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KELSEY, TEXAS: THE FOUNDING AND DEVELOPMENT OF A
LATTER-DAY SAINT GATHERING PLACE IN TEXAS

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Church History and Doctrine

Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

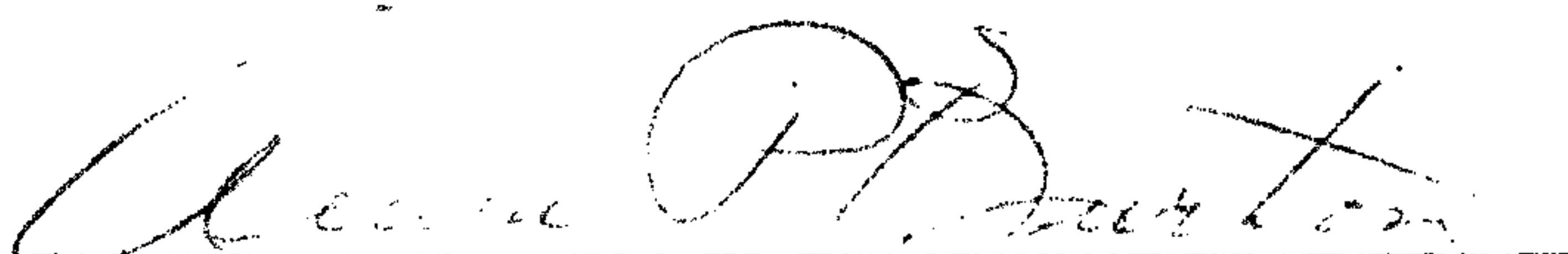
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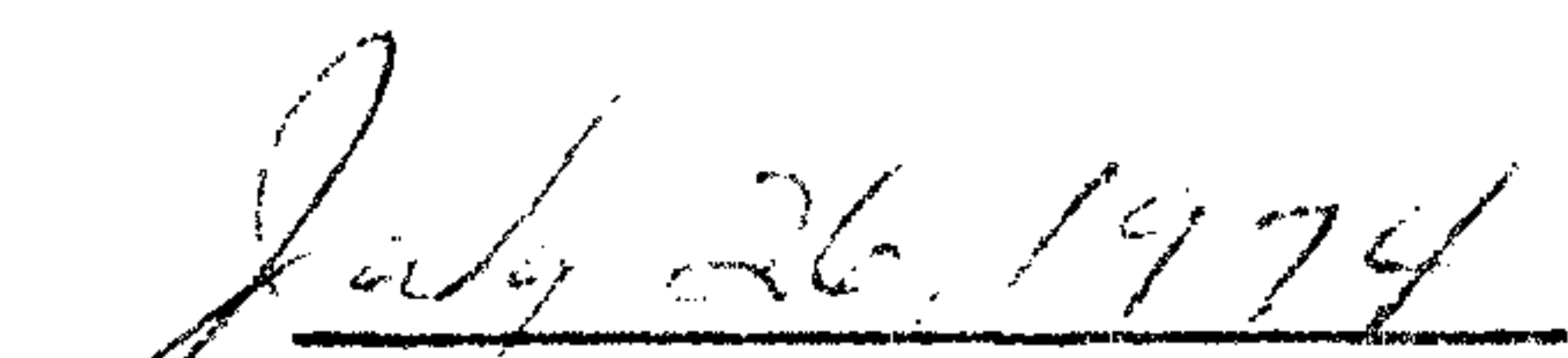
James Clyde Vandygriff


August 1974

This thesis, by James Clyde Vandygriff, is accepted in its present form by the Department of Church History and Doctrine in the College of Religious Instruction of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.


Alma P. Burton, Committee Chairman


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Date


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The writer is especially indebted to those Latter-day Saints still living in and around Kelsey, Texas for their hospitality and for their aid in gathering material for this thesis. They have opened their homes and their hearts as well as scrapbooks and family histories. They have faithfully answered many letters thereby, supplying valuable assistance to the writer. An attempt to name each individual would likely lead to neglecting someone who should have been acknowledged; however, a study of the footnotes of this work will reveal many of the names of those who have been so gracious with their time and their resources.

Appreciation also needs to be expressed to the many individuals who have assisted the writer in his research in the libraries at Brigham Young University and the Historian's Office of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Valuable manuscripts and periodicals containing much information about Kelsey have been made available in both libraries.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

On Sunday, October 12, 1969, a historical marker was unveiled by the Upshur County Historical Survey Committee in front of Ault's Store in Kelsey, Texas, honoring that community as the oldest surviving Mormon colony in the South.¹ Kelsey today, a loose collection of dairy and truck farms, bears little resemblance to the bustling community of the first quarter of the twentieth century. In fact, very few people outside of the immediate vicinity of the community have ever heard of Kelsey. The author spent the first twenty years of his life not more than thirty-five miles from the community without being aware of its existence; and yet, the colony was once known and publicized throughout the entire Southern States and Central States Missions of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and drew colonists from as far away as New York state.²

¹"Kelsey Founder Children Unveil Colony's Marker," Gilmer Mirror, October 16, 1969, p. 2.

²"Kelsey: A Southern Place of Gathering," Liahona the Elders' Journal, VII (February 26, 1910), 570.

At a time when Mormons were being persecuted and driven from the southern areas of the United States, Kelsey provided a welcome haven for those who had neither the desire nor the means to travel to the valleys of Utah. From Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Florida, and Georgia they came,³ seeking an environment wherein they could live their religion in peace.

The evolution of the Kelsey colony from an obscure settlement to a bustling townsite, through years of prosperity, and finally years of decline is an interesting and important story as it blends into the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Kelsey had developed and provided leadership for branches, wards, and stakes throughout East Texas. This thesis will examine the colonization, development, and importance of the Kelsey colony.

Kelsey grew rapidly because it filled a definite need for a religious haven for persecuted Latter-day Saints. The community declined because the need for such a shelter gradually declined as the twentieth century advanced. At present wards and branches are to be found throughout the area where members of the Church were once persecuted.

³Ibid.

Favorable public acceptance of the Church has tended to lessen intolerance and misunderstanding of its members. The failure of a shortline railroad, which once passed through Kelsey, the effects of two world wars, as well as a major depression have taken their toll and have contributed to the decline of the once prosperous colony.

At present very few of the first generation colonists are still living. Most of the second and third generations of the original families have established homes in other areas throughout the United States. There is little evidence of the stores and industries which once formed an important part of Kelsey. A few weathered skeletons of abandoned frame cottages are still to be seen. The old Church building is deserted and locked. The Kelsey Academy has long since closed. The gymnasium which once echoed to the cheers of five-hundred or more excited partisans is evidenced only by a battered concrete foundation. Soon even these few remnants may be gone. However, the influence of the Latter-day Saint people who put "The Kingdom of God First"⁴ will continue to be felt and appreciated in Latter-day Saint wards and branches of the Church throughout East

⁴Motto of the Kelsey Branch.

Texas. The history of this Mormon community, located in the midst of the "Bible Belt" of East Texas, needs to be preserved.

CHAPTER 2

UPSHUR COUNTY BEFORE THE MORMONS

Kelsey, Texas is located approximately five miles west of Gilmer, the county seat of Upshur County, on Farm to Market Road 2793. It lies in an area of sandy soil with rolling hills of red rock and clay. The area is in the forest belt of East Texas with a natural growth of pine, oak, hickory, sweet gum, black jack, and willow trees. A lush ground cover is provided by a temperate climate with 45.1 inches of average rainfall per year. The altitude of the county varies between a low of 270 feet to a high of 600 feet above sea level. The area is interspersed with many springs and branches, along which are areas of marshland. The average daily temperature is 65°. ¹

BEFORE THE WHITE MAN

There is evidence of Caddo Indians having occupied the area in which Kelsey, Texas is located as much as one

¹Doyal T. Loyd, A History of Upshur County, Texas (Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1966), p. 8.

thousand years ago.² However, the most important Indian occupation began in the winter of 1819-1820 when some sixty Cherokees and their families drifted into what is now Upshur County. They drove the Caddo Indians from the area. The Cherokee Indians had recently been displaced from their own lands in Missouri by the United States Army. They obtained a guarantee of land in East Texas from the Spanish government, but Mexico won her independence from Spain before a written treaty was agreed upon between Spain and the Cherokee Indians. The Cherokee, in the meantime, formed a loose confederacy with other displaced Indian tribes who had drifted into the area. They called themselves "The Cherokee and Their Associated Bands." The confederation was composed of Shawano, Delaware, Kickapoo, Quapaw, Choctaw, Biloxi, Alabama, and Cherokee. Since the Cherokee formed the most numerous and important segment of the band, their chief was always considered the principle leader.³ The Cherokee were a trading people, having commerce with Indian tribes in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas,

²Ibid., p. 1.

³Seymour V. Connor, Battles of Texas (Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1967), p. 82.

establishing the first important trade routes in Upshur County.⁴

The Cherokee Trace, the most important of these trade routes, bisected the county in a north-south direction, extending through present-day Gilmer and as near as five miles from Kelsey. In establishing a road or trail, the Cherokee sent out a member of the tribe who was endowed with a unique sense of direction. He would ride toward his destination dragging buffalo robes behind his mount. A small group of Indians would follow behind, blazing the trail, making it more visible. Still another group would follow close behind, widening the trail, removing logs and underbrush, and marking stream fords. A final body of men would finish the work by locating springs and camping sites. Later, wild roses and honeysuckle were set out along the trail. These the Cherokee brought from their former homelands. In some areas the trace can still be located today by the presence of these flowers. Such Texas stalwarts as Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, and Jim Bowie entered Texas by way of the Cherokee Trace, as did many of the early white settlers of Upshur County.

⁴Loyd, op. cit., p. 3.

⁵Ibid.

During the revolution which gained Texas her independence from Mexico, the Cherokees from East Texas signed a treaty agreement with the provisional Texas government in which the Cherokees agreed to support the Texans in their war with Mexico. As a direct result of this treaty, an agreement was signed by Chief Bowles, representing the Cherokee, and Sam Houston, personal friend of the Cherokee, representing Texas. The agreement guaranteed the Cherokee Indians their land and established definite boundaries, which included present day Upshur County. Unfortunately, anti-Indian sentiment prevailed in the Texas Legislature and the agreement was never ratified by that body. When Mirabeau B. Lamar was elected President of the Republic of Texas in 1838, he proposed a policy aimed at driving all Indians from East Texas, declaring that "the barbarous, impudent, and hostile Cherokee" were a constant threat to the Republic.⁶ Open warfare resulted from this policy, climaxing at the Battle of the Neches, July 15-16, 1839, in which those Indians not killed were scattered and driven from East Texas.⁷

⁶Connor, op. cit., pp. 84-85.

⁷Ibid., p. 98.

THE FIRST WHITE SETTLERS

White colonization of Upshur County began slowly. The first settlers began their colonization in 1835 when John Cotton settled north of Bettie on Lilly Creek near the Cherokee Trace. Isaac Moody settled near West Mountain in 1838, about the same time that O. T. Boulware was opening an Indian trading post on John Cotton's farm.⁸

Settlers had avoided northeastern Texas for the most part because of the Cherokee Indians; but also because of a dispute of sovereignty over the area. The United States claimed the land with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, believing that the purchase included all land north of the Sabine River. Spain claimed territory north to the Red River. This resulted in a territorial dispute which left the area with neutral ground status until Texas won her independence. The Red River then became the border of the Republic of Texas.⁹

With the Indians driven out of the area shortly after Texas won independence, the territory was wide open for settlement. By the early 1840's, a water-powered mill

⁸Loyd, op. cit., p. 5.

⁹Ibid.

had been built near Rhonesboro by Ed Horn.¹⁰ Sometime before 1850 a post village had been established at the site of Kelsey on a stage coach line which brought the mail to Upshur County.¹¹

Settlement in the area had increased to the point that on July 13, 1846, Upshur County was created by an act of the Texas Legislature, which was only one year after the annexation of Texas by the United States. The county was named for Abel Parker Upshur, Secretary of State under President John Tyler. Secretary Upshur had laid considerable groundwork for the annexation of Texas before an accident claimed his life in 1844.¹²

DEVELOPMENT PRIOR TO THE CIVIL WAR

Between 1850 and 1861 agriculture was expanding rapidly in the county with the development of two types of farms. Large plantations opened up huge tracts of land to cultivation with slave labor. Less important economically

¹⁰Ibid., p. 11.

¹¹Statement by Vaughn Rowley, long-time resident of Kelsey, August 2, 1973.

¹²Loyd, op. cit., p. 7.

were small farms of half a section or less. These farms were generally family affairs with small homes, and crops of corn, cotton, peas, peanuts, and vegetables.¹³

The census of 1857 showed the importance of slavery to the economy of the county. At that time the population of the county was 4,529. Some 2,207 slaves were recorded with a total value of \$1,130,960. The large slave population was used to cultivate cotton, the agricultural backbone of Upshur County.¹⁴

Because of the importance of the institution of slavery to the county, anyone suspected of abolitionist tendencies was likely to be dealt with harshly. In 1860 a man by the name of Morrison stole a Negro woman, a slave, and attempted to run off with her. Morrison was caught, lodged for a time in the Gilmer jail, and tried and convicted on the 14th of September, 1860. He was immediately taken outside the city limits of Gilmer and hung before an audience of about five-hundred men, women, and children.¹⁵

Early in 1861 Sam Houston, running for public office, came to Gilmer to make a speech. Houston was opposed

¹³Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 18.

to secession, and made his feelings known in his oration. As he concluded his remarks, someone in his audience asked Houston what he thought of Thomas Jefferson Green, Houston's political opponent who was in favor of secession. Houston bravely answered that Green had "all the characteristics of a dog except fidelity." It is said that Sam Houston was pelted with stones and rotten eggs and not allowed to continue his speech.¹⁶

In February, 1861, the issue of secession was the subject of a special election in Texas. The people of the state voted three to one in favor of secession, but the vote in Upshur County was an overwhelming seventeen to one in favor of secession.¹⁷

CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION IN UPSHUR COUNTY

The people of Upshur County did their part for the cause of the Confederacy during the war between the states. Most of the able-bodied men in the county joined the army, while those men too young or too old to fight managed the slaves, who produced cotton and foodstuffs for the Southern

¹⁶Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁷Ibid.

Army. A hattery was located in Gilmer which made hats for the Confederate Army. A carding and spinning factory manufactured army uniforms, and a leather goods factory made harnesses and saddles for the South.¹⁸ Two Confederate Army training camps were also located within the county.¹⁹

The cause of the Confederacy was lost, however, and Upshur County suffered the pains of defeat and reconstruction along with the rest of the South. The reconstruction story in Upshur County was a familiar pattern practiced by the Union Army throughout the former states of the Confederacy. One company of white soldiers was stationed in Gilmer. A full company of Negro soldiers, mostly ex-slaves, were also quartered in Gilmer. When the first elections were held in the county after the war, no ex-Confederate soldier was allowed to vote. As the few eligible voters came into Gilmer to cast their ballots, they were forced to walk between two columns of Negro soldiers in order to reach the polling place.²⁰

Carpetchaggers and former slaves were soon in control of the county government, raising taxes, confiscating

¹⁸Information found on historical markers at the former sites of these factories.

¹⁹Loyd, op. cit., p. 52.

²⁰Ibid., p. 57.

property, and wasting county money. With the high taxes and with the abolishment of slavery, most of the large plantation owners could no longer afford to maintain their property in the face of collapsed cotton markets. Many of the owners simply gave up their property and moved westward to a new life.²¹

Upshur County lost half of its population in the years between 1860 and 1870. Large plantations were divided into small farms or else allowed to revert to native scrub.²² However, the land was still attractive to some farmers as evidenced by an excerpt from a letter written by Orange Walker to John Coleman in 1871:

John, if you come here you can find me by following the railroad as far as it runs, then inquire of Gilmer and when you get in twelve miles of Gilmer anybody will know me for you will be in my neighborhood. Tell Caroline that I have a fine turnip patch, plenty to divide with her if she comes. John, you know I was flat broke and had nothing to go on when I landed here. I had two dollars and my horse and nothing else. I will tell you what I now have in these three years since I came here. I have sold the horse that I fetched here and I have got a fine mare and colt are worth 200 dollars here and I have got five good milk cows, twenty head of hogs, thirty acres of land, and corn enough to do me, plenty potatoes, and seven or eight bales of cotton. Me and another man own a wagon and one yoke of oxen. I think I have done well to come here in my fix.²³

²¹Ibid., p. 18.

²²Ibid., p. 58.

²³Ibid., p. 65.

During this period, long before town streets were paved, streets around the Gilmer "square" were covered with deep sand. Since there were no stock laws in the early days of the community, animals, especially hogs, roamed at will. It is said that a person could pick up a hand full of sand on the "square" and half of it would jump away. Some Gilmer oldtimers insist that one can still find fleas beneath the pavement of Gilmer streets today!²⁴

RELIGION IN UPSHUR COUNTY

Organized religion followed the early settlers into Upshur County with early churches of the Methodist, Primitive Baptist, and Presbyterian faiths being established.²⁵ These early churches were administered to by circuit riding pastors as late as 1875. Some of these ministers were colorful individuals as the reminiscence of one pastor will show:

On our way to Gilmer we spent a day with Brother Lamb of Coffeeville circuit, at his pleasant boarding house, Sister Copedge's. We were pleased to find him so snugly quartered and so much alive to work. Brother Lamb is a living monument of God's saving grace. After the morning preaching, he and I were kindly invited by ex-Sheriff Upton Wright to dine. Mr. Wright held his peace as long as he well

²⁴Ibid., p. 65.

²⁵Ibid., p. 33.

could, but finally at the dinner table in an apologetic way said: 'Mr. Lamb, I hope you will pardon me if I am wrong, but if I am not the worst mistaken I ever was, the last time I saw you, before seeing you in the pulpit today, you were shooting at a fellow.' Brother Lamb blushed and admitted that he was pretty wild before his conversion and admitted that a wicked fellow had cursed him and he opened fire and only the offender's heels saved him.²⁶

Excommunications were common in those early churches. One could lose his membership for such things as dancing or allowing dancing in the home, drinking or selling whiskey, joining another church, or for non-attendance. When charges were brought against a straying member, a committee would usually be appointed to visit the straying member and call him to repentance. If the lost sheep would acknowledge his transgression, charges would usually be dropped if repentance were judged to be sincere. Open air revivals were conducted each year in late summer after the crops were harvested. These were week-long meetings, conducted by local ministers and circuit riders. They were attended by residents from throughout Upshur County and were social as well as religious gatherings.²⁷

Picturesque names were sometimes attached to these early congregations. Mt. Gilead Baptist Church was once

²⁶Ibid., p. 37.

²⁷Ibid., p. 33.

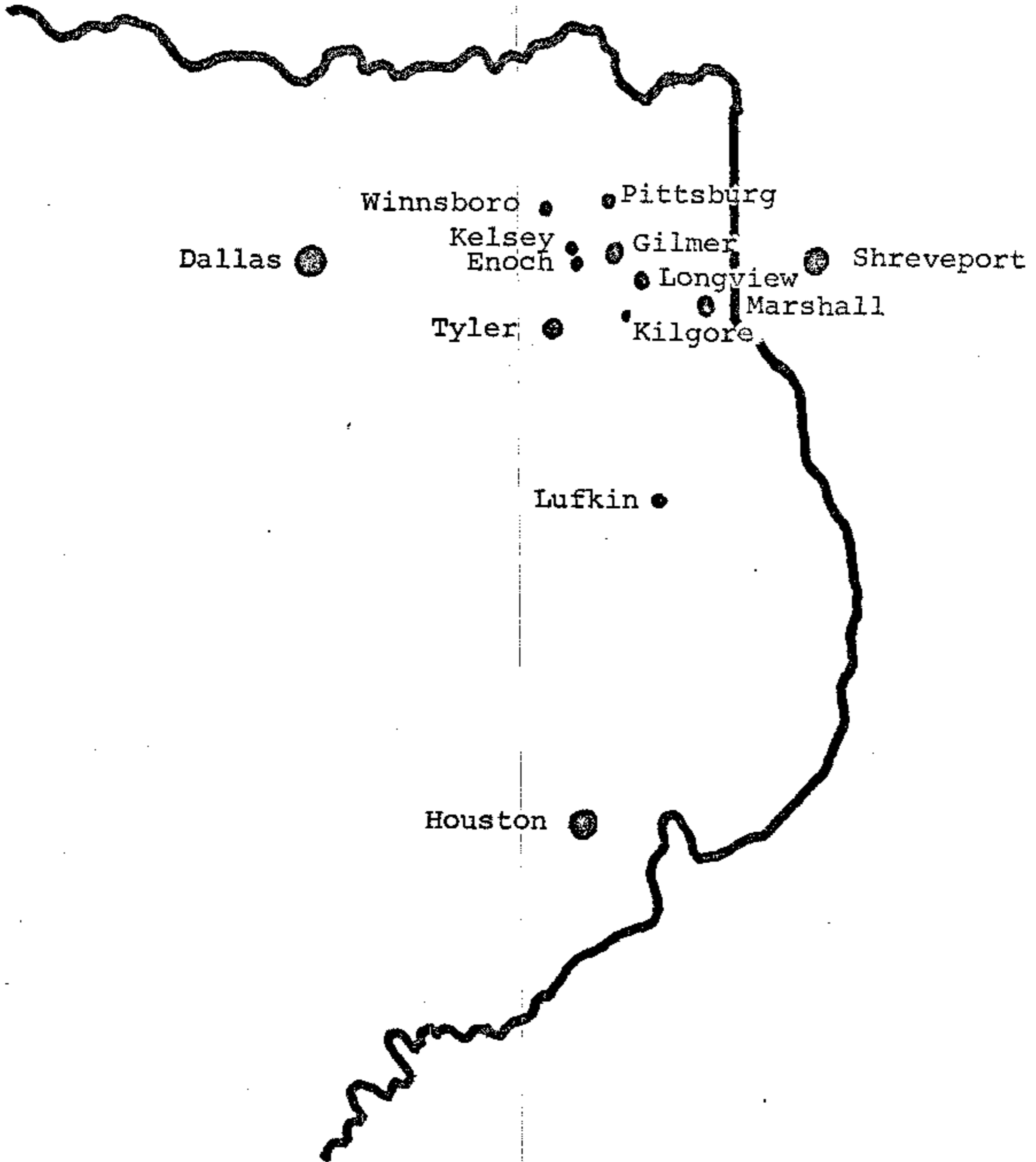
called the "No Socks Church" because one of its early pastors never wore socks. Another church earned the title "Haul Back Church" because its members once got into a heated debate over the location of a new chapel. The building material was "hailed back" from one location to another as minds changed and the name stuck.²⁸

It was in such an atmosphere that the Kingdom of God, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was shortly to establish a foothold in Upshur County, Texas.

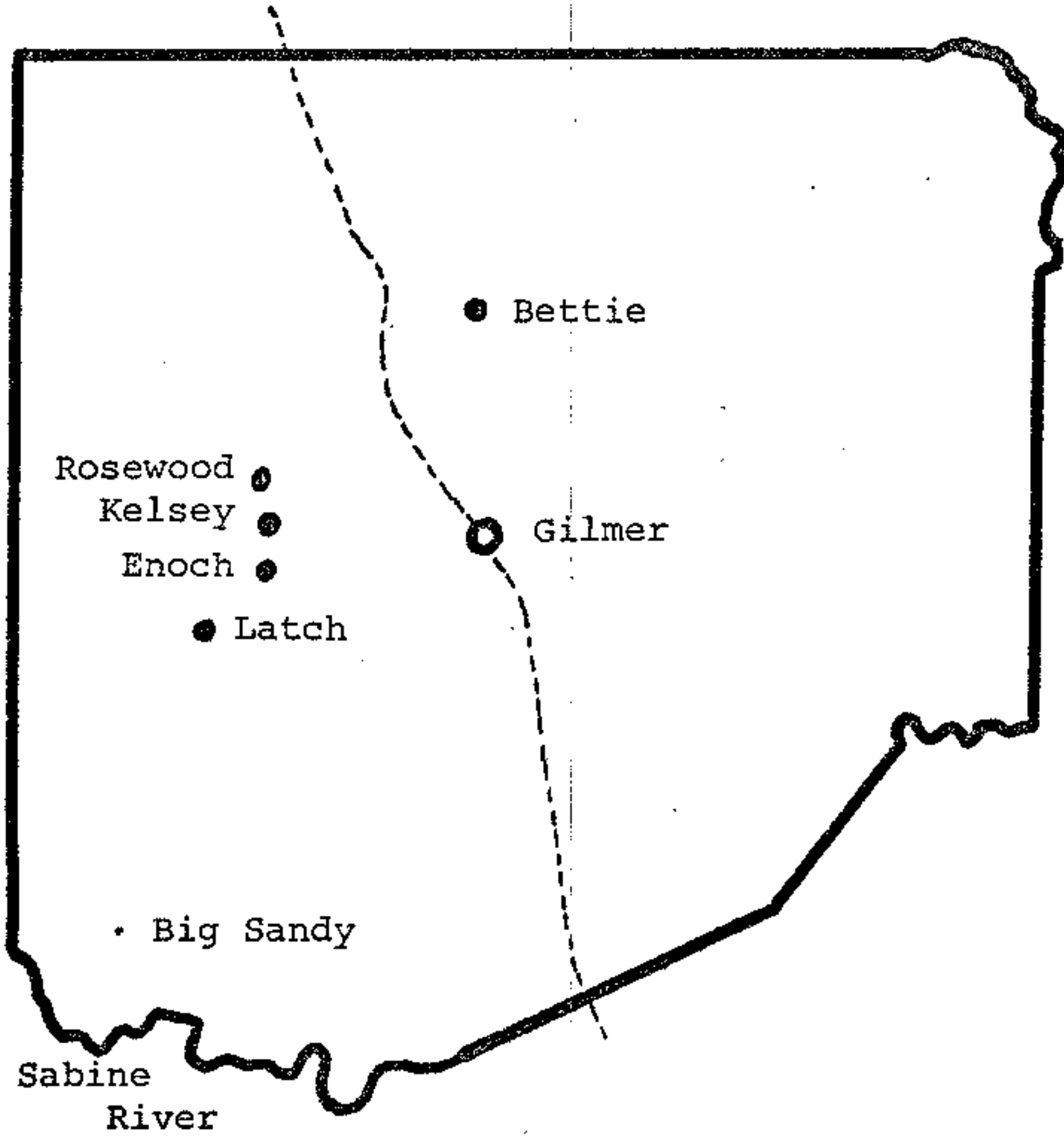
²⁸Ibid., p. 37.

Map 1

East Texas



Map 2
Upshur County



----- Cherokee Trace

Chapter 3

PERSECUTION IN THE SOUTH

On Sunday, July 10, 1879, two missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Elders Joseph Standing and Rudger Clawson, stopped at Varnell's Station, Whitefield County, Georgia, en route to a conference of elders being held in Rome, Georgia. The elders were kidnapped at gunpoint by a mob of twelve men on horseback and taken deep into the woods. Elder Clawson was severely beaten twice and Elder Standing was shot in the forehead at point-blank range, falling dead on the spot. Three of the mobbers were later arrested and tried for murder, but were eventually found innocent.¹ (Nineteen years later Elder Clawson was sustained a member of the Council of Twelve Apostles in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.)

Missionary activity, which had begun in the South early in Latter-day Saint Church history, had been

¹Deseret News, Church News [Salt Lake City], October 27, 1973, p. 16.

discontinued prior to the start of the Civil War and was not reopened until 1875. In October of that year, in the Semi-annual Conference of the Church, seven elders were called on missions to the southern states. Henry G. Boyle was sustained as President of the Southern States Mission in 1876 and work was soon under way in Tennessee, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Virginia. Numerous converts were made and baptized.² Because of the initial success of Latter-day Saint missionaries in the South, sectarian ministers were annoyed and upset and began to distribute quantities of anti-Mormon literature which made it appear that the Church was an outlawed body and that its missionaries were legitimate objects of mob violence.³ In Georgia, for instance, Mormon elders were told: "There is no law in Georgia for Mormons," and, "The government of the United States is against you."⁴

On July 20, 1879, a branch of the Church was broken up at Brasstown, North Carolina, and the members ordered to

²B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), V, 558-559.

³Ibid., p. 560.

⁴Ibid.

leave the state. Three elders were severely whipped and threatened with more violence and even death.⁵

In May of 1880 Elder John Morgan, then Mission President of the Southern States Mission, made the following observation during a meeting in the Salt Lake City tabernacle:

. . . Something like twelve months ago a spirit of persecution and mobocracy was prevalent throughout a great portion of the South, brought about, to a great extent, by inflammatory articles in the newspapers, misrepresenting us and our objects, and the denunciations hurled at us from the pulpit and from almost all directions, which resulted in the mobbing of a number of the elders and driving from their homes of quite a number of families who had embraced the Gospel in their native land. In one particular instance an entire branch of the Church was driven from their homes, lost their property and their means⁶

Fortunately for the growth of the Church in the South, the missionaries were not easily discouraged, even though life was far from easy for these young elders. Many of them traveled "without purse or script," relying upon the generosity of natives of the area in which they labored. These elders were expected to fast every Thursday and Sunday

⁵Deseret News, Church News [Salt Lake City], October 27, 1973, p. 16.

⁶John Morgan, Address delivered at Salt Lake City, May 23, 1880, Journal of Discourses, Reporter George F. Gibbs, XXI (London, England, 1884), 180.

without fail, even when the previous evening meal had been missed. One missionary to the Southern States Mission reported that he had walked 4,215 miles while on his two-year mission.⁷

Speaking in late 1881, Elder John Morgan said of these missionaries:

. . . we have found their faces set like flint toward the building up of the Kingdom of God, and the proclaiming of the principles of truth. It often occurs in our missionary labors that elders are called upon to pass through trying circumstances, but I do not remember of a single instance in which a young elder flinched from the performance of his duty.⁸

Commenting on the actions of southern mobs, President John Taylor, speaking in Provo, Utah, August 28, 1881, commented:

What is being done in certain parts of the southern states today? Mobs, led on by Christian ministers, co-religionists of these men, are seeking the lives of your own brethren.

I am reminded of a case of mobbing which occurred lately in Georgia, in which Elder George W. Bean, a young man from this place was attacked, the mob as usual having been gotten up by Christian ministers. And this same class of men will tell you what good people they are, and yet they will approve such acts.⁹

⁷N. B. Lundwall, Faith Like the Ancients, Vol. II (Manti, Utah: Mountain Valley Press, 1968), p. 198.

⁸Journal of Discourses, op. cit., XXIII, 39.

⁹Ibid., XXII, 303.

Mobbings and persecution continued in the South throughout the last half of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. As old charges of polygamy were leveled against the Church, public sentiment was aroused by a national newspaper and magazine campaign.¹⁰

Persecution was not, unfortunately, limited to one or two states. In May, 1884, Elder Charles Flake was tarred and feathered at Rye Station, Mississippi. In that same year a Latter-day Saint meeting house was burned in St. Clair County, Alabama. On July 24, 1884, in Meshaba County, Mississippi, Elders John W. Gailey and Joseph Morrell were brutally whipped and ordered to leave the area.¹¹ In nearby Hawkins County Elder James Roskelley was shot in the arm by a hired gunman. In neighboring Alabama Elder J. J. Fuller was given forty lashes and made to leave the county.¹²

The year 1884 was a violent one for the Church in the South, culminating in a horrible act of bloodshed at Cane Creek, Lewis County, Tennessee. During the spring and

¹⁰James B. Allen and Richard O. Cowan, Mormonism in the Twentieth Century (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1964), p. 13.

¹¹Roberts, op. cit., VI, 100.

¹²Ibid., 101.

summer of 1884, Elders John H. Gibbs and William H. Jones had baptized eighteen converts in the Cane Creek area. On Sunday, August 10, two traveling elders, William S. Berry and Henry Thompson, made appointments for religious services at the home of James Condor. No sooner had these elders arrived and been joined by Elders Gibbs and Jones than a mob attacked the house and its occupants. Elders Gibbs and Berry were killed, as were Martin Condor, son of James Condor, and James R. Hudson, son of Mrs. Condor by a previous marriage. Mrs. Condor was wounded and spent the rest of her life an invalid as a result of the attack.¹³

On the night of April 1, 1905, a Latter-day Saint meeting house was burned to the ground at Gavin, Mississippi by a mob.¹⁴ On July 23, 1905, Elders W. H. Hopkins and Chester Liljenquist were arrested while preaching the Gospel at Teasdale, Mississippi. They were taken by armed guard to nearby Chesterton where they were convicted of disturbing the peace. The elders were fined a total of eight dollars, but refused to leave the courtroom until they had borne their testimonies of the truthfulness of the Gospel.¹⁵

¹³Ibid., 90-91.

¹⁴"LDS Meeting House Burned," The Improvement Era, VIII (June, 1905), 635.

¹⁵"Arrested for Preaching the Gospel," The Improvement Era, VIII (September, 1905), 877.

Nearly one year later, on June 14, 1906, a young missionary laboring in Arkansas was taken by a body of men into a grove of trees, tied to a tree, and whipped.¹⁶ In that same year, at Harker's Island, North Carolina, a Mormon chapel was burned to the ground by a mob led by a local minister. A school, the only one in the community, was being taught in a member's home by a missionary. The school was closed under threat of violence by the same mob. A local merchant received notice from the mob that his store would be burned if he did not discharge a Latter-day Saint girl employed by him.¹⁷

Reflecting upon these and other acts of similar violence perpetrated upon Latter-day Saint missionaries and members in the South, it is small wonder that in July, 1897, President Wilford Woodruff, speaking to a young man who had recently been called to fill a mission to the Southern States Mission said:

Eighteen years, you are very young to go on a mission, and you are going to the hardest mission in the Church. You will meet many trials and persecutions and your life will be sought¹⁸

¹⁶James G. Duffin, "Report on the Central States Mission," Millennial Star, LXVIII (June, 1906), 382.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 383.

¹⁸Lundwall, op. cit., p. 197.

Acts of persecution and violence resulted in the displacement of many Saints. There was a need for an area relatively free from threats to life and property of individuals who had joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The movement of most of these converts, despised in their native communities, tended to be toward Texas and the West.

Chapter 4

THE SPIRIT OF GATHERING

From the time of the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on April 6, 1830, until the third decade of the twentieth century, members of the Church were a gathering people.¹ They congregated first in New York, then in Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and finally the Great Basin area of the United States as persecution drove them westward.

Not all Mormon colonization in the last half of the nineteenth century was centered in Utah. In the ten-year period between 1847 and 1857 colonies were established by the Church to control strategic routes into and out of the Great Basin. San Bernardino, California, Las Vegas, Nevada, Fort Limhi, Idaho; and Fort Bridger, Wyoming are but a few examples of such colonization.² By the 1870's more

¹William E. Berrett, The Restored Church (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1973), p. 354.

²Gustive O. Larson, Outline History of Utah and the Mormons (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1965), p. 65.

extensive colonization was being carried out in Northern Arizona along the Little Colorado River.³

Proposals were advanced for the colonization of Mexico as early as 1854, but no action was taken at that time.⁴ However, in the 1880's punitive government legislation directed against the Church because of the practice of plural marriage within the Church made colonization outside of the United States more attractive to the Latter-day Saints. The first group of Mormons to establish a colony on a permanent basis in Mexico left Arizona in February, 1885.⁵ In 1886 a colony was also established by the Church in Canada, its headquarters being Cardston, Alberta, on the banks of the St. Mary's River.⁶ Other settlements in both countries soon followed so that by 1895 stakes of the Church had been established in both Mexico and Canada.⁷

By the late nineteenth century the worldwide scope and success of the missionary effort of the Church made it evident that the limited resources of the Great Basin could

³B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), V, 476.

⁴Ibid., p. 572.

⁵Ibid., VI, 259-263.

⁶Ibid., p. 275.

⁷Ibid., pp. 262, 275.

not possibly support all of the converts being brought into the Church.⁸ The great diversity of race, language, and culture which was being introduced into the Church by conversion throughout the world created some almost insurmountable problems in attempting to gather all of the Saints into one geographic area. A case in point was the experiment in 1889 of establishing some early Hawaiian converts in the western part of Utah. The Polynesians struggled to maintain themselves in Utah for nearly thirty years; but the culture of the Hawaiians was so foreign to most Utahns, and the mountain climate so severe as compared to Hawaii that most of the Hawaiian converts in Utah eventually became discouraged and disheartened, returning to their homeland.⁹

In 1900 nearly three out of every four members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints lived in Utah. With the turn of the century, however, better transportation and communication, more effective missionary work, a stronger Church financial position, an improved public

⁸William E. Berrett and Alma P. Burton, Readings in L.D.S. Church History (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1958), III, 495.

⁹Stephen L. Carr, The Historical Guide to Utah Ghost Towns (Salt Lake City: Western Epics, 1972), p. 35.

image for the Church, and the de-emphasis on gathering to Utah caused a rapid growth of the Church outside of Utah.¹⁰ Between 1900 and 1938, the Church had grown by 332 percent, but by 1938 less than half of its membership lived in Utah.¹¹

As Church membership became more dispersed, thought was given by the leadership of the Church to preparing areas outside of Utah wherein Saints from the southern states might gather without migrating to Utah. The first area of this kind was established in the San Luis Valley of Colorado, about 250 miles south of Denver. In March, 1878, Elder James Stewart was sent by the presiding authorities of the Church into Colorado to explore the possibility of purchasing land for a colony within which Saints from the South could be relocated. Land was purchased on a Mexican claim in the San Luis Park area in Conejos County on a tributary of the Rio Grande River. In June of that same year converts from the South began to arrive. They were joined by a few settlers from Southern Utah,¹² there to

¹⁰James B. Allen and Richard O. Cowan, Mormonism in the Twentieth Century (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1964), p. 17.

¹¹Berrett, The Restored Church, p. 355.

¹²Roberts, V, 584.

"Counsel and instruct them [the southern converts] in the art of irrigating the soil and establishing settlements after the order of Zion."¹³ By 1880 about five-hundred Saints had settled in that valley with around three-hundred more expected within the year.¹⁴ By 1883 enough settlements had been established in the area to organize a stake of the Church.¹⁵

There was still the problem of settling a people who were used to an entirely different type of agriculture and climate in an area such as Colorado with its arid soil and severe winters. Elder John Morgan expressed concern for the poor health of the emigrants, who were suffering various ailments as a result of the dramatic change in climate and altitude from their native South.¹⁶ Colonies were obviously needed in areas of milder climate with farming conditions similar to the Southern States, but at the same time isolated enough to avoid persecution.

¹³Erastus Snow, Address delivered at Paris, Idaho, August 7, 1880, Journal of Discourses, reporter George F. Gibbs, XXII (London, England, 1882), 114.

¹⁴John Morgan, Address delivered at Salt Lake City, May 23, 1880, Journal of Discourses, Reporter John Irvine, XXI (London, England, 1881), 182.

¹⁵Roberts, V, 584.

¹⁶John Morgan, loc. cit.

SOUTHERN GATHERING PLACES ESTABLISHED

In 1855 the Indian Territory Mission had been established to work with the Indian people in what is now the state of Oklahoma. The mission was short-lived. In 1859 the threat of an invading United States Army approaching Utah caused the Church to call home most of its missionaries. As a result the Indian Territory Mission was closed until 1883, when it was reopened. On March 29, 1898, the name of the mission was changed to the Southwestern States Mission. In May, 1900, Elder James G. Duffin was appointed president of that mission.¹⁷

Soon after his appointment as mission president, Elder Duffin brought to the attention of the General Authorities of the Church the importance of colonizing the Latter-day Saint converts in the mission field.¹⁸ Receiving the approval of the First Presidency of the Church, Elder Duffin sponsored the establishment of colonies in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma (then Indian Territory), Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. In Texas colonies were established

¹⁷Andrew Jenson, Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Co., 1941), p. 129.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 396.

at Madisonville, Poyner, Woodlake, Joyce, Waxahachie, Odem, Spurger, Kelsey, Gonzales, Williamson, and Grul Settlement. Of these colonies only Kelsey survived for more than a quarter of a century as a Latter-day Saint settlement.¹⁹

¹⁹Bonnie Durning, "History of the Mormon Church in Texas, 1842-1906" (unpublished Master's thesis, East Texas State Teacher's College, 1964), pp. 70-74.

Chapter 5

THE BEGINNING OF A LATTER-DAY SAINT

COLONY AT KELSEY

On February 2, 1890, two brothers, John and Jim Edgar of Andalusia, Alabama, were converted with their families to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by missionaries. Having a desire to be with others of their new faith, the brothers and their families traveled by covered wagon to Arizona, where they settled near the Mormon colony at Mesa in the latter part of 1890.¹ The two brothers attempted cattle raising; but being "cotton and corn farmers," unused to the hot and arid climate of Arizona, they began to miss their former homes in Alabama.²

Adding to Jim's discontent, his wife died soon after his arrival in Arizona. Having remarried, Jim packed his family and belongings in his wagon and returned to Alabama.

¹Statement by Charity Amos, daughter of Jim Edgar, personal interview, August 1, 1973.

²History of the Kelsey Branch, located in the Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, hereinafter cited as Branch History.

By 1897 John Edgar having determined to rejoin his brother in the South and, with his family, began the long trip home.³

Dwindling money and supplies caused John to stop in East Texas and farm rented land for a season. Crossing the Sabine River into Upshur County in late 1897, John was impressed by the rolling hills, good soil, and abundant rainfall, not unlike his native Alabama.⁴ John leased land for a year near the community of Hopewell, enjoying an abundant harvest in the summer and fall of 1898. Delighted with his success in East Texas, John decided to make his permanent home in Upshur County. He wrote to his brother, Jim, urging him to come to Texas. Jim and his family arrived in Gilmer by rail on December 12, 1898, at a time when Gilmer's railroad station was a grounded boxcar.⁵

By the 28th of December, 1898, John and Jim Edgar had selected 140 acres of land near the present-day site of Kelsey. The land was purchased from W. T. McPeck and his wife for twenty-two bales of cotton, to be paid as follows:

³Charity Amos, loc. cit.

⁴Branch History.

⁵Charity Amos, loc. cit.

Three bales of cotton on December 1, 1899.
Four bales of cotton on December 1, 1900.
Seven bales of cotton on December 1, 1901.
Eight bales of cotton on December 1, 1902.⁶

All bales were to be in "good Merchantable cotton" and were to weigh at least "five-hundred pounds of lint to each bale."⁷ On November 21, 1900, the two Edgar brothers were able to purchase an additional 140 acres of land from W. Boyd, Sr., for forty dollars cash.⁸

The post village which had originally been located near Kelsey was only a memory by the time the Edgars had arrived in Upshur County. The land which they purchased there had formerly been part of a large plantation, but had long since been divided into small farms or allowed to revert to the native scrub growth. The Edgars found only two dilapidated log cabins on their land purchases.⁹ They soon began to write to relatives and friends in Alabama, who were also converts to the Church, urging them to settle in Upshur County. The Edgars offered the enticement of

⁶Upshur County Deed Records, Vol. III, p. 484, located in the Upshur County Clerk's Office, Gilmer, Texas.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., Vol. II, p. 294.

⁹Statement by Vaughn Rowley, long-time resident of Kelsey, personal interview, August 2, 1973.

cheap land, some of which was selling for less than fifty cents per acre.¹⁰

Although the Edgars had not attempted to establish a religious community, it was not long before their small settlement had come to the attention of Church authorities. The possibilities of using Kelsey as a religious haven were not overlooked by the presiding authorities of the Church.

THE CHURCH ESTABLISHED AT KELSEY

In the autumn of 1900, two young Latter-day Saint missionaries, Elders Alexander Moens and John Perkins, were assigned to labor in Upshur County.¹¹ By November, 1900, having had very little success in the county, the two elders found themselves in the community of Latch, just south of the present day Kelsey. Traveling without purse or script, depending upon the hospitality of local residents, the missionaries were forced to sleep in the open air that night. The next day they heard of the Edgars, members of the Church, who lived only three miles from Latch.¹² Shortly after, at a missionary conference of the Church

¹⁰Branch History.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Charity Amos, loc. cit.

held at Pine Mills, Texas, the elders suggested that the Edgars' settlement might become an ideal gathering place for converts to the Church who were experiencing persecution throughout the southern states.¹³ The suggestion came at a time when James G. Duffin, Southwestern States Mission President, was enthusiastically advancing the idea of settling converts in the mission field. President Duffin's plan for establishing local gathering places was endorsed by the General Authorities of the Church in the latter part of 1901.¹⁴

On August 4, 1901, Elders Moens and Perkins returned to the site of Kelsey and organized a Sunday School in the community. Jim Edgar was appointed Sunday School Superintendent, with assistant John and Lee Edgar. Twenty-three members met for that first Sunday School meeting, convening under an old oak tree, there being no chapel as yet in the community.¹⁵ Later Sunday School meetings were

¹³Notes on the back of an original photograph of the elders gathered for the conference, in the possession of Mrs. A. L. Means of Kelsey, Texas.

¹⁴Andrew Jenson, Encyclopedia History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Co., 1941), p. 396.

¹⁵Branch History.

held in the homes of members and this continued until a chapel was completed. Scriptures from The Book of Mormon formed the basis of Sunday School lessons until Sunday School literature arrived from Salt Lake City.¹⁶ The new organization was given the name "Myrtle Sunday School," since the settlement as yet bore no official name.¹⁷

On Sunday, December 29, 1901, a full branch of the Church was organized by Joseph A. Stewart, Jr., President of the North Texas Missionary Conference of the Church. William C. Harless was appointed Branch President with William Bodine and Jonathan H. D. Cox as his counselors. William Reed was appointed branch clerk and Mary M. Harless was called to be the first Relief Society President.¹⁸

By the end of 1901 at least nine families were living in the Kelsey area. A log chapel, twenty-four by thirty feet, had been completed.¹⁹

Mail had first been delivered for the settlers of the colony at nearby Rosewood Community.²⁰ Early in 1902 the first post office was established in Kelsey by Ron

¹⁶Redie Shirley, Short Biography and Memories of Charles A. Shirley (Shreveport: House of Glass, 1967), p. 1.

¹⁷Branch History.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Jenson, op. cit., p. 396.

Cantrell, in the home of his mother-in-law, Martha Aaron. Later the post office was moved to Ault's General Store where it remained for many years.²¹

In order to be granted a post office, it was necessary that the community have an official name. Although several names were considered, the name finally submitted to Washington was Kelsey, the name borne by the creek running through the settlement.²² Now with a name and a Church organization, Kelsey stood on the threshold of growth which would make it the most successful gathering place for Latter-day Saints from the southern states.

²¹Vaughn Rowley, loc. cit.

²²Shirley, op. cit., p. 2.

Chapter 6

EARLY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF KELSEY

By the autumn of 1902 President James G. Duffin had stimulated considerable interest among the General Authorities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for establishing a Mormon colony at Kelsey. In November, 1902, Abraham O. Woodruff, a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, was sent to East Texas to assist Elder Duffin in laying out a townsite at Kelsey on land owned by James Edgar.¹ The townsite was actually planned by Elder Woodruff, but the development of the site was the responsibility of President Duffin.²

The survey was officially completed by the Upshur County Surveyor, W. H. McClelland, on November 1, 1904, and

¹Andrew Jenson, Encyclopedic History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Co., 1941), p. 396.

²History of the Kelsey Branch, located in the Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, hereinafter cited as Branch History.

filed with J. D. Wall, County Clerk, on May 2, 1905. The original survey consisted of thirty-six blocks arranged in a six-block square area with four lots to the block. Each lot measured a generous 233 feet by 217 feet, or about one and one-fourth acres. The back of each lot opened into a thirty-three foot wide alley, making barns and outbuildings accessible from the rear of the property. Streets were laid off at right angles, running exactly north and south or east and west. Two main streets, Duffin and Woodruff, each ninety-nine feet wide, intersected in the center of the townsite. Other streets were sixty-six feet wide and bore numbers, such as West First Street, South Second Street, etc.³ Town lots were offered for sale at thirty dollars each. One five-acre block was set aside for a public park.⁴

A short time later an additional survey, which included the proposed right-of-way for the Marshall and East Texas Railway, was added north of the original townsite. This survey included a planned business district along the railroad tracks and many small residential lots. Streets in the new survey which ran east and west bore names such as

³Upshur County Deed Records, Vol. XIV, 190-191, located in the Upshur County Clerk's Office, Gilmer, Texas.

⁴Jensen, loc. cit.

Pecan, Houston, Cora, Kelsey, College, Laurel, Olive, and Oak Streets. North and south streets were called avenues with names such as Park, Central, and Summit. All streets in the new survey of thirty-six blocks were sixty-six feet wide. Each block contained eight lots, each measuring only fifty by one-hundred feet.⁵ It was on this second survey that most of Kelsey was to grow and develop.

The early settlers of Kelsey built houses of logs, with shutters instead of glass windows.⁶ The houses were so close together that often, according to one resident, "ward teachers would disturb one another with their singing as they held meetings simultaneously in adjacent homes."⁷

These early settlers, besides farming the land, found work in the saw mills and the shingle mills which were prospering with the area's timber industry.⁸ The people lived close to the soil and nature. They found time to hunt and fish often. Early stores, such as the one opened by

⁵Upshur County Plat Records, Vol. III, 418, located in the Upshur County Clerk's Office, Gilmer, Texas.

⁶Letter from Mrs. A. L. Means of Kelsey, Texas, March 13, 1971.

⁷Letter from Mrs. A. L. Means, November 4, 1969.

⁸Ibid.

Joshua Ault, carried everything from staple groceries to farming tools, barrels of beans, sugar, and pickles. "Star Brand" shoes were sold, along with overalls, cloth, hats, and hard candy.⁹

For the first few years after the Kelsey townsite was established, most of the early colonists came to the area either to join friends already settled there or because of the urging of missionaries in the Southern and Southwest States Missions of the Church who had heard about the settlement. The types of families and individuals joining the colony at Kelsey are well described by Elder John Morgan as he told a Salt Lake City congregation of the typical convert from the South:

As a general thing those who receive the Gospel in the southern states are to be from what are termed middle classes, people who are the owners of small possessions which, when sold, realize them sufficient to provide themselves a suitable outfit and take them to their emigrating point.¹⁰

⁹Letter from Mrs. Lola Wade of Kelsey, Texas, daughter of Joshua Ault, November 23, 1969.

¹⁰John Morgan, address delivered at Salt Lake City, December 18, 1881, Journal of Discourses, reporter George F. Gibbs, XXIII (London, England, 1883), 43.

EARLY KELSEY FAMILIES

In the summer of 1898 Elders Robert M. Caldwell and Richard F. Bodine, acting under the direction of President Ben E. Rich of the Southern States Mission, preached the Gospel in Yazoo County, Mississippi. They baptized sixty people in four months time.¹¹ On July 31, 1898, President Rich and the young elders were driven by mob force from the county. They later slipped back under cover of darkness to baptize several more families in the Big Black River. Some of these families later moved to Kelsey, including the Hamberlin, Ray, Martin, and Slater families.

The Hamberlins moved first to Kaufman County, Texas, in September, 1900. Traveling elders discovered them there and informed them of the Mormon colony at Kelsey. The Hamberlins attended the 24th of July celebration in Kelsey in 1904, and returned to make their permanent residence there the following year.¹²

Among other families coming to Kelsey from Mississippi were the William Buckleys and the Dixon family. The Buckleys moved to Kelsey after hearing of the colony from

¹¹Means, loc. cit.

¹²Letter from Vaughn Rowley, granddaughter of James Hamberlin, January, 1970.

President Rich. A daughter, Della Buckley, had lost her job as a school teacher in Mississippi as a result of her conversion to the Church. The Dixons were converted as a result of Sister Dixon having been healed of a serious illness by the administration of the Latter-day Saint elders. Hearing of Kelsey, the Dixons joined the Saints there in 1903. Having come by train as far as Gilmer, the Dixons were met by Kelsey residents with wagons to transport the family and their belongings to their new home.¹³ Another Yazoo County native, Taylor Smith, had arrived in Kelsey the previous year, having joined the Church earlier.¹⁴

During the Civil War, Noah Lindsey, a Confederate soldier, was captured and placed in a Union prison. He escaped and fled to Utah for safety. There he joined the Church. After the war, he returned to his home in Shelby County, Alabama, where he converted his brother, James and his family to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Lacking the authority to baptize his brother and family, Noah wrote to Church officials in Utah requesting that elders be sent to perform the ordinance. Missionaries

¹³Lola Wade, loc. cit.

¹⁴Statement by Lola Wade, personal interview at Kelsey, Texas, August 1, 1973.

arrived in Shelby County within a few weeks, baptizing many members of the two Lindsey families. The elders found a dangerous atmosphere of mobocracy in that section of Alabama, often needing the protection of armed guards wherever they might be staying. After the missionaries left the area, the Lindsey families moved to South Texas, where they heard of Kelsey from traveling elders. The Lindseys moved to Kelsey in 1904.¹⁵

Several other families with similar backgrounds moved to Kelsey. For instance, Clinton Bailey and John Hawkins were converted with their families in 1898 at Lee County, Texas. They moved to Arizona to join a Latter-day Saint colony there. Not liking conditions there, they returned to Texas where they heard of Kelsey, moving there in September, 1902.¹⁶

Benjamin and Ella Shirley were converted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Lauderdale County, Mississippi in 1893. Persecution caused them to flee first to New Mexico, then to Durango, Colorado. Learning of Kelsey, they moved there in 1903.¹⁷

¹⁵Rowley, loc. cit.

¹⁶Means, loc. cit.

¹⁷Redie S. Shirley, Short Biography and Memories of Charles A. Shirley (Shreveport: House of Glass, 1967), p. 6.

Two brothers, Joshua and Caleb Ault, were converted to the Church by Samuel O. Bennion in Arkansas. Expressing their enthusiasm for the Gospel, they built a church on their own land for the use of missionaries and members. However, opposition to the Mormons in the area increased until the Church building was burned. The Ault families left Arkansas for Idaho. They later moved to Kelsey in 1908, where they built a general store in the community.¹⁸

Early in the twentieth century a family named Church was living under threat of mob violence near Cane Creek, Lewis County, Tennessee, where just a few years before several missionaries and members of the Church had been slain. A little girl, Naomi Church, found a gold piece on the trail to the spring, and gave it to her parents. They used the money to order a Church publication, Liahona the Elders' Journal, a periodical subscribed to by Saints and missionaries throughout the South. The first copy arrived with an article about Kelsey. Impressed by what they read, the Church family left Tennessee in favor of Kelsey.¹⁹

Other early arrivals in Kelsey included the families of W. L. Lee, T. L. Lee, J. C. Pickett, G. T. Cude,

¹⁸Wade, loc. cit.

¹⁹Rowley, loc. cit.

W. C. Harless, C. A. Bailey, W. T. Bodine, and James F. Smith.²⁰

By 1906 seventy families consisting of over four-hundred individuals, all members of the Church, were living in and around Kelsey.²¹ These Saints owned about 14,000 acres of land.²² By 1910 there were at least 103 families in Kelsey, representing over five-hundred people. These families were from Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, and New York.²³

ANTI-MORMON JOURNALISM

In 1910 there began a new surge of anti-Mormon persecution, spurred on by defamatory articles in such national publications as Pearson's, Everybody's Magazine, McClure's, and Cosmopolitan.²⁴ The following excerpt from the March 11,

²⁰Shirley, op. cit., p. 8.

²¹Jenson, loc. cit.

²²Branch History.

²³Elder Thomas Greer, "Kelsey: A Southern Place of Gathering," Liahona, the Elders' Journal, VII (February 26, 1910), 570.

²⁴James B. Allen and Richard O. Cowan, Mormonism in the Twentieth Century (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1964), p. 22.

1911 issue of Cosmopolitan is an example of the anti-Mormon journalism of the period:

The name of the viper--I take it from the mouth of the viper--is 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.' It lies coiled on the country's hearthstone, and asks only time to grow and collect a poison and the strength to strike. I had heard of Mormons, but--dwelling far away in the ignorant East--had missed all impression of its ophidian characteristics. True, the Mormon himself had place in my mind for what he was and is--one who prefers lust's substance to love's shadow and would sooner wallow than dream; but it was not until my visit to Salt Lake City that he and his religion dawned upon me for the national threat they really are.²⁵

Such articles kept the spirit of persecution alive and well in the South, and supplied the impetus for continued gathering to Kelsey.

ARRIVAL OF SAMUEL O. BENNION

Even though President James G. Duffin had worked hard to establish Kelsey as a southern gathering place, the people of Kelsey considered President Duffin's successor, Samuel Otis Bennion, the real "father of Kelsey."²⁶ Born June 9, 1874, President Bennion brought a youthful vigor into the Central States Mission (formerly the Southwestern

²⁵Alfred Henry Lewis, "The Viper on the Hearth," Cosmopolitan, I:4 (March, 1911), 439.

²⁶Branch History.

States Mission). He received his appointment as mission president in October, 1906. One of his first actions as mission president was to move the mission headquarters from Kansas City, Missouri, to Independence, Missouri, marking the first time since 1833 that the Church had established residence in that city.²⁷ President Bennion's enthusiasm carried over to missionaries in the field. He always made it a practice to visit every elder at least once a month, as he traveled extensively throughout his mission.²⁸

According to the records of the Central States Mission in 1906, there were about one thousand members of the Church in Texas, most of them living in four colonies.²⁹ Four hundred of those members were living in Kelsey, making it the largest Latter-day Saint colony in Texas.³⁰ Of the Latter-day Saint colonies in Texas, only Kelsey, located as

²⁷Andrew Jenson, Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jensen History Co., 1901), I, 18.

²⁸Jenson, Biographical, IV, 732.

²⁹Manuscript History of the Central States Mission, November 1, 1906, located in the Church Historian's Library.

³⁰Jenson, Encyclopedic History, p. 396.

it was on a proposed railroad right of way, had potential for greater growth and development.³¹

With the arrival of President Bennion in the Central States Mission, the spreading of news concerning Kelsey took on a new dimension. Church publications began to carry news of the settlement regularly. As early as December, 1906, The Improvement Era, a Church publication enjoying wide circulation among members, began reporting on the growth of Kelsey almost every month in a section of the magazine given to reports from the missions of the Church.³² On February 5, 1910, the Church newspaper, the Deseret News, carried a feature article on the colony, calling it "one of the largest branches outside the stakes of Zion."³³

NEWS OF THE KELSEY COLONY SPREADS

On February 26, 1910, an article appeared in another Church periodical, Liahona the Elders' Journal, advertising

³¹For a detailed account of these colonies, see Bonnie Durning, "A History of the Mormon Church in Texas, 1848-1906" (unpublished Master's thesis, East Texas State Teacher's College, Commerce, Texas, August, 1964.

³²Samuel O. Bennion, "The Central States Mission," The Improvement Era, X (December, 1906), 160.

³³"News of the Church," Deseret News / Salt Lake City, February 10, 1910.

Kelsey as a "Southern Place of Gathering" and declaring that "a crop failure in this country has never been known."³⁴ Cheap land was available as an enticement to prospective colonists. Addressing the Upshur County Teacher's Institute in December, 1909, one speaker complained:

I cannot explain why our land here is not selling for more than it is. Take the counties on each side of us and compare with ours, and you will find we have better land than any of them. Our advantages are just as great. We have just as good schools and churches and our land produces better and bigger crops. Yet their land sells for twice and three times as much as ours does.³⁵

Land, at that time, according to the principal of the Kelsey Academy, was selling in and around Kelsey for ten dollars an acre or less. He stated, "Perhaps . . . the Lord does not care to have the price of land raise yet until some more good Latter-day Saints get homes here."³⁶

The sandy loam, combined with the mild climate, did produce good crops for the Kelsey Saints. Cotton averaged half a bale to the acre, although as a "money crop" it was losing favor in East Texas. Corn averaged twenty-five bushels per acre and sweet potatoes two hundred bushels per

³⁴Elder Thomas Greer, "Kelsey: A Southern Place of Gathering," Liahona the Elders' Journal, X (February 26, 1910), 570.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

acre. Ribbon cane was capable of yielding two hundred gallons of syrup per acre, bringing sixty cents per gallon on the local market. In 1910 the farmers of Kelsey agreed with the railroad agent to plant some garden truck to demonstrate the capabilities of the soil and climate in producing vegetables and fruit crops. As a result, it was decided by the colonists that they would plant twenty-five acres each of strawberries, cantaloupes, cabbages, broom corn, and tomatoes.³⁷

In 1911 President Bennion agreed to have published a tract written by Kelsey Branch Clerk W. R. Henderson and "touched up" by Elva McElrath, one of the local school teachers. The tract was printed at Marshall, Texas and distributed by missionaries in the Central States Mission under the direction of President Bennion. Many copies were also sent to President Charles A. Callis of the Southern States Mission and were distributed by elders laboring in that mission.³⁸ This tract, which would have done justice to any present day Chamber of Commerce, was amply illustrated with photographs of local homes, industries, farms, the Church building, and the school. A few extracts from

³⁷Branch History.

³⁸Ibid.

the publication will illustrate the enthusiasm of its author for his community:

Mr. Bailey . . . has lived in Utah, Oklahoma, Florida, and also the blacklands of Texas. Mr. Bailey says that he is better pleased with East Texas than any place he has ever lived.

Just think of a country as big as Michigan, richer in possibilities than Iowa, equal in climate to California. All the good things grow in Upshur County, a man can live better with less work in Upshur County than anywhere else in the world.

Three and even four crops may be raised on the same land each year, all of them profitable. A crop of vegetables can be harvested before corn is planted, and after the corn is gathered the land can be sown in turnips, which have a ready market, or with cowpeas, rape, or some other forage crop which will afford grazing and rough feed for stock. Irrigation is unnecessary in Upshur County, and the farmer is never troubled with a drouth. This section was never known to make a crop failure.³⁹

GROWTH OF BUSINESS AND CIVIC PRIDE

It is not surprising that with such publicity, combined with a desire of many southern Saints to relocate with other Saints in favorable surroundings, that Kelsey enjoyed several years of very rapid growth. By 1910 Kelsey had grown to the point where it could be divided. A

³⁹W. R. Henderson, tract published at Marshall, Texas in 1911.

separate community, Enoch, was organized just three miles south of Kelsey.⁴⁰

In 1910 there were five stores, three sawmills, one shingle mill, a brick kiln, and several retail business establishments in Kelsey. Four or five freight trains and two passenger trains serviced the community each day, stopping at the newly-completed Kelsey railroad station. The Kelsey Academy principal stated that from his own door he could see twelve homes, seven built in the previous six months.⁴¹ Between 1903 and 1917 scarcely a week went by in which several homes were not dedicated to the Lord by the branch presidency of Kelsey.⁴²

In 1911 other business enterprises were added to Kelsey, including a cotton gin, two blacksmith shops, and a grist mill.⁴³

President Bennion expressed an almost paternal interest in Kelsey, not only making frequent trips to missionary conferences held in the area, but also calling

⁴⁰Branch History.

⁴¹W. R. Henderson, loc. cit.

⁴²Branch History. Entries made on the dates that each home was dedicated and are numerous throughout the record for these years.

⁴³Thomas Greer, loc. cit.

special meetings in Kelsey to discuss ways of improving the growth and the environment of the colony. At one such meeting held February 11, 1907, he advised the Saints to plant more potatoes, tomatoes, and cabbages.⁴⁴

Branch leaders were determined that Kelsey, in spite of its rapid growth, would be a clean, orderly community. Sacrament meeting talks were often given in which Saints were urged to demonstrate pride in their colony. On January 15, 1903, Branch President W. C. Harless counseled the Saints to begin setting out trees and shrubs along the newly-graded streets. In a sacrament meeting talk given June 14, 1903, Elder J. H. Lytle spoke of the privileges of being among the "organized Elders of Zion." He warned that if "anyone should come into this colony to try to demoralize the people they will feel the chastening hand of the Lord upon them." He stated that "it takes the best people in the world to colonize as they are selected from all over the country."⁴⁵

The following year, on January 25, 1904, President Harless urged that Kelsey Creek be cleaned out as had

⁴⁴Branch History. Minutes of an industrial meeting held February 11, 1907.

⁴⁵Branch History, January 15, 1903.

previously been urged by President James G. Duffin. As the year progressed, little was done by the Saints to demonstrate that they had taken President Harless' advice seriously. On April 10 President Harless, using unmistakably firm language, said that "the Lord commanded that the creek be cleaned out." The last week in August of that year, the creek was finally cleaned and straightened.⁴⁶

On April 10, 1904, President Harless directed that the Saints beautify their community by planting spring flowers in their yards and in the Church yard. One month later President Duffin, speaking at a special conference, advised each family to install indoor plumbing and to keep it clean.⁴⁷

THE KINGDOM OF GOD FIRST

It would be impossible to separate the growth in size and strength of the community of Kelsey from the growth of the Church in that community. With the organization of the Sunday School in the summer of 1901, a Church organization was begun which would eventually concern itself

⁴⁶Ibid., January 5, 1904; April 10, 1904; August 30, 1904.

⁴⁷Ibid., April 10, 1904.

not only with the spiritual well being of the Kelsey Saints, but with their temporal and educational needs as well.

Church Building Program
in Kelsey

The building program of the Kelsey Branch reflected the growth of the community. The first chapel, completed soon after the organization of the Sunday School, was enlarged in 1903 and used until 1909, when a larger structure was completed in a different area of the community. President Duffin had sent a check for \$22.80 in the summer of 1903 to help defray the costs of doors, windows, and nails for the first chapel addition.⁴⁸

As early as 1907 when a few bricks were cut and burned, a new and larger church building was being planned. In 1908 President Bennion sent a missionary, Elder Hand, to Kelsey to supervise the manufacture of more bricks for the proposed structure. In the summer of 1909, a large quantity of materials having been collected, President Bennion sent four elders to Kelsey to begin actual construction of the chapel. At times as many as twenty-five men were engaged in work on the building. The volunteer labor was computed on a

⁴⁸Ibid.; information is recorded in a day by day fashion under the dates concerned.

basis of one dollar per day per volunteer to help defray the total cost of \$6400.00 for the project. The building was designed to seat seven-hundred people, and contained the latest in gas lighting.⁴⁹ Approximately one-half of the building costs were defrayed by the use of volunteer labor, with \$2500.00 being finally requested by President Bennion from the First Presidency of the Church in Salt Lake City to purchase building material.⁵⁰ The church building was completed in time for a conference held January 15-16, 1910. At the request of President Bennion, a General Authority of the Church, President Charles H. Hart of the First Council of Seventy, was assigned to preside at the dedication.⁵¹ Besides President Hart and President Bennion, other visiting church officials at that January conference and dedication included several mission conference leaders and two secretaries from the Central States Mission Office.⁵²

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1909, p. 6, located in the Church Historian's Library, hereinafter referred to as Journal History.

⁵¹Journal History, January 10, 1910.

⁵²Thomas Greer, op. cit., p. 571.

A report of the dedication in a Salt Lake City newspaper describes the chapel as being "beautifully located on a hill in the center of Kelsey, where it can be seen from afar as an example of Mormon integrity and industry." The building was fifty feet wide by eighty-five feet long, the main auditorium having a seating capacity of six-hundred people. The rostrum was designed to accommodate an additional fifty seats, with four adjoining classrooms capable of seating fifty other people. The building was a frame structure, decorated with brick and sheet steel. It was well heated and lighted, and contained a new organ in the chapel. The Relief Society of Kelsey purchased and presented a silver sacrament set to the branch.⁵³

A branch library had been organized in 1903 with J. H. Cox as librarian.⁵⁴ By January, 1908, all auxiliaries of the Church were functioning in Kelsey. At that time the Relief Society had seventy members; the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association, fifty-nine members; the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association, sixty-five members; and the Primary Association, eighty-six members. All

⁵³Deseret News [Salt Lake City], February 5, 1910.

⁵⁴Branch History, June 7, 1903.

priesthood quorums were functioning and holding regular Monday night meetings.⁵⁵ By 1910 the Sunday School had grown to include over 250 members.⁵⁶

Missionary Conferences in Kelsey

Missionary conferences were held on a regular basis in Kelsey, participated in by missionaries and colonists alike. Conferences were two-day affairs, with out-of-town guests being lodged in the homes of members of the Kelsey Branch, where the visitors would also take their meals.⁵⁷ Not only did these conferences serve as spiritual reinforcement for the Saints, but the conferences in themselves were great missionary tools as curious neighbors from surrounding settlements would often come to Kelsey to "hear the Mormons preach." As a result, many baptisms of converts were performed in Kelsey Creek. One mission report for a conference held May 9-10, 1908, gives the following account:

On Sunday evening a crowd gathered on the banks of the stream to hear the Gospel preached and witness the baptism of five converts . . . [among whom were] a prosperous merchant and his wife, a Christian minister willing to sacrifice his many friends

⁵⁵Liahona the Elders' Journal, V (January 25, 1908), 872.

⁵⁶Thomas Greer, loc. cit. ⁵⁷Shirley, op. cit., p. 5.

and bring down upon himself persecutions for affiliation with what he knew to be the true Church of Christ.

Altogether, sixteen converts were baptized during the two-day conference.⁵⁸ As early as 1905 baptisms were being performed in Kelsey Creek and recorded in branch records.⁵⁹

Missionary conferences, presided over by the Central States Mission President, were exciting social events in the early years of Kelsey's history. As many as ninety-six missionaries would gather, together with many other visitors to the conference.⁶⁰ When word of an impending conference was received in Kelsey, someone would butcher a beef and sell the meat throughout the community so that meat would be available to feed the crowds who would be boarded by the people of Kelsey. The church building would always be full for these conferences, with people standing in back of the chapel, and others standing outside the windows.⁶¹

⁵⁸Liahona The Elders' Journal, V (June, 1908), 1356.

⁵⁹Branch History, baptisms recorded on the dates on which they were performed.

⁶⁰Letter from Henry Knight, former resident of Kelsey, to the people of Kelsey Ward, August 24, 1954.

⁶¹Letter from Mrs. A. L. Means, Kelsey, Texas, November 18, 1969.

These meetings were used for the presentation of long spiritual sermons, interspersed with "words of wisdom" to missionaries. At one such conference held on May 16, 1904, President Duffin advised the elders that they were not "sent out here to teach dancing . . . don't think or talk dancing." At the same conference he advised that a mixture of lemon and coal oil would prevent mosquito bites. The elders were also counseled to keep their minds pure and clean and to "not take the girls on your laps." The Saints in Kelsey were told at the same time that they should "keep clean and not yell in town, not quarrel, and [they should] honor the priesthood." President Duffin also informed the Saints that part of the temple lot in Independence had been purchased by the Church, that the whole continent of America was Zion, and that the Saints should therefore stay in Kelsey and not scatter abroad or journey to Utah.⁶²

At a conference held the following year in Kelsey, President Duffin again warned the elders to "be civil, not stand on your heads, but have the spirit and teach the Gospel by example." Still concerned about the relationship of his young elders with the local young ladies, President

⁶²Branch History, May 16, 1904.

Duffin warned the missionaries: "Don't be silly and court the girls. Those who do will be kicked out." The mission president proudly proclaimed that at least eighty-five percent of Kelsey residents were keeping the Word of Wisdom.⁶³

The presiding authorities of the Church in Salt Lake City had not forgotten Kelsey. On August 1, 1908, Elders John Henry Smith and Antony Ivins, members of the Council of Twelve Apostles, visited Kelsey and spoke at a special meeting.⁶⁴

Other Social Gatherings

The social highlight of each year in Kelsey was the 24th of July celebration, commemorating the arrival of Mormon pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley. It is doubtful that this day was celebrated on such a scale anywhere else in the state of Texas. The celebration July 24, 1907, was typical of these annual festivities. Early on the morning of the 24th, everyone was awakened at daybreak by the clanging of an anvil. People began gathering from as far away as one hundred miles to take part in "Mormon Day," as the holiday was known locally. At ten o'clock A.M. a crowd of eight hundred people, Mormons and non-Mormons, was called to order.

⁶³Ibid., May 14, 1904.

⁶⁴Ibid., August 1, 1908.

Songs, speeches, recitations, and music occupied the morning, and at noon a free meal was served under the trees on plank tables. Ice water, lemonade, soda pop, and ice cream were made available to all. The afternoon was more speech making. Later the elders and some of the local Saints would break into small groups with their non-Mormon visitors, where the Saints endeavored to spread the Gospel. One non-Mormon was heard to remark that it was "the largest crowd I have ever seen at a picnic, and I never got a smell of whiskey!" He marvelled that it was the only gathering he had been to where intoxicating drinks were not used.⁶⁵ During the evening, quilt pallets were placed on the ground where the young children would sleep while their parents danced the two-step, waltz, schottische, and square dances. Music was provided by local musicians. For years the 24th of July celebration became one of the largest social gatherings in Upshur County.⁶⁶

Medicine in Kelsey

Kelsey never had a trained medical doctor. In the early days of the community all of the babies were delivered

⁶⁵Liahona the Elders' Journal, V (August, 1907), 251-252.

⁶⁶Shirley, loc. cit.

by a widow, Sister Belle Cummings, who was called the "growing woman." She was also responsible for mixing and dispensing various home remedies such as berry wine (to be used only for the healing of the sick), and a leaf tea tonic concocted from herbs which she grew herself. Sister Cummings named her tonic "Liver Regulator," but Kelsey citizens knew it by its more popular name, "Scrapegut."⁶⁷

Kelsey grew and prospered because of the sponsorship of the Church, but there was another factor which was to have an important influence on the rise and decline of the fortunes of Kelsey.

⁶⁷Mrs. A. L. Means, loc. cit.

Chapter 7

THE RAILROAD COMES TO KELSEY

There's a railroad out in Texas,
I know you'll be delighted to see.
The road is so rough and jagged,
We call it the old M and E. T.¹

Marshall, Texas, is forty miles east of Kelsey.

Marshall, before the days of the railroad, was one of the leading cities and trade centers of Texas. As the various railroads began pushing westward, Marshall sought to be on the route of the transcontinental roads laying track between the Red River and El Paso. It succeeded with only one company, the Texas and Pacific. The shops of this railroad were located in Marshall. Until the early 1870's, Marshall shared leadership as the trade center of East Texas with the nearby city of Jefferson, but Marshall's advantage disappeared as the Texas and Pacific Railroad continued building

¹Redie S. Shirley, Short Biography and Memories of Charles A. Shirley (Shreveport: House of Glass, 1967), p. 93.

westward. When the railroad reached Dallas, that city replaced Marshall in importance.²

Marshall, in order to protect its trade territory, began promoting short-line railroads which would join neighboring sections of East Texas to Marshall. On March 29, 1882, several prominent citizens of Marshall were able to secure a charter for the Marshall and Northwestern Railroad Company. After building fifteen miles of track from Marshall westward, and grading another twenty-five miles of right-of-way, the owners sold their holdings to the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad Company for twenty-three thousand dollars cash and the assumption by the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad Company of a mortgage of sixty-two thousand dollars. The purchase was part of an effort by the larger company to build into Texas from Fort Smith, Arkansas, through what was then Indian Territory; but for some unknown reason the plan was abandoned and the property sold by the Marshall and Northwestern Railroad Company reverted back to that company. The original owners then

²G. S. Reed, A History of the Texas Railroads and of the Transportation Conditions Under Spain and Mexico and the Republic and the State (Houston: St. Clair Publishing Co., 1941), p. 458.

incorporated on November 18, 1885, and became known as the Paris, Marshall, and Sabine Pass Railroad Corporation.³

The new corporation, however, did no further work on the right-of-way and sold out to George W. Parrett of Atlanta, Georgia. He in turn sold the railroad to E. Kay, who organized and chartered a new company on March 12, 1897, under the name of the Texas Southern Railway Company, issuing stock to at least thirteen stockholders. The new owners extended the road an additional eight miles westward and at the same time decided to eventually connect Winnsboro, about seventy miles northwest of Marshall, with Marshall. Two tram roads were purchased and added to the right-of-way, but lacking sufficient capital, the company went into receivership on July 12, 1904, before they could complete their plans.⁴

The Texas Southern Railway Company had acquired a right-of-way which included the Kelsey community. The location of the proposed track was a major influence on the location of the second townsite survey even though the railroad company was in receivership when the survey was recorded.⁵

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Upshur County Plat Records, Vol. III, 418, located in the Upshur County Clerk's Office, Gilmer, Texas.

It was believed that there was a genuine need for a railroad through Upshur County, and that a sufficient timber industry existed to justify the operation of such an enterprise. In 1907 there were at least ninety saw mills in the county.⁶

Finally, on August 17, 1908, the Marshall and East Texas Railway Company was chartered, taking possession of all right-of-ways, equipment, and trackage owned by its predecessor, the Texas Southern Railway Company. The road eventually operated on ninety-four miles of track, finding sufficient tonnage to maintain a profitable operation for several years.⁷ Train stations were maintained at Winnsboro, Rhonesboro, Rosewood, Kelsey, Gilmer, Graceton, James, Ashland, Marshall, and Elysian Fields.⁸

The railroad actually reached Kelsey in 1910, where a depot was built in what was then the business district of the community.⁹ A siding was also constructed to provide

⁶D. T. Loyd, A History of Upshur County, Texas (Waco: Texian Press, 1966), p. 73.

⁷Reed, op. cit., p. 459.

⁸Loyd, op. cit., p. 72.

⁹History of the Kelsey Branch, located in the Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, hereinafter cited as Branch History.

docking space for the local industries and farmers, who used the railway to ship their produce to market. Working with the local railway agent, President Samuel O. Bennion encouraged the Saints to cooperate with the agent's suggestions on the planting of crops which would be profitable to the growers and also provide ready tonnage for the railroad.¹⁰

In addition to the freight service provided, the Marshall and East Texas Railway also operated daily passenger trains connecting communities along its route. Those who utilized the passenger trains soon dubbed the railroad the "Misery and Eternal Torment," because of its informal scheduling and rough tracks. Oftentimes, running out of fuel for the wood-burning steam engines, the engineers would stop their trains while passengers and crew helped to gather and load wood to complete the journey. At times the train would stop near cane or watermelon patches, or at peach orchards while everyone helped themselves to whatever was available. This was the extent of dining car service on the Marshall and East Texas passenger trains.¹¹

¹⁰Elder Thomas Greer, "Kelsey: A Southern Place of Gathering," Liahona the Elders' Journal, VIII (February 26, 1910), 571.

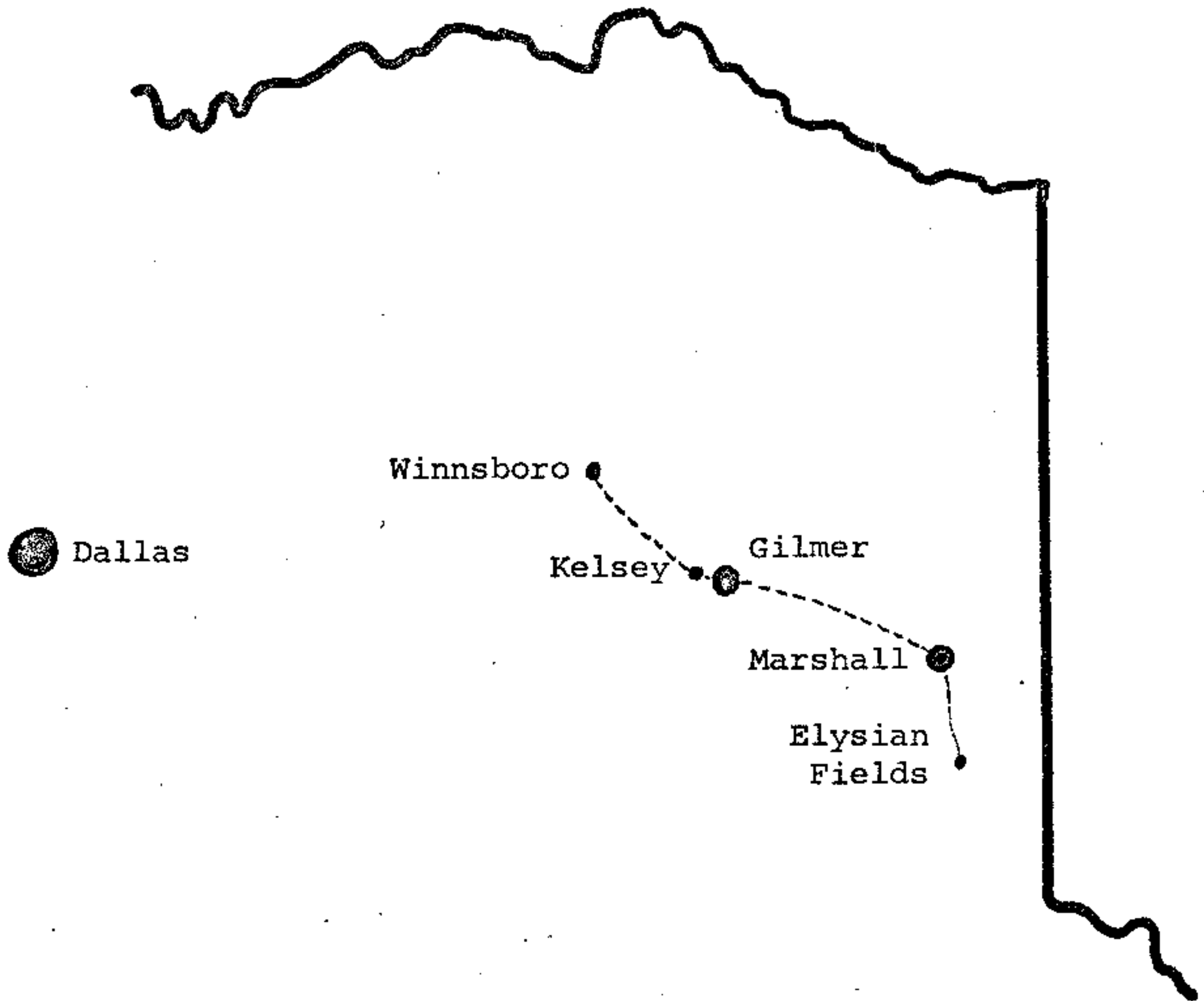
¹¹Loyd, loc. cit.

With the completion of the railroad through Kelsey, the community looked forward to a period of vigorous growth and prosperity. At the time the railroad was completed in 1910, approximately five-hundred people resided in Kelsey. In the next seven years Kelsey would triple in size, most of the new residents arriving on the Marshall and East Texas Railway.¹² The fortunes of Kelsey were now linked inseparably to those of the railroad, and would rise or fall with the fortunes of the Marshall and East Texas Railway.

¹²Branch History.

Map 3

The Marshall and East Texas Railroad



Chapter 8

PERSECUTION OF THE MORMONS

IN UPSHUR COUNTY

Although many of the Latter-day Saint settlers of early Kelsey had come to that community to escape persecution, it would have been highly unlikely that some trouble would not develop between the Mormons and the non-Mormons of Upshur County. Many of the same factors which had produced problems for the Mormons in other areas and at other times throughout Latter-day Saint Church history were present in Upshur County. The majority of the population of the county was composed of so-called "Fundamentalist" Protestant sects, people who were extremely intolerant of those whose religious beliefs differed to any large degree from their own. The same isolation of the Kelsey community which undoubtedly gave it some physical protection would have also roused the suspicions of the neighbors of the Mormon settlement. Violence was no stranger to Upshur County. As late as 1919 a young Negro, accused of assaulting a white woman, was broken from the Upshur County jail in Gilmer by

an armed mob who hanged him from an elm tree on the south side of the courthouse square.¹

The Saints of Kelsey kept to themselves as much as possible, nevertheless trouble erupted before the community was ten years old. In 1908 a man named Davis was shot and killed by his wife. Her lawyer, defending her in court in Gilmer, won an acquittal from a sympathetic jury with the argument that "any man who would settle his wife between the Mormons and the Niggers [sic] deserved to be shot." The Davis family had settled between Kelsey and Summerfield, an all Negro community.² At about the same time several members of the Church and two missionaries were pelted with rotten eggs and vegetables when they attempted to preach the Gospel in an Upshur County community near Kelsey.³

In 1911 the first serious threat to the community from a mob originated in and around the community of Latch, a few miles south of Kelsey. A mob gathered at Latch and

¹Doyal T. Loyd, A History of Upshur County, Texas (Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1966), p. 79.

²Statement by Heber Jones, long-time resident of Kelsey, personal interview at Gilmer, Texas, August 3, 1973.

³Letter from Vaughn Rowley, daughter of one of Kelsey's early settlers, January, 1970.

made plans to march on Kelsey and "burn the Mormons out." Alfred Marsh, a non-Mormon living in Kelsey and a brother of Leroy Marsh, the branch president at Kelsey, was warned by a member of the mob that he should take his family and leave Kelsey before the mob arrived. Alfred warned his brother, Leroy, who informed the settlers of Kelsey. Kelsey Saints instituted prayer and fasting in hopes that the Lord would intervene in their behalf.⁴ They also armed themselves and conducted an all-night vigil to protect their community. The next day the entire area was struck by heavy thunderstorms which flooded Kelsey Creek and prevented the mob from crossing into Kelsey. Later cooler heads prevailed and the Latch mob disbanded.⁵

In 1915 a one-armed man, claiming to be a preacher, came into Gilmer. Hearing of the Mormon colony at Kelsey, he began preaching a sermon on the courthouse square in Gilmer, denouncing and "exposing" the supposed moral corruption of the Saints. He accused the Mormons of living in polygamy, stating that he was an "expert" on Mormonism by

⁴Flave Henderson, former Kelsey resident, in a letter to Vaughn Rowley, January 5, 1970.

⁵Statement by Mrs. Lola Wade, Kelsey, Texas, personal interview, August 3, 1973.

virtue of having "spied on the secret rites of the Mormon temple." Latter-day Saints among his growing audience knew from the preacher's remarks that he was ignorant of Mormon doctrine. Several Saints tried to make themselves heard above the crowd, but were drowned out by the shouts of the mob.⁶ Finally one Latter-day Saint woman, Mae Yarbourough, prophesied in a loud voice that the one-armed preacher would live to be sorry for his attack on the Mormons. It is said that the preacher eventually died in an insane asylum at Terrell, Texas.⁷

William J. Linsey, in Gilmer on business, heard the commotion caused by the one-armed man and quickly sensed that a mob spirit was beginning to possess those listening to the one-armed preacher. The mob showed every intent of marching on Kelsey to burn the Church, school, and homes in the community. Brother Lindsey sent his son to Kelsey on horseback to warn Branch President Marsh of impending disaster. President Marsh immediately called a meeting of the

⁶History of the Kelsey Branch, May 15, 1915, located in the Church Historian's Library, hereinafter cited as Branch History.

⁷Letter from Mrs. Smith Pennington, Athens, Texas, daughter of Lee Linsey, an early resident of Kelsey, November 3, 1969.

Kelsey Saints and explained the danger.⁸ Armed guards were posted at the Church, the school, and at the home of President Marsh. Fortunately, cooler heads again prevailed as District Judge Jude Warren, Attorney Thomas Briggs, and the Upshur County sheriff confronted the mob at Hopewell community before they could reach Kelsey. The sheriff ordered the mob to disband, stating that the Mormons, having settled on "those dry rocky hills will soon starve to death anyway."⁹

The Kelsey Saints took the threat seriously enough to keep guards posted at the edge of town for several weeks after the incident, but the only violence which actually occurred was in the form of a stick of dynamite which was thrown by an unknown person at the home of President Marsh. Fortunately it exploded harmlessly in the front yard of the Marsh home. For the next three months Charles A. Shirley slept on a bench in the new brick school building with a loaded gun at his side.¹⁰

⁸Letter from Vaughn Rowley, January, 1970.

⁹Interview with Vaughn Rowley, Lela Hamberlin, Lamar Hamberlin, and Myrtle Lindsey Hamberlin, long-time residents of Kelsey, in Kelsey, Texas, August 2, 1973.

¹⁰Redie S. Shirley, Short Biography and Memories of Charles A. Shirley (Shreveport: House of Glass, 1967), p. 127.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT

There is evidence that the one-armed preacher's claim of polygamy being practiced in Kelsey was not without some basis of fact, even though branch leaders emphatically attacked the practice each time it was exposed in Kelsey.

Upshur County in the early years of the twentieth century was composed of Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists, many of whom considered dancing to be of the devil himself.¹¹ Even a rumor of plural marriage in their midst would have been enough to horrify ministers and laymen alike in such denominations.

Officially the practice of plural marriage in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was discontinued in 1890 after a long and bitter struggle in which the weight of the federal government had been brought to bear upon the Church and its members.¹² However, a practice so ingrained in the lives of Latter-day Saints could not be stamped out overnight. Rumors of the continuance of plural marriage within the Church caused President Joseph F. Smith to issue

¹¹Loyd, op. cit., p. 33.

¹²Joseph Fielding Smith, Essentials in Church History (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1969), pp. 494-495.

a strong statement at the general conference of the Church on April 6, 1904, in which he stated that plural marriage could not be practiced within the Church without the participants being subject to excommunication from the body of the Church.¹³ Still, even today various apostate groups have carried on the practice and teaching of plural marriage.¹⁴ It should not be surprising, then, that in a group of Latter-day Saints as isolated as the Kelsey Mormons, problems over the doctrine would arise.

One of the early settlers of Kelsey brought an extra "wife" with him from Arizona where he had previously dwelt in a Latter-day Saint colony there. It is said that he had at least one child by his second "wife."¹⁵ On November 26, 1903, the branch president of Kelsey called a special meeting to consider the sin of the woman, although her husband was not mentioned in the branch history. The branch president, citing the Doctrine and Covenants, urged the Saints

¹³Ibid., pp. 512-513.

¹⁴James B. Allen and Richard O. Cowan, Mormonism in the Twentieth Century (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1964), p. 21.

¹⁵Vaughn Rowley, Lela Hamberlin, Lamar Hamberlin, Myrtle Lindsey Hamberlin, op. cit.

to forgive the woman, as this was a first offense and she had confessed her transgression. He further counseled that the Saints should "quit talking about the matter."¹⁶ Three years later the charge was repeated and this time the woman was excommunicated from the Church. Again no mention was made in the branch records of the man involved.¹⁷

On January 13, 1905, after having urged the Saints to live within the official Church ban on plural marriage, Branch President Harless stated that the Saints at Kelsey "had better repent or the community would be destroyed." Elder Prickett followed the branch president to the stand and stated that the words of President Harless were from God.¹⁸

Just two months later, on March 20, 1905, notices were served by the branch president on another couple living in plural marriage. The following day Conference President William R. Lee presided at a meeting attended by the branch presidency of Kelsey as well as most of the priesthood

¹⁶Branch History, November 26, 1903.

¹⁷Vaughn Rowley, Lela Hamberlin, Lamar Hamberlin, Myrtle Lindsey Hamberlin, op. cit.

¹⁸Branch History, January 13, 1905.

body of the community, to consider the charges of adultery against the pair. The man pleaded guilty to having "sealed himself" to a second wife, but quoted extensively from the Doctrine and Covenants in order to justify his actions. He also attempted to use the Law of Moses in his own defense. President Lee reminded the man that there were to be no more plural marriages, and even if there were, he had closed the door on himself by his actions. The defendant's first wife was called to testify and stated that her husband could have his second wife for eternity, but that "he had better not touch her again in this life." She testified further that she loved her husband, and she loved the woman he had sealed himself to in plural marriage, but that her husband had better "keep his distance" from his extra wife. In this case the man was disfellowshipped, but the woman was forgiven after a public confession by her of her transgressions.¹⁹

The following year President James G. Duffin, visiting Kelsey for a conference, reminded the Saints that "one cannot seal himself to a woman in plural marriage any more than one can baptize himself."²⁰

¹⁹Ibid., March 21, 1905.

²⁰Ibid., May 14, 1906.

At least one other Latter-day Saint moved to Kelsey with an extra wife as late as 1909, but there is no official record of Church action having been brought against him; however, his name does not occur in any branch records after that incident.²¹

These isolated incidents of polygamy certainly fed the fires of religious intolerance and bigotry in Upshur County for a few years. However, the isolation of the Saints, coupled with the fact that the basic tenets of the Latter-day Saint religion were so much at odds with the beliefs of the "fundamentalist" Protestant sects in the county, would have aroused more suspicion. At the time these differences were occurring, there was not even a Roman Catholic congregation in the county.²²

Latter-day Saint missionary efforts in the county were vigorous in the early years of Kelsey, and all too successful in the eyes of jealous Protestant ministers.²³ Kelsey provided a base of operations for elders, who had previously sought in vain for a haven, as they proselyted

²¹Vaughn Rowley, Lela Hamberlin, Lamar Hamberlin, Myrtle Lindsey Hamberlin, op. cit.

²²Loyd, op. cit., p. 33.

²³Liahona the Elders' Journal, V (June, 1908), 1356.

members of other faiths. Not only were the Mormons a "peculiar" people in the eyes of their neighbors, but they posed an active threat to the beliefs of those of other denominations.

Chapter 9

THE KELSEY ACADEMY: A UNIQUE UNION OF CHURCH AND STATE

In the summer of 1919 a young Latter-day Saint missionary was called to serve his Church in the Central States Mission. Reporting in St. Louis, Missouri, the young elder, a high school graduate, was instructed by President Samuel O. Bennion of the Central States Mission to journey immediately to Dallas, Texas. There he would take the Texas State Teacher's Examination which, if passed, would qualify him to teach secondary school in Texas. President Bennion further instructed the youthful missionary that if he should pass the exam, he was to report to the Church academy located at Kelsey, Texas, and receive his teaching assignment. Although full-time Latter-day Saint missionaries are not paid, this elder was told that he would accept a full salary as paid by the state of Texas; but he would be expected to donate most of it to the Kelsey Branch. He was allowed to keep a

small portion of his wages to pay for his room and his board.¹

Between 1906 and 1940 many missionaries, most of whom had never previously heard of Kelsey, Texas, spent all or part of their two-year missions teaching a variety of subjects at the Kelsey Academy. The growth of the Kelsey Academy was not only indicative of the success of the East Texas Mormon colony, but is in itself an interesting reflection of the relationship between the colonists at Kelsey, their neighbors in the rest of Upshur County, and the state of Texas. The academy was an unusual coalition formed between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Upshur County, and the state of Texas to educate the children of Kelsey. Conflicts arose from this arrangement, but, nevertheless, Kelsey Academy functioned successfully for nearly forty years.

EDUCATION AND THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

"The glory of God is intelligence" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:36). ". . . seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118).

¹Statement by G. Byron Done, Professor of Scripture at Brigham Young University, retired, and a former missionary-teacher at Kelsey, Texas, personal interview, July, 1972.

"Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection" (Doctrine and Covenants 130:18). For Latter-day Saints secular education is an important part of their religion. The Prophet Joseph Smith was prevented both by age and circumstances from being educated when he began the establishment of the Church. Nevertheless, he made the following statement only two years after the Church was organized:

The disciples should lose no time in providing schools for the children that they may be taught as is pleasing unto the Lord, and brought up in the ways of holiness . . . It is important that to become good they should be taught good.²

Actuated by these teachings, the best schools possible have been maintained by the Church for the education of both young and old wherever enough Saints have been gathered together to support such schools. The School of the Prophets at Kirtland, Ohio; and the School of the Elders, established in Jackson County, Missouri, were among the earliest attempts to organize adult education in America.³

²Joseph Smith, History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ed. B. H. Roberts (2d ed. rev.; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1959-1960), II:276-277.

³Ivan J. Barrett, Joseph Smith and the Restoration (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1973), pp. 219-235.

Horace Cummings, Church General Superintendent of Schools in 1913, stated that "the multiplication table is as essential to salvation as is faith or baptism." He further remarked, "As well might we think of an unreformed thief in the kingdom of heaven as an uninstructed ignoramus."⁴

Shortly after entering the Salt Lake Valley in July, 1847, the Saints had established a school taught by Miss Mary Jane Dilworth. A few weeks later, when the frosts of winter lessened the outside work, a larger school was organized under the direction of Julian Moses, who was the first male teacher in Utah.⁵

As the population and colonization of the territory expanded, the Mormon people provided themselves with excellent public schools. However, as the Gentile population of the territory grew, and as public schools had to be established for the use of all, Mormon and non-Mormon alike, religion ceased to be taught in Utah public schools.⁶

⁴Horace H. Cummings, "The Church Schools," The Improvement Era, XVI (July, 1913), 938.

⁵Ibid., p. 934.

⁶Ibid.

THE GROWTH OF CHURCH SCHOOLS

Since religion was no longer being taught in the public schools, especially in areas of Utah with large Gentile populations and in areas outside of Utah, the Church began to maintain schools of its own. In the 1870's and 1880's, under the direction of the General Church Board of Education, a system of Church schools was established in the principal stakes of Zion. An academy to do high school work was founded in each of the most populous stakes, and schools for elementary work were established in wealthier stakes.⁷

In times of financial stress, the problem of financing Church schools became grave and in some cases desperate. In many instances devoted teachers willingly gave their services free, as missionaries, or for half pay, or for whatever remuneration the people in a stake could offer them.⁸

In spite of hardships in maintaining Church schools, in June, 1888, the Church Board of Education sent a circular letter to all stake presidents in the Church in which stake officials were directed to set up a board of education in

⁷Ibid., p. 932.

⁸Ibid., p. 934.

each stake. The board would supervise the teaching of religious and academic subjects in the academies of the stake, seeing to it that the Bible, The Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price be used as texts.⁹

The continued spread of state schools and the depression of the 1890's doomed many Church academies, but several persisted into the twentieth century.¹⁰ In 1906 President Joseph F. Smith, emphasizing the importance of Church schools, stated:

In my opinion the Church schools are laying the foundation for great usefulness among the people of God, and they should be sustained by the people and by the Church.¹¹

The organization of the Kelsey colony early in the twentieth century came at a time when the Church was attempting to maintain as much vitality as possible in its educational system. It was only natural that an academy would become a very important part of Kelsey's history. Surprising, though, is the degree of success enjoyed in a venture

⁹William E. Berrett and Alma P. Burton, Readings in L.D.S. Church History (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1958), III:334.

¹⁰Cummings, op. cit., p. 938.

¹¹Berrett and Burton, op. cit., p. 339.

co-sponsored by the Church with various state and county educational agencies of Texas.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UPSHUR COUNTY EDUCATION
IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY
TWENTIETH CENTURIES

There are no records of any organized school having existed in Upshur County, Texas, before 1851.¹² After that year small one-room schools began to be organized in areas where population was dense enough to support such a venture. In 1884 there were forty-one such schools in the county. However, most classes were held only on an average of two-and-one-half months out of each year, as young people were needed to share the work load in a largely agricultural area.¹³

On August 10, 1891, the first recorded consolidation of schools in Upshur County occurred as a result of an attempt to upgrade the schools by concentrating available funds on fewer but larger schools. In 1903 permanent school districts were organized and given boundaries, names, and numbers. In that year there were forty-five schools in the

¹²Loyd, op. cit., p. 14.

¹³Ibid., pp. 18-20.

county. In 1905 the school districts were given power by the county to vote bonds to finance construction of buildings and to purchase needed equipment and books. In 1907 the Texas State Legislature passed a law which required counties with over three-thousand residents to appoint a county superintendent of schools. A. F. Shepperd was appointed as Upshur Chounty's first school superintendent. Most of the rural schools in the county taught only eight or nine grades, bussing to Gilmer those students who desired education beyond the ninth grade.¹⁴

An interscholastic league was soon established with nearly every school in the district participating in competition in spelling, declamation, essay writing, debating, boys' and girls' basketball, and track. By 1920 thirty-nine schools were represented in the league. Three days each spring were given to county meets wherein nearly every school participated in each event. Three to five-thousand students and spectators would usually attend these meets.¹⁵

As the county's population expanded, several more schools were organized. By 1913, fifty-five schools were being taught in Upshur County. In the latter part of the

¹⁴Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 23.

1920's, consolidation moves were instituted again to upgrade educational opportunities which could be provided by fewer but better-equipped schools. In 1928 the number of schools was reduced to thirty-seven; by 1952, thirteen; and at present, only eight.¹⁶

By today's standards, teacher's pay and qualifications were very low in the early years of the twentieth century. A teacher having completed an eighth grade education could receive, upon passing an examination, a grade school teaching certificate. In 1916 classroom teachers in Upshur County were drawing salaries of fifty dollars per month, while principals drew sixty-five to seventy dollars monthly. After World War One a principal in a two or three teacher school drew one-hundred dollars per month for each month of the six-month term. In 1930 the same principal had only gained fifty dollars per month, and the school term had been increased to seven months. In that same year, teachers were paid sixty-five to seventy-five dollars per month depending upon their own education and experience.¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 25.

THE GROWTH OF THE KELSEY ACADEMY

As soon as the Kelsey Branch had been established and a church building erected by the end of 1901, the colonists asked the mission president for help in establishing a school for the children of Kelsey. The school could meet, at least temporarily, in the church building. The mission responded by furnishing the colony with a school principal without charge to the citizens of Kelsey. The first principal was Manassah J. Blackburn, who was succeeded by Ralph T. Boyack in 1903. The colony was expected to pay a salary for an assistant teacher when the school was first opened. From 1901 to 1904 instruction was given only three months each year. The principal was assisted in tutoring the students by the colonists or by missionaries laboring in the area.¹⁸

On January 1, 1904, a community meeting was held in the Kelsey Chapel in which Branch President Davis recommended that Della Buckley, a recent arrival in Kelsey, be hired to assist Elder Ralph Boyack in teaching school in Kelsey. It was recommended by the branch presidency that Della be employed at a salary of twenty dollars per month

¹⁸Statement by Mrs. A. L. Means, Kelsey, Texas, personal interview, August 2, 1973.

for each month that she taught. The recommendation carried, as James Edgar stated along with others that he would be willing to borrow the money if necessary to pay Sister Buckley's salary.¹⁹

The Kelsey Branch History states that:

From the beginning the aim of the mission and of the Kelsey citizens has been to make the Kelsey school the best rural school in East Texas, where young people may get the best of training and yet live in the atmosphere of a well-organized and active L.D.S. Church community. To this end no effort has been spared.²⁰

With the selection of a county school superintendent in 1907, it became necessary for Kelsey to petition the county commissioners of Upshur County for permission to organize a school district. On the 11th of February, 1907, J. O. Lindsey and twenty other citizens of Kelsey asked for and received permission to establish the Kelsey School District. The new district was assigned the number forty-five by the County Commissioner's Court.²¹ A group photograph

¹⁹History of the Kelsey Branch, January 1, 1904, located in the Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, hereinafter cited as Branch History.

²⁰Ibid., March 15, 1920.

²¹Upshur County Commissioner's Court Records, February 11, 1907, Upshur County Clerk's Office.

of the classes being taught in Kelsey in 1907 shows a total of ninety-four students and teachers.²²

By 1910 school enrollment had climbed to 130 with 30 other students attending a small church school which had been established in nearby Enoch. The following year a two-story brick school building was completed, having been properly bonded and built under state supervision. By that time an average of twelve teachers, mostly missionaries, were teaching in the Kelsey Academy, but were being paid by the County School District.²³

MIXING SPIRITUAL AND SECULAR

Whereas public schools in Utah were being restricted in teaching sectarian religion, no such problem existed in Kelsey. Soon after the completion of the new brick school, a tract advertising the Kelsey colony described the benefits of the school in the following manner:

Kelsey has a public school system that is given distinction by the state department [of education]. We feel safe in saying that in point of equipment,

²²Photograph in the collection of Mrs. A. L. Means, Kelsey, Texas.

²³Elder Thomas Greer, "Kelsey: A Southern Place of Gathering," Liahona The Elders' Journal, VII (February 26, 1910), 571.

for the work and in ability to impart knowledge and draw the latent energies of the student, our faculty cannot be excelled We regard the development of a strong moral character as the most important consideration in education. Reverence for God and trust in Him are presented as a basis for such a character.²⁴

Besides religion, other subjects taught in the eighth grade included history, composition with classics, algebra, Latin, geography, and physiology. Ninth grade students were taught composition with classics, history, algebra, Latin, biology, and agriculture. Students in the tenth grade studied geometry, American history, American literature, Latin, economics, and civics.²⁵ Besides religious and scholastic subjects, great stress was also laid upon what were known as "The Five Rules." These positively forbade the use of intoxicating drinks, profane and vulgar language, the playing of any game of chance, the use of tobacco, and the absence of a student from the limits of the school without permission.²⁶ Branch leaders could well afford to boast:

²⁴W. R. Henderson, Tract published at Marshall, Texas in 1911, hereinafter referred to as Tract.

²⁵Minutes of the Upshur County School Board, Upshur County Board of Education, Gilmer, Texas, I:300-310, hereinafter referred to as School Board Minutes.

²⁶Tract.

A fine school has been established in charge of the elders laboring in the mission, assisted by a staff of efficient, well-trained teachers, generally members of the Church, who are generating clean, revitalizing principles of better rural life, and the school children are taking the ideas into the woof and warp of the community.²⁷

In 1911 the Thirty-second Legislature of the State of Texas provided for the rating of public schools by designation of first, second, third, and fourth-class schools by the local county boards of education. As a result of this provision by the state, the Upshur County School Board was formed on June 16, 1911.²⁸ On March 18, 1912, the board classified the fifty-five white and colored schools in its district, giving only one first-class rating, and that to the Gilmer High School. Two second-class ratings were given, one of which went to the Kelsey Academy. In addition, five third-class ratings were given, with the balance of the schools in the district receiving a fourth-class rating. Fourth-class schools were not allowed to teach any grade past the seventh. Such things as teacher qualifications, facilities, and libraries were considered in classifying a school.²⁹ Kelsey had only applied for a rating one

²⁷Branch History, January 10, 1910.

²⁸School Board Minutes, III:574.

²⁹Ibid., I:310.

week before the March 18, 1912, meeting of the County School Board, but it received immediate approval of its academy as a second-class school, authorized to teach eleven grades, all that were being taught in Texas schools at that time.

CONFLICT WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD

On August 21, 1912, the county school board forced the resignation of J. T. Smith and Luther Dawson, two of the three trustees of the Kelsey Academy. Texas State Superintendent of Schools, Annie Webb Blanton, "classed this as a sectarian school since all the trustees and teachers are of the same faith, Marmon [sic]." She asked that the Upshur County Board appoint two non-Mormon trustees in their place.³⁰

After this initial clash with the school board, Kelsey's relationship with that body remained good for a few years. In the meantime the school grew in size of enrollment and its curriculum, and its achievements expanded.

SCHOOL DISTINCTIONS

The academy always made respectable showings at the interscholastic spring meet each year. One year the school

³⁰Ibid., I:248.

merited second place in the meet for outstanding performance in spelling, singing, races, and declamation.³¹

Another year one of the academy students, William Tefteller, who later became branch president at Kelsey, ranked extra high in "cattle judging."³²

Several distinctive "firsts" in education in Upshur County were accomplished at the Kelsey Academy. In 1928 the Lewis B. Boyle family came to Kelsey from Salt Lake City as missionary-teachers. Through their efforts the first classes in domestic science, art, and vocational agriculture ever taught in Upshur County were organized in the Kelsey Academy.³³

One of the first school bands in the county was organized in 1922. It consisted of thirty-five band members under the direction of Parley A. Young. The following year the band was directed by N. W. Christiansen. He was followed in 1924 by his brother, Elray L. Christiansen.³⁴

³¹Letter from Lola Wade of Kelsey, Texas, November 23, 1969.

³²Information in a scrapbook collected by and in the possession of Mrs. A. L. Means of Kelsey, Texas.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Pictures of these bands are located in the scrapbook of Mrs. A. L. Means, Kelsey, Texas.

In 1929 the first gymnasium built in Upshur County was constructed adjacent to the Kelsey Academy building. It was named Bennion Hall in honor of Mission President Samuel O. Bennion. The gymnasium provided the only indoor basketball court in the county. The building was 125 feet long by 65 feet wide, with bleacher seating for over 500 spectators.³⁵ Besides a full-size basketball court, Bennion Hall was equipped with a stage at one end, and two furnished apartments along the sides of the building to accommodate married missionary-teachers who had come with their families to Kelsey.³⁶ The boy's basketball teams always provided good competition for neighboring schools, and the girl's team was known as the "prettiest girl's basketball team in several counties."³⁷

The academy operated a dairy and a poultry plant near the campus for practical agricultural training. Eggs, chickens, and dairy products were sold to help raise funds to operate the projects.³⁸

³⁵Branch History, May 10, 1929.

³⁶Redie S. Shirley, Short Biography and Memories of Charles A. Shirley (Shreveport: House of Class, 1967), p. 4.

³⁷Letter from Vaughn Rowley, January 1970.

³⁸Shirley, loc. cit.

INTENSIFICATION OF CONFLICT
WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD

Relations between Kelsey and the County School Board remained fairly good until 1925. On the fourth of September in that year Kelsey was one of two high schools out of twelve in Upshur County which was classified to teach all eleven grades.³⁹ Two months later, in an obvious attempt to close the Kelsey Academy, a motion was made at the school board meeting to consolidate Kelsey with another school district, but a decision was postponed.⁴⁰ On March 1, 1926, the board ruled that no school should maintain classes of less than eight students. The motion did not affect Kelsey, whose school enrollment was 110 students in the high school grades,⁴¹ but the following year the nearby Mormon colony of Enoch was forced to close its high school grades and bus their students to Kelsey.⁴²

From 1927 until 1935 Kelsey maintained its classification to teach eleven grades, but some school board members were making determined efforts by April, 1933, to

³⁹School Board Minutes, I:324.

⁴⁰Ibid., I:329-330.

⁴¹Ibid., II:26.

⁴²Ibid., I:337.

either close or curtail the operation of the Kelsey Academy.⁴³ During this period the population of Kelsey was declining, and there was some justification for the discussion of consolidation with other schools. Finally, on July 29, 1936, on a motion from board member H. J. Fennell, Kelsey's classification was withdrawn.⁴⁴ Kelsey citizens immediately appealed the decision which was reversed briefly on August 31, 1936.⁴⁵ Then in November, classification was again withdrawn along with school bus service which had been provided from Enoch to Kelsey.⁴⁶

Between April, 1937, and August, 1938, heated discussions took place in the board meetings between Kelsey citizens desiring reinstatement of classification and two board members, J. B. Webb and Fred W. Rosenkoetter, both of whom claimed that the Kelsey Academy was a Church school and ineligible for state funds. As a result of motions by Mr. Webb and Mr. Rosenkoetter, state money which had already been apportioned to Kelsey was redistributed among the other schools in the county.⁴⁷

⁴³Ibid., II:23, 66, 76, 83, 86, 89, 98, 102.

⁴⁴Ibid., II:103.

⁴⁵Ibid., II:109.

⁴⁶Ibid., II:110.

⁴⁷Ibid., II:116, 122.

FINAL DECLINE

The Church attempted to run the academy without state aid for two school years, 1938-1939, and 1939-1940. Total expenses to the Church for the 1938-1939 school year were \$7,815.00, with \$5,800.00 being allocated for teachers' salaries.⁴⁸

Personnel employed during the 1938-1939 school year included three female teachers and four male teachers. One teacher held a Master of Arts degree, three held bachelor's degrees, and three held no degree. In addition to the teachers, a janitor and bus driver were also employed. The teaching assignments for the eight grades being taught were as follows: one first grade teacher, one fourth and fifth grade teacher, one second and third grade teacher, one sixth and seventh grade teacher, one English and science teacher, and a mathematics and physical education teacher, and one history and music teacher who also served as principal of the academy. The library held a total of 1465 volumes.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Kelsey Academy Account Book, 1937-1940, microfilm located in the Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City.

⁴⁹Ibid.

By the school year of 1939-1940, total enrollment for all eight grades had dropped to thirty-three students, with an average daily attendance of only 24.4. The Church decided to sell all of their furnishings and property within the school at the end of the spring term. The following items were sold for a total of \$625.00:

Seven sewing machines.....	70.00
Three typewriters.....	15.00
Two calves.....	40.00
Three calves.....	35.00
Five cows.....	175.00
One bull.....	45.00
Total with other furnishings sold.....	625.00 ⁵⁰

Classes taught in the elementary grades that final year of the Church-operated academy still stressed a variety of secular and religious subjects. A typical school day is outlined as follows:

9:00-9:15 A.M.....	Opening exercises
9:15-10:15 A.M.....	Mathematics
10:15-10:30 A.M.....	Recess
10:30-11:30 A.M.....	Language
11:30-12:00 Noon.....	Band and Music
12:00-1:00 P.M.....	Lunch and recess
1:00-1:30 P.M.....	History
1:30-2:00 P.M.....	Geography
2:00-2:15 P.M.....	Spelling
2:15-2:30 P.M.....	Recess
2:30-3:00 P.M.....	Religion
3:00-3:30 P.M.....	Civics ⁵¹

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹From a copy of "Teacher's Daily Register for Public Schools, 1939-1940" which Kelsey followed that year. A copy is in the collection of Mrs. A. L. Means, Kelsey.

On June 26, 1940, Kelsey was once again classified by the county school board, but this time as a state-run school and only to teach through the seventh grade.⁵² On May 12, 1941, Texas adopted a twelve-grade system and Kelsey was again reclassified, this time to teach eight grades.⁵³ Then in June, 1942, the school was reclassified for only seven grades which were operated during the school year 1942-1943.⁵⁴ At the end of that school year the Kelsey Academy closed its doors for the final time as a school building. The few remaining students in Kelsey would be bussed to Gilmer to school after September, 1943. Until recently the old school building was used as a community center,⁵⁵ but is currently deserted, its windows boarded up. Gazing at the structure at the present time, one might recall the words of the poet, John Greenleaf Whittier:

Still sits the schoolhouse by the road,
A ragged beggar sleeping;
Around it still the sumacks grow,
And blackberry vines are creeping.

⁵²School Board Minutes, II:149.

⁵³Ibid., II:164.

⁵⁴Ibid., II:176.

⁵⁵Branch History.

Within, the master's desk is seen,
Still scarred by raps official;
The warping floors, the battered seats,
The jackknife's carved initial.

The charcoal frescoes on its walls;
Its door's worn sill, betraying
The feet that creeping slow to school,
Went storming out to playing!⁵⁶

⁵⁶John Greenleaf Whittier, "In School Days,"
Favorite Poems Old and New, selected by Helen Ferris
(Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1957), p. 543.

Chapter 10

THE DECLINE OF THE KELSEY COLONY

Kelsey continued to grow and prosper for at least fifteen years after its founding, reaching its zenith in population and importance about 1917. At that time at least 750 people were living in Kelsey, with several hundred more living in the nearby community of Enoch. That year fourteen business establishments were operating in the business section of Kelsey.¹

After 1917 the Kelsey colony began to deteriorate rapidly. Kelsey had survived during the early years of the twentieth century because of the great need for a religious haven which it had provided. Its growth was stimulated by the coming of the railroad linking Kelsey with excellent markets for the produce of its farmers. As will be seen, both of these factors, the need for a religious haven and the railroad, came to an end almost simultaneously.

¹History of the Kelsey Branch, located in the Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, hereinafter referred to as Branch History.

REDISTRIBUTION OF CHURCH POPULATION AND
THE GROWTH OF TOLERANCE
FOR THE CHURCH

In 1900 approximately ninety percent of the Latter-day Saint population was located in Utah, Arizona, and Idaho.² As has been shown in previous chapters, the gathering concept and persecution had been responsible for this phenomenon of population concentration. However, at the turn of the twentieth century, the Church stood on the threshold of spectacular worldwide growth.

At a time when some areas of the nation, especially the Deep South, were still vigorously persecuting Latter-day Saints; some sensible men in the secular world were beginning to plead for an end to violent opposition to the Church, its members, and its missionaries. Reflecting this change in attitude, one Protestant minister considered the futility of opposing Mormonism with violence, feeling that it would eventually wither and die:

The way to oppose Mormonism is not to throw mud upon it. A campaign of detraction only helps it

²James B. Allen and Richard O. Cowan, Mormonism in the Twentieth Century (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1964), p. 34.

grow. The thing to do is treat it with candor and fairness . . . It must fall of its own weight if it is to fall at all.³

Between 1901 and 1918 membership in the Church increased from 278,645 to 495,962. Missions of the Church in the same period increased from sixteen to twenty-two, with membership in the missions for the same period increasing by 135 percent.⁴ By 1923 the first stake organized outside of the intermountain area was formed in Los Angeles, California.⁵ In 1900 Saints in the intermountain area comprised eighty-four percent of Church population, but by 1920 this figure had shrunk to 76.1 percent and by 1930 to 72.3 percent.⁶ In 1929 there were 104 stakes, 930 wards, and 75 independent branches representing almost every state in the union. Two thousand two hundred twenty-six missionaries were laboring in the field in 1929, bringing even more converts into the Church.⁷

By the end of World War I, as a result of increased public exposure and proselyting, the Church had gained the

³Ibid., p. 33.

⁴Ibid., p. 24.

⁵Ibid., p. 53.

⁶Ibid., p. 51.

⁷B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), VI, 549.

respect of many national and state leaders, who were looking more kindly upon the Saints. Increased missionary activity brought not only more converts into the Church, but also began to overcome old prejudices as knowledge of the Church spread around the world.⁸

The growth of the Church in Texas was sufficient that a separate mission, the Texas Mission, was established in 1931.⁹ Thriving branches of the Church in East Texas were organized at Lufkin, Tyler, Texarkana, Kilgore, Longview, Gilmer, and Pittsburg.¹⁰ With the formation of the Texas Mission, later renamed the Texas-Louisiana Mission, Kelsey was no longer in President Samuel O. Bennion's Central States Mission. President Bennion, nevertheless, maintained an active interest in the community¹¹ until January 20, 1934, when he was released as mission president

⁸Joseph Fielding Smith, Essentials in Church History (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1969), p. 517.

⁹Ibid., p. 619.

¹⁰Charles Kilpatrick, "Upshur County Hills Shelter South's Largest Mormon Colony," Tyler Morning Telegraph, January 21, 1949.

¹¹Branch History.

and recalled to Salt Lake City, there to fulfill his duties as a member of the First Council of Seventy.¹²

THE EDGAR BROTHERS

The Edgar Brothers, the first settlers of Kelsey, were not destined to be long associated with Kelsey. In 1908 Jim Edgar sold all of his property in Kelsey and moved to Enoch, three miles southwest of Kelsey. He stayed there only a short time, moving on to Sherman, Texas; then back to Enoch; to Billings, Montana; Lovell, Wyoming; and finally to his original home in Andalusia, Alabama.

John Edgar sold his holdings in Kelsey in 1915, moving to Bradley, Oklahoma; Childress, Texas; and finally back to Enoch where he died in 1935.¹³

THE DEMISE OF THE MARSHALL AND EAST TEXAS RAILWAY

The Marshall and East Texas Railway, which had helped boost the prosperity of Kelsey, was dependent upon

¹²Andrew Jenson, Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jensen History Co., 1936), IV, 732.

¹³Statement by Charity Amos, daughter of Jim Edgar, personal interview, August 2, 1973.

the timber industry to furnish its main freight tonnage. As the timber was cut in East Texas and the saw mills and related industries began to close down, the railroad fell upon hard times. By 1917 most of the timber was gone and the mills closed. As there was little other freight available to support the railroad, the corporation's creditors forced the Marshall and East Texas Railway into receivership. The Railway was offered for sale, but there were no buyers.¹⁴ The last train to run on the tracks operated by the Marshall and East Texas Railway traveled the route in September, 1917.¹⁵

The railroad was finally offered for sale in segments, a buyer appearing for only the segment running from Gilmer to Winnsboro, a distance of thirty miles. Kelsey was included in this route. On May 19, 1920, a new company was organized and chartered to operate this short-line railroad, renamed the Winnsboro and Gilmer Railroad Company; but although they ran a few irregularly scheduled

¹⁴S. G. Reed, A History of the Texas Railroads and of the Transportation Conditions under Spain and Mexico and the Republic of Texas and the State (Houston: The St. Clair Publishing Co., 1941), p. 459.

¹⁵"M.&E.T. Railroad's Charm Found Its Troubles," Gilmer Mirror, August 15, 1968.

trains, the railroad was not operated as a common carrier and their charter was forfeited in 1923.¹⁶

The people of Kelsey, so dependent upon the railroad to haul their produce to market, looked to other means of transporting their merchandise, but found trucking extremely difficult. The connecting roads between Kelsey and other communities were poor and unpaved at that time.

In 1928 Louis Boyle, who had been sent to Kelsey as a teaching missionary, received permission to operate a gas-powered conveyance, actually an old bus rebuilt to fit the railroad tracks, between Kelsey and Gilmer for the express purpose of hauling produce to market in Gilmer. The project had to be abandoned when the tracks were sold for scrap and removed before the project could be properly initiated.¹⁷

OTHER CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO THE DECLINE OF KELSEY

While the abandonment of the railroad and the decrease in the need for a religious haven such as Kelsey

¹⁶Reed, loc. cit.

¹⁷Statement by Virgil Means, long-time resident of Kelsey, personal interview, August 2, 1973.

dealt severe blows to that community, there were other factors contributing to the final decline of Kelsey. In 1928 a disastrous hailstorm destroyed most of the crops for that year's harvest, forcing many residents to seek employment in other areas. Many of these people failed to return to Kelsey. After the hailstorm, truck farming virtually ceased in favor of dairy farming, as many owners of small farms sold out to the operators of larger dairy farms.¹⁸

It should be noted that as late as 1922, President Samuel O. Bennion was trying to encourage the Saints in the mission field to remain in the missions of the Church. In a report issued from his office that year he said:

We have made an extra effort this year to encourage the people of this mission to remain in the mission field and help build up the Church where they live or move into some of the branches of the mission rather than move to the stakes of Zion, where through inability to find employment they might get discouraged or even apostatize.¹⁹

By 1930 economic depression had seized all of Upshur County. The price of cotton fell to as low as five cents per pound with other farm and dairy produce falling almost

¹⁸Branch History, July 2, 1928.

¹⁹Report of Samuel O. Bennion, President of the Central States Mission, 1922, in bound mission reports, Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City.

as drastically. The population of Upshur County fell from thirty thousand to twenty thousand in the space of one year. The depression forced people to travel to other areas for employment.²⁰ It was at this time that one of Kelsey's oldest residents, Charles A. Shirley, decided to leave Kelsey and seek work in Salt Lake City. President Bennion, striving to hold the colony together, persuaded Brother Shirley to remain in Kelsey and keep the Church organization functioning there. Brother Shirley often held as many as four different Church positions simultaneously.²¹

In spite of the declining population, Kelsey did not completely die during the depression of the 1930's. Oil was discovered in nearby Gregg County, and Kelsey farmers supported their families by selling eggs, dairy products, and vegetables door to door in the oil boom towns.²²

Nor did the spirit of brotherhood which had helped build Kelsey in its early years fail in the closing years. In an article in an East Texas newspaper in 1949, a detailed

²⁰Doyal T. Loyd, A History of Upshur County, Texas (Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1966), p. 23.

²¹Redie S. Shirley, Short Biography and Memories of Charles A. Shirley (Shreveport: House of Glass, 1967), p. 15.

²²Ibid., p. 17.

account of the Church welfare system as it operated in Kelsey was reported. The article stated that a food store was maintained in the church building to provide for the needy. In 1948 the home of Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Bailey, two of Kelsey's oldest settlers, was torn down to make way for their new home. However, spiralling post war prices left the couple unable to raise the needed money to complete the project. The citizens of Kelsey, working together with donated time and material, soon completed a new home for the Baileys and their invalid daughter.²³

Most of the antagonism existing earlier in the century toward the Latter-day Saints in Kelsey had disappeared by the 1940's.²⁴ In an article in the Gilmer Mirror in 1948, it was said of the Mormons:

Not only are the industrious Mormons of Kelsey hard-working people who can take the red clay soil and turn it into productive fields of grain for their dairy cattle, but they are among the most law-abiding citizens of the entire county's 26,178 population. Seldom, if ever, is a Mormon found listed on the records for misdemeanors or felonies.²⁵

²³Kilpatrick, loc. cit.

²⁴Branch History.

²⁵"Site for Kelsey Community Chosen in 1899 by First Mormon Settlers," Gilmer Mirror, January 29, 1948, p. 2.

In spite of the decline of Kelsey's population in the second quarter of the twentieth century, Kelsey continued to make some contributions to the area and to the Church. In the 1930's the first Boy Scout troop chartered in Upshur County was organized by John B. Taylor Smith at Kelsey.²⁸ Heber Jones was called to be the first scoutmaster.²⁹

Between 1946 and 1951 the remainder of the population of Kelsey began planning for a new chapel to be built on the foundations of the old one. The now abandoned gymnasium was sold for one thousand dollars, and each able-bodied man in the community was asked to donate twenty days labor to tear down the old chapel and work on the new building. Church headquarters in Salt Lake City agreed to match every hour of donated labor with three dollars in money. No additional funds needed to be raised, as enough labor was donated that only one carpenter with his helper and a few bricklayers were ever actually paid wages. Total worth of the new building was forty thousand dollars.³⁰ A

²⁸Letter from Mrs. A. L. Means, Kelsey, Texas, November 4, 1969.

²⁹Statement by Heber Jones, personal interview, Gilmer, Texas, August 3, 1973.

³⁰Shirley, op. cit., p. 59.

cultural hall was planned as an addition to the new chapel, but was never built because of the consolidation of Kelsey with the Gilmer Ward of the Church.³¹

THE KELSEY CHURCH ORGANIZATION IS
CONSOLIDATED WITH GILMER

On October 18, 1953, the Dallas Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized, including wards and branches located in East Texas. At that time, Kelsey Branch was reorganized into a ward, with Emmons C. Bryant as bishop.³² However, the new ward was to function for a little less than four years. On January 26, 1958, the Shreveport Stake of the Church was organized at Shreveport, Louisiana, with Apostles Harold B. Lee and Spencer W. Kimball presiding at its first conference. At that conference wards at Kelsey, Enoch, and Gilmer were consolidated to become the Kelsey-Gilmer Ward with a population of about five hundred Latter-day Saints. The new ward held its meetings in the Gilmer chapel.³³ A large new chapel, situated

³¹Ibid., p. 60.

³²Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 18, 1953, located in the Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City.

³³Kelsey-Gilmer Ward History, January 26, 1958, located in the Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City.

on a beautiful pine tree-covered plot land, was dedicated in Gilmer on May 1, 1966.³⁴ With the creation of the Kelsey-Gilmer Ward, the last public building in Kelsey, the chapel, was closed and locked. Along with the Kelsey Academy, the chapel stands deserted, a reminder of earlier days when Kelsey enjoyed the honor of being the most important Latter-day Saint colony in the southern states.

³⁴Program of the Dedicatory Services for the Kelsey-Gilmer Ward building, May 1, 1966.

Chapter 11

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

At a time when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was maturing as a world movement and a world church, Kelsey was symbolic of the de-emphasis of the concept of gathering all of the Latter-day Saints to one area. Kelsey was one of the first experiments in the United States of combining the gathering concept with the idea of spreading the influence of the Church throughout the nation.

There is little doubt of the value of Kelsey during the first quarter of the twentieth century. It provided a needed haven for persecuted Saints from the southern states who could not afford or did not desire to make the trip to the Great Basin area of the United States. Kelsey was not simply a "pet" project of the Central States Mission Presidents, James G. Duffin and Samuel O. Bennion. At least two presidents of the Church, Heber J. Grant and David O. McKay, displayed interest enough in the community to make a personal visit. Several apostles also visited Kelsey, among whom were three who later became Church presidents:

Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, and Spencer W. Kimball.¹

Perhaps of more lasting importance to the Church than the haven Kelsey provided for Saints from the southern states has been the leadership provided to stakes, wards, and branches throughout East Texas by people who received their training and L.D.S. background in the Church, in the academy, and in the homes of Kelsey. These individuals have become leaders in at least three stakes which have functioned in the area, and in wards and branches in Dallas, Lufkin, Kilgore, Tyler, Enoch, Gilmer, Pittsburg, Longview, and other towns and cities.²

The growth of the Church in East Texas is evidenced by the introduction and splitting of stakes of Zion as they have been established in the area. Kelsey has been located in three different stakes: the Dallas Stake, created in 1953; the Shreveport Stake, created just four years later; and most recently the Texas East Stake, created in a division of the Shreveport Stake on November 16, 1969.³ In all

¹History of the Kelsey Branch, located in the Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, hereinafter cited as Branch History.

²Branch History.

³"Texas East Stake is Organized as 49th Stake in the Church," Deseret News, Church News [Salt Lake City], November 15, 1969.

three stakes Kelsey residents have served in many and varied stake offices, being willing to travel many miles from their homes to attend to stake duties.⁴

As one drives through the Kelsey community today, he sees little evidence of the old town. The Farm to Market Road, paved now, covers some of the area where the central business district once stood. Careful searching will reveal a few rock and concrete foundations which are all that remain of most of the former business establishments. The track bed of the Marshall and East Texas Railway is discernable in a few places, but it is overgrown with dense timber and brush. Kelsey Creek, site of many baptisms, is completely overgrown, meandering through almost impenetrable thickets. The school stands abandoned and boarded up, its upper story torn away. The gymnasium is gone except for its foundations, and the chapel has stood abandoned since 1958. One of the old stores, Ault's, has been moved to a new location, standing along the highway which passes through Kelsey. Entering this store, with its dark-stained cabinetry and shelves and its rough board floors, is like entering a past era.

⁴Statement by Mrs. A. L. Means, Kelsey, Texas, August 2, 1973.

Most of the old homes are either long ago torn away, or else stand abandoned. A few new homes offer evidence of the prosperity of the dairy farms which now occupy most of the Kelsey area. Visiting with the present residents of Kelsey, most of them second and third generation descendants of the original settlers, one immediately senses not only their warm hospitality, but also the pride which they feel of being a participant in a unique chapter of Church history. Kelsey was more than a collection of people forced together by persecution and a desire to be among others of their faith. Kelsey is a story of dedication by many Saints who were determined to put "The Kingdom of God First."

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KELSEY, TEXAS: THE FOUNDING AND DEVELOPMENT OF A
LATTER-DAY SAINT GATHERING PLACE IN TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

Kelsey, Texas, was a flourishing Latter-day Saint colony for more than a quarter of a century, beginning at a time when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was encouraging its converts to stay in the mission field. Kelsey was an attempt by the Church to provide Latter-day Saints from the southern states a safe haven from persecution which existed in the South, while leaving them in a geographic area in which they could be comfortable.

The growth and success for many years of the Kelsey Academy was the result of an interesting partnership, not always tranquil, between the Church and the State of Texas. Although the academy is closed and the community is little more than a collection of dairy farms at present, Kelsey served a valuable role in building up the strength of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in East Texas.

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