

# The Religious and Family Background of Brigham Young

Rebecca Cornwall and Richard F. Palmer

Mormon origins, writes Jonathan Hughes in *The Vital Few*, are deeply embedded in the institutional experiments of nineteenth-century America.<sup>1</sup> Social and religious upheaval triggered by the Revolutionary War included a burst of Americans across the Appalachians—and the pioneering movement was accompanied by significant religious innovation. Nowhere, poses Whitney Cross, was religious upheaval more apparent and more intense than in western New York state.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere else, even before the War of 1812, does Hughes' description apply better: "Sects multiplied, vanished, reappeared in a new guise; latter-day prophets abounded in a whirlwind of Christian heresy and deviation. And in that heated religious atmosphere there appeared a new faith of stupendous novelty"—Mormonism, with its prophet who had seen God, his Indian Bible translated from gold plates, his grant of divine priesthood power to every male adherent.<sup>3</sup>

As its devotees multiplied, the founding prophet supervised the grooming for leadership of another son of the Burned-over District, Brigham Young, who even before Joseph Smith's assassination in western Illinois, became a controlling influence in the Council of Twelve Apostles and directed the emigration of thousands of British Saints to America. After 1844 he supervised the Mormon settlement of the Great Basin, established schools and irrigation companies, and made a permanent mark on the economy of the western United States. Four generations later he was still re-

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<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Hughes, *The Vital Few: American Economic Progress and its Protagonists* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), p. 74.

<sup>2</sup>Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York: 1800-1850* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950).

<sup>3</sup>Hughes, *The Vital Few*, p. 75.

garded as a man with "that peculiar American compulsion to conquer and possess the continent," a man who "abhorred the great market economy" of Babylon (the United States), and abhorred its unwholesome moral fetishes to boot.<sup>4</sup>

But Brigham Young, until age thirty-one, was a painter and carpenter of less-than-modest origins from western New York. He was raised by parents who inclined toward the Lorenzo Dow, excitable brand of Methodism and, from age fourteen on, sought a peaceful, regulated, *unexcitable* life of hoped-for prosperity. He married a Methodist but mildly chastized his younger brother for taking too seriously the "dearth" of true biblical religion in the world. Though dutiful enough a believer, he preferred to be known as an honest, hard-working, thorough craftsman who dealt justly with his neighbors and was a friend to all, even his own wife and children. How does one find in such beginnings the leader of perhaps the most sensational institutional experiment to come out of the American frontier? Where in Brigham's roots are the strands of secret hopes and conflicts which somehow got caught up and worked by the social and religious currents of his day to produce a Latter-day Saint loyalist *sans par*? Clues must lie in Brigham's family and religious inheritance—in the religious cauldron of western New York and in the catharsis of frontier Methodism.

"My ancestors," said Brigham Young to a Great Basin congregation of similar New England background, "were some of the most strict religionists that lived upon the earth. You no doubt can say the same about yours."<sup>5</sup> He referred not to his Pilgrim ancestors, but to his father and grandfather whose adult lives were encompassed by the long metamorphosis of Puritan theology into democracy. They attended church in an era in which Puritanism underwent secularization. Church membership was still synonymous with citizenship. The minister was still the social protagonist of a village or neighborhood; he controlled the schools and his voice was significant in political questions. But the Great Revival of 1740, whose intent was to reinvigorate colonial Protestantism with signs of piety and inner dedication, had divided New England Congregationalism.<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Edwards, its distinguished protagonist, was deeply influenced by George Whitefield, who preached in the colonies in 1742 with enthusiastic reception. By

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>5</sup>Brigham Young, sermon of 15 August 1852, published in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1854-86), 6:290 (hereafter cited as *JD*).

<sup>6</sup>See Edwin Scott Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1939).

Whitefield's second visit the reception had more than cooled, and the cooling had little to do with theology, for Whitefield's flocks were characterized by "disorderly conduct" and emotional emphasis on inner conversion. Those who opposed Whitefield and Edwards became known as the "Old Lights," and they had their day. But the New Lights attracted followers who believed Whitefield's method made religion vital. He put fizz into flat wine. While they lost the immediate battle, they won the war by setting a tone for western American religion for 150 years.<sup>7</sup>

Brigham Young's ancestry was represented by both Old and New Lights. His great-grandfather Ebenezer Goddard was born and raised in Boston. When he married and took up land in Framingham, Ebenezer "fell in with the opinions of John Wesley," believing that the colonial ministers of the day had strayed from strict biblicism.<sup>8</sup> "Like the Jews," he believed in rigid observance of the Sabbath. A son-in-law illustrated this common colonial attitude with a story in which a Boston merchant was fined five shillings for kissing his wife on the Sunday he returned from a long voyage.<sup>9</sup> Ebenezer believed in reading the Bible and holding it the only standard for human behavior and values.

John Howe, another of Brigham Young's great-grandfathers, was the first town councilman when Hopkinton, adjoining Framingham, was chartered in 1730. It was Howe, representing the town, who went to Boston to fetch Samuel Barrett of the North Church to be Hopkinton's pastor. Barrett, and John Howe as a leading townsman, were "steadfast and immoveable" through the "troublous times" of dissension and disaffection over the Great Revival and the Half-Way Covenant, an attempt to renew flagging church participation by permitting communion for persons of good intent who were nevertheless unable to meet rigid membership standards.<sup>10</sup> In congregational alignment John Howe was an Old Light.

William Young, Brigham's great-grandfather on his father's side, was a friend of Barrett in Boston, but also a sympathizer with Scotch-Presbyterians who broke away from churches in Boston and nearby villages such as Hopkinton because of their dis-

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.; and Joseph Allen, *The Worcester Association and its Presidents: A History of Four Ministerial Associations: Marlborough, Worcester Old, Lancaster, Worcester New* (Boston: Nichols and Noyes, 1868).

<sup>8</sup>Samuel Adams Drake, *History of Middlesex County, Containing Carefully Prepared Histories of Every City and Town in the County* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1880), p. 485.

<sup>9</sup>John Haven in a speech at a meeting of the Young and Haven families in Nauvoo, 8 January 1845, minutes in Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah (cited hereafter as Church Archives).

<sup>10</sup>Allen, *Worcester Association*, pp. 60-61.

satisfaction with the Half-Way Covenant. A clause in his will provided money for the Boston Scotch-Presbyterian congregation.<sup>11</sup>

If quantity of family lore is an indication, the Goddards were much more an influence on Brigham and his brothers and sisters than the Howes or Youngs. Ebenezer Goddard was "much respected and beloved for his upright conduct and benevolent principles and disposition." Indeed, in his young manhood he was appointed sheriff of Middlesex County. "Grandfather was a man that would do justice in the strictest manner to every one that employed him," wrote Brigham Young's sister, Fanny. "Therefore many widows called upon him to be an administrator to their estate, [in] which capacity he always gave entire satisfaction, and had many very warm and devoted friends."<sup>12</sup>

Although "not much inclined to the marvelous," Ebenezer and his wife were to have experiences that harked back to witchcraft days and that they could never account for by rational means. In the course of defending a widow's property, he came to odds with the leader of a "peculiar group of religionists" who lived secluded from the village and married in an unorthodox manner. About this time strange phenomena began to occur in the household. Papers disappeared from locked desks and were found dry in the well; silt was repeatedly found in the bottom of the fresh milk can. At first a black servant was blamed, chastized several times, then whipped upon one too many infractions. But one morning Grandmother Sybil Goddard watched her day cap fall from Dick's apron and tear itself in half, one half sailing of its own accord up the chimney as she caught the other. Next the hearthfire was discovered smothered by family books, and the last straw was when Sybil watched her twin babies' clothing appear suddenly down the stovepipe. When she looked the babies were naked, and no one else was in the house. It appeared to be a good, old-fashioned poltergeist.

They sent for many ministers, the most devout and holy men they could find. They got sixteen together at their house and they seemed to feel the importance of the occasion. They fasted two days and nights and the third day they spent in fervent prayer. There was one man among them that seemed more intent upon the subject than any other; he could not be denied; he pled with the Lord as a

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<sup>11</sup>Drake, *History of Middlesex County*, pp. 485-86; William Young's will, copy in possession of John Young Family Association; and Susa Young Gates, "Family Memories," notes for a biography of Brigham Young in the Susa Young Gates Collection, Utah State Historical Society Archives. Mrs. Gates' notes include unsubstantiated, even contradictory, assertions. Thus some of her statements must be weighed against other evidence.

<sup>12</sup>Genealogical letter written by Fanny Young, sister of President Brigham Young, to her brother Phineas Howe Young, 1 January 1845, microfilm copy in Genealogical Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (cited hereafter as Genealogical Archives).

man would plead for his life, that he would break the power of the destroyer, that he would rebuke him and command him to leave the house and family forever. Towards night, on the third day when he was pouring out his soul with such fervour, and they were all united with him, in a moment there seemed to be a shock through the whole house, not of distress or sorrow, but of joy and assurance that there was a God in the heavens, whose ears could be penetrated with the cries of his children, and who was not slow to answer the prayers of those that put their trust in him. From that hour not a thing of the kind ever took place in their house or anywhere about them.<sup>13</sup>

Until Ebenezer's death, Fanny continued, he mourned his beating of the black servant.

While there appear to be elements of the apocryphal in the tale, it has a certain value in telling us that: (1) Brigham's ancestors experienced spiritual phenomena impressive enough to remember and retell; (2) the family had no rational explanation for these experiences, leading them to question some of their religious assumptions; and (3) it convinced them that God was real and nearer than they had supposed.

Ebenezer's daughter (Brigham's grandmother) gained from this inheritance some eccentric views. She believed that Jacob's ladder was not broken but that angels still descended and ascended it.<sup>14</sup> In later years she countenanced "a very powerful revival" in the town of Colistown and regretted that "in the town of Hopkinton there has not been any particular attention to religion."<sup>15</sup> This was the grandmother Brigham mentioned in several sermons many years after leaving the East, referring to her economy and thrift in taking care of her one silk dress and being satisfied with little wealth.<sup>16</sup> Her memory was kept alive by parents wanting to instill certain virtues into their children.

By and large, the Goddards and Howes appear to have been conventional New England freemen, farmers of more or less established condition who stayed out of debt, were known and respected in the village, made their wives moderately comfortable, perhaps helped send a nephew to Yale or Harvard to become a minister. Their children were christened at Christ Church and went to subscription school, singing school, and church socials.<sup>17</sup>

Susannah Goddard Howe's daughter Nabby (Brigham's mother) became "quite a reformer."<sup>18</sup> An invalid on the frontier,

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Haven, family meeting of 8 January 1845.

<sup>15</sup>Letter of Susannah Brigham Hwe, 5 August 1827, published in Susa Young Gates, "Mothers of the Latter-day Prophets: Abigail Howe Young," *Juvenile Instructor* 59 (January 1924):6.

<sup>16</sup>*JD* 19:74 (19 July 1877) and *JD* 15:222-23 (9 October 1872).

<sup>17</sup>Haven, family meeting of 8 January 1845; and Gates, "Mothers," p. 4.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

she was sometimes fetched by neighboring families to spend the day giving counsel at the houses of newlyweds. She had the frugality of her grandmother; "neatness, as the old term was used, belonged to her as of inherited right . . . (she was) exceedingly methodical and orderly."<sup>19</sup> She is portrayed by Brigham's daughter Susa as having had a lively sense of humor, being "the prettiest girl in the county," with her sisters very popular at socials, and a fine singer.<sup>20</sup>

On Brigham Young's father's side of the family the tradition is more sketchy. A letter written in 1845 by Brigham's sister Fanny Young reported that their grandfather, Joseph Young, came alone from England with the reluctant blessing of his physician-father, William Young. According to Fanny he practiced medicine in Boston until losing his money and prestige through gambling and drinking, then removed to Hopkinton or Framingham where he resumed practice, married Widow Treadway, and struggled unsuccessfully to fight off his sins.<sup>21</sup>

The records show that Joseph was the son of William Young, profession not given, of Boston. Joseph died in middle age from a blow by a falling post or limb while crossing a field one night, leaving ten children including an infant. Among his personal effects listed on the death records were medical instruments. According to Fanny, "as soon as Dr. Joseph's sleeping dust . . . was decently committed to the grave, every man to whom he owed a dollar was on the wing."<sup>22</sup> Reverend Barrett, as executor of Joseph's will, sold the widow's farm to pay debts and every possession covered by law was confiscated. "The Selectmen of the Town found places for most of her children and bound them out."<sup>23</sup>

John (Brigham's father) and his brother Joseph, Jr., at ages six and four, were bound out as servants to Colonel John Jones, son of William Young's New Hampshire friend and one of the few truly wealthy landowners in Hopkinton. Jones' estate was in Ashland (first called Unionville), four miles from Hopkinton, where he had married the daughter of the previous owner and acquired a gristmill. Over the years a cluster of mills and shops had grown up there. Most of the people who worked in them "lived in town," commuting from Hopkinton.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>"Notes on Ancestry," Susa Young Gates Collection, Utah State Historical Society.

<sup>20</sup>Haven, family meeting of 8 January 1845; and Gates, "Mothers," p. 4.

<sup>21</sup>Fanny Young to Phinehas Howe Young, 1 January 1845.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.; probate records of Middlesex County.

<sup>23</sup>Fanny Young to Phinehas Howe Young, 1 January 1845.

<sup>24</sup>Colonel John Jones was a local justice of the peace, son of Colonel John Jones of the Massachusetts General Court, born 1722 and died 1797. See Edwin P. Conklin, *Middlesex County and its People*, 4 volumes (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1927), 2:486-95. For history of Ashland, see Drake, *History of Middlesex County*, pp. 227-32.

John Young entertained his children with tales of his upbringing in the Jones household. John described the Colonel as “a wicked, merry man” and the Colonel’s wife as a selfish, grasping woman who took a disliking to John. Once when John ran away from one of her whippings, the Colonel was obliged to take the boy to the barn and administer punishment. Once in the barn, the master stomped his foot, cried “You dog, why did you run away from your mistress,” and warned John not to do it again. As a father John himself was free with whippings (“It used to be a word and a blow with him but the blow came first,” Brigham said), so his sons, gathered around the hearth, must have listened with particular glee to the stories of their father being whipped.<sup>25</sup>

At age thirteen John ran away to enlist in the Continental Army, serving off and on for the duration of the war. He must have had the Colonel’s implicit approval, although Jones did later turn in John’s enlistment papers for payment of taxes.<sup>26</sup> At the close of the war John returned to work for the Colonel not as a servant, but as a hired man, “at good wages.” “The Colonel said he was worth more to him than any two strangers he could get.” John worked for him for at least two more years and perhaps even after his indenture was up.<sup>27</sup>

John Young was small and wiry (5’3” when he enlisted, probably several inches taller at maturity), light-complexioned, gregarious, ambitious, and adventurous but upright in morals. Someone in the Jones household had evidently attended to his moral training. He had been a favorite of some of the kitchen help and was quick to assess and satisfy others’ expectations. The master was expected to take or provide transportation for his servants to Sunday meeting. Ashland was equally distant from Framingham, Upton, and Hopkinton and they could have gone to any of these meetinghouses.

Hopkinton was a fair-sized township in which not everyone was personally acquainted but everybody had heard of everybody else and just about all were related by ancestry or marriage. John became acquainted with Nabby Howe, perhaps at meeting or at a social on the Jones estate—or maybe at singing school or grammar school. Colonel Jones was likely required by the indenture agreement to provide the orphan with several years’ schooling, and John, who later became the first ordained patriarch of the LDS Church, did learn to read and write.

Nabby’s parents, especially her father, objected strenuously to a

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<sup>25</sup>Fanny Young to Phinehas Howe Young, 1 January 1845.

<sup>26</sup>S. Dilworth Young, *Here is Brigham* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), pp. 15-16.

<sup>27</sup>Fanny Young to Phinehas Howe Young, 1 January 1845.

match with "the little orphan."<sup>28</sup> John could guarantee no inheritance or livelihood in the event of Nabby's widowhood. His father had been a drunkard and a gambler and he had been raised with the black servants in the kitchen of a worldly man; Colonel Jones' daughter Olive had not yet married the new reverend Nathaniel Howe. But in 1785 Nabby, at age nineteen, married John Young in the Congregationalist Church; Elijah Fitch was pastor at the time.<sup>29</sup> They apparently set up house in Ashland, John perhaps continuing to work in one of Colonel Jones' enterprises.<sup>30</sup>

This was a time of unrest in the new states. The American Revolution had wearied villages, broken old ties, and cleared the frontier for settlement. Sons of families which had resided in the same county or township four generations were now uprooted. That John stayed indicates several possibilities: first and foremost, that he felt there was a future for him in Hopkinton and that for the first years, at least, he was able to provide for his young, growing family. Second, that there were compelling ties to the area—perhaps the claims of parents, perhaps a preference for village society. At this time he may have been a craftsman and millworker rather than a farmer. Third, he may have fully intended to go but hadn't yet accumulated the resources to purchase a favorable site. Last, John was a congenial man who liked to please his associates and father-in-law and perhaps aspired to acceptance by the society which had labelled him "the little orphan."

There must have been characteristics about Hopkinton which John did not like. Post-Revolutionary Hopkinton was "a strongly democratic town," which could be translated to mean not so much a town that supported democratic government and the war (although they sent their share of soldiers to General George Washington), as that they opposed hierarchical control of any kind. Like other small towns, Hopkinton had been hit by war debts and now complained about the cost of maintaining a state and later a federal government. The General Court ought not to sit in Boston, citizens complained. Lawyers fees were too heavy, administrators' salaries too large, and servants of the court too many. The state ought not to be sending money to the national Congress with its own debts unpaid.<sup>31</sup> Only one Hopkinton citizen, in postwar election, voted for funding state armed vessels.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Drake, *History of Middlesex County*, pp. 485-94.

<sup>30</sup>It is speculation that John and Nabby settled in Ashland. In 1869, in response to a letter from Maria L. Hayden of Ashland in which she asked about his residence there, Brigham responded: "I was not born till after they had moved from that section." Brigham Young letter, 20 March 1869, photocopy in Genealogical Archives.

<sup>31</sup>Drake, *History of Middlesex County*, pp. 485-92.



Nabby's father Phineas Howe was one of the writers of a letter defending the majority vote which was criticized in Boston.<sup>32</sup>

The same spirit cropped up in local religious matters. Based on his gradual accomplishments which did not begin to show until after 1800, Reverend Howe's pastorate was called "one of the longest and most successful" in Hopkinton. If so, his years before 1800 must have been truly rugged. For during one of the "successful" years, "borne down with the fatigues of manual labor" and pastoral duties besides, Reverend Howe petitioned for increased support. He tried to get the elders to buy his house for him. "This passed in the negative by a large majority." He asked them to increase the public and private subscription to the church fund. "This passed in the negative by a large majority." He asked them for several other measures to lighten his burdens and facilitate the function of the pastorage. "These passed in the negative by a large majority."<sup>33</sup>

John, with his skeptical eye toward respectability, and Nabby, with her Reform heritage, apparently felt an indifference toward mainstream Hopkinton life which was worked upon by economic setbacks. Through the family Bible we know that John's first foray into the West came in 1788 or 1789. Rhoda's birthplace is listed in the family Bible as Platauva District, New York.<sup>34</sup> This was a "vast forest wilderness where fish and game were plentiful" on the eastern side of Catskills. Dutch immigrants had been farming there since 1770; a number of Revolutionary War veterans had arrived after 1782. John's older brother William Young had died there in 1784 and John may have taken up his land, or he may have taken his own. Durham was a freehold, meaning that it lay unclaimed between patents and was therefore open to homesteading. George Stimson of Hopkinton had left for Durham in 1784 with one son, sending a year later for his wife and eight remaining children. Increase Claflin and his brother John of Framingham, who were related to the Goddards by marriage, left for Durham in the winter of 1786 on an ox sled. A new turnpike (well-prepared road) laid out between Windham and Durham in 1789 and 1790 made the journey easier.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 494.

<sup>33</sup>D. Hamilton Hurd, *History of Middlesex County, Mass.* 3 vols. (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1890), 3:795.

<sup>34</sup>A story in Fanny's genealogical letter, which describes a tearful welcome by the Howe grandparents, may refer to the family's return from Green County. Otherwise, our sources are the Young family Bible, cited in Young, *Here is Brigham*, p. 18; and Brigham Young's Manuscript History, p. v, Church Archives, in which he states that Rhoda was born "in Platauva District, New York (where the village of Durham now stands, in Green Co., New York) Sept. 10, 1789."

<sup>35</sup>Mrs. J. Van Vechten Vedder, *History of Greene County, 1651-1800*, Volume 1 (Catskill, N.Y.: County Historical Society, 1927), pp. 13-15, 74, 121, 127.

It may have been in Durham that John and Nabby began their formal tenure as Methodists. Methodist itinerants had preached to small Boston congregations in 1772, 1784, and 1778, and the Youngs may have had contact with Lee and Freeborn Garrettson, who had established a lively circuit in the counties to the south of Greene County and would have been venturing into nearby settlements. The Newburg Circuit saw three very active years, 1789–1791, in which 171 settlers were baptized by Methodist elders, a notable achievement considering Dutch Reformed, Congregationalist, and Presbyterian ministers were also active in the area.<sup>36</sup> “Often a Methodist circuit rider called at a not-yet-finished cabin before the mud in his stick chimney was dry or weight poles had been positioned on the roof.”<sup>37</sup> The Methodists had a “mobile army of itinerants” who could be present wherever a grave was opened or an infant delivered. Grieved one minister: “The Methodists by their manner of supplying preachers have had great advantages in our new settlements.”<sup>38</sup>

It is family tradition that John returned to Hopkinton in 1790 at the pleading of Nabby’s parents—and possibly because he discovered that Durham was wilder country and farming more formidable without the help of sons than he had anticipated. “I remember when we came to our Grandfather Howe’s,” recalled Brigham’s older sister. “All the family flew out to receive us, and caught the three children (one older and one younger than myself) in their arms while my grandmother and mother wept.”<sup>39</sup> They established themselves on the south slope of Sadler’s Hill. That year the first son, John, Jr., was born. He joined Nancy and Fanny, who had been born during the first residence in Hopkinton, and Rhoda, who was born in Durham, Greene County, New York.

For another ten years the family remained in Hopkinton, presumably farming. During that period Nabby, Susannah, Joseph, and Phinehas were born—all of these before the birth of Brigham. A family of eight children put considerable strain on John’s earning capacity. During this period the older daughters must have been tutored in one of the subscription schools of Hopkinton, as

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<sup>36</sup>George Claude Baker, *An Introduction to the History of Early New England Methodists, 1789–1839* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1941), p. 5; Methodist Records of Newburgh, New York Circuit, 1789–1836, microfilm, Genealogical Archives; and Arthur C. M. Kelly, comp., “Zion’s Reformed Lutheran Church, Athans, Greene County, New York, Baptism Records, 1704–1899,” typescript, 1974; Vedder, *History of Greene County*, pp. 186–202; Records of Christ Episcopal Church at Greenville, Greene County, New York, 1805– , microfilm, Genealogical Archives.

<sup>37</sup>William Warren Sweet, *The Methodists* (New York: Cooper Square Publications, 1964), p. 57.

<sup>38</sup>Baker, *Early New England Methodism*, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup>Genealogical letter of Fanny Young.

Fanny developed a facility with handwriting, spelling, and language.

Surely by now John and Nabby Young were affiliated with Methodism. Jesse Lee had created a circuit which ran from Boston up the coast to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Methodism appealed to John, who believed that a man might hold to an orthodox creed yet be a meager Christian, just as a man "may keep inside of statute law, and yet be a meager citizen."<sup>40</sup>

Although John probably flinched at the flowery language of some Methodists who claimed that "the Churches of the Pilgrims were in a strange decay, worn with controversy and smitted with the broad and baneful light of half-heartedness," he certainly would have agreed that there were many who were spiritually dead, with only the form and some of the doctrine left.<sup>41</sup>

The circuit riders appealed to struggling, frustrated, unlanded farmers like John. Methodist itinerants were graduates of "Brush College—more ancient though less pretentious than Yale or Harvard or Princeton." For a library they had "the Word of God, the Discipline, and the Hymn Book, supplemented by trees and brooks and stones." The college "parchments of literary honors were the horse and saddlebags."<sup>42</sup> Though they asked for money, these itinerants seldom got it, and they were known to be self-sacrificing. For this reason few were married; in Virginia only three of eighty-four preachers had families.<sup>43</sup> The Methodist circuitrider became a folk figure for his presence in good weather or ill, in receptive or hostile surroundings. Hence the folk saying: "There's nobody out but crows and Methodist preachers."<sup>44</sup> If they were uneducated for the most part, homely and rough-mannered, the circuit riders had grit. They attracted a class like themselves—machinists, artisans, seamen, farmers with little education and not much stock in society.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Methodists rejected the harsh, punitive, exclusivist doctrines of Puritanism and Anglicanism: predestination and limited atonement. Laymen such as John Young could understand the open, ecumenical tone of John Wesley and American Bishop Francis Asbury, who were impatient with the theological quibbl-

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<sup>40</sup>A. B. Hyde, D. D., *The Story of Methodism: Tracing the Rise and Progress of That Wonderful Religious Movement, etc.* 2 vols. (Springfield, Mass.: Willey, 1888), 2:71.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>42</sup>Sweet, *The Methodists*, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>44</sup>Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River—The Story of the Great Revivalists and their Impact upon Religion in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), p. 46.

<sup>45</sup>Baker, *Early New England Methodism*, pp. 17-18.

ings that divided sects. Methodism, at least in its origin, was interested in the heart of religion—inner conversion.<sup>46</sup>

John Young appreciated the Methodist emphasis on the “Witness of the Spirit” and “Christian Perfection.” “A perfect shrub is not one incapable of further growth but the one best fitted to grow into a tree.” “Christian Perfection was the cleansing, disinfecting work of the Holy Ghost in hearts surrendered.”<sup>47</sup> There was room in Methodism for the unsanctified to become sanctified. It offered a creed to match the hopes of an upwardly-mobile frontier generation: egalitarianism, tolerance, and, contradictorily, an emphasis on performance. Works were the common Methodist’s expression of John Wesley’s abstractions.

In 1801 John Young made another try at fortune. In southwest Vermont a fifty-year-old controversy was finally settled between absentee landowners who had obtained their patents before the Revolutionary War, and settlers who had actually lived on the land, made improvements, and organized into towns and governments. In 1780 a key plot of Whitingham land called Fitch’s patent was conveyed to settlers. Land promoters obtained much of it and in 1797 Vermont itself, having become a state, redivided the still controversial patent according to actual use or disuse. This set off a mild rush to the area. Between 1791 and 1810 Whitingham quadrupled in population; in 1800 it had 868 persons or about 200 families. Among the Massachusetts families to remove to Whitingham were the Wheelers, Fullers, Faulkners, Sawyers—and Youngs.<sup>48</sup>

On 18 November 1800, John bought for a dollar-an-acre his fifty-acre Lot 21 of Fitch’s Land Grant from his sister’s wealthy husband, John Mosely. He now had two sons old enough to help clear land (John, Jr., was ten, and Joseph was eight), and probably the offer was too good to pass up. In January 1801, wanting to be already established by spring harrowing, John moved the family one hundred miles, probably along the Worcester road via Williamstown, to Whitingham. Here they engaged in “opening new farms,” meaning that they hired out to others besides clearing their own land.<sup>49</sup>

There is some evidence that the move was a sore point in fam-

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<sup>46</sup>Hyde, *The Story of Methodism*, p. 71.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>48</sup>A. Augustine Butterfield, *Some Facts about the Early History of Whitingham, Vermont* (Brattleboro, Vermont: The Vermont Printing Co., 1916), pp. 14-50; and Hamilton Child, comp., *Gazetteer & Business Directory of Windham County, Vermont, 1729-1884* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Printed at the Journal Office, 1884), pp. 22-70, 304.

<sup>49</sup>Young, *Here is Brigham*, p. 22; Elden J. Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801-1844* (Salt Lake City: Elden J. Watson, 1968), p. iv. Originally published in Volumes 25-26 of the *Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* (Liverpool).

ily relations. Rhoda, twelve years old, was left behind "with Grandfather" (presumably Phineas Howe) perhaps as a placation.<sup>50</sup> And it seems to have been in Whitingham that Nabby had her first serious sick spell. The infant Brigham (named for his great-grandmother Sybil Brigham) was born in Whitingham 1 June 1801. He was nursed from the bottle and cared for by the second daughter, Fanny, who was now fourteen years old. The baby clung to Fanny; "no one could pacify him but my sister Fanny," and he cried lustily if anyone else tried. In good weather Fanny would carry him on one hip while she milked the cow, which also refused to be managed by anyone else. Fanny seems to have become a substitute mother figure for the family; she is described as "gentle and deft-handed" and, besides nursing Brigham, later took charge of Lorenzo and Louisa, who were born after Nabby was mostly bedridden with consumption.<sup>51</sup> Children born after Brigham were Louisa and Lorenzo Dow.

Whitingham tradition suggests that Brigham's father "was a poor basketmaker."<sup>52</sup> There could be truth to this; it may be that John's land turned out to be less than promising in location and quality. It was steep, rocky, and not part of the fertile but narrow riverbed plots. Dissatisfied or unable to meet payments, John deeded back his property to his brother-in-law after only two years.<sup>53</sup> He may have thought the prospects had been misrepresented to him—the family later spoke with less than admiration of Joseph Mosely. We know, too, that Brigham's older sisters wove straw hats for the family and perhaps for townspeople and that this was a common way for New England village women to earn grocery money.<sup>54</sup> Brigham once said: "My father was a poor, honest, hard-working man . . . but the Lord never would permit him to get rich."<sup>55</sup>

If he did not get rich, John Young gained some significant associates in Whitingham. The original owner of the plot on which John's lot stood was Nathan Whiting, to become one of the six founders of Vermont's Reformed Methodism. Even before the Youngs arrived the small but vocal Methodist congregation in

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<sup>50</sup>Fanny Young to Phineas Howe Young, 1 January 1845.

<sup>51</sup>James A. Little, "Historical Items on the Life of Brigham Young," notes and research materials collected by Little for a biography of Brigham Young, James A. Little Collection, Church Archives; Little, "Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 14 (1946):25-132; and Gates, "Family Memories" and draft for chapter on Ancestry of Brigham Young, Utah State Historical Society.

<sup>52</sup>Child, *Gazetteer & Business Directory of Windham County*, p. 304.

<sup>53</sup>Whitingham Deeds, Windham County Clerk, p. 675.

<sup>54</sup>See "Letters of a Proselyte, the Hascall-Pomeroy Correspondence," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 25 (January 1957):68.

<sup>55</sup>JD 9:104-5.

Whitingham had been disillusioned with the authoritarian tenor of Episcopal Methodism. They had not yet seceded; circuit riders were sent by the annual conference to the area beginning in 1798 and continuing until 1820. But, along with many other congregations, the group had acquired democratic sentiments; they wanted representation in the selection of local exhorters, in the use of church property, and in the decision-making at annual and quarterly conferences. Moreover, the Calvinism in Whitingham was a mild brand; the creed of the Congregationalist Church established in 1795 resembled Arminianism more than Antinomianism.<sup>56</sup>

Having little to react to, Whitingham methodists turned inward. They concluded that American Methodism, which had originated as a cleanser of Anglicanism, had developed its own "pomp, ministerial oppressions, and selfish affections." "Faith and its operations" had been allowed by the episcopacy to lapse. The reformers "dared not limit faith, except by a thus saith the Lord"; they fully believed in the evidences of faith: temporal as well as moral healing and a variety of spiritual gifts.<sup>57</sup> Their attitude could be contrasted with that of Nathan Bangs, New England itinerant who one day felt faith operating in the form of a "prompting" to walk through the snow to a remote cabin. The impression was forceful; he dutifully made the long wade through the snow to the cabin but found not a soul there. Bangs "gave up trusting impressions."<sup>58</sup> An early Reformed Methodist would never have given up trusting impressions. He would have concluded that either he had misread the prompting, or the soul in the cabin had not listened to one.

In later years John Young evidenced sympathy with unorthodox Methodists such as Lorenzo Dow and eventually affiliated with Reformed Methodists transplanted to New York state. Said his son Lorenzo: "Within my recollection he was always a Methodist until he was a Mormon. He was at first an episcopal Methodist but afterwards, in common with many others, became a Reformed Methodist. These undertook to practice some of the doctrines now taught by the Latter-day Saints." Among these "doctrines" were baptism by immersion and faith healing.<sup>59</sup>

Early in 1804 the family moved one hundred miles southwest into the Whitestown or Chenango region of eastern New York. Two large land patents had been promoted and many Vermont

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<sup>56</sup>John Winebrenner, *History of All the Religious Denominations in the United States* (Harrisburg, Pa.: John Winebrenner, 1849), p. 383. Butterfield, *Early History of Whitingham, Vermont*, p. 81, prints the articles of belief of this Whitingham Congregation.

<sup>57</sup>Winebrenner, *History of All the Religious Denominations*, p. 383.

<sup>58</sup>Hyde, *The Story of Methodism*, p. 120.

<sup>59</sup>Little, "Historical Items."

farmers took the bait, including the Joseph Smith, Sr., family who settled temporarily in the southern part of what later became Chenango County. The area, especially north near Sherburne, was more sparsely settled than Whitingham. In 1807 only thirty citizens voted in the region. No good road entered the county until a year after the Youngs came, when the Oxford-Catskill turnpike was finished from the Hudson River Valley and a bridge was built across the Unadilla River. Land in 1805 was three dollars an acre but went up as the area became more accessible.<sup>60</sup> The population center of the Chenango district was twenty miles south of Sherburne, in Guilford and Unadilla, which lay between the Unadilla and Susquehanna rivers. This was where the Youngs came to trade. The entire region grew so rapidly, with so many town divisions, that though Louisa was born in the same place as Lorenzo, her birthplace is recorded as being in a different town.

Chenango County was settled by the same western Connecticut and Massachusetts families who were "twice removed" from deep New England, having tried Vermont already. They were joined by Pennsylvanians who had moved up the Susquehanna River Valley. Often they came in large family groups, sometimes individually, occasionally as village units.<sup>61</sup> Like John they would have been consigned to survival on scrubby farms back home, and they were not resigned to such a subsistence. They had the Yankee ambition, or, as the first Goddard to come to Boston from old England was described, "they came to inspect the area and liked this new country and the large possibilities here."<sup>62</sup>

These fourth-generation Puritans liked to settle with hometown people and kinfolk, and they brought their customs and religion with them. Or perhaps their ministers followed them to keep them to the faith. It was the New Lights, enthusiasts of the Great Awakening and their children, who had tended to move west and north; now they moved into New York and brought their revivalistic nature along. They were encouraged by Presbyterian, Methodist, and even Congregationalist ministers who worked the area, but especially by Methodists. There was Lorenzo Dow, who came through New York about 1807 bringing his camp meeting technique which some found too blazing and unmanageable. "Crazy Dow" was only one of the more flamboyant of many Methodist itinerants who periodically canvassed Chenango and other counties. The revivals seemed to coincide with economic cy-

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<sup>60</sup>Reverend S. N. Robinson, "Half-Century Discourse," Guilford, New York, 1862, microfilm of typescript, Genealogical Archives.

<sup>61</sup>Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>62</sup>Joel P. Grove, comp., "Early Ancestry and Genealogy of Willard Richards and Brigham Young (Cousins)," typescript, 1962-63, p. 62, Genealogical Archives.

cles—people “sought God more earnestly in adversity than in prosperity.”<sup>63</sup> The Youngs may have been ready for some intense religious experience after their failure in Vermont.

Methodist activity in the area began about the turn of the century, but Methodist preachers were usually considered “awful creatures” and were often forbidden to return.<sup>64</sup> By about 1810 it had become the Chenango Circuit, with twenty-five preaching places, a respectable route. But in Sherburne where the Youngs settled they did not have their own chapel, and the circuit did not gain enough members to have its own quarterly conference until 1814, two years after the Youngs left the area.<sup>65</sup>

When the Youngs arrived in Sherburne they were expected, like the Congregationalist communicants in “this transplanted New England community,” to support the “Calvinistick Congregationalist Society.” They paid in proportion to their tax levy.<sup>66</sup> There are fairly thorough minutes, lists of deacons and communicants, and baptisms which reflect the religious atmosphere of the settlement. In 1808, when Brigham was seven, the annual meeting included an unusual catechizing of small children and baptized youth “with regard to their views and feelings on religious subjects.” In 1807 and again in 1810 the monthly meetings were sparked by “conferring” on theological tenets, notably the doctrine of election. The society agreed “that scripture shows no difference between divine decree and the foreknowledge of god” and that theirs was “an intelligent faith.” One can picture a Methodist itinerant coming into the area, stumping for his Arminian doctrines at the Stowell Meeting House, and starting a theological brew which affected all the sects in the neighborhood.<sup>67</sup>

The War of 1812 brought a “decline of vital piety in the church,” a form of godliness with the power having fled. This year the annual meeting was small—a smallpox epidemic had stricken the region: “It was thought best to spend some time in prayer.” After the war religious activity intensified in the beginning of a remarkable series of revivals which swept the entire region. In 1816 Smyrna, near Sherburne, saw a “Great Revival,” the Lord “visiting” the church with 104 additions to communion

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<sup>63</sup>Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, pp. 5-6, 10, 12.

<sup>64</sup>James H. Smith, *History of Chenango and Madison Counties* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason & Co., 1880), p. 472; Rev. A. C. Salls, *Brief History of Guilford Methodism* (Oxford, N.Y.: Geo. Stafford, 1902), n.p.; and Earl Oldfield, “Methodism in Guilford, 1813-1964,” typescript, 1964, n.p., microfilm at Genealogical Archives.

<sup>65</sup>Oldfield, “Methodism in Guilford.”

<sup>66</sup>Mrs. Edwin P. Smith, comp., “Records of Discontinued Churches of Northern Chenango County,” Volume 3, typescript, 1969, p. 31.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 48, 54.



within a few months. But in 1816 the Youngs had moved further west and were seeing the revival in Genoa or Tyrone.<sup>68</sup>

The various frontier sects had more in common than not. Moral standards took the form of social custom; what one society was demanding of its members another society also expected. The minutes of disciplinary action for the "Calvinistick Society" are revealing of values and personalities. In 1805 a man was disfellowshipped for taking property that did not belong to him. A young girl had taunted another girl, a regular churchgoer, by decoying her into the woods and pouring oil onto her dress; the infractor was dismissed from the society for associating with the "loose and vain," attending idle plays, and spending her time in "vain jesting." Later there was disciplinary action for those who had violated the Christian Sabbath, gone to balls and vain amusements, used ardent spirits immoderately, neglected family prayers, not attended to public worship, evidenced dishonesty in a trade with another man. The clerk notes that most who were cut off from the church never returned.<sup>69</sup>

An action of particular interest involved Samuel Foote, a relation of Judge Isaac Foote and a prominent member of the community. At one time Brigham was a hired hand of Isaac Foote, although Foote's son later claimed his father found the boy "shiftless and much of a shirk" and discharged him.<sup>70</sup> Samuel Foote had a charge brought against him for "countenancing young people in holding balls at their house contrary to the well known and established rules of this church." A hearing was called in which Foote "cast reflections on the church for having such rules." Though the deacons and preacher reasoned and labored with him, he left "much troubled" and did not appear at the next hearing. Later he made a part-confession but was afterward overheard at the country store complaining about the minister. When he and his wife refused to answer this new charge, both were cut off from the society.<sup>71</sup> This was an issue which would have interested the entire community; Brigham's father, though not a Congregationalist, was strictly opposed to dancing and would not permit his children even to listen to a fiddle. Brigham ever afterward had to confront instinctive uncertainties while enjoying music and entertainment, although he defended these and supported them in the Mormon community.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-52.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 60 ff.

<sup>70</sup>Isaac Foote writing to the *Chenango Union* (Norwich, N.Y.), 8 May 1883.

<sup>71</sup>Smith, "Records of Discontinued Churches," pp. 64-67.

<sup>72</sup>*JD* 2:94 (6 February 1853) and *JD* 13:147 (11 July 1869).

Methodists and Congregationalists had similar methods of “levelling the rash frontier freedom.” Members of Methodist quarterly conferences were “particularly examined one by one” regarding the Lord’s supper, baptism both adult and infant, diligence in church callings, “experience” or inner conversion, family spiritual instruction, “Family Habits viz Drinking spiritous liquor and Wearing of Gold and ornamental apparel,” fasting, financial offerings, and attendance at love feasts and class meetings. The Methodist Discipline contained less dogma than practice—Have you borrowed from a neighbor and not returned an item? Do you pray with your family morning and evening?<sup>73</sup>

Quarterly conferences were judicial courts, handling charges brought by member against member for everything from returning broken a borrowed item, to digging after money.<sup>74</sup> Most charges were referred to a local committee of three arbiters who “affectionately labored” with the contenders to produce repentance and reconciliation. Immorality was more serious; there are long transcripts of hearings in which witnesses of “strict veracity” were questioned regarding the character of a defendant. Such “trials” attracted community-wide interest and helped to transplant social order and morality in areas where the social structure was still crude. Pastoral visits did the same; Methodist circuitriders, when coming into a new area, were not reluctant to pry into the personal behavior of families they boarded with. Neighbors followed this example, keeping tabs on one another’s conduct. Many a Smyrna pioneer—Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian, Quaker, or Methodist—“thought himself a Christian” if he fasted, prayed, attended church, and rebuked his neighbors.<sup>75</sup>

The Young home was representative of the times. “I was brought up a Christian, very strictly,” Brigham said.<sup>76</sup> He never heard his father swear, “not so much as a darn it or curse it or the devil. So you can see I was brought up pretty strictly.” He was taught as a child not to take a pin from the dooryard of a neighbor without permission. “Never did my mother or father countenance any of their children in anything to wrong their neighbour or fellow-being, even if they were injured by them.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Quarterly Conference Records of Pompey, New York, Circuit, in Sweet, *The Methodists*, p. 565. The Mormon catechism read to adult members during the Utah Reformation of 1856 has the same spirit and style. See Diary of Samuel A. Woolley, 4 November 1856, Church Archives.

<sup>74</sup>Clark Jillson, in *Green Leaves from Whitingham, Vermont* (Worcester, Mass.: Private Press of the Author, 1894), p. 113, says that a notion was common “through all this region of the country” that gold and silver were buried “under most of New England.” The idea originated, he believed, in the story of Captain Kidd, who buried 16,000 pounds on Gardiner’s Island before his hanging in 1701.

<sup>75</sup>Sweet, *The Methodists*, pp. 562, 566, 643; Hyde, *The Story of Methodism*, p. 49.

<sup>76</sup>JD 16:73 (25 May 1873).

<sup>77</sup>JD 6:290 (15 August 1852).

Brigham portrayed his father as “very circumspect, exemplary and religious.” John was strict to the point of sternness, so strict that the older children may have chafed under his rule—the daughters married very young, the sons developed well-controlled but lasting jealousies and resentments.<sup>78</sup> Even Brigham, ninth in line so that he probably escaped the harsher learning experiences, grew up protective of his right to make up his own mind and choose his own course without being hurried.<sup>79</sup> That family loyalty existed was probably attributable to the children’s observation that their parents’ “precepts of morality were sustained by their good examples.”<sup>80</sup>

Nabby Howe Young is portrayed in family traditions as an ameliorating influence on John’s sternness.<sup>81</sup> She taught the children to pray so that “God would send His guardian angel” to watch over them.<sup>82</sup> “Of my mother—she that bore me—I can say, no better woman ever lived in the world than she was. . . . I judge the matter . . . from the principles and the spirit of the teachings I received from her,” said Brigham.<sup>83</sup> An invalid with worsening health, Nabby would call a child to her bedside, telling him/her to pray and to read the Bible and live a moral life; her affection was couched in religious sentiments. It may be that Nabby’s more sympathetic manner helped win the children’s loyalty to John, who instilled the same values and thoughts in a harsher way.

Though softer in her methods, Nabby sustained John’s strict religious views. She too taught the children to accept the Word of God literally, every word of it. And Brigham was receptive to this. He was at least as strict as his father. “From the days of my youth . . . from the day that I came upon the stage of action to act for myself there never was a boy, a man, either old or middle aged, that ever tried to live a life more pure and refined. . . .”<sup>84</sup> To a brother Brigham seemed a favorite of their father’s, “who I never new to find fault with him but once.” Nor could Joseph remember Brigham getting angry except once, and on this occasion “he was violent, I thought.”<sup>85</sup> Though Brigham used tobacco, he

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<sup>78</sup>“Family Memories,” Susa Young Gates Collection, Utah State Historical Society.

<sup>79</sup>*JD* 9:248–49 (23 March 1862): “I am not disposed to compel any person to partake of that which they dislike, or have an aversion for. This may not be right in every case. Why it is right with me is, that, if a person urges upon me that which I am not disposed to receive, it creates in me an alienation of feeling toward that person. I am naturally opposed to being crowded. . . .”

<sup>80</sup>Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup>Gates, “Family Memories”; S. Dilworth Young, *Here is Brigham and Young Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962); *Proceedings of the Dedication of the Brigham Young Statue*, Capitol Building, Washington, D.C., n.d.

<sup>82</sup>Little, “Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young,” p. 25.

<sup>83</sup>*JD* 6:290.

<sup>84</sup>*JD* 1:41 (11 July 1852).

<sup>85</sup>Little, “Historical Items.”

would not take liquor.<sup>86</sup>

... Young men would say to me, "Take a glass." "No, thank you, it is not good for me!" "Why, yes, it is good for you." "Thank you, I think I know myself better than you know me." ... I recollect my father urged me [to sign the temperance pledge]. "No sir," said I, "if I sign the temperance pledge I feel that I am bound, and I wish to do just right, without being bound to do it; I want my liberty"; and I have conceived from my youth up that I could have my liberty and independence just as much in doing right as I could in doing wrong.<sup>87</sup>

One way to beat a more-than-exacting system of guilts and controls was to outdo it.

The fears and rigors of frontier religion merely reflected the stridency of day-to-day life. Both tended to be heavy-handed, to weed out those who could not cope, for whatever reason, and to develop in the survivors a certain smoldering but ebullient toughness. "Don't expect king's etiquette from me," Brigham Young would later say. "In my youth if I had on a pair of pants that would cover me I did pretty well."<sup>88</sup> "I have not suffered," he reminisced during a hard Great Basin season,

I have gone without eating and not half clad, but that was not suffering. I was used to that in my youth. I used to work in the woods logging and driving team, summer and winter, not half clad, and with insufficient food until my stomach would ache, so that I am used to all this, and have had no suffering.<sup>89</sup>

Daughter Susa saw Brigham's boyhood as "a healthy struggle with the forces of physical and human nature";<sup>90</sup> Brigham no doubt would have agreed but he would have added that as a boy he made a path with his night prowling between the loft stairs and the bread cupboard to get extra slices of bread and butter—he always went to bed hungry. In maturity he took care to see that his wives each had stores of crackers, fruit, and molasses so that the children would never go hungry between meals. And he added:

I have been a poor boy and a poor man, and my parents were poor. I was poor during my childhood, and grew up to manhood poor and destitute; and I am acquainted with the various styles of living, and with the different customs, habits, and practices of people; and I do know, by my own experience, that there is no necessity for

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<sup>86</sup>Brigham had conquered the tobacco habit by 1862 according to a letter to Brigham Young, Jr., in October of that year. See Dean Jessee, *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), p. 33.

<sup>87</sup>*JD* 14:225 (27 August 1871).

<sup>88</sup>*JD* 14:103 (8 August 1869).

<sup>89</sup>*JD* 12:287 (8 October 1868).

<sup>90</sup>"Notes on Ancestry," Susa Young Gates Collection, Utah State Historical Society.

people being so poor, if they have judgment, and will rightly use it.<sup>91</sup>

Brigham was a boy, probably no older than six years, when he got his introduction to the Camp Meetings of Lorenzo Dow. No doubt before this he had been touched by the less sensational work of Methodist itinerants—the house-visiting, circuit stops, and distribution of Methodist literature. But now Brigham was to experience a different kind of revival—Methodism intensified. The Methodists had discovered how to reach more people more effectively. The camp meeting was loud, crowded, and hyperactive. It was disorderly and confused. The Methodists (some of them) recognized its dangers and brought it increasingly under controls, but they weren't afraid of it—nor of the “frontier energies unleashed there.” Religious experience was what they wanted; they meant to get to a listener, not to his mind, but to his heart. “Worship without tears, fainting, and moans was a sham.”<sup>92</sup> They stationed their preachers at various pulpits, all preaching at once, shouting to passersby like hawkers, each in his own style.<sup>93</sup> If one preacher didn't get to a man, another might. Conceivably at one of these meetings Brigham's father “came into perfect light.”<sup>94</sup> This scant-spoken, deep-feeling child of Puritans, frustrated in his efforts to prosper, his wife becoming an invalid and a young daughter having died, was apparently “got to” by Lorenzo Dow.

But Dow didn't get to young Brigham. Brigham had heard a great deal about the esteemed preacher, and he “had thought a great many times” that he would like to hear a man who could tell him something about God and heaven:

So I went to hear Lorenzo Dow. He stood up some of the time, and he sat down some of the time; he was in this position and in that position, and talked two or three hours, and when he got through I asked myself, “What have you learned from Lorenzo Dow?” and my answer was “Nothing, nothing but morals.” He could tell the people they should not work on the Sabbath day; they should not lie, swear, steal, commit adultery, &c., but when he came to teaching the things of God he was as dark as midnight.<sup>95</sup>

This didn't mean that Brigham gave up. He was impressionable and had “a great many reflections, especially when alone,” conversing with himself “upon these eternal things.”<sup>96</sup> Then he

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<sup>91</sup>JD 4:312 (6 April 1857).

<sup>92</sup>Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River*, p. 48.

<sup>93</sup>Winthrop Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), p. 137.

<sup>94</sup>Hyde, *The Story of Methodism*, p. 21.

<sup>95</sup>JD 14:197-98 (3 June 1871).

<sup>96</sup>JD 19:6-7 (29 April 1877).

would go to the meetings and ask the ministers questions. He listened to "one of the smartest of American preachers preach on the soul of man," and the preacher ended up saying the soul of man was "immaterial." Brigham did not "give a farthing" for such answers.<sup>97</sup> They would tell him that a moral life, a confession of Christ the Savior, was all that was essential to salvation; he had read the Bible and he did not believe so.<sup>98</sup> He went to more meetings: "I have been at many of their meetings and seen their modes of conversion." It was animal magnetism (hypnotism), he decided.

I have seen the effects of animal magnetism, or some anomalous sleep, or whatever it be called, many a time in my youth. I have seen persons lie on the benches, on the floor of the meeting house, or on the ground at their camp meetings, for ten, twenty, and thirty minutes, and I do not know but an hour, and not a particle of pulse about them. . . . I used to think that I should like to ask such persons what they had seen in their trance or vision; and when I got old enough and dared ask them, I did so. . . . "Brother, what have you experienced?" "Nothing." "What do you know more than before you had this. . . ." "Nothing more." "Have you seen any person?" "No." "Then what is the use or utility of your falling down here in the dirt?" I could not see it, and consequently I was an infidel to this.<sup>99</sup>

He did not ask very many questions, for, as he said, "I was brought up to treat everybody with that respect and courtesy that I could hardly allow myself to think aloud, and consequently very seldom did so." But he thought plenty, and he observed. He overheard the wife of a minister say to some of her sisters in the church, "Do you suppose that we shall be under the necessity of eating with our hired help when we get into heaven? We do not do it here, and I have an idea that there will be two tables in heaven."<sup>100</sup> He observed men

who were considered good, clever, honest men, who would take the advantage of their neighbors or workmen if they could. I have seen deacons, Baptists, Presbyterians, members of the Methodist church, with long, solid, sturdy faces and a poor brother would come along and say to one of them, "Brother, such-a-one, I have come to see if I could get a bushel of wheat, rye or corn of you. I have no money, but I will come and work for you in harvest," and their faces would be drawn down so mournful, and they would say, "I have none to spare." "Well, deacon, if you can let me have one bushel, I understand you have considerable, I will come and work for you just as long as you say, until you are satisfied, in your harvest field, or hay

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<sup>97</sup>*JD* 12:55 (26 May 1867).

<sup>98</sup>*JD* 11:254-55 (17 June 1866).

<sup>99</sup>*JD* 14:113.

<sup>100</sup>*JD* 14:100 (8 August 1869).

ing or anything you want done." After much talk this longfaced character would get it out, "If you will come and work for me two days in harvest, I do not know but I will spare you a bushel of rye." When the harvest times comes the man could have got two bushels of rye for one day's work; but the deacon sticks him to his bargain, and makes him work two days for a bushel of wheat or rye." I did not read the Bible as they read it . . . said I, "Just go your own way, I want none of it." I wanted no religion that produced such morals. <sup>101</sup>

He found he could "put all their doctrines, when simmered down to truth, into a snuffbox of the smallest class, put it into my vest pocket and go on my way."<sup>102</sup>

Nabby Howe Young died in 1815, ten days after Brigham's fourteenth birthday, after a long, dismal struggle with tuberculosis. For a time Fanny acted as substitute mother, having left her profligate husband. But soon John "broke up hoosekeeping" and moved further west to Wayne, Steuben County (later Tyrone, Schuyler County), where he purchased on contract one hundred acres in the primitive Sugar Hill district. Brigham was apprenticed to an Auburn Carpenter, though he sometimes lived with relatives. Lorenzo, seven years old, was sent to live with his married sister Rhoda Greene, and later was bound out to Susannah's husband, James Little. "The family separated and never lived together as a family afterwards," with children coming for short periods and going again. Sometime between 1815 and 1817, at age fifty-two, John remarried a widow with several children of her own and continued a life that was hard and lonely and rough. The family seldom had money; payments on the farm came out of harvest proceeds with little or none left over.<sup>103</sup>

The effect of the common but harsh, austere, frontier experience was to develop self-reliant, stoic youth who suffered from chronic frontier depression. Often this "depression of spirits" was associated with religion and became a preface to "the new birth." Lorenzo Dow told of taking his gun into the wilderness when still a boy with the intent of ending his life. "All nature seemed to wear a gloomy aspect; and every thing I cast my eyes upon seemed to bend itself against me, and wish me off the face of the earth."<sup>104</sup> The boy Dow would go to a funeral and dare not look at the corpse for fear of becoming one.

"There was more or less of a gloom over my feelings

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<sup>101</sup>JD 15:164-65 (9 October 1872).

<sup>102</sup>Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, p. 62.

<sup>103</sup>Little, "Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young," p. 25; Little, "Historical Items"; Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, pp. v-vi.

<sup>104</sup>Lorenzo Dow, *The Dealings of God, Man, and the Devil as Exemplified in the Life, Experience, and Travels of Lorenzo Dow* (Cincinnati: Applegate & Co., 1858), p. 10.

from the earliest days of my childhood that I have in any recollection," Brigham Young said.<sup>105</sup>

Before I possessed the spirit of the Gospel [Mormonism], I was troubled with that which I hear others complain of, that is, with, at times, feeling cast down, gloomy, and desponding; with everything wearing to me, at times, a dreary aspect. . . . They appeared at times as though a vail was brooding over them, which cast a dark shade upon all things, like the shade of the valley of death, and I felt lonesome and bad.<sup>106</sup>

Of his older brother Joseph he said, "For many years no person saw a smile on his countenance."<sup>107</sup>

Brigham thought he might find relief in religion. When he was twenty-three, he was baptized a Methodist.<sup>108</sup> But it brought him no peace of mind:

I remember that when I made a profession of religion, after being called an infidel by the Christians, I often used to get a little puzzled. The Evil One would whisper to me that I had done this, that, or some other thing wrong, and inquire whether that looked like a Christian act, and remark, "You have missed it; you have not done right, and you know it; you did not do as well in such a thing as you might; and are you not ashamed of yourself in saying you are a Christian?"<sup>109</sup>

It was in 1830 that Lorenzo Dow Young, Brigham's younger brother, had a dream in which the Savior drove up in a white carriage drawn by white horses and asked, "Where is Brother Brigham?" The Savior inquired about all of the family, but especially Brigham, Lorenzo related. He slept no more that night for fear of the family's future, but when he related his dream to his father, John reassured him, saying he "didn't think the fearful interpretation was correct."<sup>110</sup> Later, Brigham himself had a remarkable experience, along with his friend Heber C. Kimball and their wives. One beautiful clear night each had gone outside with his wife. On the eastern horizon a light arose—Heber described it as white smoke which formed into a belt and dipped bow-like toward the west. The light was accompanied by a noise "like the mighty wind," and the light formed itself into an army, row after row of twelve men abreast, moving across the sky in platoons. They looked like Revolutionary soldiers, with muskets and hats, and they marched every man in step in "profound order." For sev-

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<sup>105</sup>*JD* 8:129 (22 July 1860).

<sup>106</sup>*JD* 3:320–21 (20 April 1856).

<sup>107</sup>*JD* 12:95 (30 June 1867).

<sup>108</sup>Minutes of family meeting, 8 January 1845; and Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, p. 1.

<sup>109</sup>*JD* 7:6 (3 July 1859).

<sup>110</sup>Little, "Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young," p. 26.



eral hours armies of men came up from the northwest, marched to the southwest accompanied by the report of arms, and went out of sight. After several hours the vision faded away, although the next night neighbors also reported seeing it.<sup>111</sup>

“A very remarkable occurrence,” said Brigham in retrospect.<sup>112</sup> Heber’s wife was frightened and asked Father Young what it meant. “Why, it’s one of the signs of the coming of the Son of Man,” said John.<sup>113</sup> The Kimballs did not doubt it, nor did Brigham, who not many months later would receive a copy of the Book of Mormon, read it, and gradually become convinced that the Son of Man had indeed come and established a new Apostolic Order.

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<sup>111</sup>Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball, An Apostle* (Salt Lake City: Kimball Family, 1888), pp. 31–33.

<sup>112</sup>Family Meeting of 8 January 1845.

<sup>113</sup>Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, p. 33.