

Introduction

Missouri Mormonism: Past and Present

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In retracing and interpreting the early Mormon past, the Missouri period has often been considered the darkest era in the history of the Church. During the years 1831-39, the Saints' promised hope of a Mormon utopia in the establishment of Zion in Jackson County, Missouri, brought with it misunderstandings, jealousies, mob action, confiscation and destruction of property, killings, and civil conflict. The animosity and hatred such activities created led to the eventual expulsion of more than ten thousand Latter-day Saints by order of the state's chief executive. To Missouri historians the brief decade of Mormon episodes merits only a few pages and footnotes in their histories. But to Latter-day Saints, the scenes that transpired on Missouri soil—principally in Jackson, Clay, Ray, Carroll, Caldwell, Daviess, and Livingston Counties—continue to be a dramatic epoch in Mormon history, in addition to being an integral part of the Church's spiritual heritage. The year 1998 marks the 160th year of many of the most significant, albeit tragic, events that occurred on Missouri soil, therefore, it is appropriate that this issue of the *Nauvoo Journal* has Mormonism in Missouri as its central theme.

Significantly, the story of the Mormons in Missouri did not end with Governor Lilburn W. Boggs' 1838 executive order calling for the removal of the Latter-day Saints. Some, mostly ex-Mormon confederates, remained, making Missouri their permanent home. Beginning in the mid-1840s and through the late 1850s, St. Louis became a place of temporary settlement for Mormons before emigrating to the West. During the mid-nineteenth century thousands of Mormon emigrants found passage from St. Louis up the Missouri River through Kansas City, St. Joseph, and other points of departure further north before crossing the plains by wagon and later by rail.

In the late 1860s, Missouri, but particularly the Independence area, once again became a gathering place for Restoration groups. In 1867, under the direc-

tion of Granville Hedrick, members of the Church of Christ (Temple Lot) moved from Illinois to Jackson County and subsequently purchased the main temple site property. The Church of Christ (and a few offshoots) has retained a presence in the area, but their numbers are small. An even smaller Mormon faction known as the Church of Christ (Cutlerite) relocated from Minnesota to Independence in the late 1920s, although today the organization consists of only one congregation.

In the late 1860s, members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints also began relocating in the Independence area. By 1873 a branch of the church was organized and in 1892 the first chapel, known as the Stone Church, was completed. In 1906, church president Joseph Smith III moved from Lamoni, Iowa, to Independence and took up permanent residence, but it was not until 1920 that Independence became the official RLDS church headquarters. Throughout the remainder of the twentieth century, the RLDS church presence in the greater Kansas City area has been substantial, although in recent times a number of RLDS congregations have broken off to form the Restoration Branches. Construction of the RLDS Auditorium (1926-62), and the Temple (dedicated 1994) has helped to establish the RLDS Church (and the Restoration Branches) as the dominant Restoration religion, particularly in the west central regions of the state.

The LDS Church has made significant inroads toward reestablishing an official presence in Missouri. Beginning in 1904, Church President Joseph F. Smith, authorized the purchase of twenty-five acres of Independence property, including eleven acres of the original temple lot. That same year the Central States Mission was created with headquarters in Independence, and a Church publishing house began operations, publishing the *Liahona The Elders Journal*, as well as other missionary related publications. Additional LDS buildings have been constructed over the years on the LDS Independence property, including the first chapel (1914), a mission home (1920), a new mission office (1955), a visitor's center (1971), and a modern stake center (1980). However, Church growth, particularly during the last fifty years, has been remarkable. Currently, seventeen stakes cover the Missouri area—further evidence that LDS members have a significant presence statewide. Perhaps the most visible presence of the Church is the modern St. Louis Temple, completed in 1997, located just off of I-64 and I-270.

Mormonism in Missouri during the decades of the 1830s to the 1860s was troubled and temporary, but times have changed. Today, thousands of Latter-day Saints, RLDS members, and smaller numbers of Restoration churches worship peacefully in the land of Zion and the regions round about. It is to the Missouri Mormons, past and present, that this issue is dedicated.