

# Acknowledgments

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

In retracing and interpreting the Mormon past, the Missouri period has often been considered the darkest era in the history of the Church. During the years 1831–39, the Saints' promised hope of a Mormon utopia in the establishment of Zion in Jackson County, Missouri, brought with it misunderstandings, jealousies, mob action, confiscation and destruction of property, killings, and civil conflict. The animosity and hatred such activities created led to the eventual expulsion of over ten thousand Latter-day Saints by order of the state's chief executive. To Missouri historians the brief decade of Mormon episodes merits only a few pages and footnotes in their histories. But to Latter-day Saints, the scenes that transpired on Missouri soil—principally in Jackson, Clay, Ray, Carroll, Caldwell, Daviess, and Livingston Counties—continue to be a dramatic epoch in Mormonism's historical past, in addition to being an integral part of the Church's spiritual heritage. This study will focus specifically on the events associated with the hostilities that erupted between the Mormons and the Missourians during the latter part of 1838 in an attempt not only to add to the understanding of Mormon history in the infant stage of the Church, but also to Missouri history during its early frontier era.

### Historiography

The Missouri episode of the LDS Church history can be divided into three identifiable periods, each of which has been historically examined and interpreted by historians in dissertation studies. Warren Abner Jennings, "Zion is Fled: The Expulsion of the Mormons From Jackson County, Missouri" (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1962), examines the initial years of<sup>f(1)</sup> Mormon settlement beginning in 1831 in Jackson County and the events leading to the forced expulsion of the Latter-day Saints from the county in 1833. Max H. Parkin, "A History of

the Latter-day Saints in Clay County, Missouri, from 1833–1837" (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1976), focuses on the four-year period when the majority of Mormons settled in Clay County, during which time efforts were made to reclaim and reinstate the Mormons on their Jackson County property. And finally, Leland H. Gentry, "A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri from 1836–1839" (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1965), chronicles the Mormon occupation in Missouri's upstate and the events culminating in the Mormon War and the subsequent expulsion of the Latter-day Saints from Missouri.

Additional scholarly studies examining various aspects of the Mormons' experience in Missouri, also encompassing the 1838 Mormon War, include: Pleasant Clay Deford, "The Mormon Occupation of Missouri" (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1919); Raymond Lester Booker, "Early Mormon Movement in Missouri" (M.S. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, 1932); Helen D. Ross, "The Mormons in Missouri" (M.A. thesis, Washington University, 1933); Alvin Jacob Teuscher, "A Study of the Causes of Conflict Between the Mormons and Non-Mormons in Missouri and Illinois" (M.S. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1940); and Louise D. Oliver, "The Mormons and Missouri, 1830–1839" (M.A. thesis, University of Kansas City, 1943). Each of these narratives attempts to examine the Mormon experience in Missouri, including various incidents and aspects of the 1838 Mormon War. However, these early studies demonstrate a lack of sophisticated historical methodology and critical interpretation on the part of the authors. Furthermore, the use of primary sources, particularly journals, diaries, and letters, are glaringly absent. These histories are academically sub-par and even somewhat primitive when evaluated by present-day historical standards. A more current examination of the Mormon-Missouri conflict is that of Patricia A. Zahniser,

“Violence in Missouri, 1831–1839: The Case of<sup>[2]</sup> the Mormon Persecution” (M.A. thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 1973). However, it suffers from many of the same flaws as the earlier studies. In addition to the academic studies cited, scores of articles have been published in scholarly journals and periodicals such as *Missouri Historical Review*, *BYU Studies*, *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, *Restoration Studies*, and *Restoration*, dealing with specific events and issues associated with the early events of Mormonism in Missouri. However, an interpretive and inclusive history of the entire Missouri experience has yet to be written.

In terms of the 1838 conflict, it is important to cite the contributions of two historians, Leland H. Gentry and Stephen C. LeSueur. Gentry’s dissertation is a comprehensive history of the Church in Northern Missouri between 1836–39. Considerable attention is given to the establishment of Mormon settlements in Caldwell, Daviess, and Carroll counties, in addition to some of the particulars concerning the Mormon efforts to establish their own local government. The author also brings to light the internal conflicts that confronted the Church, principally through the influence of Mormon dissenters, and then demonstrates how the internal friction was the catalyst for the external problems with their non-Mormon neighbors. The events and consequences associated with the Mormon War are often discussed in general narrative terms with an occasional interspersing of the author’s interpretations and conclusions. The strength of the dissertation is its overall breadth and the writer provides a more-than-substantial rehearsal of the most significant incidents of Mormonism during the three-year period. For this, Gentry’s study has considerable historical merit. However, if breadth is its strength, depth is its weakness, since the entire narrative is flawed by the author’s overuse of extensive and lengthy quotations (principally from secondary histories and newspaper accounts), and a paucity of primary journals and letters. While the study provided a basic framework for an analysis of the significant events of the period,<sup>[3]</sup> including the events associated with the actual military conflict, it also left room for considerable additional research in this area.

Stephen C. LeSueur’s graduate work at George Mason University culminated in the publication, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia,

Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1987). Whereas Gentry’s research encompassed the entire 1836–39 period, LeSueur’s monograph focused exclusively on the events surrounding the Mormon War itself, particularly those beginning in June 1838, and analyzes and interprets the Mormon conflict in its historical setting, that of Jacksonian America—a period when subversive extralegal violence against individuals, organizations, and religious societies was prevalent in American society. LeSueur’s study is clearly the most comprehensive on the subject to date. However, this does not mean that the door for additional research on the subject of the Mormon War is closed. In fact, his examination actually prompted the need for additional inquiry, investigation, and analysis.

LeSueur’s work contains a number of historical problems. For example, some subjects, particularly the military operations and movements of the Mormon militia, are treated too broadly and lack sufficient detail, thereby making a correct interpretation difficult. He is quick to place much of the responsibility for the conflict squarely on the Mormons and their leaders, many of whom he portrayed as being irrational and impetuous. The author also came to the conclusion that Joseph Smith oversaw all the military operations of the Mormon militia, yet he ignored sources which appear to contradict his arguments. His analysis and interpretation concerning the activities of the semi-secret Mormon paramilitary group known as the Danites, including Joseph Smith’s involvement and association with the society, are also both inflated and inaccurate. Finally, he tends to accept at face value the statements and testimonies of Missourians that appear in the public record, often failing to give credence to Mormon statements or reports that are not in agreement.<sup>[4]</sup>

### **Methodology and Statement of the Problem**

This study demonstrates that local vigilantes, county regulators, and a number of state officials (both civil and military), operated illegally against the Mormons in their attempts to force them to remove from selected regions, and finally the entire state altogether. When the Latter-day Saints’ efforts to settle the difficulties by legal means failed, they were constrained to take matters into their own hands. Even then, however, the Mormons made every attempt to lawfully defend themselves by operating under the

legally constituted militia of the county. Furthermore, the majority of the Mormon defenders who participated in the conflict did not have criminal intentions, nor should they be characterized as being a group of lawless miscreants. Theirs was a mission of community defense. Therefore, the 1838 contest must be examined from the standpoint of a defensive struggle on the part of the Mormons to maintain civil order and to protect their constitutional rights as citizens.

The Mormon-Missouri conflict of 1838 consisted of seven military episodes or campaigns: (1) the confrontation between Mormons and Missouri vigilantes in Daviess County, including the intercession made by regional militia (August through mid-September); (2) the Latter-day Saint defense of the Mormon population residing in Carroll County against county regulators, and the response of the regional militia to the disturbances (August through October 10); (3) the expulsion of the non-Mormon residents of Daviess County by Mormon militia (mid-October); (4) the encounter between Mormon and Missouri militia at Crooked River in Ray County (October 24–25); (5) the attack made by Missouri vigilante forces at the Mormon settlement of Haun's Mill in eastern Caldwell County (October 30); (6) the Mormon defense of Far West against vigilante and state militia forces (late October); and (7) the Mormon surrender and the military occupation conducted by authorized militia (November 1–29).<sup>[5]</sup>

Historians of the Missouri period of LDS history have not researched in sufficient depth, nor discussed adequately, numerous aspects of the civil conflict, particularly the military operations and movements of the Mormon and Missouri participants. This study is designed to make up for that deficiency by cutting more broadly and deeply than previous studies (particularly LeSueur's). Attention will also be given concerning the role of the state and county militia in maintaining public order, as well as the laws governing the formation and regulation of these militias, particularly those of the state of Missouri at the time of the Mormon conflict. The end result is a historical mirror that more accurately reflects and interprets the events and hostilities associated with the Mormon War.<sup>[6]</sup>