The Origin and History of the Fast Day in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

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THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE FAST DAY
IN THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS,
1830-1896

A Thesis
Presented to
the Department of History
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by
A. Dean Wengreen
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A. Dean Wengreen
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE KIRTLAND PERIOD (1831-1838)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Scripture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Instances of Actual Observance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasting and the Kirtland Temple (1836)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Regularity of Fasting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasting in 1837</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Donations on Fast Day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Ohio to Illinois</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. NAUVOO AND THE EXODUS (1839-1849)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional Fasts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations Emphasized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Policy of Caring for the Poor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirtland Period</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauvoo and the Exodus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Relationship of Fasting and Donations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. EARLY UTAH PERIOD (1847-1857)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing Regularity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to 1853</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853 to 1856</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Care of the Poor and Fast Offerings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidental Items of Interest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. FAST OBSERVANCE (1858-1896)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Interruption</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859 to 1896</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mid-week Fast Poses Problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Thursday to Sunday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The fast day is one of the singular institutions of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, it is recognized that fasting is neither unique to the Latter-day Saints nor to the people of the Jewish nations who produced the Holy Bible. The custom of fasting is well known and has been observed in various manners by nearly all peoples of the earth at one time or another. As one Latter-day Saint writer expressed it: "...if we had the records before us we would discover that fasting was introduced by revelation to man in the dawn of history."

After a preliminary investigation, the writer's interest in the subject was aroused primarily because of two reasons. First, it offered a historical challenge. The nature of this challenge involved three principle observations: (1) it was apparent that the subject had not heretofore received

1The full name of the Church will not always be used in this paper but oftentimes may be referred to as simply the "Church." The members of the Church may be collectively referred to as the "Saints".


3Deseret News, August 13, 1932, p. 5. This comment was made by Joseph Fielding Smith, now president of the Twelve Apostles of the Church.
adequate historical consideration; (2) the references to fasting appeared to be brief and scattered, thereby offering a challenge to assemble the data and give an organized account of its development; and (3) the interest manifest by those acquainted with the possibilities of a historical analysis of the subject added to the desirability of the project.

The second reason concerns the apparent misconceptions which exist concerning the origin of the fast day, its establishment as a permanent and regularly observed institution in the Church, and its historical relationship to fast offerings. For example, to illustrate the problem of endeavoring to determine when fasting was established on a regular basis in early Utah history, three quotations from prominent Church leaders are cited below. These references were among the first discovered by the writer and provided motivation to further research. The problems introduced by these quotations will be treated in their context in a later chapter.

It is recorded that fast meetings were held in all the wards in Salt Lake City on Thursday, June 7, 1849, and from that time forward fast day was regularly observed throughout the Church on the first Thursday of each month, until Nov. 5, 1896 when...it was decided that the first Sunday of the month should be observed instead...⁴

A regular fast day was established among the Latter-day Saints by President Brigham Young, in 1852, the first Thursday of the month being for years devoted to

its observance...5

To meet the very great demands of charity upon Latter-day Saints in those trying years [1855-56] our fast day came into existence; the servants of the Lord instituted the first Thursday of every month as fast day...6

There are other misconceptions which became apparent as the research progressed. It was felt that many Latter-day Saints take it for granted that the fast day was established by the Prophet Joseph Smith and has continued unchanged through the years until the present day. That the practice of fasting in the Church originated with Joseph is true, but inquiry shows that it had a varied and disconnected history before it became established as we know it today. Many also believe that the payment of fast offerings has been associated with fasting since the inception of the practice in the Church. The association of these practices will be treated at some length in this study.

Much has been written about the doctrine of fasting--its benefits, blessings, nature, purpose, etc.--but, few writers have concerned themselves with the origin and history of the practice among the Latter-day Saints. This will be the primary concern of this paper. Well may we agree that "one part of the fast day that is seldom brought to light is its


6Brigham H. Roberts, in Conference Reports of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 6, 1913, p. 120.
history."7 This, however, is the more difficult part of the subject of fasting to treat.

The purpose of this study is two fold: first, to review the historical sources pertaining to the observance of fasting from the time of the establishment of the Church in 1830 until 1896, when the last essential change in its observance occurred; and second, as the payment of fast offerings is so closely related to an analysis of the subject, to trace its development out of the Church's policy to provide for its poor.

Frequent reference to fasting may be found in the Latter-day Saint scriptures. These references, of course, have their greatest value in giving one an understanding of the nature and purpose of fasting. They have but little direct bearing upon the actual establishment of the institution of fasting among the Latter-day Saints, an exception being two or three references from the *Doctrine and Covenants* which will be considered in Chapter II. Scriptural references will be used only as they throw light upon the historical development of fast day observance.

Research on the subject has lead the writer to investigate numerous sources on the subject, but those which proved to be the most valuable were personal diaries, the "Journal History" of the Church, ward and stake records (original and

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7*Deseret News*, June 25, 1932, Church Section. p. 6.
manuscript copies), and newspaper and periodical articles. Numerous other sources were used but were not as remunerative as these. An effort has been made to examine all of the available documents which pertain to the subject, and to record only those conclusions which are supported by the historical evidence.
CHAPTER II

THE KIRTLAND PERIOD (1831-1838)

Background

For the purpose of this study, the investigation of the subject of fasting begins after the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at Fayette, New York, on April 6, 1830. In the early part of 1831, the central gathering place of the Church was moved from New York to the state of Ohio, with headquarters at Kirtland. No reference whatever to the observance of fasting was found while the Church was located in New York; in fact, the practice of fasting is not apparent in the first two or three years of the Church's history.

It should be noted that during the Kirtland period there were also members of the Church situated in the state of Missouri. Shortly after the arrival of the Saints in Kirtland, a proselyting group was sent to Missouri. From that time until the fall of 1838—when they were driven from the confines of that state—a substantial representation of the Church membership was located there. Here, again, no source was discovered which indicated that fasting was observed in that area; although, it is presumable that it was observed by some on an individual basis. The justification for this assumption is based on the fact that the Saints there had their
sacred scriptures which contained many references to fasting. Also, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, some of the Saints who were living contemporarily in the Ohio area were fasting at least occasionally.

Modern Scripture

The first mention of fasting in connection with the Church is found in the *Doctrine and Covenants*. This book discloses that while visiting at Independence, Jackson County, Missouri in 1831, Joseph Smith received a revelation, a portion of which dealt with the proper observance of the Sabbath. In expounding that subject, the revelation reads:

> Nevertheless thy vows shall be offered up in righteousness on all days and at all times;  
> But remember that on this, the Lord's day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord.  
> And on this day thou shalt do none other thing, only let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart that thy fasting may be perfect, or in other words, that thy joy may be full.  
> Verily, this is fasting and prayer, or in other words, rejoicing and prayer.¹

No further reference to fasting is found in this revelation.

In 1832, at Kirtland, fasting is again mentioned in a revelation dated the 27th of December---this time with greater clarity and with instructions which are rather explicit:

¹Joseph Smith, *The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, With Some Additions by His Successors in the Presidency of the Church, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1943 ed.), Section 59:11-14.
Also, I give unto you a commandment that ye continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth.
Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God...
The first part of this quotation might lead one to expect evidence of fast observance with some regularity after that time. Despite several twentieth century statements of Church leaders which point to the same conclusion, the writer found no such evidence for the years prior to the establishment of the "house of Fasting" (Kirtland Temple) in 1836.

One further reference to fasting is found in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, in a revelation received in 1833:

They who are not chosen have sinned a very grievous sin, in that they are walking in darkness at noon-day. And for this cause I gave unto you a commandment that you should call your solemn assembly, that your fastings and your mourning might come up into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth...

It will be noticed that these quotations shed little light on the particulars of fasting. Such questions as who should fast, when or how often one should fast, or what constitutes a fast are left unanswered. Yet, these are the only scriptures received since the organization of the Church.

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4*The Book of Mormon* contains several references to fasting. However, its contents were written hundreds of years before the organization of the Latter-day Saint Church and the writer has not found evidence that it had direct bearing on the establishment of a regular fast day in modern times.
wherein there is a reference to fasting. It appears that there was no institutionalized fasting at this point. This came about as the practice continued and as the particulars of fasting were defined by the leadership of the Church.

First Instances of Actual Observance

The first record of the actual observance of fasting in the Church located by the writer was found in Joseph Smith's manuscript history. Joseph met with several brethren of the Church at Kirtland on Wednesday, January 23, 1833. Of that event, he writes:

> Having continued all day in fasting, and prayer, and ordinances, we closed by partaking of the Lord's supper. I blessed the bread and wine in the name of the Lord, when we all ate and drank and were filled: then we sang a hymn and went out.  

This was part of a conference held for the members which had commenced the previous day. The activities of the second day included preaching, singing, and praying. The men of the Priesthood had then assembled to attend to the ceremony of the washing of feet.

Another reference to fasting is recorded during April of the same year. While engaged in L.D.S. missionary service in the state of Connecticut, John Murdock journalized as

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follows: "13th meeting of praying & fasting and broke bread
visited the sick & rebuked the disease in the name of the
Lord." An epidemic of smallpox had broken out in that vicinity. This seems to have been a special fast, called in consequence of the calamity.

These were the only statements of actual observance located until the year of 1836. It is very probable that there were other members of the Church who also observed fasting during these early years. Yet, nothing was uncovered which would argue that fasting was being observed on a regular basis either by individuals or by the Church as a whole.

**Fasting and the Kirtland Temple (1836)**

Further evidence of fasting is found in connection with the dedication of the Kirtland temple on Sunday, March 27, 1836. In making a written report of the proceedings of that event, Warren Parrish had this to say:

We further add that we should do violence to our feelings and injustice to the real merit of our brethren and friends who attended the meeting, were we here to withhold a meed of praise, which we think is their just

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7 Not all of the diaries are available for perusal. Copies of many have not been made and therefore are not available for public use.

8 This was the first temple built by the Latter-day Saints. Work on it was begun in 1833 and it was dedicated in 1836 as indicated above. The ceremonies of the dedication were repeated on March 31st for the benefit of those who could not get into the edifice on the preceding Sunday.
due; not only for their quite demeanor during the whole exercise, which lasted more than eight hours, but for their earthly substance for the relief of the building committee, who were yet somewhat involved. As this was to be a day of sacrifice, as well as fasting.9

The last sentence suggests that the sacrifice or "offering" was not necessarily associated with fasting at that time. This subject will receive attention later in this chapter.

On the following Tuesday, several of the Priesthood bearers of the Church met at the temple in a special session. And

after uniting in prayer, the voice of the Spirit was that we should come into this place three times, and also call other presidents, the two Bishops and their counselors, each to stand in his place, and fast through the day and also the night, and that during this, if we would humble ourselves, we should receive further communications from him.10

Next day, by appointment, the quorums of the Priesthood met in the temple to attend to religious ordinances pertaining to the Priesthood. They continued there until seven o'clock in the evening at which time it was observed "that we had fasted all the day..."11 Bread and wine were then brought in and dispersed to those present.

It will be recalled that thus far the references to

9Latter-day Saint Messinger and Advocate, March, 1836, p. 281.

10"Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," A day by day manuscript history of the Church beginning in 1830, compiled by the Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Entry of March 29, 1836, p. 1.

11Smith, History of the Church, II, 431.
fasting indicate that it was observed on Sunday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Just one further source remains which points to a specific day on which fasting was observed during that year. This occurs on Wednesday, April 6th, just a week following the meeting mentioned above. A group met again to attend to further religious ordinances. On this occasion it is noted that those in attendance numbered about four-hundred.

They then took their seats...and continued in fasting and prayer, prophesying and exhortation until evening... The meeting continued on through the night; the spirit of prophecy was poured out upon the assembly...12

By 1836, the practice of fasting was common among the Latter-day Saints. It may now be appropriate to consider the subject of the regularity of its observance during these early years.

The Regularity of Fasting

For the purposes of this paper the term "regularity," as it applies to the practice of fasting will signify the periodic observance of the practice with an equal length of time elapsing between each observance. In this study regularity will pertain principally to monthly observance.

The following reference illustrates the feeling of uncertainty with which most writers approach a historical analysis of this problem. The Deseret News judiciously declares that "just how regularly fast day was observed and when it

was first held is difficult to ascertain..."\(^{13}\) It then lends confusion to this statement by completing the sentence in this manner: "...although there is ample evidence that it was a regular observance in the earlier settlements of the Saints."\(^{14}\)

Now to the question: was fasting of regular observance during the Kirtland period? In this chapter it has been noted that in 1832 Joseph Smith had recorded the revelation which in part stated: "...I give unto you a commandment that ye continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth."\(^{15}\) A logical interpretation of this scripture was given by Melvin J. Ballard when he stated that "of course, it means that fasting and prayer shall be a regular observance in the Church from that time forward."\(^{16}\)

It is interesting to note that no contemporary source of that period—which tells of actual observance—was uncovered which suggested that fasting was being or was to be observed regularly. Yet, many writing or speaking years

\(^{13}\)Deseret News, June 25, 1932, Church Section, p. 5.

\(^{14}\)Ibid.

\(^{15}\)Smith, Doctrine and Covenants, Section 88: 76.

\(^{16}\)Melvin J. Ballard. "Fasting and Prayer," Liahona The Elder's Journal, XX (1922), 68. Ballard was a member of the quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the Church from 1919 to 1939.
later of the fast meetings held in the temple almost unanimously agree that they were of regular observance.

The following, from the writings of a former Church historian, amply expresses the viewpoint of most of these writers:

Besides being devoted to general meetings for worship and celebration of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, the Temple was occupied by crowded assemblies on the first Thursday in each month, that day being observed strictly, by Latter-day Saints, as a day of fasting and prayer. These, called fast-meetings, were hallowed and interesting beyond the power of language to describe...17

Eliza R. Snow, a prominent figure in Latter-day Saint Church history, gives a similar account of these fast days.

Public meetings were regularly held in the Temple, after its dedication, on Sundays; and on the first Thursday of each month a fast meeting, commencing at or before 10 a.m., and closing at 4 p.m.

These monthly fast meetings were so interesting, and so very enjoyable, that people came long distances to attend them.18

She adds a further note of interest by observing that:

On the aforementioned days, Father Smith (the Prophet's father) was in the habit of entering the Temple very early in the morning, and there offering up his prayers to God, in that holy place, before the rising of the sun, after having told the Saints, publicly, that they were

17 Andrew Jensen, The Historical Record, (Book I. Salt Lake City: Edited and Published by Andrew Jensen, 1889), V,79.

18 Eliza R. Snow, Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow, Written and Compiled by His Sister, (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1884), pp. 12, 13. This book is based primarily on Lorenzo Snow's journal which is not accessible. However, the above quotation is Eliza R. Snow's own.
welcome to come as early as they pleased. The result was that many assembled before the hour of 10 a.m., and did not leave till after 4 p.m. 19

Eliza R. Snow also contributes to this description of "Father" Smith's practice on these fast days: "...and [he] so strictly disciplined himself in the observance of fasting, as not even to wet his lips with water until after the dismissal of the meeting at four p.m." 20 One other source disclosed that "on those days labor was laid aside with us the same as on Sunday." 21

Brigham Young is apparently in agreement with these writers who declare the regularity of fast meetings conducted in the Kirtland temple. His remarks on this subject are contained in a sermon delivered by him at Salt Lake City in 1867. In discussing the obligation of the Saints to care for the poor, and the nature of the fast, he refers the congregation to the origin of the association at Kirtland by saying:

You know that the first Thursday in each month we hold as fast day. How many here know the origin of the fast day? Before tithing was paid, the poor were supported by donations. They came to Joseph and wanted help, in Kirtland, and he said there should be a fast day, which was decided upon. It was to be held once a month, as it is now... 22

Here, he not only informs them of the origin of the fast day,

19Ibid., p. 12

20Eliza R. Snow, quoted in Jensen, The Historical Record, p. 80.

21Oliver B. Huntington, "Fast Days in Kirtland Temple," Young Woman's Journal, VIII (1897), 239.

22Brigham Young, "How to care for the Poor," Journal of Discourses, XII (1867), 115.
but also avers that it was to be a regular practice at that time.

Each of these writers is equally positive in declaring that these fast days were held in regularity on the first Thursday of each month. However, the contemporary sources which were located do not support this declaration. A check of each Sunday and first Thursday in the "Journal History" during this period, as well as in The Documentary History of the Church and contemporary journals bearing on that period, failed to reveal any evidence of regularity. Of course, an absence of such information in the available documents does not rule out the possibility that they were being regularly observed. There are possibly records, still uncovered, which would support the declarations of these writers.

The fact should not be overlooked that there are writers of a later day who are of the opinion that those fast meetings were not regular. One writer, obviously of that persuasion, makes these comments in discussing the Kirtland period.

The exact date when the observance of a public fast was instituted in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not recorded, but it is known that fast meetings were occasionally held in the Kirtland Temple, presided over by the Patriarch Joseph Smith, the Prophet's father...²³

On the basis of the available documents it is rather difficult to resolve the question of regularity during the

²³Deseret Evening News, December 5, 1896, p.4.
Kirtland period. However, the evidence seems to favor the supposition that fasting was a regular practice—at least for a time—in Kirtland. At least two persons, (Eliza R. Snow and Brigham Young) who lived at that time and were closely associated with the Church, state that it was the practice to hold fast meetings on the first Thursday of each month. However, references which were located concerning fasting in Kirtland are too few to attempt to arrive at a positive conclusion.

**Fasting in 1837**

Regardless of whether or not fasting was of regular observance in 1836, there are only a few scattered references to the practice in 1837. The first of these was observed in April at Kirtland. Wilford Woodruff, one of the Twelve Apostles, makes mention of it in his journal:

> At early candle light [on Tuesday] we again met together in the quorum of Seventies at the upper part of the Lord's House to receive our anointing.

The meeting closed about 10 o'clock p.m. when I went into the lower court of the House of the Lord with Elders Joseph B. Noble and G.W. Meeks to spend the night in prayer and fasting before God.24

In the morning [Wednesday] we returned to our homes, intending to spend the day in fasting and prayer. Part of the day was occupied in attending the High Council; the remainder, until 5 o'clock in writing, prayer and fasting.25

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25Ibid., April 5, 1837, p. 1. Also from Wilford Woodruff's journal.
This was not a regular meeting for either the Priesthood or the membership, nor was it on a Thursday.

The next instance of fasting which was located concerned a few missionaries who were on their way to Great Britain to establish the first foreign mission of the Church. Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Willard Richards, and a few brethren from Canada comprised the list of missionaries who were to undertake this assignment. While at New York City, preparatory to embarking for Great Britain, this group observed a day of fasting. Heber C. Kimball, who was appointed to preside over the mission, records under the date of June 25th that:

Sunday, 25th, we fasted, prayed, administered the sacrament, held council for the success of the mission, and had a joyful time. In the afternoon two sectarian priests came in, to find fault, but they were soon confounded and left. 26

Two additional references were found which told of fasting. These were in Ohio, in the vicinity of Kirtland. The first was observed in conjunction with a conference held in West Township, Columbiana County, from October 3rd to October 6th. The fast was observed on Monday the 6th. 27

26 Whitney, op. cit., p. 111.

27 *Elder's Journal of the Church of the Latter-day Saints*, Kirtland, Ohio; October, 1837, p. 15. Microfilm at Church Historians Library, Salt Lake City.
Rochester, in the same county, on Saturday, the 28th of October, the record discloses that "at a fast meeting held in Rochester, Columbiana Co. Ohio, on the 28th of Oct. 1837, the official members present organized themselves into a conference for the purpose of ordaining some present to the ministry..."\(^{28}\)

In reviewing the record for that year, it is noted that those instances of fasting which were located fell on almost every day of the week except Thursday. These fasts were evidently in the category of "special" fasts, but the fact remains that not one of them was held on a Thursday. Even if fasts were being held regularly in Kirtland near the time of the dedication of the temple, it appears that the practice was abandoned by 1837.

**Poor Donations on Fast Day**

Brigham Young raised another important question concerning the Kirtland period in his sermon delivered in 1867. So that the subject of donation can be considered in context, the following excerpt repeats and then continues the quotation already cited:

> You know that the first Thursday in each month we hold as fast day. How many here know the origin of the fast day? Before tithing was paid, the poor were supported by donations. They came to Joseph and wanted help, in Kirtland, and he said there should be a fast day, which was decided upon. It was to be held once a month, as it is now, and all that would have been eaten that day, of flour, or meat, or butter, or fruit, or anything else, was to be carried to the fast meeting and put into the hands of a

\(^{28}\textit{Ibid.},\) November, 1837, p. 31.
person selected for the purpose of taking care of it and distributing it among the poor. 29

Perhaps as significant as the point that Brigham made concerning regularity is that which pertains to the principle of contributions to the poor. Of all the references to fasting which were located during the entire Kirtland period, this is the only one which associates a donation for the poor with fasting. Until this source was taken into account, it seemed evident that the custom of bringing a donation for the poor on fast day developed at a later date. This may yet have been the case in actual practice.

From his sermon it is difficult to ascertain whether or not this policy was actually put into execution at the time it was formulated. He states that all of these items "was to be" taken to fast meeting; it does not state that they were taken. Such close interpretation of expression may be unwarranted. Nevertheless, this is the only reference during that period which mentioned the practice of giving a donation for the poor in connection with fast day observance.

The writer is aware of the fact that it is nearly impossible to exhaust all of the source material of that early period. If we had the complete record, it is feasible that the practice could be substantiated; but no contemporary document was found which supports it. As it is, Brigham

29 *Journal of Discourses, op. cit.*
Young's statement, made thirty years after the period in question, must stand as a sole witness that a provision was made for the poor in conjunction with fast meeting.

**From Ohio to Illinois**

Internal troubles, coupled with religious persecutions, made normal living rather difficult for the Saints during 1837. Conditions became so unbearable that the part of the membership of the Church which remained loyal to the Prophet was forced to leave Kirtland. In January of 1838, Joseph, accompanied by a few others, found it necessary to flee from Kirtland to preserve his life. In March, preparations were made to move the main body of the Saints to Missouri. For this purpose, they organized what became known as the "Kirtland Camp." On July 6th the camp of over five-hundred souls began its march to Missouri. After a long and tedious journey of nearly nine hundred miles, they arrived at Far West, headquarters of the Church in Missouri at that time.

The Saints had only jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They found the situation here as precarious as in the state they had just abandoned. After considerable hardship, several of the leaders were cast into prison and the remainder of the membership expelled from the state in the early months of 1839. From Missouri, they trekked eastward into Illinois where they made their headquarters in the vicinity of Quincy, Illinois.
CHAPTER III

NAUVOO AND THE EXODUS (1839-1849)

Occasional Fasts

In 1839, through the kindness of the citizens of Illinois, the Saints established themselves in that state. After the arrival of Joseph in April, two farms were purchased in the area of Commerce. Here the Saints established themselves and began to build up a city, which they named "Nauvoo, the City Beautiful." Starting with practically no worldly possessions, the Saints in a few years built up a city of some distinction—judged by the standards of that time.

During the former period of persecution, hardships, movement—from Ohio, to Missouri and back into Illinois—and the early years of settlement in Nauvoo, the sources do not indicate that the Saints were observing a regular fast day. An exception to this may possibly have been for a short period at Kirtland during 1836, as discussed in Chapter II. The record strongly supports the supposition that the Nauvoo period was one of occasional fasts—not of regular observance of the practice. In fact, it appears that these general fasts were not held very often, and then, only when appointed by the Church leaders. An unidentified L.D.S. journalist reached this opinion following his late 19th Century investigation regarding the practice of fasting in Kirtland, he
describes the practice of fasting during the Nauvoo period in this manner:

So also at a later period were fast meetings occasionally held in Nauvoo and other places in which the Saints sojourneD, generally with some special object in view, upon which the faith and prayers of the Saints were centered.¹

The earliest record encountered by the writer of fasting during this period concerns a day of fasting which was observed in far-off Scotland in 1842. A diary entry revealed that

Sunday, Febr. 6, 1842 was aponted a day of fasting & prayer at Paisley & E.G (Elder Gibson) & I Maid apontment with the Saints at Nielston to come who could for we wold be thur, tharfor we met with the Saints in fasting & prayer & we had a happey day of it whil we was togither...it continued from 8 morning till 4 oclock evening.²

Not until January of 1843 does there appear reference to the observance of a general fast in the Nauvoo settlement. This first occasion was a special day of fasting and prayer appointed in consequence of Joseph's release from the hands of his enemies and his safe return home. An attempted assassination had been made upon the life of Governor Lilburn W. Boggs, governor of Missouri, in May, 1842. While in Missouri, the Saints had received abuse at the hands of the Missourians and Joseph was subsequently accused of being an accomplice to the deed. He was arrested and brought into court at

¹Deseret Evening News, December 5, 1896, p.4.
²Andrew Sproul, "Diary," MS, pp. 24-25. Copy made by Brigham Young University Library.
Springfield, Illinois, on a writ asking that he be delivered to the Missouri authorities. After several days of hearings, the application was quashed and he was freed to return to Nauvoo. That his followers viewed his release with deep feelings of gratitude is attested by this excerpt from a proclamation issued over the signature of Brigham Young, then President of the Twelve Apostles:

TO THE SAINTS IN NAUVOO.--Feeling a deep sense of gratitude to our Heavenly Father for the great blessings which He has conferred on us in the deliverance of our beloved President, Joseph Smith, from the oppression with which he has so long been bound, the Traveling High Council invite the brethren in Nauvoo to unite with them in dedicating Tuesday, the 17th day of January instant, as a day of humiliation, fasting, prayer, and thanksgiving before the great Eloheim...we will humble ourselves with fasting and supplication and sing praises unto our God...

The Bishops of the several wards are requested to see that the meetings are appointed sufficient for the accommodation of the brethren...

In our fastings, humiliations and thanksgivings, let us not forget the poor and destitute, to minister to their necessities...³

That the above proclamation was adhered to as announced is acknowledged by this entry in Joseph's manuscript history:

Tuesday, 17.--[January] This being the time appointed by the Twelve as a day of humiliation, fasting, praise, prayer, and thanksgiving before the great Eloheim, I attended a public meeting in my own house, which was crowded to overflowing. Many other meetings were held in various parts of the city, which were well attended, and there was great joy among the people that I had once more been delivered from the grasp of my enemies.⁴

It should be noted that Brigham Young had admonished

⁴Smith, History of the Church, V, 252.
the people to minister to the needs of the poor in connection with their fasting. This relationship between fasting and the care of the poor becomes more apparent as the history unfolds. After the instances of fasting during this period are examined, this relationship will be considered.

Under the date of November 19, 1843, the day's activities as recorded in Joseph's writings read: "Sunday, 19.--Eleven a.m. to two p.m., prayer-meeting at the old house, and fasting." It is not revealed whether or not any special significance was attached to this occasion. However, it shall be noted that it was held on a Sunday--not on a first Thursday.

A curious item of interest may be interjected at this point. It has been noted that in 1843, the Saints spent a day in fasting, prayer, and thanksgiving because Joseph had been delivered from his enemies. During the ensuing year, Joseph's antagonists used almost the same practice in an effort to enlist God's help in bringing Joseph and his associates to repentance. On February 17th

The anti-Mormons held a convention at Carthage, the object being to devise ways and means of expelling the Saints from the State. Among other resolutions was one appointing the 9th of March next as the day of fasting and prayer, wherein the pious of all orders are requested to prayer to Almighty God that He would speedily bring the false Prophet Joseph Smith to deep repentance, or that He will make a public example of him and his leading accomplices.

Joseph's enemies used more vigorous methods of per-

5Ibid., VI, 79.
6Ibid., p. 221.
suasion than this and during 1844, his life became more en-
dangered by increased mob action directed both against him-
self and his people. After it had resulted in the murder of
Joseph and his brother, Hyrum, at Carthage, Illinois, on June
27, 1844, the fury of the mob continued unabated until early
1846, when the Saints were ultimately driven from their homes,
across the Mississippi River into the state of Iowa.

During 1845, it was found that just an occasional
fast was being called, but with further emphasis given to the
practice of attending to the needs of the poor on that day.
The date of May 15, 1845 stands out as almost a milestone in
reviewing the history of fasting in the Latter-day Saint
Church. Among many accounts of the events of this day, is
this from the official history of the Church, being kept at
that time by Brigham Young:7

Fast day: all works were stopped. Meetings were
held in the several wards and donations made to the
bishops for the poor; enough was contributed to supply
the wants of the poor until harvest.8

This appears to have been a special fast called chiefly
for the purpose of assembling provisions for the poor by dona-

7 At the death of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young was Pres-
dent of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. By virtue of that
office he became the recognized leader of the Church until he
was sustained as President of the Church in 1847.

8 Brigham Young, History of the Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints, Period II, Brigham H. Roberts, ed.,
(Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,
1932), VII, 411.
tion. The account seems to imply that there would not be another such fast called until harvest. The event will be considered more thoroughly when the subject of donations is treated later.

Records disclose that a special day of fasting was also proclaimed on the first anniversary of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum. In England, Wilford Woodruff, then presiding over the British mission, wrote that

If the ancient Saints could be benefitted [sic] through the principle of prayer and fasting, so can we, and we think it would be a benefit to us; therefore we feel disposed to appropriate our time on the 27th of June, for the purpose of prayer and fasting before the Lord...Let your prayers ascend into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth...That her [the Church] widows and orphans, whose husbands and fathers were slain for the word of God, may be fed, clothed and blessed...9

This anniversary was observed by the Saints in Nauvoo on the same day.10

After the Saints were driven from the state of Illinois, they established themselves temporarily on the plains of Iowa. A major settlement was also established on the west bank of the Missouri River in the territory which later became known as Nebraska. They continued to observe fasting when a day was occasionally appointed for that purpose. One account tells of a day of fasting and prayer proclaimed to counteract the spirit of apostasy present in one locality.11 On another occasion a

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day of fasting was proclaimed, with instructions by the leaders at attend to several suggestions in connection with their fast. Besides admonishing the Saints to pray for various things—for "health, peace and general prosperity of your friends and brethren in the valley" [those already in the Utah valley]; for "our success in fitting out emigrants to go Westward"; and for "the President and rulers of the land"— they were exorted to remember those who were in need.¹²

Such fasts were as likely to be appointed on any other day of the week as they were on a Sunday or a first Thursday. In fact, the two special fasts referred to above were held on a Saturday and a Friday respectively.

From a review of the references to fasting during the Nauvoo and Exodus periods, the evidence leans heavily in favor of the premise that fasts were of an occasional nature. The instances of fasting referred to were in the category of "special" fasts. A logical question may thus arise: Does the fact that the Saints were observing an occasional "special" fast rule out the possibility that regular fast days were being observed? This can best be answered by pointing out that the only evidence of fasting at all were these "special" fasts.

One source uncovered may possibly call into question the premise just stated. The following is taken from a diary

¹²"Journal History," April 27, 1849, pp. 1,2.
being kept at Council Bluffs in 1847:

Sun. August 1 the weather warm 'twas fast day. drest early and went to Singing scool....then Marched to Meeting. we sung 2 twice. they then commenced to bless Children and continued to do so for about 3 hours while this was going on I took a walk with Amelia to see Sisters Snyder & Jenne, and returned to meeting.13

It is difficult to ascertain whether this was a "special" day of fasting or one of regular observance; the context leads one to believe that the latter may have been the case. If this were true, it still does not necessarily establish regularity of fasting in the entire Nauvoo and Exodus periods. On the other hand, it is possible that this, too, was a "special" fast. It will be noted that this observance is on a Sunday. When considering the subject of regularity in the Kirtland period, it was observed that if fasting was regular at all, the day set apart for this purpose was the first Thursday of each month. Likewise, we shall find that in the Saints' new home in the Rocky Mountains, the first Thursday of each month became recognized as "fast-day".

A check of the "Journal History" and diaries and journals of that period failed to throw any additional light on the problem. The case cannot be definitely resolved on the strength of the available documents, but the premise concerning occasional fasts must take precedence.

13Mary Haskins Parker Richards, "Diary," MS, pp. 75, 76. Copy made by Brigham Young University Library, 1950.
Donations Emphasized

It has been noted that on May 15, 1845 a fast day was observed and many contributions made for the needy. This is the first contemporary source found by the writer which definitely associates an actual donation for the poor with an appointed fast-day.

Below is an extract from a letter written from Nauvoo and printed in England for the benefit of the Saints there. It quite definitely refers to the incident mentioned above and adds detail. The writer of the letter tells of the affairs in Nauvoo, and then in speaking of Brigham Young writes:

Then he spoke at length concerning the duties of bishops, &c. He proclaimed a fast for the next Thursday, and begged the brethren to remember the poor, and assist the bishops, and each one to take what they should eat on the fast day to the poor, (not forgetting a few little comforts for them) naming several, amongst the rest a little ginger, which made us smile to think our president did not think it beneath his dignity to remember the poor old woman's comfort, &c. Well Thursday came--the fast commenced, likewise the gathering for the poor; people were seen trotting in all directions to the bishops of the different wards with bundles under their arms, some small, some great, and soon these little mites of twenty thousand people swelled into barrels of flour, and other food for the poor, and I dare say the ginger was not forgot.

Just two days later, the Twelve Apostles issued a general letter to the Church. Under the heading, "The Principle of Fasts Defined," is contained this illuminating paragraph:

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14 Young, History of the Church, VII, 411.

15 "Extract from a Letter," Millenial Star, VI (1845), 123. The publishers at this time were Wilford Woodruff and Thomas Ward.
Let this be an ensample to all saints, and there will never be any lack for bread: When the poor are starving, let those who have, fast one day and give what they otherwise would have eaten to the bishops for the poor, and every one will abound for a long time; and this is one great and important principle of fasts approved of the Lord. And so long as the saints will all live to this principle with glad hearts and cheerful countenances they will always have an abundance.¹⁶

Brigham Young has already been quoted in his assertion that this principle was formulated years previously at Kirtland.¹⁷

**Church Policy of Caring for the Poor**

**Kirtland Period.**—Before dealing with the relationship of fasting and donations, a review of early Church policy in providing for the poor is appropriate.

The leaders of the Church have always been conscious of this obligation. It has been rightly said that "the history of the Church throughout often mentions efforts of the Saints to take care of the poor among them."¹⁸ Various revelations made known by Joseph during the early existence of the Church make the point quite definite. Some, received as early as 1831 and 1832, contain such pointed instructions as: "...certain men among them shall be appointed...and they shall look to the poor and needy...that they shall not suffer...";¹⁹

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¹⁶Ibid., p. 413.
¹⁸Deseret News, June 25, 1932, Church Section, p. 6.
¹⁹Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants*, 38:34,35.
...thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support...and inasmuch as yet impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it unto me..."20; and "the storehouse shall be kept by the consecrations of the church; and widows and orphans shall be provided for, as also the poor."21

The obligation of caring for the needy was always with the Saints. A constant reminder of this was their own oftimes lamentable circumstances, the product of frequent harassing and persecution by people who neither understood nor appreciated their convictions. Their printed publications contained frequent mention of this obligation. For example, a letter of general instructions printed in Missouri in 1833 contained this comment:

...we are mindful of the word of our Father, which informs us that in his bosom it is decreed, that the poor and meek of the earth shall possess it. The Welfare of the poor has always a place in our hearts...22

In 1834, their scriptures used even stronger language than that in declaring this all-important obligation:

Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment.23

20 Ibid., 42:30,31.
21 Ibid., 83:6.
23 Smith, Doctrine and Covenants, 104:18.
Such forceful language doubtless had its effect upon the people. In the late 1830's the leaders continued to remind the people to consider the poor along with their own problems. This admonition pertained not only to the central gatherings of the Saints: it was part of the instructions to the outlying settlements or the "Churches abroad." It was declared that the duty of the church members everywhere was "to provide for those who are objects of charity, that are not able to provide for themselves."\(^{24}\)

The Church, both at Kirtland and in Missouri, was in embarrassing financial straits.\(^{25}\) Yet, the obligation of caring for the poor was not to be neglected in the face of other pressing problems. Until the Saints arrived at Nauvoo, it knew no real prosperity.

As long as the principle of consecration remained a subject of emphasis during the early 1830's, it is possible that provision for the poor out of the storehouse would likely be the program of the Church. This may account for the fact that nothing was found during this early period concerning the association of fasting and donations for the poor.

**Nauvoo and the Exodus.**—After the establishment of the Saints in Illinois, this responsibility took on more definite


\(^{25}\)Ibid., See also "Journal History," September 18, 1837, p.1.
and permanent characteristics. The financial records of one of the original wards in Nauvoo yield many of the details of this program. In this record is contained an "Account of donations Received by Bishop Edward Hunter for the use of the poor in the fifth Ward in the City of Joseph, (Late City of Nauvoo)." It is at this point that we find recorded evidence of a definite program set up wherein donations—not necessarily associated with a fast day—were received for the poor. If the fifth ward in Nauvoo had a program of donations for the poor, it is not unlikely that other wards had a similar program.

The entries in Bishop Hunter's record of donations included a complete list of the names of donors, what was donated, and the value of the donation. The date the contribution was made (at least the date it was recorded) was also given. These donations were generally in kind and included such items as beef, wood, flour, meal, pork, sugar, rice, pepper, "one cat fish," coffee, soap, a shirt, a waistcoat, "socks," or some candles. Included also were such entries as "by assistance," "2 weeks board for poor man," and "2 days work washing."

Dispensing these items to the needy at or near the time they were received seems to have been the procedure. A statement at the bottom of the first page reads: "The above distributed to the poor at the time of delivery."

All through 1845, this record shows that donations were being received periodically. However, there seems to have

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been no regular day or part of the month set aside to receive these offerings. In some cases a month would contain no entries: in other months there were several entries. Take for example, the month of May (1845). During that month there were donations listed under the dates of the 2nd, 12th, 14th and 15th. Recordings of such donations continued through January and February of 1846.

The first groups of Saints began to leave Nauvoo in the early part of February, 1846, eighteen months after the death of Joseph Smith and after a period of intensive preparations under hostile pressure. Slowly, laboriously, and in great privation they made their way across the bleak plains of Iowa. At points along the way—-at Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah—semi-permanent camps were established. Crops were planted, shelters erected, and a few families left behind to carry on the work of caring for the crops, while the main body of the Saints pushed on. These "oases" of the plains were a haven to the exiles who followed in the wake of these first pioneers.

On reaching the east bank of the Missouri River in mid-June, they established a settlement which came to be known as Council Bluffs. It was intended that the Saints would continue their march right on to the valleys of the Rocky

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27 Ibid., pp. 1-5.
Mountains. This was delayed primarily because of the war which broke out with Mexico in April of 1846. Approximately five hundred able-bodied men were enlisted as army volunteers by the United States government to march west and secure California.

Because of the poverty of the Saints and more particularly because of the loss of such a large group of men from their ranks, it was decided to postpone the westward trek until the following spring. A spot on the west bank of the Missouri was selected as a site for a permanent camp. This camp was appropriately named "Winter Quarters." Here the bulk of the exiles gathered to await the exodus to a new home in the west.

During the struggles of this westward movement there was a economic "leveling-off" among the Saints. All were in a sense "poor" and as they trudged along and camped in units, they looked to the needs of each other. The policy was to "share and share alike."

The entries in Bishop Hunter's record book do not stop after his last entry at Nauvoo on February 24, 1846, but continue sporadically after leaving Nauvoo. One list of donations is dated June 28th "at Camp." Upon reaching Winter Quarters the record continues under a few scattered dates such as November 10th, November 25th, and several days in December. From January 30 to March 30 of 1847, these donations were listed under: "An Account of Donations and Distributions to
the Poor of the 1st Ward at Winter quarters. 28

This obligation of providing for the poor among them was still a major concern of the Saints while at Winter Quarters. The burden had been ominously increased because of the loss of the services of the Mormon Battalion. Specific instruction regarding the poor was given to those in positions of leadership in December of 1846:

The Bishops were requested to meet once a week with the High Council, and Pres. B. Young instructed the council to watch over the Bishops with a fatherly care and see that they organize and watch over their wards, have weekly meetings herein; also see that those under their charge have work and that none suffer through want, also instruct their wards to establish schools. 29

As planned, when the first green began to appear on the plains the following spring, the first company of pioneers began their memorable trek to the Great Basin in the Rocky Mountains. Successive companies made the journey during that year, but the bulk of the Saints were still at Winter Quarters or scattered across the Iowa prairie when the snows came in the fall of 1847.

As the snow melted in 1848, preparations were being made again for new companies to go west. All who were not included in the companies ready to move by May were instructed to remove to the east bank of the Missouri River. Thus, Winter Quarters had served its purpose and was now abandoned by the Saints.


In Iowa, very singular instructions were addressed to the Saints in regard to their responsibility to care for those less fortunate than themselves. George A. Smith, one of the Twelve Apostles, in charge of emigration at Kanesville (formerly Council Bluffs) issued these rather extensive yet very enlightening instructions "To the Saints in Iowa":

Greeting: ...we wish at present to give some advice and information in relation to the poor. The Lord by the revolution of seasons, has sent the snow, and the cold north winds, alike upon the just and the unjust, the strongman [sic] and the invalid, the orphan and the widow; but all men were not equally well prepared for so severe a winter; and it becomes necessary to call upon the Saints to pay up their tithings. Bring in your corn, wheat... that the hearts of the needy may be made glad with an abundance of good things of the earth; and that they may not lack fire-wood we advise that every tenth day during the cold season, the brethren all turn out with their teams and those who have no teams, take their axes to cut and prepare wood for the fires; that the prayer of the orphan, the poor and the sick may ascend up to the ear of the Most High for blessings and deliverance; for "he that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord" etc.

We have been thus far particular that the Bishops of the different Branches may know how to proceed to supply the pressing calls that surround them; and as a great many of the poor have made complaints to us, we are determined to stir up the minds of all brethren to this important subject...for as the Lord liveth, if this people forget the poor, and neglect their tithes and offerings according to the laws, he will forget them in the day of trouble. Let Every [sic] Saint be awake for this is the key of peace on this land, the key of plenty, the key of health; for as our hearts are open to the needy, so is the hand of the Almighty in dispensing his favors unto us; and in the great day, when the judge of all shall say, "Come ye blessed, inherit the Kingdom" etc; we will learn that visiting the sick, feeding the poor, sustaining the needy, were the very things for which we received our crown of glory; and those who neglect these duties, were found destitute [sic] of pure and undefiled religion.30

It will be noted that tithing was also used to help discharge this responsibility. A few months later at a special conference held at Kanesville "Elder Aaron Johnson was chosen to act as the presiding Bishop, to receive the tithing, and with it to provide for the poor." 31

The Relationship of Fasting and Donations
It does not appear that donations for the poor had become permanently associated with fasting during this period. There was no regularly appointed fast day; a day was periodically appointed, usually with a suggestion to the membership to exercise their faith in behalf of some designated matter or condition.

There is an interesting consideration which rises out of one of the instances of fasting and donations already given. Part of one of the quotations read that "enough was contributed to supply the wants of the poor until harvest." 32 This fast day was held on May 15th. Yet, in Bishop Hunter's record of poor donations, an exceptionally large list of donations was recorded under the date of June 12th, and contributions continued to be received and recorded at intervals until harvest and on through the winter. 33

There are those who, while discussing the subject of

31 Ibid., July 22, 1849, p.2.
32 Young, History of the Church, VII, 411.
fasting, have agreed with this general conclusion: that the practice of giving donations for the poor has not always been associated with the observance of fasting. As a relatively recent editorial in the Church Section of the Deseret News put it:

Contrary to what some people might expect to find, the earliest Fast Days observed by the membership of the Church did not have donations of funds for the care of the poor attached to it. This practice was introduced later, at a time of great need.  

Joseph F. Merrill, a late member of the Twelve Apostles, also lent credence to this view when he remarked:

To get an offering that all in the Church can afford to make is one purpose of the fast day. But it is not the chief purpose, for fasting was commanded many years before the offering was made a regular requirement.

Although this is the conclusion reached after a review of the documents found on the subject, we find that the decision was not unanimous. President Joseph F. Smith, after explaining what constitutes an acceptable fast, continued by stating that: "In addition, the leading and principle object of the institution of the fast among the Latter-day Saints, was that the poor might be provided with food and other necessities."  

In this chapter considerable attention has been given both to fasting and donations and their eventual relationship

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34Deseret News, June 25, 1932, Church Section, p.6.
35Deseret News, August 24, 1935, Church Section, p.3.
to each other. After a consideration of the available sources the writer is of the opinion that general fasts were observed only periodically when appointed by someone in authority; and that the fasting and donations had but little association.

Let us now turn our attention towards the Rocky Mountains and see what place the institution of fasting had in the lives of the pioneers of the Great Basin.
CHAPTER IV

EARLY UTAH PERIOD (1847-1857)

Establishing Regularity

To 1853.--In the Utah period, one finds a problem in trying to determine when the first Thursday of each month was set apart as a regular fast day. There is a divided opinion among those who have been specific in writing on the subject. Our purpose is to study the sources and attempt to arrive at the most historically acceptable conclusion.

"The appointment of a periodical day of fasting occurred some time after the arrival of the Pioneers in Salt Lake valley."¹ This statement typifies most of the sources on the subject. A letter from the First Presidency to the membership in 1896 also includes a like declaration: "Shortly after the arrival of the people in the valley of the Great Salt Lake, the first Thursday in each month was set apart as a day of fasting and prayer."²

That the first Thursday in each month was designated as a regular fast day soon after the arrival of the pioneers, is a generally accepted fact. However, when striving to establish a more precise date of establishment such adverbs as "soon," "sometime," or "shortly after," provide a margin of time which is difficult to measure. A closer look at records

¹Deseret Evening News, December 5, 1896, p. 4.
²Deseret News, November 7, 1896, p. 4.
of the first few years of Utah history throws additional light on the subject.

Amid the hardships of the trek from Winter Quarters to the valley of the Great Salt Lake, the first company observed a few days of fasting. Sunday, May 30 (1847) was appointed as a day of fasting and prayer,\(^3\) and of the following Sunday Howard Egan wrote, "Tomorrow is set apart as last Sunday was for prayer and fasting."\(^4\) Sunday observance lent itself best to the practice while traveling because it was the policy of the pioneers to refrain from traveling on the Sabbath.

By July 24, 1847, all of the members of the first pioneer company had arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. With the arrival of later companies, the population in the valley grew to approximately 2,000 persons during the remainder of 1847. The Great Salt Lake Stake of Zion was soon organized with five wards. At a conference in February of 1849, Great Salt Lake City was divided into nineteen wards.\(^5\)

It appears that in 1849, the fast day began to take on a definite pattern of regularity. The first reference found of a general fast day reads as follows:

Thursday, April 26, A very strong south wind prevailed in G. S. L. City; the day was cloudy. This day was observed as a fast day in the city and an assembly of the saints met at the stand to fast, pray and speak."\(^6\)

\(^4\)Ibid., June 5, 1847, p.2. This entry is taken from Egan's journal.
\(^5\)Jensen, Encyclopedic History, p. 741.
The next Thursday (a first Thursday) was also observed as a day of fasting. This was the first instance of a fast day on a first Thursday of the month found in the Utah period. The wife of Amasa Lyman, one of the Twelve Apostles at that time, recorded this in her diary: "Thursday 3rd May Fast day. We went home found Caroline washing." The first Thursday of the following month was likewise observed as fast day. From the "Journal History": "Thursday, June 7 This day was observed as a fast day in G. S. L. City, Fast Meetings were held." There seems little doubt that fast day observance got an early start in Utah. The question of the permanence of the institution rises as a natural sequence to this observation. But, was it as well established at this point as one prominent church historian put it?

It is recorded that fast meetings were held in all the wards in Salt Lake City on Thursday, June 7, 1849, and from that time forward fast day was regularly observed throughout the Church on the first Thursday of each month until Nov. 5, 1896, when, at a meeting of the First Presidency and the Apostles, it was decided that the first Sunday of the month should be observed instead, and Sunday, December 6, 1896, was the first time it was held on Sunday.

There was nothing of a contemporary nature uncovered which would contradict this declaration. There are, however, other sources which give the impression that it was established on

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7Eliza Marie Partridge (Smith) Lyman, "Diary," MS, p. 38. Copy made by Brigham Young University Library, 1945.
a regular basis at a later date.

Some writers point to 1852 as being the year in which a regular fast day was established among the Latter-day Saints. Others date it a few years later—as a result of the trying years of 1855-56—when it took on a permanent economic aspect. These will be considered in order.

Before 1852 there is yet other evidence of its general acceptance on the first Thursday of the month. From the "Journal History" in 1851 we take this entry for "Thursday, July 3. This being the regular fast day, meeting was held at 11 in the Bowery, G.S.L. City."\(^10\)

Eighteen hundred and fifty-two becomes a year of prime importance when endeavoring to determine when the fast day became a permanent and regular institution of the Church. One may regard the announcement of this year as another "milestone" in the history of fasting. The prominence of this year centers around a notice given by Brigham Young during the annual April conference.

President Young then gave notice that from henceforth we should hold meetings regularly each Sabbath at 10 a.m., and 2 p.m., and in the evening, the several quorums of the Priesthood would assemble to receive instructions. On Thursdays the brethren and sisters would come together at 2 p.m., for prayer and supplication; and on the first Thursday in each month at 10 a.m., for the purpose of fasting and prayer, calling on the saints to observe that day.\(^11\)

This is the announcement as it was recorded in the minutes by Thomas Bullock, clerk of the Conference. President Young also


\(^{11}\)Deseret News, April 17, 1852.
made note of it in his manuscript history as follows: "I appointed meetings for the Saints at two p.m. on Thursdays, and a ten a.m. of the first Thursday of each month for the purpose of fasting and prayers, and asked the Saints to observe that day."12 That this announcement was of some importance is evidenced by the fact that several other sources record it.13

There are several alternatives which may be taken in scrutinizing these instructions: Some of these are: (1) the observance of that day was formally announced to the Saints for the first time since coming to Utah, (2) reaffirmation of a practice already in existence, or (3) merely a notice of change in meeting time was given. It may even have been a combination of these possibilities. There can be no doubt that it was being observed on the first Thursday before 1852; however, there was not found undeniable proof that it was regular and permanently established.

That the official nature of the announcement was recognized by other high Church officials is evident from this excerpt from the writings of Joseph F. Smith, President of the Church from 1901 to 1918.

A regular fast day was established among the Latter-day

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12 "Journal History," April 11, 1852, p.2.

13 Deseret News, April 17, 1852 and "Minutes of General Conference," Millenial Star, XIV (1852), 357.
Saints by President Brigham Young, in 1852, the first Thursday of the month being for years devoted to its observance, the principle of fasting having previously been taught by the Prophet Joseph...\(^\text{14}\)

Despite such evidence as has been presented, there are those who maintain that the regular and permanent practice of fast day became established at a later date. This group considers its establishment to have taken place as a result of the economically distressing years of 1855-56. Let us examine the records prior to 1856, before investigating these later claims.

1853 to 1856.--There is good reason to believe that between the years of 1852 and 1856 the first Thursday of the month was recognized as fast day. Hosea Stout, while making his way to China to fill a mission for the Church, stopped at Parowan, Utah. While there he made this notation in his diary: "Thursday 4 Nov. 1852. Today was a regular fast day for the people of Parowan. All met and spent the day preachin & praying."\(^\text{15}\)

John S. Woodbury was called on a mission to the Hawaiian Islands in 1851, leaving Great Salt Lake City in March. The record does not reveal how long it took him to arrive at his destination, but he began a detailed account of his missionary labors in January, 1853. Beginning in April of that year his diary discloses that he and the people among whom he labored faithfully observed the first Thursday of each

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\(^\text{15}\)Hosea Stout, "Diary," MS. VI, 6. Copy made by Brigham Young University Library, 1942.
month as fast day. An entry can be found for fast day on practically every first Thursday from April, 1853 until August of 1855. He was released from his mission at that time, boarding a ship for San Francisco in September.

If the Saints were instructed in June of 1852 to observe this day, it is plausible that Elder Woodbury received word of it in Hawaii some months later and began its observance. Of the fast day held on Thursday, September 7, 1854 he wrote: "Kept this a day of fasting & prayer....I explained the nature of the [sic] our fast day & why it is Set apart." We can be certain that he recognized the first Thursday as a regular fast day.

The "Journal History" discloses that "Thursday, March 2 1854 ...was observed as Fast Day throughout the Church." During the same year, a copy of the original records of the old Seventeenth Ward in Salt Lake City revealed this: "Thursday August 3rd being appointed as a fast day a meeting was held in the School House commencing at 10 o'clock A.M." A perusal of the sources for 1855 reveals so many instances of a regular fast day observance that it would be


17 Ibid., Part I, 306.

18 "Journal History," March 2, 1854, p. I.

19 Seventeenth Ward, Salt Lake Stake, "Historical Record 1853-1857," #6293, Church Historians Library, Salt Lake City, p. 55.
superflous to attempt to document each of them. Such entries as: "Fast Meeting and Blessing of Children..."\(^20\) "Being the 1st Thursday in the Month the Bishop and several brethren & Sisters met at the 16th Ward School house for the purpose of Blessing Children & Fasting & prayer..."\(^21\) or simply such entries as "Novr 1st 1855. Fast Meeting."\(^22\) leave unmistakable evidence of its acceptance and regular observance by this time.

One further quotation may serve to make this point even more significant. A group of Saints had been sent to colonize a portion of eastern Utah in 1855. This assignment became known as the "Elk Mountain" mission. They, too, established the practice of observing a regular fast. The diary of William Pace yielded these particulars:

> On the 3rd July Tues William Hamlin and James Ivie commenced cutting hay....In the evening we held a council meeting for the purpose of taking into consideration the holding a \([sic]\) fast meeting on the morrow and decided we should.

> Thursday meeting at 10 o'clock good speaking from different ones: all voted to hold fast meetings on the first Thursday of every month (as they do in the vallesy) \([sic]\)....

> The 2nd of Aug. Thursday being Fast day we held meetings with the Indians...\(^23\)

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\(^{20}\) Thirteenth Ward, Salt Lake Stake, "Historical Record, 1854-1859," #23782, Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, no pagination.

\(^{21}\) Sixteenth Ward, Salt Lake Stake, "Record of Members and Historical Record 1850-1856, #15365, Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, no pagination.

\(^{22}\) Seventeenth Ward, op. cit., p. 63.

\(^{23}\) William Bryan Pace, "Diary," MS, pp. 40-42. Copy made by Brigham Young University Library, 1941.
With this array of evidence of its observance before us, let us now consider the writings of those who lean towards 1856 as about the year it became a regular practice.

1856-1857.—The position held by some writers—that the fast day was established on a regular basis in 1856—seems to have its mooring in one source, a statement made by George A. Smith\(^2\) and quoted later by Brigham H. Roberts. Roberts writes that the outstanding causes of the difficult years of 1855-1856 were prolonged drought, plague of grasshoppers, severity of the winter which caused the death of cattle on the range, heavy immigration of Saints, and the great number of gold hunters en route to California who came to the valley destitute of food. He continues by quoting from George A. Smith who wrote:

> In all these times of scarcity...measures were taken to supply those who were unable to furnish themselves. A fast day was proclaimed for the church on the first Thursday of each month, and the food saved in that way distributed among the poor; and thousands of persons, who had abundance of bread put their families on rations, in order to save the same for those who could not otherwise obtain it."\(^2\)

In making further comment on this subject, Roberts explained that "the practice then begun has continued, and become a permanent institution in the church, only the fast day has

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\(^2\) George A. Smith was designated as Historian and General Church Recorder at the April Conference of 1854. See Andrew Jensen, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1901), I, 41.

been changed from the first Thursday in the month to the first Sunday of the month." 26 While addressing the Saints assembled at general conference in April, 1913, he described the distressing conditions of that period and is reported to have said:

   To meet the very great demands of charity upon Latter-day Saints in those trying years, our fast day came into existence; the servants of the Lord instituted the first Thursday in every month as fast day, with a view of taking what was saved by this sacrifice and minister unto those who otherwise would be in want. This plan of meeting that emergency became an established institution... 27

A search of the records of this period was made with special attention directed to any sort of official announcement which might substantiate the above position. Although no such announcement was discovered, it does not eliminate the possibility that there was one given. The fact that Roberts refers to no specific date, makes verification difficult. It also supports the probability that there was no official declaration given at that time.

   It is not overlooked that both Smith and Roberts were stressing the "charitable" aspect of the fast day; and it is true that this practice was being crystallized as a part of fast observance about this time. However, existing without due qualification, this claim has lead many to accept the 1855-56 period as the time of the establishment of a regular fast day among the Latter-day Saints. The importance of determining whether it was established in 1849, 1852 or later may

26 Ibid., p. 110.
27 Conference Reports, April 6, 1913, p. 120.
be questioned. But it has value in this study as it has a bearing on the desirability of historical accuracy.

There are numerous articles written on the origin of fast day wherein writers have indicated that the principle of fasting was introduced soon after the organization of the Church. They then generally skip up to 1855 or 1856 to assert that it became a regular institution at that time.

Typical is the Deseret News article on the fast day which has been cited several times thus far in this work:

We are told by President Brigham H. Roberts in an address at the April Conference of 1913, and again in his "Comprehensive History...that the regular fast day observance was begun in 1855 because of the famine that existed..."

The writer then goes on to quote further from Robert's analysis of the subject.

A thesis by H. Lester Petersen afford another example:

This fast day service was held the first Thursday of each month, and it included the paying of fast offerings. During the interval from 1831 to 1855, no record appears as to the regularity of fast meeting and to the payment of the fast offerings.

It is recognized that the subject of Petersen's thesis was "fast offerings," not fasting. Yet, this statement concerning the history of fasting is typical of the writings of those who use Roberts as the basic source.

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28Deseret News, June 25, 1932, Church Section, p.6.

No controversy pertaining to the regularity of fast day observance was found after this period. One has no difficulty in finding a record of fasting on any given first Thursday during 1856, 1857 and later. A brief interruption in the general pattern occurred in 1858 as a result of the "Utah war." This episode and its relationship to the observance of the fast day will be presented in the following chapter.

In paying particular attention to the historical development of the fast day, it is not meant to exclude the fact that it was neither uncommon to call a special fast nor for the Saints to observe fasting of a private nature.

The Care of the Poor and Fast Offerings

It was confirmed that during the Nauvoo period fasting and donations for the poor had become definitely associated—not alone in principle, but also in practice. It was likewise indicated that this principle of charity was made known to the Saints in a general epistle from the presiding authorities. At what point offerings became permanently associated with the regular fast observance is difficult to determine. Certainly by 1856, the institution was a fixed feature of Latter-day Saint practice. The writer does not presume to have made an exhaustive analysis of the history of the fast offering; but inasmuch as it became prominently linked with the observance of fast day, it of necessity must have a place in this study.

It appears that contributions for the needy were first
referred to as "donations." The term "fast offerings" seems to have become indentified with the practice when or soon after the giving of donations became an accepted part of fast day observance. This differentiation had meaning only when one understands that there is a difference between donations and fast offerings. The former may or may not be associated with fast day; in general, they may come in any amount, at any time, from any source, and need not necessarily be for the poor. But the designation "fast offerings" has a more restricted meaning and is associated with the fast day.

The Nauvoo Fifth Ward record of donations for the poor continued through Winter Quarters and on into Utah. The last entry at Winter Quarters was made on March 30, 1847 and the first in the valley was on September of the same year. These records reveal that contributions for the poor were received every month (and often several times during each month) until March 12, 1848. During this time, Bishop Hunter records that these donations were received in behalf of the "blank" ward—he leaves a blank space where the name of the ward originally appeared. After this, nothing is recorded until 1850, shortly after the old Nauvoo Fifth Ward began its existence as the Thirteenth Ward of the Salt Lake Stake.

The Church continued to shoulder the responsibility of caring for their worthy poor after they arrived in the valley.

31 Ibid., p. 15.
Much of this was done by donations but not yet for "fast donations." The bulk of this responsibility was put into the hands of the bishops of the various wards, for whom definite instructions on this matter can be found early in Utah history. On the day that Great Salt Lake City was divided into nineteen wards it is recorded that

Pres. Brigham Young met in council with President Heber C. Kimball, the Twelve and others at Geo. B. Wallace's house....Pres. Young advised to first fence the city by wards and wished the Bishops to gather up the poor and look after them, and each Bishop to provide food for the poor of his own ward, and not depend upon the Bishops of other wards.32

Another reference to this subject was located which brings to light the basic plan which had been in operation previous to this time. Not long after the above-mentioned meeting

The Bishop's Quorum met in the School Room. Bishop Hickenlooper introduced the subject of providing for the poor, saying that he had many loud calls for assistance.

Charles C. Rich said that we supported the poor last year by donations, and the brethren giving into the hands of the Bishops who dealt it out, holding the receiver responsible for the pay when they were able. They had generally paid up.

Voted that the plan of supporting the poor last year be adopted.33

The principle means of providing for the poor during this early period seems to have been by the means of such donations. As yet, there was no evidence that these donations had become "fast" donations, or given in connection with the observance

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33 Ibid., March 25, 1849, p.l.
of fasting.

It is not intended to imply that the poor were supported only by donations given through the Bishops of wards, although it does seem that this was the main source of support and where the burden of the responsibility lay. The sources reveal other avenues of assistance both of an individual and collective nature. A cardinal teaching of Mormonism was that the Saints should look to his brother's need without needing to be commanded in all things. An example of the expression of concern manifest by the Saints for each other may be indicated by this diary entry of 1849:

21st Sat. April Sister Emily brought us 15 lbs flour. Said Pres [nt Young [sic] heard that we were out of bread and told her to bring that much although they had scanty allowance for themselves. I sincerely hope I may be able to return it before they need it. 34

In proclaiming a day of "Praise" and "Thanksgiving" to be observed by the citizens of the Territory of Utah on January 1, 1852, Brigham Young (in his official capacity as Governor) also requested that they spend the day in doing good; in dealing your bread, your butter, your beef, your pork, your turkeys, your molasses and the choicest of all the products of the vallies of the mountains, at your command, to the poor...35

Concern for the poor was repeatedly expressed all through the first trying years of Utah History. The donations

34 Lyman, "Diary," pp. 37, 38.

were, of course, not always limited to food or clothing. The records of the old Salt Lake Stake throw considerable light on the activities of those early pioneers. In relation to the poor, these lines are found:

The unusual continuance of mild weather not only affords opportunity for thoroughly closing up the ordinary outdoor operations, preparatory for winter, but enables the liberal to provide fuel for the destitute, ere the days of cold and storms set in...it does seem obvious that there is room for improvement in furnishing tithing wood to the Tithing Office, and then a chance for a rich blessing in providing wood for the needy by donation, or consecration.36

During the critical years of 1855 and 1856, the practice of bringing donations for the poor to fast meetings commenced. The causes for this precarious situation have already been cited. The results threatened the well-being of the people. As early as June of 1855, Geo. A. Smith reported "That scarcity of bread stuff existed in many families in the city and that in calling upon Parley P. Pratt's family, he found that they had commenced to ration themselves at half a pound a day each."37 In February of 1856, Heber C. Kimball wrote to his son, William, who was then on a mission in England. He wrote that

Money will not buy flour or meal, only at a few places and but very little at that. I can assure you that I am harrassed constantly; I sell none for money, but let it go where people are truly destitute. Dollars and cents do not count now, in these times, for they are the tightest that I have every seen in the Territory of Utah.38

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36"Salt Lake Stake Records," MSS., Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, entry for November 30, 1854. No pagination.
37Ibid., June 15, 1855.
38"Foreign Correspondence," Millenial Star, XVIII (1856) 396.
Brigham Young in writing to Franklin D. Richards who was also in England, wrote on March 3, 1856, that

The loss of our crops, the last season, renders our situation far more difficult than it would otherwise have been.
We are obliged to suspend operations of the Public Works, owing to the scarcity of provisions, and already a great number are quite destitute of food.

The situation became so grave that the First Presidency of the Church took stern measures to guard against loss of produce through wasteful conduct; and at the same time to provide means whereby those in need could help themselves. This action is best illustrated by the leaders' proclamation concerning what was referred to a "gleaning." The grain raisers were advised to let the poor come into their fields during harvest and be permitted to follow the rackers and binders. The Bishops were requested to see that the grain raisers either followed this procedure or else made arrangements to do it themselves immediately after the binding so as to prevent loss of grain. If the grain producers should be negligent in either case, they were to be dealt with "according to the law of Zion." Likewise, if the poor were improvident in this program, they were to be instructed by the Bishop that they had the privilege to leave the ward.

It is at this point in early Utah history that we find the payment of donations definitely associate with the obser-

\[39^\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 384.}\]
\[40\text{"Salt Lake Stake Records," June 25 and July 9, 1856.}\]
vance of fast day. The practice as understood and observed in
the Church since that time became crystalized during these
years. Brigham H. Roberts undoubtedly had the condition of
those years in mind when he declared that "the servants of the
Lord instituted the first Thursday in every month as fast day,
with a view of taking what was saved by this sacrifice and
minister unto those who otherwise would be in want."\textsuperscript{41}

Much of the certainty of this observation is furnished
by several of the original ward records of that period. The
records of the old Eighteenth Ward contain the minutes of a
meeting held the first Thursday of every month during 1855.
These were fast meetings used for blessing children, confirm-
ing of members, bearing testimonies, and attending to other
ward business.\textsuperscript{42} These records of this ward tell of donations
for the poor being received on fast day. For example: "Thurs-
day Oct. 4th 1855 Meeting opened by prayer by....L. D. Young
brought-------- [not legible] and Sister Taylor 2 lb Korn
for the poor."\textsuperscript{43}

The sources for the year 1856 are replete with evid-
ence which affirms that it was a common practice to bring
donations for the poor to the monthly fast meetings. In Feb-
ruary, the Eighteenth Ward records contain these minutes on

\textsuperscript{41}Conference Reports, April 6, 1913, p. 120.

\textsuperscript{42}Eighteenth Ward, Salt Lake Stake, "Historical Record,
1854-1856," #2691, Church Historians Library, Salt Lake City,
pp. 1,9.

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., p.9.
fast day:

Thursday Feby 7th Meeting opened by Prayer by Bro G Works Saints who met for fasting and Prayer and who had brought Korn Beef & c for the relief of the Poor Bore, their Testimony and the meeting was closed by Prayer...

The minutes of the fast day in March was recorded in a similar manner, but which also provided a list of the contributions and the names of the contributors. In addition, a list was made of the goods which were contributed to those in need. These donations were still mostly in kind, but with some donations paid in cash. The ward clerk wrote this comment into the minutes of the April fast day meeting: "My heart feels glad this morning to see so much provision brought here there is almost as much brought to day [sic] as there have been through the Winter." The following month, he concluded the minutes of the meeting with this comment:

Elder Works remarked that its about time to close our meeting and that he was instructed by the Bishop to divide what little provisions we receive this day to those that are in most need and whose husbands are on missions &c.

The original records of other wards likewise confirm the fact that donations were being received and disbursed on

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44Eighteenth Ward, op.cit., p. 23.
46Ibid., p. 38.
47Ibid., p. 42.
the regular fast day. So, one should be able to state without fear of contradiction that by the year 1856 a regular fast day was being observed by the general membership; and, that it had become customary for donations to be brought on that day and put in the hands of the ward Bishop. It was his responsibility to see that these contributions were placed in the hands of those who were in need of assistance.

**Incidental Items of Interest**

There are a few items of interest which should be considered here, for the insight they offer into early Utah Pioneer life. Being few in number, when the Saints first came to the Valley they assembled in one place on fast day. John Smith, the Patriarch to the Church, presided over these meetings, as had former Patriarch Joseph Smith Sr. presided over the meetings held in the Kirtland temple. As the Saints became more numerous and new wards and settlements were formed, fast meetings were held in several locations and presided over by the bishops.

At least in one ward the practice of observing two fasts each month was inaugurated. This was during the rigo-

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49 *Deseret Evening News*, December 5, 1896, p. 4.
rous year of 1856. The historical and financial records of the Sixteenth Ward reveal this interesting experiment. The first Thursday was still being observed and with the accompanying donation for the poor. On April 16th of that year the ward minutes state that the Bishop "gave instructions to Proclaim a fast on Fryday the 18th for the Benefit of the Poor with a request for the inhabitents of the ward to send in 2/3 of the amount of their Dayly alowances for the above perpas." These ward records also often contain lists of receipts for donations, entered twice a month. That all of the members of the ward did not take well to this inovation is illustrated by these minutes of fast meeting held on July 4th.

Met according to previous appointment...Some few Refuse to give in anything on fast day they say their judgment is aequal in not a little supperior to that of the Bishop in Regard to who ought & who ought not to be helpt others say they Dont see the Necessity of the extra fast in the middle of the month. The Bishop said they will all no Doubt Redgive according to their works this will be Justus...

This practice of an "extra" fast was only a temporary procedure in that ward during a few months in 1856. After July 20th the financial record (which goes to 1866) contains no donation receipts except for the first Thursday.

It will be noticed from the above incident that on one occasion it was stipulated how much the Saints were to bring in on fast day—"...2/3 of the amount of their Dayly

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51 Ibid., pp. 4-7, 149.
52 Ibid., p. 61.
alowances..." 53 During the early years of the Church, very little was written about the question of the length of an acceptable fast before the Lord. It was, however, generally understood from the Scriptures that it was customary to fast from "even to even." 54 The instructions to the Saints in Nauvoo had also been for them to fast for "one day." 55 To fast from "even to even" or for one day implies that one should fast for a period of approximately twenty-four hours, thus missing two consecutive meals. So it is in keeping with this basic principle of fasting that one would give "2/3 of the amount of their Dayly allowances" as an acceptable fast offering. This was the principle upon which the amount of the fast offering was computed by the Saints. The observation has already been made that they should take what they otherwise would have used and give it to the poor. 56

It is of interest to note that reference to this practice of attending to the needs of the poor in connection with fasting is found in the Bible. For instance, this relationship is made rather explicit in the following verses from Isaiah:

Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

53 Ibid., p. 1.
54 Lev. 23: 26-32.
55 Young, History of the Church, VII, 413.
56 Ibid., p. 411.
Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

In the early years in Utah, the fast day took on the characteristics which are basic to its observance today. Such things as the blessing of children, testimony bearing, and ward business were attended to, besides abstaining from food and paying fast offerings. By 1857, the fast day had become a permanent and recognized institution in the Church.

57 Isaiah 58: 4, 6, 7.
CHAPTER V

FAST OBSERVANCE 1858-1896

Temporary Interruption

From 1858 until 1896, the first Thursday of the month was observed as a regular fast day. Nothing was located which gave the impression that it was not the recognized day, nor does any problem arise concerning its permanent establishment. To make the analysis complete, a few items of interest during these years should be considered. The coming of Johnston's army into the Territory of Utah temporarily upset the established program among the Saints.¹ Those living in the northern settlements were advised to take as much of their belongings as possible and move to the south until the difficulties were settled. The regular fast meetings were held in the Salt Lake area up to and including the meeting for March, 1858.² But other public meetings were held in the Tabernacle (the central meeting establishment for the Saints) as late as the month of June.³ A settlement of the misunderstandings was

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²See "Journal History," March 4, 1858, p.1; Thirteenth Ward, no pagination; and Salt Lake Stake Records, entry for March 4, 1858.

³Salt Lake Stake Records, entry for January 2, 1859.
soon consummated and the army was allowed to pass unmolested through Salt Lake City on June 26, 1858. It continued on to Cedar Valley where Camp Floyd was founded. The Salt Lake Stake Records disclose that on June 30, 1858, "Pres. Brigham Young said that all who wished to return to their homes in G.S.L. City, [sic] were at liberty to do so." The next day, he and his party arrived in Great Salt Lake City. The people then commenced to return to their homes.

It evidently took the Saints several weeks to return and establish normalcy again. Once source indicated that on August 15th: "G.S.L. City seemed still and lonesome, no meetings as yet being held on the Sabbath." It appears that sometime during the month of September things were beginning to move along as usual. The minutes in the Thirteenth Ward on September 14th, with the notation that "The reason there was no meetings from March untill [sic] September the church was moving South & came back in the fall."

The first meeting held in the Tabernacle after the return of the Saints to Great Salt Lake City was on October 6, 1858. This was not a public meeting, but in the nature of a

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4Salt Lake Stake Records, no pagination.
5"Journal History," July 1, 1858, p.1.
6Salt Lake Stake Records, no pagination.
7Thirteenth Ward, no pagination.
special Priesthood conference. It was remarked at this gathering that as soon as the tabernacle could be put in repair, it would be open for "preaching on Sundays." Anticipating that the United States army would enter the Territory, and possible drive them from their city, the Saints had stripped the Tabernacle of its furnishings. These had not yet been restored, which accounts for the delay in resuming public meetings there. On Sunday, January 2, 1859, it was opened for public worship. Approximately seven months had elapsed since the last public meeting had been conducted there.

The regular fast day meetings in the various wards had previously been resumed. Conditions being normal again, on August 4, 1859, the wards of "G.S.L. City" were invited by President Young to hold their fast meeting jointly in the Tabernacle. He desired "those who possess the Spirit of God to occupy the time," so that he could learn how the "brethren" felt. He then delivered a sermon to those assembled, admonishing them to be true to the gospel after having come so far out west for the sake of their religion. That this occasion was the first such meeting held since their return is verified by this diary notation: "Thursday 4th For the first time since the return of the people to the city last season the

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8 "Journal History," October 6, 1858, p.1.
9 Salt Lake Stake Records, no pagination.
monthly fast was kept in the Tabernacle..."11

1859 to 1896

As then instituted, the practice of fast observance continued on in much the same manner, with no major changes instituted until 1896. During this period there is not much to add to the total picture. The leaders of the Church occasionally called special fasts for various purposes, along with the regular fasts; and the practice of bringing an offering to the poor continued. These offerings were still largely paid in kind with such items as flour, butter, molasses and beans appearing frequently in the record, but with an occasional offering in cash being contributed.

The Mid-week Fast Poses Problems

The regular fast day was being held on a week day and during normal working hours. It was customary for those who attended, to leave their work long enough to be present at the meeting. A certain furniture store in Salt Lake City, for example, posted its new "Business Code" on New Year's Day, 1870. A portion of this "code" contained these instructions: "Each employee will attend Sunday Sacrament Meeting and adequate time will be given to attend Fast Meeting on Thursday."12 Other documents likewise reveal that the Saints generally went


about their normal labors before and after the fast meeting. Such diary notations as the following are of common occurrence during this period: "5th went to fast Meeting Bore my Testimony & administered to the sick put up some Hay."13 "6th Worked at school house again to day, [sic] except during fast Meeting..."14 "7th Fast day, paid 12 lbs flour fast offering--Threshed out 2 loads wheat..."15 "Thursday 7...Worked 1/4 day at co books & went to fast meeting..."16

This practice of taking time off during regular working hours for a religious meeting was attended with success during the early years in Utah; but as the "gentile"17 became more numerous and the press of competition in business became more pronounced, it created a problem for those who desired to attend. As shall be seen, this state of affairs was in large measure responsible for the decision to change the fast day from Thursday to Sunday.

From Thursday to Sunday

After it became a regular practice in the early Utah period, the fast day was observed on the first Thursday of


15Ibid., p. 339.


17In Latter-day Saint terminology this term refers to one not of their faith.
each month until December, 1896. On November 5, 1896, by decision of the Twelve Apostles and First Presidency, the regular monthly fast was changed to the first Sunday of each month. Two days later, over the signature of the First Presidency, the change was announced in the Deseret News. Following is part of the official proclamation which adequately discusses the reasons for the change and at the same time counsels the Saints to carry out the instructions contained therein:

"Dear Brethren and Sisters--It has been a practice in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sanctioned by the word of the Lord, to fast and pray and in this manner to seek for the faith which Saints should possess, and obtain that spirit of humility which we are commanded to cultivate.

Shortly after the arrival of the people in the valley of the Great Salt Lake, the first Thursday in each month was set apart as a day of fasting and prayer. The members of the Church were enjoined to bring on that day their contributions for the relief and sustenance of the poor, and hand them to the Bishop of the ward.

At the time of the adoption of this regulation it was very convenient for the people generally to meet together in their places of worship in that day. The conditions were such that they, being of one faith, employers and employed could leave their labor and devote a few hours to the worship of the Lord.

For many years these meetings were well attended, and they were of a most interesting character, and were a comfort and strength to all who shared in them, as it was the practice for persons of both sexes to bear their testimony and take active part in them in each ward under the direction of the bishopric.

As the years rolled by, conditions changed, and it became more difficult for the people generally, and especially those in steady employment, to attend these meetings, until at the present time they have dwindled to such an extent that comparatively few have the opportunity of attending them. Thursday as a day of fasting and prayer in the Church no longer served the object for which it was intended.

Our attention has been called to this subject, and after mature deliberation, it has been decided to change the day that has heretofore been devoted to this purpose. Instead of the customary assemblages in the various wards throughout Zion on the first Thursday in each month, we have concluded to set apart the first Sunday in every month as the day for the regular meeting.

In giving this counsel to the Church upon this subject, we include all the missions where the Elders are laboring, either in the United States or in foreign lands. We think this arrangement will suit the convenience and circumstances of all the Latter-day Saints throughout the world, and we would like it to be observed by all the organized branches of the Church in every land, so that our fasting and praying may be uniform and the time be understood by all."

We are your brethren,
Wilford Woodruff,
George Q. Cannon,
Joseph F. Smith,
First Presidency.19

Sunday, December 6th was designated as the day the change should officially take place. The diary entries for that day are numerous which make a special mention of it.

The following two are typical:

Sunday, Dec. 6th The Pres. of the Church has changed the regular monthly fast day from Thursday to the first Sunday in every month, and we are expected to fast until after the afternoon meeting. This is the first one held since the change was made, and was a wonderful success in our ward. I nearly always fast on Sunday morning anyway.20

Sunday, Dec 6th Very Cold...This has been Fast-Day, The first regular fast Sunday in the history. [sic] The regular Fast-Day was changed from Thursday to Sunday to give more an opportunity of attending Fast-meeting. The change seems to meet the approval of all the Saints. The fast is to be kept from Saturday night to Sunday night (2½ hrs).21

20 Lucy H. White Flake, "Diary," MS, p.91. Copy made by Brigham Young University Library, 1953.
At the time this innovation was announced, many people took the opportunity both in diaries, journals, and in writings for public consumption, to discuss the nature of proper fast day observance and to reaffirm their believe in its various doctrinal aspects. Much was also written concerning the wisdom in effecting such a change. As the Deseret Evening News declared:

It seemed fitting and most easy when the Church was small, and most of its members in rural pursuits, that fast day should be in the middle of the week. Since its enlargement, since the overthrow of its isolation, and the engagement of its members in numerous branches of business and employment; all interfering with the original method, it has seemed good to the authorities to make the first Sabbath of the month, the day of fasting and prayer, coupling therewith the remembrance of the poor. Thousands will hail this change with delight, for of all meetings it is recognized that the monthly fast days have furnished the richest and the best--yet large numbers were deprived of this privilege, and brethren in places where competitive ardor was intense, have been barred the opportunity even of blessing their own children or confirming those of increased years.22

Conclusion

In keeping with the main purpose of this study, little attempt has been made to explain the doctrine or philosophical aspects of fasting. In conclusion, it may not be inappropriate to present a few quotations from Church leaders which in part illustrate the L.D.S. attitude relative to what is generally considered to constitute an acceptable fast. As President Joseph F. Smith concisely defined it:

The law to the Latter-day Saints, as understood by the authorities of the Church, is that food and drink are not to be partaken of for twenty-four hours, "from even to

even," and that the Saints are to refrain from all bodily gratification and indulgences.  

He then went on to say:

...but let it be remembered that the observance of the Fast Day by abstaining twenty-four hours from food and drink is not an absolute rule, it is no iron-clad law to us, but is left with the people as a matter of conscience, to exercise wisdom and discretion.

A touch of humor is couched in a remark by President Wilford Woodruff.

It was remarked this morning that some people said they could not fast because it made their head ache. Well, I can fast, and so can any other man; and if it makes my headache by keeping the commandments of God, let it ache.

Further, the First Presidency announced in 1896: "In making donations to the poor also it has been the understanding that the food that would be necessary for the two meals should be donated to the poor..."

It was stated in the introduction that the development of a regular fast day in the Church has had a varied and disconnected history. This study has undertaken to trace that history and point out the events and influences which were responsible for the development which has occurred. Not until the Church had been organized for some sixty-six years was the

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24 Ibid.


26 Deseret News, November 7, 1896, p.4.
last significant change made in 1896. In brought into its present pattern a basic institution of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
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THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE FAST DAY
IN THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS,
1830-1896

An Abstract
of a Thesis Presented to
the Department of History
Brigham Young University
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in History

by
A. Dean Wengreen
July, 1955
ABSTRACT

Although the fast day is an integral part of the Latter-day Saint program—and has been for many years—the writer has found that there is some lack of understanding among Latter-day Saints concerning its origin in the Church. Many believe that a regular fast day was established by the Prophet Joseph Smith during the early years of the Church and that it has continued unchanged through the years until the present time.

After a cursory examination of the writings readily available of the subject, it became apparent that such was not the case. It was found rather, that the fast day had a varied and interesting history, and that it was many years before it became an established institution in the Church.

Another subject closely associated with the establishment of a regular fast day was the practice of giving a donation for the poor in connection with the observance of that day. The purpose of this study then, is to trace the establishment of the regular fast day in the Church, and also to trace its historical relationship to the payment of fast offerings.

There are numerous references in Latter-day Saint writings and sermons which in some detail explain the philosophical aspects of fasting; with the blessings and benefits associated with it. However, little it written regarding the historical development of a regular fast day in the church,
which, as stated, is the purpose of this study.

In general, the topic has been treated chronologically -- from the organization of the Church in 1830 until 1896. The day was well established years before 1896, but in that year it was officially changed from Thursday to Sunday.

The information contained in this thesis was supplied chiefly from the "Journal History" of the Church, diaries, and early stake and ward records. There were, or course, many other sources which cast additional light on the subject. These were especially valuable in reviewing what others have written or said concerning the establishment of the fast day. Out of an examination of these came a further consideration which lent further interest to the study. This concerns the apparently conflicting data which exists concerning the establishment of a regular fast day and its historical relationship to the fast offering.

It is difficult to state the conclusions of this study in a concise manner. However, the following general conclusions can be drawn. Fasting became a rather common practice in the Church during the lifetime of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Yet, the contemporary sources do not indicate that it was a regular practice during either the Kirtland or Nauvoo periods. A possible exception to this may have been a brief period near the time of the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in 1836.

There is evidence of fasting soon after the arrival of the Saints in the Great Basin, but it appears that it was
not until 1852 that it had become a regular monthly practice. A few prominent Church leaders differ concerning the year of its establishment in Utah. Certainly, by 1856 it was a regular and recognized practice, and there appears to be no controversy after that year.

No contemporary source revealed that there was an association of fasting with donations for the poor until during the Nauvoo period in 1845. This association, as we know it today, did not become permanent until more than a decade later in early Utah history.

By 1856 the fast day and its association with fast donations was an established institution in the Church, except for a brief interruption occasioned by the coming of Johnston's army to Utah. The most significant change after this date was in 1896, when the regular day for fast observance was changed from the first Thursday to the first Sunday of the month.