most of those that considered themselves to be faithful Mormons returned there because there was no organized branch of there Church there after December 1857. In fact, it wasn't until 1921 that the Latter Day Saints again reestablished a branch of the Church in San Bernardino. It was almost as though San Bernardino and Mormonism were glad to rid themselves of each other. There was a bad taste and it took a couple of generations to filter the byproducts of misunderstanding.

A side note here. Along with the group heading back to Utah was a Australian by the name of Joseph H. Ridges. A few of the wagons carried some wooden pipes that Ridge had fashioned into a pipe organ. These same pipes would one day be a part of the first organ in the Salt Lake Tabernacle.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Why did they leave?

While the first three years of the community were notable examples of success and cooperation, the last three years, present a contrary picture of growing disenchantment and rising antagonisms.

Brigham Young had a growing perception that the California Saints, and perhaps some of their leaders, were failing to follow his direction carefully. Maybe the real reason that Brigham Young called his people back was that he could see they were spilt with apostasy and dissension. The cracks in the dam had become all too obvious to this shrewd leader. He could see that if the Mormons were to stay in California the cracks would continue to widen and deepen and the list of those leaving the Church would length. It would be much better to sacrifice the fertile lands and nice homes, he felt, and save the souls of those people that left.⁽⁶¹⁾

It is quite evident that the leaders in San Bernardino were so fearful of apostasy that they used the wrong weapons to combat it. From the very first signs of dissension, a gulf was created by the strong promises that any who were not faithful would be cast out of the Church. Their philosophy was that any diseased or dead wood should be promptly pruned from the tree, but sometimes their desire to keep the Church pure bordered

on the tactics of a purge. Excommunication and disfellowship were common for infractions that today would go unnoticed.

Land problems

One factor was the continued bitterness of the apostates and other anti-Mormons. In addition to their dissatisfaction with the Church dominated political control, they became very antagonistic because of the land policies and water rights. There was the misunderstanding of the original Mexican land grant that resulted in the Mormons receiving less than half of the land they thought they had bought. The court decision entitled them to choose what they considered to be the best land in the grant, and they were naturally careful to get the most for their money. Unfortunately, numerous people had "squatted" on the land before the survey was completed, hoping that it would be declared government land. Lyman and Rich had to resort to the courts to get control of such property, and in this caused a great deal of bitterness.⁽⁶²⁾

One of those cases involved an apostate Mormon named Jerome Benson. After losing the lawsuit for the possession of the land that he had "squatted" on, Benson refused to move. Other apostates and anti-Mormons soon joined with him to support his lawless actions. Anti Mormon meetings were held at his house, and no one was admitted unless they would swear to stand behind him in defiance of the law. Benson and others in his group secured a cannon that was used to celebrate Independence Day and other holidays, and fortified Benson's home with it. This led to wild rumors that there were anywhere from one to five hundred men, armed with small arms and numerous canon, ready to resist any law official that attempted to secure the property. Evidently the resistance was successful, for the scribe makes no mention of Benson being removed from his homestead.⁽⁶³⁾

Anti Mormons

Another unfortunate affair that increased the bitterness between the two factions in town was the Perkins-McDonald murder case. Perkins, a popular young Mormon, was stabbed and killed by Wm. McDonald, an apostate anti-Mormon, during a drunken quarrel. Rumors developed that the Mormons were going to take the law into their own hands and lynch McDonald. Stake President Cox stated that the Church would not interfere with the civil authorities in their discharge of their duties. Eventually the grand jury dismissed the case, which caused the Mormons to feel that they could no longer expect justice in that land.⁽⁶⁴⁾

Disillusionment with Brigham Young

The son of David Seeley, who was the first President of the San Bernardino Stake, left a manuscript account of his father's experience, which gives insight on the conditions and problems the San Bernardino Saints met when they returned to Utah. He wrote:⁽⁶⁵⁾

"In 1857 the Mormon were called back to Utah. I went with my father back to Salt Lake during the move. My mother refused to move back to Utah and stayed here in California with the rest of the children. She said that she had walked as far as she intended to walk when she came to California, having come from Long Island, to Illinois, to Utah, and then to California. My father and I returned in 1859, the following year."

In correspondence with Beattie, Mr. Seeley said that his father's brother, Wellington Seeley, told him that his "father and Brigham Young had a heated argument, and finally Brigham Young told David Seeley to go back to California."⁽⁶⁶⁾

There is evidence that Brigham Young had little sympathy with these members who had been to California, and that his lack of sympathetic understanding drove several from the Church.⁽⁶⁷⁾

In a very real sense, San Bernardino was coming to serve as a means of escape from the geographical harshness of Utah and, to some extent, the theocratic despotism of Brigham Young's Mormon empire. There is some evidence that the California settlement became a haven for those becoming disillusioned with the faith of plural marriage. Apparently a significant number of Utah Church members were convinced they had enough of their present situation but may not yet have concluded to completely sever their ties with the church. San Bernardino could serve as a means of transition, where they could escape much of what they recognized as unpalatable while maintaining at least nominal ties to the religious movement to which they had previously held strong commitments.⁽⁶⁸⁾

In 1854, Brigham Young wrote to Apostle Parley Pratt, then engaged in missionary work in Latin America and the Pacific Islands, advising him to carefully interview the Latter-Day Saints he came into contact with and ascertain the extent of their commitment and obedience to authority. President Young frankly instructed Pratt that "those who were faithful and determined to remain so" should be encouraged to come to Utah; all others to remain in California that would be a strainer to the streams from that direction leading into the reservoir of Utah Mormondom.⁽⁶⁹⁾

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

After three or four years living without active religious participation in an organized Church, many of the San Bernardino Mormons, as well as those living in the northern part of the state, were ripe for the harvest by the newly formed Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The members of the Church that did remain were absorbed into the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.⁽⁷⁰⁾

In matters of doctrine, they were about the same as the "Utah" group with the important exception of the concept and practice of celestial marriage. They maintained that this practice had its origin with Brigham Young and that Joseph Smith Jr. had never sanctioned such a doctrine, much less practiced it. (This proved to be a means of attracting many people who had accepted the main tenants of the Mormon faith, but could not accept the practice of polygamy. What is interesting to note is that years later the Reorganized Church, admitted that Joseph Smith Jr. did indeed practiced and taught polygamy. Space does not allow me to fully discuss the deep history and causes of the split between the two churches. It is sufficient to know that the RLDS Church followed the teachings of Joseph Smith Jr. through most of the years in Kirtland, which is where the first Temple of the Church was constructed. This is prior to what most believe is the beginning of the Temple Ceremonies which is associated with the LDS Church. This later period could be called the Nauvoo period, where the second Temple was built. In early RLDS history, they had stated that the Endowment period was another practice that Joseph Smith Jr. had not taught nor practiced; that it was something that Brigham Young had "again" created. Many years later, with the building of the RLDS Temple in Independence, the RLDS did acknowledge that Joseph Smith Jr. and Sidney Ridgon had brought forth the Endowment. I have the belief that possibly the RLDS believe that Joseph Smith had become a fallen Prophet sometime during the later stages of the Kirtland period. The LDS Church has always believed that Joseph Smith was never a fallen Prophet. As you might have noticed, early Church history fascinates me.)⁽⁷¹⁾

Closing

Brigham Young had alluded to the California settlement as a "strainer" screening out those weak in faith prior to their moving to the center of Zion in the mountains. To a greater extent, the San Bernardino settlement

acted as a magnet for attracting uncommitted Church members from throughout the other Mormon settlements. Thus occurred the reverse of the Church leaders' intended "gathering." Those whose common bond was their weakening attachment to the principles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and an unwillingness to "follow counsel" of the Church leaders congregated in the settlement that was most distant both physically and spiritually from the center of Mormondom.⁽⁷²⁾

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I just finished a full read of this talk (it's been awhile since the last one) and I give much thanks to those who have made me aware of spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Keep those corrections coming!!