Settling Northern Missouri
1836–1838

Following the expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County, Missouri, in November 1833, the majority of Church members relocated in Clay County (see p. 34). Although Clay’s residents were much more fair-minded than Jackson’s old-time settlers, by 1836 continued Mormon immigration caused local residents to feel the Mormon stay in Clay County had been long enough. Rather than resorting to physical violence, Clay’s citizenry opted to allow the Mormons to relocate peacefully and even offered assistance.

In the spring of 1836, Missouri Church leaders began searching out possible sites for permanent settlement in the region of Missouri north of Ray County (then not organized within any county). After conducting explorations of the region, Mormon officials began making a number of land purchases in what would become Caldwell County. The most significant of these purchases took place on August 8, 1836, when W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer of the Missouri presidency purchased a square mile (640 acres) near Shoal Creek from the local government land office as the main place of Mormon settlement in the region. The site was subsequently named Far West.

During the fall 1836 Missouri legislative session, Alexander W. Doniphan, Clay County’s representative to the state legislature and the Mormons’ hired attorney, introduced legislation proposing the creation of a county for the Mormons north of what was considered “incorporated” Ray County. Doniphan initially proposed that the county be 24x24 square miles. However, a number of non-Mormons living between the 53rd and 54th township lines protested being included in the Mormon county, so this region (called the Buncombe Strip—6x24 square miles) was attached to Ray County, leaving the proposed Mormon county at 18x24 square miles. As discussions progressed, Doniphan began to fear that the bill to organize one county exclusively for the Mormons might not pass, so he proposed that a second county also be created, to be called Daviess, directly north of the proposed Mormon county. The bill passed the legislature, and on December 29, Governor Lilburn W. Boggs signed it into law. Mormons purchased most of the lands owned by earlier settlers and began to move to Caldwell County in earnest. Soon, Daviess County also attracted many Mormons, especially after Adam-ondi-Ahman was identified as a place of great spiritual significance.

Alexander L. Baugh

Mormon Settlement in Northern Missouri, 1839

Population figures for the number of Mormons living in northern Missouri just prior to their expulsion from the state in 1839 are difficult to determine because no census data exists. Although some Mormon narratives mention as many as 10,000–15,000 Latter-day Saints living in the region, these figures are probably too high. More careful estimates place the number of Mormons living in Caldwell County at approximately 5,000–5,500, with another 1,000–1,250 residing in Daviess County. Additionally, perhaps another 200–250 Mormons were scattered throughout other surrounding counties (Clay, Clinton, Ray, Carroll, and Livingston) or were living in nearby unincorporated regions. Therefore, at its height, the Mormon population of northern Missouri was likely around 6,000–7,000.

Missouri, 1836–1839

May 1836
Missouri Church leaders search out possible sites in “unincorporated” Ray County and begin making land purchases for a possible Mormon settlement

8 August 1836
W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer purchase 960 acres of land in behalf of the Church, including one square mile (640 acres) that became Far West

29 December 1836
Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs signs the bill creating Daviess County, specifically for Mormon settlement

3 July 1837
The foundation for the Far West Temple is excavated

14 March 1838
Joseph Smith arrives in Far West and takes up permanent residence

26 April 1838
Joseph Smith and several other Church leaders are taken into custody by Missouri militia officials

31 October 1838
The Mormons begin evacuating Caldwell County and temporarily relocate in Adams County

1 December 1838
Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, Lyman Wight, Alexander McRae, and Caleb Baldwin are put in Liberty Jail

February 1839
The Mormons begin evacuating Caldwell County and temporarily relocate in Adams County

4 July 1838
LDS leaders formally dedicate the Far West Temple site

16 April 1839
En route to Columbia, Joseph Smith and his prison companions are released by their guards and make their way to Quincy, Illinois

26 April 1839
Brigham Young and the Twelve return from Quincy, Illinois, to Far West to rededicate the Far West Temple site and officially begin their mission to Great Britain
Caldwell and Daviess Counties, 1839

From 1836 until early 1839, Caldwell County became the main settlement location for Mormons gathering to northern Missouri. Land parcels could be purchased from the government land office at nearby Lexington, generally for $1.25 per acre. Although Far West became the main place of Mormon gathering, smaller settlements were established on or near the creeks, typically bearing the name of the original inhabitants. These outlying settlements were generally scattered clusters of farms, not platted villages.

A few Mormons began settling Daviess County in 1837, but most came in 1838. Land transactions in Daviess were different than in Caldwell; because it was not yet open to government sale, settlers filed a preemptive claim for up to 160 acres. The tenant could then live on the property and make improvements with the expectation that when the federal government officially offered the land for sale, he would have the first rights to buy the land. Adam-ondi-Ahman (Diahman for short) soon became the largest settlement in the county (platted as a city much like Far West), but other Mormon settlements also arose, soon coming into conflict with the non-Mormon settlers, who were building towns such as Gallatin and Millport. Unlike Kirtland and Nauvoo, when the Mormons abandoned their settlements in 1839 (see p. 50), they were not re inhabited by other settlers but became ghost towns, eventually reverting to farmland.

Far West, Missouri

Located in Mirabile Township in Caldwell County, Far West was the largest Mormon settlement in northern Missouri. Although its existence was relatively short-lived (1836–39), it became the center of the religious, political, and social activities of the Latter-day Saints living in the region. Originally, Far West was to have been one square mile according to the City of Zion plan (see p. 44) but was soon expanded to two miles square (four times its original size). Joseph Smith took up permanent residence in the community on March 14, 1838, making it the new headquarters of the Church. On July 4, during a festive celebration, a site was dedicated for a temple on the town’s public square.

By the early summer of 1838, Far West was a thriving community consisting of 150 homes, several stores, blacksmith shops, a printing establishment, a school, and two hotels. Throughout the summer and early fall, the community continued to increase in number and size as companies of Mormon immigrants arrived from the East. As hostilities increased in the fall, large numbers of Mormons from outlying areas, particularly Daviess County, took up temporary residence in or near Far West before leaving the state beginning in early 1839.

Far West disappeared almost as quickly as it had appeared. Dissident John Whitmer, who had originally purchased most of the town site, turned the former town into a farm. On this aerial photograph, it is clear that the former town is now cropland; nothing more than a few foundations have been found.
The universal call to gather was received by the Prophet Joseph Smith during the second conference of the Restored Church, less than six months after its organization in 1830 (D&C 29:7–8). From then on, missionaries encouraged their converts to join the main body of the Saints, first in Kirtland (1831–37, p. 30), then Missouri (1831–38, pp. 32, 48), then Nauvoo (1839–46, p. 56).

At first the Saints were gathered from only the United States and Canada, until the British Mission was opened in 1837 (see p. 46). The Apostles baptized thousands during their second mission to Britain (1840–41), encouraging the new Saints to gather. Soon after the Apostles arrived, the first company of British Saints boarded a ship for America, followed by thousands more. These British immigrants gathered first to Nauvoo (1840–46) and later to Utah after the Saints selected a new gathering place in the valleys of Utah in 1847. Most entered the United States at New Orleans, since the cheapest way to reach Nauvoo was by steamboat. Church agents were stationed in Liverpool and New Orleans to charter transportation and help the Saints on their way.

By 1850, missionary work was expanded in Europe (see p. 94), and by 1852 Scandinavian converts began to gather along with the British, joined by converts from Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and France. With the increasing volume of immigration and Salt Lake City a thousand miles further away than Nauvoo, agents were dispatched to find the cheapest route to Utah, even if it were not the fastest. This was usually (but not always) through New York City, then on a train to the Midwest, then by wagon, handcart (see p. 106), or eventually rail across the plains and mountains.

By the end of the nineteenth century, about 90,000 converts had gathered to America, including approximately 55,000 British and 25,000 Scandinavians. In addition, missionaries were also finding success in Australia and New Zealand, and hundreds of those converts gathered to America via the Pacific Ocean.

By 1890, Church leaders began to encourage foreign converts to remain in their homelands. However, converts continued to gather by their own means, even after a stronger call to stay in 1911 from President Joseph F. Smith. The gathering in this form officially ended in the early 1950s, when President David O. McKay issued a call for Saints to “gather” together in their own homelands (see p. 158) and backed this call up through the creation of stakes, meetinghouses, and temples worldwide (see pp. 162, 182, 184).

Fred E. Woods

Immigration to Nauvoo began with a company of 40 British converts aboard the new ship RMS Britannia on June 6, 1840, led by English convert John Moon. After entering the United States at New York on July 20, the group divided. Some traveled via the Erie Canal and Great Lakes, reaching Nauvoo in early fall (the same route taken by the second British company a few months later); the others traveled through Philadelphia, Pittsburgh (where they were forced to spend the winter), and St. Louis, before arriving in Nauvoo on April 16, 1841. A third 1840 company sailed to New Orleans then took a riverboat to Nauvoo.

This third route turned out to be the fastest and cheapest, and almost all Nauvoo-era emigrants used it, traveling as large companies organized by Church agents in Liverpool and New Orleans. Occasionally, small groups traveled by their own means and by their own routes, such as three groups in 1841 that sailed from Bristol to Quebec. In total, nearly five thousand British Saints sailed to Nauvoo between 1840 and 1846 on 34 Mormon company voyages and 13 additional LDS voyages not chartered by the Church.

After arriving in Nauvoo in the first company, Francis Moon wrote back to his native homeland in England (published in the Millennial Star) to describe the favorable temporal and spiritual conditions that now surrounded him at Nauvoo. He referred to Nauvoo as a refuge in the troubled last days, further noting that a purpose of gathering the people of God in any age was to “build a sanctuary to the name of the Most High.” Moon’s glad tidings to his British homeland, other letters from early LDS immigrants, and counsel from general Church leaders encouraged the British Saints to gather.
Gathering to Utah was influenced by an “emigration revelation” received by Brigham Young near the banks of the Missouri River at Winter Quarters on January 14, 1847 (D&C 136:1). This instruction not only provided a much-needed administrative map to guide the Mormon pioneers across the plains to the Salt Lake Valley but also provided a divine pattern of principles and promises for all segments of the journey, whether by sail, rail, or trail.

Experienced leaders, such as returning missionaries, guided the Saints across the ocean, the eastern United States, and the Great Plains. LDS agents at Liverpool, New Orleans (1840–55), New York (1855–89), and frontier outfitting posts chartered transportation and offered provisions and trail supplies. Church leaders published updated travel guidelines in LDS periodicals such as the Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star, The Mormon (New York), the St. Louis Luminary, and The Frontier Guardian (Kanesville).

The rise of steam power greatly aided the Mormon gathering. After 1867, Latter-day Saints traveled by steamships, which were much faster than sailing vessels. Railroads were taken as far as they went; when the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, Latter-day Saints were able to cross the ocean and the eastern United States and reach Utah in about three weeks. This was in stark contrast to the earlier sailing voyage of a month (to New York) or two (to New Orleans) and several months to cross the United States by boat, wagon, and foot.

The Frontier Guardian (Kanesville).

In 1840–41 three LDS voyages entered North America at Quebec and three at New York before proceeding on to Nauvoo. All other voyages launched from Liverpool bound for Nauvoo (1840–46) disembarked at New Orleans. Vessels continued to use this same port, plying up the Mississippi and Missouri rivers to frontier outfitting posts until the route was changed to eastern ports in the spring of 1855. The reason for this alteration can be traced to a letter sent by President Brigham Young in 1854 to Elder Franklin D. Richards at Liverpool: “You are aware of the sickness liable to assail our unacclimated brethren on the Mississippi river, hence I wish you to ship no more to New Orleans, but ship to Philadelphia, Boston, and New York, giving preference in the order named.” However, the vast bulk of immigration passed through New York because Castle Garden, the first U.S. immigration depot, had been erected there in 1855.

In 1849, the Church launched a revolving loan (1849) known as the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF) to assist those who could not afford the high costs of traveling for months by land and sea to reach Zion. Once they were settled, they were expected to repay the loan to fund later immigrants; not everyone was able to repay, but enough did to keep the program running. In all, over 10,000 loans totaling over $1.2 million were made before the U.S. government shut it down in 1887 as part of their anti-polygamy laws.
Missionary Work

President Spencer W. Kimball was a champion of the spread of missionary work. In 1978, he said that “it seems clear to me—indeed, this impression weighs upon me, that the Church is at a point in its growth and maturity when we are at last ready to move forward in a major way. . . . We have paused on some plateaus long enough. Let us resume our journey forward and upward.” Two years later, he followed this up, saying, “We have already asked you and we now repeat that request, that every family, every night and every morning, in family prayer and in secret prayers, too, pray to the Lord to open the doors of other nations so that their people, too, may have the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Since these declarations, well over 150 new missions have been organized worldwide. A third of the new missions were created in South and Central America, more than 18 percent were organized in Asian countries, and a significant percentage of its missions were organized in other, non-U.S. countries.

David F. Boone

Missionary Training Centers

The earliest missionaries for the Church had little formal training. Most went to their assigned missions without sufficient financial support, depending on the hospitality of the local citizens, and preached in homes, on the streets, or wherever they could be heard. The School of the Prophets, established in 1833 in the Newel K. Whitney Store in Kirtland, was the first formal attempt to train men to better preach the gospel. Similar schools were established in subsequent Church centers, joining temples as places for the preparation and instruction for potential missionaries.

In 1925, the Mission Home opened in downtown Salt Lake City. Its location changed over the next 50 years (see p. 114), but it was crucial in providing a brief (usually one week) initiation to full-time missionary service for thousands of missionaries. However, during the 1960s, the number of missionaries rose from approximately 5,000 to over 13,000, necessitating a more significant service. In 1961, a Missionary Institute was established at Brigham Young University to teach Spanish; its success led to expansion in 1963 to become the Language Training Mission, teaching a variety of languages on the BYU campus. Church schools in Rexburg, Idaho, and Laie, Hawaii, were likewise utilized, the latter specializing in Polynesian and Asian languages.

In September 1976, a new facility opened adjacent to the BYU campus. The Missionary Training Center (MTC) continued to leverage the strong international and foreign language programs at the university, especially the large number of students who spoke foreign languages (many returned missionaries themselves) who could help teach the young American missionaries. The facilities in Utah, Idaho, and Hawaii were soon closed to consolidate all training at the MTC. As the number of American missionaries continued to rise, the MTC was enlarged. However, the 1970s also saw a massive increase in the number of missionaries from other countries, and the Church recognized that the most efficient way to train them was to construct regional MTCs closer to their homes. These centers, much smaller than the Provo site, typically had less need for language training but more need for doctrinal education, hence they were often built next to temples. In 1993, fifteen training centers were in operation worldwide.

In recent years, the costs of maintaining these facilities have increased far faster than transportation costs, such that, in countries such as South Korea and Japan, it has become more efficient to fly local missionaries to Provo for training. These and a few other MTCs are being closed or moved as needs continue to change.
Missionary Work by the Numbers

The numerical success of the LDS Missionary Program has waxed and waned during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in response to a variety of factors. Declines in the numbers of missionaries during the Great Depression and major wars were offset by an explosion in the number of missionaries in the early 1960s (due to the onset of the Baby Boom and the establishment of the standard age of 19 for young men to serve missions). This wave of missionaries was very successful in terms of baptisms due to improved training and standardized teaching practices, as well as questionable practices such as using sports to recruit youth into the Church. Although growth slowed over the next decade, it accelerated again during the 1980s, especially as Latin America became the dominant source of converts as well as a growing source of missionaries. Since then, the program has slowed significantly, due to a variety of factors: long-term demographic shifts leading to a lower proportion of young men and women in the Church, rising eligibility standards for both missionaries and their prospective converts, and the increasing secularization of the world. However, the Church still recognizes the importance of spreading its message around the world, and looks for every opportunity to expand that effort. The bottom graph shows where the Church has focused its missionary efforts over the years (compare with the distribution of members on p. 174). An early focus on the Pacific led to countries like Samoa and Tonga having a very high percentage LDS (see p. 238), and Europe has been a focus far beyond its share of conversions until very recently. The growth of missions in Latin America seems to be in sync with its growth in membership, while in Africa, membership is growing faster than any other region despite receiving relatively few missionaries. The growth of missions in Asia is likely limited due to restrictions on proselytizing in many countries.

Jonathan Napela led one of the earliest efforts to train missionaries for service beyond their native land. A recent convert in Hawaii, Napela felt that he could assist the missionaries arriving from Utah. In 1852, he began teaching them Hawaiian language and culture, providing them with housing and food if they would do their part and study. Although it was a considerable personal sacrifice for Brother Napela, these efforts proved to be greatly beneficial to the proselytizing success of the missionaries in Hawaii, predating official training efforts by the Church by over one hundred years.
The thirteen countries of South America consist of native Americans, Europeans, Africans brought to the continent as slaves, and various mixtures of the three groups, with groups of Asians in some cities. Early LDS interest in the continent was sparked by the desire to make contact with and convert the indigenous population, believed to be descendants of Book of Mormon peoples. Apostle Parley P. Pratt, his wife, and Rufus Allen went to Chile in 1851–52 as the first missionaries to South America. They returned after five months having had no success.

In 1925, the immigration of several German members to Argentina encouraged Church leadership to send three General Authorities to Buenos Aires: Apostle Melvin J. Ballard along with Rey L. Pratt and Rulon W. Wells of the First Council of the Seventy. They stayed six months and had seven baptisms. Reinhold Stoof, a German immigrant to Utah, served nine years as president of the South American Mission (1926–35). After two failed attempts to establish the Church among the native populations of northern Argentina, the missionaries concentrated on the immigrant population, primarily Germans, expanding to German communities in southern Brazil.

Growth was slow in all of South America until the 1960s, with only a small number of missionaries sent to South America, possibly due to a lingering semiofficial doctrine that the descendants of Israel were found primarily among northern Europeans rather than the southern European heritage of most immigrants to South America. However, the Church gradually expanded beyond Argentina and Brazil into neighboring countries and to the West Coast during the 1950s and 1960s. The Church was typically introduced into these new countries by American LDS expatriates working for multinational corporations.

During the 1960s, David O. McKay’s desire for growth worldwide deemphasized the focus on northern Europe, and he assigned A. Theodore Tuttle of the First Council of the Seventy to move with his family to Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1961 to direct the Church regionally. His leadership resulted in an increase in missions, missionaries, and baptisms, and the organization of numerous additional congregations. Elder Tuttle encouraged the local members and the leaders in Salt Lake City to change their thinking, suggesting that South America was no longer just a distant outpost but an integral part of the Church that deserved to participate fully in all the programs of the Church. That change was demonstrated in the 1960s and 1970s, with the organization of stakes in major cities, then temples in the 1970s and 1980s.

Another major change came with the priesthood revelation in 1978, which eliminated a Church-imposed barrier to growth, especially in Brazil (45 percent of its population is of African descent) and the three Guianan countries. The organization of Area Presidencies in the mid-1980s decentralized Church administration, enabling the development of local leaders. Between 1980 and 2000, there occurred a growth in the number of baptisms almost unparalleled.

Church Membership in South America

Membership in South America grew slowly and steadily until the late 1970s, when it suddenly exploded (due to the priesthood revelation and other factors), beginning a 20-year period of phenomenal growth. As a result, Brazil and Chile have the highest number of members in the region, while Chile and Uruguay have the highest LDS percentage of the population.

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The three countries of Guiana are ethnically more similar to the Caribbean than to the rest of South America, and the recent introduction of the Church is typical of the West Indies. They are still in the early stages of growth.

Since 1978, growth in Brazil has been especially strong among the millions of Afro-Brazilians, especially in the major cities and the northeast coast.