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New St. Joseph, Nevada: The Muddy Mission Experience Revisited

CAROLYN GRATTAN-AIELLO

THE HISTORY OF THE MORMON church's colonization policies has long been of importance to Nevada historians. One such colonization project, the "Muddy Mission," occurred between the years 1865 and 1871. Small settlements along the Muddy River in southeastern Nevada became the first permanent towns of the Moapa Valley.

A few historians have treated the turbulent years of the Muddy Mission in detail.¹ Moving to the Moapa Valley in 1865, the settlers found the need to relocate their townsites several times. The change in town locations has been a source of confusion, as have the reasons for the abandonment of the valley in 1871. The reasons for the abandonment are usually attributed to Nevada's tax policies. However, the work of earlier historians and pioneer diaries now allows a new interpretation. The many townsite relocations, as well as the abandonment, were the logical results of processes going on in the 1860s. Moreover, failures at the administrative level of the Church's colonization program contributed to the failure of the Muddy Mission.

New St. Joseph, one of the most longlasting of the Muddy Mission settlements, is the focal point for this discussion. Occupying the center of the Moapa Valley, near the present-day Overton Airport, it was founded by a mixture of settlers from two other Muddy Mission towns. New St. Joseph is an atypical example of the Mormon experience during the Muddy Mission, and the Muddy Mission itself is atypical of the Mormon experience in the Great Basin. Most colonization projects thrived, while in sharp contrast the Muddy Mission failed. Since the focal point for the mission was the establishment of a large central community, St. Joseph, and New St. Joseph shows the manifestation of this effort in several forms, it is necessary to study New St. Joseph in order to understand the entire Muddy Mission experience.²

Leaders of the Church of Latter Day Saints hoped to accomplish three purposes by settling in southern Nevada: establish the cultivation of cotton, develop a support system for navigation on the Colorado River, and keep non-Mormons or "Gentiles" from settling the area. Because the Civil War cut off cotton supplies to Utah, the Mormons decided to grow their own. Begin-

ning in 1861, settlers were “called” to southern Utah to fulfill a Church mission by raising cotton. The Muddy Mission, part of this effort, became a prime cotton supplier to Utah.

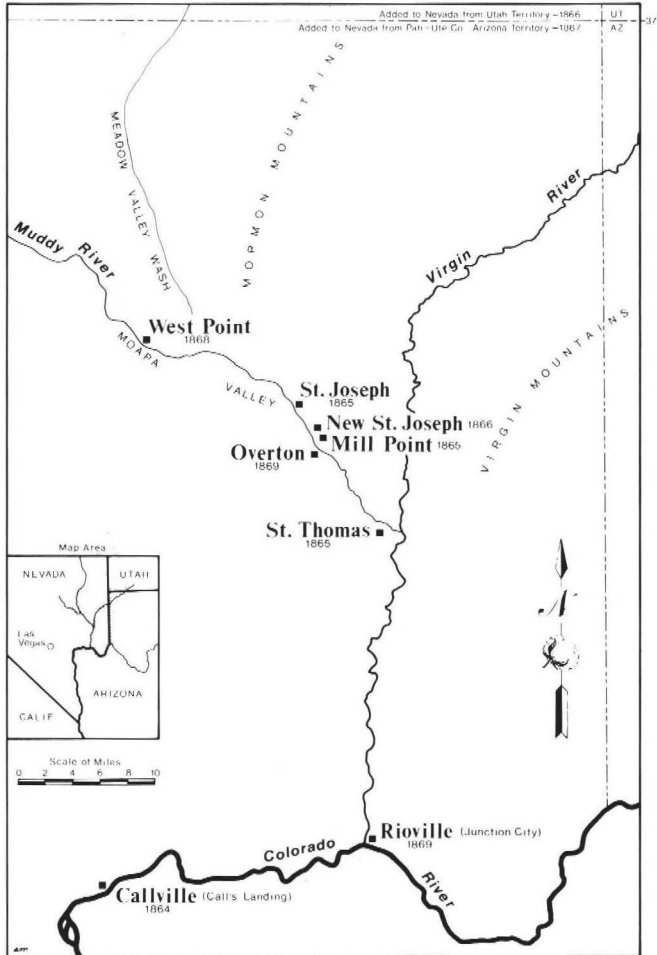
The Colorado River had been a source of interest to Mormon leaders from the time of the first settlement of Utah. It was hoped colonists and goods could be transported from Europe, around Cape Horn, and up the Colorado as far as possible. Wagons could then carry settlers and supplies to Utah, thereby eliminating the long overland trek across the prairie. In 1864, Call’s Landing was established as a port on the river. The Muddy settlements were founded shortly thereafter, and served as support for the Call’s Landing project.

Settlement of the Muddy River Valley, which was part of Arizona territory at that time, was also designed to keep non-Mormons away. As the mining districts of Pioche developed the Muddy River became a natural route for miners traveling south. Mormons hoped that settlement along the Muddy would keep passing Gentiles from utilizing the area.

The settlement of the Muddy River began on January 8, 1865, with the establishment of St. Thomas at the confluence of the Muddy and Virgin Rivers.³ Erastus Snow, president of the Southern Utah Mission and presiding authority over the area, visited the Muddy on April 26, 1865, to survey the valley for future towns. Later he chose two locations, one of which became St. Joseph, the present site of Logandale.⁴ On May 28 the Saints arrived at the St. Joseph site, nine miles north of St. Thomas, and organized a branch of the Church there.

In August, 1865, Arizona officials contacted the settlers to secure their vote in upcoming elections. Thomas Smith, the leader of the St. Thomas community, wrote to Brigham Young for instructions. Young advised the people to remain neutral on political issues for the time being.⁵ Their refusal to vote in the Arizona elections is testimony to the control Brigham Young exerted over the Muddy settlers at that time. During the same year Orawell Simons established a grist mill three miles south of St. Joseph; the settlement which grew up at that location became known as Mill Point.

Early in 1866, in response to problems with the Indians, some of the St. Joseph settlers moved to an area surveyed as the “Public Square,” and there constructed homes in the configuration of a fort. At the same time, other settlers also moved to Mill Point.⁶ Later in the year, Erastus Snow received a letter from Brigham Young and his counselors urging that the small settlements of the Moapa Valley be abandoned in favor of larger fortified ones.⁷ The settlers of old St. Joseph were ultimately given the option of moving to either St. Thomas or Mill Point. Snow advised the settlers to: “Take hold with energy this fall and winter in putting the water as high onto the bench at that place as can be conveniently done, and build a permanent and commodious fort there, or go down to St. Thomas.”⁸ Although they had already built their



Early Mormon settlements in the mid 1860s. (Map by Amy Mazza)

homes in the formation, the St. Joseph settlers obeyed Snow's advice and moved to one of the two new locations.

Thus, old St. Joseph, the site of present-day Logandale, was abandoned in June, 1866; and New St. Joseph, which was built in fort formation on the sand bench above Mill Point, dates from this time. By the fall of 1866 the population of New St. Joseph was recorded as 167 people, thirty-five of them men,⁹ but by December of 1867 the population of New St. Joseph had fallen to twenty-three men.¹⁰ Most of the settlers had returned to Utah.

Because of this loss of settlers, the general conference of the Church in Salt Lake City in October of 1867 called upon 158 new missionaries, mainly from the Salt Lake area, to strengthen the Southern Mission including the Muddy settlements. A total of about seventy-five had arrived at the Muddy by the beginning of the next year.¹¹ The success of the Muddy Mission depended

upon the number of missionaries in residence, as well as their ability to work together. Late in 1867 the new missionaries began arriving from Utah. Although some lived in Fort New St. Joseph long enough to have built adobe homes, they apparently failed to form a cohesive unit with the older inhabitants. Darius Salem Clement reported in his diary that "a dislike for St. Joseph was perceptibly growing among them. . . . A kind of conclusiveness was noticeable on the part of some, a feeling to keep themselves separate & [sic] not commingle with the old settlers."¹² The new settlers left New St. Joseph in early 1868 for West Point, a center on the upper Muddy near the present-day Moapa Indian reservation. This location appeared superior to New St. Joseph because of the ease with which the Saints could control irrigation water over the low level banks of the Muddy. Although the West Point settlement was sanctioned by Erastus Snow,¹³ Brigham Young in February of 1868 gave the West Point settlers the option of returning to New St. Joseph fort or coming home to Utah. Most took the opportunity to return to Utah.¹⁴

Some settlers did remain at West Point or immediately returned after having been called back to Fort New St. Joseph, for Erastus Snow found people there on his visit on June 9.¹⁵ The continued settlement of West Point suggests the existence of individualistic behavior which may be due to the contradictory messages the settlers received from authority figures.

Fort New St. Joseph was designed to be a temporary community, as were most forts on the Mormon frontier. After nearly two years of living in the "Fort," Erastus Snow chose a permanent location for the city of St. Joseph.¹⁶ Indeed, on March 25, 1868, J. J. Fuller surveyed the city lots for the New St. Joseph town plat where settlers from Fort New St. Joseph were expected to move as soon as possible.¹⁷ This location, which has been referred to as Sandy Town A, is situated near the north end of the Overton Airport.¹⁸ "Sandy Town" was the settlers' own derisive term for the St. Joseph city.

Although Erastus Snow listened to the "pros and cons expressed relative to the best place for the city," he did not defer from his original plan of settling the permanent St. Joseph city near the center of the sand bench.¹⁹ Located "about ½ mile north of the fort," the town could "spread each way as lots were wanted hereafter."²⁰ The water ditch which supplied culinary and irrigation water to Fort New St. Joseph had been completed on February 27, 1868,²¹ approximately a month before Snow's decision to settle permanently on the sand bench. Perhaps if Snow had realized the problems the missionaries would encounter with ditches on the sand bench he would have chosen another location for the town.²²

By May of 1868 the population of the fort had fallen. Bishop Alma H. Bennett reported only twenty-five to thirty missionaries called the previous October remained on the Muddy.²³ The June *Deseret News* published a lengthy letter from Joseph W. Young, nephew of Brigham Young and assistant to Cotton Mission President Erastus Snow. The letter is an advertise-



Looking toward the Mormon Mesa, St. Thomas, Nevada. (Photograph courtesy of Bureau of Reclamation Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library)

ment for the beauty and availability of the Muddy region. Disregarding the many desertions due to the harsh Muddy environment, Young lists the poor quality of roads leading to the area as the only disadvantage.²⁴

Early in August of 1868, Joseph W. Young spoke to the inhabitants of Fort New St. Joseph on matters of “direct concern” to them:

He said he found that some wanted to make a settlement at old St. Joseph. Others thought it best to make the city down on the west side of the valley . . . others wanted to build on their 2½ acre lots. . . . This diversity of feeling tended to scatter and weaken. He thought men who have teaching and experience in this church should manifest more wisdom and a better understanding of the principles of the religion.²⁵

Joseph W. Young continued by advising the settlers to move to their city lots (Sandy Town A, the permanent St. Joseph city location) as that was the place designated for settlement by the “rightful authority.”²⁶

On Tuesday, August 18, 1868, a fire in Fort New St. Joseph gutted the interiors of about half of the adobe dwellings there. Spreading rapidly across the wood and cattail roofs, the fire had a devastating effect on the inhabitants. Many accounts of the fire have surfaced, but the following account by Darius Salem Clement, the Church Clerk for the local ward, gives the most com-

plete, and because of the immediacy of the account, perhaps the most accurate record of the fire.

Tuesday, the next day after their departure, an occurrence took place at St. Joseph, which will long be remembered by all who witnessed it. 3 or 4 children made a fire on the east side and midway of the fort the light (word indecipherable) trash lying around took fire a strong breeze blew from the N. E. The fire was kindled back of Bros. Streep and Miles premises. They were living in sheds made of willow and flag. The fire took a small calf pen first. . . . It happened that all these were near enough together and arranged in such a position as to easily conduct the fire to the houses with the wind blowing in the direction it was . . .²⁷

More than half the residents lost homes in the fire. The meetinghouse was also burned. Resident William Gibson reported that on the day of the fire "the heat was up to 119 in the shade and everything was as dry as tinder."²⁸ The next day Bishop Alma Bennett sent a letter to Erastus Snow and Joseph W. Young concerning the fire. In their response they advised the settlers to rebuild on the "Sandy Town A" (St. Joseph city) location. They urged the settlers to work together "and by so doing you will see in a short time, better homes, and brighter prospects spring out of the ashes of your ruined dwellings, than you ever had before."²⁹

Although the presiding authorities suggested that the New St. Joseph missionaries rebuild on the "Sandy Town A" location, most remained in the fort.³⁰ It was not until September that the first house appeared at 'Sandy Town A,' and by November 15, three or four families were living there.³¹ Settlers gradually moved to the new location until December of 1868.

In December a more experienced surveyor with more accurate equipment resurveyed the "Sandy Town A" location. This surveyor was probably Daniel Stark who was listed by that occupation under the Rio Virgen County organization. Stark found the town to be out of alignment by about one degree. His resurveyed site moved the town to the north. Archaeological remains identified as "Sandy Town B" appear to be this resurveyed townsite.³²

The resurvey discouraged the settlers who had already built homes in "Sandy Town A." Additionally, in December of 1868, a lesser authority figure than Erastus Snow gave the settlers the option of moving to a third Sandy Town location, this one north of a geologic feature known as the "Big Hollow."³³ Some settlers, the ones with agricultural land located below Fort New St. Joseph were reluctant to move to the northernmost settlement, a considerable distance from their farm plots.³⁴

In reality, of the three Sandy Towns, the missionaries would have had the most favorable location, in terms of water usage, at the northernmost settlement. The ditch system they constructed to carry culinary and irrigation water actually leached more water through the porous sand of its walls than it carried. Since the settlement farthest north, past the Big Hollow, meant the

shortest distance of travel for the water from the Muddy River through the ditch, the northernmost town would have experienced less water loss than either of the Sandy Towns A or B, or Fort New St. Joseph.³⁵

House foundations have been recorded at a location north of the "Big Hollow," but it is difficult to determine how many settlers actually moved there. By February of 1869 people were living at all locations on the sand beach. Three teachers were listed for "St. Joseph," one in the first district at the fort, one in the "middle district," and one at the "third district on northern part of city."³⁶ At this time the settlers were described as "scattered and living in camp."³⁷ Rather than unite the settlers into a cohesive group, the experiences of living on the sand bench had scattered them and encouraged a growing individualism in their attitude toward the Muddy Mission. Moreover, many abandonments of the region at this time may be attributed to the Sandy Town relocations and water ditch problems.

During a visit to New St. Joseph in December of 1868, President Snow spoke to the brethren about the scarcity of water in St. Thomas. Although consumption by the Sandy Towns and the fort on the sand bench did not leave enough water for the downstream settlement, Snow did not consider abandoning the effort at St. Joseph. Rather, in spite of the fact that the ditches leached more water than they carried to the settlements, he suggested even greater ditch building efforts. What became known as the "St. Joseph Canal" was begun early in 1869.³⁸ Snow must have felt the need to emphasize his position as leader of the Muddy settlements, since he ended his remarks by "speaking of men who disregard and treat lightly the counsels and wishes of their leaders. . . . When they landed in hell and looked on their back track they would see that they commenced to go down when they began to trifle with the Priesthood."³⁹

On December 3, 1868, the Church called another 150 men to strengthen the Muddy Mission. At that time, President Snow advised that not more than twenty-five families should settle the upper Muddy at West Point.⁴⁰ Perhaps this limitation on settlement indicates the settlers' preference for West Point over any of the sand bench communities. On December 15, Joseph W. Young left to meet Erastus Snow on the upper Muddy to survey and "permanently locate and organize the settlement."⁴¹ Trouble with the upper Muddy Indians was anticipated, some of the brethren had purchased land from them. "This kind of traffick [*sic*] was forbidden . . . ," and it is assumed that the Mormons were reprimanded for this action.⁴² In retrospect, the settlers' initiative in attempting to foster good relations with the Indians appears to have been justified. Although forbidden by Church policy, the purchase of land from the Indians might have forestalled further problems between the Mormons and the Indians. In any event, the act demonstrates that the settlers' desire to solve the real problems of life on the Muddy River took precedence over Church policy.



Century General Merchandise in the Mormon settlement of St. Thomas, Nevada. (Photograph courtesy of Merle and Beola Frehner Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library)

On February 15, 1869, Rio Virgen County was organized by the Utah legislature, an area which would have included all the Muddy townsites. Some scholars credit this organization to a desire on the part of the Muddy residents to be governed by Utah,⁴³ although current research points to various authority figures as catalysts for this movement. Prior to this time the settlers of the Muddy region had believed themselves to be in Pahute County, Arizona Territory.

A petition to become Rio Virgen County had been signed by the citizens of the Muddy. "The boundaries were defined in the act, but it was recommended by President Young that St. Thomas remain in Arizona at present."⁴⁴ Discussing the organization of Rio Virgen County by Utah, historian James McClintock wrote:

This county organization is not understood, even under the hypothesis that Utah claimed a sixty-mile strip of Nevada, for St. Joseph, on the Muddy, lies a considerable distance south of the extension of the Southern Utah line, the 37th parallel.⁴⁵

McClintock refers to the 60-mile strip of Nevada which had been added in 1866 from Utah territory. Even if Utah had claimed that the area had been

falsely appropriated, the territory in question still did not include the Muddy region, which was south of the Southern Utah border line.

On February 20, 1869, Brigham Young ordered Joseph W. Young to secure the confluence of the Virgin and Colorado Rivers and keep Gentiles out of the area by placing a settlement there. Joseph Young, in fact, had already been there and begun work on the townsite called Rioville or Junction City.⁴⁶ Erastus Snow had first explored the region on December 14, 1867, with the intention of establishing a community;⁴⁷ and he discussed the mouth of the Virgin River as a settlement site with the residents of New St. Joseph as early as December 3, 1868, although they were reluctant to move there.⁴⁸ According to President Brigham Young the mouth of the Virgin River was:

The key to the southern country. Railroad and business men in different parts of the country are now directing their eyes toward it. It is expected that the southern and northern Pacific Railroads will be connected by one that will cross the Colorado at that point. He (Joseph W. Young) expected that he would be blamed more for letting that place slip out of his hands, than he would be if he should fail in getting the water on the bench.⁴⁹

In a letter St. Thomas Bishop James Leithead described to James Bleak the problems at Junction City with the two Mormon families there at the time. Of the settlers, Leithead wrote:

Bro Asay altho [*sic*] sent there to keep outsiders from taking possession, has without my knowledge induced three Gentiles to go down and engage in fishing taken [*sic*] them in as partners he has proven himself unfit for that position but if I withdraw him and his boys the other family can not stay alone consequently there will be no one there at all. I scarcely know how to get these Gentiles away from there for I think that Bro. Asay has told them some Big tale [*sic*] about a main thoroughfare crossing the river at that point and they [*sic*] can be money had in establishing a Ferry etc.⁵⁰

Brigham Young was undoubtedly aware of the plan to build a southern transcontinental railroad which ultimately crossed the Colorado River at Needles. At this time, however, a crossing at the Virgin River may have been under consideration, explaining Brigham Young's urgency to control the area. Although Young was the religious leader of the territory, acquiring the Muddy region as part of Utah's Rio Virgen County would have also insured his secular control of the area.

Sometime in 1869 the settlers of the sand bench, who had been scattered in the New St. Joseph fort, the Sandy Towns and "Northern District" settlements, abandoned the area for Overton and the original St. Joseph (Logandale) locations.⁵¹ This move appears to have been initiated by the settlers rather than sanctioned by authority.

The moves were probably based on frustration with the "St. Joseph Canal," begun on February 7 and finished as far as intended for that season on March



The Moapa Post Office, c. 1889, probably the site of the Mormon settlement of West Point. (Photograph courtesy of Ferron-Bracken Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library)

8, 1869.⁵² By April 3, 1869, a “considerable portion” of the ditch was filled with wind-blown sand, requiring continual cleaning of the ditch as often as every two days. As people abandoned the settlements for Utah, six or seven families leaving on April 7th alone,⁵³ the exhausting work fell on a shrinking labor force.

The idea of moving to Overton was not new to the settlers; indeed, it had been discussed as early as August of 1868. The Overton settlement, which lasted from 1869 until abandonment of the Valley in 1871, appears to have been successful in terms of agricultural productivity. However, authorities were dissatisfied with the region.

In March of 1870 Brigham Young journeyed to the Muddy villages where he found conditions “unfavorable for agricultural or commercial development.”⁵⁴ In a December 14, 1870, letter addressed to James Leithead, he ascribed the reason for the abandonment of the Muddy to the property assessment made by Nevada officials. The Muddy was actually in an area added to Nevada in 1867, although the boundaries were in dispute until an 1870 survey confirmed Nevada’s claim to the region. On December 20, 1870, the colonists met with Joseph W. Young and decided to abandon the valley.⁵⁵ Of the 600 people living in St. Thomas, old St. Joseph (Logandale) and Overton, only 123 voted to leave and three to stay; obviously most people abstained.⁵⁶

During the spring of 1871 the Mormon colonists abandoned the Muddy Mission in a large-scale effort. Indeed, according to Morton Cutler, “teams were sent down from Washington, Santa Clara, St. George and other southern towns to help us hurry out of Nevada. The people who couldn’t move were aided in getting back to Utah.”⁵⁷

The exorbitant tax Nevada wished to impose on the residents and the demand for payment in gold, which was believed impossible for the Saints to acquire, are the reasons usually given for the abandonment of the Muddy Missions. There is evidence, however, that the Saints were able to obtain cash either by employment within the Muddy settlements or in Gentile towns. For example, in March of 1869 one settler earned five cents per head per day for herding cattle at New St. Joseph,⁵⁸ and others had apparently worked for wages on the railroad in February.⁵⁹ In October of 1868 “several of the brethren” were recorded as having hauled salt to Pahrnatagat for money and “store pay.”⁶⁰ Also, Snow reprimanded some settlers for selling grain to “outsiders” although it is not clear to whom the term refers.⁶¹ At one point a missionary was counseled by the local Bishop to go to work at the Pahrnatagat Quartz Mills where men were needed to chop wood.⁶² But allowing Mormons to work for Gentiles was against the Church’s goal of self-sufficiency. Dependency on the Gentile world would have reduced Church control over the Muddy.

One author has argued that the Mission failed prior to the abandonment of the area, because of problems with the canal and water supply on the sand bench.⁶³ The abandonment of the sand bench and the subsequent success of Overton should, however, be taken to its logical conclusion. The settlers were able to pick an area which became agriculturally successful. Although agricultural success was crucial to the average settler, it would not have been



Brigham Young, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1847-1877, directed the settlements of the Mormons in the Utah Territory. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

desirable to the Mormon officials if it meant the loss of control over the brethren. Moreover, agricultural success is indicated by Joseph W. Young's

suggestion that ten men stay in the valley to grow cotton, after the call for abandonment was made.⁶⁴

Daniel Bonelli, one of the few who voted to stay in Nevada, vented his frustration to the *Reese River Reveille* at being abandoned by the Church as follows:

“. . . while indeed there were not six men on the Muddy who would have had more taxes to pay over in Nevada than two square rods of grape vine would have yielded, or a load of salt hauled to the smelting works would have paid.” The writer then proceeds to point out the repeated failures of enterprises undertaken at the command of the inspired Priesthood, and finally comes to the conclusion that Brigham Young does not interview God Almighty near as often as he pretends to, else he would not make so many egregious blunders.⁶⁵

Although Bonelli was embittered because the Church had left him to face the Muddy environment alone, his harsh words reflect another reason for the abandonment of the region, namely, the strong possibility that leadership figures had lost control over their charges.

The greatest authority figure for the Muddy settlers was Brigham Young. Although the Muddy was important to him, he did not personally make the trip to view the settlements until 1870; instead, Young advised the settlers through Erastus Snow, President of the Cotton Mission. Feramorz Young Fox contended that Mormon colonization would have progressed in much the same way even without the leadership of Brigham Young.⁶⁶ Fox felt the real decision making for each settlement was made at a lower level of authority.

The lines of authority led from his hands [Brigham Young's] through the hands of divisional leaders, to the most remote settlement. Thus careful attention to detail and genuine solicitude on the part of leaders for the welfare of their people went far to assure the success of Mormon colonial enterprise.⁶⁷

Lower level authority figures were crucial to the process of transforming people into “Saints.” But there were problems associated with Mormon authority. The power of Church authority had developed early in Mormon history, and it remained strong for years afterward, “even when rigid authority was unnecessary and sometimes disadvantageous.”⁶⁸ The lines of authority at New St. Joseph ran from Brigham Young to Erastus Snow and then to Joseph W. Young, who seems to have been “assigned” to the St. Joseph settlement early in 1868, becoming Muddy Mission President in the fall of that year.

It is important to remember that even lower level authority figures were believed to follow divine guidance. The operation of the Mormon religion relied on “conceptual looseness” of religious thought coupled with authoritarianism.⁶⁹ Little discussion of theology is recorded for New St. Joseph, but little was needed. If a person believed in the religion, then he believed in

obeying an authoritarian leader. If the leader was successful in the outside world, the belief of the individual was enhanced. The leadership must have been inspired if secular success was attained. Erastus Snow and Joseph W. Young reminded the New St. Joseph settlers that their guidance came from a divine source: "Now brethren these are our feelings and we trust they are dictated by the Holy Spirit."⁷⁰ This reinforcement gave greater credibility to their instructions. If their instructions proved successful on temporal matters, the settlers' belief in Mormonism grew.

Joseph W. Young's role in the development of the Muddy settlements was, as assistant to Erastus Snow, to enforce Snow's decision to locate St. Joseph city on the sand bench (Sandy Towns A and B). In June of 1868 he published a lengthy letter in the *Deseret News*, which was clearly an advertisement for the beauty and availability of the Muddy region. On August 17, 1868, Young visited the New St. Joseph fort, where he spoke to the people on the issue of settlement. Some wanted to resettle the old St. Joseph location (Logandale), some wanted to make a new settlement on the west side of the valley (Overton), and some wanted to settle on their two and a half acre farm lots near the river. Young "earnestly advised the brethren to move on to their city lots (Sandy Town A) as soon as they could and go to improving and not think of any other place than that which has been designated by the rightful authority."⁷¹ In December of 1868 new settlers arrived at Fort New St. Joseph. Before they had a chance to unload their wagons and settle in the fort, Young led them to the Sandy Town A site where the permanent city had been designated for settlement.⁷² There he told them to "amalgamate and unite together,"⁷³ later telling them not to give way to a "murmuring spirit" of fault-finding.⁷⁴

Young felt that the St. Joseph settlement was superior to St. Thomas due to the abundance and desirability of the land. He admitted the city lots were located in a sandy area but extolled the virtues of the sand to the point of being ludicrous: ". . . yet the Sand was clean; they might lay down and roll in it, and then get up and shake themselves, and it would fall off and not stick like the mineral mud of the northern (word indecipherable)."⁷⁵

The fact that irrigation was crucial to the agricultural prosperity of the Muddy Mission was well known to Joseph Young, who appears to have been a tireless speaker on the issue of building the water ditch to supply the Sandy Towns with water. Young's solution to the problems lay in the concept of unity. On January 24, 1869, he spoke on the subject of union. Again on February 7 he spoke on the principle of union, countering the feelings of some of the settlers who felt the canal would fail.

Before work was begun on the Canal, he gave the plan of operation, and invited all who were interested to go with him, and look over the ground where it was to be located, to see for themselves and then give their judgement. . . . As but few

accepted the invitation and went he supposed the remainder would acquiesce and be satisfied with any arrangement that might be made by those who did go. When any measure of importance is brought before the people, they have the right and privilege of expressing their views and opinions in relation to it. But no man has a right to find fault with a measure after it has been decided upon. . . .

The St. Joseph Canal might possibly prove a failure, but he did not believe it would. And if it did, it would be because men failed to perform that which is expected of them, and not because of any defect on the plan on which it is being carried out. But should it fail after everyone has done his part, they might find fault with him as much as they pleased.

He believed that the opposition and fault finding proceeded more from ignorance and want of faith than from a disposition to be rebellious.⁷⁶

The ultimate reasons for leaving the sand bench in favor of Overton and the old St. Joseph location are not recorded by Clement but may be assumed to be the exhaustive work required on the water ditch project. More important are the methods used to secure the continued work and faith in the sand ditch project. Fort New St. Joseph, a temporary community, represented a transition. The Mormon hierarchy sought to kindle a spirit of unity among all Mormons living in the fort, a unity that would prevail in their later permanent settlement. To accomplish this, Young felt the people needed to “unite with their leaders and follow them. It could never be accomplished by the Leaders endeavoring to follow the people in all their different ways and notions.”⁷⁷ President Snow summarized the process, arguing that “there were some minds that can see . . . the future of this country, and what can be made of it. There were others who cannot see, but if they will continue to be steadfast, and do as they are told, their faith will increase.”⁷⁸

Ultimately, one must question why people remained on the sand bench and continued to build a community there. At one point, of the 175 men called the previous fall, only eight of them remained at New St. Joseph.⁷⁹ George Brimhall in *Workers of Utah* surveyed the Muddy region for settlement, decided against it, and returned to Utah where he prospered.⁸⁰ According to Melvin T. Smith, “For some of these Mormons, the issue was not one of options, but whether or not one would be faithful.

For the faithful, not only was history an unfolding of God’s will, but Church leaders were viewed as the ones who understood these things best. Leaders were believed to be inspired, so that what they asked the Saints to do was seen as God’s will for the members. One consequence for many cotton missionaries was extreme sacrifice, both economically and in loss of loved ones.⁸¹

Can the Mormon leadership be described as insensitive to the sufferings of their people in light of the many failures of the sand bench ditch? Smith characterizes the Mormon leadership in the case of Jacob Hamblin as being so religious that he “reported what he believed was supposed to be there, not what in fact was.”⁸² The same can be said for Joseph W. Young, in another

context. His comments about the sand, “they might lay down and roll in it” might not be taken seriously in a later age, but he probably meant them to be serious. But they illustrate how his faith in the project took precedence over his ability to see reality.

Finally, it must be concluded that an individual’s personal faith determined how closely he followed the advice of the Mormon hierarchy. While Mormon elders often asked for superhuman feats in order to settle the sand bench area, it must be assumed the efforts of the brethren in following their leaders were proportionate to their individual belief. But even if a settler did remain faithful, he would have faced problems in following the mixed messages of the leaders of the Muddy Mission.

At West Point, for example, Snow allowed settlement while Brigham Young later recalled the settlers, who must have been confused and discouraged. The call to settle Rioville met with passive resistance which ultimately backfired when Gentiles were included in the settlement. But the location of the St. Joseph City on the sand bench was the worst exercise in poor judgment by Snow. The need for water on the sand bench and the limited technology for procuring it prohibited settlement of the area. However, if Snow personally believed with other Mormon leaders at his administrative level, that his choice had followed Divine guidance, it would have been difficult if not impossible to suggest later a different location was needed. The New St. Joseph settlers realized the folly of settling at the location and resisted moving there. Although the town was surveyed for settlement in March, no one even attempted to move there until September of 1868, well after the New St. Joseph fire. A year after the original survey, in the spring of 1869, settlers were still living in the fort. The faithful settlers were faced with a double bind situation. How could they question the location of the St. Joseph city on the sand bench? It had been set aside according to religious protocol. To admit it would not work would question the Church itself.

APPENDIX NOTE

Fort New St. Joseph

“The Great Basin is a good place to make Saints,” said Brigham Young.⁸³ This statement implies that the primary goal of Mormon colonization was a social one, that of transforming people of diverse cultures into a people of one thought: Mormons. The place for this transformation was the Mormon village or town. Examination of New St. Joseph and the Muddy Mission shows the town as a social force, a mode of transformation wherein all people, American or European, wealthy or common, were asked to develop a new Mormon cognition.

The term cognition has been developed by many scholars. Archaeologist

James Deetz's definition includes: "Such aspects of a past people as the way in which they perceived their environment, the world view that underlay the organization of their physical universe, and the way ideology shared their lives."⁸⁴ Anthropologist Mark Leone has analyzed Mormon technology and cognition in a study of Mormon fences and town plans. He believes the effect of the Mormon environment on the individual has been a cognitive one.⁸⁵

The Mormon's physical world is divided or compartmentalized by interior walled spaces, yards full of fences, and gridded towns with gridded fields. This is the cultural environment the Mormon was and is born into and raised in. He knows it all his life and it is reasonable to assume it has an effect on him: a cognitive effect.⁸⁶

Leone argues that twentieth-century Mormons need to compartmentalize. They need to be able to synthesize contradictions between their religion and twentieth-century reality, and the Mormon environment reflects this need symbolically with a compartmentalized landscape.

Nineteenth-century Mormonism was in the process of development. The Great Basin gave the Mormons the isolation necessary to create a Mormon cognition. The developmental stages of Mormonism were reflected in a nineteenth-century society characterized by forts. Ordering the physical environment in such a way as to separate Mormons and alienate outsiders, the fort epitomized the isolation characteristic of Mormon society.

The primary role of the fort was to create a unity of feeling among its inhabitants. Symbolically the fort contributed to this feeling. The effectiveness of symbols lies in the change of ideas they express. Claude Levi-Strauss has shown that symbols manipulate thought "through meaningful equivalents of things meant which belong to another order of reality."⁸⁷ The "thing meant," as symbolized by the fort, was unity of thought. The Mormon reality was the physical environment, and the Mormon fort the symbol. The constant visual reminder to unify, symbolized by the fort, would have added to the individual settlers' development of a Mormon cognition.

Scholars have observed significant variations between Mormon settlements in size of town plats, widths of roads, size of garden plots, etc.⁸⁸ If individual examples of Mormon fort settlements are examined, a large disparity between the "ideal" and the "real" fort exists. Brigham Young dictated on several occasions the exact type of fort settlement he desired:

I want to see every settlement fort in their cities. I want you to make a wall round here so that no man can get over and if your enemies come with scaling ladders they cannot get you and no gun faze the wall and be perfectly safe make four permanent gates and make yourselves secure so that you can sleep in peace. . . . Make the wall 6 or 8 feet high and don't be talking about it but go and do it.⁸⁹

Mormon settlers appear to have followed the prescribed "idea" of a fort, but with modifications necessitated by frontier conditions or personal prefer-

ence. Indeed, according to Anson Call, who described the early fort attempts at Fillmore, Utah, "it was next to an impossibility to stockade or picket in our houses with the tools we had to work with so we have built our houses in close order having no doors or windows upon the outside."⁹⁰ In fact, the desire to follow Brigham Young's advice was strong enough that settlers in Wellsville, Utah, in 1865 built a stockade consisting of a pole fence which was unable to keep out livestock, scarcely a threat to the Indians.⁹¹

Fort-building was a symbolic gesture which served a twofold purpose: protection against the Indian threat, real or imagined, and a system to consolidate settlers into a homogeneous group. Brigham Young spoke in 1853 on the concept of the fort, advising his people to "Let your dwelling house be a perfect fort."⁹² The fort became a symbol to the Mormon encouraging him to keep out alien ideas and to preserve the Mormon unit.

New St. Joseph was constructed as a fort, following a pattern already prevalent in Utah. Settlers built forts on the Utah frontier which roughly fall into one of three categories: the cabin row fort, the detached wall fort, or the contiguous compartment fort.⁹³ Warren Foote described New St. Joseph as similar to the St. Thomas fort, "only the rows of houses were farther apart."⁹⁴ "The north end was kept open so as to add to the length if necessary."⁹⁵ A description of the New St. Joseph fire includes more information about the fort. In his "Diary" Darius Clement explained that "the roofs of both strings of houses were joined but disconnected from those that did not burn."⁹⁶ From these descriptions it is assumed that New St. Joseph fit the "cabin row fort" pattern, although the backs of houses do not appear to have formed a continuous wall. Nor is there archaeological evidence to point to a detached wall surrounding the fort.

Forts were almost never the first type of settlement in a new area. As Pitman stated, "most of the settlements were actually several years old and quite well established before a fort was built."⁹⁷ And so it was with New St. Joseph, which was formed from a mixture of settlers from the original St. Joseph and from the Mill Point group. While it has traditionally been assumed that the move to New St. Joseph was in response to an Indian menace, there is evidence to indicate that the settlers did not feel overly threatened by the Indians. In fact, local frustration with the Muddy Indians prompted some Mormons to call for "indiscriminate extermination" of the Indians at one point.⁹⁸

The population of old St. Joseph (Logandale) had moved into a fort encampment during January of 1866. The call to consolidate the settlers of old St. Joseph and Mill Point during the summer of 1866 could have been in part in response to the hostility between the two groups which is discussed in Warren Foote's autobiography. If the Indian threat was exaggerated, then it would have been a greater influence for the amalgamation of the people. They would unite in a common effort against a common enemy. The fort at

New St. Joseph would contribute to a cognitive effect for the inhabitants. It is interesting to note that of the original settlers listed at old St. Joseph and the settlers at New St. Joseph at the time of the fire, most resided together at the “burned” end of the fort; only the Andersen and Bennett families of the original settlers of old St. Joseph were in the unburned section.

On May 30, 1866, Erastus Snow and others met with the Muddy Indians, and although a “good feeling” prevailed, Snow organized on June 7 a battalion of the Nauvoo Legion. On June 12, 1866, Snow issued the letter to Thomas Smith advising the old St. Joseph settlers to move to Mill Point and “fort up” or move to St. Thomas. Issuing the letter as General Snow of the Nauvoo Legion emphasized the Indian threat, although the real threat might have been the dissension between the two groups of Mormons.

In reality, the New St. Joseph complex offered a poor method of defense. All types of cabin row forts were deficient, because Indians could easily scale the walls, although the mere presence of a fort might have deterred Indian attacks.⁹⁹ New St. Joseph was even more deficient as there were spaces between the cabins, and the north end of the fort was kept open. The only importance of New St. Joseph as a fort was in the minds of those residing there.

According to Darius Clement, Joseph Young viewed the fort as a temporary town:

He spoke of the brethren having to move from where they intended to settle, at Old St. Joseph, on acct. of Indians, and afterwards their getting on the hill and building in a fort, which was all right and served a good purpose for the time being, yet they would have to make another move in order to get places in the right position. In all these moves there is a guiding hand of wisdom, leading the Saints in the path wherein lies the experience necessary to qualify them for the work required at their hands.

So long as men stayed in the fort, and tried to get rich by farming or raising stock, so long they would remain poor.¹⁰⁰

Still, people remained in the fort for months after receiving instructions to move. The New St. Joseph experience does not seem to have united the population sufficiently for the tasks they were then asked to perform. New St. Joseph failed as a true fort, and also failed in fostering a Mormon cognition among the residents. Although other forts on the Utah frontier failed as true fortifications, most were successful in developing a Mormon cognition among the Saints. Thus, the causes of New St. Joseph’s failure as a social force must lie within another realm: that of leadership and administrative problems.

NOTES

¹ Elbert Edwards, "Early Mormon Settlements in Southern Nevada," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, VIII (1965), 25-43; Pearson S. Corbett, "Settling the Muddy River Valley," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, XVIII (1968), 141-151.

² Refer to the Appendix for a further discussion of the fort built at New St. Joseph.

³ James Bleak, *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission*, Book A (Utah Writers Project, 1941), p. 165; St. Thomas is now under the waters of Lake Mead.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170. After the abandonment of the Muddy Mission other settlers moved rapidly into the valley, often inhabiting the Mormons' homes and harvesting their crops. Logandale, named for an early pioneer, became the new designation for the old St. Joseph townsite.

⁵ Pearson Starr Corbett, "A History of the Muddy Mission" (Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University, Provo 1968), p. 136.

⁶ Warren Foote, *Autobiography of Warren Foote of Glendale*, Microfilm of holograph, U.N.L.V. Special Collections, p. 194.

⁷ Brigham Young, Heber Kimball and Daniel Wells to Erastus Snow, May 2, 1866, James Bleak Papers, Latter Day Saints Historical Library Archives, Salt Lake City.

⁸ Bleak, *Annals*, p. 220.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

¹¹ Andrew Jenson Comp., "Muddy Valley Mission Manuscript History," Latter Day Saints Historical Library Archives, February 5, 1868.

¹² Diary of Darius Salem Clement, 1867-1868, Latter Day Saints Historical Library Archives.

¹³ Corbett, "History of the Muddy Mission," p. 80.

¹⁴ Diary of Darius Salem Clement, August 1868-April 1869, Latter Day Saints Historical Archives, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁶ Diary of Darius Salem Clement, August 1868-April 1869, Latter Day Saints Historical Library Archives.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Richard Lincoln McCarty, "Sandy Town, A Mormon Confrontation with the Mojave Desert" (Master's Thesis, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 1981), p. 112. Sandy Town A and B are designations used by modern historical archaeologists. It is the author's belief that these sites correspond to the historical documentation presented in this article.

¹⁹ Clement, "Letter," n.p.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Diary of Clement, 1867-1868.

²² It should be remembered that New St. Joseph was founded in July, 1866, yet the ditch was completed more than one and a half years later. Snow's permanent residence was St. George, Utah, and he visited the Muddy Mission infrequently as there were other areas also under his jurisdiction.

²³ Bleak, *Annals*, p. 263.

²⁴ *Deseret News*, June 19, 1868.

²⁵ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.* Beside receipt of a "city lot," most settlers obtained a two and a half acre "garden plot" located near the Muddy River and a five acre parcel on the sand bench. It appears that vegetables, hay and products for personal use were grown on the two and a half acre parcel, while grain and cotton were more likely to be grown on the five acre parcel. William Wood, "Autobiography," Latter Day Saints Historical Library Archives; German E. and Mary Smith Ellsworth, *Our Ellsworth Ancestors* (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing Company, 1956), p. 130.

²⁷ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, pp. 3-4.

²⁸ Journal of William Gibson, 1855-1870, Latter Day Saints Historical Library Archives, p. 78.

²⁹ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, pp. 6-7.

³⁰ The settlers could physically move quite rapidly if they chose to by settling in a wagon box removed from the running gear of a wagon. This could be supplemented by tents and willow "wickiup" structures. Most people settled in this fashion when they arrived on the Muddy River. When adobe dwellings were desired rapidly settlers could pay Indians to construct the bricks, cf. Gibson *Journals*.

- ³¹ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 12.
- ³² McCarty, "Sandytown." The religious importance the Mormons placed on proper polar alignment of their cities should not be underestimated.
- ³³ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 24.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ³⁵ Even today, few of the homes located on the sand bench have landscaping and lawns are almost nonexistent.
- ³⁶ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 36.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.* The term "living in camp" refers to the practice of living in a wagon box removed from the running gear of a wagon and placed on the ground.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ Corbett, "History of the Muddy Mission," p. 141.
- ⁴⁴ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 44.
- ⁴⁵ James H. McClintock, *Mormon Settlement in Arizona* (Phoenix, Arizona, 1921), p. 126.
- ⁴⁶ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 40.
- ⁴⁷ Diary of Clement, 1867-1868.
- ⁴⁸ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 15.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.
- ⁵⁰ Corbett, "History of the Muddy Mission," p. 86.
- ⁵¹ Arabell Lee Hafner, Comp., *100 Years on the Muddy* (Springville, Utah: Art City Pub., 1967), pp. 44, 73.
- ⁵² Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 47.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- ⁵⁴ McClintock, *Mormon Settlement in Arizona*, p. 120.
- ⁵⁵ Francis Leavitt, "The Influence of the Mormon People in the Settlement of Clark County" (Master's Thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 1934), p. 100.
- ⁵⁶ "History of St. Thomas Ward 1865-1932," Latter Day Saints Genealogical Library, Las Vegas.
- ⁵⁷ Morton Brigham Cutler, "Autobiography," Latter Day Saints Historical Library Archives, p. 7.
- ⁵⁸ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 42.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ⁶² Wood, "Autobiography."
- ⁶³ McCarty, "Sandytown," p. 107.
- ⁶⁴ "History of St. Thomas Ward," For other missionaries' commentaries on the agricultural success of the last years of the Muddy Mission, see William Decatur Kartchner, "Autobiography," Brigham Young University Special Collections," Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, pp. 73, 70, 68, 58, 51, 129.
- ⁶⁵ *Reese River Reveille*, March 21, 1871.
- ⁶⁶ Feramorz Young Fox, "The Mormon Land System: A Study of the Settlement and Utilization of Land Under the Direction of the Mormon Church" (Doctoral Dissertation, Northwestern University, Evanston, 1932), p. 76.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- ⁶⁸ Ephraim Ericksen, *The Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life* (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah Press, 1922), p. 39.
- ⁶⁹ Mark P. Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 7-8.
- ⁷⁰ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 7.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 28.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 24.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 11.
- ⁸⁰ George Brimhall, *Workers of Utah* (Provo: 1889).
- ⁸¹ Melvin T. Smith, "Mormon Exploration in the Lower Colorado River Area," Richard H. Jackson ed., *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press Charles Redd Monographs in Western History No. 9, 1978), p. 44.
- ⁸² Ibid.
- ⁸³ *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London 1856-86) 4: 32.
- ⁸⁴ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten, The Archaeology of Early American Life* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. 23.
- ⁸⁵ Mark Leone, "Archaeology as the Science of Technology: Mormon Town Plans and Fences," Robert L. Schuyler ed., *Historical Archaeology: A Guide to Substantive and Theological Contributions* (Farmingdale, New York: Baywood, 1978), p. 197.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 199.
- ⁸⁷ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 200.
- ⁸⁸ Robert Lynn Layton, "An Analysis of Land Use in Twelve Communities in Utah Valley, Utah County Utah" (Doctoral Dissertation, Syracuse University, Syracuse, 1962).
- ⁸⁹ Joel Edward Ricks, *Forms and Methods of Early Mormon Settlement in Utah and the Surrounding Region, 1847 to 1877* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press Monograph Series, 1964), p. 38.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 61.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., p. 65.
- ⁹² *Journal of Discourses*, 1: 167.
- ⁹³ Leon Sidney Pitman, "A Survey of Nineteenth Century Housing in the Mormon Culture Region," (Doctoral Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1973), p. 128, and Peter L. Goss, "The Architectural History of Utah," *Utah Historical Review*, XLIII, No. 3 (Summer 1975), pp. 208-239.
- ⁹⁴ Foote, "Autobiography," p. 196.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 201.
- ⁹⁶ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 4.
- ⁹⁷ Pitman, "Survey of Nineteenth Century Housing," p. 127.
- ⁹⁸ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 18.
- ⁹⁹ Pitman, "Survey of Nineteenth Century Housing," p. 130.
- ¹⁰⁰ Diary of Clement, 1868-1869, p. 9.