

BY NO MEANS MEN OF WEAK MINDS:
THE GULLIBLE BUMPKIN THESIS AND THE FIRST MORMONS

Steven C. Harper

Efforts to understand what kinds of people became Mormons in the first years of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are generally two-part, including attention to regional forces and social circumstances.¹ Interpretations of the regional forces vary widely, while much of the existing literature shares a common interpretation of the social circumstances of early Mormons, an interpretation referred to here as “the gullible bumpkin thesis”.

In *The Burned-Over District*, Whitney Cross proposed that Mormonism rose in the long settled, Yankee filled and hell-fire scorched Burned-Over District of western New York state, where established villages provided Mormon converts.² Mario DePillis claimed, to the contrary, that Mormonism attracted the “socially dislocated” of the American frontier. He held that early Mormons came mostly from points further west than New York, where “prospective converts almost always lived under unstable local social, economic, or religious conditions, usually in a newly settled, value disoriented society.” These “socially disinherited” folks “could no longer look to their former religious leaders and former ways of life for security and orientation,” and were thus ripe candidates for conversion to the Mormon gospel.³ In this context, DePillis strongly suggests that once “socially dislocated” to frontier areas, people were more easily united under the communitarian ideals of a representative poor prophet.

David Brion Davis expressed yet another conviction. Early Mormons were New Englanders, he claimed, “usually the descendants of those cast off by the Half-Way Covenant. They were the churchgoers who did not

belong, the Bible readers who did not understand”; they were believers in the “gibberish of a crazy boy,” a “practically illiterate ragamuffin.” Thus, “Mormonism,” Davis concluded, “can be seen as the extreme result of the evils of literal mindedness,” a biological and cultural remnant of Puritan zealotry.⁴ These and other efforts to identify early Mormons are, to borrow from DePillis, “oversimplifications and distortions.” Each lacks the depth of extensive research in the important and plentiful primary accounts of the early Mormons, and rest instead on such things as “long established sociological truth.”⁵

Cross, DePillis and Davis each stress widely divergent regional forces that worked on early Mormons while simultaneously placing early Mormons in social circumstances that support a gullible bumpkin thesis. “In Ohio and other parts of the Midwest,” writes DePillis, Joseph “Smith continued to find the same kind of rural, evangelical, uneducated, receptive audience that had welcomed the Book of Mormon and the first few tentative revelations back in New York state.”⁶ Cross feels that Mormonism grew best among “easily swayed” Yankees; and Davis thinks that the unfortunate simpletons were persuaded by the “gibberish of a crazy boy,” for the most part because they “did not understand” the Bible.⁷ To his credit, Cross notes that “interest in Mormonism was no necessary indication either of extraordinary ignorance or of unusually febrile imaginings,” but this does not change his thesis.⁸

Many Mormons provide a gullible bumpkin thesis of their own, where poor, uneducated frontiersmen and women are thought to be the humble, industrious ancestors they revere. One of the revelations of Joseph Smith

STEVEN C. HARPER has been an instructor at the LDS Missionary Training Center and the LDS Institute at Utah State University. He currently lives in Blackfoot, Idaho. He received his B.A. from Brigham Young University and his M.A. from Utah State University. He was an editorial assistant for *BYU Studies*; *Mormon Americana*; *The Way, the Truth, the Life*; and *The Journals of William E. McLellin*. He has also been a copy editor for Professors James B. Allen and LaMar C. Berrett. His paper on “Ministerial Tramps” was presented at The Mormon History Association meeting in 1994 and published in *Mormon Heritage Magazine*, Sept./Oct., 1995.

calls “upon the weak things of the world, those who are unlearned and despised, to thrash the nations by the power of my Spirit. . . . And the poor and the meek shall have the gospel preached unto them.”⁹ No shortage exists in accounts of poverty stricken pioneers. Pathetic pictures of starving, struggling saints are painted throughout the literature of Mormon history by historians from within and without the church.¹⁰

It must be remembered, however, that these people mostly made themselves poor. The principle of a gathering of Israel in order to build Zion in preparation for the second coming of Christ brought people from communities where they owned and improved their own farms and homes into a communitarianism that demanded more sharing and cooperation. Supplying and sending missionaries into all the world; printing the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s revelations and church newspapers; building temples — all these ambitious activities meant that Mormons spent more and more time working for the Lord instead of working for a living. Moreover, near constant moves dictated now by revelation, now by persecution, kept many from setting up their shops or harvesting their crops. This chapter, however, will confine itself with who Mormons were before they were Mormons.

As part of his argument, DePillis observed the lives of six early Mormons to see what might be learned of their “social sources.” One of these six was Martin Harris, whom De Pillis describes as an “increasingly prosperous” Palmyra, New York landowner. A non-Mormon neighbor of Martin and Lucy Harris thought that “none in all that neighborhood were more promising in their future prospects than they.”¹¹ Two more early Mormons included in DePillis’s sample (or half the total) were Joseph Knight, Sr. and Peter Whitmer, Sr., again “prosperous” landowners. Yet, to support the “long established sociological” understanding, or gullible bumpkin thesis, DePillis concludes that “all early Mormons came from the lower but not the lowest classes.”¹²

The remainder of this chapter examines the regional and social circumstances of early Mormon converts in light of primary accounts. It also identifies and analyzes patterns in the religious and spiritual outlook of prospective Mormon converts. The arguments presented here are based on the birth and conversion places of 350 Mormons baptized between 1830-1839, as well as their dates of birth and conversion. Such a method creates a clearer focus on the impact of identifiable geographic regions on Mormonism. Blended with this data are de-

tails from primary accounts that indicate converts’ education, pre-Mormon occupations, and religious beliefs, in order to gain a better understanding of who early Mormons were in terms of social, economic and spiritual status. This methodology shows discrepancies in the gullible bumpkin thesis and enhances our understanding of early Mormons.

A major shortcoming in the analysis of earlier scholars lies in the overstatement of regional forces (e.g. New England, frontier, Burned-Over District) and a corresponding underemphasis on individual circumstances. We find when we combine the work of Davis, Cross, and DePillis that early Mormons came from all regions of the United States as well as Canada. Beginning in 1837, thousands came from Great Britain as well. This study limits itself to those who joined the church in North America from 1830-1839. These are the people referred to throughout this chapter as “early” Mormons. They are also called “prospective” Mormons in those sections where pre-Mormon religious inclinations are under consideration.

Early Mormons hailed from New England, New York, the Western Reserve, the Carolinas, Missouri, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Great Britain, and all points in between. Not surprisingly, New York had more converts than any other state, though they represent a smaller percentage than previously assumed — just over twenty-eight percent of all sampled. About sixteen percent of those sampled were born in Vermont (including Joseph Smith and Brigham Young). New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts and Connecticut also yielded converts aplenty. Pennsylvania’s fields were, in a Mormon colloquium, ripe for the harvest.¹³ More western states, those carved from the Northwest Territory especially, begat Mormons who had migrated from the east. A common assumption remains that Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois converts were just migrant New Englanders, but this is not quite the case. Of thirty-six converts baptized in Indiana from 1830-1839, at least one was born in South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky as well as Ohio and all the New England states. The large numbers converted in Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana had migrated from New England and New York, but also the South, a significant but overlooked area in Mormon history.

Charting both the birth and conversion places of early Mormons shows that their migration patterns reflected those of most Americans, revealing a people not as “unstable” as previously taught. Of sampled converts

born in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, fifty percent were baptized in states further west — mostly Ohio — and fifty percent converted at or near their birthplace.¹⁴

It cannot comfortably be concluded that these numbers diminish Mormonism's heritage from the Second Great Awakening in New York. Yet they invite one to wonder whether Kentuckians would not have flocked to Zion just as numerous if Mormonism had been established in their neighborhood instead, or if the missionaries had combed the southern countryside as completely as they did the Burned-over District. John Butler wrote that the elders baptized twenty-two Kentuckians in his environs in March, 1835.¹⁵ The documented conversion experiences of Virginians, Kentuckians, and Tennesseans, though fewer in number, are laced with similar reasoning and identical auras of sanctity as those from Puritan posterity or from frontier Yankees.¹⁶

We have been taught to think of early Mormons as Puritan-like, or as Yankees, as frontier farmers, gullible bumpkins all. We would do better to approach them as a diverse group, distinguished by spiritual and intellectual similarities; assorted enough to receive the extremely anti-masonic editor, William Phelps, and accept, among other free blacks, Jane Manning and Elijah Abel, making a missionary of the later.¹⁷

Early Mormons were, in fact, families and parts of families, the men of which were shoemakers and shopkeepers, farmers and ferrymen, carpenters and coopers, ministers and millers. A few were Shakers and Quakers; most came from Unitarian, Presbyterian, Freewill Baptist, Reformed Methodist, Campbellite, Universalist and various related religious persuasions. A significant number professed no affiliation at all; and though all of these considered themselves Christians, most all were conversant with the Bible, and some thought themselves "naturally religious."¹⁸

Still, few reliable efforts explore what it meant to be a typical early Mormon.¹⁹ Meanwhile, historians and genealogists have examined Joseph Smith's family at great depth. The social, economic, geographic and religious conditions of Smith and his ancestors is well documented for several generations. While this information informs the history of early Mormonism, it can mislead the historian who relies too heavily on the Smiths to form interpretations of Mormons in general. Nathan Hatch notes, for instance, that "for two generations Smith's

deeply religious family had minimal connection with mainstream Protestantism," though a vast majority of his followers descended through that estuary into Mormonism.²⁰

Moreover, the Smiths were "almost rich once," but poor otherwise. Prior to the organization of the Church of Christ in 1830, Joseph had only a common school education (three years or less) at best; and much like his brother, Samuel, was "a man of slow speech and unlearned."²¹ These and similar well known facts fuel extensions that most early Mormons were poor, gullible bumpkins. But a thorough examination of plentiful primary sources provides a different picture of most early converts.

Some of these were poor like the Smith family; but very many others were "almost rich," and these took advantage of the opportunities of a new nation as much as they bore its hardships. Joseph Knight typified more Mormons than Joseph Smith. He "was not rich, yet possessed enough of this world's goods to supply himself and family the necessities and comforts of life."²² Moreover, Joseph Knight, Jr. represented the largest percentage of early Mormon converts: young, aspiring, upwardly mobile individuals looking for satisfaction, which was not to be mistaken for comfort.

A sampling of 280 early Mormons reveals that almost all "received a common school education; few received an extended education, and fewer still were illiterate."²³ These people were Bible readers; and some were read in such works as "The History of Jesus Christ and the Apostles, which was about as long as the Bible."²⁴

Among other early Mormons, Oliver Cowdery, Evan Greene, and William McLellan taught school. Lorenzo Snow, an Oberlin College student, taught school in Ohio where his sister, Eliza, published poetry. And if there were "unlearned" Samuel Smiths among the early Mormons, there were corresponding Orson Hydes — a clerk and teacher, later lawyer, associate state supreme court justice and legislator—who embraced the Mormon gospel considerably more readily than Samuel Smith.²⁵

John P. and Rhoda Greene were among the first Mormon converts. John made shoes when he was not preaching Methodism on the local circuit. Rhoda had very likely "been tutored in one of the subscription schools of Hopkinton," Massachusetts in her early teens. In the 1830s, between Mormon missions, the Greene's oldest son, Evan, taught school in Kirtland, Ohio, where he also

clerked for Joseph Smith. He later served as a mayor and state legislator.

When the Mormon gospel came in 1830, the Greene's were not rich, but Rhoda at least possessed better than a "common school" education and they were temporally comfortable enough for John to spend considerable time in spiritual pursuits. In fact, John was "about starting on a preaching mission" in the summer of 1830 when Samuel Smith stopped at the Greene's Bloomington, New York home. "Like others," John "did not wish to make a purchase of what he considered at that time to be a nonsensical fable," so Smith loaned the Greens a copy of the Book of Mormon.²⁷ Perhaps to get rid of the missionary, John agreed to advertise the book on his circuit.

When Smith returned for the book some weeks later, Rhoda related the discouraging news of John's disinterest but expressed her own satisfaction with the book. Smith felt impressed to make her a gift of the Book of Mormon and "explained the most profitable manner of reading," along with the encouragement to "ask God for a testimony of the truth of what she . . . read." John and Rhoda Greene became convinced that the Book of Mormon fulfilled its lofty claims and were baptized into the newly organized Church of Christ shortly thereafter.²⁸

Even the less learned — Rhoda's younger brother Brigham Young, for instance — could read and write well enough to study the Bible and keep a diary. Though Brigham Young types are rare, he demonstrates the hazard in considering a person "easily swayed" due to the lack of formal education. Indeed, Young demonstrated a keen power of observation no college could endow.

Contrary to speculation that early Mormons descended "from those cast off by the Half-Way Covenant," Brigham's Grandfather, John Howe, remained an Old Light who broke from the Hopkinton, Massachusetts Congregational Church because of his dissatisfaction with the Half-Way Covenant.²⁹ "My ancestors," preached Brigham in 1852, "were some of the most strict religionists that lived upon the earth."³⁰ That included his mother, Abigail Howe, who admonished her children to read the Bible, "observe its precepts, and apply them to your lives as far as you can."³¹

In the generation between John Howe and Brigham Young, Brigham's parents took part in what Nathan Hatch called the "democratization of American Christianity." By incorporating principles of the Revolu-

tion into religion, and also hearkening back to the Reformation, descendants of Congregationalists and Presbyterians increasingly embraced less elitist and less Calvinist Baptist churches, more popular Arminian Methodism, and more primitivist Campbellite Christianity.³²

The Young family chose the Methodist path, for which they seem to have had a "predilection."³³ Except Brigham and young Lorenzo Dow (whose very name reveals the family's religious inclinations), the sons of John and Abigail Young became Methodist exhorters in turn; and as they matured, each of the Young children exhibited a growing concern over the apparent lack of "pure Bible religion."³⁴

When Mormon missionaries came to his Mendon, New York home, Brigham Young was as skeptical of them as he had become of all professors of religion, yet he maintained his search for someone "who could show me anything about God, heaven, or the plan of salvation." In that search, Brigham grew familiar "with the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, New Lights, Baptists, Freewill Baptists, Wesleyan and Reformed Methodists"; yet none could tell him what he wanted to know. But Brigham's skepticism declined in inverse proportion to his increasing conviction that "there was something to Mormonism."³⁵ After a lengthy investigation, including study of the Book of Mormon, Brigham consented to baptism. Still, this came only after meeting Joseph Smith, who, Brigham became convinced, could show him anything about God.

In late 1830 Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer, Jr., and newly converted Parley P. Pratt embarked on perhaps the most important mission in Mormon history. They were sent to the far western frontier, but followed Pratt on a detour that took them to the Western Reserve, where they met and converted Pratt's Reformed Baptist minister, Sidney Rigdon, and much of his congregation, as well as some local Shakers. A contemporary newspaper described the spread of Mormonism thus:

Strange as it may appear, it is an unquestionable fact, that this singular sect have, within three or four weeks, made many proselytes in this county. The number of believers in the faith, in three or four of the northern townships, is said to exceed one hundred — among whom are many intelligent and respectable individuals.³⁶

Five years later in 1836, an otherwise unsympathetic observer wrote that Mormons, "as a class,"

were “by no means . . . men of weak minds.”³⁷ Yet these are the people said to have been so socially unstable. Kirtland census records show, to the contrary, that many who became converted to Mormonism were active in bringing social stability to the community. Moreover, this group added significant steadiness to the young church.³⁸

Among such converts were John Johnson and his wife Elsa, mainstays of Hiram, south of Kirtland. They joined Mormonism when the rheumatism afflicting Elsa Johnson’s arm was healed through a laying-on of Joseph Smith’s hands in 1831. Their sons Luke and Lyman also joined and were chosen as apostles in 1835. Luke practiced medicine, taught school and farmed; Lyman made his living as a merchant but also practiced law. John and Elsa’s daughter, Nancy, also converted. She married Orson Hyde in 1834. After John and Elsa moved into Kirtland in 1832, he was elected one of three trustees. Luke served as one of two town constables.³⁹

Other names appear repeatedly in Kirtland town records and church related writings. Reynolds Cahoon supervised Kirtland’s third district, where he had resided since 1818. Isaac Morley and Sylvester Smith were others who participated in Kirtland’s civic affairs long before they heard of Mormonism.⁴⁰ New Englanders, Newell and Elizabeth Whitney met and married in Kirtland, Ohio in 1822. They established a mercantile there, where, according to Elizabeth, “we prospered in all our efforts to accumulate wealth,” and gained a reputation for good luck and integrity.⁴¹

Such persons as the Johnsons, Cahoons, and Whitneys had really never been “socially dislocated,” nor could they be so labeled when Mormonism came into their lives. Indeed, these were the types of people who made their communities socially and economically stable. Early Kirtland residents seem very value oriented rather than “value disoriented,” rather a different sort than many of the much more “socially dislocated” Missouri residents with whom the Mormons could not cooperate.⁴²

Much older New England towns yielded Mormon converts with values very much like those held by the Greenes of New York and the Whitneys of the Western Reserve. Wilford Woodruff, that so-called “gullible Connecticut Yankee,” descended from orthodox Congregationalists.⁴³ His father and two brothers served in the Northington Ecclesiastical Society “in various capacities.” Aphek and Ozem Woodruff, Wilford’s father and

uncle, filled civic capacities in both Northington and Farmington, including “tithingmen, surveyor of highways, tax lister, and grand juror”; and townsmen elected Ozem as selectman in 1816, “perhaps the highest honor the community could bestow on a citizen.”⁴⁴

In Northington, Aphek’s prosperous mill ranked him among the top ten percent of property owners in 1808. A chain of events led to the loss of the mill and a move to Farmington, where the Woodruffs resembled more middle-class families. Wilford gained from his father’s social and economic status. He and his siblings received “the best education the local community could offer.” After attending common school until age fourteen, Wilford lived with George Cowles, a member of the Connecticut General Assembly and supporter of the Farmington Academy, at which Cowles offered Wilford a work-study trade. Wilford remained in this pursuit four years, after which he contracted to operate various mills. In 1832, Wilford and his brother Azmon bought a farm with a saw mill and orchard in New York.⁴⁵

All the while the Woodruff family, like the Youngs of New York and the Whitneys of Ohio, felt the “democratization” of religion. In 1815, “Wilford’s stepmother and uncle Ozem joined the Baptists,” as did other family members. But the same claims that converted many left Wilford’s brother, Aphek, antagonistic towards all churches. Wilford himself took part in the religious awakening, exploring the Congregational and Baptist claims especially. He gained faith in Christianity, but remained unattached to any institution until he converted to Mormonism after hearing one of its distinctive sermons.⁴⁶

Another convert, Sarah Leavitt, was heir to a pious Presbyterian upbringing. Her “parents were very strict with their children, being descendants of the old pilgrims.” “My father,” she recalled, “would never suffer any profane language in his house”; and he taught it was “very wicked” to steal, play cards or break the Sabbath.⁴⁷

Sarah’s parents possessed above average education, which they shared with their children. “I had the privilege of reading the Bible for myself,” Sarah remembered. Moreover, as Dean of the Lime, New Hampshire Presbyterian Church, Lemuel Leavitt “had many books that treated the principle of man’s salvation,” and Sarah “took great pleasure in reading them.” Lemuel’s community and church positions made his house “open to [persons of] all denominations, so his children had the privi-

lege of hearing the interesting religious conversations” that frequently took place there.⁴⁸

Sarah Leavitt married in 1817 and moved across the Canadian border to Quebec. During her sojourn there she lost her first child, which inspired a resurgence in the regular prayers of her youth. Then “there was a minister who came from the states and formed a church, called the Baptist, which I joined,” Sarah wrote, “because I wanted to be baptized by immersion.” In 1838, after reading Mormon apostle Parley P. Pratt’s tract, “A Voice of Warning,” Sarah and her husband traveled to Ohio and became Mormons.⁴⁹

If early Mormon converts came from all settled regions of the young republic and its northern neighbor, and if they covered a moderate spectrum of social, educational and economic ranks, they held in common a distinctive spirituality. As noted, early Mormons were Bible readers. They had overwhelmingly been taught from early youth to study the Good Book and obey its teachings, however they were understood.

While many united with one faith or another, Bible reading and attendance at revivals turned many prospective Mormons from any existing churches. As Methodists and Cumberland Presbyterians competed for Lewis Barney’s conversion to Christ, he “came to the conclusion that religion of every kind was a hoax . . . and that all preachers of religion were hypocrites.”⁵⁰ “I was frequently urged and exhorted to get religion,” wrote Jon Crosby, “but I could not see it,” continuing, “all their hell-fire and brimstone . . . could not frighten me.”⁵¹ George Laub’s kin “persuaded” him to try Methodism. For three nights he “went to the anxious seat, as they call it, very anxious to embrace religion,” but he could not. “They used to tell me I should believe I had it, and I would have the same. . . . I tried all I knew but could not believe any such unreasonable doctrine.”⁵² “None of the excitements of the day moved me,” wrote Jesse Crosby.⁵³

If Methodism turned many away from the anxious seat, others acknowledged the doctrines of free-will and free-grace as those taught by Jesus and his disciples. Most prospective Mormons either “felt an earnest desire to become a subject of Christianity” or rejected all established religions until embracing Mormonism, but this phenomenon is not as dichotomous as it appears. They were all bound by the thread of belief in the primitive gospel and some interest in the primitive church. Relatively few were waiting for the literal restoration of the

ancient church and gospel that Mormonism declared itself to be. Yet, they were asking the same questions that led Joseph Smith to found the new church: “Why all this division in the world? Where is the faith and gifts of the gospel that were enjoyed by the ancient Saints?”⁵⁴

Those who needed to unite with a church picked the one that, in their mind, “was nearest to the truths of the New Testament,” but there exists a curious diversity in their affiliations since so many sought the same things.⁵⁵ The primary accounts of prospective Mormons are replete with sola scriptura wording, but a strong cultural current influenced their exegesis. The widespread decline in the popularity of predestination, for instance, was felt by prospective Mormons. It tore John Butler. “I did not believe one word of their predestination doctrine,” he wrote of the Baptists, and yet he “valued baptism by immersion”⁵⁶

Benjamin Brown’s “ideas of religion were just those which are naturally instilled into the mind by the statements of scripture, [with] no priestcraft to pervert them, diminish their force, or cloud their meaning. Consequently,” Brown wrote, “I believed in the Bible just as it read, where the selfevident rendering of the context did not prove it figurative or parabolic.” To Brown this meant that the “Universalist system appeared . . . the most reasonable of the various denominations,” since the “horrible hell and damnation theories of most of the other parties” were “inconsistent,” Brown felt, “with the mercies and love of God.”⁵⁷ In Brown’s exegesis, passages concerned with hell and damnation were to be understood as “figurative or parabolic,” while those dealing with God’s love and mercy were to be believed just as they read.

In this context, the otherwise useful label, “literalist,” is misleading. Everyone wanted to interpret the Bible literally, and Christians of every stripe knew in their minds that they did so. Yet no one’s exegesis lacked cultural influences, and all were far removed from the first Christians. When prospective Mormons expressed their desire for “pure Bible religion,” when they asked where the gifts of the apostles could be found, what they were ultimately asking for was a new, authoritative revelation to clarify the confusion.

Prospective Mormons had enough education to read the Bible, but not enough to be confident making sense of an ancient book in evangelical America. They were “traditionated” in diverse creeds and confounded by the confusion between Christians.⁵⁸ It would require an

unusual leader to unite them, someone who gave them reasons to recognize him as a prophet and a revelator. All prospective Mormons may not have understood or admitted so much, but they were like Brigham Young, looking for a man who could show them “anything about God.”

By the time he and five associates organized the Church of Christ in Fayette, New York in 1830, Joseph Smith filled well the role prospective Mormons sought. He offered the much sought (sometimes unconsciously) exegesis of the Bible with a new, authoritative revelation. He presented what became for many a perfect package: revelations from heaven, a return of gifts, a distaste for revivalistic religion, a near six hundred-page book of answers and commentary on the Bible that both clarified the need for a new prophet and qualified him to be one.

The people who accepted this theology cannot be best understood in terms of regionalism or marginality with respect to social class, for they spanned all sociological categories. They are, instead, best understood in terms of the intellectual, spiritual climate of their time and the distinctive response they made to that environment.

NOTES

1. As a young graduate student, David Brion Davis compared Mormonism to Puritanism, strongly suggesting that early Mormons inherited much from their New England ancestors. The value of community and circumspect living among both the Puritans and Mormons betrayed, Davis believed, an undeniable connection. See David Brion Davis, “The New England Origins of Mormonism,” *New England Quarterly* (27 (1953): 148-163.

In 1980, Gordon Wood offered an explanation of the rise of Mormonism in the context of “evangelical America.” With so much social upheaval resulting from the Revolution, Wood believed that Mormonism provided stability for converts in a sea of turmoil. See Gordon S. Wood, “Evangelical America and Early Mormonism,” *New York History* 61 (October 1980): 359-86.

2. Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual Origins of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950).

3. DePillis, “Social Sources,” 76.

4. David Brion Davis, “New England Origins,” 153, 157-158, 168. Richard Bushman criticized, “the shortcoming of this form of analysis is that it exaggerates similarities and suppresses differences.” In Bushman, 7. Also see Grant Underwood’s important review essay, “The New England Origins of Mormonism Revisited,” *Journal of Mormon History* 15 (1989): 15-35.

5. DePillis wrote: “American historians seem unable to accept the long-established sociological truth that the social dislocations giving rise to prophets can be either rural or urban—that the settlement of the woods of Wayne County, New York, could be as socially unsettling as the early-nineteenth-century growth of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; that both areas could provide Mormon converts.” While both areas did yield Mormon converts, the evidence suggesting they were “socially unsettled” is by no means “established” or conclusive. DePillis, “Social Sources.”

Underwood is respectful of Davis’s work, but points out his inconsistencies in quoting “an 1890s Mormon one moment and an 1850s Saint the next, and yet, in an article discussing Mormon origins, he omitted citations from the 1830s, the essential first decade.” Underwood further stated: “quoting Apostle James Talmage to explain early Mormonism is like citing Cotton Mather in an attempt to establish the contours of Puritan orthodoxy during the period of the Great Migration. Underwood, “The New England Origins of Mormonism Revisited,” 16.

6. DePillis, “Social Sources.” As an aside, I note that the phrase “tentative revelations” seems incongruous. Any revelation pronounced to the public to be from God himself is a bold move. Moreover, those early revelations referred to announced the visitation of angels and sometimes reprimanded Joseph Smith bluntly for his follies. See the *Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).

7. DePillis, “Social Sources,” 61; Cross *Burned-Over District*, 141-148; Davis, see above.

8. Cross, *Burned-Over District*, 143.

9. *Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 35:13-15.

10. For an acute example, see no less than Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964).

11. Stephen Harding letter in Gregg, Prophet (1890), 37. Another contemporary “had heard” Harris “spoken of as a farmer in comfortable circumstances.” in John Clark Gleanings (1842), 222-23.
12. DePillis, “Social Sources” 57, 64, 77; emphasis added.
13. Doctrine and Covenants (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 4.
14. See Appendix for list of converts including names, birth years and places, conversion years and places. The contents of this table came from Joseph Smith, Jr., History of the Church 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980); Dean Jessee, ed., The Papers of Joseph Smith 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989-1991); John Welch and Jan Shipps, eds., The Journals of William E. McLellin (Urbana and Provo: University of Illinois Press and BYU Studies, 1994); Susan E. Black, comp. Membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1848 (Provo Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center); Andrew Jenson, Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson Memorial Association, 1936); and Cheryl Bean, “LDS Baptisms in Erie County, Pennsylvania 1831-1833,” The Nauvoo Journal 5 (Fall, 1993): 3-44.
15. John Butler Autobiography, typescript, Brigham Young University Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections, 78.
16. See, for example, Henry Boyle’s autobiography in Special Collections at the Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; John Butler’s autobiography, available now in William Hartley’s My Best for the Kingdom: the History and Autobiography of John L. Butler (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1994); and John Welch and Jan Shipps, eds., The Journals of William E. McLellin (Urbana and Provo: University of Illinois Press and BYU Studies, 1994).
17. See Jane Manning’s autobiography, LDS Church Historical Department Archives, Salt Lake City; and Eunice Kennedy, “My Testimony of the Latter-day Work,” in the same repository, which includes information on the missionary work of Elijah Abel.
18. Elizabeth Whitney in Tullidge, Women of Mormondom (New York, 1877), 34.
19. Two who have seen this gap and made efforts to fill it are Lawrence Yorgason and Grant Underwood. I am indebted to them for their methods as well as their discoveries. Yorgason, “Preview on a Study of the Social and Geographical Origins of Early Mormon Converts, 1830-1845,” Brigham Young University Studies 10 (1970): 279-82; and “Some Demographic Aspects of 100 Early Mormon Converts, 1830-1857,” M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974. And Underwood, “The Meaning and Attraction of Mormonism Reexamined,” The Thetean (March, 1977): 1-15.
20. See Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 303 n. 3. Hatch formed his conclusion from studying Richard Bushman, Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984).
21. Anderson, Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses, 140-141, Dean Jarman, “The Life and Contributions of Samuel Harrison Smith” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1961).
22. Journal of Newel Knight, LDS Church Archives.
23. Yorgason, “Preview On a Study of the Social and Geographical Origins of Early Mormon Converts, 1830-1845,” 282.
24. Joseph Holbrook wrote: “This summer [1827 or 1828] I read the History of Jesus Christ and the apostles which was about as large as the Bible.” Joseph Holbrook Autobiography, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. John Murdock wrote: “As I was travelling in Tioga, Pennsylvania, I stayed overnight with a Mr. Short and he put into my hands a pamphlet treating upon baptism and it gave me some light on the subject. Soon after I had the opportunity of reading the Church History . . . I found, according to that historian, that immersion was the ancient mode with the church and this caused me to search the scriptures to see if these things were so, for I had learned that my father, or mother, or priest, or anybody else, saying a thing was so, did not make it so. John Murdock Journal, Historical Department Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. Also see Sarah Leavitt, “The History of Sarah Studeviant Leavitt,” ed., Juanita L. Pulsipher (n.p. 1919), housed at the Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

25. Hill, "Historical Study of the Life of Orson Hyde." Though Samuel was the first person baptized after Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, he "was not . . . very easily persuaded" that his brother had translated ancient writings from gold plates or received heavenly visitors. See Joseph Smith, History of the Church 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 7:216.
26. Rebecca Cornwall and Richard Palmer, "The Religious and Family Background of Brigham Young," BYU Studies 18 (Spring 1978): 295.
27. Lucy Mack Smith, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and his Progenitors for Many Generations, reprint ed. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 166-67.
28. *Ibid.*, 166.
29. Cornwall and Palmer, "Religious and Family Background of Brigham Young," 288-289.
30. Journal of Discourses 26 vols. (Liverpool, England: Orson Pratt, 1856), 6:290.
31. Ronald Esplin, "The Emergence of Brigham Young and the Twelve," Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1981, 49.
32. Nathan O. Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1989.
33. Leonard J. Arrington, Brigham Young: American Moses (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 21.
34. On the animated Methodist exhorter, Lorenzo Dow, see Hatch, Democratization of American Christianity, 132. On the Young family see Palmer and Cornwall, "Religious and Family Background of Brigham Young."
35. Arrington, Brigham Young: American Moses, 24.
36. Western Courier (Ravenna, Ohio), May 26, 1831. Levi Jackman wrote that "something like one hundred persons joined the Church from that place [Kirtland], with many other branches of the Church organized in adjoining towns and counties. See Jackman's autobiography in the Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections, Brigham Young University.
37. James H. Wells, to Br. Leavitt, 1836, in William Mulder and Russell A. Mortensen, Among the Mormons: Historical Accounts by Contemporary Observers (New York: Knops, 1958), 86-88.
38. DePillis, "Social Sources." The essential history of Mormonism in Ohio remains Milton Backman's, The Heavens Resound: a History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830-1838 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983).
39. Kirtland Town and Census Records, 1832, Family History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, microfilm number 0877763.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Elizabeth Whitney in Tullidge, Women of Mormondom 34-35.
42. DePillis, "Social Sources." See two well-done histories of relations between Mormons and other Missourians, Warren A. Jennings, "Zion is Fled: The Expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County, Missouri" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1962; and Kenneth Winn, Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830-1846 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).
43. Stegner, The Gathering of Zion, 113.
44. Thomas G. Alexander, Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 6, 12-13.
45. *Ibid.*, 12-13.
46. *Ibid.*, 8-11.
47. Sarah Studeviant Leavitt, "History of Sarah Studeviant Leavitt," ed., Juanita L. Pulsipher (n.p., 1919).
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*

50. Lewis Barney Autobiography, typescript, Brigham Young University Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections, 16-17.
51. Jonathan Crosby Autobiography, typescript, Utah State Historical Society, 9.
52. George Laub Autobiography, typescript, Brigham Young University Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections, 2-3.
53. Jesse Crosby Autobiography, Brigham Young University Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections, 1.
54. For one of unnumbered examples, see Jonathan Crosby Autobiography, typescript, Utah State Historical Society, 9.
55. Milo Andrus Autobiography, Brigham Young University Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections, 2.
56. William G. Hartley, *My Best For the Kingdom: The History and Autobiography of John L. Butler* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1994).
57. Benjamin Brown, "Testimonies for the Truth" (1853), 4.
58. Jonathan Crosby Autobiography, Utah State Historical Society, 1.

DESCENDANTS MEMORIALIZE EDMUND DURFEE
ON THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS MURDER AT MORLEY'S SETTLEMENT

November 15, 1995, marked the 150th anniversary of the murder of Edmund Durfee at Morley's Settlement (also called Yelrome and sometimes Lima), 23 miles south of Nauvoo. It appears Durfee was one of the few Latter-day Saints other than Joseph and Hyrum Smith who was killed in Illinois by anti-Mormons because of his religion. To memorialize this tragic and historic event, descendants of Edmund and Magdalena Pickle Durfee gathered at a special "Remembering Edmund Durfee" program held on Sunday, November 12, in Provo, Utah. Word of mouth brought together some 350 descendants, most not knowing each other. Names and addresses were obtained, and program organizers hope to locate a lot more Durfee descendants as a result of this gathering. (If *Nauvoo Journal* readers can help, please contact Kay Durfee, 4291 S. Bennion Road, Salt Lake City, UT 84119, 801-968-3018.) BYU professor Bill Hartley, an Edmund Durfee descendant, delivered a tribute taken from a 38-page pamphlet he wrote, "The Murder of Edmund Durfee," 100 copies of which were given to attenders afterwards. Another 150 have been ordered by the relatives.

Durfee's death happened three months before the first contingent of Saints left Nauvoo. After about a year of relative calm following the martyrdom, anti-Mormons near the south edge of Hancock County decided to drive the Morley's Settlement Saints out. Starting on September 10 at the cabin belonging to Edmund and Lana Durfee, they torched the settlement, burning down more than 100 residences and outbuildings. Some 400 homeless Saints fled to Nauvoo for safety, helped by more than 100 teams sent from Nauvoo to rescue them. One home not burned belonged to Solomon Hancock. Two months later, in November, several LDS men, including Durfee, returned to where Morley's Settlement had been in order to harvest late fall crops. On November 15, 1845, Durfee, age 57, salvaged what he could from his farm and then, with others, overnights at the Hancock home. About 11:00 p.m. nightriders hiding along the Hancock's rail fence set fire to loose straw in the barnyard. When Mormons rushed from house and barn to put out the fires, the attackers shot at them. A bullet struck Durfee in the lower neck and killed him almost instantly. The attackers then fled, but were followed in the moonlight by Hancock's son, Charles. Durfee's body was hauled to Nauvoo and buried in the cemetery east of the city. His murderers were identified and arrested, but because of intense anti-Mormon sentiment, they were freed without a trial.

Descendants are planning to erect a historic marker where Morley's Settlement once was, identifying the site and telling about the settlement, so that descendants of other LDS families who lived there (for a list see *Nauvoo Journal* 3, April 1992, pp. 40-45) can visit and connect with their family's past.