As early as September 1830 the Lord was telling Joseph Smith: "Ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect . . . they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked."  

Over the next several months more revelations developed this theme. For example: " . . . it shall be called Zion. A land of peace, a city of refuge, a place of safety."  

"Let them, therefore, who are among the Gentiles flee until Zion," "that ye might escape the power of the enemy, and be gathered unto me a righteous people."  

"Therefore, a commandment I give unto all the churches, that they shall continue to gather together unto the places which I have appointed."  

"For this is Zion - the pure in heart."  

This concept was well established in the Church by 1843, and was in the minds of the first missionaries to Polynesia. From 1844 to 1852, proselyting was successful in the Society Islands. The gathering was talked about during that time, but nothing much was done about it. The missionaries saw that sending their newly converted Polynesian Saints to the central Zion would not work as it had for those from the States or from Great Britain.

First, after hearing rumors of the martyrdom and expulsion from Illinois, they were not at all sure just where Zion was. And they feared the consequences of moving a group of people to an unfamiliar culture speaking an unfamiliar language. For most of that time the understanding was that the Island Saints would stay where they were until further notice.

But equally serious considerations were arising in Tahiti. The French were just then imposing their colonial dominance, and although they supposedly guaranteed religious freedom, non-Catholic groups led by non-French clergy were given a hard time. The LDS Church had a
membership of nearly a thousand in the area, but it had no political clout and in 1852 the mission was forced to shut down.

In 1851 mission President Addison Pratt assigned a homebound elder to find a gathering place for Polynesians in California. He evidently felt that having their own colony on the coast would be less traumatic for them. (It must also be noted that he preferred to live in a mild maritime climate himself.) There is no indication that there was any serious attempt to find such a place. Elder Benjamin Grouard tried to arrange for a charter ship to take them anyway, but there was no time.

There was another plan to emigrate. In 1851 the mission launched its own ship, a three-masted schooner named the Ravaai, built largely by the elders themselves. It was intended to provide reliable transportation and communication between the far-flung branches. In 1852 Pratt proposed to take a number of the faithful to California on their own ship, perhaps to return for more. That plan fell through.

Strangely, it was after the missionaries left that the Saints gathered in French Polynesia. With no American supervision, a large congregation on the main island of Tahiti moved into and around the village of Faa'a, some three mile west of Papeete. They renamed the area Tiona, or Zion. Mahu, one of the principal town on Tubuai, was already mostly Mormon. They also referred to their village as Tiona and others joined them there.

When missionaries from Utah returned in 1892 they found these gathering places thriving. The Faa'a Zion, not knowing the difference, had largely converted to the Reorganization in the interim, as had many member on other islands. There were many members holding steadfast at Mahu. And in the Tuamotu Archipelago, although there was no single LDS colony, there was a centralized church organization headquartered on the island of Anaa under the leadership of Elder Maihea.

This was not part of the mainstream gathering that was taking place at the time. There was no direction from the General Authorities. There was no communication with the main body of the Church. Yet it worked. These island Zions provided a refuge where the Saints practiced their religion for forty years alone with remarkably few deviations and dropouts.

While French Polynesia was beginning its unofficial gathering, in Hawaii an authorized version was getting started. Missionary work began in these islands in 1850, and in two years there were enough members to
organize several branches. To house these branches, they instituted a program of building meetinghouses; and soon there were more here than the Church had built anywhere in the world outside Utah. Soon also, there were more branches than missionaries, so most of them operated under local leadership.

These circumstances indicate an assumption that Hawaiian members would stay home; that there was no plan to rush them off to the Great Basin. The leaders had, rather, adopted the unusual idea of having a center place within the mission to provide stability. Missions in general were not intended to be stable units, and in those days did not have central headquarters. Missionaries, even presiding ones, were to travel around spreading the message, and part of that message had been for converts to join the body of the Church in Zion. There was a permanent mission office in Liverpool, but even that served mainly as a clearing house for emigration.

The elders in Hawaii made a sort of informal headquarters on the island of Maui. The communications center was necessarily the main port of Lahaina. Several branches with meetinghouses had been established in and around Kula and at Keanae. Jonatana Napela set up the very first language training mission at his home in Wailuku. Maui was not a formal gathering place and no one left home to go there. But it had become something of a focal point for the Church in the Sandwich Islands.

Still, a central place for members to look to is only half a Zion. Considering the opposition they were running into, and hearing of the persecutions in Tahiti, the elders and the General Authorities in Salt Lake agreed that these people needed a refuge. Again, the question was raised of moving them to the California coast, but it was decided that a site in the islands would be more suitable.

In their October conference in 1853, mission leaders resolved to find an empty place suitable for settlement. The selection was the idyllic, albeit dry, Palawai Basin on Lanai. They renamed the valley "Ephraim," called their village "Joseph," or "losepa," and worked very hard to pioneer an economy and a society. It was done much as in Utah: the townsite was laid out very early; families were assigned lots, and the main plantation was worked in common. The ecclesiastical leadership presided over temporal matters as well.

This time, Zion failed. Living conditions were so primitive in the first years, and the idea of relocating was so foreign to the Hawaiians,
that only the most faithful would go. When they did go, it left the branches on other islands short of leadership and faltering. When the missionaries were called home to Utah in 1857, the colony was still struggling and members all over were discouraged.

For four years the settlement and the branches hung on. Then Walter Murray Gibson appeared with vague authority from Brigham Young. Finding that the Palawai property was not owned by the Church, he sold other church properties elsewhere and ordered members to sell their private property to raise money for its purchase and expansion. He knew little about the Law of Consecration used to buy lands for gathering in Missouri. However, this was not a reprise of that movement, but simply a means to personal aggrandizement. The deeds were registered in his own name, and when called upon to turn Ephraim over to the Church, he refused. Members were more discouraged over the mess and many left the Church.

In 1864 it was decided to try again, away from Lanai and Gibson, and this time under church sponsorship rather than with local financing. The six thousand acre Laie plantation was purchased and the workers' quarters quickly turned into an LDS community.

Management was handled differently. The mission leaders from Utah were always in charge, but now they brought their families with them; making it a more personal enterprise. At first they raised mostly food, on both individual and communal plots. But the emphasis was to be a cash crop, and by 1868 they were cultivating and processing sugar cane with profits earmarked for the building of Zion.

This time it worked. The plantation seldom made a profit and no one got rich, but it held the community together until the opening of the temple made Laie more a spiritual Zion than a temporal one. Of course, much of the aura of a cooperative society, or United Order, has remained, and Laie is today as much a Mormon gathering community as, say, Manti or Cardston.

Like many colonies of the Great Basin Kingdom, Laie has had a couple of spin-offs. The first, Kahana, was settled in 1875. After a disagreement over plantation policies, a small group of families went in together and bought a small plantation some seven miles to the south and moved onto it. The mission president considered them to be rebels, but they saw themselves as good Latter-day Saints and very much part of the gathering movement. They were finally vindicated and Kahana was recognized as a branch of the main operation.
The second spin-off occurred in 1889. A number of Hawaiians had moved to Utah to be near the temple, and were not doing well dispersed in that alien environment. The Church purchased a large ranch over fifty miles west of Salt Lake City and settled them on it. The town was called "losepajosepa" after Joseph F. Smith and its cooperative economic enterprise was the losepajosepa Agriculture and Stock Company.

The leaders of losepajosepa were Anglos appointed by the Church to preside over and guide the Hawaiians, especially in business matters. Anglos from the surrounding area were hired to help out, particularly in technical and supervisory positions. It may be argued that this pattern, used at all the island gathering places as well, was necessary to compensate for the islanders' lack of experience in corporate management and in the culture that engendered it. It might also be seen as the Anglos bearing the "white man's burden" to look after lesser peoples who were not capable of holding their own in civilized society.

We must forgive them that bit of racism, remembering that prior to the mid-twentieth century such an attitude was the standard of conventional wisdom. In any case, it was felt that the Polynesians must be taught new social and economic systems lest they revert to traditional ways and former beliefs. And the record shows that in positions other than mission presidency or plantation management there was extensive use of Polynesian leadership.

Whether because or in spite of Anglo leaders, the Hawaiians at losepajosepa prospered. Again, no one got rich, but no one went hungry and their children had a neat, clean LDS environment to grow in. At the town's centennial celebration in 1989, some of those children remembered it fondly as a happy place. But it lasted only until 1917. There was much sickness and physical suffering in the harsh climate, and as the Laie Temple was being built, most of the residents opted to return to the islands which were now part of Zion proper. And losepajosepa folded.

Meanwhile, a spin-off of the other losepajosepa on Lanai was being renewed. While still holding a measure of church authority, Walter Murray Gibson had sent two Hawaiian elders to spread the gospel in Samoa. Beginning on the tiny island of Aunu'u, then Tutilla and Upolu, they baptized a number of converts and organized at least one branch. After twenty-five years with no contact from the Church, the first regularly appointed missionaries arriving there found the survivor of the two living among a few members on Aunu'u.
The little island was not thought of as a gathering place, but it had served that purpose, and now in 1889 it became the mission headquarters. Later that year the mission seat was moved to Fagalii, just outside Apia, Upolu, and a decade later to the other side of Apia at Pesega. These were center places and members tended to cluster around them, so that they were thought of as ad hoc gathering places, but they were never intended nor designated to be such.

In 1899 the First Presidency announced the end of the gathering as a removal to LDS settlements, counseling Saints in other places to stay home and build up Zion in their own communities. But the utopian spirit was strong and new settlement continued, even in Utah, as late as 1930.

In Samoa some of the members asked for a real gathering place. Alienation from tribal customs, disfavor of government officials, and the scorn of the dominant Protestants made the idea attractive to them. Mission leaders wanted to concentrate the members because so many elders were assigned to the scattered branches that there were few left for proselyting.

Land was acquired near the largely Mormon village of Faleniu, Tutuila, and in 1903 the new LDS village of Mapusaga was established there. A small plantation was started, and a few years later a larger area with a small dependent village called Malaeimi was added further up the mountain.

In 1904 land was acquired for gathering plantations on the islands of Upolu and Savai'i. The Savai'i site was never developed as a village, but Sauniatu, on Upolu, became a showplace. It began auspiciously enough, with members and missionaries pioneering virgin forest in a torrential downpour, and for years hauling supplies and produce over a primitive jungle trail. But the area is well-watered and produced lavishly. The village was laid out in the standard Mormon ideal of wide streets on a grid pattern with private home lots and a communal plantation. It was kept neat and clean. When Apostle David O. McKay visited there in 1921, he called it "the most beautiful place I have ever seen." When he returned in 1955 he reaffirmed that opinion.

Gathering to Mapusaga and Sauniatu was urged vigorously, becoming almost a requirement. It was difficult: immigrants lost contact with family and friends. Chiefs especially lost their positions of influence. The faithful went, but many did not like it. Other branches were left decimated and discouraged. The mission found itself having to retrench
and nurture members who remained at home to keep the spirit of Zion from leaving them behind entirely.

It had been hoped that the plantations would make the mission self-supporting. They never did, and in fact they had always to be subsidized by the Church. In 1908 Mission President William Moody was inspired to end the gathering as a calling and make residence in these villages voluntary.

A case can be made for including as gathering places the village of Vaiola on Savai'i, established in 1928; as well as the farm around the Maori Agricultural College near Hastings, New Zealand from 1913; and Temple View near Hamilton, New Zealand, ca. 1955. These are peripheral to the central concept, however, since they were all settled solely to support boarding schools. Their populations were not permanent, and they were never considered to be residential gathering colonies.

We can identify two kinds of gathering places in Polynesia. First, the informal ones where a mission headquarters or central branch offered a focal point for members to look to from their home towns. The school and temple towns might fit here, particularly if conferences or hui taus were held there.

Then there are the formal ones. Here a site was selected, a new village pioneered, and a cooperative economic system set up to support it. The plantations were never very successful financially, but they allowed the residents to live their chosen lifestyle without dependence upon hostile or morally substandard neighbors.

These colonies tended to attract the more faithful of the members, leaving the outside branches short of leadership and enthusiasm. In this way they were actually detrimental to the missions. But in periods of adversity, they provided havens of peace and safety.

All of them, formal or informal, have to this day been sources of spiritual strength for the pure in heart: true constituent "stakes" of Zion.
ENDNOTES

1 Doctrine and Covenants 29:7-8.

2 D&C 45:66-67.

3 D&C 133:12.

4 D&C 38:31

5 D&C 101:67.

6 D&C 97:21.

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