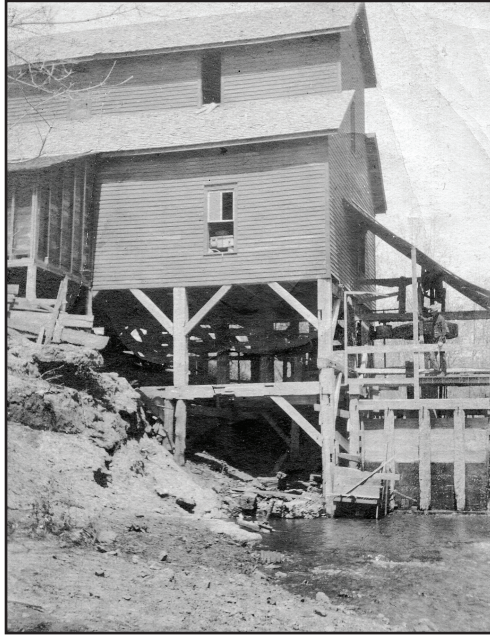


## When the Cherokee Nation was a Mormon Sanctuary



*By Allen LeBaron\**

This is the untold story of about 190 Mormons who lived in the Cherokee Nation for periods of six months to seven years. Overlapping arrivals and departures of families and groups created an almost unbroken stream between December 1849 and October 1860. During this eleven-year interval the nation acted as a sanctuary while these visitors organized their next move or, in a number of cases, seemed to have no plan except to settle into semipermanent residence.

Prior to the Civil War roughly five hundred Texas Mormons migrated to Utah Territory or to Midwest locations. Mostly they traveled in nine identifiable groups along a route that traversed Indian Territory. Of that number, two groups did not simply “pass through” and they are the focus of this work.<sup>1</sup> One of the two originated around Houston and the other was from the Hill Country of central Texas. The Houston group fit the usual pattern of arriving in a single company, but then it split: two-thirds stopped for nine months and the rest stayed in the

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nation an additional two and one-half years. The second group was unusual in that it was comprised of members or remnants of a Mormon colony that struggled to succeed for more than a decade near Austin and San Antonio. Individuals and families that splintered off during that period kept coming into the Cherokee Nation—staying two, four, or more years.

The roots of the group from south Texas developed in a straightforward way. Beginning in the winter of 1848–49 three missionaries from the Mormon camps on the Missouri River near present-day Omaha, Nebraska, and Council Bluffs, Iowa, first obtained a few converts in counties below Austin. Two of the three returned north in the spring and the third switched his labors to the Houston area and surrounding counties. Aided by local converts, he slowly built up a loosely knit “branch” of more than a dozen extended families during the 1849–52 period.<sup>2</sup>

These new converts began contemplating emigration to Utah Territory but could not agree on various details, the most important of which was the route to follow west. Should they travel via El Paso, or the Platte River/South Pass? Supporters of both options wrote to the missionary pair that had been assigned to labor in Texas that season and urged an early arrival to help guide the final decision.<sup>3</sup> Missionaries Preston Thomas and Washington Jolley reached Houston February 14 and spent more than ninety days organizing a wagon train and a great herd of cattle for travel. Thomas was a known quantity, having baptized his own brother in Texas in 1849, laboring there again in 1850. He solved the travel issue by suggesting an intermediate route up the Arkansas River, known as the Cherokee Trail. He agreed to act as temporary captain of the company until the membership got used to the travel routine. In the meantime, Jolley would continue missionary labor and oversee the residual south Texas flock.<sup>4</sup>

Once on the road, this company of eighty-five persons plus a lot of wild cattle did not move very fast. The original plan was to travel to Utah Territory in one season, but they could not meet that schedule. Even before they got out of Texas it was apparent that they would have to stop somewhere to winter over. They found what they were looking for in the Cherokee Nation.

Members of the Texas Hill Country colony first came together in 1843–44 while they were getting out lumber in Wisconsin for Mormon building projects at Nauvoo, Illinois. This group requested a “mission call” to establish a colony in Texas that could act as a magnet for Mormon believers in the southern states and American Indian converts interested in living their religion in a communitarian setting. A promi-

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nent Elder named Lyman Wight led the "Texas Company" overland, across Iowa, southwest Kansas, eastern Oklahoma, and into Texas.<sup>5</sup>

Wight's followers, comprised of about 120 people, passed through Indian Territory between October 14 and November 10, 1845. A stop was made just below the Red River and most adult males fanned out on both sides of the river to find paid employment. "The winter of 1845 and 1846 was spent in working for the Indians and Texans."<sup>6</sup> It is thought that some of these workers constructed or helped construct two famous homes near Preston Bend: one on the Texas side called Glen Eden and the other in the Chickasaw Nation for James Tyson and Charlotte Love.<sup>7</sup>

About a year of similar endeavor at Austin financed the colony's first homestead near Fredericksburg. About the time they were fully settled, colony members experienced some personnel accretions important to the story. In February 1848 the Mormon who had negotiated purchase of the Wisconsin sawmills appeared on the Texas colony's doorstep with more than twenty relatives and friends in tow. This bishop, George Miller, previously had carried out various other important church assignments but had gotten crosswise with church leaders at Omaha and Council Bluffs and, in early 1847, decided to join his old friend Lyman Wight in Texas. Miller had traveled via Tahlequah where, aided by two other families of good mechanics, some long-lasting brick buildings had been erected under contract with local citizens.<sup>8</sup>

Some thirty-five Mormons lived at the Cherokee capital for about seven months. One of Miller's stepsons, William Leyland, worked as a typesetter on the *Cherokee Advocate*.<sup>9</sup> Apparently the Mormon visitors got along well enough and, according to his own assessment, even the bishop's preaching was well received.<sup>10</sup> On December 15, 1847, Miller departed, leaving fellow contractors Joseph Kelting and Richard Hewitt to finish some minor construction details. Kelting returned north and was back at Council Bluffs by January 1849 at the latest.<sup>11</sup> Hewitt had rented Cherokee land for a year and his extended family did not accompany Kelting.<sup>12</sup> Census and other sources show that, instead, the Hewitts went to Texas, trailing Miller by several months.<sup>13</sup>

Bishop Miller's entourage decided to unite with Wight's organization. The two leaders had worked together in the past but could not agree on how the Texas experiment should be conducted. In August Miller announced that he would rather be in Wisconsin where he could cast his lot with James Strang, the leader of a large anti-Brigham Young Mormon faction. Wight called attention to a rule that anyone who withdrew before the colony's purpose had been achieved "would go out empty." This lack of means thwarted the bishop's travel plans for more than a year, but he finally put an outfit together and headed

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north in October 1849, leaving behind all who came with him from Council Bluffs save his extended family of nine persons. The Lymanites made available an additional yoke of oxen as an inducement to carry away a certain Jarvis Miner family that Wight accused of being indolent and lazy.<sup>14</sup>

Just below the Red River crossing at Preston, Texas, Miller and Miner ran into Elder Clark L. Whitney, an old Mormon acquaintance who was headed north having just finished a construction project for a client living near Dallas.<sup>15</sup> Miller persuaded Whitney to forget about the Brighamite Mormons at Council Bluffs and alter course to Michigan or Wisconsin, toward the leadership of James Strang. It was December 12, 1849, when these three families, twenty-eight persons total, decided to winter over on "the North Fork of the Canadian . . . at an important trading post."<sup>16</sup>

Miller was careful to not stop in Cherokee territory, where earlier he had faced some animosity, choosing the Creek Nation instead. Here they found "ample work at good wages" and remained about seven months. Again, Miller says he was invited to preach quite regularly and he claims that the established missionaries and ministers serving the Creek people decided to ignore his presence and avoid any open conflict.<sup>17</sup> In July 1850, when it was time to move on, Miner had not finished his own responsibilities, was owed wages, and decided to remain behind. Just how long this family continued in the Creek Nation is unknown but it is clear from census and Strangite Church records that the Miners eventually followed Miller and Whitney to Wisconsin.<sup>18</sup> For a few months the number of known Mormon visitors anywhere in Indian Territory dropped back to zero.

Then, during the winter of 1850–51, the entire Hewitt family left Texas and "went to the Cherokee Nation."<sup>19</sup> This party of eleven persons seems to have settled in a thriving area not too distant from Tahlequah and most of them remained there between three and four years.<sup>20</sup> Prior to leaving Lampasas County, Texas, the Hewitts were friends of a John Taylor family, who lived some thirty-five miles distant in Milam County. The Taylors were ex-Lymanites, who had rebelled in 1849 and, during the winter of 1851–52, they joined the Hewitts in the Cherokee Nation. "Brother John Taylor . . . and father moved to a saw mill and got out timber in the spring of 1853 we moved to McCoys Prairie rented a place kept transit hotel and a corell father doing some freighting."<sup>21</sup> There were now twenty-one Mormons living in the nation.

During the summer and fall of 1853 their numbers increased. The Wight colony lost sixty-five members to death and rebellion, and seven of these rebels (two families) headed for the Cherokee Nation. Exactly where they settled is not known, but it was well away from the

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Hewitt/Taylor location.<sup>22</sup> Two of the three family heads, Pierce Hawley and Eber Johnson, had prior experience working in Indian Territory. Johnson had helped erect the Tahlequah buildings in 1847 with Miller, Kelting, and Hewitt, whereas Hawley was part of the Lyman Wight company that “worked for the Texans and Indians” during the winter of 1845–46. So their decision to stop was not accidental. Probably they rented farmland and possibly they did some construction work, but this is strictly conjecture.

Twenty-nine Mormons were now in the Cherokee Nation, and they were joined in late August by a group of eighty-two Mormon converts from south Texas. Their travel route had taken them west of Fort Worth to a Red River crossing point “40 miles above Preston.” On July 19 they began a four-day rest at Fort Arbuckle, and were helped by government blacksmiths and the camp surgeon.<sup>23</sup> They already had decided it would be necessary to winter over during their trip to Utah Territory and the requirements of all the cattle they were trailing had to be met. The spot they chose was an open plain along the Verdigris River, west of Claremore.<sup>24</sup> Their leader, the aforementioned missionary Preston Thomas, had decided to remain with the company until they were settled and he then would continue westward more or less on his own. Thus, in August, while passing west of Fort Gibson, Thomas purchased a light wagon and travel supplies. Five young men joined him and, with the addition of a second wagon and associated gear, this small party set off for Utah Territory on September 14 via the Evans Road/Cherokee Trail.<sup>25</sup> Mormons in the Cherokee Nation then numbered 111.

Not every south Texas convert encamped on the Verdigris River. On the way north the family of James Slade pulled out of line and settled in the region of Chouteau.<sup>26</sup> What opportunity or attraction caught the family’s eye is unknown, but their decision effectively eliminated them from the next travel season’s picture. In February 1854 a large, extended family headed by Jacob Croft removed from the Verdigris camp to “the Saline River” in order to build a mill for “Lynch and Martin.”<sup>27</sup>

During the late summer of 1853, right when the big Mormon group arrived, Richard Hewitt died. Rebecca Hewitt recorded that “around August while Father was teaming [oxen] got him in a pond of cold spring water . . . and gave Father a severe cold [*sic*] from which he took the fever we lived 15 miles from Telaquah [*sic*] . . . he was taken to the sulpher [*sic*] spring but he only lived a short period ten days [before he died September 15, 1853] while he was sick he had many dreams and visions and told us to get out of that county that it would be torn up by War . . . and he also warned Bro Taylor never to go to salt lake.”<sup>28</sup>

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*Fort Arbuckle, c. 1930 (20588.41.2, Thomas-Foreman Home Collection, OHS).*

In the meantime, Preston Thomas's missionary companion, Washington Jolley, was still in south Texas. He had been left behind with the understanding that Thomas would drop out of the northbound company somewhere along the road and return so that the pair could complete their missionary assignment to Texas. Instead, Thomas elected to send one of the Texans, William Coats, back to the Houston area "to visit those who are there and gather them out as many as will come with him and bring them to this place [the Verdigris] and be joined with the company here to go on to Salt Lake together next season."<sup>29</sup> Whether Coats conveyed an excuse to Jolley is unknown, but the latter decided to help facilitate Coats's instructions and by February 1854 he was hustling about Harris, Grimes, and adjoining counties rounding up convert stragglers and organizing their travel to the Cherokee Nation.<sup>30</sup>

Upon reaching the Verdigris camp, the additional arrivals rested barely a week. Jolley put himself in charge of the entire camp and formed up all the saints who were ready to travel onward. By this author's count, ninety-seven persons made up the company that left on the Cherokee Trail on June 6, 1854. The John Taylor family tagged along; all the other ex-Lymanites living in the Cherokee Nation skipped the opportunity. A married Hewitt son named Eli also left and went as far as Council Bluffs. The departure of Jolley and the others left behind

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the Slades, the Crofts and all their connections, plus all but one of the ex-Lymanite families as well as remnants of the colorful Hewitt family.<sup>31</sup>

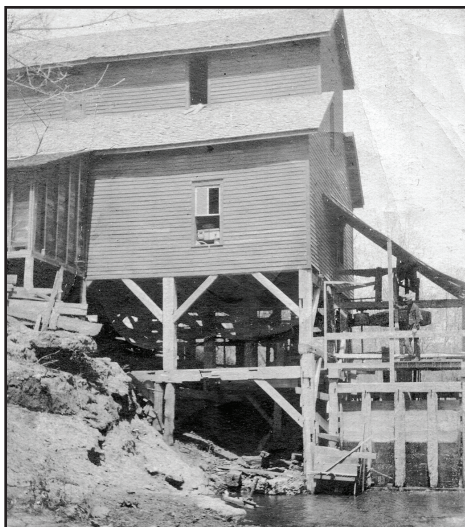
A month or so passed and thirty-three more persons who had rebelled against Wight showed up. Six families were involved, and two of them, totaling seventeen persons, seem to have continued right on through Indian Territory. The sixteen persons who stopped were two married Hawley sons, plus the families of John Young and Joseph Goodale. Mormon numbers increased to sixty-seven. It can be assumed that the newcomers all located with that portion of the Hawley family on the west side of the Grand River. These people were not wealthy Texans so how they supported themselves during the two to six years they lived in the Cherokee Nation would be information of interest. A story about two of the new families' initial attempts to establish themselves indicates that "plenty of work at good wages" was not automatically achievable.<sup>32</sup>

The Hewitt drama continued to unfold during late summer of 1854. The widow Hewitt decided to purchase a farm just across the border in Arkansas, but before she moved a letter arrived from the Texas Hill Country containing her eldest daughter's request to rejoin the family while her soldier husband was finishing out his service with an assignment in Mexico. The arrival of the daughter (and her husband, S. Maloney, some months later) added to the Mormon presence in the area, and this couple did not accompany the mother and four siblings when they crossed into Arkansas.<sup>33</sup> Widow Hewitt's married stepdaughter had not followed her brother Eli when he traveled north, instead remaining in the Cherokee Nation. The net effect of this shift was zero.<sup>34</sup>

In the winter of 1854–55 Jacob Croft's mill-building proclivities turned to Spavinaw. He arranged to buy or take over an existing Cherokee property known as Lynch's Mills.<sup>35</sup> Much of the Mormon activity shifted toward that location and by early 1855 four Hawley sons—George, John, Isaac, and William—were on site helping to rebuild the mill.<sup>36</sup> This quartet had been through the business of building at least three sawmills or gristmills with Lyman Wight so they knew what they were doing, but how long the arrangement lasted is unclear.<sup>37</sup> So the general question of how all of the Mormons who did not work building mills supported themselves is still open.

During the summer and fall of 1855 Mormons in the Cherokee Nation were stirred up by the arrival of both Strangite and Brighamite missionaries, and each set was bent on moving them from their Cherokee homes.<sup>38</sup>

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*Mormons built this mill, depicted here with some improvements, in 1851 for the Cherokees at Spavinaw (5250, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).*

Following the 1846 breakup of the Mormon community in Nauvoo, Illinois, the largest faction followed Brigham Young beyond the Rocky Mountains. The next largest was led by James Strang, first to Wisconsin and then to Beaver Island, Michigan. For a number of years he had organizational and financial resources to keep a few missionaries or other representatives moving about the Midwest or eastern states and numbered two high status elders, brothers Anson and Luther Prindle, among the group. While visiting the Mormons in the Cherokee Nation, the Prindles tried to turn them to Strang's point of view. At the same time, five elders from Utah already were in the area, having been commissioned specifically to initiate missionary efforts inside Indian Territory. John Hawley, one of the ex-Lymanites, said that after listening to presentations from both sides, Brigham Young was judged to have the better case.<sup>39</sup>

The Utah missionaries had arrived in June and established headquarters at the Spavinaw mills. Their leader was a prominent elder named Henry W. Miller, whose diary was featured in a 1935 article by Grant Foreman in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*. After getting his feet on the ground, Miller liked the prospects and sent for reinforcements. Four additional missionaries arrived in November. Eight of the nine spread out to live and work in various American Indian nations while Miller kept an eye on the whole effort. His personal challenges were the Houston backsliders who had failed to travel to Utah with Jolley in 1854 and the ex-Lymanites who had failed to align themselves with Brigham Young back in the Nauvoo days. Once Miller had blunted



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the Strangite effort to get in front of Brigham Young, he decided to rebaptize the Texas Mormons still living in the nation. In this effort he was successful except for holdouts in four families.<sup>40</sup> Two of the widow Hewitt's daughters, Jane H. Maloney and Rebecca Hewitt, accepted a new baptism, but none of the other siblings agreed. The Hawley parents and youngest brothers refused, but all the married sons accepted. Both the John Young and Joseph Goodale families refused. But these were minor setbacks and the stage now was set for most Mormons to head to Utah Territory during the 1856 season.<sup>41</sup>

The person chosen to be leader was Jacob Croft. On June 26 a company of fifty-five persons set out. None of these families had lived with the Cherokees for less than two years; the majority had lived with them for three and one family left a home of five years. Henry Miller, the missionary leader, accompanied them as far as Kansas City. At that point Croft turned northwest to intersect the Platte River route and Miller went east to the Mormon base in Saint Louis.<sup>42</sup> The persons who refused rebaptism were left behind: the oldest and youngest Hawleys, the Youngs and Goodales, plus the Utah missionaries—seventeen persons total.<sup>43</sup> In addition, by this time, there was another Mormon, just returned from Utah and living near Adair, named Samuel M. Couch.<sup>44</sup>

The Mormon missionaries now were without a fixed base and had to depend upon friends among the local people. One missionary died in the summer of 1856. And after their leader, Henry Miller, returned from Saint Louis in August, he discovered that Cherokee tribal leaders wanted Mormon missionary activity to cease.<sup>45</sup> He left in October, taking another of the missionaries with him. This left six missionaries scattered about the territory. One of them, John A. Richards, married a Cherokee woman, so only five were active in their calling.<sup>46</sup> Thus, in effect, five missionary and ten other Mormons were in the Cherokee Nation as of the winter of 1856–57.

During the summer of 1857 or 1858, Pierce Hawley and his son Henry died and nonmissionary numbers fell to eight. This left only the Hawley matriarch and son, Gideon, in the nation with that name.<sup>47</sup> No doubt this pair had help and support from the Youngs and Goodales, but how this small group integrated itself into the local economy remains a mystery.

In late winter 1857–58, Lyman Wight's Texas colony finally collapsed. Most of the residual members stayed in Texas, but about 25 percent immediately headed for the Cherokee Nation, or at least that is where twenty-three adults and several children halted in midsummer. It can be assumed that they settled near the three ex-Lymanite families that had been in the nation for years, although there is no direct evidence

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of this. Mormon numbers rose to thirty-two excluding some children. Utah missionaries immediately tried to point the newcomers toward the Rocky Mountains, but had no success.<sup>48</sup> In November another of the missionaries died. Four were left, working mainly in the Creek Nation.<sup>49</sup>

The Lymanite newcomers came away from Texas with their share of the colony's final assets and probably were not as poor as earlier ex-Lymanite arrivals. Nevertheless they all had to support themselves for some indeterminate length of time. About a year passed and the group suddenly split. Fifteen departed for southwest Iowa. The eight adults who stayed apparently worked with the Goodales, Youngs, and widow Hawley. This static situation lasted for more than another year. Then in October 1860 these eight, plus the three families who had been in place for so long, removed to Jasper County, Missouri.<sup>50</sup>

Simultaneously the pre-Civil War Mormon missionary effort in Indian Territory also wound down. As of spring 1860 the last of the four active Utah missionaries had departed for his mountain home. Except for Sam Couch and the lone ex-missionary John Richards—neither of whom pressed Mormonism on anyone—the decade-long Mormon utilization of the Cherokee Nation as a place for extended human and animal recruitment, employment, and shelter came to a virtually unnoticed end.<sup>51</sup>

Date	Group Name	Duration of Stay	Number of People (plus children)
Winter 1849–50	Miller/Whitney/Miner	6.5 months	33
Winter 1850–51	Hewitt	3–4 years	11
Winter 1851–52	Taylor	2.5 years	10
Summer 1853	Hawley parents/Johnson	3–7 years	7
Summer 1853	Houson converts to Utah	9 months	53
Summer 1853	Houston converts undecided/died	3 years	24
Summer 1854	married Hawleys	2 years	9
Summer 1854	Young/Goodale	6 years	7
Fall 1854	Maloney	2 years	4
Fall 1855	Utah missionaries	1–5 years	8
Summer 1856	Couch/nominal missionary/Richards	post Civil War	2
Summer 1858	final Lymanites	1–2 years	23

Total of 191 lived in the Cherokee Nation. About 182 departed, 2 stayed beyond 1860, and about 7 died or disappeared.<sup>52</sup>

*There may have been other Mormon visitors before 1860, but this table summarizes the author's research data from the south Texas and Hill Country area studied (table courtesy of the author).*

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### Endnotes

\* Allen LeBaron is emeritus professor of economics at Utah State University. While investigating the lives of two Texas Mormon ancestors and their many associates, the author came to realize that numerous references to the Cherokee Nation in their family traditions, biographies, trail journals, and other sources held a story that had been incompletely captured in old-time Latter Day Saints Church reports of the pre-Civil War era.

<sup>1</sup> There is only sketchy mention of Mormons or Mormonism in online catalogs of Oklahoma institutions concerned with the state's pre-Civil War history. With one exception the few that I have located all refer to portions of articles printed in the Oklahoma Historical Society's journal, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*. That exception is an entire 1935 article by Grant Foreman entitled "Missionaries of the Latter Day Saints Church in Indian Territory," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 13, no. 2 (June 1935): 196.

<sup>2</sup> The missionaries were Preston Thomas, William Martindale, and James McGaw, and it was the latter who labored with the Houston area convert base. The missionaries' own movements and example references to McGaw's efforts are described or mentioned in the following: Daniel H. Thomas, comp., "Preston Thomas, 1814–1877, a Biography," photocopy of typescript of selections from his father's missionary journals describing five trips to Texas between late 1848 and 1856, 5–16, film 0874203, item 3, LDS Family History Library, Salt Lake City, UT. "When I was about nine years old and while we lived at Spring Creek [Harris County, 1851] a missionary, James McGaw . . . came to our district declaring [Mormonism]. . . . About a dozen families wanted to go," in Thomas Waters Cropper, "Family History of Thomas Waters Cropper and Hannah Lucretia Rogers, also short Sketches of their Immediate Ancestors and the Lives of their Daughters," in *Robert L. Ashby and Hannah Cropper Family Book* (Salt Lake City, UT: Armis J. Ashby for the Ashby-Cropper Family Organization, 1991), 2, LDS Family History Library, Salt Lake City, UT. "Seguine was in his teens when an Elder James McGaw and other missionaries were in the area. Seguine's father and mother were baptized in 1851. Other members of the family were baptized the same year," in "R Family Historian: Seguine Cooper," [familyhistorian.blogspot.com](http://familyhistorian.blogspot.com).

<sup>3</sup> D. H. Thomas, "Preston Thomas," 24.

<sup>4</sup> D. H. Thomas, "Preston Thomas," 26, 29, 30, 31, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Jermy Benton Wight, *The Wild Ram of the Mountain: The Story of Lyman Wight* (Bedford, WY: Afton Thrifty Press, 1997), 211–66. This is the most detailed of the many available accounts of the Wight colony's travel from Wisconsin to Texas.

<sup>6</sup> John P. Hawley, "The Life of John Pierce Hawley Written from Memory," 1885, 6, typescript copy from World Headquarters, Community of Christ Archives, Independence, MO.

<sup>7</sup> "Glen Eden Plantation, a Red River plantation of Preston Bend, Grayson County, was begun by Holland Coffee after he moved to the bend in 1837 to establish a trading post. . . . The mansion was . . . imposing for its time. It was probably built by the Mormon congregation of Lyman Wight in the winter of 1845–46," in Morris L. Britton, "Glen Eden Plantation," Handbook of Texas Online, [www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ccg02](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ccg02); "July 14. Drove to Coffee Bend, east side of the Washita at its confluence with Red River, Bryan County. . . . Members of the Love family were early settlers in this locality. In the year 1849 [1845–46], some Mormons passed through the country on their way to Salt Lake [Texas], stopped long enough to build a two story double log house for Mr. Tyson," in J. Y. Bryce, "Temporary Markers of Historic Points," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 8, no. 3 (September 1930): 284; "Not long after 1846, James Tyson, of North Carolina, whose wife was Charlotte Love, daughter of Henry Love of the Chickasaw Nation, owned a ferry at Rock Bluff . . . on the north side of Red River in the Chickasaw Nation (now Oklahoma). One day in talking to a party of Mormons who were traveling

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through the Indian Territory on their way to Utah [Texas], Mr. Tyson learned there were a number of carpenters among them. Finding them anxious to make expenses and save money by plying their trade as they traveled along, he engaged them to build a residence for him about two miles from his ferry. They proved themselves skilled artisans for when Mr. Tyson's home was completed, it exhibited the finest workmanship, walls of heavy, hand hewed logs closely fitted at the corners, and hand dressed flooring and other finishings," in Muriel H. Wright, "Historic Places on the Old Stage Line from Fort Smith to Red River," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 11, no. 2 (June 1933): 802.

<sup>8</sup> George Miller, compiled by Earl W. De La Vergne, *Correspondence of Bishop George Miller with the Northern Islander from his first acquaintance with Mormonism up to near the close of his life. Written by himself in the year 1855* (Burlington, WI: W. Watson, c. 1915), 37–39. The *Northern Islander* was a newspaper published by James Strang, a disaffected Mormon (at least with respect to Brigham Young), who led a group of followers for a few years (1846–56) in southern Wisconsin and later at a place called Beaver Island at the north end of Lake Michigan. Written references to this group often use the word "Strangites."

<sup>9</sup> William Leyland, "Sketches on the Life and Travels of William Leland," c. 1850, 15, author's copy from World Headquarters, Community of Christ, Independence, MO.

<sup>10</sup> "Upon our arrival there I looked around a day or two for work. I had a great many applications to do several kinds of mechanical labor at good prices. I went to work, not losing a day. In a short time became quite popular among the Cherokees, on account of my close attention to my labors. The brothers, Hewitt and Kelting, proposed to me that we should have meetings every Sunday at one of our houses (or my tent, as I then lived in one). The first meeting we held was at Hewitt's, and only our own folks in attendance; but before the end of our services two white men came in, one a Methodist preacher, and the other a merchant. They both had half-breed wives and solicited me to preach in the Court House; that I could occupy the house once every Sunday, either forenoon, afternoon, or at candle lighting. I assented to their requests, and on the next Sunday had a large congregation in the Court House; and from this time onward I became the popular preacher. These things moved on smoothly through the summer and fall, and after the session of the Cherokee Legislature I was solicited by them to preach twice a week. My compliance with this request created a clamor and jealousy among the missionaries and teachers in their seminaries, some of them having been among the Cherokees over thirty years. They said, in petition to the principal chief, setting forth that they had been preachers and teachers among them all their best days; had grown old in their service, and always been faithful to their interests; that they had educated their Legislators and Statesmen, and for the interest they had taken against the United States in behalf of the Cherokees, were identified as of them, and had no country or interests aside from the Cherokees; and when I preached I had crowded houses, they had to speak to the empty walls; and, furthermore, the Legislature had never called on them to preach, notwithstanding the services they had rendered the nation; and I, a stranger holding heterodox principles, could preach to crowded houses, and receive the caresses of the principal men of the nation. They therefore prayed that my preaching be stopped. I was confidentially told that the chief informed the petitioners that he could not constitutionally grant their prayer. After being appraised by a friend of what was going on, and having but a short time to stay, I gradually broke off preaching," in Miller, *Northern Islander*, 37–39.

<sup>11</sup> Danny L. Jorgensen, "Conflict in the Camps of Israel: The 1853 Cutlerite Schism," *Journal of Mormon History* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 47, n39. This article describes a January 1849 appearance of Kelting before a church disciplinary council.

<sup>12</sup> "In the spring we started for Texas but when we got to Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation, Father rented a farm and we stayed in the nation over a year. . . . We then went to Texas. . . . While in Texas [father] visited Lyman Wite [*sic*] but could not agree with him as

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being in sound doctrine,” in Rebecca Hewitt, “Autobiography,” [www.minson.org/hewitt/rhewittjournal1-6.pdf](http://www.minson.org/hewitt/rhewittjournal1-6.pdf) and [www.minson.org/hewitt/rhewittjournal7-11.pdf](http://www.minson.org/hewitt/rhewittjournal7-11.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Three households of Hewitt’s extended family are enumerated in the 1850 census in Travis County, Texas. “Households 64, Richard; 65, b-in-1 James Welch; 66, Eli Hewitt; 67, Enoch Hackshaw & wf Sophia Hewitt, altogether a 13 member extended family.” A June 1849 letter from Richard Hewitt in Texas to James Strang in Wisconsin was published in a publication of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, *Autumn Leaves* (Lamoni, IA), September 23, 1910, 395–96. Hewitt wanted to know where Strang stood on the practice of polygamy.

<sup>14</sup> Wight, *The Wild Ram*, 305, 310; Miller, *Northern Islander*, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Miller, *North Islander*, 46.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>18</sup> The Miner parents and two children are named on a Strangite member list compiled by Vickie Speek in 2009, author’s collection; Miner family members were enumerated in the 1860 census in Sharon, Walworth County, Wisconsin.

<sup>19</sup> “Texas was verry drouthy and father did not like the climate,” in Hewitt, “Autobiography,” 4.

<sup>20</sup> Hewitt, “Autobiography,” 7. Eleven is used for the family number because Eli’s wife, Elizabeth, and Richard’s brother-in-law, James Welch, are missing from any record later than the 1850 Travis County census.

<sup>21</sup> Hewitt, “Autobiography,” 9. The Taylors had the experience of working “for the Texans and Indians” during the winter of 1845–46, so they arrived with a positive notion of employment possibilities.

<sup>22</sup> One indication of the Hawley “location” might be deduced from an 1856 travel report found in Mormon missionary Henry W. Miller’s journal and reproduced by Oklahoma historian Grant Foreman: “Proceeding by way of Fort Scott, he [Miller] arrived at Spring Creek on August 18. . . . Here we met Bro. Buster from the Cherokee Nation. . . . On the 21st we crossed the Niosho (Grand) River, stopped at Mr. Hutson’s place to feed and camped at the Nephite Springs where we met Father Hawley. On Friday, August 22nd, we reached Sister Wright’s place. . . . On Saturday, Aug. 23rd, we reached the Spavenaw Mills,” in Foreman, “Missionaries in Indian Territory,” 207.

<sup>23</sup> Two reports of this stopover: “A party of Mormons en route from Texas to Salt Lake City spent several days at the fort during this same summer [1853]. Dr. Glisan records the fact that he attended their sick during the time of their stay, and did not even receive thanks for his trouble, though their lack of gratitude should probably not be attributed to their peculiar religious beliefs. By request of the soldiers, who were curious to know something about Mormonism, the elder in charge of the party preached for the garrison,” in W. B. Morrison, “Fort Arbuckle,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 6, no. 1 (March 1928): 29–30; “We have been stopped here . . . to have some blacksmithing done which the Government officers are kindly doing for us. . . . July 23, 1853, this day we left Ft. Arbuckle after a stop of four days during which our sick recovered very much. The Commanding officer, Capt. Simmons treated us with much respect and kindness as did all the other officers. . . . Capt. Simmons came to our camp this morning to bid me farewell—also several of the officers of the Fort. I will not here forget to mention the kindness of the physician of this station in waiting upon our sick and furnishing medicine free of charge to anyone. May he be rewarded in the resurrection of the just for his kindness. He, too, came over this morning to bid us farewell,” in D. H. Thomas, “Preston Thomas,” 33.

<sup>24</sup> Estimates of the travel distance from the Mormon camp to Coody’s Bluff are given in Preston Thomas’s trail journal. These work out to be about twenty-five straight-line miles, indicating a spot west of Claremore. D. H. Thomas, “Preston Thomas,” 34–35. “We burned a large strip of land to protect our camp from prairie fires, and began building log houses . . . which were built with large doors on two opposite sides. . . . We could drag

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logs in with oxen and build a fire on either side. . . . The wagon boxes were put against the sides of the house for bed rooms," in Ashby, "Thomas Waters Cropper," 4.

<sup>25</sup> D. H. Thomas, "Preston Thomas," 34.

<sup>26</sup> Foreman, "Missionaries in Indian Territory," 198–200. This physical location is suggested by the several references to Mormon missionaries stopping for the night at the Slade home during travel between Spavinaw and Tahlequah. The Slades remained in the Cherokee Nation until mid-1856.

<sup>27</sup> "We left our cattle and horses in the care of Martin. We had no permit to keep them in the nation. Martin furnished some help and a dam was built in the Saline River for the gristmill. I was sent to Martin's across the Grand River about twenty miles away to tend the horses and stayed there about two months," in Ashby, "Thomas Waters Cropper," 4.

<sup>28</sup> Hewitt, "Autobiography," 9. Her autobiography does not mention any adjustment to the family's living or business patterns following the death of the patriarch. Although warned not to follow Brigham Young, it happened that the Taylors already had close relatives in Utah Territory and this fact, combined with the sudden death of their friend Richard Hewitt and the great concourse of people, wagons and cattle, parked up the road and pointed west, all must have worked to induce the Taylors to join the south Texan company. After the passage of two more years, some Hewitt descendants took the Brighamite trail as well.

<sup>29</sup> D. H. Thomas, "Preston Thomas," 34.

<sup>30</sup> "Sunday Feb 26 This morning we made a start about 11 A.M.," in a copy of Mormon missionary Washington L. Jolley's trail journal, attached as a source to the entry "Washington Lafayette Jolley Company," found at "Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel," [history.lds.org/overlandtravel/sources/15479/washington-lafayette-jolley-in-biographical-information-relating-to-mormon-pioneer-overland-travel-database](http://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/sources/15479/washington-lafayette-jolley-in-biographical-information-relating-to-mormon-pioneer-overland-travel-database) (hereafter cited as Jolley Journal).

<sup>31</sup> Information from Jolley Journal, June 6 entry, and the author's calculations (an allowance has been made for at least six deaths or disappearances from the record). The idea that the E. B. Hewitt family left for Iowa no later than the 1854 season is based on the 1854 state census of Council Bluffs City, which includes "E B Hewet. 2 males 2 females total 4," from [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com). Ancestral file entries indicate that Eli had remarried a widow with two children, date and location not given.

<sup>32</sup> "[In] the winter of 1854 and 1855 I built a house for a man by the name of Rogers. It was a frame building. But he took the advantage of me and paid me nothing although I had a permit from the Chief of the Nation . . . but finding no law for a white man I concluded to look me a home in Kansas Territory. So John Young and I traveled as far north as Fort Scott. But all the timber was taken by squatters so we returned home. Then I concluded to rent a salt works down on what is called the Spavinaw Creek. Here John Young and Joseph D. Goodale and father and myself labored at the business and cleared nothing but a living," in Hawley, "The Life of John Pierce Hawley," 12.

<sup>33</sup> Hewitt, "Autobiography," 11.

<sup>34</sup> Sophia Hewitt Hackshaw and her husband, Enoch, were married before the extended Hewitt family trailed Bishop Miller into Texas. Her full brother was Eli B. Hewitt. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "International Genealogical Index (IGI): Enoch Hackshaw," FamilySearch, accessed July 22, 2017, [familysearch.org/ark:/61903/2:1:9VMC-KFK](http://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/2:1:9VMC-KFK).

<sup>35</sup> "Spavinaw, as a place or locality, was originally known as Lynch's mill later taking the name of Spavinaw or Spavinaw. A sawmill was the first improvement on the place and a gristmill was added soon afterward. Later a colony of Mormons from the north came and took over the sawmill and gristmill. They then put in a large mill building, two or three stories high, and also they put in a flouring mill. That was the status of the place up to the Civil War; it was Known as Lynch's mill. . . . Salt works were opened south of

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the mill, at the foot of the hill that borders the town of Spavinaw on the south. Both of these properties were operated under the same management until the war began, 1861,” in John L. Springston, “Lynch’s Mill was Spavinaw’s Name in Early Day History,” *Tulsa (OK) Daily World*, November 1, 1925, in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 5, no. 3 (September 1927): 322–23. On August 18, 1855, Henry Miller, leader of the newly arrived Mormon missionaries, stayed the night in the Springston home and attended church with the family the following day. Foreman, “Missionaries in Indian Territory,” 200.

<sup>36</sup> Ashby, “Thomas Waters Cropper,” 8.

<sup>37</sup> Wight, *The Wild Ram*, 271, 283, 359–60.

<sup>38</sup> “Henry Miller had charge of the mission from Utah and [Anson] Prindle had charge of the mission from Beaver Island,” in Hawley, “The Life of John Pierce Hawley,” 11. The story of this competition for what both sets of missionaries saw as Mormon backsliders—the ex-Lymanites plus the south Texans who had failed to continue toward Utah Territory—has been part of LDS historians’ lore for quite some time. See for example B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 5 (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 103.

<sup>39</sup> Hawley, “The Life of John Pierce Hawley,” 12. The Strangites were outward bound on a trip to the south Texas coast, exploring for a possible place to relocate Strang’s church, or at least part of it. The meeting in the Cherokee Nation occurred about November 1855. Jane Prindle Szymanski, e-mail to the author, January 14, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Identities are an amalgam of data given in Hawley, “The Life of John Pierce Hawley,” 12; Foreman, “Missionaries in Indian Territory,” 220; and Ashby, “Thomas Waters Cropper,” 9.

<sup>41</sup> Two successive entries in Henry Miller’s journal for June 1856 tell of a gathering at a common camp or staging area and of his own efforts to organize “the company for travel.” Foreman, “Missionaries in Indian Territory,” 207.

<sup>42</sup> At the end of May 1856, just as everyone was about to leave, two small Mormon groups from south Texas, fifty-six persons total, passed through Indian Territory.

<sup>43</sup> Rebecca Hewitt had accepted the ordinance, but stayed with her mother who, it turned out, soon exchanged her farm just inside the Arkansas border for another one lying between Fort Leavenworth and Lawrence, Kansas.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel was the oldest son (not previously counted) in the Couch family from Houston that was part of the Jolley Company that traveled to Utah Territory in 1854. In late 1855 he was back in the Cherokee Nation to woo and marry a part Cherokee woman named Nancy Adair. She is said to have been the daughter of Benjamin Adair and Eliza Martin, the daughter of Judge John Martin. “I know of at least one Couch family of Cherokee blood. Samuel Mitchell Couch, son of John Couch and Mary “Polly” George, married a mixed blood Cherokee named Nancy Ellen Adair. Nancy was the daughter of Benjamin Franklin Adair and a mixed blood Cherokee named Eliza Martin, who was the daughter of Judge John Martin, a famous Cherokee,” from a bulletin board originally on Rootsweb and now housed on Ancestry, archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/COUCH/2002-07/1027963983.

<sup>45</sup> A specific complaint was that the missionaries pressured local converts to remove to Utah. Foreman, “Missionaries in Indian Territory,” 211.

<sup>46</sup> According to one biographer, this marriage lasted until the death of his wife, well beyond the Civil War. “John A. Richards,” in Andrew Jensen, *Latter-Day Saints Biographical Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 (Salt Lake City, UT: Western Epics, 1971), 702.

<sup>47</sup> Ancestral File, 2RBR-9D and 2RBS-PL, LDS Family History Library.

<sup>48</sup> In the year 1858 the few “loyalists” still following Lyman Wight at the time of his sudden death settled in the Cherokee Nation for one to three years. Heman Hale Smith, “The Lyman Wight Colony in Texas,” 1912, 49, LDS Family History Library. “Elder Henry Eyring preached to these people in 1859, but they held stubbornly on to their own views and would not be shaken in their determination follow their own inclinations,”

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in *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, August 31, 1860, LDS Family History Library, as cited in Foreman, "Missionaries in Indian Territory," 212.

<sup>49</sup> The four remaining Brighamite missionaries struggled on, appointed some American Indian ministers, and eventually established branches in the Creek Nation called Princes and Nephi, plus two in the Cherokee Nation called Lehi and Pryor's Creek. Foreman, "Missionaries in Indian Territory," 204, 205, 212.

<sup>50</sup> Regarding the Texas colony's ultimate breakup, a Wight great-grandson wrote, "A part of the colony continued on to the northern states wintering two years in Indian Territory and another year in Missouri and finally settling in 1861 in the northwest corner of Shelby County, Iowa." Smith, "The Lyman Wight Colony," 49 LDS Family History Library.

<sup>51</sup> Around 1862 Samuel Couch's younger brother, Marion, left his mother's home in Ellis County, Texas, and married Sam's wife's half-sister, Mary Ellen Wright. This couple lived out their lives in the northwest portion of the Cherokee Nation. Almost simultaneously (1862) Sam and Nancy left the Cherokee Nation and settled in Ellis County. Two or three children were born in Texas. After the Civil War they returned to Adair, the place of their eventual burial. "Samuel Mitchell Couch," Find a Grave, [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=5995752](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=5995752). John A. Richards had a daughter by a previous marriage in Utah, but he never joined her, even though he outlived two American Indian wives and a son by one of them. At least some of his wives' lands were east of Catoosa in Rogers County. When the Civil War ended and missionaries from Utah returned to Indian Territory, Richards apparently had the means to open his home as a kind of headquarters for the last years of his life. Supposedly his was not just a passive role, as he is said to have traveled with the elders to some degree. Andrew Jensen, *Latter Day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (Salt Lake City, UT: Western Epics, 1971), 702). Jensen or his many unnamed assistants created hundreds of short biographies for early day Utah pioneers that filled four huge, separately paged, indexed volumes. Most entries are simply titled with the subject's name.

<sup>52</sup> Managers of the Pioneer Overland Travel database name the members of each individual company featured, but what is featured is constantly in flux, in number of named companies or associated member totals. Nevertheless, a given company's information is an important element for any study of early LDS members' lives and movements. My own genealogical research shows that double checking listings from that website often lead to additions and subtractions. The situation is particularly difficult because Pioneer Overland Travel does not feature Lyman Wight. Also, listings for Jolley and Thomas are a confusing mix because "Indian Territory" is not taken into account as either a destination or an origin of travel. My own database of pre-Civil War Texas converts has taken into account such difficulties and has been created from other source documents. Thus, all counts reported in this article are presented as the most accurate available at time of publication.