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Reclaimed from a Contracting Zion: The Evolving Significance of St. Thomas, Nevada

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RECLAIMED FROM A CONTRACTING ZION:
THE EVOLVING SIGNIFICANCE OF
ST. THOMAS, NEVADA

By

Aaron James McArthur

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History
College of Liberal Arts
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May 2012



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ABSTRACT

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By

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Historians tend to treat Mormon history separately from the larger patterns of western American and U. S. history. The history of St. Thomas, Nevada, the remains of which are within the boundaries of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, show that this segregated treatment is inadequate. St. Thomas was established in 1865 by Mormon missionaries after the Mormon leader Brigham Young sent them to the Moapa Valley in what is now southern Nevada to grow cotton. The town, like a few other Mormon sites in the region, was abandoned by the LDS Church, taken up by other people, and assigned new meanings. This dissertation serves as a general history of the town from its establishment, abandonment, and recovery to a place of regional importance. It also discusses its demise under the waters of Lake Mead and the evolving interpretations of the place in the present. Through its location in a national recreation area and the lens of civic engagement, the National Park Service has interpreted it as a place significant for all Americans, regardless of religion. It

highlights those historical themes that show how this little Mormon community was a fully integrated part of the history of the American West.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In 2002, in the midst of the worst drought in the recorded history of the Colorado River System, the remains of St. Thomas, onetime town on the Muddy River, emerged from the depth of Lake Mead.¹ This mud-caked Brigadoon drew the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* columnist John L. Smith in for a visit. After pounding over the rutted road that wound through sandy washes and slogging through a mud flat to St. Thomas, Smith reveled in standing where pioneers once stood, and in seeing what the Paiute and Shoshone saw. While surveying the scene, he asked himself the question, “Why was lowly, mud-caked St. Thomas so important, and what can we still learn from it?” His answers focus on the fragility of life and the scarcity of water in the desert. St. Thomas, for Smith, seems to exist to provide a cautionary tale about water, since Las Vegas’, and thus Nevada’s, economic engine ultimately does not run on dice or cards, but water.² Smith’s observations are mirrored by the scene he observed of the town emerging from the water. In both, much more lay hidden beneath the surface, waiting for time and determined searching to expose. It is clear from the article that, at least for Smith, the fact that it was originally a Mormon community has very little to do with what is important about it.

For some, the emergence of the remains of a small town from a reservoir may seem so mundane as to scarcely merit discussion. The West is littered with

¹ http://www.snwa.com/ws/river_drought.html (Assessed 24 January 2012)

² John L. Smith, “Town’s Ruins Emerge From Water to Whisper,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 20 February 2003, 1B.

the remnants of communities that simply did not make it. Who cares about just another town that failed - especially one surrounded by apparent barrenness? Such an attitude has many proponents. Journalist Joel Garreau describes most of the Intermountain West as the “Empty Quarter,” hardly a term that reflects a belief in the area’s importance. The Empty Quarter is an area of resource extraction, mining, cattle, railroads, and the ghost towns abandoned when those industries busted. The area is littered with boomtowns and supports the highest concentration of government-owned land in the United States. The other eight “Quarters” of North America are then presumably the places where all the important things happen.³ In the words of many others, it is the middle of nowhere. Southern Nevada has many of the characteristics that could make an area a “nowhere”: barren desolation, arid isolation, and a settler-repelling difficulty in travel.

Despite its very real geographic liabilities, southern Nevada illuminates the inadequacy of Garreau’s notion of an empty quarter. It is full of history, recreation, defense industries, and cutting edge architecture. The name Las Vegas, the biggest city in the area, carries a cachet that no other place in the world does. It is the entertainment capital of the world, a glittering jewel in the desert, a Mecca for fun in the sun and in the Green Felt Jungle. The city has come to occupy a

³ Joel Garreau, *The Nine Nations of North America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1981).

central position in popular America mythology.⁴ It is setting the pace for nationwide trends in city growth, demographics, immigration, consumption, work, and recreation.⁵ The history of that area then becomes important for understanding the society it birthed. The interpretation of St. Thomas gives us an opportunity to provide a deeper understanding of southern Nevada history of which Las Vegas is but a part. It also fills a gap in the historiography, not just by telling the story of St. Thomas, but also of the Muddy Mission, which is underrepresented in the available literature. One hundred and forty-five years ago, Las Vegas was a failed experiment. Missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints built a fort in the Las Vegas Valley in 1855, but poor relationships with the Southern Paiute, crop failures, weather, and the Utah War led to its abandonment in 1857. The political, economic, and social locus of the area was sixty miles to the east, in St. Thomas, Nevada. Located on the Muddy River, St. Thomas sat on the only significant water source for a one hundred and twenty mile stretch of the Old Spanish Trail, and became the main town on the Mormon supply line that stretched from the Colorado River to St. George, Utah. The town was one of hundreds established by the Latter-day Saints in the U.S. West in an effort to create, and populate Zion, a modern day promised land. It was the first and most important town established in the Muddy Mission, the

⁴ Edward E. Baldwin, "Las Vegas in Popular Culture" (PhD diss, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1997).

⁵ Hal Rothman, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Shed its Stigma and Became the First City of the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Routledge, 2003.

trailhead for mining expeditions and supply routes, and even a base of exploration for government surveys undertaken in preparation for the construction of a dam on the Colorado at Black Canyon. St. Thomas sat at the heart of an important developing region, one that its developers considered a place of great promise.. This dissertation traces the history of the town, how it fits in with the pattern of Mormon place creation, the town's importance in the region, and its eventual demise. It also discusses how the town was taken up by new owners and reinterpreted. It explains part of its continuing significance in Southern Nevada. St. Thomas was abandoned by a contracting Zion as political, social, and economic realities changed. The study will show that the place is now remembered for reasons that are often completely different from the one originally conceived by its founders.

St. Thomas lies approximately sixty miles east of Las Vegas, Nevada, on the southern end of the Moapa Valley, which is close to the rim of the Great Basin. Surrounded by great aridity, the town site benefited from its proximity to the spring-fed Muddy River and the Virgin River. The area has little rainfall, searing heat in the summer, winds, and dust. Its official birthday was January 8, 1865, when Thomas Sassen Smith and his party of eleven men and three women arrived at the confluence of the Muddy and Virgin rivers and founded the town. Brigham Young established the town in part to secure Mormon self-sufficiency in the production of cotton. As an incorporated town, it ceased to exist in June 1938,

when it went under the waters of Lake Mead. It is now part of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area.

Until it re-emerged from the water in 1999, St. Thomas had been largely forgotten by the public. There are several reasons that this historical amnesia is unfortunate. In January 1867, Congress took one degree of longitude from Utah Territory and gave it to Nevada. An accurate survey was not completed for nearly four years, during which time Nevada, Utah, and Arizona fought over who controlled much of what is now southern Nevada. As the primary settlement in the Muddy Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, St. Thomas played an important role in the conflict. The affair is a prime example of boundary conflicts between states. The town was also the terminus of John Wesley Powell's 1869 exploration of the Grand Canyon. St. Thomas was a key water and rest stop on the Arrowhead Trail, the first all-weather road between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City. St. Thomas residents played a very important role in maintaining the road. The federal government bought out all the residents in the 1930's in preparation for filling Lake Mead, which was created by Hoover Dam. Out of the water since 1999, the town site has become a popular hiking area for residents of and visitors to southern Nevada.

St. Thomas's story has not been told before. After the Saints had firmly established themselves in the Great Basin, St. Thomas was among several places abandoned for one reason or another. San Bernardino, the Carson Valley, Fort Limhi, Pipe Spring, and even Las Vegas, to name a few, were left to the Gentiles.

Capable historians have written at least cursory accounts of all of these places, except for St. Thomas. This dissertation provides comprehensive coverage of entire history of St. Thomas, while addressing larger themes including sacred space, water, dams, Native American relationships, boosterism, railroads, mining, legal wrangling, historic site management, and more.

In discussing the creation of St. Thomas as an outpost of Zion, is it necessary to discuss the concept of sacred space. Though some vociferously deny it, man is a spiritual creature. The most strident atheist generally adheres to traditions that satisfy a deep seated spiritual need. This is particularly true with regards to place and space. Those most disinclined to commune with deity may still feel ties to their first home, the site of their first kiss, or some such other commemorative place. Those who are spiritually inclined have, since people first walked the earth, held certain places as sacred. As a historian of the U. S. West, I am interested in seeing how this reverence for places, sacred space, has played out in the West.

When Brigham Young's party arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on July 24th, 1847, he proclaimed that "this is the place." For the footsore and weary members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons, who were with him, this was a prophetic declaration from the Lord. There followed nearly a half a century of Mormon expansion as the Saints enlarged the borders of "The Place", which they tried to bring into the Union as the state of Deseret. They sought not only to take up as much land as possible for the Saints to dwell on, but to create a

buffer between themselves and hostile “gentiles.” In doing so, Brigham Young, and to a lesser degree his successors as president of the Church, tried to establish industries that would help the Saints become more self-sufficient, and independent from the outside world. Additionally, when a new settlement was established, the land it occupied was literally dedicated to the Lord, and thus the place became holy ground. To establish a community was to bestow a sacrament on the land. This concept of sacred space was vastly different from the use value of a place for most Euro-Americans in the West who tended to see the land in economic terms.

Politics, economic realities, and shifting priorities had a profound impact on the physical land of Zion. As the needs of the Church and the society changed, some places no longer fulfilled vital functions and eventually passed out of Church ownership, and the Saints began to forget them. This is not to say that the places were scrubbed from the memories of the Latter-day Saints, but they passed out of their economic and social orbit. Those who lived in these places took their lived experience to the grave. The places themselves do not have a morality, or an inherent memory. It was their inhabitants that assigned the meanings the places held. Some of these places, when abandoned by a contracting Zion, were reclaimed and repurposed by people not interested in establishing Zion. Parks and historic sites are an important part in the dissemination of these repurposed stories. The story of expansion is well-covered territory; the story of contraction has scarcely been considered by scholars. Closely following the story of

contraction is the story of these places after the transition in ownership and meaning has occurred. The old paradigm is no longer acceptable. The Great Basin is part of America, and the history that occurred there belongs to the whole country. A new approach is required that puts these places into their proper historical context. Through the lens of the defunct town of St. Thomas, Nevada, I will investigate how at least one of these previously Mormon places has been repurposed for the needs of the present nation.

According to W. Paul Reeve in *Making Space on the Western Frontier: Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes* (2007), to understand sacred space, we must understand the mechanisms that make it so. In general, there are three parts to creating sacred space. First, the space is selected, and ritually or physically set aside. Second, the place is named. Last, the founding experience is ritualized. Returning to and reliving or commemorating that founding experience is a form of renewal. The group that does the best job of physically controlling an area for long periods of time is generally afforded the privilege of dictating the predominant meaning of that area. This dissertation traces the changing interpretation of the space that makes up the town site of St. Thomas as a result of changes in control over the place.

Very closely related to the concept of sacred space is the concept of Zion. The term Zion means many different things to many different people. Geographically, it is either one of two sites of a palace or the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, depending on what time frame you are considering. It is the name of a

National Park in the United States, and a wildlife garden in New Zealand. It is also the name of towns in Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Zion is the name of the post-apocalyptic city of the humans in *The Matrix* film series. It shows up as the name of Israeli soccer players and in the titles of songs by Bob Marley and Lauryn Hill. It is also the name of my daughter. For most, it denotes some kind of chosen or promised land.

Even within LDS theology, there is a range of possible meanings for the term. Zion can retain its Biblical meaning and refer to Jerusalem, or to the Millennial New Jerusalem in Missouri. It can also mean any central location to which the Saints have gathered: Kirtland, Ohio; Jackson County, Missouri; Nauvoo, Illinois; and the Great Basin centered in Salt Lake City.

Zion can refer to the city founded by Enoch the prophet, which was taken up into heaven. It also describes the people in that city, “And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.”⁶ Because of this, the term can be applied metaphorically to Saints who are fully living the gospel. It is also a metaphor for a unified society of Saints, in the sense that Stake of the Church is considered a “Stake of Zion.”⁷

⁶ *Pearl of Great Price* 7:18. The *Pearl of Great Price* is part of the official canon of scripture for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

⁷ A stake is an ecclesiastical unit roughly comparable to a diocese, usually consisting of 7-10 wards. The name comes from the Old Testament, Isaiah 54:2, which reads, “Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.”

At the time St. Thomas was established, the Saints understood Zion to be both the land in which the Saints have settled and the social and religious effort to prepare themselves and the world for the coming of Jesus Christ. The Great Basin was the place “where the city of Zion would be erected, where they would “dig in,” as Prophet Joseph predicted, and the Devil would not again root them out. In this place they would build Zion by their own plan, live life by their own pattern, and no law of gentile design would be foisted on them.”⁸ President John Taylor (successor to Brigham Young) laid out what this Zion would look like. He wrote:

In all cases in making new settlements the saints should be advised to gather together in villages, as has been our custom from the time of our earliest settlement in these mountain valleys. The advantages of this plan, instead of carelessly scattering our over a wide extent of country, are many and obvious to all those who have a desire to serve the Lord. By this means the people can retain their ecclesiastical organizations, have regular meetings of the quorums of the priesthood, and establish and maintain day and Sunday schools, Improvement associations, and Relief Societies. They can also cooperate for the good of all in financial and secular matters, in making ditches, fencing fields, building bridges, and other necessary improvements. Further than this they are a mutual protection and a source of strength against horse and cattle thieves, land jumpers, etc., and against hostile Indians, should there be any; while their compact organization gives them many advantages of a social and civic character which might be lost, misapplied, or frittered away by spreading out so thinly that inter-communication is difficult, dangerous, inconvenient, and expensive.⁹

Zion then, was both a place *and* a social order.

⁸ Nels Anderson, *Desert Saints: The Mormon Frontier in Utah* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1942), 67.

⁹ Feramoz Y Fox, “The Mormon Land System: A Study of the Settlement and Utilization of Land under the Direction of the Mormon Church” (Ph. D diss, Northwestern University, 1932), 142-3.

Following sacred space, or simply the meanings that people attach to the landscape, the most important theme to discuss in relation to St. Thomas is that of water. Without the Muddy River and the water it provides, St. Thomas could never have existed. The Anasazi that built a pueblo near the confluence of the Muddy and Virgin Rivers would never have chosen that location were it not for the presence of those two rivers. They would never have been able to grow the corn and squash that served as their main source of food. The Paiute would have never have found grains in sufficient quantity to warrant spending any time in the Moapa Valley.

Among other ways, the Mormons were pioneers in the sense that they were the first to create large scale irrigation works in the West. From the time that Jefferson Hunt, a member of the Mormon Battalion, traveled through the area in 1847 to 1865 when St. Thomas was established, Church leaders were very aware of the potential the valley's water and soil represented. The water grew their crops, gave them drinking water, and occasionally flooded away their improvements. The water from the Muddy allowed the Saints to help one little corner of the desert "blossom as a rose."

As the Church lost control of the community and the water that ran through it, the meaning of the water changed as well. It still allowed resident farmers to grow their crops, and thus represented a livelihood, but once water disputes began to be handled in the courts rather than in the bishop's office, its

administration changed.¹⁰ With the construction of Hoover Dam, water became a completely destructive force, smothering the entire southern half of the Moapa Valley under a blanket of water. In recent years, since the town has emerged from the depths a decade ago, the town has served in the press as a cautionary tale for those who would be irresponsible stewards over water.

The subject of water naturally leads us to that of dams and reservoirs. Historians can easily fall into the trap of saying that the subject of their research is exceptional when, in reality, their perception is colored by their attachment to that subject. That being said, St. Thomas is truly unique among ghost towns. At first blush, this may not seem to be the case. There is nothing unique about St. Thomas going under the water of a reservoir. From both St. Thomas and Kaolin, less than three hundred people were displaced. This is hardly significant considering how many others have lost their homes because of dam construction. Some estimates place the total number of people in the world who have been displaced by dams to be between forty and eighty million people.¹¹ The Three Gorges Dam over the Yangtze River in China flooded 13 cities, 140 towns, 1350 villages, displacing 1.24 million people.¹² The Lost City was flooded by the construction of Hoover Dam, but this hardly seems to compare to the numerous

¹⁰ Early LDS communities in Utah had little to no separate secular government. Church leadership served double duty, exercising secular and religious authority. Joseph Smith referred to this fusion in the Mormon context as “theodemocracy.” See Patrick Q. Mason, “God and the People: Theodemocracy in Nineteenth-Century Mormonism,” *Journal of Church and State* 53:3 (Summer 2011), 349-375.

¹¹ <http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/way-forward/world-commission-dams/world-commission-dams-framework-brief-introduction>, (Accessed 15 September 2011).

¹² <http://www.internationalrivers.org/china/three-gorges-dam>. (Accessed 15 September 2011).

ancient Egyptian sites flooded with the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Even along the Colorado River, both Lake Powell and Lake Havasu covered more towns than Lake Mead. Nevertheless, St. Thomas is the best place in the United States, and probably one of the best in the world, to assess the effects of reservoir creation and drowned towns.

First of all, it is in the West. Much has been written about water in the West.¹³ This is certainly understandable given the arid nature of most of the region. For some, aridity is the defining characteristic of the West. This makes western reservoirs particularly important, as they allow the agricultural utilization of land that would otherwise lay fallow. It also means that every major river in the West, with the exception of the Yellowstone River, has been dammed. While water, dams, and reservoirs are central features in many western stories, the towns that were drowned in their creation have received very few mentions.¹⁴ There are some local histories about individual towns drowned under reservoirs, but the only scholarly article that deals with drowned towns in the West was just published in the summer of 2011. That article discusses Hover, Washington and Detroit,

¹³ Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Donald J. Pisani, *To Reclaim a Divided West: Water, Law, and Public Policy, 1848-1902* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Penguin, 1986) and Norris Hundley, Jr., *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water, 1770s-1990s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), to name a few.

¹⁴ Bob H. Reinhardt, "Drowned Towns in the Cold War West: Small Communities and Federal Water Projects," *Western Historical Quarterly* 42:2 (Summer 2011), 149-172. Reinhardt contends that the reason that the towns he discussed went under with hardly a fight is cultural pressure to conform in the face of the communist menace.

Oregon, which were drowned in the 1950's, and how neither raised much of a fuss. The author believes this is because they did not want to appear unpatriotic in the Cold War environment.¹⁵

There were obviously reservoirs created that incited strong reactions. There was a flood of vitriol over the damming of the Hetch-Hetchy valley, but it had nothing to do with the destruction of a town, so the unfortunates that lost their homes when that valley was dammed were confined largely to burrowing animals. There were other places whose residents did not think that the government offered them enough money for their land.

St. Thomas is the best site in the United States to interpret drowned towns for reasons other than its accessibility. Most drowned towns are still drowned. They are only accessible to scuba divers and fish, which remain obstinately indifferent to the politics of dam construction. St. Thomas has emerged from the water five times since the completion of Hoover Dam. This last time, it has been out for a decade, and, as I will discuss in a later chapter, may never go under the water again. Another reason is the location of the town. It lies in Lake Mead National Recreation Area, which was the first national recreation area and remains the largest. It is the fifth most visited national park, with a yearly visitation of about eight million, which equals the visitation of the Grand Canyon and Yosemite combined.¹⁶ It is closely associated with Hoover Dam, one of the biggest projects

¹⁵ Ibid.

to come out of the Great Depression and one of the greatest pieces of human engineering.

St. Thomas is in an area that is easily accessible. Visitors can drive to within about a quarter mile of the site and hike to it. You can actually go to the town site, walk down the roads, and touch what remains of the town. The road to the parking area is maintained. The National Park Service has erected signs to direct visitors to the site and provide a little information about it. The accessibility of the site is very significant. According to Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen in *The Presence of the Past*, a national survey shows that Americans trust museums and historical sites more than any other source of history, mainly because they can see the places or items on display for themselves and draw their own conclusions.¹⁷ The Park Service showed how interested they were in understanding what the town could teach by spending \$75,000.00 to commission a historic resources study to learn how to better interpret it.¹⁸ There is no other site like it in the United States.

The history of St. Thomas is very useful for showing how accounts of the relationship between whites and Native Americans have been repurposed from a

¹⁶ William K. Dickinson, "Lake Mead National Recreation Area," April 2010, http://crc.nv.gov/docs/iolll_0410/William%20Dickinson.pdf. (15 September 2011).

¹⁷ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 22.

¹⁸ Task Agreement No. J8R07060008, Cooperative Agreement No. H8R07010001, Great Basin Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit. Agreement between the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents on behalf of the University of Montana and the Pacific West Regional Office of the National Park Service.

story of building Zion to a more inclusive one. According to LDS theology, Native Americans are primarily descended from a group of Israelites who left Jerusalem six hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ. Upon arriving in the new world, they split into two main groups. Those groups were the Nephites, who were righteous, and the Lamanites, who were not. Eventually the Lamanites killed off all the Nephites.¹⁹ Modern Native Americans are descended from those Lamanites, and ultimately members of the House of Israel, God's chosen people. The Mormons felt that they had been divinely appointed to help these descendants of Abraham back to a knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ. This led the Latter-day Saints to establish missions to specifically proselytize Native Americans and to generally treat them better than most other Americans at the time did.

One of the stories of the area that is not very important to the official Mormon story is that of early explorers. The Muddy River was essential to eighteenth and early nineteenth century explorers in what is now southern Nevada. Fathers Francisco Atanasio Dominguez and Silvestre Velez de Escalante crossed the Muddy on their way to Santa Fe from Los Angeles in 1776. Also making stops, and recording their visits, were Antonio Armijo, John C. Fremont, Jedediah Strong Smith, and others. These early travelers must have been very happy to see the Muddy River, especially when traveling north, because they referred to the area between the Las Vegas Springs and the Muddy River as the *Jornada del*

¹⁹ This is according to *The Book of Mormon*, which is part of the official canon for the Latter-day Saints. Founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Joseph Smith claims to have been led by an angel to a hill in upstate New York where he found the record on plates of gold. The *Book of Mormon* is reportedly a translation of those plates.

Muerte, the journey of death.²⁰ For anyone who undertook the journey in the summer, the fifty miles without water would make that name seem like a logical one.

Many themes that are explored in this dissertation are already integral parts of the traditional interpretation of the history of the West. This makes it very easy for the Park Service to highlight these themes for non-religious audiences. *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greely famously wrote “go west, young man.” For Greely and others, the West was a place of opportunity. For the Mormons, the Muddy was also a place of opportunity. Brigham Young encouraged volunteers to travel to the Muddy and join the mission there. Some were happy to do so because so much of the available land in the Mormon core of settlement was already claimed by others. Gentiles moved into the area after the Mormon exodus to capitalize on the good farmland and irrigation network. Speaking of the exodus, it ushered in over a decade of history where the town fit into the mythic, violent West, serving as a hideout for outlaws and others living on the fringes of society.

The theme of mining shows up repeatedly. Mining, at least in most of the nineteenth century, was not part of the official Mormon story. At one point, Brigham Young even threatened to excommunicate members who abandoned their farms and went off to look for mineral treasures rather than spiritual ones. Nevertheless, St. Thomas served as a supply point for some Pahrnagat miners as

²⁰ Letter from John Steele to George Albert Smith, 25 July 1855. MS 1322 Box 5 Folder 10. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

well as the main supply depot for the Gold Butte Mining District. The salt mine near St. Thomas was also important for the Paiute before whites arrived and was continuously mined until it went under the waters of Lake Mead.

Boosterism was a part of life in St. Thomas from the very beginning. Letters sent to the *Deseret News* by various leaders portrayed St. Thomas as being in a land of opportunity and promise. Residents seeking to secure a spot on the route of the Arrowhead Trail Highway and on the railroad sang the praises and great potential of the town. They were apparently successful, too, because two other themes that this dissertation discusses involve transportation on the highway and rail spur that reached the town on the Muddy and the efforts of boosters that secured them.

This dissertation also addresses many legal issues that St. Thomas residents had with the state and federal governments. In 1866, Congress voted to take one degree of longitude from Utah and give it to Nevada. St. Thomas lay within this ceded territory, and residents there fought the transfer for four years, until they left the town *en masse* to avoid falling under the jurisdiction of Nevada. Residents again faced the power of the government in the 1930s, when the area was surveyed and appraised so that the government could purchase the land needed to create Lake Mead behind Hoover Dam. These two events really show how St. Thomas is tied into larger American themes of federalism, regionalism, and more.

The National Park Service's approach is to attempt to mean as many things to as many different people as possible. Through civic engagement (which will be

discussed in the last chapter of the study) the NPS actively encourages community members to be involved in how historic sites are interpreted. Historian Jan Shipps accused most historians of the U. S. West of “circling all around the Great Basin, taking into account and telling nearly every western story except the Mormon one,” creating a “donut hole” of history.²¹ In St. Thomas, and other previously Mormon sites that are now part of national or state parks, history is interpreted as if the “donut hole” created by some professional historians does not exist. Those providing interpretations from the Park Service are very clear that the original (white) inhabitants of the town were LDS, sometimes mentioning their unique history. But they then proceed to explain how this unique history is part of a larger American story. A way of interpretation that may be distinct for strictly academic historians is taken to be as standard operating procedure by the National Park Service. The interpretation provided by the Park Service is very important because Americans are much more likely to be exposed to, and accept, history as presented by the Park Service than they are to accept the interpretations of academics.

One of the reasons that many academics avoid Mormon history is that it is so tied up in religion. According to the late Ferenc Szasz, whose research focused on religion in the American West, there are several reasons for the avoidance of religion in the historiography of the West. Much recent scholarship on the West

²¹ Jan Shipps, “Gentiles, Mormons, and the History of the American West,” *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 21.

has focused on the privileged topics of race, class, and gender. The biggest reason avers Szasz, is that a focus on religion as a motivating factor “realigns all the traditional categories used to understand the western past: ethnic, political, economic, social, the traditional western expansion, and the new triad of race-class-gender.”²² Even with a though much of the history of St. Thomas is colored by religion, its stories resonate with a larger audience. This is one reason that the place works as a NPS property.

The study is divided into four sections: Planted, Ebb and Flow, Drowned, and Reclaimed. Part I, Planted, discusses the establishment of St. Thomas and the functioning of the early Muddy Mission. Part II, Ebb and Flow, looks at the abandoning of the town by Mormon missionaries, its slow recovery in terms of population and wealth, culminating in the arrival of the Arrowhead Trail Highway and the railroad. Part III, Drowned, covers the slow demise of the town after the announcement of Hoover Dam, the survey of lands for purchase by the government, and its inundation. The fourth and final section, Reclaimed, discusses the times that the town site has emerged from the waters of Lake Mead and the efforts of various groups to decide what the ultimate meaning of the town is. The section also shares the stories of other formerly Mormon places and how their current interpretations parallel those of St. Thomas. These four sections are further divided into chapters.

²² Fenerc Szasz, *Religion in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), xii-xiii.

Chapter One serves as the introduction to the work and lays out its major themes. Chapter Two introduces the area that the Saints discovered when they arrived in 1865. It describes the physical layout of region encompassing St. Thomas as well as the climatic conditions. With the exception of narrow strip of land on either side of the Muddy River, the conditions are desolate, dry, and hot. Despite an environment that most Europeans shunned, the Moapa Valley has a long history of human habitation. I briefly discuss the Anasazi presence and their replacement by the Southern Paiute. I also cover the efforts of explorers such as John C. Fremont and Jefferson Hunt. Focusing in on the townsite, I discuss the Latter-day Saints' motivations in creating the town: pre-empting gentile settlement and creating a buffer between the Saints and the gentiles already there, creating homes for Saints, a way station between the Colorado River and St. George, and especially a place to grow cotton for Brigham Young's drive for self sufficiency.

Chapter Three addresses the process of establishing an outpost of Zion. It discusses both the philosophical as well as the physical mechanic of establishing a Mormon community. It lays out how the entire process was directed by Church leaders in Salt Lake City from selection of the site, the physical layout of the town based on the Plat of the City of Zion, as well as exactly who should go to establish the new community. Also covered is how all these elements are parts of the sacralization of the land. The chapter also relates the efforts of the missionaries to

build a town in the desert, to irrigate their crops, and to maintain a workable relationship with their new Paiute neighbors.

Chapter Four discusses the rarely addressed topic of Mormons abandoning areas within the Mormon Culture Region. It covers the government survey that showed St. Thomas to be within the boundaries of Nevada and all the legal wrangling on the part of the Saints and Nevada officials over taxation. After receiving permission to abandon the settlement, the missionaries left the valley *en masse*, with the exception of Daniel Bonelli and wife.

Chapter Five covers the uneven and somewhat aborted transition from Zion to the Silver State - the desacralization of St. Thomas. It shows how for a while, St. Thomas became almost quintessentially “western” in the mythic sense as it was taken over by outlaws, miners, solitary farmers and beset by difficulties with Native Americans. After a decade, the Saints began to slowly filter back into the area, integrating with the Gentile community, even when the St. Thomas Ward was re-established.

Chapter Six shows how the town began to thrive at the turn of the century and once again take on a regional significance. Though the town’s population increased by 395% in the first two decades of the twentieth century, it never had power or municipal water, yet it managed to obtain a railroad spur and become an important stop on the Arrowhead Trail highway, the first all-weather highway from Los Angeles to Denver. The chapter details the events that secured these improved transportation features for the town.

Chapter Seven relates how the 1920's were both positive and negative for the town. The discovery of an Anasazi pueblo, the Lost City, near St. Thomas brought in an influx of tourists and spread word of the town across the ocean. During the decade, there were also several crop failures, flooding, and road washouts. Eventually the highway was rerouted around St. Thomas as it became clear that the federal government was going to drown the town under the reservoir created by Hoover Dam. The appraisal of lands illustrates the divide between Mormon and larger American world views. Following the survey, the chapter recounts the slow exodus of people from the doomed community.

Chapter Eight recounts the death of St. Thomas as a community, covering the dissolution of the ward, moving the cemetery, dismantling the railroad, and the removal of many buildings for scrap. Of particular interest is the flurry of activity at the Post Office on the last day the town was out of the water. Following its inundation, there were several years of legal wrangling over land purchases and valuations.

Chapter Nine addresses the periodic reemergence of St. Thomas like some sodden phoenix and the reunions of former residents. It then contemplates the shifting meanings attached to the town as it became a part of a National Recreation Area. The chapter compares how the interpretation of places operated by the National Park Service in relation to their goal of civic engagement compared to those operated by the LDS Church.

Part I: Planted

Chapter Two: Physical Setting, Native American Usage, and Pre-Muddy Mission Mormon Movement

In 1864, the Samuel Claridge family lived in Nephi, Utah. Dressed in their finest clothes, they were eager to attend a meeting with the visiting President of the Church, Brigham Young. Samuel's daughter Elizabeth described the meeting:

During the afternoon we all attended the meeting, the girls in white having reserved seats in front. The sermons were inspirational and grand. They made us very happy until well on toward the close of the meeting when President Young announced that he had a few names to read—names of men who had been selected to go with their families and “settle the Muddy.” That almost stopped our beating hearts. Many of our people had been previously called to settle the Dixie county. But the Muddy—that was so much farther—so much more difficult. Then I heard the name of Samuel Claridge, my father. After that I knew nothing for a moment and when I recovered myself again I was weeping bitterly. Tears were spoiling my new white dress but I sobbed on just the same. Said the companion who was at my side, “What are you feeling so badly about? My father has been called, too, but you see that I am not crying because I know he won't go.” “That is just the difference. My father is called and I know that he WILL GO; and that nothing can prevent him from going. He never fails to do anything when called upon; and badly as I feel about it, I would be ashamed if he didn't go. But I will have no occasion to be ashamed for I tell you my father WILL GO.”²³

Samuel Claridge did go to the Muddy, despite some initial problems. Just as the family was ready to depart, one of his horses was poisoned and he had to buy another animal. A week later, one of his mules choked to death in the barn.

Elizabeth related that some of their friends said “Brother Claridge, this shows that

²³ S. George Ellsworth, *Samuel Claridge: Pioneering the Outposts of Zion* (Logan, Utah: Self-published, 1987), 81, 87. The original is a memoir in the article “From an Adobe Hut to a Mansion of Brick and Stone,” *Deseret Evening News*, 6 June 1903.

you are not to go!” “Does it?” Elizabeth recalled her father saying. “It shows me,” he continued, “that the adversary is trying to prevent me from going; but I am going all the same if I have to walk every foot of the way.”²⁴

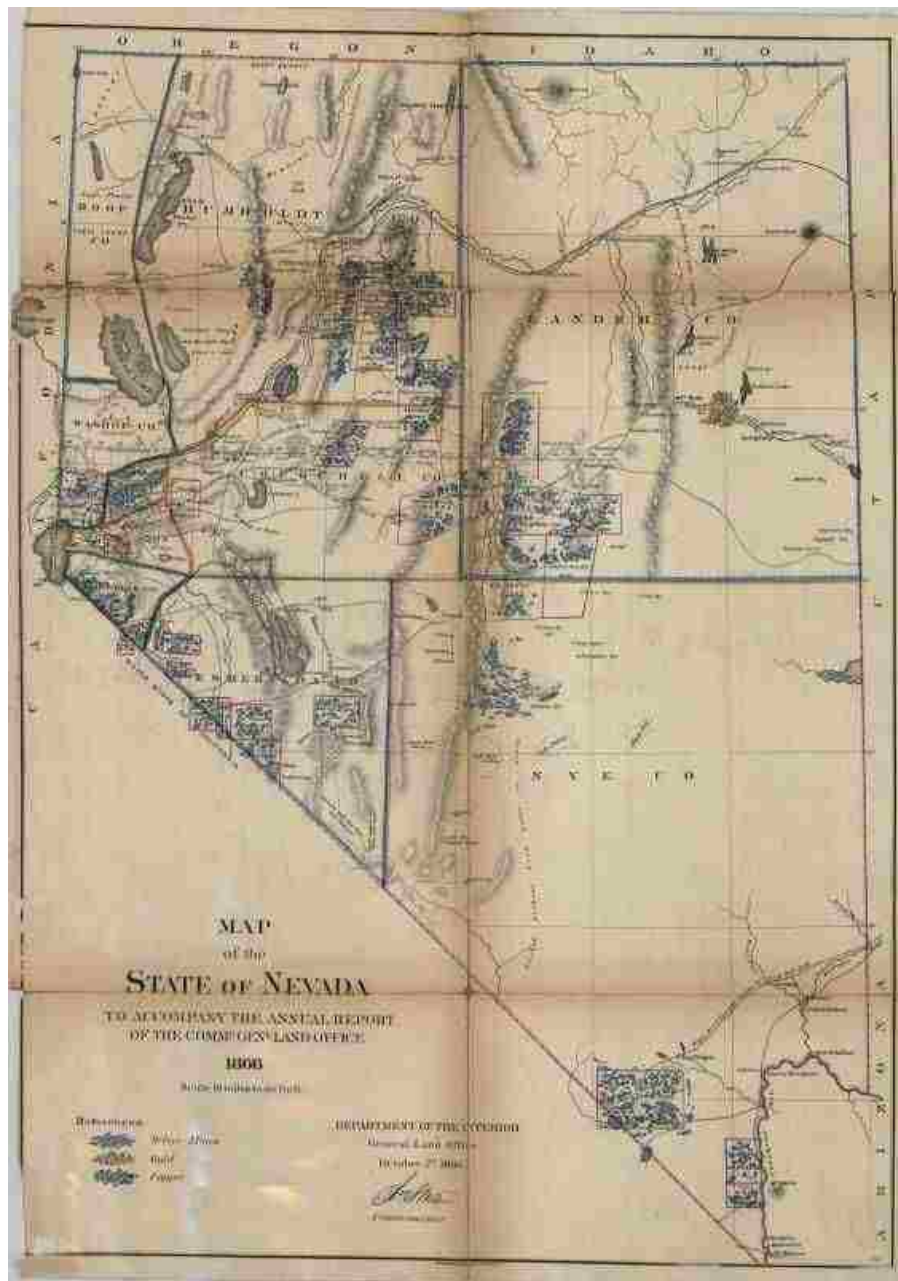


Figure 1: Nevada in 1866. The Moapa Valley is in the lower right.

²⁴ Ellsworth, *Samuel Claridge*, 81, 87.

The young Miss Claridge had some very concrete reasons for her consternation. While not everyone who went to the Muddy had such a hard time getting there, all had the geography and climate to deal with, both of which could be very harsh. Explorers and settlers of European descent also encountered the Southern Paiute who lived in the area. Sometimes they were very welcoming to newcomers, and other times displayed serious hostility. Early interactions influenced both the positive and negative relationships that the Mormons and Southern Paiute had in the region. To understand the story of St. Thomas, we need to look at the things that so disconcerted Elizabeth and how they factored into general Mormon settlement motivations and place making.

The valley resembles much of the southern Great Basin, with steep, high mountains around relatively flat plains. The area is desert, averaging less than six inches of rain a year. Winter is mild, but in summer the heat can be oppressive, with temperatures reaching up to 122° Fahrenheit.²⁵ The valley's greatest asset is the spring-fed Muddy River. It is more of a stream than a river, but most important for the Paiute and the Mormons who followed after, it flows year-round. The water and the area's lower elevation allowed for a longer growing season than St. George, which made the area desirable for cotton production.²⁶ It was also the only water

²⁵ S. George Ellsworth, "Mormon Settlement on the Muddy" (Dello G. Dayton Memorial Lecture, Ogden, UT: Weber State College Press, 1985), 2. PAM 22691, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah. This source actually indicates that the highest temperature recorded in St. Thomas was 140°, but the highest temperature for the area that I was able to verify was 122° in Overton.

²⁶ Starr Pearson Corbett, "A History of the Muddy Mission" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1968), 88.

for fifty miles in every direction but south. There was plenty of grass for travelers' animals, which allowed for extended stays. Most journals of early travelers in the area mention the Muddy.²⁷ Addison Pratt, one of the members of Jefferson Hunt's 1849 expedition through the area, said the water in the Muddy was warm and pleasant to bathe in. He also noted that the fish in the stream, which he thought resembled carp, were easy to catch. He also noted that the Paiutes' crops seemed to be doing well.²⁸

Despite the presence of water, some travelers had very little positive to say about the Muddy. Parley P. Pratt wrote that the area was a,

wide expanse of chaotic matter . . . consisting of huge hills, sandy deserts, cheerless, grassless plains, perpendicular rocks, loose barren clay, dissolving beds of sandstone and various other elements, lying in inconceivable confusion—in short, a country in ruins, dissolved by the peltings of the storms of ages, or turned inside out, up side down, by terrible convulsions in some former age. Eastward the view was bounded by vast tables of mountains one rising above another, and presenting a level summit at the horizon, as if the whole country had once occupied a certain level several thousand feet higher than its present and had been washed away, dissolved or sunk, leaving the monuments of its once exalted level smooth and fertile surface. Poor and worthless as was the country, it seemed everywhere strewn with broken pottery, well glazed, and striped with unfading colors.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 9.

²⁸ Leroy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Journals of Forty-Niners: Salt Lake to Los Angeles* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 87.

²⁹ *Journal History*, 31 December 1849, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah. The *Journal History* is a massive collection of clippings, articles, and primary source documents relating to Church history maintained by the Church Historical Department. The collection is indexed by day.

Another traveler agreed with Pratt's estimation. He asked, "Was this Hades, Sheole, or the place for the condign punishment of the wicked, or was it the grand sewer for the waste and filth of vast animation?"³⁰

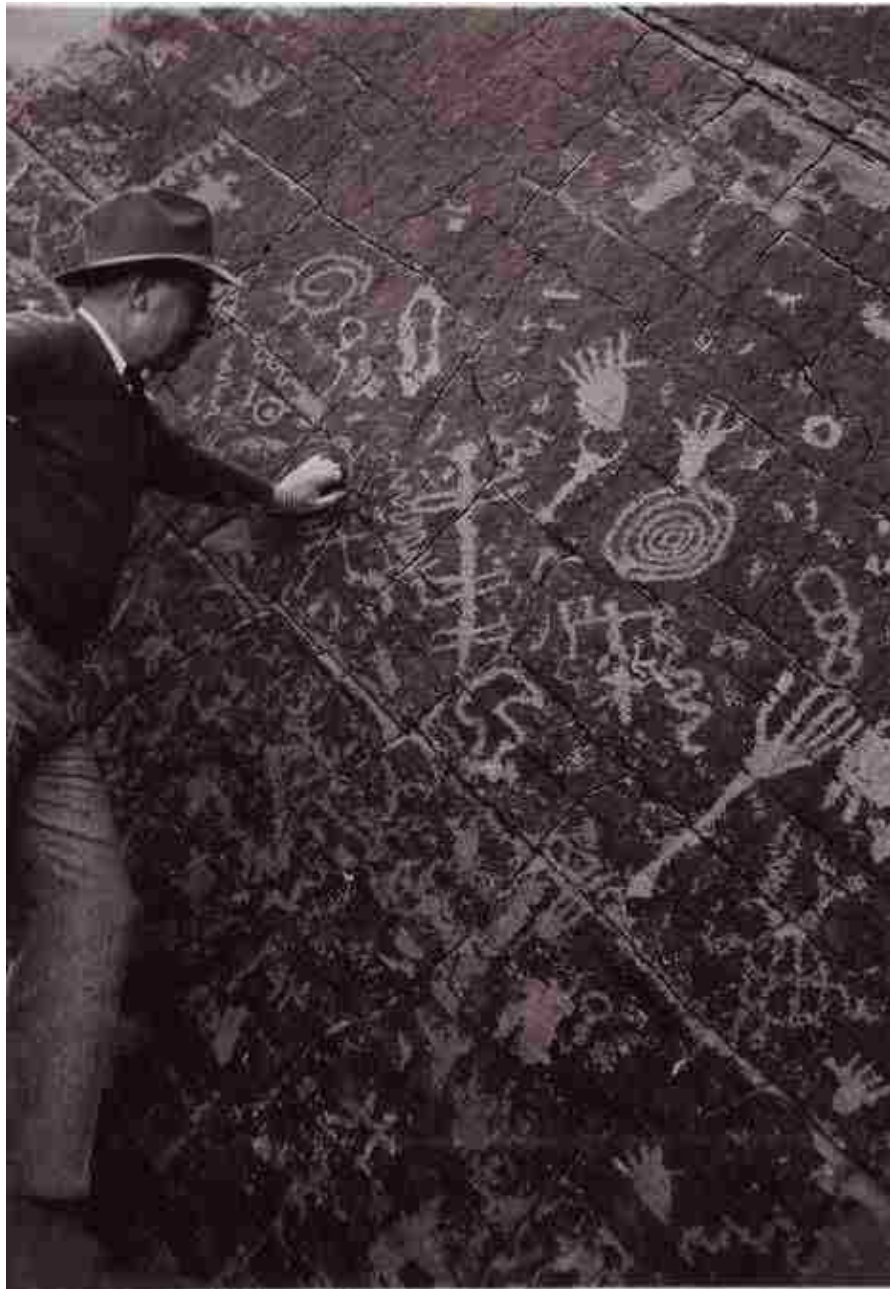


Figure 2: Petroglyphs in Valley of Fire, near St. Thomas. Photo NARA Denver.

³⁰ George W. Brimhall, *The Workers of Utah* (Inquirer Company: Provo, UT, 1889), 41.

Despite the low estimation that many whites had for the land, the Paiutes and their predecessors held the land in great regard, having inhabited the area for a millennium. The Paiute believed their god Tabuts placed them on the land, and that act of placement made the land sacred.³¹ The Paiute were not the first Native American group to make the area that became St. Thomas their home. In 1931 near the Colorado River, archaeologists discovered the bones of an ancient sloth in a cave over the remains of human presence—charcoal, flint, and bones. The bones of the sloth were approximately twenty thousand years old.³² The surrounding area contained further evidence of human habitation from eight thousand years ago.

Pueblo Grande de Nevada, also known as the Lost City, was the residence of a group of Pueblo Indians that lived in the area from about 100 AD to 1150 AD. Lost City residents grew corn, beans, squash, gourds, and cotton; gathered seeds, turquoise, and paint materials; and hunted. Archaeological exploration showed that they had large trade networks from the seashells found in the ruins. Given the evidence of extensive primitive salt mining, it is likely that salt was one of their main trade items.³³ Hopi oral traditions suggest they are descended from people

³¹ W. Paul Reeve, *Making Space on the Western Frontier: Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 11.

³² “See an Ancient Sloth’s Bones Dug out of Gypsum Cave,” *Millard County Chronicle*, 29 January 1931.

³³ “Prehistoric Industry is Being Covered by Lake,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 24 June 1937, 1:6–7.

who lived on the Muddy. Some posit that drought, a stronger enemy, malaria, or yellow fever drove them from the area.³⁴



Figure 3: Lost City reconstruction, 1939. Bureau of Reclamation, Office of Chief Engineer, Boulder Canyon Project, album 7. NARA Denver.

By the time Europeans found their way to the Moapa Valley, the Paiute had long made it their home. The Paiute found the land along the Muddy very amenable to their lifestyle. In addition to water, the valley had other valuable resources. The Muddy had groves of the Desert Fan Palm, which the Paiute used for weaving baskets and bags, and for the construction of shelters.³⁵ The area that

³⁴ Michael R. Harrington, "A Primitive Pueblo City in Nevada," *American Anthropologist* 29:3, New Series (July 1927): 262-77.

³⁵ <http://www.xeri.com/Moapa/wf-hr-foreword.htm> (accessed 19 March 2008). The palm is *Washingtonia Filifera*.

became St. Thomas was very well suited to their agriculture, being generally level and close to the confluence of the Muddy and the Virgin Rivers, which provided irrigation water. Parley P. Pratt noted during his 1852 visit to the area that the Paiute were engaged in agriculture. He wrote that “sixty Muddy Indians in a state of nudity thronged the camp, bringing with them green corn, melons, and dressed skins in exchange for clothing.”³⁶ Addison Pratt noted that there were “fine fields of wheat, corn and beans, above us that belonged to the Indians.” They “irrigated their lands from this stream and their field had the appearance of bearing a very heavy crop.”³⁷ Joseph W. Young also reported on their farming practices. He said they planted their wheat in hills, one to two feet apart, and watered it often, but did not let the water stand and soak. He said this created large heads and full berries, so much so that he “never saw finer grain in [his] life.”³⁸ The Paiute also gathered wild plants to supplement their diet. They mixed mesquite meal with water and made it into huge cone-shaped loaves. These loaves would weigh as much as fifty pounds. They would then dry it for their winter storage.³⁹

Whites, who did not understand the exigencies of surviving in the desert with limited technology, derided the Paiute’s eating habits. The Southern Paiute were referred to as “Diggers” by whites due to their habit of carrying a stick with

³⁶ Parley P. Pratt autobiography, 378, 406, as quoted in Andrew Karl Larson, “Agricultural Pioneering in the Virgin River Basin” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1946), 40.

³⁷ Hafen and Hafen, *Journals of Forty-Niners*, 87.

³⁸ Joseph W. Young, *Deseret News*, 19 June 1868.

³⁹ Larson, “Agricultural Pioneering in the Virgin River Basin,” 34.

which they constantly probed and dug, looking for edible roots, insects, and reptiles. To the less gastronomically adventurous whites, the Paiute seemed to have no compulsion against eating absolutely anything they could get their hands on. One early visitor observed, “They ate lizards, snakes, grasshoppers, locusts and crickets, ants, and even the vermin which infested their furry clothing and their own hair.”⁴⁰ Another visitor presented the Paiute on the Muddy with some dried beef which had gotten wet and was spoiled and moldy. As disgusting as the beef was, they ate it “voraciously.” After consuming the beef and some coffee they “expressed their satisfaction by rubbing down their stomachs, and grunting in a manner which would have done credit to a herd of well-fed swine.”⁴¹ No doubt, the eating habits of the white man seemed ridiculous or at least wasteful to the Paiute as well.

Cultural differences between the Paiutes and early explorers led to further misunderstandings. The lack of clothing in Paiute culture offended Christian sensibilities. Men generally wore a breechclout and women a skirt. For warmth, those possessing one wore a robe. John C. Frémont was not kind in his estimation of the tribe. In his memoirs, he wrote that, “In these Indians I was forcibly struck by an expression of countenance resembling that in a beast of prey; and all their actions are those of wild animals. Joined to the restless motion of the eye, there is a want of mind—and absence of thought—and an action wholly by impulse,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33-34.

⁴¹ Leroy R. Hafen and Ana W. Hafen, *The Old Spanish Trail* (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1954), 323-24.

strongly expressed and which strongly expressed the similarity.” They followed Fremont’s group” stealthily, like a band of wolves.” Any livestock allowed to straggle was quickly stolen and eaten.⁴²

Though Frémont compared their cunning to that of wild animals, the Paiute were wise when it came to surviving in a harsh environment. Almost as invidious as the belief that they were savages was the notion that the Paiute were innocent “Children of Nature,” and lived simply and free of cares.⁴³ The Mormons who came later had somewhat softer prejudices against their Native American neighbors, but still held some of the notions evidenced in Frémont’s account.

Running directly through the Muddy River Valley, the St. Thomas area provided an important stop on the Old Spanish Trail.⁴⁴ Mexicans, white Americans, and Native Americans used the trail extensively for exploration and traffic in fur, liquor, guns, horses, and Native American children for slaves. Though beaver are scarce in southern Nevada today, various trappers sought them in the area in the early nineteenth century. Accounts are spotty in part because Mexican

⁴² John C. Fremont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 378–80, as quoted in Larson, “Agricultural Pioneering in the Virgin River Basin,” 37.

⁴³ Arabell Lee Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, (Springville, UT: Art City Publishing, 1967), 7.

⁴⁴ The Old Spanish Trail is somewhat of a misnomer. Spaniards did explore the area in the 1500’s, and the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition did travel through the Muddy on their way to Santa Fe in 1776. The trail did follow routes used by various Native American tribes to trade, especially the Ute who traded slaves extensively with Mexico. The trail did not see heavy use by whites until after 1830, when Antonio Armijo attempted to create a “new” route from Los Angeles to Santa Fe. By this time, Mexico had been independent from the Spanish for almost a decade.

authorities made trapping on the Colorado or tributaries illegal, so any activity had to be clandestine.⁴⁵

Jedediah Strong Smith passed through the area in 1826. With fifteen men, he went south from the Provo, Utah area, following a trail used by Father Escalante down the Sevier River. He then followed the Virgin past the Muddy and traveled across the Mojave to San Bernardino.⁴⁶ By the time the Saints arrived in the Great Basin in 1847, great caravans were traveling up and down the trail. In 1842, a party of 194 New Mexicans on their way to trade in California stopped to rest on the Muddy with 4,150 cattle and horses.⁴⁷ Every caravan that came through stopped at least overnight, and often for several days as their animals grazed on the abundant grass in the valley.⁴⁸

For travelers on the Old Spanish Trail, the importance of the water running down the Muddy may be hard to overstate. The nearest accessible water was the Las Vegas Springs in one direction and springs in Utah in the other direction. In May 1844, Fremont left Las Vegas for the Muddy. His party had not traveled far when they came upon the skeletons of horses, mute testimony to the

⁴⁵ Richard E. Gillies, "A History of Lincoln County, Nevada, 1776-1874" (master's thesis, University of Utah, 1959), 13.

⁴⁶ Clifford Dale Harrison, *The Ashley-Smith Explorations* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1918), 187, and Hafen and Hafen, *The Old Spanish Trail*, 113-14.

⁴⁷ Scholars of Mormon history, LDS and Non-LDS alike, often refer to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints simply as "Saints." The term "Mormon" was originally a pejorative used to illustrate the belief that a Mormon was not a Christian. The use of the term Saint allows writers to refer to members of the LDS church quickly and easily and is in no way indicative of the idea that every who is not a Saint is naturally a sinner.

⁴⁸ Corbett, "A History of the Muddy Mission," 17-18.

consequences of not finding water in the desert. As they traveled, the desert floor reflected the heat of the sun, baking them from the bottom as well as the top. Occasionally, they would chop into a *bisnaga*, a cactus, to get at the pulp, or chew on the leaves of sour dock to moisten their mouths. When they had been marching for sixteen hours with the sun over the horizon for several hours, their mules suddenly began to run forward. After another two miles, the weary travelers reached the Muddy, which Fremont called the Rio de Los Angeles.⁴⁹ Though the water was greatly appreciated, Fremont called the Muddy the “most dreary river” he had ever seen.⁵⁰

Attorney and future Oregon Supreme Court justice Orville C. Pratt recorded a more positive experience on the Muddy, although traveling in a different direction from Fremont. Upon reaching the river, his party “made a delightful camp on a fine stream of water with good grass.” They had a pleasant meal of corn and beans purchased from the Paiute while they looked around in appreciation. Pratt wrote that “The valley of “Muddy” is large & land fertile. The water is of the best and purest kind and some day, & that not too distant, this valley will teem with a large & healthy population.” The desirability of the Muddy River was highlighted by his observations on his subsequent march to Las Vegas.

⁴⁹ Allan Nevins, *Fremont, the West's Greatest Adventurer* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), 202-3.

⁵⁰ John Charles Fremont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842, and to Oregon and California in the Years 1843-44* (Chicago: Bilford Clark and Co., 1887), 379-80.

He wrote “Our march was a very hard one of full 50 m. & one of the mules failed by the way side. Not a drip of water or a spear of grass the whole distance.”⁵¹

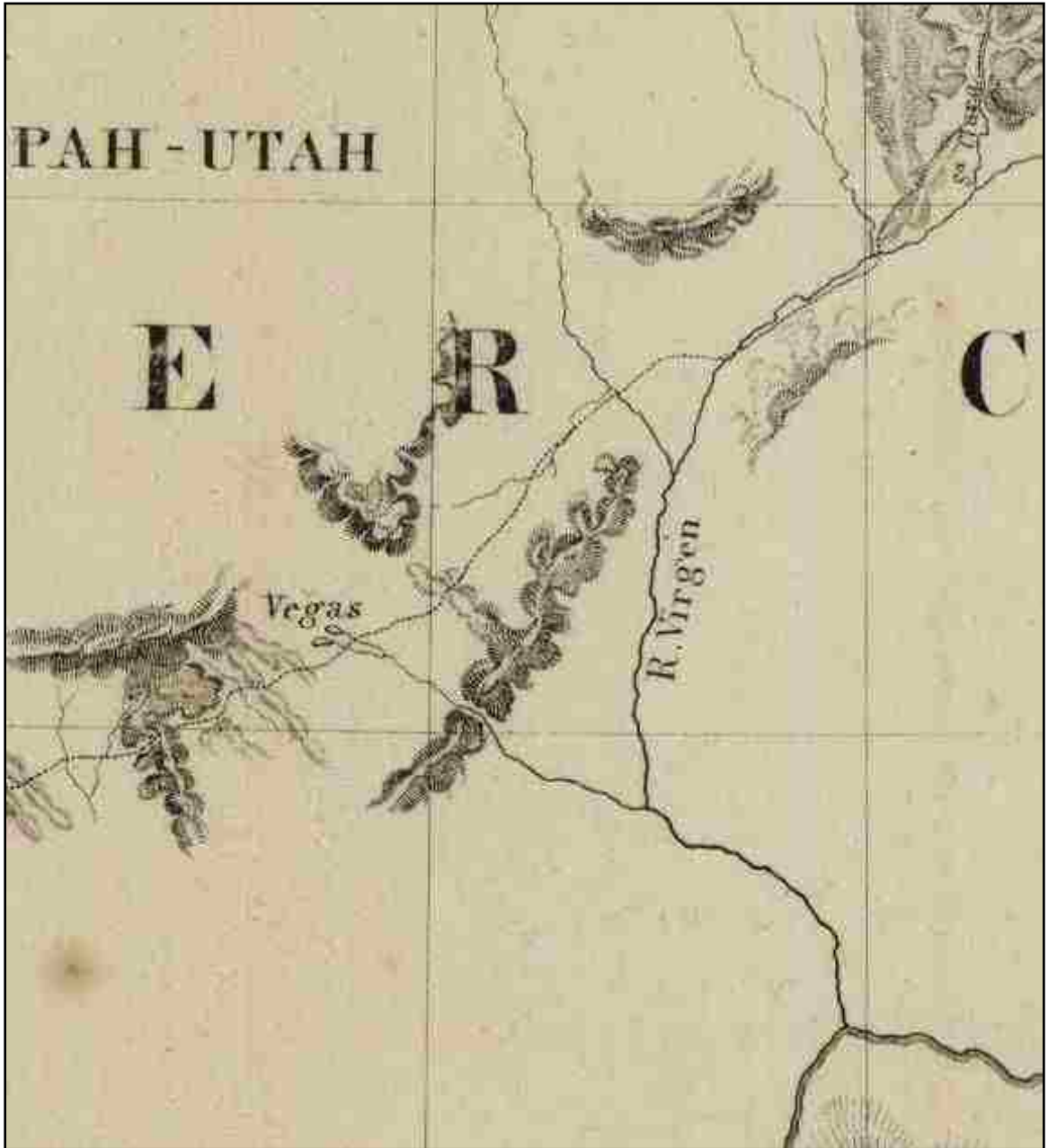


Figure 4: Detail of Fremont's 1848 map. UNLV Special Collections.

⁵¹ The Diary of Orville C. Pratt, as quoted in Hafen and Hafen, *The Old Spanish Trail*, 324-25.

When Kit Carson traveled through the area in 1844, he also had to contend with the Paiute and the environment. While camping on the Muddy, he was approached by about three hundred Paiute who wanted to come into his camp. Carson refused, telling them that they had killed seven Americans the year before, and they were treacherous creatures who could not be trusted. He explained that he felt the only reason they wanted to enter his camp was to maintain the guise of friendship long enough to kill his party, and if they did not leave, he would open fire. One Paiute was killed when the group refused to leave, then the others withdrew. He had no more trouble with them after that.⁵²

There is disagreement among scholars as to who named the river the Muddy River, whites or Native Americans, and if whites, who named it first. Jedediah Smith (1826), Kit Carson (1847), and Orville Pratt (1848), all referred to the stream as the Muddy.⁵³ Joseph W. Young claimed that the term Muddy River originated because the Old Spanish Trail crossed the valley near a low alkali swamp that proved hard to cross in wet weather. Young remembered the water as clear and good to drink but too warm for pleasant drinking.⁵⁴ Historian James McClintock claimed to have seen a map of the New Mexico Territory from 1853 that called the stream El Rio Atascoso, denoting a miry place where the traffic

⁵² Ibid., 314.

⁵³ Ibid., 314, 355.

⁵⁴ Joseph W. Young, *Deseret News*.

sticks fast, rather than a river that is muddy its entire length.⁵⁵ Lieutenant Edward Beale, another explorer, referred to the Muddy by its Spanish name. Fremont was apparently the only one to call the stream Rio de Los Angeles.⁵⁶

Some sources suggest that the name Muddy is from a Paiute word for mesquite. Their term for the mesquite bean is *moudy*, and many mesquite trees grow along the stream. Another explanation is that, according to Perry Liston, when he visited the Muddy in 1857, the Paiute referred to the stream as *ma-pat*, which means “muddy water.” The Muddy River may have obtained its moniker when whites adopted what the Paiute already called it.⁵⁷ Even if that is not the case, the name seems appropriate if both groups arrived at it individually. The source of the name of the Moapa Valley is much clearer. The Paiute called the valley *Moa-pah*, meaning water valley.⁵⁸

Mormons established St. Thomas in 1865, but the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints arrived in the area two decades prior. In 1847, the same year that the Saints reached the valley of the Great Salt Lake, Jefferson Hunt, having recently

⁵⁵ James H. McClintock, *Mormon Settlements in Arizona* (Phoenix, 1921), 102.

⁵⁶ Melvin T. Smith, “The Lower Colorado River: Its History in the Lower Canyons Area” (PhD dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1972), 35.

⁵⁷ Information attributed to George Perkins, a St. Thomas resident, as quoted in Melvin T. Smith, “The Lower Colorado River,” 26.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

mustered out of the Mormon Battalion, led a party from Salt Lake to Los Angeles.

The Mormon Battalion served from July 1846 to July 1847.⁵⁹

Because he knew much of the area terrain from his time in the Battalion, the Church sent Hunt to buy seeds and explore the area between Salt Lake and the ocean. Hunt followed the Old Spanish Trail.⁶⁰ The next year Howard Egan, under the direction of Brigham Young, carefully surveyed every possible campsite between Provo and Southern California, noting the natural resources available at each possible stop.⁶¹ His report of course included the area that later became St. Thomas. The Church utilized this information to publish a guide for travelers.

⁵⁹ The Mormon Battalion has the distinction of being the only religiously based unit in the history of the United States military. The unit was formed shortly after the Saints left Nauvoo, Illinois in February of 1846. President Brigham Young sent Apostle Jesse C. Little to Washington, D. C. to seek a redress of their grievances. With the help of the well connected Thomas L. Kane, Little met with the secretaries of state and war as well as President Polk. Partly to keep the Saints from fighting against the United States, Polk agreed to allow a few hundred men to enlist under the command of Colonel Stephen W. Kearny. On July 1st, 1846, Captain James Allen arrived at the Mosquito Creek, Iowa camp of the Mormons. The Saints were initially wary, but President Young was swayed by the possibility of the public relations victory and the promised \$42.00 signing bonus per person, paid in advance. Though they were recruited because of the war with Mexico, the Battalion never saw combat, except with a herd of wild cattle called the Battle of the Bulls. They nearly clashed with some Mexican soldiers at Tucson, but avoided this because of a Mexican retreat. While occupying Tucson, they learned many irrigation techniques that would serve them well once they mustered out and went to their new homes in the Great Basin. Much of what the unit did was construct a wagon road between Santa Fe and California, some of the most forbidding terrain in North America. In total, their circuitous march from Council Bluffs, Iowa to San Diego, California covered nearly two thousand miles. There are several good works that cover the history of the Mormon Battalion, the first being B. H. Roberts, *The Mormon Battalion: Its History and Achievements*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1919. Other notable books include N. B. Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion: U. S. Army of the West, 1846 – 1848*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996; Sherman L. Fleek, *History May be Searched in Vain: A Military History of the Mormon Battalion*, Spokane WA: Arthur H. Clark and Company, 2006; and Will Bagley and David Bigler, *Army of Israel: Mormon Battalion Narratives, Kingdom of the West: Mormons on the American Frontier*, Spokane, WA: Arthur H. Clark and Company, 2000.

⁶⁰ Gillies, "A History of Lincoln County," 24.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

On his way to the mission field in May of 1851, LDS Apostle Parley P. Pratt stopped briefly on the Muddy. He noted that while getting there was a challenge, the valley was well watered, had good soil and fuel, and sufficient grass to support a settlement of one to two hundred families. Agriculture was feasible given that the Paiute were already growing wheat and corn.⁶² He also noted the area lacked timber for building. Since Pratt was an Apostle, it is certain that this information made it back to LDS president Brigham Young.⁶³ By 1854, records clearly show that President Young contemplated establishing a settlement near the Colorado River. Given the extremely mild winters, cotton, indigo, and other tropical plants and fruits would grow. A southern settlement would also benefit those whose health suffered in Utah winters. Young went so far as to tell church member John Eldridge that he was free to start such a settlement if he so desired.⁶⁴

In the meantime, some Paiute along the Muddy invited the Saints to settle in the area. Brigham Young believed the rest of the Moapa Paiute would welcome LDS settlement. The southern Paiute were much weaker militarily than the neighboring Ute and Navajo. The Paiute feared the Ute in particular because they captured Paiute children and sold them into slavery in Mexico. The Paiute hoped

⁶² *Journal History*, 21 March 1870, 2. Excerpt is from the autobiography of Parley P. Pratt. <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/PPPPratt.html> (Accessed 12 September 2011).

⁶³ The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles is the governing body of the LDS Church directly underneath the President. The Quorum, as a body, has equal authority as the First Presidency. A more detailed description of LDS hierarchy can be found at: <http://newsroom.lds.org/topic/organizational-structure-of-the-church> (accessed 27 January 2012).

⁶⁴ Brigham Young to John Eldridge, 14 March 1854, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 1 Folder 6, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

the Saints would serve as buffers between them and slave raiding parties as well as become trade partners. In response to their invitation, leaders of the Southern Indian Mission sent Rufus Allen to the Muddy to teach the Paiute the “Restored Gospel.” Allen’s missionaries baptized 230 Paiute on the Muddy in 1855.⁶⁵ Since the Paiute in the valley were now members, Church leaders no doubt felt they would continue to welcome Mormon settlements in the area. A letter that Brigham Young sent to George W. Armstrong, Indian agent, evidences this belief. Young wrote, “The natives . . . on the Rio Virgin and Muddy are very peaceful, and are extremely anxious to learn and adopt the manners and customs of civilized life. Good policy aside from more important considerations, dictates the encouragement of that feeling, and the furnishing of the proper facilities therefor [sic].”⁶⁶

Perhaps the most interesting settlement proposed for the Muddy was that of Sandwich, or Hawaiian, islanders who had joined the Church and desired to be “gathered to Zion,” since they were unable to find a suitable gathering place on the archipelago. President Young felt it unwise to have the islanders settle with the Saints at San Bernardino or nearby where they could be “contaminated” by “Gentile” Californian settlers.⁶⁷ Young said the soil was good and the climate was

⁶⁵ *Deseret News*, 15 June 1858.

⁶⁶ Brigham Young to Major George W. Armstrong, Indian Agent, 9 February 1856, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 16 Folder 2, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁶⁷ The Mormons viewed themselves as the Lord’s chosen people, a modern day Israel. Just as in the Old Testament, those who were not part of Israel were Gentiles. It was extremely common for early

much more similar to that of their native land than areas further north. On the Muddy, they would have “every reasonable facility for applying all the skill & industry they are at present possessed of, & above all, they will be in the midst of a mild spirited, industrious portion of the remnants of Jacob, their blood brethren, who are welcoming our missionaries with warm hearts & open arms.”⁶⁸ The plan was never carried out.

The “warm hearts & open arms” did not last long. William Bringhurst, the leader of the Saints at Las Vegas, explored the entire Muddy Valley in early 1856. Bringhurst reported that the Moapa Valley was “probably a better place to colonize” than Las Vegas was because of the amount of water and arable land. He found that many of the Moapa Paiute were sick, and had become very suspicious of the whites. Evidently, a band of Utes told them that the white men were going to take all their land.⁶⁹ Despite their less than cordial welcome, Bringhurst’s appraisal of the valley reached Brigham Young.

In September 1856, President Young wrote to William Bringhurst, advising him to remain in the Las Vegas settlement. However, Young did give his permission for all not actively engaged in producing lead to establish a settlement on the Muddy. Young reasoned that the Muddy offered “a good opening for

Latter-day Saints to refer to any non-Mormons as Gentiles. The term was not necessarily a negative one.

⁶⁸ Brigham Young to Amasa Lyman, 18 July 1854, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 2 Folder 1, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁶⁹ Andrew Jensen, ed., “History of the Las Vegas Mission,” *Nevada State Historical Society Papers V*: 201–2.

extensive farms suitable for cotton growing,” which the Church could use to clothe the Saints, lessening their dependence on cloth brought in from the East. Despite this encouragement, President Young made it very clear that settlement on the Muddy should take place only if there were truly too many people in Las Vegas, since the standing excuse of those in that mission was that there was insufficient work for all there.⁷⁰ President Young also discussed the possibility of cotton production on the Muddy with Miles Anderson, another Las Vegas Saint.⁷¹

One of the main reasons the Church continued to establish new settlements on the periphery of lands controlled by the Saints was to provide as much buffer as possible between the main body of the Saints and the “Gentiles,” or nonmembers, with whom the Church had experienced poor relationships since the establishment of the Church in 1830. The Saints had been driven out of Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois by their non-LDS neighbors, and their founder Joseph Smith had been killed by a mob. The Church leadership had no desire to have similar events happen again in the Great Basin. In 1857, a group of Saints happened upon Lieutenant Joseph C. Ives of the Corps of Topographical Engineers who was exploring the Colorado River under the orders of the Secretary of War. When President Young found out about the expedition, he sent George A. Smith to explore the area and identify places for settlement to preempt the arrival of any

⁷⁰ Brigham Young to William Bringhamurst, 30 September 1856, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 3 Folder 5, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁷¹ Brigham Young to Miles Anderson, 4 October 1856, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 3 Folder 5, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

non-Mormon settlers.⁷² Activities like this were not limited to what is now southern Nevada. Young was intent on securing all the lands claimed by the Mormons in the proposed state of Deseret, and sent explorers and settlers all throughout the Great Basin and surrounding areas, eventually establishing over 500 settlements throughout the West.⁷³

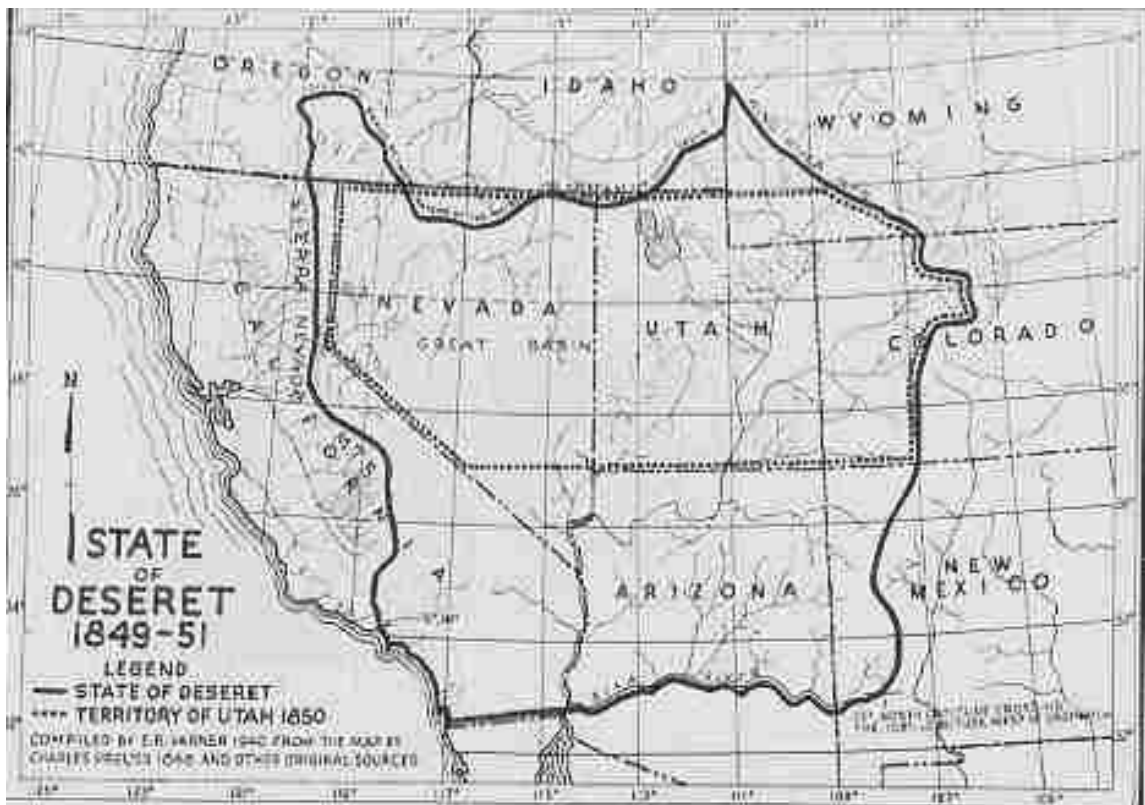


Figure 5: Proposed State of Deseret. Utah State Historical Society.

There were many in Washington, D. C. who were acutely concerned with the concept of Deseret. Part of the Compromise of 1850 was the creation of the

⁷² Gillies, "A History of Lincoln County," 34-35.

⁷³ Deseret was the Saints' word for the honeybee, which, along with the hive, symbolized industry and hard work.

Territory of Utah, of which President Millard Fillmore appointed Brigham Young governor. This kept the Saints from having “unsympathetic carpetbag appointees,” at least for a while. The newly minted Republican Party, in the presidential election of 1856, attacked the “twin relics of barbarism,” namely slavery and polygamy. They tied the popular sovereignty guaranteed by the 1850 compromise with the practice of polygamy. This led Stephen A. Douglas, formerly a Latter-day Saint ally, to attempt to salvage popular sovereignty by denouncing Mormonism, effectively turning the Democratic Party against the Saints as well. Politicians from both sides of the aisle, including President James Buchanan, were concerned with the practice of the Saints to elect their religious leaders to political offices, which some called “Theodemocracy.” The communitarian practices of the Saints seemed to violate republicanism as well as laissez-faire economics.

The relationship between federal appointees and Saints in Utah deteriorated as well. Some federal appointees, beginning in 1851, began to flee Utah, claiming that they feared for their safety. These “Runaway Officials” convinced Buchanan that the Mormons were on the verge of open rebellion. One in particular, territorial supreme court judge William W. Drummond, claimed in his resignation letter that Brigham Young had set aside the rule of law in deference to the priesthood. Other officials made accusations of fraud, treason, theft, battery, and other crimes.

After his inauguration, Buchanan appointed a new governor for the territory and sent a force of twenty-five hundred federal troops to build a post in

Utah and defend the new governor if necessary. The Saints did not have clear information about the mission of the troops, and so began making preparations to defend themselves, many vowing that they would not be driven from their homes again. Saints in outlying communities including San Bernardino, California and Genoa, Nevada were recalled to consolidate their position. All missionaries serving in the United States and Europe were recalled. Brigham Young met with Ute leaders to enlist their aid, and he also re-activated the Nauvoo Legion.⁷⁴

Captain Stewart Van Vliet of the U. S. Army went to Salt Lake City in July of 1857 to make arrangements for the accommodation and supply of the troops when they arrived. President Young refused to comply, but still convinced Van Vliet that the rumors about the rebellion of the Saints were lies. The Nauvoo Legion began to harass the Army troops about South Pass, Wyoming, burning grass and stampeding Army cattle. Winter allowed time for negotiation, which resulted in the installation of the new governor. The arriving army found residents ready to burn their properties to the ground should they show the slightest provocation.

Meanwhile, President Buchanan came under the pressure of Congress to resolve the crisis. In April of 1858, he sent a commission to Utah. The commission

⁷⁴ The Nauvoo Legion was established in 1840 in Nauvoo, Illinois. This militia was commanded by Joseph Smith, Jr. By 1844, it numbered 3,000 troops. In comparison, the U.S. Army at the time only had 8,500. When Smith was killed, Brigham Young became the ranking officer in 1844. The Legion continued to function after the Nauvoo city charter was revoked, protecting the Saints as they fled Nauvoo. In 1852, the Utah Territorial militia was established, and it retained the Nauvoo Legion name. After the Legion opposed federal troops entering Utah in 1857-8, it was allowed to exist only on the suffrage of the federally appointed governor. Despite this, the legion remained more responsive to Church leaders than appointed officials. Legion troops were used to protect the mail and telegraph lines during the Civil War and saw action in Utah's Black Hawk War (1865-8). Governor J. Wilson Shaffer deactivated the Legion, whose action was enforced by Federal troops dispatched in response to the 1870 Ghost Dance phenomenon. The Legion was permanently disbanded by the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nauvoo_Legion, accessed 26 March 2008.

offered a pardon to the Mormons for any act of rebellion they may have committed if they would submit to governmental authority. The commissioners assured the Saints that the government would not interfere any more in their religion. The Army settled in at Camp Floyd, fifty miles south of Salt Lake City, where they would not produce so much friction with the Saints.

Buchanan was criticized heavily for his mismanagement of the crisis, including failing to investigate the claims against the Mormons before he acted, dispatching an expedition late in the season, and failing to adequately provide for the troops in the field. The Saints also suffered because of the conflict. Many of the saints had to leave their homes and crops to follow the orders of Brigham Young. Almost a year's worth of work that could have been used to improve their condition was lost. Some outlying settlements had to be permanently abandoned, and in some areas, poverty persisted for years after the presidential pardon. It is easy to understand why many Saints continued to be wary of Gentiles and the federal government.⁷⁵

In addition to worrying about Gentile settlement and the arrival of the Army, 1857 also saw the deterioration of the relationship with the Paiute. Historian of the Southern Utah Mission James G. Bleak recorded that on his way to Las Vegas from the St. George area he learned of Paiute plans to attack his party while

⁷⁵ For more information on the Utah Rebellion, see Sherman L. Fleek, "The Church and the Utah War, 1857-1858," in Robert C. Freeman, ed., *Nineteenth Century Saints at War*, Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2006; Richard D. Poll and Ralph W. Hansen, "Buchanan's Blunder" *The Utah War, 1857-1858*, *Military Affairs* 25:3 (1961), 121-131; and William P. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 1: A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858*, Norman: Arthur H. Clark, 2008.

they camped. The Paiute believed they could easily kill the men and obtain a large amount of spoil. Once the party arrived at the Muddy, Bleak called the Paiute together. They sat and smoked some tobacco that Bleak had brought for that purpose. He told them, "You have listened to my talk in times past, you believe that it is good to hear, and do what I say," to which the Paiute agreed. Bleak told them that they were going to California with some friends to trade the goods that they had brought. He expressed his desire that if any animals were to stray, that they would be returned. Some of the Paiute did not readily consent to let the company pass in peace.

To secure a peaceful resolution, Bleak had the Paiute send for their women and children who they had placed in hiding, as was the custom of the Paiute when preparing for battle. Bleak then spent the evening and most of the night with them so they could not make a large-scale move without his knowledge. The next day Bleak's party continued on to Las Vegas. The plan of the Paiute on the Muddy had apparently been long in the making, because while at Las Vegas, residents informed Bleak that news of the proposed attack had reached the fort there. As they continued on to California, three Native Americans who attempted to steal from them followed Bleak's party. The Mormons captured the Native Americans, kept them overnight, and released them the next morning. The party had no more problems with Native Americans for the rest of the trip.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ James G. Bleak, Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, August 1857.

To try to improve their relationship with the Paiute and protect travelers going between San Bernardino and Utah, church leaders sent Jacob Hamblin and Ira Hatch to spend some time on the Muddy. Hatch arrived in January 1858. His record indicates he lived there alone “among the savages” for at least two weeks. Since the Saints abandoned the Las Vegas mission in 1857, the nearest white settlement was Fort Clara, a one-hundred-mile trip. Hatch camped in a broken-down wagon left on the side of the road and had considerable difficulty keeping his food in his own possession. Generally cooking in the evening, Hatch waited until the Paiute had retired to their own camp before he pulled his food out from a concealed spot. They finally discovered where he kept his food. While Hatch interpreted for some travelers, some Paiutes stole his bread and meat, leaving him only a little cheese. To console him, they told Hatch he should not feel bad, because he could beg travelers for food and they would give to him because he was white.⁷⁷ Both Hatch and Hamblin’s missions were a success, at least enough so that Bleak’s *Annals* do not tell of any incidents along the Muddy for the duration of their time there.

Up until 1858, discussions of cotton growing at the Southern Utah Mission, also known as Utah’s Dixie, were strictly speculative. In order to test the feasibility of producing cotton, Brigham Young sent a group of sixteen men who were

⁷⁷ Manuscript Histories of the Church—The Muddy Mission, ms4029, Roll 8, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake.

experienced in growing cotton to Santa Clara to experiment.⁷⁸ Many Saints viewed a call to move to the Southern Utah Mission tantamount to exile. Church leaders very carefully emphasized that this was not the case. Speaking to a group of cotton missionaries in 1862, Heber C. Kimball said, “God is inspiring this mission, and only those should go who can be relied upon, for the leaders [have] been careful to select good men. No man [was] called with the thought of getting rid of him.”⁷⁹ As was the pattern when settling any other LDS community, Young and other leaders were careful to select people not only for their faith and willingness to go when called, but to ensure that all important trades were represented, such as blacksmiths, coopers, wheelwrights, carpenters, etc.

LDS efforts to establish a town on the Muddy finally passed beyond a mere proposal and began to take shape in 1864. There were several reasons behind establishing St. Thomas on the Muddy, though most sources generally only cite one—cotton production. There is no doubt that cotton was a motivating factor for church leadership in establishing St. Thomas. The Civil War interrupted Southern cotton production, and freighting material in from the East was already expensive. Brigham Young wanted to promote cotton production to help the Utah Saints become more self-sufficient.

Another reason scholars mention as a motivation to settle on the Muddy was to take up all available lands before the Gentiles had an opportunity to do so.

⁷⁸ Bleak, *Annals*, January 1858.

⁷⁹ *Journal History*, 19 October 1862.

This makes the fact that much of the area became part of a national park especially ironic. Having been driven out of Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois by their non-Mormon neighbors, the Saints were not heartened by the prospect of a non-Mormon population developing in their new home. Closely related to this concern was the reality that President Young was also averse to the Saints getting involved with precious metal mining, saying that the love of money distracted the faithful from focusing on what was important. At a meeting in Panaca in 1865, Erastus Snow reinforced that policy, stating the Church would excommunicate any man who left their community for the mines.⁸⁰ Despite his opposition to the enterprise, President Young recognized significant mining opportunities in Mormon controlled territory, and knew that if the Saints did not lay claim to them, Gentiles certainly would. Because of that, the First Presidency sent people to actively locate and claim all valuable mining areas in what is now southern Nevada. Church leaders claimed silver deposits in Meadow Valley, claims that would eventually pass to Gentiles and form the basis of the rush that created Pioche, Nevada.

Ira Hatch was one of the men sent by the Church to locate claims. Hatch was a loyal member of the Church who would not have violated the injunction against mining unless directly instructed by his leaders. His party located claims in the Pahrangat Valley and established a mining district. Usually, when miners established districts, they were not very creative in writing the rules—they simply copied the laws from other districts and got down to the business of mining.

⁸⁰ Bleak, *Annals*, 5 August 1865. Panaca was in Utah at the time, though it is now in Nevada.

Hatch's group departed from this tradition and established rules specifically designed to suppress any general rush to the area. Their laws allowed them to monopolize the best properties, permanently hold title to their claims, and deny future claims. They did this while letting their own properties remain undeveloped.⁸¹ The Saints were unsuccessful in keeping out the Gentiles, and the boom in the Pahranaagat spawned Hiko, the eventual seat of Lincoln County.

Beyond simply keeping Gentiles out of the area, President Young recognized that the Church needed to occupy the land. In early January 1865, before the missionaries ordered to the Muddy had even arrived, Young sent a letter to all the bishops and general authorities in the Church to promote settlement in that area. He wrote:

In reports which we have received from the southern part of our Territory . . . to the Colorado River are of so favorable a character that we are desirous that a number of families should go down there as early as practicable and make settlements and secure the land. The knowledge of the advantages which settlements there offers is not much known outside of our Territory at present; but, when it becomes known that we are making efforts to open a door for our trade to come in by that way, the news will soon spread, and we may reasonably expect that parties who have an eye to money-making will seek to take possession and profit by our labors, unless we by prompt action, forestall them. If there are any well-disposed, faithful brethren, who have families in your settlements who have a desire to move on to the Colorado, or in that vicinity, we would be pleased to have you inform us as soon as you can, and we will give you further instructions as to what they should do.⁸²

⁸¹ John M. Townley, *Conquered Provinces: Nevada Moves Southeast, 1864-1871* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1973), 8, 10–11.

⁸² Brigham Young to the Bishops and the Brethren, 3 January 1865, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 8 Folder 3, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

When present, the men did a good job of holding off Gentile incursions; however, simply sending men like Ira Hatch to camp out for a few weeks at a time was not sufficient to permanently hold the land. Entire families needed to settle to accomplish that. Despite the Mormon presence in the area beginning with George A. Smith, who President Young sent in 1857 to scout out places to settle, it was not until March 1864 that the First Presidency called George Brimhall to explore the viability of settlement near the Colorado River. In order to get an accurate feel for what the trip would really be like for families called to settle there, Brimhall took his family with him.⁸³

In addition to George Brimhall, President Young sent others in preparation for a settlement effort on the Muddy. In February 1864, Young instructed Jacob Hamblin to locate the best route for a road from St. George to the mouth of the Virgin River. Young said that he considered erecting a telegraph line, and wanted to place it along the most traveled route.⁸⁴ According to Melvin T. Smith, the Church also contemplated a railroad line from St. George to the Colorado as early as 1864, an idea repeated for various routes in 1868 and 1881.⁸⁵

Scholars have posited several other reasons for the establishment of St. Thomas and the Muddy Mission. In 2007, Apostle Jeffrey R. Holland proposed that

⁸³ Brimhall, *The Workers of Utah*, 41.

⁸⁴ Brigham Young to Jacob Hamblin, 4 February 1864, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 8 Folder 3, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁸⁵ Melvin T. Smith, "The Lower Colorado River," 230-31.

the Saints felt obligated to work with the Paiute.⁸⁶ Others claim that President Young expressed concern that other Christian denominations had sent missionaries to Utah to bring Mormons back to a more traditional Christianity.⁸⁷ These theorists believe Brigham worried that the Saints were getting soft and might wander from the path if not toughened up by some sacrifice. James H. Wood, a modern-day descendent of Muddy missionary William Wood, wrote that church leadership sent William to the Muddy because he “was showing signs of progress that were too rapid, affluence that was too competitive for the Authorities to accept without question.”⁸⁸ President Young did say, however, that one of the reasons for settling southern Utah was to provide hiding places for those that will love and serve God.⁸⁹

With the arrival of new inhabitants who were bent on establishing themselves permanently along the Muddy, there also came a new meaning for the land. The definition of “sacred” in relation to space on the Muddy established by the Paiute was supplanted by another. Assigning a new meaning to the land, which is that of the Promised Land as opposed to the land that Tabuts placed the Paiute, was an important part of establishing *de facto* control over the land.

⁸⁶ Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, address at Nevada Stake Conference Broadcast, 4 March 2007. Transcript in possession of the author.

⁸⁷ There is little documentary evidence to support this conclusion, but this is the assertion of one descendent of a Muddy missionary, James H. Wood.

⁸⁸ James H. Wood, “William Wood on the Muddy Valley Mission, 1867-72,” Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake.

⁸⁹ Bleak, *Annals*, 2 May 1869.

According to Michael Foucault, the control of space is “fundamental in any exercise of power.”⁹⁰ This is partially because, according to David Chidester and Edward Linenthal in *American Sacred Space*, sacred space is not merely discovered, founded, or constructed, it is claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interests.⁹¹ For the Saints, that specific interest was to provide a hiding place, a home for the Saints, and integrate the land into Zion.

The last main reason Brigham Young initiated settlement on the Muddy was to aid in the movement of goods and people from the Colorado River into Utah. Shipping goods overland was very expensive, so President Young wanted to build a depot at the head of navigation on the Colorado and forward goods from the East around South America and up the Colorado River. He also contemplated sending all people emigrating to Utah from across the Atlantic across the Isthmus of Panama and up the river, which would be a much easier walk than two-thirds of the way across the United States. At a meeting in Salt Lake City on November 11, 1864, Anson Call received a calling to build a warehouse on the Colorado to receive goods.⁹² Settlements on the route to St. George “for resting places and as supports and strength for the warehouse and road” were to be established.⁹³ Planners sold

⁹⁰ Michael Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, and Power,” in Paul Rainbow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 252.

⁹¹ Daid Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, *American Sacred Space*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 15.

⁹² *Journal History*, 10 November 1864.

⁹³ Brigham Young to Daniel H. Wells and Brigham Young Jr., 18 November 1864, Box 8 Folder 2, and Brigham Young to Judge J. F. Kinney, 23 December 1864, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 8 Folder 3, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

sixteen thousand dollars in stock to the public to fund the venture. President Young felt the route was necessary for the shipping of goods and emigration, and did not anticipate any serious difficulty in making the route “safe for every purpose for which we may need it.”⁹⁴ Call and his companions left Salt Lake City on November 15, 1864, a mere week after President Young appointed them to their mission.

Call reported positive prospects for the warehouse and supporting settlements. He found a suitable spot on the Colorado River, relaying that the Colorado was about the size of the Illinois River and possessed a landing that was as good as the Peoria landing in Illinois. The flowers were in bloom, and he found a patch of ripening watermelons “growing thriftily.” The areas he recommended for settlements were near the confluence of the Virgin and the Muddy, and Beaver Dam. He estimated that it would cost sixty thousand dollars to make a good road to the new landing from St. George.⁹⁵ Call named the new settlement Callville.

Along with preparations for the construction of the warehouse, plans also went forward for settlements to support the river traffic. In the October 1864 General Conference of the Church, church leaders called thirty-five families to establish homes on the Muddy.⁹⁶ Brigham Young did not announce the names of

⁹⁴ Brigham Young to Daniel H. Wells and Brigham Young Jr., 18 November 1864, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 8 Folder 2, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁹⁵ Bleak, *Annals*, 17 December 1864.

⁹⁶ Bleak, *Annals*, 7 October 1864 and 26 April 1865.

the planned settlement's leaders at the meeting, but on November 11, 1864, Thomas Sassen Smith and Henry W. Miller of Farmington received notice that they would bear that responsibility.⁹⁷

The people chosen to settle on the Muddy in the initial and subsequent calls had a variety of reactions when they heard the news. William Wood sold his butcher shop, his slaughterhouse, and his brick home that had cost him four thousand dollars. Within four weeks he was ready to go.⁹⁸ Hannah Sharp received the news of her husband's call nine days after she gave birth to, and lost, her first child. The brethren came to her house while her husband was away. She fainted at the news. When she apprised her husband of the call, he wanted to go with some of the other families and come for her later. She refused that arrangement, so they traveled to the Muddy together.

People living in a secular society might wonder why anyone so unhappy about a call would be willing to carry it out. The answer lies in the *Doctrine and Covenants* (D & C), a collection of what believers accept as revelations given to Joseph Smith and his successors as president of the Church. D & C 1:38 reads: "What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself, and though the heavens and hearth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the

⁹⁷ *Journal History*, 10 November 1864, and Brigham Young to Hy. W. Miller, 8 November 1864, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 8 Folder 3, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁹⁸ Wood, "William Wood."

same.” A call to settle was not simply the whim of a Church leader. The Saints believed it was the will of the Lord.

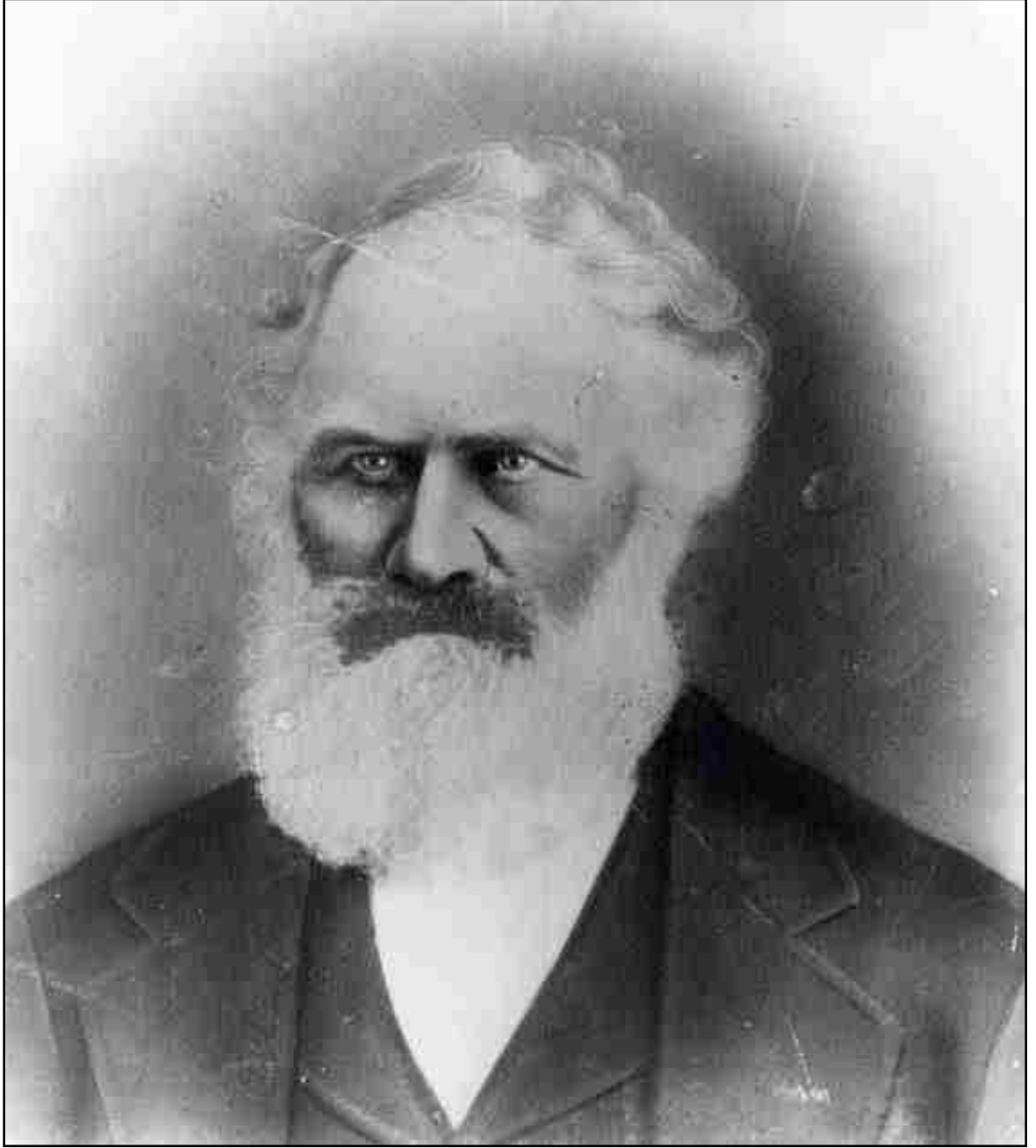


Figure 6: Thomas S. Smith. Courtesy of LDS Church archives, Salt Lake City.

The Latter-day Saints were not the only people who felt that they were doing the will of the Lord in establishing homes in the West. Many Catholic and Protestant missionaries traveled west to share the “good news” of Jesus with Native Americans. Many settlers pushed hard to establish churches in their new homes upon arrival. Many who were not so religious ascribed to the notion of Manifest Destiny. The term was coined by journalist John L. O’Sullivan, who contended that Americans have the “right of ...manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us.”⁹⁹ Providence, or God, had given the land to Americans to develop. The difference was that the God of O’Sullivan did not give direct orders of exactly where to settle, and what to grow.

There was nothing new about the presence of people on the Muddy. Human habitation stretched back for millennia. The area was, however, about to enter a new phase in history. For the first time in the Muddy’s recorded history, a group of people deliberately colonized the area. Their willingness to settle and stay in the harsh environment shows the resolve and obedience the people had to leaders they felt spoke for God. That resolve was tested repeatedly by weather, the scarcity of resources, tensions with their Paiute neighbors, and everyday life in newly settled areas.

⁹⁹ John L. O’Sullivan, *New York Morning News*, 27 December 1845.

Chapter Three: Establishing an Outpost of Zion

Anson Call reported on a late 1864 trip through the area on his way to El Dorado Canyon south of Las Vegas that:

Every facility seems to abound here to warrant the establishment of a large self-sustaining settlement...Dec. 1st. This morning we crossed the river and passed up on the upper side of the Muddy. We were well pleased with the extent of land and with the quality.... The muddy is about the size of Big Cottonwood clear, and water of a good quality....Most of the land is suitable for cultivation.... Convenient to the place, opportunity most suitable for settlement, is to be found large quantities of sand-stone... the road traveled today is naturally good, our guide talked with many of the Indians met by us today. They are anxious for us to settle the country, and are willing for our cattle to eat their grass, if we will employ them that they may have clothes to wear and food to eat when their grass seed is all used.

As if high quality land, plenty of water, available building material, and friendly native residents were not enough, Call mentioned the rock salt quarry, with “thousands of tons” available for nothing more than the effort of extracting it. Punctuating his glowing report, Call wrote that on their return trip, they “more thoroughly examined the facilities for forming a settlement on the Muddy; our examinations proved highly satisfactory, exhibiting greater facilities than we at first anticipated.”¹⁰⁰ He neglected, however, to mention the man, animal, and equipment-punishing trip involved in getting there or the agonizingly brutal summer weather, let alone that the nearest timber for building would involve a drive that would be long and arduous.

¹⁰⁰ Anson Call, “Head of Navigation on the Colorado,” *Deseret News*, 18 January 1865.

Establishing a Mormon community involved much more than just finding a promising spot of land. Site selection, who would settle, and often when they would travel to the site was all determined by leaders in Salt Lake City. After Brigham Young decided to create a settlement on the Muddy River, the ecclesiastical domination continued with the establishment, surveying, and peopling of St. Thomas, all of which conformed to eighteen years of Mormon settlement patterns in Deseret.¹⁰¹ The missionaries often experienced great hardship reaching the Muddy River, not to mention the harsh desert conditions the summers brought once they were there. These missionaries encountered great difficulties in creating a viable community once they arrived. This was in part due to the scarcity of trees and other preferred building materials such as bricks and nails, which encouraged creativity in the construction of their dwellings.

St. Thomas residents were involved in many things that parallel larger American settlement patterns of the West: the telegraph, farming, irrigation, mining, simple entertainments, and more. Because the area they settled in already was inhabited, there were many cultural misunderstandings with their Native American neighbors, violence and reprisals on both sides, treaties, and the white utilization of Paiute labor.

In *Religion in the Modern American West*, Ferenc Szasz asserts that the nation's conventional religious history is inadequate because it is told exclusively

¹⁰¹ See Lowry Nelson. *The Mormon Village: A Pattern and Technique of Land Settlement*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952.

from an eastern perspective. The Spanish Catholic and Russian Orthodox heritage of the region complicates the notion that American religious history is built on a foundation of Anglo-Protestantism. This is particularly true in the West.

Migration and settlement in the west fostered a religious pluralism. Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Jews, Mormons, and Native Americans, to name a few, all flourished under a “largely secular cultural umbrella.”¹⁰² This is what came to pass in St. Thomas over the course of nearly a century and a half. Bear in mind that Szasz’s “cultural umbrella” is a modern one, so early St. Thomas looks nothing like his model, but looking at how conditions were in areas controlled by the Saints makes the contrast even more interesting. Religion in St. Thomas was not an umbrella; there were no other religions to share the populace with.

It is vital to understand that the single most important organization in St. Thomas and the rest of the settlements in the Muddy Mission was the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It could hardly be otherwise since most of the residents would never have moved there, much less remained, but for their spiritual leaders directing them to go. Residents held meetings regularly, and the church building was the most substantial structure in town. They usually closely followed the wishes of the Church and its leaders, which they believed to be the wishes of God. Though the Saints were experiencing difficulties with the state of Nevada, the Paiute, and the environment itself, the fate of the town would be

¹⁰² Ferenc M. Szasz, *Religion in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 194.

decided by Church leaders. Because their leaders asked them to be there, they were determined to make it work. As a group, if they had not been mostly obedient to the wishes of their leaders, they would never have ended up on the Muddy in the first place.

The town of St. Thomas was born on January 8, 1865, when Thomas S. Smith, eleven other brothers, and three sisters arrived at the Muddy.¹⁰³ Geography determined the town's location. The eroded, waterless desert between the Muddy and St. George did not lend itself to wagon travel, so most travelers followed the Virgin River south. This route was also difficult because the Virgin generally meanders between steep and rocky embankments, making it necessary to ford the river over thirty times. The Virgin meets the Muddy within sight of the location selected for St. Thomas. Brigham Young instructed that the town be established as close to the Colorado landing as possible. Smith chose the land closest to the river that could support a settlement. Others quickly joined Smith's party, swelling the group to forty-five families. A Gentile named Elias McGinnies joined this initial group of Mormons in St. Thomas and drew lots with the Saints when they distributed the land.¹⁰⁴ Seemingly, Gentiles in Zion were not a problem if their numbers were small. Either that, or McGinnies had a particularly good relationship with the leaders of the settlement. A Paiute known as Old Bishop also accompanied the Saints. It is not clear from the records if he was a Mormon or not,

¹⁰³ Mormons refer to fellow members of the Church as "brother" and "sister," regardless of actual blood relationships.

¹⁰⁴ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 27.

though his name implies he was. Old Bishop watched their livestock at night while on the trail.¹⁰⁵

Hannah Sharp's account of her trip to the Muddy shows some of the difficulties the missionaries faced simply getting to the new town. Sharp was terrified of water, yet their passage required crossing the Virgin River thirty-four times. After the first white-knuckle crossing of the river, she turned to her husband and said "John, I'd rather you would hang me than take me through that water again." Nevertheless, she survived the subsequent crossings. Water was not the only factor that made the passage down the Virgin so treacherous. Wind blew sand across the road for miles. The sand would, as Sharp put it, "pour over the wheels like treacle from a jug." One crossing that she said was a block long combined water and quicksand, making it especially dangerous.¹⁰⁶ The Sharps made it through unscathed, but occasionally missionaries found themselves stalled out in the river. Trapped, they either waited to have their outfits swept away or for another team to pull them out of the muck.

¹⁰⁵ *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1865-1871* (Salt Lake: Church Historians Office), 2, 112, as cited in Corbett, "A History of the Muddy Mission," 11-12. There was a Ute near Provo who was also referred to as "Old Bishop" because of his resemblance to a local bishop. The record does not make it clear if this Old Bishop and the one from the Provo area are one and the same.

¹⁰⁶ Ramona Wilcox Cannon, "Aunt Hannah Sharp and the Muddy Mission," *Relief Society Magazine* (October 1926).



Figure 7: View of the Virgin River. Photo by author.

Coming down the Virgin was not the only way to get to the valley, but by most accounts was the easiest. William Wood came down through what is now central Nevada. The roads were so bad that he ended up leaving many of the items he brought, including a stove, at the side of the trail. At one point he had to disassemble his wagon and lower it over a cliff to continue.¹⁰⁷ Whatever the route, the difficulty took a physical toll on the travelers. George Lowe, an early resident, remembered the challenge of walking four hundred miles with his father to get to the Muddy.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Wood, "William Wood."

¹⁰⁸ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 72.

Such a walk may have been unpleasant, but it did avoid the precipitous entry in to the valley from the mesa overlooking the river. Elizabeth Claridge's journal records the dangerous entry. The beginning of the nearly mile long descent in to the Moapa valley is an almost perpendicular, which required the wagons to be triple-teamed and frequent blocking of the wheels to allow the horses to rest. In some places, the wagon had to be lowered by chains. Making Elizabeth's passage even more complicated was that the wind "blew a perfect hurricane." They seemed to make good progress until disaster struck. She recorded:

But lo! A crash! The tongue that was broken in the river gave way and down came the wagon; as the massive thing dashed past me, it drug my dress under the wheel. How narrow was my escape from being crushed to death! The wagon rolled down a ways then suddenly plunged over the side of the precipice. Now, it tumbled over and over scattering the flour and other provisions all over the hillside. I shall never forget the look of consternation on the faces of that group as they stood gazing at the destruction spread out below.¹⁰⁹

Once the Saints made it safely to the Valley, they commenced establishing their settlement. As they lacked legal title to the land, they occupied it by squatter's rights. With the exception of San Bernardino where they purchased the land their settlement was built on, this was standard practice throughout the entire Mormon domain.¹¹⁰ They laid out the town with eighty-five one-acre town

¹⁰⁹ "Mrs. Elizabeth Claridge McCune," MSSA 1593, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹¹⁰ The Church purchased the San Bernardino Ranch. The Mormon system of acquiring land was not that much different from the method used in Oregon. In 1843, Oregon settlers created a provisional government. This government granted 640 acres to married couples and 320 to the unmarried. While these claims were not valid under United States or British Law, the United States chose to honor them in the Donation Land Act of 1850. For the Saints, when they arrived in

lots, eighty-five two-and-a-half-acre lots for vineyards, and the same number of five-acre farm lots. Ten town lots formed a block. The streets were six rods wide, and included twelve-foot sidewalks.¹¹¹ The survey was not exact; settlers paced off the measurements.¹¹² The methods used place St. Thomas squarely within the traditions of Mormon town founding.

“Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion,”¹¹³ and Mormons laying out towns took that phrase to heart. The Mormon village is unique in the West, since most communities grew up more organically. Joseph Smith’s plat for the City of Zion (1833) is not part of the Mormon scriptural canon. Nevertheless, Mormons followed it in spirit, if not with precision, all throughout the West. The plat was one mile square, and all the squares on the plat contained ten acres. The lots were laid with every other block facing north–south, the others east–west. A square for public buildings occupied the center. The plat reserved land away from the town lots for barns and stables. The plan also apportioned off farmland.

Geographer Donald Meinig portrays the City of Zion as a rigid gridiron of roomy blocks and streets in which one is able to discern the influence of the plans

the Salt Lake Valley, the land belonged to Mexico. In 1848, the area was ceded to the U. S. The Church allotted land based on need. After 1850, land holders could obtain a title from either the Church or the county recorder’s office. It was not until 1869, when a federal land office was established, that true legal ownership of land in Utah was possible.

¹¹¹ Bleak, *Annals*, 8 January 1865.

¹¹² Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 27.

¹¹³ *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:8.

of New England towns, but formalized by the biblical foursquare and expressing a firm belief in the virtues of social concentration and of a rationally ordered society, which was a worthy setting for the kingdom of God on earth.¹¹⁴ Distinct from New England towns though, Smith added space at the center for monumental architecture, for the construction of twenty-four temples. These temples were more like civic structures than traditional meetinghouses.¹¹⁵ According to Wallace Stegner, the result was “a right-angled and rather stiff-elbowed version of the garden city, created well ahead of its time and demonstrating the advantages of an orderly town-building over the hit-and-miss squatting that characterized the usual western settlement.”¹¹⁶ The reasons for the plan were more than just a desire for orderly settlement.

In a letter accompanying his plan, Joseph Smith enumerated the benefits accrued by settling in a nucleated pattern. Farmers and their families, who were often isolated from society by the distances they had to travel from their farms to population centers, which society “has been, and always will be, the great educator of the human race.” With easier access to village life, they would be able to enjoy all the societal advantages found in access to schools, public lectures, and other meetings. They would be able to surround their homes with the “same intellectual

¹¹⁴ D.W. Meinig, “The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (June 1965): 198.

¹¹⁵ Martha Bradley, “Building Community: The Fundamentalist Mormon Concept of Space,” *Communal Societies* 21 (2001): 5.

¹¹⁶ Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 28.

life, the same social refinement as will be found in the home of the merchant or banker or professional man.”¹¹⁷ The plat for the City of Zion provided the general outline for settlement in the Great Basin, but on a much smaller scale. As the Saints were agriculturalists, communities of 20,000 were not feasible, but a village was. Settlements established in the West may not have strictly followed the plan Smith outlined, but their morphology grew out of the same theological and philosophical concepts.¹¹⁸

Various scholars have noted that Smith seemed to have been copying rather heavily from the prototypical New England Village as the ideal system of settlement. Historian Richard H. Jackson noted that in the early- and mid-1800’s “there was a ‘city mania’ among Americans, [with] contemporary observers noting that nearly every person in the Ohio-Mississippi valley had in his pocket a grandiose plan for a city that he wanted to sell in whole or in part,” so Smith was not unique in having a plan for a utopian community.¹¹⁹ Smith’s unique contribution was the setting aside of public areas as well as the population and replicate-ability plans.

Brigham Young echoed the sentiment that the Saints should gather in communities. He decried the “injudicious movement” of settling on scattered farms or up canyons on whatever piece of land caught their fancy. He said that it

¹¹⁷ Richard H. Jackson, “The Mormon Village: Genesis and Antecedents of the City of Zion Plan,” *BYU Studies* 17 (Summer 1975): 230.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

“would give their enemies an opportunity to disturb their peace and perhaps endanger the lives of many, which is a thing we desire to avoid. God has given us wisdom to preserve ourselves, and if the brethren will strictly adhere to council, God will overrule all things for their good.”¹²⁰

After the Saints arrived in the Great Salt Lake area, Young was intent on monopolizing all the land in the area that could support a settlement. In a General Epistle from the First Presidency in October 1848, Brigham Young announced his intentions to lay out two towns ten miles from Salt Lake City, one to the north and one to the south. Milton Hunter, in his *Brigham Young the Colonizer*, took this to mean that President Young intended to establish a new town every ten miles, and that he achieved that goal.¹²¹ Wayne Wahlquist’s research showed that the average distance between settlements, at least in 1850, was 2.8 miles.¹²² What Brigham Young did seem to do was establish “anchor communities” as spearheads of settlement. Independent settlement filled in the rest. This was the case with St. Thomas. It was established under the express orders of Church leadership. St. Joseph, West Point, and Overton were all settled independently. It was not necessary for the incoming Saints to “be commanded in all things,” since they

¹²⁰ Brigham Young to Joseph S. Murdock, 11 March 1868, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 10 Folder 5, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹²¹ Milton R. Hunter, *Brigham Young the Colonizer* (Independence, MO: Zion’s Printing and Publishing Company, 1945), 143-3.

¹²² Wayne L. Wahlquist, “Settlement Processes in the Mormon Core Area, 1847-1890,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1974), 97.

naturally radiate out from the initial settlements.¹²³ As long as the people continued to settle in ways that spread and strengthened Zion, there was no reason for Brigham Young to micromanage the enterprise.

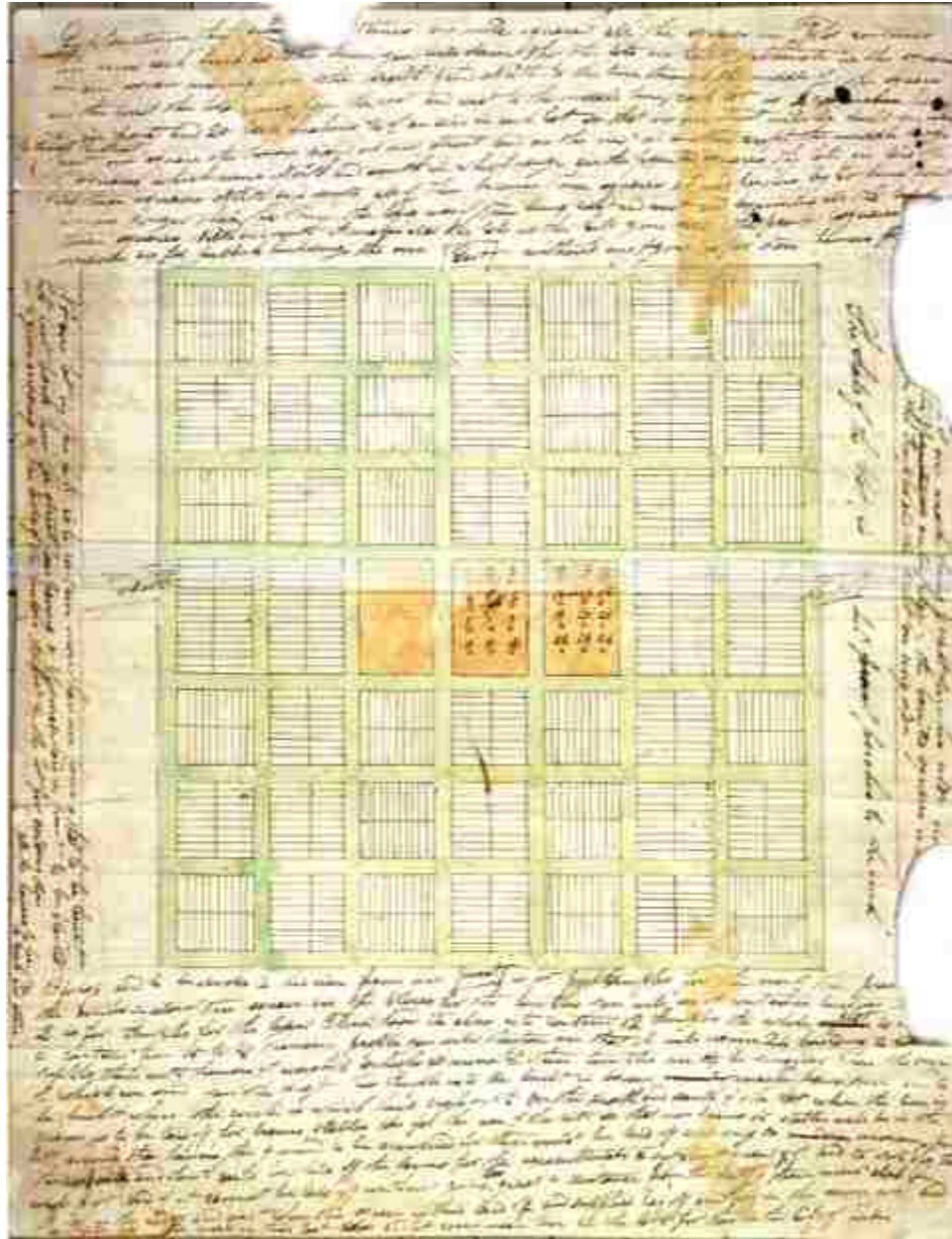


Figure 8: Joseph Smith’s Plat of the City of Zion.

¹²³ *Doctrine and Covenants* 58:26 reads “For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.”

Mormon farm villages were unique in the West not only because the Church was the only faith to move its entire organization west, but because the Homestead Act (1862), under which much of the land outside of the Great Basin was claimed, required people to live on their land to gain title to it. St. Thomas residents did not apply for ownership of their land through the Homestead Act, but formed their settlement according to the Mormon pattern, receiving their allotment from Church leaders and filing their claim with the Church-controlled land office.

The exact measurements of town plats might not have been an article of faith, but forming farming villages was. In 1838, Joseph Smith specifically said “it was the duty of the brethren to come into the cities and build and live, and carry on their farms out of the cities, according to the order of God.”¹²⁴ This made the act of creating new towns and inhabiting them virtually a sacrament on the land.¹²⁵ It provided security, allowed the retaining of church organization, promoted social contact, and allowed for cooperative work arrangements.¹²⁶

There was one other way that St. Thomas fit firmly Mormon settlement patterns—the Saints located it in an area most whites spurned.¹²⁷ Were it not for

¹²⁴ Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake: Deseret News Press, 1902–1932), 3:56.

¹²⁵ Meinig, “The Mormon Culture Region,” 198.

¹²⁶ Lowry Nelson, *The Mormon Village: A Pattern and Technique of Land Settlement* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952), 52–53.

¹²⁷ The Saints did not rejoice in inhabiting poor lands per se, but believed they were fulfilling prophecy by doing so. In the Old Testament of the Bible, Isaiah 35:1 reads, “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as a rose.” This is a

mineral resources, the Mormons may have been unchallenged in the area. On September 11, 1861, *Deseret News* described much of the area that became the state of Utah as “measurably valueless, excepting for nomadic purposes, hunting grounds for the Indians, and to hold the world together.”¹²⁸ A discourse by Apostle George Q. Cannon in 1873 is instructive. He told the Saints “good countries are not for us . . . the worst places in the land we can probably get and we must develop them.” They should thank God, even if all they had was a “little oasis in the desert where few can settle.”¹²⁹ After all, every other crop was secondary to growing Saints. Brigham Young, in numerous sermons, indicated that the Great Basin was uniquely adapted for that production, even if nothing else would readily take root.

No matter the condition of the land, the Saints wanted to ensure that their control of St. Thomas remain unchallenged. Four days after Smith’s party arrived on the Muddy, Brigham Young received Anson Call’s report of the area. Call reported a fine body of land at the confluence of the Virgin and Muddy Rivers that was equal to any land in the Utah Territory. The area would comfortably support three hundred families. Young, writing to Daniel H. Wells of the First Presidency, stated they must take all the eligible spots, “as we have no wish to see outside

precondition to the second coming of Christ. They believed that by settling in “desert” places and exerting themselves to make them blossom they were hastening the coming of the Lord. From a practical standpoint, they had been driven out of Kirtland, Ohio; Independence, Missouri; and Nauvoo, Illinois, and by settling in areas nobody else wanted forestalled a similar expulsion from the Great Basin.

¹²⁸ As quoted in Neil R. Peirce, *The Mountain States of America: People, Politics, and Power in the Eight Rocky Mountain States* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1972), 187.

¹²⁹ George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1886), 16:143–44.

parties come in and take possession of the best places and reap the fruits of our toil.” Young believed this would surely be the case once other parties discovered that they were going to route all their shipping through the area.¹³⁰ In addition to settlement, George A. Smith in the Utah territorial legislature oversaw the passage of a memorial to Congress asking the attachment of the Muddy to Utah, since they understood it to be part of Arizona.¹³¹ The uncertainty about whose jurisdiction St. Thomas lay under proved very troublesome during the entire time the town was part of the Muddy Mission.

In addition to the settlers officially called to the Muddy, the Church encouraged any who desired to be part of the new settlement to go south. Brigham Young answered many letters in 1865 from people who wanted to take advantage of a fresh start and warmer weather on the Muddy. He also fielded many letters from bishops asking what they should tell people who wanted a release from their current assignments so they could go south. President Young generally granted the person permission to go and assist in settling the country. He advised them to travel to St. George, where Erastus Snow would give them further instruction. If they could not leave immediately, Young counseled them to send an agent on their behalf to select and secure land and put in grain to ensure food was available upon

¹³⁰ *Journal History*, 12 January 1865.

¹³¹ ACTS, Resolutions and Memorials, Passed and Adopted by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah. Fourteenth Annual Session, 11 January 1865. Utah State Historical Society Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

their arrival. Many were no doubt heartened by Anson Call's positive description of the Muddy

Regardless of why people came, by May 1865 between forty and fifty men with families arrived in St. Thomas. There were enough people on the Muddy that church leadership created the St. Joseph Branch, with Warren Foote as branch president.¹³² St. Joseph is now known as Logandale. The first natural increase began to affect the population in the summer of 1865, when Margaret Ellen Johnston, daughter of William James and Ellen Turks Johnston, was born. Thomas S. Smith blessed the child on August 6.¹³³

The calling of missionaries to St. Thomas and the Muddy was not isolated to the October conference of 1864. Erastus Snow, apostle and leader of the Southern Utah Mission, complained that most of the original "wealthy" missionaries had neither gone south nor sent replacements. Those sent brought only the barest of necessities.¹³⁴ In early 1865, Brigham Young sent letters to bishops of various settlements asking them if any ward members wanted to join the new colonization effort. He wrote, "We are anxious" to have many families settle on all the lands available for settlement.¹³⁵

¹³² Bleak, *Annals*, 24 May 1865 entry, and Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

¹³³ Record of Baptisms, 1866–67, Moapa Stake Records, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake.

¹³⁴ Melvin T. Smith, "The Lower Colorado River," 309.

¹³⁵ Brigham Young to Jas. H. Martineau, 28 March 1865, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 10 Folder 4, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

President Young periodically issued individual callings. In the fall of 1866, Neils Ipson received one of these callings to settle in St. Thomas and assist in building up the Muddy Mission. Ipson immediately began selling everything he had in Manti, Utah, except for necessities transportable by ox train. He took with him his first wife Georgine, and her children and his third wife, Inger Kerstine, who was pregnant during the journey.¹³⁶

It is significant that Ipson took his first wife to the Muddy, because the 1870 census seems to indicate that this was not the normal practice. The average fifteen-year disparity between the ages of husbands and wives suggests that “first families” generally remained in the north while men took a younger wife to the Muddy. At St. Joseph, the median age for men was thirty-nine and for women, twenty-four. At nearby Overton the respective figures were forty-nine and thirty-five.¹³⁷ First wives, presumably, remained in the north and took care of their husbands’ lands and livestock.

When individual callings did not provide enough new settlers, President Young issued 158 new calls in the October 1867 conference.¹³⁸ Most were young, unmarried men; many recently returned missionaries who had labored in Europe. Church leadership believed they would inject the settlement with new life.

¹³⁶ Ipson Family Papers, MSS SC 627, Brigham Young University Special Collections, Provo, Utah.

¹³⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Manuscript Census of the Territory of Utah,” Rio Virgin County, 1870. As quoted in Ellsworth, “Mormon Settlement on the Muddy,” 12.

¹³⁸ Melvin T. Smith, “The Lower Colorado River,” 309. The 6 October 1867 entry in Bleak’s *Annals* lists the names of all 158 called during that conference. Other sources list the number called as 163.

President Young asked those who were single to marry and take their wives with them, so Salt Lake City experienced a small boom in marriages. Two of the women married in this group who went south were daughters of President Young.¹³⁹

Young was pleased that so many responded to the call. He wrote to Franklin D. Richards two weeks after the issuing of the calls, stating that many of the newly called were almost ready to depart. He rejoiced in the “alacrity with which they respond to any call that may be made upon them whether it is to preach the gospel, to gather the poor, or do anything connected with the work of God abroad; or to build up new settlements and to perform any of the multifarious duties devolving upon them in this new country.”¹⁴⁰

Despite President Young’s optimism, *Journal History* reports that of those called at that conference, only about eighty reached the Muddy. Many of the newly arrived missionaries were experienced cotton growers who had joined the Church in the South, which was a great benefit to the existing settlements.

Although the established missionaries were willing to share their land, many of these new settlers were rebellious, rejected the counsel to settle in established areas, and formed their own settlement on the Upper Muddy.¹⁴¹ Another 150

¹³⁹ Brigham Young to John Brown, 18 October 1867, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 10 Folder 3, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake, and Ramona Wilcox Cannon, “Aunt Hannah Sharp and the Muddy Mission.”

¹⁴⁰ Brigham Young to Franklin D. Richards, 18 October 1867, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 10 Folder 3, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁴¹ *Journal History*, 15 April 1868.

missionaries received calls at the October 1868 General Conference.¹⁴² Rather than attempting to infuse the Mission with youth again, Brigham Young called “men of weight” who were well respected in the places they hailed from.¹⁴³ This round of calls was more effective than previous ones. This is clear from reports received in January 1869, which claimed that most of the missionaries called at the conference had arrived. The messenger passed others heading to the Muddy while carrying the report north.¹⁴⁴

St. Thomas did not remain the only town on the Muddy for very long, but it continued as the principal town. Thomas S. Smith was the acting bishop and high priest over the settlements on the Muddy, and since he lived in St. Thomas, all major communication went through that community.¹⁴⁵ The town served as the base of explorations for the Mormons.¹⁴⁶ Gentiles also used it as a principal supply stop as well. When George M. Wheeler of the Army Corp of Engineers explored the lower canyons area of the Colorado, he traveled to the mouth of the Muddy in September 1869 for supplies.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Brigham Young to Geo. Nebeker, 21 November 1868, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 11 Folder 2, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁴³ Brigham Young to Heber Young, 22 October 1868, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 11 Folder 2, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁴⁴ Brigham Young to A. Carrington, 5 January 1869, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 11 Folder 3, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁴⁵ Bleak, *Annals*, 1 November 1866.

¹⁴⁶ Bleak, *Annals*, 10 April 1867.

¹⁴⁷ Melvin T. Smith, “The Lower Colorado River,” 173.

Even while the town was almost 100% LDS, there were some events that most Americans, then and now, would recognize as historically significant in a more general sense, like Wheeler's expedition. St. Thomas played a role as a transportation and information center in the Southern Great Basin for many expeditions, including Powell's exploration of the Colorado. On August 30, 1869, when Powell's party emerged from the Grand Wash, the outlet for the Grand Canyon, some Mormon residents were there to meet them. Powell recorded that Mr. Asa and his two sons were far less surprised to see the group than he was to see them. Leaders in St. Thomas received a report that Powell's party was lost, and church leaders in Salt Lake City wanted St. Thomas residents to watch for any fragments of boats or any other remnants of the party.¹⁴⁸ Once Powell received the news that a Colonel Head had sent mail addressed to members of the expedition to St. Thomas, he immediately dispatched a Paiute to the town to get it. Powell's men were most anxious to get their mail, since their last mail stop was in Green River City, three and a half months earlier.¹⁴⁹

The next day, the runner returned with a letter from Bishop Leithhead saying he was bringing two or three men and supplies for the exhausted explorers. Leithhead arrived that evening to a very welcome reception as he brought three

¹⁴⁸ John W. Powell, *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons* (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), 286.

¹⁴⁹ William Culp Darrah, "George Y. Bradley's Journal, May 24–August 30, 1869," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 15 (1947): 31–72.

dozen melons and other luxury items for Powell and his men.¹⁵⁰ Powell's party went on to St. Thomas, where Frederick S. Dellenbaugh, who was the artist and topographer for the expedition, found himself very impressed by the town and its people. He observed that "As pioneers, the Mormons were superior to any class I have ever come in contact with, their idea being home-making and not skimming the cream off the country with a six-shooter and a whiskey bottle." Butter, milk, cheese, and vegetables were readily available, as opposed to Gentile towns, where if such items were available, they were canned. Indeed the empty tin was the chief decoration in Gentile frontier towns; Mormon towns looked much better when compared with "the entire absence of any attempt at arrangement at order, or to start fruit or shade trees, or do any other sensible thing." Rather, "Gentile frontier town[s were] a ghastly hodge-podge of shacks in the midst of a sea of refuse."¹⁵¹ Possibly his favorable report was influenced by the fact that St. Thomas was the first "civilization" he had seen in months. Even if this is the case, many of those traveling through the town on the early Arrowhead Trail Highway repeated his sentiments years later.

In 1869, the Church decided to increase the amount of "civilization" on the Muddy by making communication between St. Thomas and the rest of the Church's settlements easier. In April, Brigham Young asked the Saints at St. George to put up telegraph poles to connect with the settlements on the Muddy.

¹⁵⁰ Powell, *Exploration of the Colorado River*, 286.

¹⁵¹ Frederick S. Dellenbaugh, *A Canyon Voyage* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), 174-75.

He promised that if they erected the poles, the Church would provide wire and instruments to complete the line.¹⁵² In June, Erastus Snow traveled to St. Thomas to introduce the proposal to the Saints on the Muddy. Snow also asked the Saints to purchase stock in the cotton factory. Residents passed a resolution to build their portion of the telegraph from St. Thomas north, and appointed Andrew Gibbons and Joseph W. Young to locate the line and apportion the cost out to all the settlements. They also raised \$1,100 toward the cotton factory.¹⁵³

While it was true that the Muddy did have water and arable land, there were significant disadvantages to living there, the weather being the chief among them. Summertime temperatures could top 120°, causing everyone to suffer.¹⁵⁴ In the official history of the Muddy Mission, Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jensen wrote that watering carrots in the morning would cook them by noon, causing the skin to slip off when pulled out of the ground. Men working in the field would put fresh coffee grounds in a canteen and hang it on a bush. By noon, the coffee was ready. Schoolgirls would run until their feet hurt, throw down their bonnet or apron, and stand on it until their feet cooled. Jensen said that he perspired so much that after his overalls dried when he took them off at night,

¹⁵² Bleak, *Annals*, 30 April 1869.

¹⁵³ Bleak, *Annals*, 3 June 1869, and Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

¹⁵⁴ The highest recorded temperature in Overton, which is close to the site of St. Thomas, is 122°. <http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/cliGCStT.pl?nv5846> (Accessed 12 August 2011)

they would nearly stand on their own from all the minerals and salt in them.¹⁵⁵ A swamp nearby St. Thomas produced mosquitoes and malaria. Combined with the heat, this meant that the missionaries “had to bake the days [they] didn’t shake,” referring to malaria’s symptom of shaking.¹⁵⁶ Adding to their discomfort were occasional outbreaks of influenza, whooping cough, and other maladies, though these maladies were by no means unique to St. Thomas.¹⁵⁷

There was little reprieve at night. The setting of the sun simply made it dark, not cool. Abraham Kimball wrote that in order to sleep he would climb on top of a shed, thus escaping the scorpions, tarantulas, and rattlesnakes. Unfortunately, there was no escaping the mosquitoes.¹⁵⁸ Samuel Claridge said that in order to escape the heat he would go out and lie naked in the ditch that ran through their lot. By morning, he almost felt worse than he had when he lay down, having slept in a muddy ditch all night.¹⁵⁹

The oppressive heat also proved very hard on the animals. One woman gave up raising chickens because the hot sand cooked the eggs nearly as fast as the hens laid them, though the hens were willing to sit on them until they boiled. She

¹⁵⁵ Andrew Jensen, comp., “History of the Muddy Valley Mission, 1847–1875.” As quoted in Ellsworth, “Mormon Settlement on the Muddy.”

¹⁵⁶ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 46.

¹⁵⁷ Bleak, *Annals*, October 1865, and Mary Amelia Richards Streeper Letters 1849–1868, ms9430, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake.

¹⁵⁸ Andrew Jensen, comp., “History of the Muddy Valley Mission.” As quoted in Ellsworth, “Mormon Settlement on the Muddy,” 15.

¹⁵⁹ Reminisces of Samuel Claridge. As quoted in Ellsworth, “Mormon Settlement on the Muddy,” 15.

related her attempt to rescue some of the eggs, where she set three eggs up on the mantle with the intent of using them in the evening. Distracted by the arrival home of her husband, she forgot about the eggs. She later remembered the eggs when she found on the mantle a chick that had incubated in the ambient air.¹⁶⁰ Dogs scratched frantically in the sand for places to cool their burning feet, while the chickens threw themselves on their backs to wave their feet in the air in an attempt to cool off.¹⁶¹ Heat was not the only problem. High winds destroyed gardens and filled in irrigation ditches with sand. Resident Darius Clement complained that the blowing sand combined with the heat made area almost unbearable.¹⁶²

The summer sun was capable of doing more than simply making people miserable. On June 12, 1869, a horse wandered into the camp of some people digging a well. The well diggers fed and watered the horse, and tied it up, thinking that it had wandered from its owners. One of the workers, William Webb, went out with one of his mules and found a boy lying dead about half a mile from the camp. His face and body were so badly bloated from exposure to the heat of the sun that identification was impossible. Beside the boy were an empty canteen and a dry gallon keg. Webb buried the boy and put up a headboard to mark the place. Soon after, residents discovered that James Davidson, his wife, and son had left St.

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth Wood Kane, *Twelve Mormon Homes* (Salt Lake: Signature, 1972), 117.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Journal of Darius Salem Clement*, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Thomas for St. George. Along the way, their wagon had lost a wheel along a waterless stretch. Would-be rescuers found Mr. and Mrs. Davidson lying dead together under a blanket stretched over two cacti where they had camped while their son went for water. James Leithead, who at this time was the bishop at St. Thomas, sent a party of men to either retrieve or bury the Davidsons.¹⁶³

Those who were not members of the LDS Church were also aware of how uncomfortable it could be on the Muddy. When Italian revolutionaries forced Pope Pius IX from Rome, Secretary of State Seward offered him asylum in the United States. One Salt Lake reporter went further and offered the Pope and his entourage a farm on the Muddy. Historian John Townley wrote, “One senses an inference that the Muddy was the ultimate in earthly damnation that could be provided Pius IX.” The anti-Mormon *Salt Lake Tribune* characterized the Muddy as a “Siberia for troublemakers from better lands in the North.”¹⁶⁴

Despite the weather, there were Gentiles who were very interested in creating a presence on the Muddy. A group of San Francisco merchants contemplated the sale of stock to create a steam navigation company to cultivate a possible market there.¹⁶⁵ Church leaders expressed concern over this plan. Brigham Young and other Church leaders were determined “to prevent stragglers who are drifting around that country from securing land and speculating and profiting by

¹⁶³ Bleak, *Annals*, 20 June 1869.

¹⁶⁴ Townley, *Conquered Provinces*, 47, 54.

¹⁶⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 October 1867, as quoted in Melvin T. Smith, “The Lower Colorado River,” 356.

our operations and toil.”¹⁶⁶ When word reached President Young that there were Gentiles trying to settle near Callville, he sent people to claim all remaining land and to try and convince the non-Mormons to leave.¹⁶⁷

In 1868, the Union Pacific Railroad announced the commencement of a rail line that would start at Washoe, go through the Pahranaagat Valley, down the Muddy, and on to Prescott, Arizona; the announcement met with consternation. Planners contemplated the rail line as a means of accessing the Southern Pacific Railroad at Kingman, Arizona.¹⁶⁸ No doubt completion of the transcontinental railroad in May 1869 stalled progress on the route before it reached St. Thomas. Some Gentile traffic did pass through St. Thomas, as the machinery that was used to process ore on the Pahranaagat traveled through the town.¹⁶⁹

Even though the summers were oppressive, most Mormons called to the Muddy did not complain about conditions to their church leaders. Regardless of how they might have felt, complaining showed a lack of faith. Whatever burdens were borne, they were borne for God. Others liked the heat, or at least tolerated it better, and thrived. Regardless of which description fit individual settlers, most agreed the winters were pleasant. The missionaries were encouraged by their

¹⁶⁶ Brigham Young to Wm. H. Dame, Wm. F. Warren, and Hy. Lunt, 2 March 1865, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 8 Folder 3, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁶⁷ Brigham Young to Erastus Snow, 2 March 1865, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 8 Folder 3, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁶⁸ Horatio, “Letter From Nevada,” *Deseret News*, 27 May 1868.

¹⁶⁹ Townley, *Conquered Provinces*, 25.

prospects for the future and sent President Young a glowing report in February 1868. According to the letter, the sun was shining and the thermometer read 55° Fahrenheit. The men could work without their coats, and the only need for fire was to cook their food. It was a “delightful climate,” though fuel was scarce.¹⁷⁰ The scarcity of fuel was one of the few negative references to the Muddy that Brigham Young openly acknowledged.

It was during this time of “delightful climate” that settlers arrived at the site of St. Thomas in January 1865. The first building constructed was a fort, as was customary. In addition to putting land to the plow that had never before supported intensive, European-style agriculture, the Saints also set about familiarizing themselves with their new surroundings. In April 1865, the stake presidency from St. George, Apostle Erastus Snow, Marius Ensign, James G. Bleak, and James Cragun, came to St. Thomas to visit the new settlement. The day after they arrived, President Snow and Thomas Smith traveled up the valley to explore. About two miles above St. Thomas, they came upon a meadow they estimated to be about one thousand acres. Two miles farther up, the Saints found another promising meadow of six hundred acres.¹⁷¹ The first meadow they came upon must have been appealing indeed, because in February 1866, residents surveyed it in preparation for relocating the town. The second survey followed the same plan as the first, with eighty-five one-acre lots, and the same number of two-and-a-half-

¹⁷⁰ Brigham Young to W. H. Hooper, 4 February 1868, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 10 Folder 5, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁷¹ Bleak, *Annals*, 26 April 1865.

acre vineyard lots and five-acre farm lots.¹⁷² Bleak reported that by early March, people were moving to the newly surveyed St. Thomas.¹⁷³ It is this second meadow where the rusting and decaying remains of St. Thomas lie today.

Construction proved difficult due to the lack of wood and other building materials. In 1870, Bleak indicated that the cost of getting lumber to the lower Muddy was \$20 per 100 board feet.¹⁷⁴ At that price, you would only get 18.75 8-foot, 2 x 4 inch boards for \$20, which is only enough to frame one fifteen foot wall using modern construction methods. Because of costs, most settlers chose to build houses out of adobe bricks, which Mormons used extensively elsewhere. Adobe houses did require some lumber for the door and window frames, but much less than required by a frame house.¹⁷⁵ Floors, at least at first, were usually dirt, but packed so hard they could almost be scrubbed.¹⁷⁶ Women would often inscribe intricate designs into the dirt floors to give the impression that the walking surface was really just an earth-colored carpet.

Adobe bricks were not the only building materials in use. Henry and Mary Maudsley lived in St. Thomas for four years in a tent. They walled up the sides and

¹⁷² Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

¹⁷³ Bleak, *Annals*, 6 March 1866.

¹⁷⁴ Bleak, *Annals*, 21 December 1870.

¹⁷⁵ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 74.

¹⁷⁶ Don Asbaugh, "St. Thomas Resurrects From Depths of Lake Mead," *The Nevadan*, 5 August 1962, 25.

put a fireplace at one end.¹⁷⁷ To protect the roof of the tent, they built a bowery of willows over it.¹⁷⁸ The tent of Hannah Sharp had a floor of straw, which she changed frequently. Sometimes Sister Sharp would say, when visiting someone's home, "Well, girls, I must go home now. I have to put down a new carpet this morning."¹⁷⁹ Settlers constructed the first church meetinghouse out of woven willows. It had a dirt floor and two square holes without glass in the back for light.¹⁸⁰

Charles Pears Smith had a novel approach to home building. He built his shelter by digging a trench in the earth, then placing upright posts closely together in the trench. He weaved wet strips of cowhide between the posts near the top, which held the posts tightly once dried. Smith then covered the posts with plaster, which provided protection from both the heat and the cold. He made the roof by stretching small poles from wall to wall and then covering the poles with willows. Finally, he wove bear grass throughout the roof, and then spread a coat of mud on top.¹⁸¹

Other Saints found different methods to create a workable roof. Helen Gibbons recorded that some would go to the swampy areas of the Muddy and

¹⁷⁷ Euzell Prince Preston, "The Prince Family in St. Thomas," *Memories*, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections.

¹⁷⁸ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 52.

¹⁷⁹ Ramona Wilcox Cannon, "Aunt Hannah Sharp and the Muddy Mission."

¹⁸⁰ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 68-69.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

gather cattails and tie them in bunches six inches in diameter. These cattails grew up to twelve feet tall, so they were long enough to make a good roof by piling them on and tying them in place. The cattail roof shed snow and rain, keeping the occupants dry.¹⁸² While the St. Thomas Saints were very creative with their choices of building material, they were not doing anything unique for the area. Part of the evidence for this is that the “Mormon Fence,” a fence created from any and all available materials imaginable, is one of the things that most predominantly Mormon communities had in common.¹⁸³ For all the creativeness of St. Thomas residents, there were some traditional buildings. The new meetinghouse, for example, had a roof of handmade wooden shingles.¹⁸⁴

Despite the few buildings like the meetinghouse, St. Thomas was a rough looking place. One missionary described it as “a little group of adobe huts with willow and mud roofs mused together into a fort, pitiful attempts at wheat and corn fields; not a tree to impede the direct rays of the sun.”¹⁸⁵ The lack of timber made it hard to construct fences out of poles, so residents created corrals by piling mesquite bushes to enclose an area.¹⁸⁶ The lack of wood presented a problem for cooking. There was some desert willow, but the main source of fuel was

¹⁸² Helen Bay Gibbons, *Saint and Savage* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book, 1865), 127.

¹⁸³ Richard V. Francaviglia, *The Mormon Landscape: Existence, Creation and Perception of a Unique Image in the American West*, (New York: AMS Press, 1978).

¹⁸⁴ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 74.

¹⁸⁵ Hannah Sharp, as quoted in L. A. Fleming, “The Settlements on the Muddy 1865 to 1871: ‘A God Forsaken Place,’” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 35 (Spring 1967): 157.

¹⁸⁶ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 169.

mesquite.¹⁸⁷ The settlers paid Paiutes to dig the entire tree up, roots and all, and dry it out to burn it. The work was hard, and a good worker could manage seven or eight a day. For this work, they received a cup of flour per root.¹⁸⁸ Entries in various journals and diaries show that Native American labor was a very important part of the economy of St. Thomas, yet most interactions are mentioned almost in passing.

Church leaders recognized that many would find St. Thomas less than desirable, but realized that it was the best place to settle in the area. Brigham Young felt that despite the deficiencies, industry and perseverance were the only requirements to make the place a desirable one to dwell. He wrote, “It is no new thing for the Saints to contend with and overcome the obstacles” that the Muddy had to offer.¹⁸⁹ President Young based his opinion on the reports of others, as he did not visit the area until 1870.

For nearly a decade before the Church planted a town on the Muddy, the Moapa Paiute had asked for the Saints to become their neighbors.¹⁹⁰ The Paiute asked Las Vegas bound missionaries in 1855 to settle there, and many Paiute received baptism at the hands of the Elders. Nevertheless, many of the problems

¹⁸⁷ Thomas Day, *Journals and Letters of Elder Thomas Day*, M270.1D2744d1978, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁸⁸ Ellsworth, “Mormon Settlement on the Muddy,” 8.

¹⁸⁹ Brigham Young to Joseph S. Murdock, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁹⁰ George Washington Bean Papers, MSS 1038, 3. Courtesy, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602

that the residents of St. Thomas encountered were because the Moapa Valley had inhabitants when the Saints arrived. There were understandable tensions since the situation created by the founding of the town was that of two sizable groups of culturally dissimilar people living in close proximity. There are no indications that church leaders expected the settlers to proselyte the Paiute, but frictions rose because of other matters. Three months after the arrival of Thomas Smith, some of these tensions came to a head.

Toward the end Erastus Snow's visit in April 1865, his company received a visit from To-ish-obe, the principal chief of the Muddy band of Paiute, and a number of his men. To-ish-obe first addressed Snow's company in a very angry and excited manner. President Snow listened patiently to the interpretation given by Andrew Gibbons and replied mildly. Snow's subdued manner helped defuse the tense situation. To-ish-obe told Snow that some of the Santa Clara Paiute who lived near St. George and Santa Clara had sent word that "Snow and some of his men were going to the Muddy and poison the water and kill off all the Indians." Snow assured the chief that these were not his intentions, and the meeting ended peacefully. Bleak reported that the false report had been circulated because the Paiute from the St. George area had experienced some bad business dealings with some Mormons and were resentful.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Bleak, *Annals*, 21 April 1865, and Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Paiute certainly deserve some blame for difficulties experienced between the two groups. Many of those problems, however, are traceable to attitudes that the Mormons held towards Native Americans. Joseph W. Young's correspondence with *Deseret News* is illustrative. In 1868, he wrote that "In the early history of our Utah settlements these Indians were considered about the worst specimens of the race. They lived almost in a state of nudity, and were among the worst thieves on the continent."¹⁹² Another observer wrote that "The Indians on the Rio Virgin and Muddy are the most low and contemptible I ever saw and show the most degraded and dishonest disposition. They are worse than the Otoes & Omahas & I believe they are more treacherous and fickle."¹⁹³ Young, at least recognized that the Mormons deserved some blame for poor relationships. He reported that the Native Americans, when the letter was sent, were peaceful, and "perhaps might continue so, if there were no foolish white men; but unfortunately there were too many of that kind."¹⁹⁴

Darius Clement knew one such man in St. Thomas. This man stole some ammunition from the Paiute and "degraded himself to their level." Speaking of the incident, Brigham Young said that he would not whip an Indian any sooner than he would a white man if the white man was guilty of the same thing. The white man should "receive more & severer lashes of the black snake, because he had been

¹⁹² Joseph W. Young, "A Visit to the Muddy" *Deseret News*.

¹⁹³ Juanita Brooks, *On the Mormon Frontier, The Diary of Hosea Stout*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964), 461.

¹⁹⁴ Joseph W. Young, *Deseret News*.

taught better.”¹⁹⁵ Another culturally insensitive white man was Captain R. N. Fenton, who the government sent in 1869 to be the agent for the Paiute living on the Muddy. The Paiute looked on him with such contempt that he threatened to open fire on them in order to get their attention.¹⁹⁶

Food was the source of many of the confrontations between residents of St. Thomas and the Paiute. Some of these incidents were minor. Orville Cox recorded one such moment in his journal. His wife, Elvira, was ironing a shirt with the door to the house open. They had no stove to heat the irons, so she was using long handled fire shovels, bottom up, over a pile of coals, and she would use one while the other heated. A “big buck Indian” wearing a G-string and breechclout came to the door and demanded bread. Elvira gave him three small biscuits. He demanded more, but she told him there was none. He then demanded the shirt, which she refused, saying that it was her son’s only shirt, and he was in bed while she ironed it. The man bent to pick up the shirt, so Elvira picked up one of the shovels and whacked his bare backside. From then on, his friends knew him as the “buck that was branded by a squaw.”¹⁹⁷

Other confrontations were more severe. One day a white boy killed a rabbit for food. The Paiute believed that all the wild game belonged to them, and demanded that the boy be shot, or at least punished in some way. The settlers held

¹⁹⁵ *Journal of Darius Salem Clement*, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

¹⁹⁶ Corbett, “A History of the Muddy Mission,” 128.

¹⁹⁷ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 36.

a council with the Paiute and agreed that they would not kill any of their wild animals if they would agree not kill any of the white man's cattle. They still demanded that the boy, Walt, be shot. The boy was able to shoot some wild ducks that the Paiute accepted instead.¹⁹⁸

Not so easily resolved was a raid on the settlers' cattle. Because cattle left to roam were sometimes picked off and eaten by the Paiute, the settlers had taken to herding all their livestock onto an island in the Muddy at night. One morning in February 1866, the settlers discovered that their neighbors had improvised a bridge to the island for the livestock to pass over. They were able to escape with all the cattle and horses, about sixty head.¹⁹⁹ The Paiute had pulled up all their crops, and had taken every man, woman, and child out of the valley. They had even buried containers of water out along the trail so they could escape quickly. The loss of all their work animals made it very difficult for the settlers to complete their work.²⁰⁰

Eventually, the Paiute began to filter back into the valley after the incident. Warren Foote recorded how the matter was eventually resolved. St. Thomas leaders called upon Old Captain Thomas to explain their actions. Thomas said that the band that lived over the Timber Mountains "prevailed" upon them to assist in the theft. Captain Rufus, another leader, and himself were opposed to the theft, but fearing reprisals fled with the actual thieves. After their successful

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Bleak, *Annals*, 6 February 1866.

²⁰⁰ Corbett, "A History of the Muddy Mission," 121.

escape, the other band took all the food from the Paiute from the Muddy and left them to starve. Thomas and those who followed him decided to give themselves up to the Mormons so they could return to their homes. Brother Thomas S. Smith spoke with them, saying that the Saints had settled there to do the Paiute good, that we were their friends, and reminded them of the good done for them. The theft of the teams had deprived the missionaries the ability to plow the land and raise grain to feed their women and children, who might now go hungry. Foote recalled that when Brother Smith's words were interpreted to him, "tears ran down old Captain Thomas' cheeks and they seemed fully to sense the crime they had committed, and to throw themselves upon our mercies."²⁰¹

Some of the culprits received severe punishment. Old Thomas, who was chief of the band near the California Road, To-ish-obe, chief of the Muddy band, and another chief met together and decided that two of their men who had stolen horses and cattle were outlaws.²⁰² The chiefs delivered Co-quap, one of the guilty parties, to St. Thomas for execution.²⁰³ By one account, his execution was cruel. The Mormons took him two miles out of town and let him loose. They shot at him jumping and running, nearly making his escape before falling prey to Mormon bullets.²⁰⁴ According to another source, St. Thomas residents simply hanged him;

²⁰¹ Journal of Warren Foote, 196–97, as cited in Corbett, "A History of the Muddy Mission," 122.

²⁰² Bleak, *Annals*, 18 February 1866.

²⁰³ Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

²⁰⁴ Reeve, *Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes*, 187.

this explanation seems more in line with Mormon attitudes toward Native Americans.²⁰⁵

To forestall difficulties in the future, Price Nelson recorded in his journal that the Paiute made a treaty that whoever stole and was caught was to be whipped, five lashes for the first offence and doubled every time after that.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, To-ish-obe had a hard time getting his people to refrain from theft and sabotage of the settlers' crops. The chief requested that Andrew Gibbons come and talk to the Paiute men, because they would listen to him.²⁰⁷ Even though To-ish-obe was not always able to control his people, the settlers on the Muddy were grateful for his moderating influence.²⁰⁸

During 1866, however, the moderating influence of To-ish-obe proved insufficient to keep the peace. That year saw a general uneasiness and anger among Native Americans due to the Black Hawk War. Utah's Black Hawk War lasted from 1865 to 1872. Named after Ute chief Antonga Black Hawk, the war was a series of battles, skirmishes, raids, and killings between the Mormon settlers in central and southern Utah and the Ute, Paiute, and Navajo. Native American belligerents responded to Mormon pressure on their hunting, fishing, and camping areas, sought revenge for personal insults, and generally worked to

²⁰⁵ Fleming, "The Settlements on the Muddy," 159.

²⁰⁶ Journal of Price Nelson, 7, as cited in Corbett, "A History of the Muddy Mission," 124.

²⁰⁷ *Journal History*, 2 April 1866.

²⁰⁸ Ramona Wilcox Cannon, "Aunt Hannah Sharp and the Muddy Mission."

discourage further outside settlement. The Ute felt particularly aggrieved by the lack of promised supplies and the resultant starvation at the Uintah Indian Reservation during the winter of 1864–65. Mormon settlers retaliated against repeated livestock raids and constant begging by their native neighbors. During the war, the Paiute on the Muddy became bolder and more difficult to maintain relations with.²⁰⁹ In an attempt to normalize relations with area bands, Erastus Snow convened a meeting at St. Joseph with Tut-se-gavits, chief of Santa Clara band; To-ish-obe, principal chief of the Muddy band; William, chief of the Colorado band; Farmer, chief of St. Thomas band; Frank, chief of Simondsville band; Rufus, chief of the Muddy Springs band above the California Road; and Thomas, chief of the band at the Narrows of the Muddy. Sixty-four braves from the seven bands accompanied the chiefs to the meeting.²¹⁰ President Snow spoke at length through interpreters, and a good feeling prevailed at the meeting.

A meeting with the Paiute bands was not the only reason President Snow traveled south from St. George. He received a letter from President Young and his councilors on May 20, 1866, instructing him to make the necessary preparations in each settlement to protect them from Native American attacks. The letter required 150 to 500 “good and efficient” men be called in each settlement for the militia. If it became necessary to travel outside of the settlement, no parties of one or two should leave alone, but should travel in a well armed party or be escorted by

²⁰⁹ Corbett, “A History of the Muddy Mission,” 125.

²¹⁰ Bleak, *Annals*, 4 June 1866.

armed guards, as “the careless manner in which men have traveled from place to place . . . should be stopped.” Any abandoned settlement should have their house logs and fence poles buried to prevent their destruction. The Saints should “Adopt measures from this time forward that not another drop of your blood, or the blood of anyone belonging to you, shall be shed by the Indians and keep your stock so securely that not another horse, mule, ox, cow, sheep, or even calf shall fall in their hands and the war will soon be stopped.” Any settlement not abandoned should have a strong fort erected and all the people should move into it. To protect livestock, the letter stipulated the construction of strong corrals. When it became necessary to send their animals out to graze, an armed guard should accompany them. The same rules applied for men working in the fields.²¹¹

Pursuant to his instructions, Snow organized a battalion of the Nauvoo Legion for the Muddy consisting of ninety-three men, rank and file, with Thomas S. Smith as major.²¹² He also divided the Muddy into two areas for protection. In case of a conflict with Paiute, all settlers on the south end of the valley were to travel to St. Thomas and band together for protection. Snow designated Mill Point as the meeting place in the north. St. Joseph residents, who were in the middle, were at liberty to choose where they would go.²¹³

²¹¹ Bleak, *Annals*, 20 June 1866.

²¹² Bleak, *Annals*, 4 June 1866.

²¹³ Bleak, *Annals*, 12 June 1866.

No major confrontations occurred on the Muddy, despite the scare in August 1866. In a letter to Thomas Smith, Brigham Young shared some information he had received regarding the movement of Native Americans in the area. Kanosh, the chief of the Pahvant band of the Utes, which was the only large group of Utes that did not participate in the Black Hawk War, carried the warning.²¹⁴ He said that the Piedades (Southern Paiute on the Arizona Strip) told him that two sons of a slain Navajo chief were preparing to descend on the settlements in the south with six thousand warriors and reclaim all the land from St. George to Beaver. Young called this an “Indian story,” but one that called for observation. He called on settlers to push forward their efforts to defend the settlements on the Muddy, sparing no pain to secure the area. President Young also indicated that he would attempt to raise more people to settle on the Muddy to strengthen it.²¹⁵

While there was no general warfare, occasional confrontations occurred. Delaun Mills Cox recorded one such confrontation in his history. A group of Paiute men killed a cow and the herdsman reported it. Men from St. Thomas, Overton, and St. Joseph went to confront them and demand payment for the cow. The guilty parties replied that they would fight first, and called their brothers to arms. Cox said that:

All night long the Indians kept up the pow-wow and war dance on a little knoll not far from town. Early the next morning the men all

²¹⁴ Kanosh was a member of the Church, and one of the earliest Native Americans to receive participate in temple ordinances, receiving his “endowment.”

²¹⁵ Brigham Young to Thomas S. Smith, 15 August 1866, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 9 Folder 4, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

gathered [to organize.] The Indians came down a few at a time, twanging their bow strings, anxious and waiting to shoot. A few of them in front had guns. There were about fifty who came forward but there were around seventy-five in the whole bunch. Finally their big chief, Frank put in his appearance. Andrew Gibbons stood on the wagon tongue and began talking peace, and the Indians were about to give in when one young buck began twanging his bow string again and raising his tomahawk. This was all that was needed to stir up the fighting blood of the Indians, and the Captain said, "No, we'll fight." . . . [There was then some maneuvering for position] "Don't shoot," commanded Pratt, for just then an old Indian stepped out calling, "Hole-on, hole-on, hole-on," and Captain Frank began waving his blanket which signified surrender. When the Indians saw that the white men really meant business they didn't feel so brave, so the battle, though a silent one, ended without bloodshed, but it was a close call.²¹⁶

The Black Hawk War continued until 1872, but the Moapa Paiute stopped participating in 1867, and relations between St. Thomas residents and the Paiute returned to a semblance of normalcy. In order to maintain that peace, President Young advised that no Saint should attempt to establish a settlement north of the California Road, I-15 today.²¹⁷ From that point on, Erastus Snow advised new settlers that despite their feelings toward the Paiute, it was much more effective to "shoot them with biscuits" than with bullets.²¹⁸ There were other instances of the Paiute taking and killing horses and cattle, but the warlike feeling that had

²¹⁶ Delaun Mills Cox, "History of Delaun Mills Cox: written by his daughters with his help and approval in his 80th year, supplemented by his diary, originals secured from Mrs. Susie Wilson, Hurricane, Utah" (Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake), 11-12.

²¹⁷ Brigham Young to Erastus Snow, 2 January 1868, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 10 Folder 4, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²¹⁸ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 74.

prevailed on the Muddy dissipated for a while.²¹⁹ Unfortunately, another confrontation in late 1870, right before the Saints left the Muddy, led to the decision that thieves caught in the act of stealing faced execution.²²⁰

Not all the interactions between St. Thomas residents and the Paiute were negative. The Mormons tried to teach them better farming methods to increase their food supply, but with disappointing results. The Paiute, however, were an important source of labor for the Saints. Joseph W. Young wrote that of all the tribes he had experience with, the Paiute were the best workers.²²¹ They were hired to do housework, haul wood, do construction, and for agricultural work. Payment for services rendered was usually in food. For picking cotton, a Paiute woman received a yard of calico and three cakes of bread per day.²²² For washing for several hours, their pay consisted of a level pint of flour.²²³

Working and living in close proximity to each other did generate some moments of understanding between the two groups. Hannah Sharp noticed that the Paiute had a novel way of avoiding sunstroke. They would wind their hair around their heads and plaster it with wet mud, which they allowed to dry. As the

²¹⁹ *Journal of Darius Salem Clement*, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Brigham Young to Jesse C. Little, 25 December 1868, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 11 Folder 3, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²²⁰ Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

²²¹ Joseph W. Young, "A Visit to the Muddy," *Deseret News*.

²²² Monique Kimball, "A Matter of Faith: A Study of the Muddy Mission" (master's thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1988), 106.

²²³ Ramona Wilcox Cannon, "Aunt Hannah Sharp and the Muddy Mission."

mud chipped off, they added more mud.²²⁴ Others just found their prejudices confirmed. One sister writing to her friend wrote, “There is no lack of company, for I have about a dozen dirty-looking Indian visitors every day, and they manage to stay all day sneaking around, and watching out, as though you were stealing. I have engaged one to wash for me, what do you think of our hired help? Is it not a fine prospect, to think of spending one’s days with such associates?”²²⁵

On at least one occasion, amusement was the result of cultural misunderstanding. Joseph W. Young related the following story in *Deseret News*. One Paiute man decided he wanted the wife of another man, which, of course, the second man objected to. To decide the matter, all the friends of the two men gathered to fight for the woman. After laying their clothes and weapons to the side, the two sides fight until a victor emerges and leads the woman to his willow shade. The woman has no voice in the proceedings. Sometimes, when the two sides got tired of beating on each other, they would grab the woman and engage in a tug-o-war, almost killing the poor woman. The Saints tried to get the Paiute to moderate these “barbarities” as much as possible, but at least in one case, a Mormon’s attempt to intervene was significantly misunderstood. Joseph W. Young recalled that:

One man, who is by the way, a pretty hard man to handle, got his sympathies excited by seeing some twenty Indians pulling at a little squaw, and he went up to try and make them desist, when they

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Mary Amelia Richards Streeper Letters, 1849–1868, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

thought he wanted a hand in the fight, and they all turned on him, but he soon whipped the whole of them. They gave him peaceable possession, and all hands cheered for the *wyno* Mormon. He turned the prize over to the brave, who, he thought had the best claim: still the young lady claims to be his squaw, and says she is just living out on permission.²²⁶

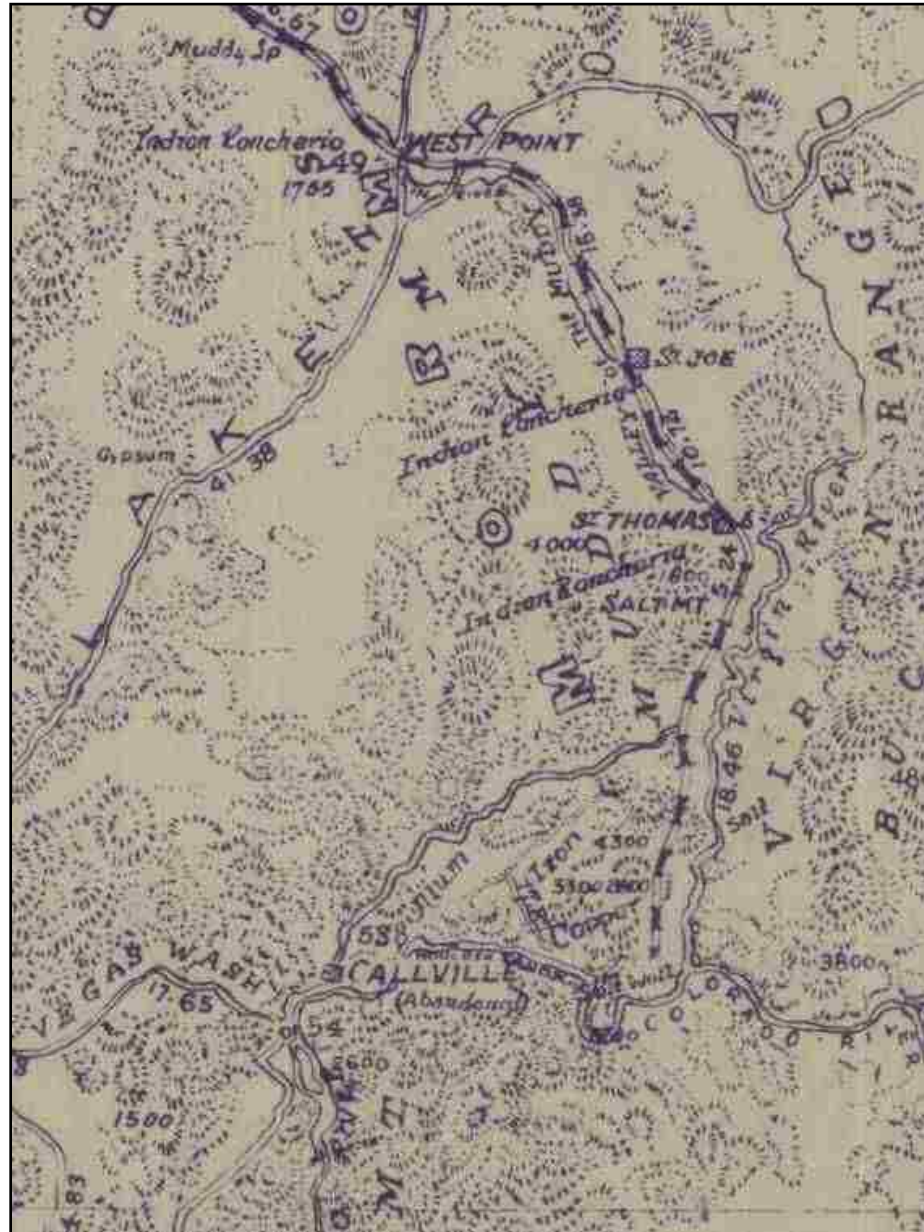


Figure 9: Detail of Wheeler's 1869 map. Note the proximity of Paiute encampment to St. Thomas. UNLV Special Collections.

²²⁶ Joseph W. Young, "A Visit to the Muddy," *Deseret News*.

In 1869, government action altered the basic relationship between the Mormons and the Paiute. The Mormons took very seriously President Young's advice that it was easier to feed the Native Americans than to fight them. They showed this repeatedly by their distribution of blankets, shirts, agricultural tools, and other items to the Paiute.²²⁷ Captain R. N. Fenton arrived on the Muddy to take up his duties as Indian agent. Fenton believed in taking a different approach than the Mormons, disrupting the relationship that had worked fairly well up to that point. He believed that the Paiute were ready to go onto a reservation because they were so poor and starving, and reservation life would ensure the meeting of their basic needs.²²⁸ He recommended the creation of a reservation on the Upper Muddy, an area that the Saints had left to the Paiute anyway.

Many of the Saints were worried that instead of placing the reservation on the Upper Muddy, Captain Fenton would recommend the designation of the entire Muddy as a reservation, thus breaking up the settlements.²²⁹ The uncertainty threw them into a "state of suspense & anxiety & clouded their future prospects which hitherto seemed bright."²³⁰ The anxiety proved unfounded in December 1869, as Captain Fenton received word from the Indian Department of the

²²⁷ *Journal of Darius Salem Clement*, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²²⁸ Reeve, *Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes*, 92-93.

²²⁹ *Journal of Darius Salem Clement*, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

acceptance of the Upper Muddy as the site for the reservation.²³¹ In February of 1870, Fenton moved his headquarters from St. Thomas to Hiko as it was “nearer the central part of this tribe of Indians, than St. Thomas, and more convenient for communications.”²³² Five months later, Fenton moved to Pioche as it was “more convenient for the transaction of the business connected with [the] Agency.”²³³ In reality, he moved to Pioche so he could participate in the mining boom there, neglecting his duties as agent.²³⁴

St. Thomas residents did not spend all their time worrying about relations with the Paiute. They had to work to support themselves and their families. The primary occupation of St. Thomas residents was farming, as was the case for a large percentage of Americans at the time. Bleak recorded in April 1865 that several farmers broke ground and put in crops. He listed that Thomas S. Smith had seven acres of wheat, two of barley, and one of oats. John Bankhead, from Wellsville, Cache Valley, had planted ten acres of wheat and two of oats. Robert Harris, from Davis County, nine acres of wheat, one acre of barley, and one acre of oats. Henry Nebeker from Payson, Utah County, had ten acres of wheat.²³⁵ Many of the men had gone north shortly after arriving to retrieve their families or to get

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² R. N. Fenton to E. S. Parker, 14 February 1870. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1870-1871. UNLV Microforms. E 93 U95X Reel 539.

²³³ R. N. Fenton to E. S. Parker, 12 July 1870. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1870-1871. UNLV Microforms. E 93 U95X Reel 539.

²³⁴ Reeve, *Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes*, 92-93.

²³⁵ Bleak, *Annals*, 26 April 1865.

food. Bleak only mentions thirty-three acres under the plow, but the Mormons surveyed nine hundred acres for farmland, and six hundred of those acres belonged to settlers. The one thousand acres of meadowland remained unsurveyed.²³⁶

The first year of farming seemed promising for the new community. Cotton grew very well on the Muddy, and by October, the agriculturalists looked forward to a good crop.²³⁷ They were not disappointed either, as all the settlements on the Muddy raised five thousand pounds of cotton that first year.²³⁸ Andrew Gibbons was particularly enthusiastic about the prospects of agriculture at St. Thomas. He said, “All that we need, to make this part of the desert blossom like the rose, is the men and means.”²³⁹

What the desert really needed to blossom like a rose was not just men and means, but water. This holds true for most of the West, so much so that many consider aridity the key hallmark of the West. Naturally, scholars have fought over exactly what that means. For Donald Worster in *Rivers of Empire*, water, “more than any other single element...has been the shaping force in the region’s history,” and the western social order is built around the control of that water.²⁴⁰ Worster

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Brigham Young to Brigham Young Jr., 18 October 1865, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 8 Folder 5, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²³⁸ Bleak, *Annals*, 31 December 1865.

²³⁹ *Journal History*, 13 November 1865.

²⁴⁰ Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 5.

refers to the Mormons as the “Lord’s Beavers.” The effects of this are shown in Marc Reisner’s *Cadillac Desert*.²⁴¹ Donald Pisani, however, asserts that the major theme in water management in the west is *fragmentation*, messy and resolved through trial and error.²⁴² Looking at the history of water usage in the Moapa Valley, it becomes very clear that trial and error perfectly describes the way residents managed water.

The only thing that made sustained human life possible in the Moapa Valley was the fact that the Muddy River is fed by springs and flows year round. The average yearly precipitation for the area is less than five inches, and even then most of it comes November through February.²⁴³ This means that the bulk of the rain comes when it is the least useful for growing crops. Irrigation is the only way to sustain agriculture in the Moapa Valley. Consequently, immediately after surveying the land for farming, the Saints wasted no time digging irrigation canals to water their new fields. In an August 1865 report to Wilford Woodruff, apostle and president of the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society, St. Thomas residents reported the construction of a three-mile long, eight-foot wide, and two-and-a-half-foot deep canal. They used teams and scrapers as much as possible, but much of the work required a pick and a shovel. The estimated cost of labor and

²⁴¹ Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Penguin, 1993).

²⁴² Donald J. Pisani, *To Reclaim a Divided West: Water, Law, and Public Policy, 1848-1902* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992).

²⁴³ <http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/cliMAIN.pl?nvover> (Accessed 13 September 2011).

materials totaled \$3,840. Another \$1,160 worth of smaller canals were under construction at the time of the report.²⁴⁴

In 1866, St. Thomas residents built a dam north of their settlement to raise the level of the water in the river so that it would feed their ditch. First, they had to dig a canal around a swamp so they could get to a suitable dam site. Warren Foote and twenty others from St. Joseph went south to help in the construction. Foote helped the St. Thomas residents lay out ditches along the streets to facilitate water delivery for garden lots.²⁴⁵



Figure 10: Pioneer irrigating ditch in the Moapa Valley. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

²⁴⁴ Bleak, *Annals*, 29 August 1865.

²⁴⁵ Journal of Warren Foote, 187–88, as cited in Corbet, “A History of the Muddy Mission,” 96.

Starting in 1868, St. Thomas began to have serious problems with water. As the population increased on the Muddy, so did the demand for the finite resource. The canal that the residents of St. Joseph dug to supply their community with water presented the biggest problem for the town downstream. About two hundred yards of it ran through sandy soil, and up to 90 percent of the water that ran through it seeped into the ground. This new canal greatly diminished the amount of water that made it downstream to St. Thomas.²⁴⁶ In communities not controlled by the Church, such a situation would certainly have led to litigation, and rightly so. As leaders in Salt Lake directed both communities, all parties involved sought another solution.

The lack of water is traceable to other reasons besides the actions of upstream residents. The swamp to the north of St. Thomas took much of the water that made it past St. Joseph's canal. It also bred mosquitoes while keeping land out of cultivation. To overcome this problem, residents dug a ditch ten miles long, six feet wide, and two and a half feet deep to drain the swamp. The completion of the ditch allayed the fears over scarcity of water for St. Thomas residents.²⁴⁷ Their confidence was conditional though. They recognized that St. Thomas had reached its population capacity.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Darius S. Clement, "1868," diary, papers, account books, and notebooks, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, as quoted in Kimball, "A Matter of Faith," 46.

²⁴⁷ Bleak, *Annals*, 3 June 1869 and 6 June 1869.

²⁴⁸ *Journal of Darius Salem Clement*, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Even their conditional optimism was not well-founded. 1869 was a drought year, and the lack of water resulted in very poor yields in every crop.²⁴⁹ The drought required new solutions. Speaking at St. Thomas in December 1869, Erastus Snow proposed a solution. He said that the Muddy should be totally diverted into two canals, one on each side of the valley—one to St. Joseph on the east side, and the other to St. Thomas on the west side. Each settlement would then receive the same amount of water. Any water that leached into the soil while it was running through the canals would come out in springs further down the valley.²⁵⁰ The proposal was significant considering the investment that the Saints already had in the existing canal network.

Table 1: Irrigation Canals on the Muddy.²⁵¹

# of Canals	Place	Length in Miles	Average Width/Ft.	Average Depth/Ft.	Cost to Construct	# Acres Useful Land
10	Lower Muddy	52.5	5.7	2	\$62,320.00	6,230
4	Upper Muddy	13	5.2	1.9	\$18,520	1,700
Total: 14		65.5			\$70,840	7,930

In the St. Thomas area, the Saints had already built over fifty miles of ditches spread out over ten canals. These canals represented a tremendous investment in time and resources. If the water were to come from further up the

²⁴⁹ Bleak, *Annals*, 5 August 1869.

²⁵⁰ *Journal of Darius Salem Clement*, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

²⁵¹ Bleak, *Annals*, 31 December 1869. The chart is extracted from a report on irrigation for every settlement in the Southern Utah Mission.

valley, the existing network of canals required reconfiguring to tie into the new source of water, a prospect that must have seemed daunting. They did not shrink from the work though. When the Saints left the valley, there was a nine-mile canal down one side of the river, and they had plans to dig a canal on the other side.²⁵²

Water was definitely an essential part of agriculture on the Muddy. Another was hard labor. William Wood recorded in his journal the type of work necessary for farming on the Muddy. Upon arrival, he was assigned two and a half acres of swampy and wet land for hay. He also received five acres of upland which was covered with mesquite brush which had “thorns...strong enough to pierce a hole through a leather strap.” Though the brush was not terribly tall, he was forced to dig as deep as five feet into the ground to clear the stumps. With the help of a hired Paiute, he created a pile of firewood that made “the best fire [he] ever burned.”

The hard labor did not end with preparing the land for farming. He planted two and a half acres of cotton, from which he gathered a few bales. His hay land was so badly inundated that he had to cut a small quantity with his scythe, rake it up, and carry it to higher ground to be spread out and dried. To accomplish this, he had to bind it in a rope and carry it out on his back. After it dried he had to

²⁵² McClintock, *Mormon Settlements in Arizona*, 120.

rake it again and pile it to be ready to feed his stock. To get enough food to survive, he cradled the grain of other settlers at the rate of one bushel per acre.²⁵³

Producing enough food to survive was very important, but the main agricultural pursuit of the residents of St. Thomas was to produce cotton for the rest of the Saints in Utah. Cotton production on the Muddy was not consistent throughout the Muddy Mission's tenure. The first year, St. Thomas and its sister settlement produced 5,000 pounds of cotton. The next year with a larger population, Bleak reported only 3,000 pounds from thirteen and a half acres of cotton land. That makes an average of 222.2 pounds per acre. In comparison, R. M. Eglestead, in 1865, produced 600 pounds on three-quarters of an acre, nearly four times the next year's average.²⁵⁴ In 1867, output ranged from 300 pounds per acre to as high as 800 pounds. According to President Snow, the only thing that was preventing the production of up to 100,000 pounds of cotton on the Muddy was the fact that only about 30 of the 158 called to settle on the Muddy in October 1867 were actually in the area a year later.²⁵⁵ Part of why Brigham Young continued to call people to the area was because he believed it would end up being the granary of the south, if only the "brethren are permitted to dwell there in peace."²⁵⁶

²⁵³ James H. Wood, "William Wood." This was directly from his journal, which was published by the DUP.

²⁵⁴ Bleak, *Annals*, 20 January 1867.

²⁵⁵ Bleak, *Annals*, May 1867.

²⁵⁶ Brigham Young to Erastus Snow, 2 January 1868, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

In some ways, Brigham Young's belief seemed to be well-founded. They had several good years of wheat crops.²⁵⁷ In 1869, early estimates projected a yield of approximately three thousand bushels of wheat.²⁵⁸ Other crops produced well also. Andrew Gibbons claimed one year to have seven cuttings of alfalfa. Each one of the cuttings was two feet high and in blossom.²⁵⁹ As has been the case in so many other places in the West, water proved the limiting factor.

In 1869, the flow of the Muddy was very light. In June, the Saints in St. Thomas were not too concerned because they had just completed the ditch that bypassed the swamp north of town.²⁶⁰ Though they had "no concern of scarcity" a mere two months before, by August it was becoming clear that conditions were not good. James Leithead reported to James Bleak that because of the scarcity of crop, there was very little cotton, cane, or corn.²⁶¹ There was wheat, however. The poor cotton crop was to hit the town very hard.

The economy of the Muddy focused almost exclusively on cotton production. Because the cotton was not sold on the open market, there was very little money in the settlements, beyond what was brought in selling hay and salt

²⁵⁷ Brigham Young to A. Carrington, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²⁵⁸ Bleak, *Annals*, 3 June 1869.

²⁵⁹ Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

²⁶⁰ Bleak, *Annals*, 3 June 1869.

²⁶¹ Bleak, *Annals*, 5 August 1869.

down the river to El Dorado, or even as far as Yuma.²⁶² Because the area was so money poor, any non-barter exchange utilized “Bishop’s Chips.” Bishop’s Chips were octagonal pieces of lead stamped with various values. The ward bishop issued them at the town store, and they were legal tender at the town store.²⁶³ The settlers’ situation was made even more complicated by the fact that because the store was not bringing any specie in and nobody was growing anything in salable quantities other than cotton, it could not afford to stock many goods. Anywhere outside of Zion, store owners could take either cash or a wide variety of goods in trade, and obtain their goods from whoever they wanted to, rather than only from those interested in Mormon self sufficiency.

This situation made cotton very important in the economy of St. Thomas, since it provided almost the sole means of securing goods from outside the valley. A letter from James Leithead to James Bleak shows just how dire a situation the Saints on the Muddy were in. He wrote:

In a letter last week to President Snow I said something about our cotton. I wish now to say or rather propose to the Rio Virgin M. Col, that if they will furnish us . . . with goods such as we will select, or rather, such as we are really in need of, such as shoes, clothing, partly home made, shovels, spades, hoes, ploughs, and articles of this kind that we are destitute of, we will agree to deliver our cotton, some 20 to 25 thousand pounds, providing we get the goods at about the same rate we have purchased them from the Southern Utah Coop. We will freight our goods down and deliver the cotton at the factory. I make this offer because we are destitute of such articles, and our cotton is our only dependence to get them. If the Rio Virgin

²⁶² Corbett, “A History of the Muddy Mission,” 55.

²⁶³ Don Ashbaugh, “Ghost Towns of Nevada: St. Thomas, Part 2,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 10 April 1960.

Co. cannot accede to something of this kind, we must try to find another market . . . We care less about the price, could we only obtain the articles needed. Many are nearly naked for clothing. We can sell nothing we have for money, and the cotton, what little there it, seems to be all our hope in that direction . . . Please ascertain the Company's mind on this subject at as early a date as possible, and communicate to me.²⁶⁴

The factory agreed to meet the demands of the people on the Muddy, as the factory in Washington, Utah was always in need of cotton to keep its machinery going.

While it lacked the same economic importance to St. Thomas, salt was a very important commodity for the settlers. The mine was five miles from the town, but all land-bound traffic heading to the mine went through St. Thomas. It was a very valuable commodity for culinary, livestock, and mining uses. Everyone had free access to the mine and extracted their own salt. One day, the proximity to the mine created a stir when a camel walked into town. When the Paiute saw it, some thought that the Great White Spirit had sent it to punish them, so they ran away, afraid. There was a "Dromedary Line" between Los Angeles and Fort Mojave because some freighters thought that the camels would be better than horses for freighting salt in the desert. The plan proved unworkable because the rocks cut the camels' feet and made them sore. Additionally, the sight of the camels made the horses hysterical. The failed business owners turned the camels loose in the desert to fend for themselves.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Bleak, *Annals*, 1 December 1870.

²⁶⁵ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 55-56.

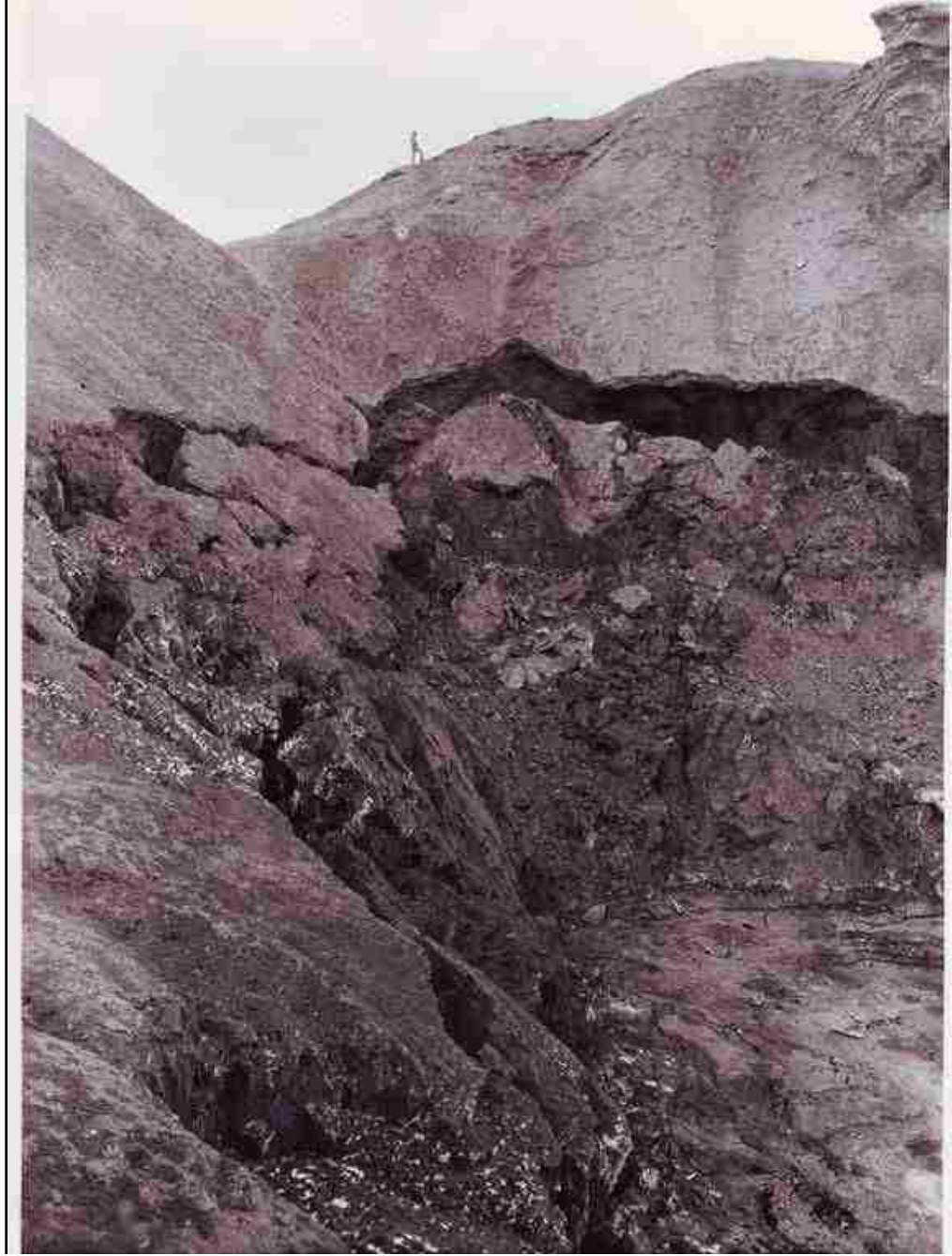


Figure 11: Salt mine near St. Thomas. The white areas are pure salt. NARA Denver.

Life in St. Thomas was not just about agriculture, cotton, and salt mining. Residents were determined to create a real community with all the benefits that their previous homes had offered. An early effort to establish a school began in

1865. Students met in the home of Moses Gibson.²⁶⁶ Residents also held many social gatherings, seeming to look for any occasion to have a party. When Hannah Sharp and her husband arrived in St. Thomas, the town organized a dance to celebrate their arrival.²⁶⁷ The fiddler had only two strings for his instrument, but the enthusiasm of the dancers made up for the deficiencies of the music. Dust billowed up from the floor as dancers performed the quadrille or polka. Their efforts urged those who were not dancing to stand outside in order to be able to breathe.²⁶⁸ On the nights that there was no dancing, Sister Sharp reported that her tent was a social hot spot, where crowds would gather to tell stories, sing, and laugh.²⁶⁹ Evidently the lightheartedness was a matter of consternation to some of the leaders of the Church, who compared the actions of the residents of St. Thomas to those of the Israelites making the golden calf while Moses was up on the mountain.²⁷⁰

Despite the efforts of many to create a working community, there were, of course, those who were dissatisfied with the place. In March 1866, Betsy Simons recorded in her journal that “if I were not here by council, I would not stay here

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 292.

²⁶⁷ Ramona Wilcox Cannon, “Aunt Hannah Sharp and the Muddy Mission.”

²⁶⁸ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 68–69.

²⁶⁹ Ramona Wilcox Cannon, “Aunt Hannah Sharp and the Muddy Mission.”

²⁷⁰ Erastus Snow, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 12, 8 April 1868, 214–15.

any longer.”²⁷¹ Her faith in the divine approval of her call to the Muddy was the only thing that kept her there. Still others survived by simply leaving when the weather became unbearable and returning when it cooled. Erastus Snow lamented that so many St. Thomas residents summered in the north. He said that those who had genuine health concerns should of course absent themselves from the Muddy in the summer, or move entirely. However, “those who have not such a good excuse should put their shoulder to the wheel with their brethren and help to roll on the good work that has been so well begun in developing the resources of that region.”²⁷²

Many who did stay year-round seemed to mirror the sentiments of Betsy Simons. When visiting St. Thomas in January 1867, Bleak found residents to be “highly discouraged.” In a Sunday meeting, Bleak observed, “it seemed rather hard to get enough spirit in the people to have a meeting at all. [The] Officers and people were apathetic.”²⁷³ Given their problems with their Paiute neighbors and with agriculture, it is understandable that some felt discouraged. Residents were also experiencing extreme difficulties with the state of Nevada over state boundaries and taxes. Despite this, many remained optimistic and faithful, though events to come would dampen that.

²⁷¹ Betsy Jane Tenney Loose Simons diary, February–March 1866, as quoted in Audrey M. Godfrey, “Colonizing the Muddy River Valley: A New Perspective,” *Journal of Mormon History* 22:2 (Fall 1996): 125.

²⁷² Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Also Bleak, *Annals*.

²⁷³ Bleak, *Annals*, 20 January 1867.

In 1870, James Leithead received word that Brigham Young wanted to come and inspect the settlements on the Muddy. Leithead had replaced Smith as bishop in St. Thomas in December 1867 when the former bishop's health had begun to fail.²⁷⁴ Young told Leithead that he wanted to do some exploring in Arizona, so he required a flat boat capable of carrying a wagon and team. Leithead sent teams to Sheep Mountain, sixty miles away with no water on the way, to retrieve timber. Leithead and R. Broadbent erected a saw pit in a cottonwood grove to cut the planks they needed. They assembled, caulked, pitched, and launched the boat in preparation of the impending visit. President Young, however, was so disappointed in what he saw that he did not feel like exploring and the effort was wasted.²⁷⁵ President Young, though disappointed with the area, told people to remain there, work, and act as if they were to remain forever. Some agreed with Young's negative assessment of the land and left the area against his counsel. Others were determined to make it work no matter the cost, some going so far as to purchase additional lands.²⁷⁶ Unfortunately, such purchases proved to be misguided.

²⁷⁴ Bleak, *Annals*, 16 December 1867.

²⁷⁵ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 50.

²⁷⁶ Andrew Jensen, comp., "History of the Muddy Valley Mission, 1847-1875." As quoted in Ellsworth, "Mormon Settlement on the Muddy."

Part II: Ebb and Flow

Chapter Four: Now That We Are Here, Where Are We? Boundary Disputes and the Abandoning of St. Thomas

In 1870, a Federal survey showed that St. Thomas was in Nevada. Rather than submit to the state's high rate of taxation, the Saints voted to abandon the settlement after receiving permission from Brigham Young to do so if they so desired. The timing of the decision to leave was particularly poor for Israel Hoyt. Israel was in the mountains sawing lumber for a new home when the Saints received the letter from Brigham Young advising them to gather to discuss the fate of the mission. Arriving late on a Saturday night, he left the wagon loaded. At their worship service the next day, the missionaries received a release and advice to move elsewhere. Israel came home from the meeting, and when his wife expressed the need for wood for cooking, he threw down some of the lumber he had so arduously obtained and began chopping it up for firewood for use in what would be an extremely expensive fire. His children stood around big-eyed and frightened, wondering if their father had lost his mind.²⁷⁷ Though not everyone responded as dramatically as Brother Hoyt, this chapter recounts what must have been a very emotional time for the Saints on the Muddy.

When the Mormons established St. Thomas, nobody was entirely certain what state or territory it belonged to. The Mormons were content with a purely theocratic government. As this chapter shows, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah were

²⁷⁷ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 71.

not content to leave Caesar out of the picture. Government surveys finally located St. Thomas firmly in Nevada. After protracted legal wrangling, the Saints finally abandoned the Muddy mission *en masse*, leaving only one dissenting family behind.

St. Thomas may have been remote from the main body of the Saints along the Wasatch Front and in Dixie, but they discovered that they were anything but remote when it came to interactions with the federal and state governments.²⁷⁸ State boundary maneuvering from 1866 to 1870 between Arizona, Nevada, and Utah placed the town, at various times, in each state. This wrangling over jurisdiction proved to be the undoing of St. Thomas as part of the Muddy Mission and Utah community of Saints.

When the Saints first arrived in St. Thomas, they were much more concerned with building homes, digging ditches, and growing crops than in forming any local government. All secular decisions devolved to church leaders. This did not stop the three nearby states from attempting to bring the town into their respective political orbits. Thomas Smith reported to Salt Lake that in August 1865 officials from Fort Mojave in Arizona Territory visited St. Thomas and St. Joseph. These officials informed residents of the upcoming election the next month and informed Smith of his appointment as assessor and collector. They further informed residents of the impending division of Mohave County, and of

²⁷⁸ Ogden, Salt Lake City, and Provo all lay at the base of the Wasatch Mountains. The entire urban corridor is often referred to by locals as the Wasatch Front. Southern Utah residents refer to their area as Dixie. The original LDS settlers to the area coined the term in the 1850s in reference to it being a cotton producing area.

the desire of residents at El Dorado to have a representative in the Arizona legislature from St. Thomas. The new county, Pah-Ute County, established their county seat at Callville.²⁷⁹

According to James Bleak, Elder Smith and his fellow missionaries “did not appear to be dazzled by the specious promises made by the visitors.”²⁸⁰ In a letter to Erastus Snow, he indicated that they would not organize any precincts or hold any elections. Residents arrived at that decision after a council decided that elections would tend to “raise excitement and jealousy [and] would do us as a people more harm than good.” This was not just a local decision. Apparently the council simply ratified the advice given to Smith from Brigham Young, who counseled them to “let pollytics alone . . . we thought that to be nutral would be the best pollacy for us at present [sic].”²⁸¹

The Saints in St. Thomas wished to retain their theocratic government. Bleak reported that the stake high council at St George established the St. Thomas Ward on August 12, 1865. The ward was comprised of missionaries in St. Thomas, St. Joseph, and Callville. Thomas Smith was named acting bishop of the ward.²⁸² Confirming the Saint’s dismissal of Arizona’s overture, Bleak’s entry for September 5, 1865, the day of the election in Arizona, affirmed again that no election occurred

²⁷⁹ Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

²⁸⁰ Bleak, *Annals*, 7 August 1865.

²⁸¹ Thomas S. Smith to Erastus Snow, 6 August 1865, St. George Temple Archives, St. George, Utah. Quoted in Corbett, “A History of the Muddy Mission,” 136.

²⁸² Bleak, *Annals* 7 August 1865.

on the Muddy.²⁸³ Little did the Saints realize that in the same month in the nearby Pahranaagat Valley, a miner working in the new Pahranaagat district wrote the governor of Nevada, asking for instructions on how to form a county.²⁸⁴

One way to illustrate the confusion over exactly what state St. Thomas was in is to look at the establishment of post offices in towns on the Muddy:²⁸⁵

Table 2: Post Office Establishment Dates

Town	County	Establishment Date
St. Thomas	Washington County, Utah	23 July 1866
St. Joseph	Pah-Ute County, Arizona	26 August 1867
West Point	Rio Virgin County, Utah	20 September 1869
Overton	Pah-Ute County, Arizona	25 April 1870

When established, government records place the post office in St. Thomas in Utah, in Washington County. A short time later, jurisdiction over the area transferred to Pah-Ute County, Arizona.²⁸⁶ Also in 1866, the Nevada legislature created Lincoln County by splitting Nye County. Hiko claimed the county seat, that town being the principle one in the Pahranaagat Mining District. In 1869, Utah tried to reclaim the area by forming Rio Virgin County, which included all the Muddy settlements. The federal government declared the area part of Nevada on May 5, 1866. Because no reliable survey existed, neither Utah, Arizona, or Nevada

²⁸³ Bleak, *Annals*, 5 September 1865.

²⁸⁴ Townley, *Conquered Provinces*, 3.

²⁸⁵ NARA, Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832–September 30, 1971, Publication M841, Washington, DC.

²⁸⁶ Jane Percy Kowalewski, “Strange Bedfellows: Mormon and Miners in Southern Nevada” (master’s thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1984), 67–68.

officials, nor Muddy Mission residents, were absolutely sure what jurisdiction the valley lay in. What was clear is that if the area proved to be in Nevada, it would belong to Lincoln County, as the county's organic act provided that any land added to the state contiguous to the county would belong to the county. The matter remained unresolved until established by a survey party in December 1870.

County officials pined for taxable income from St. Thomas and the other settlements on the Muddy. George Ernst, Lincoln County assessor, identified in his 1868 report that the only taxable properties in the county were in the Pahranaagat Mining District, hardly enough to run such a large jurisdiction. Add the Mormon settlements, he claimed, and the tax rolls doubled. When he tried to assess the Mormon properties, however, he had to retreat because of the open hostility he faced.²⁸⁷

Ernst was not without allies. Nevada Congressman Delos Ashley lobbied heavily in the U.S. House to have the eastern border of Nevada established along its current boundary. He argued that the people in Pioche were a mining people and as such did not belong in pastoral Utah, but in Nevada. He then said that Nevada's population of nearly fifty thousand annually paid three hundred thousand dollars in taxes to the federal government, while Utah's larger population paid only forty-one thousand dollars, and then most of it was paid in produce, not specie. "Let members [of Congress] decide," argued Ashley, "which is the most benefit to the United States." Given that the country was deeply indebted

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 65-66.

in the wake of the Civil War, Ashley's call found willing listeners. He did not, it is important to note, claim that the residents desired to live in Nevada.²⁸⁸

In the midst of this, Arizona again attempted to claim St. Thomas. On October 1, 1867, it moved the seat of Pah-Ute County from Callville to St. Thomas. This time, the Saints did not rebuff the attempt. Octavius Gass of Callville and Andrew S. Gibbons of St. Thomas departed shortly thereafter to represent residents at the territorial legislature, held in Tucson beginning December 10, 1868. They started down the Colorado on November 1 in a boat built by James Leithead, but the trip did not go as planned. The passage through Black Canyon, the site of Hoover Dam, prompted Gass to sit in the back of the boat gripping the sides and yell "For God's sake, Andy, keep her pointed down stream." Fearful of attack by Native Americans, they kept the boat in the middle of the river, camping only in secluded areas. After they reached Fort Yuma, they had difficulty finding transportation since they arrived at about the same time as the news of a coach that had been waylaid and the driver killed. Consequently, they took their seats in the territorial assembly six days late.²⁸⁹

Though Gass and Gibbons were not there when it passed, the Arizona legislature passed a memorial to send to Congress asking them to reconsider giving the Muddy to Nevada. They said, "It is the unanimous wish of the inhabitants . . . that the territory in question should remain with Arizona; for the

²⁸⁸ Reeve, *Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes*, 78-79.

²⁸⁹ McClintock, *Mormon Settlements in Arizona*, 125.

convenient transaction of official and other business, and on every account they greatly desire it.”²⁹⁰ One St. Thomas resident was very skeptical of the efficacy of the legislature’s effort. Writing about Andrew Gibbons’s return to St. Thomas in his journal, Darius Clement penned, “They doubtless labored with commendable zeal, but very little benefit accrued to their constituents through their services.”²⁹¹

Utah was not content to concede the area to Nevada either. On February 18, 1869, in Salt Lake City, the Utah legislature created Rio Virgin County out of Washington County.²⁹² The legislature designated St. Joseph as the county seat. Church leadership did not explicitly approve the action. Nevertheless, Brigham Young’s nephew and apostle, Joseph W. Young, received an appointment to be the first probate judge of the new county. As an apostle, he would have never accepted the appointment if it ran counter to the wishes of the president and remain in his

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 124.

²⁹¹ *Journal of Darius Salem Clement*, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²⁹² The act reads: An ACT providing for the organization of Rio Virgin County, and defining the boundaries thereof. Sec 1—Be it enacted by the governor and legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah: That all that portion of Washington County, beginning where the east line of the State of Nevada intersects the 37th parallel of north lat., running thence north along the east line of the State of Nevada to a point due west of the summit of Clover Valley mountain, thence east to said summit to its intersection with the gulch, (known as Beaver Dam Wash) thence down said wash to its junction with the Rio Virgin, thence due south to the 37th parallel, thence west along said 37th parallel to the place of beginning, shall be known and designated as Rio Virgin County. Sec. 2—The County Court of said county shall locate the county seat, and report to the Legislative Assembly. Sec. 3—Said Rio Virgin County is hereby attached to the Second Judicial District, and for representation in the Legislative Assembly shall be associated with Washington and Kane Counties until otherwise provided by law. Sec. 4—This Act shall be in force from and after its passage. Approved February 18, 1869. *ACTS, Resolutions and Memorials, Passed and Adopted by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah*, Eighteenth Annual Session, 1869, Chapter X, 7. Utah State Historical Society Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

position. Joseph W. Young held his first county court on April 3, 1869, at St. Joseph.²⁹³

Nevada did not remain quiescent while Utah and Arizona were maneuvering. In July 1869, Lincoln County officials sent a man whom the sources only identify as “Carlow” to attempt once more the assessing of the settlements on the Muddy. Residents recognized him and ran him out of town. Muddy Mission residents doubly reviled him because he was an apostate Mormon and he arrived on July 24, Pioneer Day, when he felt that the missionaries would be too distracted by their celebrations.²⁹⁴ In 1870, the Lincoln County assessor and surveyor said that, “I found it very difficult to make an assessment at all, and utterly out of my power to collect; yet with constant protests, and many threats, I managed to make an assessment.” He finally determined that the taxes due Nevada in that part of the state amounted to \$61,700, but if “the question of Jurisdiction be finally settled, and a correct assessment made, it would greatly exceed that amount.”²⁹⁵ The amount of sixty-one thousand dollars was for all the settlements on the Muddy, not just St. Thomas.

In 1870, Lincoln County stepped up its efforts to bring St. Thomas and the other Muddy settlements under its *de facto* jurisdiction. When the Lincoln County

²⁹³ Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

²⁹⁴ *Journal of Darius Salem Clement*, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Saints use the term “apostate” to describe someone who has left the Church and fights against it.

²⁹⁵ Nevada Surveyor General Report of 14 January 1871, 16. As quoted in Corbett, “A History of the Muddy Mission,” 149.

sheriff served summons to the Saints at Meadow Valley, the First Presidency in Salt Lake advised them to show their receipts for taxes paid in Utah, advice repeated elsewhere for those on the Muddy. Church leaders reasoned that the Saints would be subject to the laws of Nevada once the boundary line was officially drawn. President Young advised the Saints to arm themselves and defend their property, even by force if required.²⁹⁶ The Saints, if they needed any further motivation to resist, found it in the form of the prosecuting attorney for the county. Church Historian Andrew Jensen did not record the man's name, but indicated that he was also an apostate Mormon who had been prominent in the early Church but had become a Reorganite.²⁹⁷ A Reorganite is a member of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, now the Community of Christ. Though the two churches have diverged further in the last century and a half, initially the biggest difference is that members of the reorganized church believe that the rightful successor to Joseph Smith was his son, Joseph Smith III, and not Brigham Young. Those defending their property understood that they would receive no quarter from the county.

²⁹⁶ Andrew Jensen, *History of the St. George Stake*, entry for January 1870. As quoted in Gillies, "A History of Lincoln County," 48.

²⁹⁷ Ellsworth, "Mormon Settlement on the Muddy," 15. PAM 22691, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah. The source is silent as to the name of the prosecuting attorney, but it is possible that it was Carlow, who had already served in an official capacity for Lincoln County in the past. Another possibility is E. W. Wandell, who was the District Attorney for Lincoln County at the time.

Because of the very real threat of violence over the issue, Erastus Snow sought to intercede with Nevada officials over the issue. Bleak copied a letter that Snow wrote to Bishop Henrie of Panaca, stating:

Since writing to you and Bishop Hatch by last mail, I have had another talk with the Acting Governor, who advised the U.S. Supreme Court for the Territory of Utah to issue an injunction against the Sheriff of Lincoln County, Nevada, or any of his deputies or assistants, restraining them from any attempt at collecting taxes until the line is officially determined; and told men that the Court was willing to issue such a writ, and place it in the hands of a Deputy Marshal, or a Special Deputy among you, ready to serve whenever attempts shall be made to collect. I have requested the attorney general to have such an injunction issued ready to forward to you by next mail . . . I think this will be a better course. Try to keep down any violent measures until it be definitely known. You had better send an agent to answer for you at the Hiko Court so as to avoid, if possible, any further excitement, or great expense or more angry feeling, in case you should find yourselves in Nevada.²⁹⁸

Because Snow was the president of the Southern Utah Mission, he spoke for residents of St. Thomas as well on this issue.

St. Thomas residents did not object to being residents of Nevada out of principle. Taxation was the biggest issue. The treasurer's report of June 6, 1870, for Rio Virgin County shows just how little in taxes missionaries on the Muddy paid. Officials transferred \$24.00 from Pah-Ute County, Arizona coffers, which gave the total contents of the treasury \$180.19. The treasurer paid \$119.00 in county warrants, and had \$28.55 in cash, \$20.00 in flour, \$12.45 in wheat, and an under-

²⁹⁸ Bleak, *Annals*, 6 February 1870.

balance of 19¢, making a total of \$180.19.²⁹⁹ Up until 1870, residents paid taxes to both Utah and Arizona. Nevada had attempted to tax St. Thomas in 1867, 1868, and 1869. If those efforts had been successful, residents would have seen their tax rates tripled.

Nevada had some of the highest taxes in the United States at the time. In Rio Virgin County, Utah, in 1870, officials raised taxes from one-half mil to three-quarters mil.³⁰⁰ Nevada, on the other hand, required 3 percent state and county tax, stamp tax, license tax, and poll tax. Residents would not have simply paid a third more than they had already paid. In Utah, they could pay their taxes in kind. The requirement that Nevada taxes were only payable in gold and silver coin was especially onerous to the agriculturally oriented Saints. Because gold and silver were scarce in Mormon communities, it was more valuable than in areas where it was more readily available. This had the net effect of raising taxes even higher. Even had the Saints been inclined to pay the higher taxes, they had little faith the tax money would be used responsibly. In a letter to Congress on behalf of the Saints on the Muddy, Apostle George A. Smith wrote “The cession of these settlements to Nevada may seem a small matter, but that state is the heaviest taxed in the union, and ignores the federal currency, its taxes must be paid in gold;

²⁹⁹ “The Muddy Mission,” Moapa Stake Records, 6 June 1870, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake.

³⁰⁰ A mil is one-tenth of one percent.

it[s] counties are also deeply in debt. Most of its officials are mere adventurers, who wish to raise the wind somehow and go to a better country.”³⁰¹

Available records show that the Saints on the Muddy felt that they were being treated unfairly by Lincoln County officials. While there may have some anti-Mormon attitudes held by those officials, they were attempting to carry out their legal responsibilities. They had no doubt that the Muddy was in Nevada, and as Nevada residents, the missionaries needed to be subject to taxation just like any other resident of the state. While the Saints may have found it difficult to pay their taxes in specie, other Nevada residents managed to comply with the requirement. It was not the fault of Lincoln County officials that the Saints had not paid their Nevada taxes since 1866 or that they had paid them to the wrong governmental agency, namely the territory of Utah. Because of the injustices that the Mormons as a group had experienced previously, the Saints on the Muddy may have been predisposed to feel as if they were being treated unfairly because of their religion rather than their lack of fiscal responsibility.

Knowing that a survey was being conducted that would make a final determination as to which state their settlement was in, residents of St. Thomas spent the last months of 1870 in a state of anxiety. James Leithead reported to Erastus Snow that in all the settlements on the Muddy, he had found uncertainty and doubt about the permanency of the Muddy Mission. Brigham Young’s recent

³⁰¹ Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. George A. Smith is not to be confused with George Albert Smith, who was the eighth president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. George A. was George Albert’s grandfather and namesake. He was also a cousin to Joseph Smith Jr. St. George, Utah, was named after him.

visit did little to assuage this sentiment, nor did the breaking up of the settlements on the Upper Muddy. There were, however, many who did wish to stay. They “feel as though it would be hard after so many years of toil, to abandon, wow [sic] what little progress they have made towards a home. I have tried to encourage the Saints, those who feel this way, to persevere.”³⁰²

There were those who did not choose to persevere as President Snow desired, feeling that the writing was on the wall. Ruth Cornia recalled her early departure from the Muddy while her children were sick with cholera. “My, we had a time eating chickens. We couldn’t sell them or anything so what we couldn’t take with us we had to leave for the Indians. We weren’t out of sight of our home before the Indians had set fire to it. We left December 3 and went to Pine Valley where we stayed with my Aunt Sophia M. Burgess.”³⁰³

On December 19, 1870, Bleak recorded that the boundary survey and been completed and that all the settlements on the Muddy were officially in Nevada. Brigham Young, George A. Smith, and Erastus Snow wrote to James Leithead and the Saints on the Muddy with instructions on how to proceed. They advise that despite the positives the location has, their isolation from market and high taxes may make staying untenable. They advised the calling of a general meeting and a vote to remain or leave, but that all should abide by the will of the majority. They also advised the settlers to petition Congress and the Nevada Assembly for relief

³⁰² Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

³⁰³ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 75.

from their burden of taxation.³⁰⁴ The texts of those petitions are in Appendix C. In order to comply with the wishes of Brigham Young and chart a new course for the Muddy Saints, residents held a meeting in St. Thomas on December 20. In that meeting, they moved to abandon the Muddy. The group appointed a delegation to go look for a new place to settle. The records of the Moapa Stake report that in the vote to abandon the Muddy, sixty-three elected to leave. Only two voted to stay, Daniel and Ann Bonelli.³⁰⁵ The meeting in St. Thomas must have almost depopulated the rest of the Muddy mission, since according to Bleak, the 1870 census listed only about 150 people.³⁰⁶

Daniel Bonelli was born in Switzerland in 1836. He joined the Church as a young man. He served as a missionary in his native land, baptizing over three hundred people. Bonelli came to America in 1859. While crossing the Atlantic, he met Ann Haigh from England, whom he married shortly after landing in the States. Bonelli was a very intelligent man—he reportedly spoke six languages. The decision of the Bonellis to remain in St. Thomas did not derive from sheer stubbornness. According to Warren Foote, the Bonellis were in a state of apostasy, being believers in “The New Movement.”³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Bleak, *Annals*, 14 December 1870.

³⁰⁵ Moapa Stake Records, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. Of the sixty-three, forty-seven were men and sixteen women.

³⁰⁶ Bleak, *Annals*, 31 December 1870.

³⁰⁷ Diary of Warren Foote, 210, as cited in Corbett, “A History of the Muddy Mission,” 157.

The New Movement was officially launched in October 1869 by William S. Godbe and associates. Godbe was one the ten wealthiest men in the Utah Territory and a disaffected member of the Church. The Godbeites started a spiritualist movement, a “Church of Zion” nominally headed by Amasa Lyman, an apostle who had been disfellowshipped.³⁰⁸ The main thrust of their policies was that Brigham Young’s economic policies were wrong, and that the Saints should assimilate economically with the East. Their church quickly foundered and the movement quietly dropped its religious bent to focus on social reforms, claiming that the LDS Church should confine itself to spiritual affairs. Bonelli’s acceptance of the Godbeite doctrine explains his refusal to abandon his investment in southern Nevada.

Residents immediately began preparing to move. Warren Foote’s mill ran constantly so the Saints could move their flour to St. George. He did not finish grinding until February 16, at which time he disassembled the mill and moved it to Utah. In order to have enough wagons and teams to evacuate the Saints, Brigham Young called on people in St. George to help.³⁰⁹ Many answered that call. According to the records of the Moapa Stake, “the people generally looked upon the vacating of their homes and the labor of years thrown away joyfully, and

³⁰⁸ Disfellowshipping is a form of Church discipline just under excommunication. A disfellowshipped member is forbidden to speak or offer prayers in meetings or hold a calling. Members who have been to the temple are generally stripped of their temple recommend as well. After completing the steps outlined by the disciplinary council that disfellowshipped the member, they can then be restored to full fellowship.

³⁰⁹ Ellsworth, *Samuel Claridge*, 108.

rejoiced in the providence of God.”³¹⁰ It is hard to imagine that this was truly the case, but at least the newly dispossessed must have put on a happy face about the situation.

Because the Saints felt it was imperative to leave quickly to avoid prosecution by county officials, they were not able to take everything they might have otherwise. Parts of the mill were not portable. All the lumber in their houses, which had been hauled great distances over poor roads, remained behind. Much of the livestock had to either be slaughtered and quickly eaten or left and retrieved later. The biggest non-portable investment was the nine miles of canals along the Muddy, a system that they told Congress cost them one hundred thousand dollars to construct.

While the Saints prepared to leave, church leaders in Salt Lake arranged for a place for them to resettle in Utah. In a letter of January 24, 1871, to H. S. Eldridge, Daniel H. Wells spoke of their destination.³¹¹ He wrote that settlers from the Muddy and Meadow Valley area were anxious to leave because of the high taxes and unfriendly neighbors. “This move will greatly help the settlements of the new ‘Land of Canaan’; as many of those leaving the Nevada settlements will locate at

³¹⁰ Moapa Stake Records, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City, Utah.

³¹¹ H. S. Eldridge was one of the Seven Presidents of the Seventy. The Seventy are traveling ministers directly under the authority of the apostles. Daniel Wells was an apostle and councilor to President Young in the First Presidency of the Church.

Kanab and in the surrounding regions.”³¹² Brigham Young sent letters to the Saints who left Long Valley, which is north of Kanab, in the face of Native American hostilities in 1866. He asked them to relinquish their claims to the area so the Saints from Nevada would have a place to go. For those unwilling to relinquish their claims, he asked them to state their terms. Erastus Snow encouraged those who felt that they must be paid to be generous in their terms to the displaced. President Young also instructed the bishops in Long Valley to treat sales of land to anyone besides those from the Muddy as null and void.³¹³

St. Thomas residents left on February 1, 1871. The long lines of wagons leaving the Muddy Valley reminded some observers of the Camps of Israel that followed Moses out of Egypt. The roads leaving the valley were no better than they were arriving, with over thirty crossings of the Virgin River. The evacuees also found it necessary to break trail through snow in the Santa Cruz Mountains, which Samuel Claridge said, “made it very uncomfortable.”³¹⁴ As they left, some residents realized that they would never return, so they destroyed their property rather than

³¹² Daniel H. Wells to H. S. Eldridge, 24 January 1871, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 12 Folder 4, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

³¹³ *History of the Kanab Stake*, as quoted in Larson, “Agricultural Pioneering in the Virgin River Basin,” 225–26. To ensure that President Young’s wishes were followed, the bishops distributed the following for landowners to sign. “Know all men by these presents: That we the undersigned, do, for and in consideration of the good will which we have for our brethren who are broken up on the Muddy, and are seeking homes elsewhere, relinquish all our claims to land, houses and other improvements formerly owned by us in Long, or Berry, Valley. And we do hereby give our full, free, and unqualified consent for the brethren from the Muddy to take and occupy our claims in said Long, or Berry, Valley; the same to be set off to individuals, as their Bishops may deem best. And we do further covenant and agree, that we will never demand pay of these brethren for our claims and improvements in the aforesaid valley. As witness our hands this _____ day of _____ 1871. Bleak, *Annals*, circa 19 January 1871.

³¹⁴ Ellsworth, *Samuel Claridge*, 110.

see it fall into the hands of those that drove them out. John Kartchner set his house on fire as they rolled away rather than leave it to the Paiute or the gentiles.³¹⁵

It was a very unpleasant day for those staying behind as well. It was raining, and Ann Bonelli was having a baby. As the teams rolled out, a few sisters stayed until the last wagon to deliver the baby. The sisters then got on the wagon and left, leaving the newly increased Bonelli family alone in the rain.³¹⁶ Daniel Bonelli would later say that he did not so much leave the Church as it abandoned him.³¹⁷

On February 8, the Lincoln County sheriff arrived from Hiko to serve summons to all the brethren still on the Muddy. Finding the people were leaving the state, the sheriff declared his intention to return and make oath of the facts, get attachments on personal property, and to return with sufficient posse to enforce the writ.³¹⁸ Following the sheriff's visit, residents held a meeting in which the remaining Saints determined to leave en masse by March 1 in order to avoid having their teams and wagons confiscated. All the loose stock had already been taken out by Rice W. Nelson.³¹⁹ Any inclined to linger were hurried along by the fact that the total amount of tax and cost for 1870 alone would have been about

³¹⁵ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 44.

³¹⁶ Perkins, transcript of the Centennial Celebration by former residents of St. Thomas, 8 January 1965, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections.

³¹⁷ Melvin T. Smith, *The Lower Colorado River: Its History in the Lower Canyons Area*. (PhD Dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1972), 484-485.

³¹⁸ Brigham Young to H. S. Eldridge, 7 March 1871, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybook, ms2736, Box 12 Folder 5, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

³¹⁹ Ellsworth, *Samuel Claridge*, 109.

twelve thousand dollars in gold coin.³²⁰ As the Saints left, there were miners and other opportunists that flocked to the valley to take up the land and improvements left by the departing Saints.³²¹

The era of St. Thomas as the main settlement in the Muddy Mission was over. The seeming rapacity of Nevada officials was not the only factor that caused the settlement to fail. Excluding matters of faith, Bonelli's adherence to the New Movement made economic sense. Tax rates in the Silver State were very high, but there were resources in the area that would have allowed the Saints to survive. The missionaries on the Muddy were unable to identify a strong market community because of the Church's insistence that they participate in the cotton experiment of the Southern Utah Mission. That lack of diversification prevented them from developing a more secure economic base.³²² Economics, politics and environment do not fully reveal the full story of the first seven years of St. Thomas and the Muddy Mission. Active members of the Church pointed to a belief that God blesses those that sacrifice in His name. Because of their obedience in settling and building up St. Thomas, the Saints were laying up treasures in heaven, the only place where treasure truly mattered to them. Regardless of outlook, what is certain is that one chapter in the life of the town had definitely ended.

³²⁰ Brigham Young to H. S. Eldridge, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

³²¹ Bleak, *Annals*, 28 February 1871 entry.

³²² Kowalewski, "Strange Bedfellows," 11.

Chapter Five: “Not a town of the past...” From Zion to the Silver State

After the Mormon Exodus, St. Thomas was a much different place. Opportunists moved in and stripped the town of everything of value. For a time, the town looked a more like Dodge City than Salt Lake City, with prospecting, hard drinking, gambling, and horse racing. The experience of the Syphus family shows just how different a town St. Thomas was after the Saints left. Luke and Julie Syphus moved to St. Thomas in 1887, as Luke had received the contract to carry the mail to area mining camps. His duties required him to be gone every other night. To protect his wife, Syphus built a platform high up in a cottonwood tree where she kept her bed. On the nights he was away, Julie climbed up her perch and drew the ladder up behind her. She would then lay trembling with fear “as the drunken desperadoes rode the streets shooting their guns and yelling out foul language.”³²³

It is not just polite white society that fell apart. Changes in policies toward the Paiute brought deterioration in white-Native American relationships as well as the creation of the Moapa Paiute Reservation. The general lawlessness did not prevail indefinitely, however. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Mormons returned to the Moapa Valley, they established a school, reestablished the St. Thomas Ward, and since they were no longer required to survive off a cotton monoculture they were able to generally put the town on a more stable economic footing.

³²³ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 144.

The missionaries sent a party of nine explorers to reconnoiter the area in Kane County, arriving on Christmas Day, 1870. The explorers found a valley one hundred yards wide to three-quarters of a mile wide and barely twenty miles long. The east fork of the Virgin River ran the length of the valley, but it scarcely held enough water to irrigate the thirteen hundred acres of arable land. Abraham Kimball, speaking of the valley, said “of all the vallies [sic] I ever saw it was one, no one team could pull an empty wagon out of it [because of its high sides], and hardly wide enough to turn a wagon around.”³²⁴

The Church also faced the unresolved issue of obtaining cotton. A main priority for the settlement of Utah’s Dixie was for the production of cotton, and from 1865 to 1870, the Muddy Mission provided most of the cotton that came out of the area. Erastus Snow sent letters to the settlers who remained asking them to place a renewed emphasis on cotton growing to compensate for the lost production.³²⁵

The missionaries on the Muddy barely made a clean getaway from Nevada. Besides their difficulties with state and county officials, the Saints faced other difficulties as they fled. Brigham Young described the exodus thus:

As the brethren left their homes . . . there were stragglers hanging around like sharks in the wake of a ship—who slipped into the houses of the saints so soon as they left them and commenced gathering up every thing of value and taking possession of the best houses &c. . . the Indians set fire to the houses as soon as the Saints

³²⁴ Ellsworth, *Samuel Claridge*, 113.

³²⁵ Ivan J. Barrett, “History of the Cotton Mission and Cotton Culture in Utah” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1947), 159.

left, and before the latter were out of sight nothing remained of their pleasant homes but the blackened walls.

This move, caused by the “rapacity and hostility of the political cormorants who devour the earnings of the people of Nevada” was made even more miserable by the almost two feet of snow that fell in the Beaver Dam area during their exodus.³²⁶

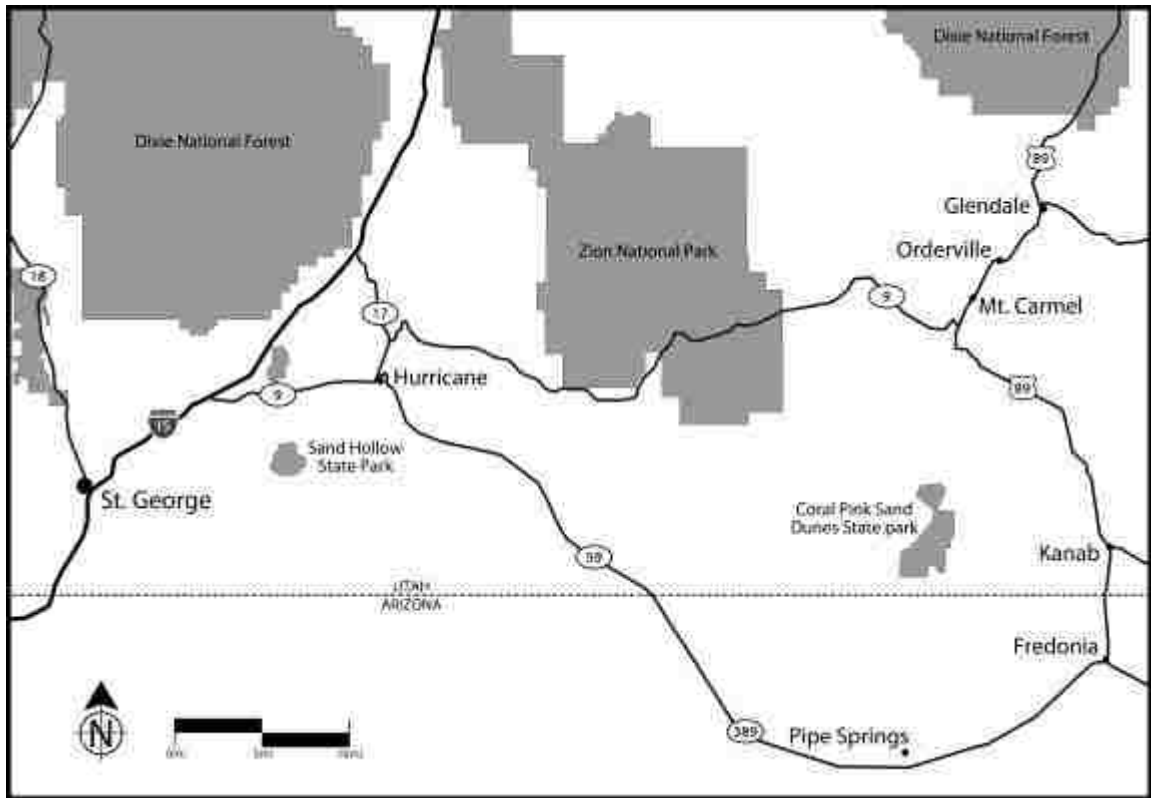


Figure 12: Map of southern Utah showing St. George, Glendale, and Orderville. Map by Brandon Hall, halldesign@gmail.com.

³²⁶ Brigham Young to H. S. Eldridge, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Arriving in Long Valley on the first of March, the missionaries quickly planted spring wheat and established a town they named Glendale.³²⁷ Continuing their streak of bad luck, the new transplants saw grasshoppers destroy their crops.³²⁸ A smaller number of the displaced Saints settled in Orderville, four miles to the south. Others simply went back to the places they had been called from in the first place.

The Mormons' time on the Muddy left a complicated legacy. William Wood, who had given up a successful business and a comfortable brick home in Salt Lake City when called in 1867, ended up back in Salt Lake living in a dugout. Upon asking his wife Elizabeth if she would rather they had never left in the first place, she replied, "I am glad you have filled your missions, and would rather be in this dugout with your mission filled, than in that fine house with your mission unfilled."³²⁹ Despite their poor condition upon their return to Salt Lake, Wood managed to reestablish himself, and when Elizabeth died in 1887, she was living comfortably. James H. Wood, a direct descendent, claimed that Elizabeth "often testified that Brigham Young's prophetic statement made to she and William and

³²⁷ According to Bleak's *Annals*, only 7 of the 150 settlers called to strengthen the Muddy Mission in the 1867 October General Conference were among those who settled in Glendale.

³²⁸ Bleak, *Annals*, 1 March 1871.

³²⁹ James H. Wood, "William Wood." This was directly from his journal, which was published by the DUP.

their three little boys on the road at Provo had been fulfilled—“You go and fill that mission and God will bless you!”³³⁰

Elizabeth Wood’s sentiments were not unusual given that she remained an active member of the Church her whole life. Mormons were no strangers to sacrifice. Non-Mormons generally held a different view of the Muddy Mission. The editor of the *Salt Lake Tribune*, in particular, was critical of the decision of the missionaries to abandon their settlements. He wrote “It is presumable that the Spirit of Revelation knew where the boundaries of Utah Territory were, and it is also supposable that knowing all things, it should have been acquainted with what the Nevadans would do if the church located . . . settlements upon their territory.” He was very critical that settlers were given the choice of throwing away years of labor and leaving or staying and being considered apostates “to remain with their little all.”³³¹ In all fairness, the reader should understand that the Church did very little that the editor of the *Salt Lake Tribune* was not critical of. For those not of the faith, the decision to leave seemed to be sheer folly. Later settlers were able to survive because they did not grow cotton and were able to have economic dealings with non-Mormons.

The determination to cut their losses and relocate left the Saints with very little bargaining power when they tried to liquidate their few possessions. Nevertheless, some tried to dispose of what property they could. Before leaving,

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ “The Muddy Settlements,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 21 September 1873, 3.

they negotiated with a Gentile named Isaac Jennings to buy cows and property. All they received from Jennings and his associates was a promise to pay once he harvested the crops, and then only one and a half cents per pound, which would only cover the cost of the seed. The wheat crop was good that year, and Jennings reportedly harvested eight thousand bushels for which he received six cents a pound. He also tore down houses to sell the lumber for ten cents a board foot.³³² One source reported that Jennings tore down several buildings because he heard a rumor that some of the newly departed were considering returning to the area. He dismantled and sold the lumber to forestall their return.³³³ He had a ready market for his agricultural goods, selling grain to the Paiute Agency. He was also able to utilize cheap Paiute labor to grow his crops. Despite all this, *Deseret News* reported in 1875 that Jennings lost all his money and left the area a broken man.³³⁴ Not everyone who left was involved in the Jennings agreement. Warren Foote said that he “would rather have given his to the Indians than these fellows to speculate on.”³³⁵ The Saints never received the money promised them by Jennings.

Mormons are strongly encouraged to be a record-keeping people. The settlers who took their place in St. Thomas after the exodus were not similarly motivated, as evidenced by the paucity of available historical accounts covering

³³² *Deseret News*, 26 January 1875.

³³³ “Muddy Mission,” Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This assertion is unsubstantiated by other sources.

³³⁴ *Deseret News*, 26 January 1875.

³³⁵ Ellsworth, *Samuel Claridge*, 109.

the entire 1870s. One observer described the town during this period as the epitome of the western frontier.³³⁶ The town became a rendezvous for outlaws, cattle rustlers, and horse thieves because of its isolation and available water and forage.³³⁷ The most notorious of these outlaws were Jack Reed, nicknamed “Black Jack,” Shan Balden, and a man by the name of Siebrecht. Not everyone who settled in St. Thomas immediately after the exodus was an outlaw, though nearly all were single men. Some just wanted to live life undisturbed by the confines of regulated society.³³⁸ The presence of miners and Native Americans, along with outlaws completed a trifecta of quintessential characters of the mythic west.

Regardless of their motivations for taking up residence in the area, most of the land reverted to desert as the fields, orchards, and vineyards deteriorated.³³⁹ The January 26, 1875, edition of *Deseret News* carried the report of a traveler who had recently visited St. Thomas. He claimed that the “once lively Mormon settlement has now a peculiarly desolate appearance which brings vividly to mind Oliver Goldsmith’s masterly production of the ‘Deserted Village.’”³⁴⁰

³³⁶ Scott Gold, “It’s a Historic Drought,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 October 2004, A1.

³³⁷ Jori Provas, “The Death of a Town Called St. Thomas,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 5 October 1969, 12. St. Thomas was not necessarily isolated from civilization, but it was a significant distance from the county seat of Pioche and the sheriff located there. See Florence Lee Jones, “St. Thomas Ends Second Cycle as Lake Floods Town,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 18 June 1938, 1:1-8.

³³⁸ Dustin George, “Tales of the Old West,” *The Nevadan*, 6 September 1970, 27.

³³⁹ James G. Scrugham, *Nevada, A Narrative of a Frontier Land.*, vol. 1 (Chicago: American Historical Society, Inc., 1935), 599, as quoted in Gillies, “A History of Lincoln County,” 40.

³⁴⁰ As quoted in Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

As noted earlier discussing sacred space, “space is not merely discovered, founded, or constructed; it is claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interests.”³⁴¹ Those replacing the Saints on the Muddy may have not consciously been thwarting the interests of the LDS Church, but their control of the land was a direct attack on the land’s sacrality. Some of these new residents lived their lives about as far away from the patterns pursued by the Saints as possible, living on the edge of society and over the edge of the law.

One such person was Jack Reed, who has a significant place in the lore of St. Thomas, and his story played out in numerous journals and remembrances. Ute Vorace Perkins recalled playing along a ditch and bending down for a drink. His friend stopped him, saying that he met Jack Reed there the summer before. Reed was living in a tent under a tree. He had terrible sores on his legs, and would wash them in the ditch. Perkins reported that Reed ended up in St. Thomas under the care of Mrs. Jennings. One day Perkins mother visited Mrs. Jennings and watched Reed have his dressings changed. Mrs. Perkins asked Reed if he felt he was improving. He replied ““No lady, I am getting no better, at times the pain eases a little but I will never get well and for a reason, lady, I was in the mob that killed the Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith in Carthage Jail and every man who was in the mob has suffered just such as I am suffering, by the flesh being eaten off their bones by worms.” Mrs. Perkins reportedly saw the worms in his flesh and the

³⁴¹ David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, *American Sacred Space*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 15.

oozing sores. When Reed died, residents rolled him in canvas and buried him in an unmarked grave.³⁴²

Reed had the reputation in some quarters as a Robin Hood figure, but not all the outlaws maintained such a positive reputation despite their troubles with the law, as the experience of the Syphus family shows. St. Thomas residents did not just have criminals to worry about as whites and Paiute alike caroused and raised havoc. The October 14, 1882 edition of the *Pioche Weekly Record* described the current situation in St. Thomas. They wrote:

Everything is not jes zackly as it wus when u hurd from thes quarters afore. We hav been mad down hear, and one Piute got stabled in the back, and several Lamenites had jes a little too much firewater fur thur good. An one Gentile wus mity mad, but he didn't hurt enybody by it. U understand now that Sant Tomas is not a town of the past any longer. No sur, she kumin to the frunt, she iz.³⁴³

Though the reporter did not frame the changes to the town in terms of sacred space, he was very clear that the environment was very different than when the Saints were in control.

Even if they were not total outlaws, some of those who settled at St. Thomas brought a checkered past with them. Andrew Jackson "Jack" Longstreet's origins are unclear. He was born sometime around 1838, possibly in Louisiana. His most noticeable feature was the lack of one ear, a feature he kept hidden under long

³⁴² Eugene H. Perkins, *A Pioneer Family's Legacy*, the Ute Vorace Perkins Family Organization of Moapa Valley, Nevada (Provo, Utah: Published privately, 2002), 10. In Perkins, Transcript of the Centennial Celebration, the man is identified as Jack Reed. This story may well be apocryphal, but is included because it has appeared in various forms in several different sources.

³⁴³ I. C. U. "Muddy Valley," *Pioche Weekly Record* 14 October 1882, 2:3.

blonde hair. In his youth, he had belonged to a group of horse thieves. When his group was apprehended, the authorities hung the rest, but spared him because of his extreme youth, but cut off his ear to teach him a lesson and warn others of his background.³⁴⁴ Despite this history, his biographer, Sally Zanjani, takes great pains to paint Longstreet as the quintessential Western gunfighter, but one who adhered to a strict moral code, showing himself to be well outside the criminal underclass. Essentially, everybody he killed richly deserved it, or at least that was the legend surrounding him.³⁴⁵

Longstreet made his first historically verifiable appearance in the Southwest in 1861 at El Dorado, on the Nevada side of the Colorado River. El Dorado, besides being a mining camp, was also a haven for criminals and deserters from the Civil War. Longstreet ran a small store near one of the principle mines.³⁴⁶ His name appears on some mining claims in 1880 Arizona, and in 1882, he moved to St. Thomas on the Muddy.³⁴⁷ Apparently deciding that it was more lucrative to sell goods to miners than mine himself, Longstreet opened a saloon/drug store in St. Thomas, as it was a "grate stopin plac for the publick [sic]."³⁴⁸ It did not take long for the new business to have an impact on the town. A mere fifteen days after the

³⁴⁴ Sally Zanjani, *Jack Longstreet: Last of the Desert Frontiersmen* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1988), 12.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁴⁸ I. C. U. "Affairs at the Muddy," *Pioche Weekly Record* 16 September 1882, 3:4.

business opened, one *Pioche Weekly Record* correspondent noted “Mr. Jack Longstreet flung is dores open to the public on the 17th uv Sept., an we’ve had more fites since then enybody’s town – it’s the salun and drug store I speak uv [sic].”³⁴⁹ While in St. Thomas, one of Longstreet’s favorite pastimes was horse racing.

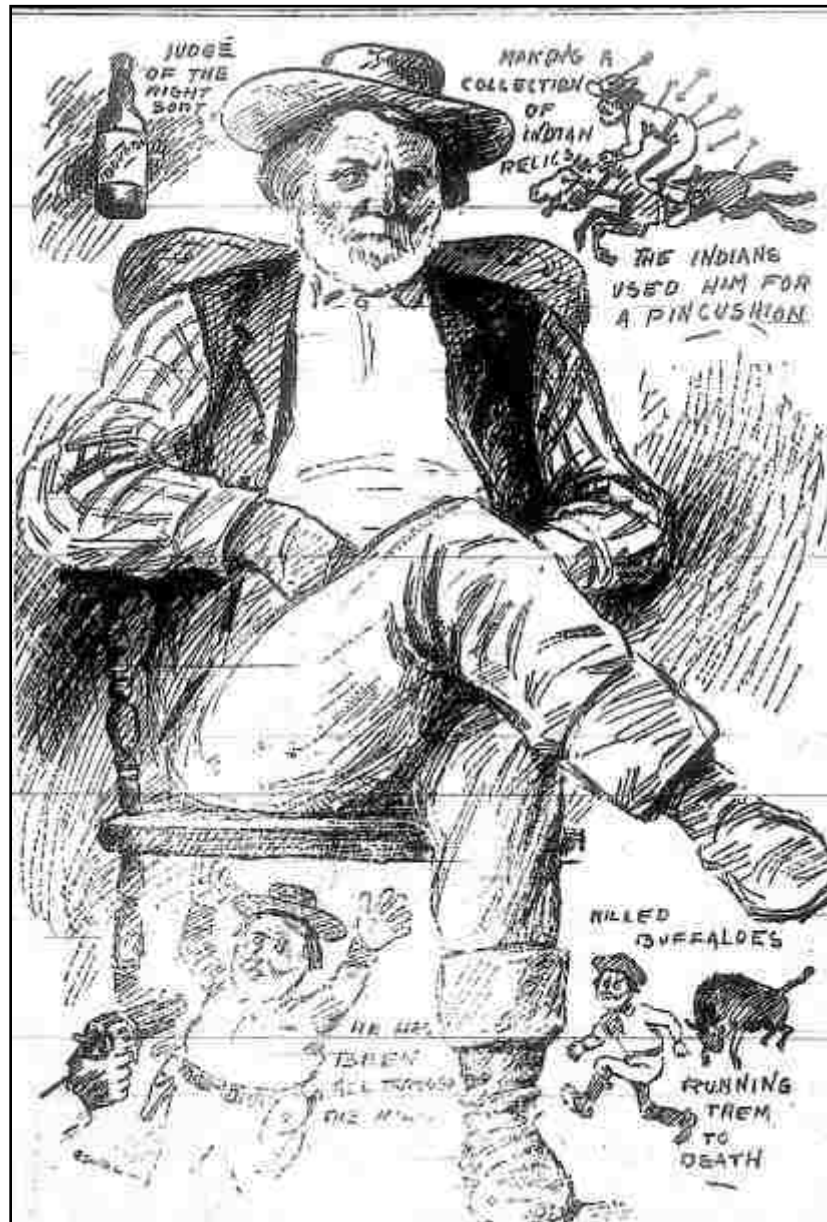


Figure 13: Jack Longstreet. Tohopah (Nevada) Daily Sun 13 August 1905, 1:3-5.

³⁴⁹ I. C. U. “Muddy Valley,” *Pioche Weekly Record* 14 October 1882, 2:3.

Native Americans, outlaws, and respectable whites alike in St. Thomas enjoyed horseracing. Massive sums were bet on races, and whenever one was held, most of the valley turned out to watch.³⁵⁰ “Tramp,” a correspondent from the Muddy, recounted one notable race. Moapa Valley resident Pat Curlin sold his ranch and went horse-racing. He bought a horse and bet \$1,200 on a race against Longstreet’s Indian pony. Curlin arranged for the “Chief of the Muddy Indians” to ride the horse in the race. The night before the race, the chief was “doped,” and his drawers, night-cap, and night-shirt stolen. Curlin’s trainer had to race the next day, and narrowly lost.³⁵¹

The race and the circumstances surrounding it was just the beginning of the problems between a man named Dry and Longstreet in regard to horses. About a year later, the two fought over the purchase of a horse which ended with Longstreet repossessing the animal. In May of 1884, the duo, apparently having settled their differences, departed St. Thomas together, heading north. Sometime later, Longstreet returned and said that when he and Dry had reached the big bend of the Muddy between St. Thomas and the reservation, Dry turned his guns on him. Longstreet shot and killed Dry in self defense. In the absence of any witnesses to the contrary, Longstreet was quickly acquitted by Justice Megarrigle

³⁵⁰ Zanjani, 24. The source does not give the population of the valley, but according to the 1880 census, the population of St. Thomas was 71, which did not include the Native American population.

³⁵¹ Tramp, “From the Muddy,” *Pioche Weekly Record* 3 March 1883, 3:4.

of St. Thomas.³⁵² Longstreet was also implicated in another killing in 1886, but was never charged with any crime.³⁵³ The victim in that crime was accused of irregularities in a deal regarding horses as well.³⁵⁴

The Mormons departure from St. Thomas and the rest of the Muddy also drastically changed the dynamic between whites and the Paiutes. In June 1871, when Andrew Sproul and Woodruff Alexander went back to retrieve the remainder of their belongings, they found that those who had moved in were having trouble with their neighbors. Some of the Paiute had drowned three cows in a spring, which led the settlers to attempt to “teach them a lesson.” The only thing that saved the thirty whites from the three hundred armed Paiute was the accidental discharge of a Henry repeating rifle that spooked the larger group.³⁵⁵

In 1869, the Bureau of Indian Affairs sent Rueben N. Fenton to serve as Agent for the Paiute on the Muddy, even though there was no reservation set aside for their exclusive use. Fenton headquarters started out in St. Thomas, but then shifted to Hiko, and then to Pioche. At first, his job was relatively easy because as long as there were Mormons in St. Thomas and surrounding towns to “sho[o]t

³⁵² “Local Intelligence,” *Pioche Weekly Record* 17 May 1884, 3:1. “Megarrigle” may be James Ross Megarrigle who moved from St. Thomas to Las Vegas in 1889 to work as a school teacher on the Stewart Ranch.

³⁵³ “Local Intelligence,” *Pioche Weekly Record* 25 December 1886, 3:2.

³⁵⁴ “Local Intelligence,” *Pioche Weekly Record* 20 November 1886, 3:1. For more on western violence, see Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

³⁵⁵ Interview with Andrew Sproul Jr., 19 June 1956, as quoted in Laraine Graf, “They Came, They Saw, and Then They Went Elsewhere” (English 102, Dixie College, St. George Utah, 1974).

them with biscuits,” relations with the Paiute remained workable.³⁵⁶ Once the Mormons were gone, there was no buffer between the Moapa Paiute and other whites, whites who were not nearly as willing to give food to their native neighbors.

The Paiute food situation was already precarious when the Saints were preparing to leave the Moapa Valley. Captain Fenton wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington D. C., requesting funds to purchase the Paiute some beef, flour, and other necessities. Apparently, the Mohaves had driven the Paiute into the white settlements, and the starving tribe was killing stock, stealing grain, and being a general annoyance.³⁵⁷ The situation for the Paiute deteriorated further when the Saints left the valley, taking all their livestock with them.

Fenton may have expressed concern for his charges, but in reality he did very little during his time as agent other than enrich himself at public expense. Bureau of Indian Affairs audits in June and September of 1870 detailed some of the problems. One recorded that “no Report from Capt. Fenton of any visits to Indians have been received as yet at this office, and the voucher [requesting reimbursement] cannot therfor be verified as to the number of journeys, their extent or necessity.”³⁵⁸ Fenton could not account for property purchased in behalf

³⁵⁶ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 74.

³⁵⁷ R. N. Fenton to Ely S. Parker, 2 January 1871. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1870-1871. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 539.

³⁵⁸ N. Douglas, September 1870. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1870-1871. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 539.

of the Agency, and the amount requested for rental reimbursement seemed unnecessarily high. The Auditor reported several other irregularities as well.³⁵⁹

On June 2nd, 1871, Fenton apparently decided he could no longer get away gaming the system, and attempted to leave town. The Lincoln County Sherriff pursued and arrested him for attempting to skip out on the debts that he owed. Henry A. Fish, Fenton's clerk, sent an explanatory letter to BIA headquarters, laying out the many ways Fenton abused his position. Fish claimed that Fenton filed spurious travel papers and received reimbursement for supposed escort services. According to Fish, Fenton made no trips in the service of the Indian department. Despite vouchers and invoices to the contrary, Fish reported that "No beef cattle has ever been furnished these Indians....[He] has never rented any office in Pioche or purchased any fuel for office purposes or any other purpose, no medicine has ever been issued...to these Indians except on one occasion." For that one occasion, Fenton charged \$10.00 to his personal account at the drug store. That account remained unpaid when Fenton tried to skip town. To back up his assertions, Fish included a list of charged and actual costs for the second and third quarters of 1870.³⁶⁰

To replace Fenton, and on the recommendation of the Baptists' national association, the Commissioner sent Mr. Henry G. Stewart. Stewart arrived in

³⁵⁹ N. Douglas, June 1870. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1870-1871. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 539.

³⁶⁰ Henry A. Fish to Ely S. Parker, 3 June 1871. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1870-1871. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 539.

Pioche only to discover that Fenton had made off with or destroyed all the Agency's papers, and not only left no funds, but all but guaranteed that nobody in town would extend any more credit to the Agency. In poor health when he arrived, Stewart died in July of 1871. The Commissioner replaced him with Charles F. Powell, who had previously served as agent at the Fort Hall Reservation in Idaho.

Shortly after Powell arrived in Pioche, he was visited by two large groups of Paiute. They were in very rough shape, naked and nearly starved. He used the scant resources available to feed and clothe them. Powell recognized that it was the departure of the Mormons that made their situation so dire, writing that the Mormon "removal and the necessary farming has left the Indians in fact nothing to subsist upon and unless provided for, must either steal or starve." The solution was very clear for Powell, who wrote, "I cannot too earnestly recommend the establishment of a Reservation for these Indians on the Muddy at St. Thomas."³⁶¹

Powell would not see the reservation created while he was agent. He was replaced in 1872 by George W. Ingalls, who was retained as agent when President Ulysses Grant issued an executive order creating a 3,900 square mile reservation for the Paiute. The next year, Congress expanded it even more to include timber and additional farmland, creating the Southwest Nevada Indian Agency in 1873, headquartered in St. Thomas. The reservation was two million acres, thirty nine

³⁶¹ Charles F. Powell to H. R. Clum, 6 September 1871. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1870-1871. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 539.

thousand square miles. It was the administrative center for thirty-one tribes from Utah, Arizona, Nevada, and California. Ingalls used his position to convince six of the tribes to take up farming along the Muddy.³⁶² Ingalls felt that conditions along the Muddy were ideal for “civilizing” the Paiute by making them farmers because of the existing \$75,000 irrigation system that was free to the government.³⁶³ This is ironic considering that one justification for taking the land from Utah and giving it to Nevada was that the land was best suited for a mining people.³⁶⁴

Agency headquarters did not remain in St. Thomas for long, as Ingalls found himself infected with the mining bug and moved agency headquarters to Pioche. This afforded him easy access to mining opportunities, but isolated him from his charges. Travelers passing through the area complained of harassment by Paiute who demanded to know where the agent was. According to one reporter, they “never knew their agent and were given only the most putrid portions of flabby and stinking salt pork.”³⁶⁵

White settlers on the Muddy were very frustrated by the incompetence and corruption of the agents. Daniel Bonelli wrote to the Commissioner to complain, saying that while agents have “strutted about the streets of some far off mining

³⁶² Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 12.

³⁶³ G. W. Ingalls to F. A. Walker, 1 November 1872. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1872-1873. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 540.

³⁶⁴ Letter from Acting Secretary of the Interior, Relative to the Condition of the Pi-Ute Indians, 42nd Congress, 3rd Session, 1873, House Ex. Doc. No. 66, serial set 1565, 2-3. As quoted in Reeve, *Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes*, 94-95.

³⁶⁵ “Pioche Notes,” *Deseret News*, 18 June 1873.

town” wasting up to 90% of the reservation’s funds on alcohol, gambling, and den[s] of infamy. The Indians were left to beg and steal, while farmers had to “buy peace” with more than a quarter of their entire food production. Congress had made appropriations sufficient to meet the needs of the Paiute and protect settlers and travelers, the “settler has suffered inconceivable annoyance...perpetual anxiety, the Indians have gone naked, hungry and prowling and the traveler has fallen by their blows by the side of his desert pathway and the bones of scores of them are bleaching upon the desert plains.”³⁶⁶

The Paiute may not have written letters, but they did not take their treatment lying down. The *Tri-Weekly Ely Record* of September 11, 1872, related numerous instances where the Paiute showed their unwillingness to tolerate their situation. A man named James was chased from his dwelling, was shot at, and had two fingers cut off with a shovel by some of the disgruntled Native Americans. Another man by the name of Stewart was forced to take refuge in his house when fired upon by some Paiute. He was so shaken by the experience that he sold his property for a very low price and was glad to escape unscathed. The county assessor encountered some Paiute who demanded he pay a toll for passage. He barely avoided paying it, “but it was a “hard, close game.” St Thomas residents reported Paiute running around the village in the middle of the night carrying torches. They claimed they were catching rabbits, but residents viewed it as a

³⁶⁶ Daniel Bonelli to Francis A. Walker, 8 August 1872. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1872-1873. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 540.

threat. Residents were demanding that the Indian agent relocate to the Muddy and address the situation immediately, or trouble would ensue.³⁶⁷

Beyond mismanagement, the simple creation of the reservation brought problems with whites as well. The *Pioche Daily Record* called the reservation an outrage. Those who squatted on the land after the Saints left found themselves on reservation land, for which the government offered the scant sum of thirty-two thousand dollars.³⁶⁸ Daniel Bonelli in particular lobbied against selling the land to the government under the terms offered. In a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Bonelli very politely threatened the government with legal action and heavy lobbying of Congress if satisfactory compensation was not arranged.³⁶⁹ Even the Agent, Ingalls, was not happy with the reservation. His objection was that the reservation was much larger than the Paiute actually needed. He wrote his superiors that “there is but a very small portion of this territory that is at all suitable for reservation purposes, and that portion is embraced in the valley of the Muddy.”³⁷⁰ Bonelli and others objected to the size of the reservation because it took in large amounts of land that could be valuable for mining and should not be off limits to whites.

³⁶⁷ “Torch-Bearing Redskins Feared; Indians Were Only Hunting Rabbits,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 28 June 1964.

³⁶⁸ *Pioche Daily Record*, 16 April 1873, and *Reeve, Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes*, 96–98.

³⁶⁹ Daniel Bonelli to Edward P. Smith, 3 December 1873. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendency 1861-80. 1872-1873. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 540.

³⁷⁰ G. W. Ingalls to H. R. Clum, 7 March 1873. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendency 1861-80. 1872-1873. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 540.

According to Daniel Bonelli, most of the farmers who were being displaced by the reservation did not object to selling out to the government as long as they were fairly compensated. Isaac Jennings and his wife Grace hatched a plan to detach St. Thomas from the reservation. Mrs. Jennings traveled to Washington, D. C. to convince Congress to do just that. She claimed to represent all the white people in the Moapa Valley. Bonelli wrote to Edward Smith, Indian Commissioner, refuting that assertion, claiming that there was no other person in the valley who agreed. He called it “a mere trap, an opening for friction, trouble, and expense and utterly infeasible,” as no honest man would wish to live on the reservation or close to it. The only reason any were left is they were waiting for their compensation from the government.³⁷¹

Mrs. Jennings’ visit to Congress frustrated the plans of those waiting for that compensation. While the legislators were deliberating on the bills that would have delivered the amounts appraised by Agents Powell and Ingalls, she arrived and convinced them that the settlers were not okay with the settlement. With the help of Joseph W. Young, all the canals, trees, houses, etc., owned by the Mormons but not claimed by settlers were donated to the government for the benefit of the Paiute.³⁷² They did not get to enjoy the benefits for long as the size of the

³⁷¹ Daniel Bonelli to Edward P. Smith, 10 September 1874. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1874-1875. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 541.

³⁷² A. F. Barnes to Edward P. Smith, 20 December 1874. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1874-1875. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 541.

reservation was reduced from two million acres to one thousand in 1875. Under the Carter administration, the reservation was expanded to nearly seventy-two thousand acres in 1980. Despite President Grant's intentions, whites retained the best lands and water rights, even after Carter's efforts. For the Paiute, almost nothing remained.³⁷³

A letter from a concerned citizen in 1877 shows how bad the situation was for the Paiute on the reservation. Robert Logan reported that the agency farm was a mass of weeds, and the whole operation was inexcusably ignored by the agent. The worst thing, according to Logan, was that the "poor Indians are dying of neglect." The agency had a large amount of medicine, yet the Paiute were dying "like sheep." Logan wrote that "Not an Indian allowed in the Agency, nobody to give them medicine, no more attention paid them than dogs. It is a burning disgrace."³⁷⁴ It is no wonder that so many Paiute turned to theft as a means of simply surviving.³⁷⁵ The Paiute's situation did not improve under the administration of Colonel Bradfute, who was eventually removed for mismanagement and embezzlement.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ *Pioche Daily Record*, 16 April 1873, and Reeve, *Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes*, 96-98.

³⁷⁴ Robert Logan to N. B. Booth, 8 August 1877. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1876-1877. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 542.

³⁷⁵ One resident, Charles Byers, complained to the commissioner that the Paiute stole from one thousand to fifteen hundred dollars worth of grain a year from his fields. Charles P. Byers to Bureau of Indian Affairs Commissioner, 25 May 1880. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881. Nevada Superintendancy 1861-80. 1880. UNLV Microforms E 93 U95X Reel 545.

³⁷⁶ Blow Fly, "From the Lower End," *Pioche Weekly Record* 16 August 1884, 3:3, and Zanjani, 34-38.

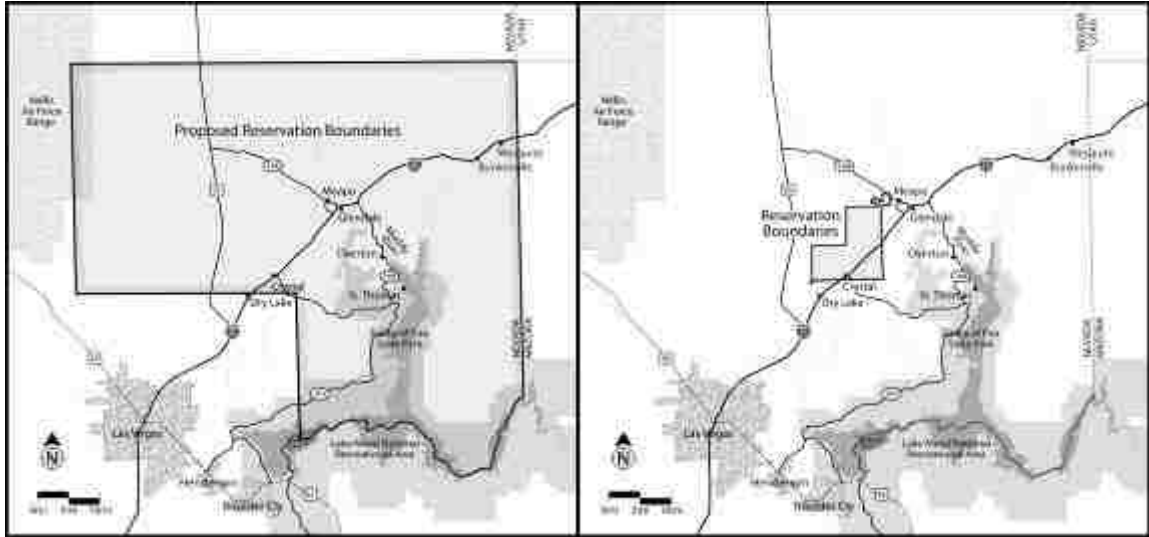


Figure 14: Proposed vs. Current Reservation Boundaries. The boundary as it existed from 1875 to 1980 would scarcely show up on a map of this scale. Map by Brandon Hall, halldesign@gmail.com.

One cannot deny the Paiute's importance in community dynamics during the 1870s and 1880s. The 1880 census shows St. Thomas with a population of sixty-seven. Forty-four of that total, or two-thirds of the residents, were Paiute. If it is difficult to discern the history of St. Thomas from a non-LDS perspective after 1871, it is even harder to get the Paiute point of view, due to scarce archival material from Native American sources. What is clear is that for the Paiute, life was hard. From 1860 to 1880, their numbers on the Muddy decreased from 500 lodges to 150 individuals.³⁷⁷ Regardless of numbers, the Paiute represented a very valuable source of labor for whites. The Paiute's primary interaction with whites into the twentieth century was labor at mining camps and farms. They performed menial

³⁷⁷ David F. Myrick, ed., *Reproduction of Thompson and West's History of Nevada, 1881, with Illustrations and biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1958), 491. As quoted in Melvin T. Smith, "The Lower Colorado River," 105. The information apparently came from Daniel Bonelli.

labor at wages one-third to one-half of those paid to whites.³⁷⁸ One St. Thomas resident recalled that Paiute were most important around harvest time. Until area farmers purchased a threshing machine in the 1890s, Paiute women performed the winnowing of the grain on windy days.³⁷⁹ Clearly, Paiute labor continued to be important to the more heterogeneous population as it was to the Mormon farmers in St. Thomas.



Figure 15: Paiutes picking radishes in the Moapa Valley.³⁸⁰

According to historian Martha C. Knack, Indian wage labor was extremely common in the Great Basin. Wage labor was the dominant mode of subsistence for Native Americans all along the Wasatch Front, and once established, persisted for nearly a century. Knack contends that Native Americans provided nearly all

³⁷⁸ Reeve, *Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes*, 135.

³⁷⁹ Eugene H. Perkins, *A Pioneer Family's Legacy*, 20.

³⁸⁰ Arthur Rothstein, "Paiutes Picking Radishes, 1940," Farm Security Administration—United States Office of War Information.

the regional construction labor until the Great Depression. They continued to be the primary migrant farm workers until replaced by the Navajo and then Hispanics.³⁸¹ It is not surprising that their labor was so important, particularly on the Muddy. White wage laborers were scarce, and demanded room and board, a monthly wage, and to remain on the payroll even when not actively working. Native Americans worked for considerably less than white labor and took their wages in kind rather than specie. Knack focuses on the Paiute, but the work of Colleen O'Neill and David R. Christensen, among others, show how important Indian labor was throughout the West.³⁸²

After extracting all the easy money out of the town in the 1870s, Jennings sold his claim on St. Thomas to the mercantile firm of Wooley, Lund, and Judd of St. George, which included the entire 480-acre town site. The firm attempted to turn the property into a soft shelled almond production zone. The attempt was a failure, and the almond trees died from lack of water. Mesquite trees reclaimed the area.³⁸³

³⁸¹ Martha C. Knack, "Nineteenth-Century Great Basin Indian Wage Labor" in Alice Littlefield and Martha C. Knack, eds., *Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 162.

³⁸² Colleen O'Neill, *Working the Navajo Way: Labor and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), and David R. Christensen, "'I Don't Know What We'd Have Done Without the Indians': Non-Indian and Lakota Racial Relationships in Box Butte County's Potato Industry, 1917-1960" *Nebraska History* (Fall 2011).

³⁸³ George E. Perkins, *Old St. Thomas*, 2, as quoted in Larson, "Agricultural Pioneering in the Virgin River Basin," 217.



Figure 16: Unidentified Farmer in his field near St. Thomas. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

Despite the greatly reduced agricultural output of St. Thomas and other Muddy settlements, farming remained one of the primary occupations. *Deseret News* reported from Pioche in February 1873 that the new grass was six to eight inches high; wheat and barley three to four inches high, and framers had prepared the fields to plant vegetables. Pioche residents were very interested since the Muddy was a main source of fresh produce for the mines.³⁸⁴ Prospects must have been very good, because in March 1873 the new residents focused on clearing the irrigation ditches that had filled with sand after two seasons of disuse. The

³⁸⁴ *Deseret News*, 19 February 1873. As quoted in Melvin T. Smith, "The Lower Colorado River," 314.

irrigation system that cost thousands of dollars to build only required a few hundred dollars to put back in working order.³⁸⁵

Daniel Bonelli benefitted most from the departure of the Saints. Shortly after the departure of the rest of the Saints, he filed for water rights in the valley, claiming one-quarter of the total flow of the Muddy, or four hundred inches. That number came from a survey completed February 1–2, 1872.³⁸⁶ The missionaries on the Muddy paid no attention to water titles, relying on church leaders to regulate its usage. Since the Saints had constructed an irrigation system, this made Bonelli's claims particularly valuable as people filtered back into the area.³⁸⁷ Bonelli raised hay and vegetables on his irrigated land, along with beef cattle, which he sold to miners in El Dorado, White Hill, and Chloride.³⁸⁸

Mining also attracted Bonelli's attention. He discovered silver in the hills around St. Thomas. Because of his discoveries and those of others who discovered placer gold nearby, miners formed the St. Thomas Mining District on January 25, 1873.³⁸⁹ He also filed claim on the salt mine near the town. According to Moapa

³⁸⁵ Manuscript Histories of the Church, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

³⁸⁶ "Excerpts From Report of Irrigation Investigations in Utah By U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Experiment Stations, Bulletin No. 124," State of Arizona, *Complainant v. State of California*, Palo Verde Irrigation District, Imperial Irrigation District, Coachella Valley County Water District, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, City of Los Angeles, City of San Diego, and County of San Diego, Defendants, United States of America and State of Nevada, Intervenors, State of New Mexico and State of Utah, Parties. The Supreme Court of the United States, October 1956, No. 10 Original, 253.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 253–54.

³⁸⁸ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 41.

³⁸⁹ Gillies, "A History of Lincoln County, Nevada," 88–90, and *Deseret News*, 21 February 1872.

Valley resident Sidney Whitmore, Bonelli charged \$1 a ton if you blasted the salt yourself, \$2.50 a ton for salt he had blasted beforehand.³⁹⁰ For many, the premium was worth it. One group from Mesquite who came to purchase salt watched a ledge give away and bury one of their companions, leaving only the tip of his boot hanging out.³⁹¹ Accidents aside, salt mining flourished because the mineral was in great demand by area miners who needed it for processing ore.

Once out of the ground, it was sometimes a challenge to get the salt to its destination, given the state of the roads in the area. One hauler came up with a unique solution when he ran into trouble. John Huntsman, who had broken down on his way to southern Utah, buried the salt along the route. To explain the fresh digging, he erected a crude inscription reading “Here lies John Dillon, died of heart disease on his way to Calif.” A wagon train happened to be passing by when Huntsman went to retrieve his stranded load. The train’s passengers “heaped abuse” on Huntsman until they saw him throwing blocks of salt out of the hole.³⁹²

Even though the Church abandoned the area in 1871, the proximity of so many Latter-day Saints to such large tracts of relatively unused agricultural land almost guaranteed the Muddy would not be completely left to miners, drifters, and outlaws. Beginning in 1880, Mormons began to come back to the Muddy to settle, this time without the Church’s planning and direction. The first was Elizabeth

³⁹⁰ “The Papers of Sidney Whitmore,” MSS 48, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Special Collections.

³⁹¹ Dorothy Dawn Frehner Thurston, *A River and a Road* (Mesquite, NV: Self-published, 1994), 53.

³⁹² Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 96.

Whitmore, who bought the Patterson Ranch near Overton from Robert Patterson and his partner, E. Marshall, a one-armed Confederate veteran.³⁹³ In St. Thomas, Saints Harry Gentry and Edward Syphus arrived first, followed by Isaiah Cox, Jesse W. Crosby, John Monson, and Easton Kelsey.³⁹⁴ The firm of Wooley, Lund, and Judd of St. George subdivided land and sold town lots to the newcomers.³⁹⁵

Though not directed by the Church in the same way as the first settling effort, leaders in Salt Lake were marginally involved. Church president John Taylor appointed Isaiah Cox, Jesse Crosby, and Archibald McNeil to a committee to ensure that as Mormons moved back to the Muddy on their own, they were able to obtain proper land and water titles.³⁹⁶ Arabell Hafner, in her book *100 Years on the Muddy*, asserts church leaders assigned Cox to lead a resettlement effort on the Muddy, rather than just assist with filing claims.³⁹⁷ If the Church sent people, their program was much more limited than the one initiated in 1864. The 1880 census, taken right before Mormons started moving back to St. Thomas, lists twenty-three whites. Twenty years later, the census listed forty-three, a net gain of only

³⁹³ Larson, "Agricultural Pioneering in the Virgin River Basin," 216.

³⁹⁴ "The Papers of Sidney Whitmore," University of Nevada, Special Collections, and Eugene H. Perkins, *A Pioneer Family's Legacy*, 11-12.

³⁹⁵ George E. Perkins, *Old St. Thomas*, 2, as quoted in Larson, "Agricultural Pioneering in the Virgin River Basin," 217.

³⁹⁶ *Deseret News*, 26 January 1875.

³⁹⁷ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 180.

twenty.³⁹⁸ As early as 1883, there were only two bachelors who had not sold out to the returning Mormons.³⁹⁹ None of the records of those Latter-day Saints who took up residence in St. Thomas indicate that they were trying to re-establish Zion or re-impose sacrality to the land, but were merely looking for good irrigated farmland.

With the return of the Mormons, signs of growth began appearing up and down the valley. On September 1, 1881, Lincoln County established the Virgin School District to accommodate the increased number of families with children. According to the 1880 census, there were 31 children under the age of 16 in St. Thomas, 43% of the total population. In 1883, residents built a schoolhouse to accommodate those who were school-aged. It was a rough affair. One correspondent described it with pride as, “12x16 feet in the clear, with a dirt roof, two large windows on either side, with sash and lights of the same material – light canvas – and a door and shutters of the same kind of lumber. A log about six-feet in length constitutes the school furniture – it is the half of a cottonwood log split in two.”⁴⁰⁰

The year 1881 also saw the establishment of the Star Pony mail route.⁴⁰¹ The LDS Church also established a ward in Overton, which included all the families in

³⁹⁸ Population numbers are unavailable for the 1890 census. Those census records were destroyed in a fire in the basement of the Commerce Building in Washington DC in March 1896.

³⁹⁹ Tramp, “From the Muddy,” *Pioche Weekly Record* 3 March 1883, 3:4.

⁴⁰⁰ I. C. U. “Muddy Valley,” *Pioche Weekly Record* 14 October 1882, 2:3.

⁴⁰¹ Eugene H. Perkins, *A Pioneer Family’s Legacy*, 11–12.

St. Thomas. The new Overton Ward bishop called Harry Gentry, who would be an important figure in the town's history, as his first councilor.⁴⁰² In 1885, ward membership numbers were sufficient to establish a branch of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association, or YMMIA.⁴⁰³

Part of the reason for the success of the new Mormon settlers is the Church did not take such an active role in their agricultural decisions. Since they were no longer required by authorities in Salt Lake City to focus their farming attention on cotton, they could grow a more reasonable, and sustainable, range of agricultural products. Because they were also now free to associate with the Gentiles, they were also free to sell their produce to area miners, which proved a ready market.⁴⁰⁴

The return of Latter-day Saints to St. Thomas did not stop the town from being a haven for people avoiding law enforcement, though the character of the crimes of the fugitives was different from the decade before. In the 1880s, the federal government stepped up its prosecution of polygamists. As a youth, Willard L. Jones remembered traveling in a covered wagon through southern Utah at night to avoid officers looking for polygamists. Jones' mother was a second wife, and they were heading to the Muddy. Jones' family arrived in April 1885.⁴⁰⁵ Those fleeing the federal marshals considered St. Thomas out of reach of the officers

⁴⁰² Bleak, *Annals*, 3 March 1891 entry.

⁴⁰³ Bleak, *Annals*, 18 October 1885 entry.

⁴⁰⁴ Kowalewski, "Strange Bedfellows," 11.

⁴⁰⁵ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 183.

because of its distance from the main settlements in Utah. It was also an appealing hiding place because most of the deputies who were seeking polygamists lacked the authority to arrest anyone outside of the Utah territory.

The establishment of a school provided a more positive development for the town than a place to hide from the law. Some sources mention a Mr. McGargle as a schoolteacher before 1881, but in that year Martha Cox began teaching in Overton, and all the children began going there for their lessons.⁴⁰⁶ In 1893, George B. Whitney moved to St. Thomas and took up the duties of schoolteacher, boarding with Daniel Bonelli and using Bonelli's parlor as a classroom. A few years later, Whitney moved the school to a boarded up tent, where they remained until Moses Gibson's front room offered better accommodations. It was not until 1915 that St. Thomas had a dedicated school building.⁴⁰⁷

As the town began to regain population, its geographic location once again established St. Thomas as a supply center. John Lytle Whipple recalled that while he was working as a cattle driver for Preston Nutter, they ran out of supplies and subsisted for nearly a week on wormy peaches. His boss saddled up his horse and took a packhorse fifty miles over the mountains to St. Thomas to get supplies. When he returned with flour and coffee, Whipple and the other drivers were very happy to see him.⁴⁰⁸ While this is a far cry from being an essential link in the

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 292. Mr. McGargle may be James Ross Megarrigle, who was a school teacher who later taught the Stewart children at the Las Vegas Ranch.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ John Whipple, "The Coffeepot Rescue & the Six-Shooter Fire," *Beehive History* 26 (2000): 10.

movement of people and goods that traveled around South America into the Southwest, it is significant that Allan Montgomery, the boss, did not head for El Dorado, Rioville, Overton, Bunkerville, Mesquite, or Kingman, but St. Thomas.

Another indication of the recovery of St. Thomas is that in the 1890s, the town was detached from the Overton Ward of the LDS Church and made into its own unit. The 1900 census shows only forty-three people in the town, but evidently authorities in Salt Lake, who would have ultimately made the decision to re-establish the ward, felt that there were enough members to support a ward. John Bunker received the calling of bishop for the reconstituted ward, joining Martin Bunker, Luke Whitney, Robert O. Gibson, and Nellie Gentry as other significant ward leaders.⁴⁰⁹

As St. Thomas prepared to enter the twentieth century, there were significant signs of recovery in other areas besides spiritual. The town changed from a grouping of dwellings to a full-fledged community with a nascent business district. Commercial agriculture ventures increased, and the renewed output generated discussion of a possible railroad connection to the area. This discussion was further encouraged by the mining activity in the area that used the town on the Muddy as their main source of supplies.

Though there were other stores in St. Thomas, the most important one, judging from the number of references to it in personal histories and contemporary newspaper articles, belonged to Harry Gentry. Gentry did not set

⁴⁰⁹ Bleak, *Annals*, 31 December 1899.

out to become a store owner. In the mid-1890s, it became Gentry's custom to travel to Kingman, Arizona, to stock up on supplies he knew his family would need while he was out working as a freighter.⁴¹⁰ His wife, Ellen, sold her surplus supplies to others out of the post office, for which Harry was also responsible. Gentry's store developed piecemeal from this practice.⁴¹¹

The increase in population and efforts to grow more crops for market put a strain on the water supply. The Muddy flows year-round, but is not a particularly vigorous stream. In order to distribute the limited water equitably, the residents formed the Muddy Valley Irrigation Company in 1895. The company had \$15,000 in capital stock that was divided into 15,000 shares. By 1902, there were 1,514 acres controlled by the company. Though the company water master nominally controlled water distribution, individual settlements controlled their own distribution and largely ignored the water master. St. Thomas took water from the Muddy and had six miles of canal in three ditches. These ditches irrigated 500 acres, with an average holding of 50 acres.⁴¹²

The major problem with the Muddy Valley Irrigation Company, aside from a limited supply of water and towns that tended to ignore its decrees, was that the only legal water right in the valley belonged to Benjamin Bonelli. Bonelli refused to

⁴¹⁰ The town of Kingman, Arizona was founded in 1883 along the route of the Santa Fe Railroad and was a regional supply depot.

⁴¹¹ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 158.

⁴¹² "Excerpts From Report of Irrigation Investigations in Utah By U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Experiment Stations, Bulletin No. 124," State of Arizona, 251.

join the company and consistently accused others of stealing his water. His father worked the rights he filed on in 1873 until 1879, when his tenants began to farm it. In 1894, the elder Bonelli passed control to his son. To protect his right, the younger filed suit on September 5, 1899, at Pioche, the county seat. Other valley irrigators claimed that Bonelli did not use his water to irrigate more than ten acres and the public good demanded that they have access to Bonelli's water that was otherwise going to waste.

The court eventually sided with Bonelli, but did not give him everything that he wanted. As mentioned earlier, his father's claim totaled 400 inches, one-fourth of the flow of the river. The actual average flow of the river barely reached 240 inches. In 1893, the flow in July was 75 inches; for August it was 80, which is very different from the 1,200 Bonelli's claim was based on. Courts awarded Bonelli 60 inches in the 1890s, one-fourth of the proven maximum flow. Other irrigators could now legally water their crops.⁴³ Though the town was not necessarily an "outpost of Zion" any more, the final piece in its recovery as a functioning community was complete.

⁴³ Ibid., 253-54.



Figure 17: Unidentified Farmer irrigating his fields near St. Thomas. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

Prospects for St. Thomas and the rest of the valley at the close of the nineteenth century were much brighter than they had been in 1871. The Nevada-Utah border was firmly established, and the population slowly began to climb. Once a basic level of security was established, some residents began to, in the finest tradition of western communities, boost the area. Muddy Valley resident Jesse P. Holt claimed in his correspondence with *Deseret News* that he was “in every way pleased with said country and am sanguine in the belief that home-seekers who establish themselves there can make it easy and comfortable a living as in any part of the West. The climate is semi-tropical and during ten months of

the year is delightful.”⁴⁴⁴ Another sign that the town was beginning to thrive was the growing conversation about the prospect of the railroad passing through the valley. Though it would require concerted hard work, the idea had returned that “in a few years this valley could be transformed from its present desolate condition into a perfect garden of Eden.”⁴⁴⁵ The next two decades of growth made that idea, for many, not too far removed from reality.

⁴⁴⁴ Jesse P. Holt Jr. “Defends the ‘Muddy,’” *Deseret News*, 20 June 1896.

⁴⁴⁵ Andrew Jensen, “The Muddy Valley,” *Deseret News*, 23 March 1892.

Chapter Six: The Mountains Brought Down and the Valleys Exalted

Las Vegas Sun editor A. E. Cahlan visited the Moapa Valley in the early 20th century. His experience shows St. Thomas entering the modern era, albeit haltingly. He described some difficulty he had in breaking a twenty dollar note to pay a bill. He just about had to visit everyone in town to get enough change gathered together. The Moapa and Virgin valleys were both very cash poor, and the closest bank, in terms of travel time, was in St. George. Non-barter exchanges were accomplished using endorsed checks. Cahlan reported that:

A buyer would write a check for the amount of his purchase, say \$1 or 50¢. This immediately became legal tender. The merchant would give it back in change. The recipient would use it again in making his purchases. Each handler, of course, had to endorse the check. When there was no more room for an additional endorsement, the holder would take it back to the maker and have him make out a new one and start all over again. The check became sort of a negotiable promissory note not unlike the green IOU's Uncle Sam puts out today and calls them money. Checks were written for as little as 10 cents and a few ever went above \$5.

During the same visit, Mr. Cahlan attended a basketball game. The only electricity available in the valley was from personal generators and the basketball venue did not have one. The light for the night game was provided by ten to fifteen citizens standing around the court holding old fashioned kerosene lamps on their heads.⁴⁶ Both experiences show an interesting mix of old and new.

The year 1900 marked a change in St. Thomas and the beginning of a new period on the Muddy. The town showed significant signs of recovery in population

⁴⁶ A. E. Cahlan, "From Where I Sit," *Las Vegas Sun*, 19 September 1966.

and its economy was growing. In agriculture, mining, and transportation, St. Thomas found itself emerging from the backwater and entering into a more modern world. The arrival of the railroad and the Arrowhead Trail Highway brought goods and visitors in much greater numbers. Despite these advances, much of the town and its operation remained the same as they had in the century before.

The closest St. Thomas ever came to having a municipal water system were ditches running through town. Residents collected drinking water in cisterns. Electricity never arrived for lights or refrigeration, for which they used “desert coolers” consisting of wire frames covered in burlap. Water dripped onto the burlap from a reservoir overhead to keep food cool. The town never acquired a sewer system although some residences had septic tanks. Other buildings had individual plumbing features, but none that were available to all. Several residents used the old adobe homes built by Muddy missionaries well into the twentieth century.⁴⁷ Not all of the buildings in St. Thomas were the old adobe. Residents constructed many modern homes and businesses as well, but evidence of the hardscrabble existence shows in the improvised construction materials residents used to build these structures.

⁴⁷ “Moapa Valley,” *Las Vegas Age*, 16 May 1908, 6.



Figure 18: Front suspension piece from an old automobile used as concrete reinforcement, Hannig's Ice Cream Parlor. Photo by author.



Figure 19: Axle used as concrete/window frame reinforcement, Samuel Gentry home. Photo by author.

Census returns are one of the clearest indicators that the town was once again becoming viable (see appendix B). In 1880, the population of St. Thomas was sixty-seven. Forty-four of those enumerated were Native American. Of the remaining twenty-three, there were eleven surnames among them. Eight of the surnames are unique, representing a single man or woman, all listed as laborers, miners, and boarders. In 1900, the population was forty-three, with Native Americans enumerated elsewhere. Of the ten surnames, seven represented single men or women. There were still only three family surnames, but these three names represent many more nuclear families as children married and stayed in town.

By 1910, the population had risen to ninety-three, but it is the 1920 census really shows that the town had recovered most of the population that it had lost half a century earlier. That year, the population of the town reached 170, about 75 percent of the peak 1868 population. There were only four single people counted, and one of those appears to be a mother-in-law. There were twenty different surnames, showing both natural growth and people moving into the town. In some ways, the town was one big family. The 1930 census illustrates this well. Of the 194 people enumerated, four surnames account for seventy of the people.⁴⁸ In the twenty years that this chapter covers, the population of the town increased 395 percent.

It is not just the total population that made a significant recovery in the twentieth century. When the Muddy Missionaries left St. Thomas, the LDS

⁴⁸ U.S. Census 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15 data for St. Thomas, Nevada.

population was reduced to one family. Though census returns do not list religion and the LDS Archives does not make membership rolls public, a familiarity with the stories of many of the families in the town let the careful reader count at least part of the LDS population. In 1900, out of the total population of 43, at least 29, or 67% were LDS. The percent could have been higher, but some of the people listed are not mentioned in any available sources as LDS or not. For 1910, the number was 44 out of 93. By 1930, the total LDS population was at least 105 out of 194, which is 54%. The actual number was likely much higher. Regardless of the actual proportion, none of the available sources on the history of the town mention any sort of confrontation or conflict between the Latter-day Saints and any non-LDS neighbors.

Farming and ranching remained residents' main occupations, though the crops they grew were much different from those in the 1860s. While the town was part of the Muddy Mission, cotton, wheat, and corn received the most attention. The twentieth century brought much greater experimentation with crops. William M. Murphy, upon moving to St. Thomas in 1903, put in twenty acres of asparagus. He was the first to grow this crop on a commercial scale.⁴¹⁹ Onions were another experimental commercial crop for area farmers. One reporter stated in 1908 that farmers along the Muddy grew enough onions to "perfume the breath of every girl in the United States," and were experimenting to produce an odorless variety.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁹ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 98.

⁴²⁰ "Moapa Valley," *Las Vegas Age*, 16 May 1908, 6.



Figure 20: Vineyard in St. Thomas. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

There were several other cash crops as well. Various farmers produced alfalfa, cantaloupes, watermelons, sugarcane, corn, sweet potatoes, peanuts, peaches, pears, grapes, pomegranates, and many other vegetables. The land was so productive that one person could only handle ten acres by himself.⁴²¹ Another sign of modernity was that the Moapa Orchard and Fruit Company seriously contemplated the construction of a hydroelectric plant on the Muddy.⁴²² Nothing ever came of the plans to build the dam, but it certainly would have been welcome

⁴²¹ "Talks About Clark County," *Las Vegas Age*, 18 September 1915, 1.

⁴²² "St. Thomas," *Las Vegas Age*, 30 July 1910, 1.

not only for the electricity, but for flood control. Floods in 1910 and 1914 wiped out crops and fences, and damaged a railroad right of way.⁴²³



Figure 21: Sheep near St. Thomas. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

Many in St. Thomas engaged in animal husbandry. Frank Bonelli, George Pearson, and Brig Whitmore grazed 250 head of cattle along the Muddy River. Sam Gentry and his partner from Utah, Warren Cox, ran 2,000 head on the Gold Butte Range during these years.⁴²⁴ Horses were especially important since they

⁴²³ United States Department of Agriculture—Soil Conservation Service, Clark County Nevada Conservation District, and Nevada Division of Water Resources, *Flood Hazard Analyses, Las Vegas Wash and Tributaries, Clark County, Nevada: Special Report, History of Flooding, Clark County, Nevada, 1905–1975*, August 1977, 6–8, 10–11.

⁴²⁴ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 98.

performed farm work and transportation duties. Not all the horses in the area were domesticated. Matilda Frehner had fond memories of working with the wild horses in the area. She remembered that the horses were almost economically valueless; they were so small and skinny. Matilda remembered that when she was twelve, she convinced one of the cowboys who had rounded up some of the horses to give her one. It ended up being her favorite horse for a long time.⁴²⁵

The Church's injunction against mining did not survive into the twentieth century. Many devout members of the Church engaged in mining with just as much zeal as their Gentile counterparts. Several of the residents of the town operated successful mining operations. In 1905, the *Salt Lake Mining Review* expressed excitement about the prospects of the new St. Thomas Mining District.⁴²⁶ Prospectors struck gold at the base of Granite Mountain, across the Virgin River from St. Thomas, and the *Review* was certain that a rush was imminent.⁴²⁷ Interestingly, residents of St. Thomas knew about the deposits at Gold Butte and Granite Mountain, but not being miners, they did not realize the true value of the deposits that were in their back yard.⁴²⁸

It did not take long for locals to begin to take note of the mining possibilities the area held. In an article entitled "St. Thomas to the Front," the *Salt*

⁴²⁵ Vivian Frehner, *Memories of Matilda Reber Frehner*, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections, Las Vegas, 5.

⁴²⁶ "The Nevada Gold Butte Mines Co.—Ltd.," *Salt Lake Mining Review*, 30 December 1905.

⁴²⁷ "Growing Interest in Gold Butte," *Salt Lake Mining Review*, 15 February 1906.

⁴²⁸ "The Nevada Gold Butte Mines Co.—Ltd.," *Salt Lake Mining Review*, 30 December 1905.

Lake Mining Review speculated that the town was part of an immense mineral zone extending from Searchlight to Goldfield, and a boom in the area was very likely.⁴²⁹ Residents wanted to capitalize early on the possibilities. One of the great mineral finds in the area was discovered by an associate of Harry Gentry.

Gentry's associate was prospecting in limestone near the Gold Butte and Granite Mountain camps. After working all day and finding nothing of apparent value, he sat against a boulder to rest, discouraged. While sitting there, he unconsciously began feeling the rock with his fingers. Feeling a formation crumble, he looked at the rock and noticed a small copper seam. He put up a marker and did the work required by Nevada law to make a claim. A few days later, he began to work the claim. He had followed the seam in from the face for about a foot when he broke into a large body of fine copper. After working the site for a week, he had enough ore to fill two railcars. The ore turned out to contain 64.8 percent copper.⁴³⁰ This strike was not Gentry's last foray into mining, as a few years later Harry and Ellen Gentry, Levi and Clara Syphus, and Nellie Perkins incorporated the Bronzel Mining Company in St. Thomas, capitalized with one million one dollar shares.⁴³¹

Ellen Gentry had a particularly strange experience with mining. According to legend, one morning she awoke with a very odd feeling about a dream she had

⁴²⁹ "St. Thomas to the Front," *Salt Lake Mining Review*, 15 August 1906.

⁴³⁰ "Growing Interest in Gold Butte," *Salt Lake Mining Review*, 15 February 1906.

⁴³¹ "Mining Enterprise," *Las Vegas Age*, 10 June 1910, 1. The article does not say how many of those shares were actually ever sold.

about a nearby borax deposit. Her dream was so vivid that she and her daughter, Laura, grubstaked two prospectors to search for the “dream mine.” The prospectors followed Ellen’s details and found a gulch with a large exposed face of borax. Francis “Borax” Smith, the man behind the twenty mule teams in Death Valley, learned of the discovery and purchased the mine. This mine did not require twenty mules to haul the borax, being much closer to the rail line than the Death Valley deposits.⁴³² While most miners in the West were not led to their finds by dreams in the night, it is clear that, at least in regards to mining, St. Thomas was quintessentially western.

When St. Thomas collapsed in 1871, Overton became the mercantile center for the valley. With the beginning of the new century, however, St. Thomas began to show significant signs of recovery in that industry as well. 1907 saw the construction of a new store in St. Thomas and the increased availability of goods. This and Harry Gentry’s store caused one observer to remark that it “looks as if this country must be coming to the front.”⁴³³

By 1918 there were a handful of other businesses in town. R. Hannig operated a grocery store and soda fountain. Preston Nutter also ran a grocery store. Ellen Gentry, Harry’s wife, ran a hotel that was located next to the Gentry store. The town had a post office, and William Sellers operated a café, which also carried groceries geared toward tourists. A man name Howell operated a garage,

⁴³² “New ‘Dream’ Borax Mine Bought by ‘Borax’ Smith,” *Salt Lake Mining News*, 30 March 1921.

⁴³³ “Growing,” *Las Vegas Age*, 4 May 1907.

and Rox Whitmore owned a meat market from which he supplied the valley with fresh beef and pork. Whitmore even made deliveries as far as Las Vegas and Arden, which is now part of Las Vegas, but further south on the way to Pahrump.⁴³⁴ The 1910 and 1920 census also listed a professional photographer, Frederick G. Rance, with a studio in town.

Though St. Thomas was slowly developing economically, it faced significant challenges. The Saints left the town in 1871, in part due to their inability to pay taxes in specie. Decades later, the area remained cash poor, barter remaining one of the preferred methods of carrying out financial transactions for many people, as evidenced by the experience of A. E. Cahlan mentioned earlier. Economic difficulties or no, it was the businesses run by the Gentrys, however, that were the most important in town. Harry was the postmaster, so people would congregate at the store in the afternoons and socialize while they were waiting for the mail buggy from Moapa. The fourteen-room Gentry Hotel was a popular gathering place as well, hosting important guests such as U.S. Senator Key Pittman and Nevada Governors Tasker Oddie and James Scrugham on different occasions.⁴³⁵ Such august visitors were not the norm, though. Most customers were residents of the town or the immediate surrounding area.

Beyond being a successful businessman, Harry Gentry was also a community pillar. He moved to St. Thomas from Panaca in 1883 with Ellen and

⁴³⁴ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 102.

⁴³⁵ Dennis McBride, "The Mormon Atlantis," *Nevada* (November/December 1993): 85.

was almost immediately made the local postmaster, a position he held until he died. When he died, he was the oldest postmaster in the state.⁴³⁶ He also held many positions of importance in the St. Thomas Ward of the LDS Church. Martin A. Bunker, one of his friends, said he never knew a more charitable man in his life. Harry once caught a man stealing from his store. The local justice court tried and convicted the man, but rather than see him go to jail, Harry loaned the man forty dollars to pay the fine.⁴³⁷ Gentry also had a soft spot for children. The young Joe F. Perkins asked Harry for the job of mail carrier to Bonelli's Ferry. Perkins was not old enough to work legally for the government, but he must have been extremely persistent in his pleading. Gentry finally said, "Alright, Joe, how old are you?" "Ten," said Joe. "Ah, no," Gentry said, "you're sixteen," and proceeded to swear Joe in.⁴³⁸

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints remained the most important institution in town. Available sources are silent on what happened to the church building with the hand split shingles after the abandonment of the town, though it is likely that Isaac Jennings dismantled and sold it. Regardless of what happened, in the early 1900s the faithful met in a boarded up tent. Doris Reber lived across the street from the rudimentary chapel. She told John Bunker, who became bishop of the ward in September 1908 that she did not want to go to

⁴³⁶ "Harry Gentry Passes Away," *Washington County* (St. George, Utah), 9 June 1921.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 102.

church.⁴³⁹ She said she might as well stay home because she could hear him just as well across the street, as he talked so loud.⁴⁴⁰ With streets ninety-nine feet wide, his voice must have been penetrating indeed.

Members of the Church's woman's auxiliary, the Relief Society, decided they would like a nicer place to meet. They determined they would fund the construction of a Relief Society hall. In order to raise the money for the hall, the women held a series of ice cream socials. On the day of a social, they made ice cream from eggs, cream, and their carefully hoarded sugar. In the evening, the sisters brought their husbands and children and used their "pin money" to purchase their own ice cream. They counted themselves very blessed when freighters from the Grand Gulch Mine were in town and in the mood to spend money. After all the fund-raisers were over and the hall completed, it served triple duty. It held school and Church meetings as well as Relief Society meetings.⁴⁴¹

Although St. Thomas lay on the periphery of significant Mormon settlement, general authorities of the Church did not ignore the congregation. Apostles and other leaders came to conduct Church business when the rail line opened. They also made periodic visits when there were not any significant events occurring. Everett Syphus' history recorded a chance encounter with George Albert

⁴³⁹ Andrew Jensen, Church Chronology, September 18, 1908. Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Doris Reber, as quoted in Laraine Graf, "They Came, They Saw, and Then They Went Elsewhere."

⁴⁴¹ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 127.

Smith, who at the time was an apostle but later became the president of the Church. Syphus was out working in the field one hot day when he saw two men walking toward him, whom he discovered to be Smith and his son. They were very hot and thirsty, having been stuck in the sand and working in vain to free the wagon. Syphus felt honored to take his team and help an Apostle out of a tight spot.⁴⁴² Other visits by Church leaders transpired with less drama.

The Paiute remained a constant presence in and around St. Thomas, though armed confrontations did not. Inez Gibson Waymire, daughter of Bishop Robert O. Gibson, claimed that not many Paiute actually lived on the reservation, but camped in tepees by the “Big Ditch.”⁴⁴³ The Paiute men and women continued as a valuable source of labor. The men worked as farm laborers or as maintenance workers on the irrigation works. White women hired the Paiute women to wash laundry, scrubbing the clothes on washboards outside. The group had not become sedentary though. In the fall, the entire encampment would move to the mountains and gather pine nuts. They sold their surplus to the townspeople or wholesale to the Gentry store. At Christmastime, residents usually were visited by a Paiute woman who would knock on the door and hold out a sack saying “Christmas gift,” expecting flour, bacon, or whatever happened to be on hand. Though they may have been on the fringes of the white community, they were

⁴⁴² Everett Syphus, “Everett Syphus History,” *Memories*, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections.

⁴⁴³ Inez Gibson Waymire, “Robert O. and Edith H. Gibson,” *Memories*, Las Vegas Special Collections, University of Nevada.

included in every large community celebration. Paiute came from miles around, especially when there was a barbecue, taking away any leftover meat or bones.⁴⁴⁴

As more whites moved into the area, the traditional ways of the Paiute became less viable as a means of support. Consequently, the Paiute became even more dependent on wage labor, and it is not a good idea to antagonize your employers. George Perkins, a local observer of the Paiute, told a story of how the presence of whites influenced them. Early Paiutes, after burying their dead, would take all the deceased's possessions and burn them. If the departed had a horse, then relatives and friends killed it so the departed would have a mount in the afterlife. One young Paiute watched over an older one, who in return made the young man heir to his estate, which comprised a few acres of land and two good horses. When the man died, tribal elders expected the young man to sacrifice the horses. Instead, he burned an old Model T that had given him considerable trouble. He said, "When all the Indians come riding up on horses in the next world, old John will drive up in that Model T and be just as well off as any of them!"⁴⁴⁵

For many towns in the West, a primary place to gather and socialize was some kind of bar, which St. Thomas did not have at this point. Adult entertainment in St. Thomas during this period was predictably scarce. Adults would gather at the Gentry store waiting for the mail and gossip. It was there that

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.

“all the town problems were solved.”⁴⁴⁶ Not all entertainment was just talking to neighbors. In the mid 19-teens, Preston Nutter had a crystal radio set in the back of his grocery store. The kids would line up for a chance to listen to it for a few minutes, relishing the time they spent with the headphones on their heads.⁴⁴⁷ Mr. Hannig showed the first motion pictures in town in the Relief Society hall. The machine that showed the silent movies was hand cranked and suffered frequent breakdowns. Despite this, those who attended were fine with spending their twenty-five cents on admission.⁴⁴⁸ Residents celebrated holidays with dances, horse races, relay races, and baseball and basketball games. Horse races in particular were subject to intense betting. Baseball games were more relaxed. The young women would play the married women and the young men would play the married men.⁴⁴⁹ The youth particularly enjoyed watermelon bursts. Euzell Prince Preston recalled that at such activities, all the boys would catch a girl and wash her hair in watermelon rinds.⁴⁵⁰

The lives of the children of St. Thomas were not all carefree. Being a farming community, there were always chores that needed attention. At one point, the town was experiencing an infestation of rodents, and the youth played an

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁴⁷ Euzell Prince Preston, “The Prince Family in St. Thomas.”

⁴⁴⁸ Interview with Doris Reber, as quoted in Laraine Graf, “They Came, They Saw, and Then They Went Elsewhere.”

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Euzell Prince Preston, “The Prince Family in St. Thomas.”

important role in the eradication effort. Katherine Perkins, a schoolteacher, spearheaded efforts to eliminate gophers, rats, and mice. She divided the boys from 1st thru 6th grade into two teams. The first side to get three hundred tails treated themselves to a candy pull hosted by the losers. Mrs. Perkins verified the number of tails. One first grader thought that they were only interested in the tails, so he cut them off and released the mice to grow more tails for future harvesting.⁴⁵¹

Life in St. Thomas in the first two decades of the twentieth century was not always idyllic, but it was a close community nonetheless. Neighbors planted and harvested each other's fields and treated wagons and threshers as community property. The only town government was a school board. The town required no police or jail. All civic leadership was performed by church leaders.⁴⁵² Residents united in the promotion of their town, excited by the advances made in transportation to and from St. Thomas.

Former St. Thomas resident Merle Frehner, a prominent Las Vegas who died in 1994, is most widely remembered as a good businessman and founder of the Boulder Dam Area Council, now the Las Vegas Area Council, of the Boy Scouts of America. Less remembered is that he was an expert in hauling freight in wagons with six-horse teams. In interviews and remembrances, Frehner painted a vivid picture of just how difficult it was to move goods from one place to another. Trains

⁴⁵¹ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 116.

⁴⁵² Dennis McBride, "The Mormon Atlantis," 84.

consumed water and wood or coal only when moving. The same holds true for gasoline and automobiles. Horses, however, required water and forage whether they were working or not, and could not be “parked” for a week while work was done. One of the first issues of the *Las Vegas Age* reveled in the arrival of automobiles in the Bullfrog Mining District in 1905, but early vehicles were not suited to haul heavy loads. Long distances from railheads over poor roads with no gas stations kept freight wagons and teams rumbling across southern Nevada well into the twentieth century.



Figure 22: Freight wagons on the main street of St. Thomas. A. Frehner on burro, L[evi?] Syphus on horse, Sam Frehner and Lee Frehner on the left wagon. On the right wagon are Harry Gentry Jr. and Harry Gentry Sr. Merle and Beulah Frehner Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

Frehner's 1918 account of one freighting trip illustrates just how difficult the process could be. Merle and his brother Harry contracted to haul heavy machinery fifty miles to the Grand Gulch mine from St. Thomas. The brothers removed the bed from their biggest wagon and replaced it with heavy timbers upon which they chained the equipment.⁴⁵³ Before leaving they had to plan carefully to provide for the team of twelve horses required for the one hundred mile round-trip through the desert. No doubt the brothers were glad that they were not hauling the freight into St. Thomas. Crossing the Virgin River could be very dangerous, and many loads were lost attempting to cross in high water. To minimize that danger, the county built a steel bridge across the Virgin River in 1915, but the freighters then had to maneuver their six- to twelve-ton loads down a steep slope to get to the bridge. If the water was low, many preferred to take the river route and avoid the very real possibility of their wagons going out of control and crashing.⁴⁵⁴ Given the difficult experience of freighters it is no wonder why so many wanted modern transportation in the area.

The arrival of the railroads marked St. Thomas's strategic location within southern Nevada. Securing a rail line into the town was a coup of the highest order for the town. Many localities better situated than the town on the Muddy had to resort to bribery to have a line located to their town. Because railroads were more interested in profits than in any town's welfare, the decision demonstrates the

⁴⁵³ A. D. Hopkins, "Wagon Freight Business Made Anything Else Look Easy," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 12 May 2005, 17AA.

⁴⁵⁴ Frehner Thurston, *A River and a Road*, 56.

faith they had in St. Thomas. Though Brigham Young had envisioned St. Thomas as a key link in the transportation of people and goods from the Colorado River north to Utah, he probably never envisioned the construction of a rail line there. President Young's nephew, Joseph W. Young, certainly never foresaw rail access for the town. He wrote of the area in 1868 that "The timber and the mineral [in the soil] may be partially overcome, but the bad roads never, at least not till the mountains are brought down and the valleys exalted, and the sand hills and sandbeds covered with brush."⁴⁵⁵

Assistant church historian Andrew Jensen mentioned the possibility of a railroad into the Moapa Valley as early as 1892, but not until 1908 did it even begin to look like St. Thomas had a chance. By 1905 Moapa, twenty-five miles from St. Thomas on the north end of the valley, connected to the Salt Lake line. Residents of St. Thomas, to get their connection to the south engaged in the same self-promotion that almost every community in the West undertook. Oil started the discussion in earnest. In February 1908, Standard Oil began oil exploration near Overton. If crews struck oil, promoters envisioned the inevitable rail line from Moapa extending all the way down the valley to St. Thomas. According to the *Las Vegas Age*, farmers believed this would enable the entire valley to easily provide produce for oil workers.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ Joseph W. Young, "A Visit to the Muddy," *Deseret News*, 19 June 1868.

⁴⁵⁶ "Railroad News," *Las Vegas Age*, 1 February 1908.

Other boosters looked to the railroad to expand industries that already existed in the valley. One company believed that of the 400,000 tons of salt consumed yearly along the Pacific Coast, the salt mines near St. Thomas could produce a significant part of it, up to 25,000 pounds, or more than 45 tons a day.⁴⁵⁷ Farmers and those engaged in home manufacture wanted the greater access to markets. Miners of gypsum, pottery clay, copper, silver, and gold all would benefit from the arrival of the iron horse.⁴⁵⁸ Still others who were lobbying for a state experimental farm to be built on the Muddy felt their enterprise could only be strengthened by a rail line.⁴⁵⁹ The groups differed on whether they should wait for a major rail line to build there or seek the construction of a cheaper narrow gauge line to expedite the process.⁴⁶⁰

In order to bring their plans to fruition, different groups lobbied railroad executives and capitalists in different ways. The *Las Vegas Age* reported in February 1908 that a group contemplating increased salt production sent a representative to New York in an attempt to get funding to build the rail line.⁴⁶¹ A. L. F. MacDermott, secretary of both the Moapa Valley Farmer's Association and the Muddy Valley Irrigation Company, commissioned a survey in 1909 for a branch

⁴⁵⁷ "St. Thomas," *Las Vegas Age*, 25 April 1908, 4.

⁴⁵⁸ "Moapa Valley—Railroad Down Muddy Valley Soon to St. Thomas," *Las Vegas Age*, 9 May 1908, 5.

⁴⁵⁹ "St. Thomas," *Las Vegas Age*, 25 April 1908, 4.

⁴⁶⁰ "Moapa Valley—Railroad Down Muddy Valley Soon to St. Thomas," *Las Vegas Age*, 9 May 1908, 5.

⁴⁶¹ "St. Thomas," *Las Vegas Age*, 25 April 1908, 4.

railroad from Moapa to St. Thomas so when the anticipated funds were secured, there would be little need for delay in starting construction.⁴⁶²

It was not until 1911, however, that the efforts of the railroad boosters began to pay off, beginning with a meeting between E. J. Robertson, manager of Moapa Valley's Irrigation and Development Company, and Senator William A. Clark of Montana. Clark was also president of the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake railroad, which was the line that ran through Moapa.⁴⁶³ He was an important figure in the history of southern Nevada and a controversial one in the history of the United States. A consummate businessman, Clark experienced a series of early successes in business, the largest being the Anaconda Copper Company in Butte, Montana. He achieved national prominence in 1899 when he bribed the Montana state legislature to appoint him senator. Upon arriving in Washington, Clark realized that the Senate would never seat him, so he resigned from his seat, creating a vacancy. The governor of Montana, who disliked Clark, was out of the state at the time, so the lieutenant governor, who was more kindly disposed to Clark, hastened eight hundred miles back to Helena to appoint Clark senator again. The governor rescinded the appointment and chose another man. The Senate refused to seat either man. This episode helped clear the way for the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution, which provided for

⁴⁶² "Moapa Valley," *Las Vegas Age*, 23 October 1909, 5.

⁴⁶³ "Valley Improves," *Las Vegas Age*, 29 April 1911, 1.

the direct election of senators. Clark won a seat in the Senate in 1901, this time legitimately.



Figure 23: William A. Clark in 1905. Chicago Daily News negatives collection, DN-0002197. Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society.

Clark built the San Pedro, Los Angeles, & Salt Lake line because it decreased the distance between his mines in Montana and a working seaport by 663 miles.

Clark and E. H. Harriman of the Union Pacific and Oregon Short Line survived an uneasy partnership to complete the line in 1905. Clark's line purchased the land for the town site of Las Vegas from Helen Stewart, who owned the Las Vegas Ranch.

The ranch started as the Mormon Fort on Las Vegas Creek. Clark and his brother tried to diversify the economy of the new town beyond railroad repair yards.

Indeed, his brother, J. Ross Clark, actively promoted Las Vegas until his death in

1927. It was in honor of William Clark's efforts that the new county created by the division of Lincoln County in 1909 received the name Clark County.

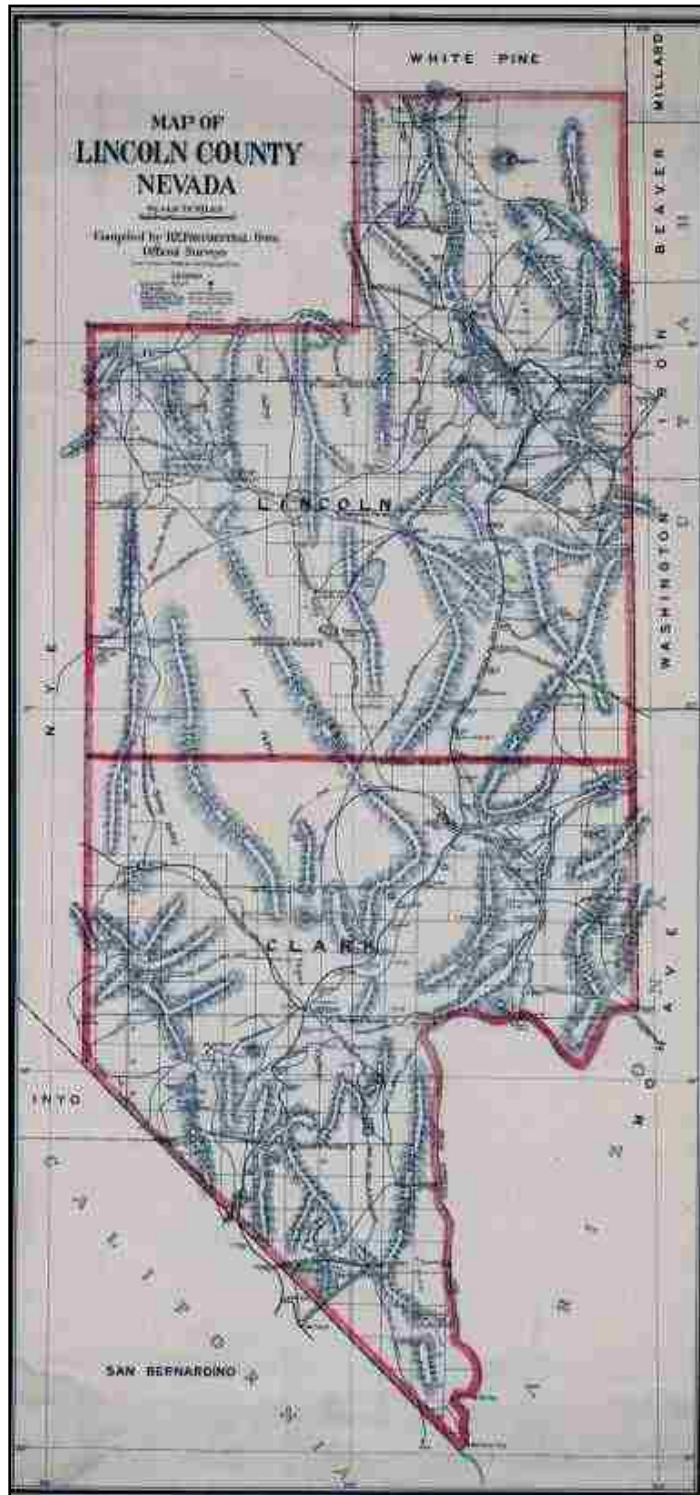


Figure 24: Map of proposed Clark County boundaries, 1908. UNLV Special

The spur down the Muddy was only supposed to go as far south as Logandale, previously known as St. Joseph. In his meeting with Clark, Robertson waxed rhapsodic about the potential of St. Thomas. He discussed the salt and kaolin deposits, as well as the agricultural output, which improved market access would only increase. The reality was probably more prosaic, but Robertson reported, "When the real facts were brought before Senator Clark he lost no time in authorizing the construction of the line on from Logan."⁴⁶⁴ Farmers immediately began putting in more crop than they had originally planned for that year, though it would be another year before the rails actually reached the town. Residents had known the good news barely two weeks when some began to speculate that the line would not really terminate at St. Thomas, but would follow the Virgin River up to St. George.⁴⁶⁵

Collections.

Three months before the projected completion of the line to St Thomas, the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce already had a plan to celebrate the event. The plan was to run a special train from Las Vegas to St. Thomas, stopping at all the scenic areas along the way. The goal was to "give many people of Vegas who have never seen the wonderful Moapa valley a chance to visit it on a pleasant occasion at small cost, and partake of the open handed hospitality of the valley people." It

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ "Railroad to St. Thomas," *Salt Lake Mining Review*, 15 May 1911.

was also seen as an opportunity to showcase the agricultural output of the area.⁴⁶⁶ Construction delays thwarted the initial plans of the organizers, but the papers continued to track the builders' progress and speculated on the completion date. As it turned out, the rails reached the town at the end of March 1912, though it was a month and a half before the line officially opened.⁴⁶⁷

Boosters and farmers were not the only ones excited by the imminent prospect of the rail line into St. Thomas. Salt miners, as mentioned previously, believed it would make them a major player in their market. St. Thomas resident and principle owner of the Tramp mine, Brig Whitmore, owners of the Key West mine, and the Los Angeles-based Copper City mine managers were only waiting for the completion of the line to begin shipping ore. All three mines already had large quantities of ore stockpiled and ready to go.⁴⁶⁸

In late May 1912, when it became apparent when the line would open, plans began again for a celebration to mark the event. The Majestic Theatre in Las Vegas held a "Queen of the Rail" contest to see who the most popular woman in the county was. The winner would win an expense-paid trip to St. Thomas as an honored guest and the privilege of driving the final spike. The Grand Gulch Copper Company provided the copper spike for the occasion. The queen would use a

⁴⁶⁶ "Fruit Festival," *Las Vegas Age*, 10 June 1911, 1.

⁴⁶⁷ "St. Thomas Has Railroad," *Las Vegas Age*, 16 March 1912, 1, and "Branch Opened," *Las Vegas Age*, 4 May 1912, 4. During this two-month period, there was almost a daily update on the progress of the construction.

⁴⁶⁸ "Moapa Mining Notes," *Las Vegas Age*, 23 September 1911, 4.

“handsome” hammer, provided by the Salt Lake Hardware Company, and receive the hammer and spike as souvenirs at the close of the festivities.⁴⁶⁹ The prospect of gaining recognition as the most popular woman proved sufficient to “make the ladies’ hearts to flutter.”⁴⁷⁰ The honor fell to local resident Mildred Anderson, apparently a Las Vegan.⁴⁷¹

Ms. Anderson drove that last spike on June 1, 1912. The Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce organized the excursion train to St. Thomas. After leaving Las Vegas, it proceeded to Logan[dale] to allow for the brief inspection of the state experiment farm. From there it went to Overton, which by now was the most populous town on the Muddy, and then on to St. Thomas for the festivities. At St. Thomas, in addition to the spike driving ceremony, there was a southern barbecue to “fill the inner man to overflowing with all manner of good things,” followed by a ball game, steer roping competition, and other sports. At five in the evening, the train would depart for Overton and a dance held there. Return to Las Vegas was to commence at 11:00 p.m. for the hour and a half trip back. Passengers could even expect to have a pleasant time while on the train. During the train ride and at various stops, the Las Vegas Brass Band, who would make the journey as well, would entertain passengers. Mayor Buol of Las Vegas called on all residents to take the day off and spend it on the Muddy to “congratulat[e] . . . our northern

⁴⁶⁹ The story contains no clues as to what makes a hammer handsome.

⁴⁷⁰ “Popular Lady to Drive Spike,” *Las Vegas Age*, 25 May 1912, 1.

⁴⁷¹ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 219.

neighbors on the new era of prosperity which must come to them following the advent of railway transportation for their products.” His call fell on willing ears, as about two hundred, or one-quarter of the population of Las Vegas, expected to make the trip.⁴⁷²

The arrival of the railroad was a harbinger that the area had “arrived” in many ways. The festivities were attended by the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Francis M. Lyman, and apostle George F. Richards, as well as O. P. Miller of the Presiding Bishopric of the Church. D. T. Collet, secretary of the Utah Manufacturers Association, accompanied the Church leaders. While there, the Church leaders created a new stake, named the Moapa Stake, from the wards in St. Thomas, Overton, Panaca, Mesquite, Bunkerville, and Alamo.⁴⁷³ The visiting authorities also called Robert O. Gibson as bishop of the St. Thomas Ward, where he remained until the disbanding of the ward.⁴⁷⁴

The arrival of the railroad brought some changes to St. Thomas, the newly christened “Terminal Town.”⁴⁷⁵ The refrigerated cars brought ice, which allowed residents to replace their wood, wire, and burlap desert coolers with iceboxes.⁴⁷⁶ However, the rails brought more than ice. Improved access allowed the casual tourist easy access to the south end of the Muddy. The railroad published tourist

⁴⁷² “Special Train for Excursion,” *Las Vegas Age*, 1 June 1912, 1.

⁴⁷³ “New Stake Organized,” *Washington County* (St. George, Utah), 13 June 1912.

⁴⁷⁴ Andrew Jensen, *Church Chronology*, June 9, 1912.

⁴⁷⁵ “Terminal Town,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 8 March 1913, 1.

⁴⁷⁶ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 111.

tracts to encourage this trend.⁴⁷⁷ Not all of the people who came down the rails were entirely welcome though. Ed Syphus had a patch of melons by the railroad grade, and the railroad workers frequently stole them. One night while the train was stopped, he went up to the patch and fired his gun in the air, causing the workers to quickly scatter.⁴⁷⁸

As the boosters had hoped, the railroad proved to be a benefit to the area's major industries. T. O. Tolan, Benjamin Bonelli, Levi Syphus, Harry Gentry, and H. E. George organized the Virgin River Salt Company in 1908, but they recognized that the venture was not viable until the railroad arrived. After the completion of the line, the papers contained periodic reports of large shipments of salt from the St. Thomas salt mine. By 1926, the company was shipping a carload of salt a day.⁴⁷⁹ The agricultural sector also greatly benefitted by the railroad. While many crops grew well on the Muddy, cantaloupes and watermelons became a major cash crop.⁴⁸⁰

Area miners warmly welcomed the railroad as well. The Grand Gulch mine freighted its ore to St. Thomas, which saved the heavy wagons a much longer trip

⁴⁷⁷ San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad, *The Arrowhead*. Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview with Doris Reber, as quoted in Laraine Graf, "They Came, They Saw, and Then They Went Elsewhere."

⁴⁷⁹ "Mountain of Salt," *Las Vegas Age*, 30 May 1908, "St. Thomas Salt Mine Lease Deal is Closed," *Las Vegas Age*, 9 January 1926, and "Shipping Much Salt From St. Thomas Mine," *Las Vegas Age*, 2 February 1918, 4.

⁴⁸⁰ "Talks About Clark County," *Las Vegas Age*, 18 September 1915, 1.

up the Muddy.⁴⁸¹ The mine was profitable, as prices were high and the ore ran as high as 56 percent copper. The new line cut the distance to the railhead by a third, which was very welcome for its effect on the bottom line.⁴⁸²



Figure 25: St Thomas salt mine in 1930. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

Completion of the railroad highlighted talk about rail-related improvements in St. Thomas. In 1913, the Nevada State Railway Commission approved the issue of \$1,119,000 in bonds to pay for improved locomotives and

⁴⁸¹ Frehner Thurston, *A River and a Road*, 56.

⁴⁸² "Cactus Kate is in Wonderland," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 May 1916, III4.

rolling stock, earmarking about a third of the funds for the line to St. Thomas.⁴⁸³ Also in 1913, the Southwestern Pacific Railroad incorporated in Sacramento, California. The \$105,000,000 road would be 2,200 miles long and run between Denver and San Diego and through St. Thomas. Like so many other railroad lines in the West, this one never made it past the planning stages.⁴⁸⁴ In 1915, San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake R.R. engineers surveyed a line between St. Thomas and the area gypsum mines but never constructed it.⁴⁸⁵ Another paper railroad contemplated a line through Mohave County, Arizona, from Kingman to St. Thomas in 1917.⁴⁸⁶

Having successfully secured railroad access, St. Thomas residents began to turn their attention to other ways to link themselves to the outside world. A mere ten months after the driving of the last spike, St. Thomas residents told reporters “[we] have good lands, [we] want good roads.”⁴⁸⁷ They earnestly sought to have a modern highway pass through their town. Automobiles did not have nearly the freight capacity of railroads, but had much greater flexibility. One of the first things the residents did was to send Joseph Ira Earl and William E. Abbott from the Muddy to Salt Lake City to attend a meeting of the Salt Lake Auto Club and

⁴⁸³ “Big Improvements,” *Las Vegas Age*, 7 June 1913.

⁴⁸⁴ “New Railway Through Vegas,” *Las Vegas Age*, 6 June 1913, 1.

⁴⁸⁵ “Gold Near Moapa,” *Las Vegas Age*, 15 October 1915, 1:6.

⁴⁸⁶ “Another Railroad?” *Las Vegas Age*, 2 June 1917, 1.

⁴⁸⁷ “Have Good Lands; Want Good Roads,” *Washington County* (St. George, Utah), 10 April 1913.

sing the praises of an auto route running through St. Thomas to Los Angeles.⁴⁸⁸

They probably did not have to talk too much to convince the people in Salt Lake that the route through southern Utah was the best one, since the other possible route went through Ely, Goldfield, and Bishop, and added considerable distance to the trek. The Los Angeles to Denver distance via St. Thomas shortened the trip by four hundred miles and was serviceable year-round.⁴⁸⁹

Despite the new railroad, obtaining good roads remained important to St. Thomas residents, given the poor condition of existing wagon tracks. The Grand Gulch Mining Company purchased the first truck in St. Thomas and shipped it to the lower Muddy by rail. The man the company sent to drive the truck dressed in a glowing black duster, goggles, fancy leggings, and other finery. The entire town turned out to see the truck unloaded. When the truck backed off the railcar, its hard rubber tires sunk into the sand, rendering the vehicle stationary. The company needed a team of horses to haul it down the street. All the kids in town climbed into the back of it and took a ride. Beyond tires unsuited for the territory, the motor ran hot, the brakes smoked coming down the canyon, and a six-mile stretch of sharp lime rocks on the route to the mine destroyed the tires. The truck only managed three trips to the mine before it was shipped out of the area.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸ "Virgin Valley Boosts Road," *Las Vegas Age*, 5 April 1913.

⁴⁸⁹ "Government Will Survey Road," *Las Vegas Age*, 4 July 1914, 1.

⁴⁹⁰ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 146, 160.

While the machine was clearly unsuited for service in the desert, good roads would likely have allowed the mining company to continue to use it.



Figure 26: Bridge over the Virgin River. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

Within four months of Earl and Abbott's trip to Salt Lake, Clark County commissioners used St. Thomas as their base of operations to scout out the best route for the new road.⁴⁹¹ The topic frequently made the papers for the rest of the year, and public opinion throughout the entire county viewed the construction of the road favorably.⁴⁹² Stories about the contemplated highway frequently graced the front pages of area newspapers. Because of the cost, however, in a county

⁴⁹¹ "Automobile Road Located," *Las Vegas Age*, 23 August 1913, 1.

⁴⁹² "Virgin Valley Favors Roads," *Las Vegas Age*, 8 November 1913, 1.

commissioners meeting in March 1914, the commissioners decided that the time was not right to begin building it. County commissioner Bunker from St. Thomas raised the sole voice to try to keep the plan for the road alive.⁴⁹³

The commissioners were not reticent because they considered the road a bad idea, but because of the route dictated by geography. Several miles would pass through the corner of Arizona, which would be of absolutely no benefit to that state. Consequently, Mohave County officials refused to spend any money on it. Clark County and Mohave County officials reached a compromise. Mohave County would provide the funds to complete the road through the corner of its state, while Clark County built south from St. Thomas to Bonelli's Ferry on the Colorado to connect with the Arizona system of roads. This route would utilize the \$13,500 dollar bridge over the Virgin near St. Thomas then currently under construction.⁴⁹⁴ By the middle of 1915, the Arrowhead Trail highway was a reality.⁴⁹⁵

As with the opening of the railroad, St. Thomas hosted a party to celebrate the completion of the Arrowhead Trail. The Southern Nevada Automobile Club joined with the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce to promote the excursion to the Muddy, held on May 30, 1915. The group planned to leave Las Vegas at 6 a.m. and arrive in St. Thomas three to four hours later, depending on the road. St. Thomas

⁴⁹³ "Meeting at Moapa," *Las Vegas Age*, 28 March 1914, 2.

⁴⁹⁴ "Auto Highway to be Opened," *Las Vegas Age*, 1 May 1915, 1.

⁴⁹⁵ "Normal Boys Build Roads," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 November 1916, VI8.

residents provided a barbecue to fete the visitors. Those without a car received an invitation to come, and for a small fee, they could ride along.⁴⁹⁶

The report of the trip was front-page news in Las Vegas. Though the road was not in the best condition, Las Vegans made the fifty-seven mile trip in just over four hours without mishap. A crowd that had gathered in a bowery in Harry Gentry's yard met the excursionists, who received ice water and lemonade. Chair of the county commissioners C. C. Ronnow presided at their ceremony, and made a plea to all the people there that they would cooperate with the county in keeping the roads repaired and in good condition. Nevada Democratic Party leader Levi Syphus spoke as well. At the close of the meeting, the audience sang "The Star Spangled Banner," and "America."⁴⁹⁷

The railroad was extremely important to the economy of the area, but because the line to St. Thomas was a spur line, there was no traffic "just passing through." The completion of the Arrowhead Trail changed that. St. Thomas began to gain recognition outside the region as it became apparent that it sat on the best route from the interior of the country to the Pacific Coast.

Earl Anthony and his car, Cactus Kate, gained St. Thomas much of that recognition. Earl was a member of the Automobile Club of Southern California, one of the earliest such clubs in the country. His black, gold, white, and red Packard 5-48 stunt car made several trips north from Los Angeles, and his exploits

⁴⁹⁶ "Auto Excursion to St. Thomas," *Las Vegas Age*, 15 May 1915, 1.

⁴⁹⁷ "St. Thomas Gives Royal Welcome," *Las Vegas Age*, 6 June 1915, 1.

were reported in the *Los Angeles Times*.⁴⁹⁸ His travel accounts and pictures helped greatly to popularize the Arrowhead Trail. A year after the road opened, Anthony waxed rhapsodic about the road in Clark County. He penned, “Of all the desert roads of the great Southwest none holds such a wonderful sight present in such a dramatic manner as the Arrowhead trail between Las Vegas and St. Thomas at which latter place the Cactus Kate party arrived tonight.”⁴⁹⁹ He found more than the road leading up to the town agreeable. St. Thomas impressed him as well. He penned, “St. Thomas at the end of today’s run is a beautiful little town that nestles under the huge cottonwoods in the bottom lands of the Big Muddy River.”⁵⁰⁰ Anthony was also very impressed with the scenery between St. Thomas and St. George, and speculated that the eroded sandstone would prove to be a powerful tourist draw.⁵⁰¹ He had high praise for the residents he met along the way, saying that “nowhere in the United States could be found a more loyal set of skilled road workers” than he found along the Arrowhead Trail.⁵⁰²

Other travelers expressed pleasure with the area as well. One enjoyed his foray into Mormon country because “wherever one goes in the United States, one

⁴⁹⁸ “Cactus Kate’ Name for Car,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 April 1915, VII1.

⁴⁹⁹ “Cactus Kate is in Wonderland,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 May 1916, III4.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ “Cactus Kate is in Wonderland,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 May 1916, III4, and “Cactus Kate is in Salt Lake,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 May 1916, I6. The sandstone was not the only natural landscape feature that was a tourist draw. The salt mines were also an attraction. “Arrowhead Trail, A Common Sense Road Through a Land of Rare Beauty and Romance, Leads from Los Angeles to Salt Lake,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 May 1916, VI15.

⁵⁰² Ibid. Residents were the road crews at the time.

will not find a kindlier or more hospitable people.”⁵⁰³ C. H. Biglow mirrored these sentiments in an article in *Arrowhead Magazine*. Biglow noted, “When you get among the Mormons you are in good hands.”⁵⁰⁴ Several other travelers shared many stories of Mormon hospitality from their trips over the highway.

Not every Arrowhead Trail traveler was as impressed with St. Thomas. The reason was the same that travelers had complained about for the previous two centuries: the weather. One person from central Utah passing through the area had the following to say about the environment:

January in this country is equivalent to a mild March in Utah, and the parallel holds good until July, when Hades is a refrigerator by comparison. During July and August the box-washes are veritable ovens, and those who are compelled to traverse them under a southern Nevada sun will never forget their experience. . . . While you are in Utah are blowing your fingers to keep them warm and walking around in a ten pound overcoat, we are fighting green flies, killing tarantulas, keeping a wary lookout for deadly sidewinders, and going about in our shirt sleeves. . . . There are ten million flies and twenty million mosquitoes to each of the three hundred residents of the Muddy Valley, and with even that proportion of flies are kept busy keeping the inhabitants awake during daylight, and the mosquitoes compel them to take some exercise during the night.⁵⁰⁵

The road did make things better for heat sensitive travelers, if only because it allowed them to travel through the area much more quickly than a horse-drawn wagon.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ C. H. Biglow, “Something About the Arrowhead Trail,” *Washington County* (St. George, Utah), 23 November 1916.

⁵⁰⁵ J. F. Gibbs, “The Wilds of South Nevada,” *Richfield Reaper*, 15 March 1906.



Figure 27: Automobile traffic in St. Thomas. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

Hospitality was important to make travelers feel welcome, but even more important was road maintenance, which could be a challenge without full-time work crews on unpaved roads. The lack of state funds supporting the roads made it even more difficult. This lack led many to the conviction that there was a funding bias for roads around Carson City. Though this may or may not have been true, the papers show that the state road commission did move at a glacial pace in approving projects in the south.⁵⁰⁶ At other times the weather did not cooperate,

⁵⁰⁶ *Las Vegas Sun* editor A. E. Cahlan said that the opposite was true. He wrote “The Valleys’ were a political power in those days and, because they voted together with only a few mavericks, they regularly decided elections—not only county but state. Politicians were quite aware of this fact and spent several million dollars over the years building two bridges over the Virgin River so that Bunkerville would be on the highway.” A. E. Cahlan, “From Where I Sit.” Circa 1920.

as in 1916, when flooding on the Virgin washed out sixty feet of the approach to the bridge near the town. Fortunately, the steel span escaped damage.⁵⁰⁷



Figure 28: Automobile in St. Thomas. Courtesy Boulder City Museum. Harry Gentry's store is on the right. In the foreground is the only concrete conduit/bridge in the town.

The County secured sufficient funds in 1917 to build a road from St. Thomas to Moapa and improve the road to Mesquite. Road workers used St. Thomas as their base of operations for the work.⁵⁰⁸ In 1918, residents took maintenance on the road unto themselves to keep it in good shape for tourists and other travelers.

Residents declared March 8 and 9 of 1919 road days and turned out with rakes and

⁵⁰⁷ United States Department of Agriculture—Soil Conservation Service, Clark County Nevada Conservation District, and Nevada Division of Water Resources, *Flood Hazard Analyses, Las Vegas Wash and Tributaries, Clark County, Nevada*, 11.

⁵⁰⁸ "County Road Funds in Splendid Shape," *Las Vegas Age*, 11 August 1917, 1.

shovels to rake off the loose rock and fill the chuckholes.⁵⁰⁹ The people of the town recognized the advantages the road brought and were not about to lose them through their inattention. When the town found itself in danger, it was not poor road maintenance that was the cause, but decisions made by bureaucrats on the other side of the country.

One thing that these chapters have very clearly shown is that St. Thomas despite its lack of saloons, was in many ways quintessentially “western.” The things that were important to the town were agriculture and transportation. Residents worked hard and played hard. Water, and its scant availability was a central concern for many. Mining played an important part in the economy. Boosters touted the positive of their town with a zeal matched in countless other towns throughout the region. All their efforts to boost the town, the progress they had made, ironically could not save them from progress. Trouble was just around the bend.

The first indicator that something was coming was in the summer of 1919, when Osborn Gentry traveled thirty miles on horseback to deliver a telegram to Harry Armitage, a Colorado River boatman, from the United States Bureau of Reclamation.⁵¹⁰ The news he brought would eventually make two decades of business, highways, and railroads seem to be of little consequence. That little

⁵⁰⁹ “Road Day Planned for the Arrowhead Trail,” *Las Vegas Age*, 23 February 1918, 1.

⁵¹⁰ Jori Provas, “The Death of a Town Called St. Thomas,” 12.

piece of paper proved to be the beginning of the death knell for the community of St. Thomas.

Part III: Drowned

Chapter Seven: Not With a Bang, but a Whimper

In St. Thomas, the twenties started out in fairly encouraging fashion. In March of 1921, the county completed a bridge over the Virgin River at Mesquite. The opening celebration almost depopulated Mesquite, Bunkerville, St. Thomas, Overton, and Logandale, for the day, and saw many attend from Las Vegas as well. Nearly two thousand attended the bridge opening, which was presided over by the Mesquite bishop. The Stake President and another bishop spoke at the ceremony, and the Stake Patriarch dedicated the bridge.⁵¹¹ The bridge made traveling the Arrowhead Trail through the area much more pleasant. However, 1921 proved to be the last year that transportation seemed promising on the Arrowhead Trail for St. Thomas residents. In August 1921, flooding rendered the bridge across the Virgin River at St. Thomas useless. The steel span escaped damage, but the approach on the east side succumbed to the torrent.⁵¹² This mix of elation and disappointment characterized the whole decade of the 1920s for the town.

Boosters reveled in the abundant signs of progress in the Moapa Valley. Not all progress boded well for St. Thomas, however, especially the decision of Congress to build Hoover Dam. Because of its proximity to the proposed dam sites, St. Thomas served as a base of operations for survey crews. Even though

⁵¹¹ "Bridge Opened on Arrowhead Trail," *Washington County* (St. George, Utah), 24 March 1921.

⁵¹² United States Department of Agriculture—Soil Conservation Service, Clark County Nevada Conservation District, and Nevada Division of Water Resources, *Flood Hazard Analyses, Las Vegas Wash and Tributaries, Clark County, Nevada*, 14.

those continuing surveys made it apparent to residents that the town's days were numbered, they continued to boost the town. Boosters efforts were rewarded richly with the discovery of the Lost City - Anasazi ruins right outside the town – and then a pageant in its celebration.

The discovery could not prevent the relocation of the highway far to the north of the town, and certainly did not slow the survey of lands for government purchase and the resolution of mining claims. Most mining claims were settled relatively smoothly, but the appraisal board quickly split into two factions and created the basis for years of legal wrangling and acrimonious discussion. By the end of the appraisal process, the town was largely abandoned.

By itself, the telegram that Armitage received was relatively innocuous. The Bureau of Reclamation contracted with Armitage to carry survey crews on the Colorado in preparation for the construction of a dam. The survey was headed by H. L. Baldwin and assisted by St. Thomas residents Hugh Lord, Ernest Ward, and Sam Gentry, who were chosen in part because their “interests [were] not particularly involved.”⁵¹³ Though the decision to place the dam in Black Canyon rather than Boulder Canyon had yet to be made, it was clear that whatever the dam site, both could bring the water to the 1,250-foot contour line and inundate both St. Thomas and the small nearby community of Kaolin.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹³ H. L. Baldwin, Preliminary Report of the Survey of the Proposed Boulder Canyon Reservoir and Dam Site on the Colorado River in Nevada and Arizona (Department of the Interior, Reclamation Service, February–June 1919), 13, 16–17. The statement that Hugh Lord was not particularly involved with St. Thomas is ironic given how hard he would fight leaving the town in the 1930s.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

Baldwin's initial report was not very flattering toward St. Thomas and the surrounding area. He noted that because the amount of annual rainfall was very small, only the hardiest plants were capable of surviving unaided. He said that "even cactus in its various forms is quite scarce . . . sagebrush, that almost universal habitant of the desert hardly occurs at all." The cattle appeared to be undernourished, being forced to subsist on the meager forage or on grain that had to be shipped in by rail.⁵¹⁵

Baldwin was derisive of area farming. He reported that residents grew wheat, alfalfa, grapes for raisins, cantaloupe, and some garden vegetables, but "none . . . seem profitable, and the community . . . is far from being a thrifty, enterprising, or successful one." There was land that he felt could have been productively farmed but was neglected. He was even critical of the irrigation system, saying that bad management had reduced its effectiveness to almost nothing. His estimate of the total value for all improvements, houses, fences, ditches, and irrigable lands up the Muddy and the Virgin from the confluence of the two streams was less than \$450,000. This estimate did not include the value of railway property. Irrigated land, he claimed, deserved no more than \$125 an acre.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 13-14.

Subsequent government representatives agreed with Baldwin's low estimation of the area.⁵¹⁷

Recognizing the preliminary nature of his survey, Baldwin included with his report some advice for survey crews in the future. He listed the nearest dependable store to obtain supplies as Harry Gentry's store and described Harry as unusually obliging and well-informed about the country.⁵¹⁸ He also reported that a route through St. Thomas was the best way to reach the proposed reservoir site.⁵¹⁹ As the survey crews that followed heeded his advice, the town benefitted economically from the increased traffic.



Figure 29: Bureau of Reclamation party visiting St. Thomas, June 23, 1929. Secretary of Interior Ray Lyman Wilbur in striped tie, Stetson, and sunglasses, right center. Second from Wilbur's right is Elwood Mead, a short fat man wearing a tie. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

⁵¹⁷ "Arizona Exhibit No. 45, Problems of Imperial Valley and Vicinity, S. Doc. No. 142, 67th Congress, 2nd Session, 1922, AKA Fall-Davis Report," Arizona vs. California: 24 California Exhibits, vol. XXIV, miscellaneous.

⁵¹⁸ H. L. Baldwin, Preliminary Report of the Survey of the Proposed Boulder Canyon Reservoir, 10.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

Merle Frehner remembered that there were several survey crews that would come and make St. Thomas their base of operations, staying for several months.⁵²⁰ They used the town for more than lodging and a supply depot. It was also the place where surveyors hired local help. In November 1921, the *Las Vegas Age* reported that the U.S. Reclamation Service was planning to run three drilling outfits to work at Boulder Canyon. The Bureau brought in drill runners from the outside, but required about twenty “good husky” men for laborers, with the hiring done in St. Thomas. There is no record of how many responded; the pay the Bureau was offering was good, \$3.75 a day, minus \$1.50 for board and \$1.50 a month for the hospital.⁵²¹

Though the surveys made it apparent the town was in trouble, many aspects of life in St. Thomas continued on the way they had for the last fifty years. Residents did not share the same dismal view of their agricultural prospects that H. L. Baldwin had, but recognized the necessity for improvements. To accommodate the need for agricultural expertise in southern Nevada, the Farm Bureau established a branch in St. Thomas. Keeping with the tradition of church leaders occupying positions of secular authority, Bishop Robert O. Gibson became president of the bureau.⁵²²

⁵²⁰ Dennis McBride, “The Mormon Atlantis,” 87, and “Reservoirs for Colorado River,” *Salt Lake Mining Review*, 15 August 1919.

⁵²¹ “U.S. Reclamation Service Begins Work,” *Las Vegas Age*, 19 November 1921, 1.

⁵²² Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 114.

Sometimes, towns faced with a problem come up with rather odd solutions. Seizing upon the fact that the valley had experienced shortages of corn, farmers organized the Moapa Valley Corn Club. The club wanted to lay to rest the arguments of any skeptics who thought that corn would not grow in the valley. The club offered prizes for the best corn, poultry, and hogs. They accepted entries in three categories: local, statewide, and interstate. One of the members of the Corn Club was St. Thomas resident Berkeley Bunker, future U.S. Senator from Nevada.⁵²³

Despite a concerted effort to help the agricultural sector flourish, agriculturalists found it increasingly apparent in the 1920s that commercial farming was not a viable enterprise for St. Thomas. Residents still felt that it was a valuable area to grow grain, alfalfa, asparagus, carrots, turnips, cantaloupes, and other crops, but there was not enough output to justify marketing facilities. They raised livestock but not in sufficient quantities for market either. Even when marketable quantities were attempted, things just did not work out. Nellie Gentry decided to attempt to raise some pigs for market. She went to St. George and purchased two white pigs, bringing them back to St. Thomas in a Hudson car. She put them in the basement of a vacant house to raise them. They multiplied, and in two years the whole herd was ready for butchering. Before she was able to do that, the pigs contracted cholera and died.⁵²⁴

⁵²³ "First State Corn Show," *Washington County* (St. George, Utah), 13 December 1923.

⁵²⁴ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 111.

FIRST STATE CORN SHOW

DECEMBER 28 AND 29, 1923

St. Thomas, Nevada

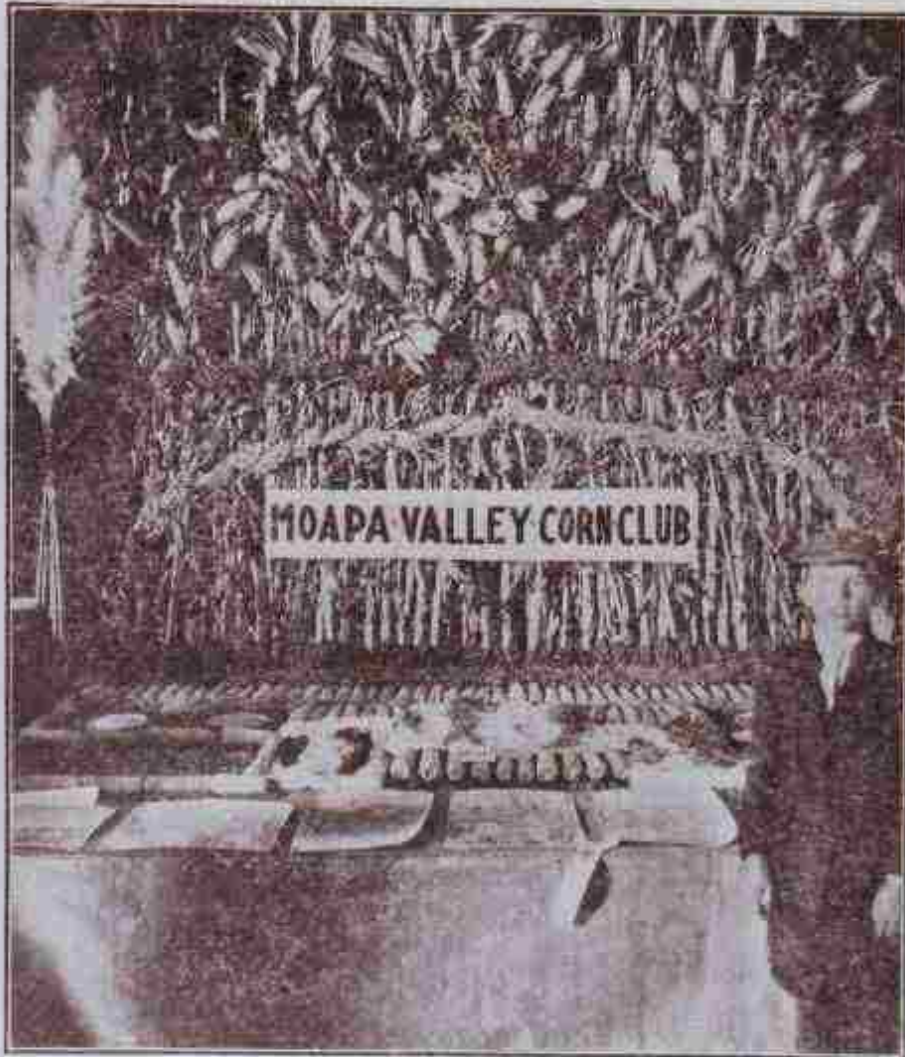


Exhibit at the Southern Nevada Fair, 1923

PROGRAM AND PREMIUM LIST

Under the Auspices of

THE MOAPA VALLEY CORN CLUB

—Logandale, Overton, Koolin, St. Thomas Community Centers; Moapa and
Virgin Valley High Schools, Clark County Farm Bureau, U. of N. Extension,
U. S. Department of Agriculture-Cooperating.

Figure 30: Program of the First State Corn Show, St. Thomas, 1923. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

The rail spur that was so welcomed in 1912 required a large volume of products to justify sending cars to the end of the line. One farmer in St. Thomas found it necessary to haul his truck crops to Overton by automobile because he was not able to produce enough to permit car lot shipment. Part of the problem that St. Thomas faced is that the valley is narrow, and cantaloupes matured up to two weeks faster on the higher slopes than in the center of the valley. If they were to ripen at the same time, they would have had enough to permit car lot shipment.⁵²⁵ Even if that were the case, the railroad and refrigeration still ruined the market for St. Thomas melons. The melons in California's Imperial Valley ripened earlier and in much larger quantities, inundating the market before those from the Muddy Valley were ready for distribution.⁵²⁶

Major flooding that destroyed crops in 1920 and 1932 did not help the situation either.⁵²⁷ Even if the floods were not catastrophic, they still did damage. Ruth Cornia remembers that one year they had a flood three Sundays in row, covering their gardens, grapevines, fruit trees, etc. In an attempt to save the grapes, they waded out in the floodwater and picked them. They dipped the grapes

⁵²⁵ W. W. Johnston, Classification of Privately Owned Lands—Boulder Canyon Reservoir—Boulder Canyon Project (Department of the Interior, Reclamation Service 18 March 1931), 1.

⁵²⁶ Inez Gibson Waymire, "Robert O. and Edith H. Gibson."

⁵²⁷ United States Department of Agriculture—Soil Conservation Service, Clark County Nevada Conservation District, and Nevada Division of Water Resources, *Flood Hazard Analyses, Las Vegas Wash and Tributaries, Clark County, Nevada*, 13, 32.

in a weak lye solution and set them out to dry into raisins. Even that was a failure because flies got to them and they had to be thrown out.⁵²⁸

The twenties were not uniformly bad for St. Thomas. The discovery of ancient Native American ruins focused the attention of many in the county on the town on the Lower Muddy. In 1924 excavation began on the Lost City, Anasazi ruins north of St. Thomas. There was great excitement among political leaders and scientists about the possibilities the ruins offered. Governor Scrugham of Nevada recognized the site as a possible boon to tourism. Promoting the site, he said “the most important contributions to archaeology ever found in the United States are being dug from the ruins of the buried city.”⁵²⁹ Academics focused on the discovery that residents of the pueblo appeared to have developed their own written language.⁵³⁰ Even the local residents were excited about the Lost City. Mark R. Harrington of the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City superintended the excavation. He expressed his pleasure that the ranchers and residents to the Moapa Valley went out of their way to help the archaeological team perform their work.⁵³¹

Residents had a good reason to be helpful. Any tourism to the area generated revenue. In national news, St. Thomas became associated with the Lost

⁵²⁸ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 75.

⁵²⁹ “Governor Describes Nevada’s Buried City,” *Las Vegas Age*, 6 December 1924, 1.

⁵³⁰ Leslie Higginbotham, “Lost City Discovered in Nevada Sands,” *New York Times*, XX4.

⁵³¹ Mark R. Harrington, “A Primitive Pueblo City in Nevada,” 262.

City. *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* carried stories about the discovery and what it meant for those interested in the early history of the Southwest. The *Los Angeles Times* story showed great excitement about the site. It read that it was “probably right here in the Moapa Valley that the ancestors of some of the modern Pueblo tribes learned how to build permanent dwellings, to weave fine cloth, to make good pottery, to practice agriculture—in brief, developed the arts which, in after days, made them one of the most highly civilized peoples in America north of Mexico.”⁵³² Another article said that a trip to the site was “perhaps the most interesting and historically significant motor-car trip that can be made.”⁵³³ News of the discovery even found its way into the *Times* of London.⁵³⁴

To capitalize more fully on the tourist possibilities of the Lost City, Governor Scrugham conceived the idea of holding a pageant on the site. The theatre department at Brigham Young University produced it. They brought in Native Americans from New Mexico and Arizona to augment the local Paiute used in scenes. The pageant was a triumphalist narrative of the history of the valley. It showed the early residents of the Muddy working and playing at the Lost City, the ways of the Paiute, and the travels of early explorers. It showed the arrival of the

⁵³² “Pueblo Theory Substantiated,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 1923, A3.

⁵³³ Al Parmenter, “Indian Gone From City Thousands of Years,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 December 1930, E1.

⁵³⁴ “Archeology in the U.S.A. Very Ancient Ruins Found in Nevada,” *The Times* (London), 13 March 1925, 13.

Mormon settlers and “civilization,” their departure, and events up to the current day. The Union Pacific Railroad, one of the sponsors of the event, ran a special train to St. Thomas for the event. Approximately 2,500 attended the pageant, the largest crowd ever assembled in the valley.⁵³⁵



Figure 31: Lost City excavation site. Pueblo Grande Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

Through the surveys and attention from the Lost City, St. Thomas seemed to continue to function as a community. The residents still knew how to throw a party as well. Their 1921 July 4 celebration was sufficiently spectacular to garner

⁵³⁵ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 358.

front-page attention from the *Las Vegas Age*. Reporter Dick Arnold said that the event brought in people from the entire Moapa Valley, including about one hundred Paiute from the reservation. There was horseracing, auto racing, and rodeo events. The funds for the day's sports and barbecue came voluntarily from residents of St. Thomas. With the exception of the dance, the organizers charged nobody for participation.⁵³⁶

There were many positives for the town in the early twenties, but as the decade wore on, things began to unravel. When the bridge approach was washed out, though it was not the first time it had happened, it was the first time that it had occurred when there was talk of putting the entire area under a reservoir. Because of the uncertainty and high costs associated with road construction in the area, the county commissioners decided to abandon the Arrowhead Trail route through St. Thomas. They routed the road through the Apex Summit, as the commissioners determined it would be a cheaper route to maintain.⁵³⁷ Interstate 15 and Highway 93 today follow this new route.

Planners did not arrive at this decision lightly. In 1920, Division Engineer C. G. Benson of the State Highway Department signed off on the highway continuing to go through St. Thomas because it would do the greatest good to the greatest number of people. The other route would bypass St. Thomas and Bunkerville on the way to Mesquite. The route through St. Thomas also promoted tourism in the

⁵³⁶ Dick Arnold, "St. Thomas Celebrates on July Fourth," *Las Vegas Age*, 9 July 1921, 1.

⁵³⁷ "Definite Plans for Highway Construction," *Las Vegas Age*, 11 February 1922, 5.

Valley of Fire, which was a great asset to the area. Benson's report noted that on average, twenty-nine cars went through St. Thomas daily.⁵³⁸ The town was also already equipped to deal with tourist traffic. Roughly halfway between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City, St. Thomas offered shade, a hotel, good food, and a garage with experienced mechanics to keep cars running well. One of the businesses in town, the Arrowhead Store, catered to tourist traffic. It sold groceries and candies, had automobile service facilities, and operated a free campground.⁵³⁹ These assets made St. Thomas southern Nevada's "first widely publicized tourist arcadia," even if Rox Whitmore and Harry Gentry did have a regular income from pulling cars from the Virgin at two dollars apiece.⁵⁴⁰

Before making the determination, members of the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce, the chairman of the County Board of Commissioners, and the district engineer of the State Highway Commission went on a surveying expedition to explore the feasibility of the route change. After driving over the existing and proposed routes, they favored moving the road because the new shorter route would have fewer grades and cost less to construct. Another motivation for relocating the road was that Nevada could not obtain any federal funds to repair the St. Thomas route because of the likelihood of the town's inundation.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁸ "Reports on Route for Arrowhead Trail," *Las Vegas Age*, 8 November 1919, 1, 6.

⁵³⁹ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 121.

⁵⁴⁰ Don Ashbaugh, "Ghost Towns of Nevada."

⁵⁴¹ "Favor Changes in Route of Highway," *Las Vegas Age*, 4 March 1922, 1.

Another factor may have been that in 1921, copper prices dropped sharply and the Grand Gulch mine stopped shipping ore through St. Thomas, so mining traffic had become a non-issue. After considering all the factors, the commissioners felt keeping the road on the same route an untenable position.

St. Thomas residents were likely quite aware of the decision of the County Commission. Despite that knowledge, in March 1922, residents of St. Thomas and Bunkerville raked forty miles of the Arrowhead Trail to make travel over it more pleasant.⁵⁴² This was a good decision, as relocating the road would require a significant amount of time; meanwhile, it remained the only all-weather automobile route between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles. Traffic on the road continued to be good, as if “the entire east was moving westward.”⁵⁴³ In 1925, however, the good times came to an end. The bridge over the Virgin at St. Thomas burned and traffic was routed through Glendale and Mesquite.⁵⁴⁴ The move must have been very bitter for St. Thomas residents, considering that congressional approval for the dam required three more years.

⁵⁴² “Arrowhead Trail in Good Condition Says Lecturer,” *Washington County* (St. George, Utah), 9 March 1922.

⁵⁴³ “Sierra Summit Not Open Yet,” *Las Vegas Age*, 6 May 1922.

⁵⁴⁴ Jori Provas, “The Death of a Town Called St. Thomas,” 12, and Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 53.

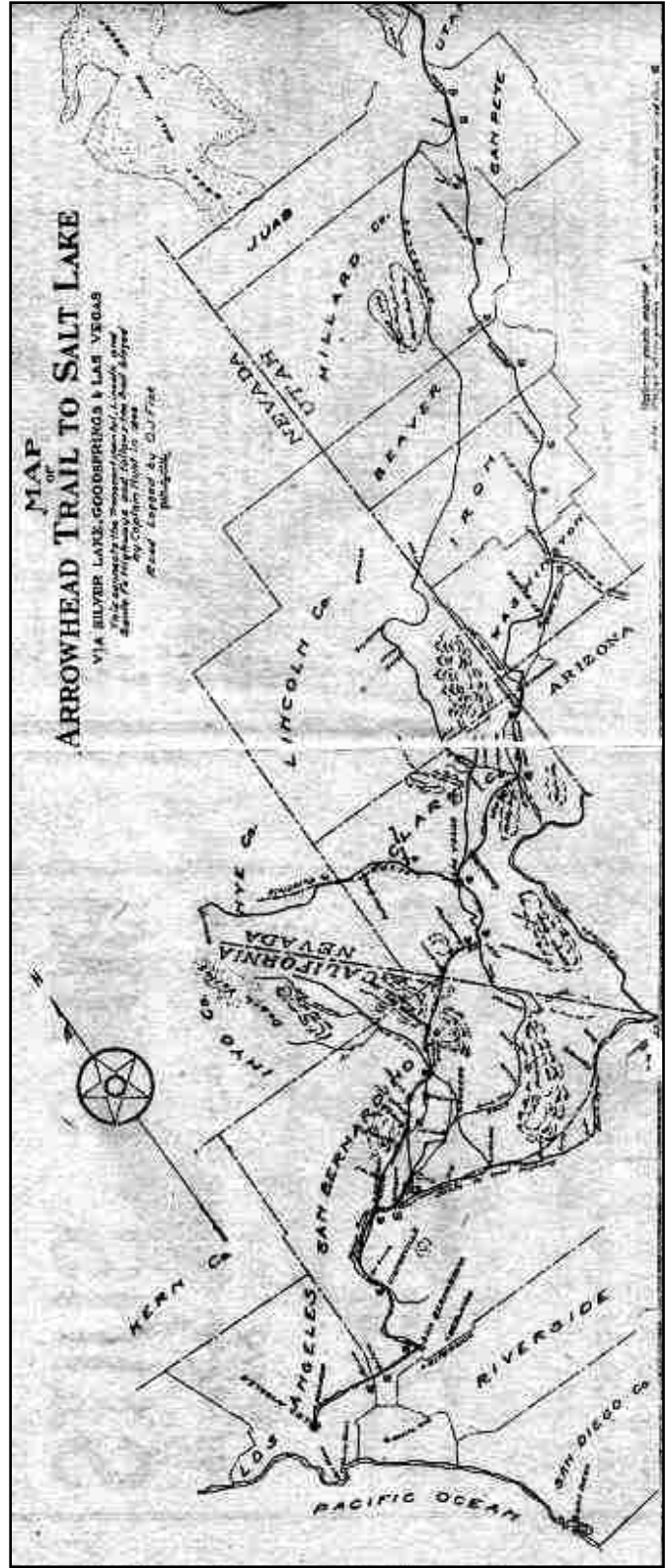


Figure 32: Map of Arrowhead Trail, Las Vegas Age, August 28, 1920.

On December 21, 1928, President Calvin Coolidge signed the bill approving the Boulder Canyon Project. Approval for the initial funding took until July 1930. Only then did the government begin making real plans for relocating the 234 residents of St. Thomas and providing compensation for their lands that would end up seventy feet under the surface of the water.⁵⁴⁵ In order to do that, the government required a detailed appraisal of the entire area. Secretary of the Interior Ray Lyman Wilbur began assembling an appraisal board to complete the task. By September, Cecil W. Creel, director of the Agricultural Extension Division and professor of Agricultural Extension in the College of Agriculture at the University of Nevada, Reno, received an appointment as one of the appraisers, as did Harry Crain, an appraiser from Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Creel suggested that the citizens of St. Thomas gather and elect one of their own to serve on the appraisal board to protect their interests. During this election, Levi Syphus received forty-eight out of fifty votes. Syphus, the brother of Ellen Gentry, had served on the boards of several valley enterprises. The Nevada State Democratic Party leaders urged Syphus to run for governor, but he declined because he felt the fact that he was both a Mormon and single would handicap him in a race.⁵⁴⁶ Tasker Oddie, United States Senator from Nevada, wrote Secretary Wilbur to endorse Syphus. He indicated that he had known Syphus for

⁵⁴⁵ "St. Thomas Gains in Population," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 26 April 1930, 1:4.

⁵⁴⁶ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 229–30.

many years and could “state unhesitatingly that he is a man of the highest honor, integrity, and ability, and I strongly recommend that he be appointed without further selection . . . This will save unnecessary trouble and complications, and you will be perfectly safe in following this suggestion.”⁵⁴⁷ Wilbur followed the wishes of Senator Oddie and the residents of St. Thomas and appointed Syphus to serve on the board.

With the board assembled, it was ready to proceed, but there was some disagreement on how to proceed. In December 1930, Harry Crain wrote Elwood Mead, secretary of the Bureau of Reclamation, indicating that he felt business deals in general would be better for both parties if concluded quickly. He recommended a quick survey and offer on land. To sweeten the deal for the landowners, the government would allow them to live on the land until the department needed it. The biggest problem with that approach, Crain explained, was that Cecil Creel had discovered that some people had bought tracts of land in the area to speculate on. Crain told Creel that this should not be a problem, because if they were ignored until the last moment, “we will be in a position to talk pretty straight to them.”⁵⁴⁸

In Mead’s reply, he agreed that it was usually the case that speedy business deals were most satisfactory, but not in this situation. Funds earmarked for

⁵⁴⁷ Senator Tasker Oddie to Ray Lyman Wilbur, Secretary of the Interior, 19 September 1930, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

⁵⁴⁸ Harry E. Crain to Elwood Mead, 15 December 1930, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

purchasing land in the reservoir site drew 4 percent interest as long as it stayed in government accounts, so there was no advantage to the government to purchase lands as quickly as possible, other than to get the matter over with. He agreed, however, that the best approach for dealing with recalcitrant landowners was to put them off as long as possible.⁵⁴⁹ He also approved of letting previous owners stay on the land after the sale, but with the caveat that the termination of lease agreements occur before completion of the dam. Mead left the lease terms to the board to consider when affixing values to the land.⁵⁵⁰

Secretary Mead underestimated the divisive potential of the survey. Crain expressed concern about the appraisers meeting resistance from landowners while they carried out the appraisal. Mead did not feel that this should be a problem because the board would only declare the land's value, not negotiate the land purchases.⁵⁵¹ It seems odd that he felt that just because the board would not be the ones handing out the money, they should encounter no significant resistance, yet that is what happened. Perhaps he was unconcerned because he did not think there would be much variation in land value from one tract to another. In a letter from Mead to W. W. Johnson, who apparently was an engineer for the Bureau of Reclamation, he requested that all private lands in the proposed reservoir be classified prior to appraisal, so the appraised price of each tract be reasonably

⁵⁴⁹ Elwood Mead to Harry E. Crain, 18 December 1930, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

uniform, “as it should be between various tracts.”⁵⁵² That survey reported that there were 1,293.8 acres of cultivated land and 3,561.9 acres of uncultivated land, with four different categories of land values based on use.⁵⁵³

There government also needed to resolve the issue of the numerous mining claims surrounding St. Thomas. W. B. Acker, comptroller general of the United States to the Secretary of the Interior, lamented that there were so many mining claims in the area, it would take almost twelve thousand dollars just to publish proceedings to take over the claims, which he did not have in his budget.⁵⁵⁴ There were a few valid claims that the government settled, but there were so many mining claims that were essentially worthless that the Bureau of Reclamation records were replete with copies of letters denying mining claims. The typical letter looked something like this:

Sir or Madam: [depending on owner]

By office letter ___ of _____, adverse proceedings were directed against ____ mining claim in approximately Sec. ___ T. ___ R. ___ upon the charges: 1. That the land within the limits of the claim is non-mineral in character. 2. That minerals in sufficient quantities have not been discovered within the limits of the claim to constitute a valid discovery. 3. That the mining location has been abandoned . . . the location is hereby declared null and void and the United States has taken possession of the land covered thereby for its own uses and purposes.

⁵⁵² Elwood Mead to W. W. Johnson, 23 December 1930, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

⁵⁵³ W. W. Johnston, Classification of Privately Owned Lands, 3.

⁵⁵⁴ W. B. Acker, Comptroller General of the United States to the Secretary of the Interior, 27 March 1931, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

The case is closed.⁵⁵⁵

Very few who received such letters contested the actions taken against their claims.

The appraisal of lands in and around St. Thomas did not go nearly so smoothly. The appraisal board quickly broke into two factions, with Levi Syphus fighting with Harry Crain and Cecil Creel. Being a resident of the town gave Syphus a different perspective on what had value, which was beyond what the market would bear, which he tried to explain to the others on the board. He wrote to Crain and Creel in April 1931:

The people have built themselves schools and churches, have established a communal and social life. All of these things have value and are to be completely destroyed. They cannot remain in the vicinity or enjoy the fruits of their past developments in these respects. The land is all taken and privately owned and the ousted settlers occupying the lands and towns to be flooded must move to an entirely new locality. As a consequence the benefits which the land enjoyed as being a part of the town and community center are items of value which should be considered . . . Climate allows crops grown year round, two and sometimes three crops on same land in one year. For \$6 an acre, phosphorous fertilizer vastly increases yield. Alfalfa yields over ten year period justify \$800 an acre. Market price is not a fair way to judge value because the announcement of the dam stops people from wanting to buy the land. Even if it were not for that, there have not been enough recent sales to be able to judge what a fair price should be. It is an established precedent that owners of land are entitled to the value of the water right taken, even if they had not used that right. The agricultural survey shows underlying water, so land not under cultivation could be so used and should be paid for as such. There are numerous cases where the

⁵⁵⁵ This boilerplate was extracted from USDOJ-GLO Acting Commissioner to Stanley Summeril, 16 August 1931, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

owners took the government to court and won, getting much more for their lands.⁵⁵⁶

Syphus did recognize that as a member of the board, he was more than just a resident of St. Thomas, and he had to keep the best interests of the government in mind as well. He attempted to reconcile this by stating, “To the best of my knowledge and belief, lands generally elsewhere situate under like climatic condition to those of the Moapa Valley and having other similar favorable opportunities and conditions range higher in price than that at which I would evaluate the lands to be taken for Boulder Reservoir.”⁵⁵⁷ Crain and Creel were not moved by his logic.

While the appraisal board was wrangling over valuations, some of the residents of St. Thomas were getting restless and again enlisted Senator Oddie to contact the Secretary of the Interior on their behalf. Senator Oddie had some leverage beyond membership in the Senate. He, along with Reed Smoot, U.S. Senator from Utah and a Mormon, were members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, which oversaw the Department of Interior’s budget. He also had friends in St. Thomas, friends who were anxious to know when the government would make them an offer for their homes and farms in the area to be covered by Lake Mead. Part of their anxiety came from the fact that they did know if they should invest in new equipment and farm machinery needed to properly cultivate

⁵⁵⁶ Levi Syphus to Harry E. Crain and Cecil W. Creel, 13 April 1931, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver, 15.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

their farms. Oddie wrote that “It seems fair that these people should have some intimation as soon as possible as to when their lands will be taken over and paid for. Delay will cause them additional losses. In my opinion, this question should be decided with as little delay as possible.”⁵⁵⁸

In the meantime, the Nevada Land and Livestock Company, which owned a large chunk of the lands in the reservoir site, requested a meeting with the appraisal board. They wanted to show their lands were especially valuable, not because of any agricultural output, but for becoming part of a reservoir that generated electrical power. They asked the board to consider this when they made valuations. While waiting for their meeting, company owners attempted to organize St. Thomas residents to bargain as a unit. J. R. Alexander, district counsel for the Bureau, was concerned about the move, but realized that they could do nothing but let the effort “run its course.”⁵⁵⁹ Part of what Alexander was concerned about is that he conflated the owners of the Nevada Land and Livestock Company, many of whom were prominent church members, with the Church itself. He was concerned because the Church had greater resources to contest appraisals and offers than individual landowners or the livestock company would. The effort apparently “ran its course” as Bureau records contain no more references to it.

⁵⁵⁸ Senator Tasker Oddie to Curtis D. Wilbur, Secretary of the Interior, 22 August 1931, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver. One cannot help but wonder if the effectiveness of this letter was blunted by an error in addressing it. The letter is directed to Curtis D. Wilbur, Secretary of the Interior. Curtis Wilbur was a judge for the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco and brother to Ray Lyman Wilbur who was the Secretary of the Interior.

⁵⁵⁹ J. H. Alexander to Richard J. Coffey, 2 March 1931, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA Denver.

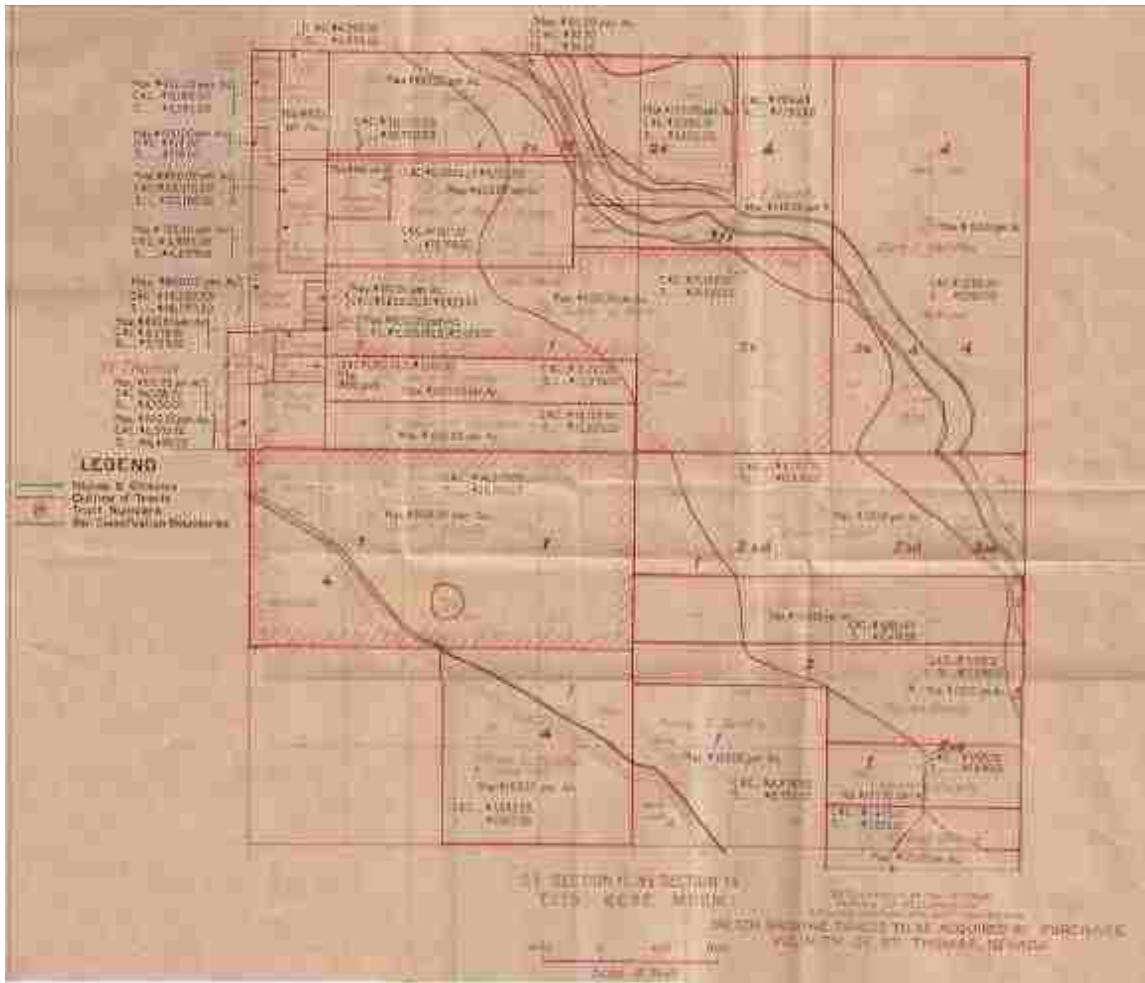


Figure 33: Map showing appraisal details. NARA Denver.

The delay in making offers on land was not the result of any intransigence on the part of the Department of the Interior, but in reconciling the appraisals of the divided board. By August 1931, Elwood Mead was beginning to feel pressure from his superiors to expedite the completion of the appraisal. He felt that there was no hope of reconciling the different valuations, but if he and the chief engineer, Walker Young, did not move quickly, they would “have a good deal of explaining to do.” He recommended that a majority and a minority report be filed

and have Secretary Wilbur decide what course to take. Mead, however, recommended accepting the Crain and Creel valuations.⁵⁶⁰

The government finally published the appraisal report in October 1931. There were major differences between the majority report of Crain and Creel and Syphus' minority report. Part of that stemmed not just from the fact that Syphus was from the area, but the methods that both sides used. Syphus merely assigned a value to each of the 266 tracts, while Crain and Creel attempted to justify their value estimates. They stated the land classification (agricultural, with or without water, in town, orchards, etc.) and what part of the total represented water rights or stock in the Muddy Valley Irrigation Company.⁵⁶¹ The two reports agreed on forty-eight tracts, leaving 218 tracts in dispute. Syphus was generally more generous in his appraisals, but his valuations were actually lower on twenty tracts than Crain and Creel's. The tracts that the board agreed on covered 4620.12 acres, all uncultivated. Only twenty-one tracts had water rights and were valued at \$2.50 an acre; the rest were valued lower. The value of the tracts agreed upon was only \$15,525, only 1-2 percent of the total value of land appraised.⁵⁶²

Following are charts showing the difference between the appraisals.

⁵⁶⁰ Elwood Mead to Chief Engineer [Walker Young], 26 August 1931, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

⁵⁶¹ Walker R. Young and J. R. Alexander, *Appraisal of Lands Which Will Be Flooded by Hoover Reservoir—Boulder Canyon Project* (Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, 7 October 1931), 11.

⁵⁶² Walker R. Young and J. R. Alexander, *Appraisal of Lands Which Will Be Flooded by Hoover Reservoir*. NARA Denver.

Table 3: Summary of the Syphus Appraisal.⁵⁶³

Total Appraised Price of Land	\$829,728.50
Total Appraised Price of Improvements	\$131,430.25
Grand Total	\$961,158.75

Table 4: Summary of the Crain and Creel Minimum Appraisal.⁵⁶⁴

Acreage Cultivated	1,509.15
Acreage Uncultivated	6,517.72
Total Acreage	8,026.90
Total Number of Tracts	218
Average Size of Tracts in Acres	36.82
Total Appraised Price of Land W/O Water and Improvements	\$352,305.15
Average Price per Acre of Land W/O Water and Improvements	\$43.89
Total Number of Tracts with Improvements	71
Total Appraised Price of Improvements	\$132,559.25
Average Price per Acre for Improvements	\$16.51
Est. Number Preferred Shares of Muddy Valley Irrigation Co.	936.95
Est. Number Common Shares of Muddy Valley Irrigation Co.	3,084.15
Total Appraised Price of Shares of Stock	\$112,460.90
Est. Total Appraised Price of Water	\$115,999.90
Average Price per Acre for Water Rights	\$14.45
Total Appraised Price of Land W/Improvements and Water	\$600,864.30
Average Price per Acre of Land W/Improvements and Water	\$74.85

Crain and Creel Maximum Appraisal, which is basically an additional \$100 per acre.

Table 5: Appraisal Comparison

Total Appraised Price of Land and Water	\$700,469.15
Total Appraised Price of Improvements	\$132,559.25
Grand Total	\$833,028.40

Predictably, the Bureau of Reclamation chose to follow Crain and Creel's minimum appraisal values, releasing their findings to the public and burying the

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 8-11.

minority report. The owners of each of the appraised tracts received letters advising them of how much the government was willing to pay for their land (figure 50). There were many who owned land in the area that were disappointed when they did not receive an offer to purchase their lands. The Bureau of Reclamation fielded many letters from people offering their land for sale and requests to know if the government might need their land at some future date.

Newspapers throughout the West almost immediately began analyzing the offers and discussing what the offers meant for the residents of St. Thomas and Kaolin. Area ranchers were the first people notified of their land's appraised value. The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reported that St. Thomas ranchers were to receive an average of two thousand dollars, or slightly less than forty dollars an acre.⁵⁶⁵ The *Garfield County* (Panguitch, Utah) reported that approximately half a million dollars was in store for landowners.⁵⁶⁶ As more information became available, the papers continued to follow the story. The August 4, 1932, edition of the *Review-Journal* listed the names, acreage, and prices for each of the tracts sold.⁵⁶⁷ Certainly part of why the appraisal values were front-page news in the region was that the country was in the midst of the Great Depression, and two thousand dollars would have been warmly welcomed by most Americans.

⁵⁶⁵ "St. Thomas Ranchers Receive Average of \$2000 For Holdings to Be Flooded," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 28 November 1931, 1:7.

⁵⁶⁶ "Ranch Owners Get Offers For Lands, Water," *Garfield County* (Utah), 11 December 1931.

⁵⁶⁷ "Nearly Third of Million Paid Out For Land to Be Inundated," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 4 August 1932, 3:1-3.

Las Vegas, Nevada
_____, 1931

According to our records you are the owner of the following described land within the area required for the reservoir of the Souhier Canyon Project:

containing _____ acres.

In the result of an appraisal recently completed the United States will pay you \$ _____ for the acreage above described, with appropriate reductions or increases for the area actually conveyed, and subject to the terms of a contract hereinafter mentioned.

In addition, payment will be made for wash water stock or other water rights which are owned and used in connection with this land. Preferred stock in the Muddy Valley Irrigation Company is appraised at \$10.00 per share and common stock at \$6.00 per share.

In accordance with governmental procedure you will be required to enter into a contract containing the detailed terms and conditions governing the purchase of the property in question.

If you are willing to accept the above offer please advise this office and furnish a detailed description of your land and the water rights involved for insertion in the contract. Perhaps the description could best be obtained by furnishing your deed for copying. It will, of course, be returned when copied.

After execution of the contract by yourself and the United States you will be required to furnish a policy of title insurance or at the option of the United States a complete abstract of title for your land as provided in the contract.

Very truly yours,

~~Walter H. Young~~
Construction Engineer

NOV 12 31 60447

Figure 34: Purchase notice boilerplate. NARA Denver.

Since St. Thomas residents faced imminent dispossession from their homes, they exhibited understandable consternation over the appraisal's results. Many

would likely have objected strenuously to their valuation even if Syphus had been able to dictate land prices. The Bureau was able to resolve some of their concerns with relative ease. Many residents resented the fact that the government required title insurance, especially since if the government were to condemn the land residents would have no guarantees that the title was free of defects. They requested that a current abstract of title showing no defects along with a deed be sufficient to allow the purchase to proceed, which the government accepted.⁵⁶⁸

Another shared issue was that Levi Syphus had been so obviously ignored as a member of the appraisal board. Richard Lyman, a LDS apostle who had written on behalf of St. Thomas residents, wrote to Elwood Mead that St. Thomas residents felt the Bureau had an unfriendly attitude toward them. They felt the Bureau opposed putting Syphus on the board but acceded because of outside pressure. Once he was on the board, he had very little influence on its decisions.⁵⁶⁹

The discussion between Walker Young and Elwood Mead on how to respond to Richard Lyman's letter is revealing. Young wrote:

In discussing the matter of the ignoring of Mr. Syphus as one member of the Board of Appraisers we did not deem it advisable to state in the draft of [the] letter that we think that Mr. Syphus was more of an advocate than an appraiser and that in performing his services on the board we gained the impression that he was acting more as a agent of the land owners in getting as high prices as

⁵⁶⁸ Clark, Richards, and Bowen to Judge Dent, 4 April 1932, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

⁵⁶⁹ Richard Lyman to Elwood Mead, 11 October 1932, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

possible rather than as an impartial appraiser whose duty it was to be fair to the United States as well as the land owners.⁵⁷⁰

Though they would never admit it publicly, the Bureau's attitude toward Syphus was exactly what Lyman and others believed. His appointment was a mere sop for the residents of St. Thomas and Kaolin.

Mr. Stewart wrote Elwood Mead asking for an explanation of the discrepancies between the majority and minority reports. He requested information on nine tracts.

Table 6: Appraisal Comparison Detail

Tract Number	Syphus Minority Appraisal	Crain & Creel Majority Appraisal
124	\$1,050	\$200
170	400	200
217	5430	2,025
227	250	300
228	750	750
229	1,980	750
230	600	225
231	3060	1,075
232	660	250
Totals	\$14,180	\$5,775

Young and Mead also discussed Stewart's letter. Their disgust with Syphus over this is apparent. Walker noted that he did not request information on three other tracts that he owned but upon which the full board agreed. The Bureau never made the minority report public, so this information was only available from Syphus. Young wrote "In this connection it will be remembered that Mr. Stewart under date of September 6, 1930 wrote a letter to the secretary, highly

⁵⁷⁰ Walker R. Young to Elwood Mead, 4 November 1932, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

recommending Mr. Syphus as to his fitness as one of the appraisers and rather urging that he be appointed as such.”⁵⁷¹

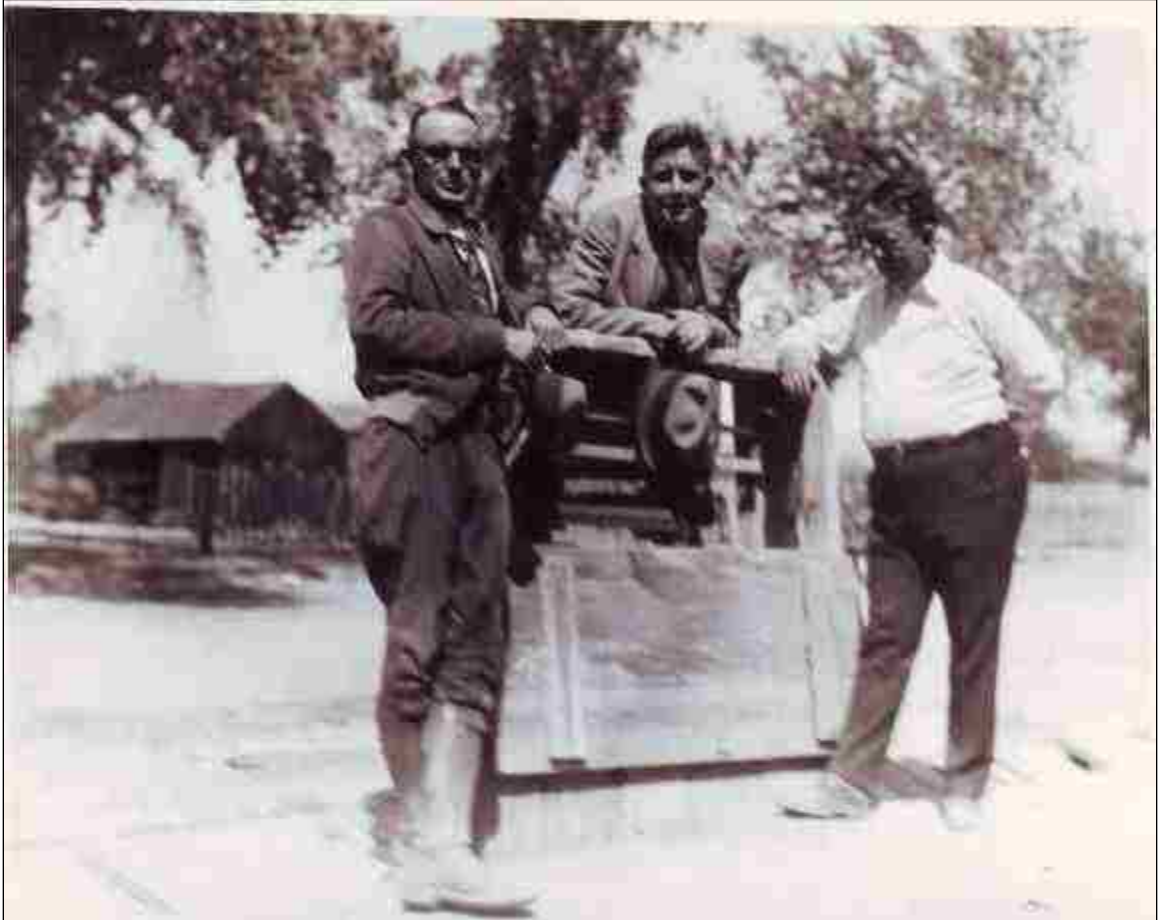


Figure 35: Walker Young on the left. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

Some of the disagreement over valuations arose because of cultural misunderstanding. According to Lowry Nelson in his landmark *The Mormon Village*, LDS communities were unique because they used the village system. Outside of Mormondom, dispersed farmsteads predominated.⁵⁷² Because St.

⁵⁷¹ Walker R. Young to Elwood Mead, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA.

⁵⁷² Nelson listed four reasons why the village system was preferred by the Mormons. 1. It provided security. 2. It facilitated cooperative efficiency by placing the members of the community in ready touch with the directing officers of the group. 3. It made for contentment, in that social intercourse was

Thomas was a farm village, residents valued the land in town more than farmland, regardless of water rights or productivity. Crain, though an appraiser, was not from an area that was predominantly Mormon and did not understand how the Saints valued land in town. Creel's specialty was agriculture. Besides these factors, they were in a sense advising the government to offer a price that was reasonable for the rest of the country.

St. Thomas bishop Robert O. Gibson seemed confused by Crain's and Creel's apparent ineptness, writing that what "hurt the people most is the great variation or inequality in the prices that have been fixed on property which actually has almost exactly the same *intrinsic* worth" (italics mine).⁵⁷³ Gibson was incredulous that the board would "place a valuation three times as great on areas which are down in the fields and cannot even be reached by alley ways, as they are placed on other areas located next to the principle streets in the city."⁵⁷⁴ For the Saints in St. Thomas, it seemed that the board arbitrarily paid high prices to some and low prices to others.⁵⁷⁵

facilitated. Even in the pioneer stages these villages were of sufficient size to make possible the maintenance of religious, educational, and other social institutions. 4. By separation of residence areas from arable lands a more advantageous utilization of the lands was made possible – common pasturing of the fields after harvest, common fencing at first, were made possible by the fact that crops were stored and stacked in the village. Lowry Nelson, *The Mormon Village: A Pattern and Technique of Land Settlement* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952), 52-3.

⁵⁷³ Richard Lyman to Elwood Mead, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

Many of the objections raised came down to the fact that the government was requiring the people to give up their roots, their emotional investment in the land. No amount of money could satisfy them. The displaced lamented other intangibles. Walker Young recalled that John Perkins, who owned a house in St. Thomas, brought up the subject of the value of shade with the engineer. Young at first thought this was kind of a silly thing to worry about, but when he reflected upon it, he realized that shade was very valuable in St. Thomas, and that “there wasn’t anything on his place worth as much as that shade created by trees he’d planted years and years ago.”⁵⁷⁶

Because so many strenuously objected to the assigned value that their land received, talk began to circulate about a possible reappraisal. Walker Young and J. R. Alexander considered the possibility in their analysis of the newly completed appraisal. They felt that the poor lands appraised at \$2.50 an acre received the proper appraisal as for use value, but the price was so small it might force the government to condemn the land. The small offers left landowners with little to lose over challenging the valuation in court. They worried there was little likelihood that a jury would award less than \$2.50 and would likely award more. If challengers received more, it would create discontent with those who settled for the lower price. One Bureau official, Pr. Walker, suggested raising the minimum

⁵⁷⁶ As quoted in Dennis McBride, “The Mormon Atlantis,” 89.

price per acre to \$5.00, but worried that those who owned lands that were more valuable would want their prices raised proportionally as well.⁵⁷⁷

Young broached the subject to J. R. Alexander, district council, and Elwood Mead in early December 1931. They desired not to publish the appraised values, but a demand from the bank of Pioche for the valuations on some of their properties forced publication.⁵⁷⁸ The resurvey effort seemed to gain some steam as the dissatisfied landowners hired the St. George law firm of Clark, Richards, and Bowen to represent them.

Elwood Mead was firm in his refusal to consider revisiting the appraisal. In a letter to Senator Oddie, Mead wrote that he reviewed all the records of the appraisal and everything seemed in order. He expressed the opinion that the lawyers representing the landowners were little more than opportunistic rabble-rousers whose arguments were largely without merit. Mead said the values assigned seemed liberal at the time and were far more generous in light of the valley's current agricultural condition.⁵⁷⁹ Mead minced no words with Apostle Richard Lyman. Mead wrote, "If people had a problem with the appraisal, they would need to challenge it in the courts."⁵⁸⁰ He said that Lyman did not realize the

⁵⁷⁷ Walker R. Young and J. R. Alexander, *Appraisal of Lands Which Will Be Flooded by Hoover Reservoir*, 4.

⁵⁷⁸ Walker R. Young and J. R. Alexander to Elwood Mead, 2 December 1931, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

⁵⁷⁹ Elwood Mead to Senator Tasker L. Oddie, 14 April 1932, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

⁵⁸⁰ Elwood Mead to Richard Lyman, 1 November 1932, Department of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

“friendly spirit” which prompted appraising the land years before it was actually needed. If residents did not like the appraisal, they were free to reject the offer. Further, he wrote that holding out for the value listed in the minority report was ill-advised, because its valuations “were so far out of line with prices being paid for farm property elsewhere that there seemed to be no economic justifications of its values.”⁵⁸¹

Mead’s arguments did not satisfy those who were unhappy with the assigned value of their land, but Mead was at least able to quash talk of opening up the appraisal again. It was clear that “there was nothing to argue,” said William Murphy, who was born and raised in St. Thomas. “The government said, ‘Move out or we’re going to flood you.’”⁵⁸²

The town had begun to die when state engineers rerouted the highway through Apex. It began in earnest once the appraisal was finished and the government began sending notices to owners. Staying was not an option, so the soon-to-be-displaced began looking for places to go and establish new homes before their temporary leases on their previous homes ran out. Some tore down their homes and rebuilt them at Overton, Alamo, or Nepae, a “Y” on the railroad only a short distance north of St. Thomas but above the projected shoreline.⁵⁸³ A group of people went to Mount Trumbull on the Arizona Strip.

⁵⁸¹ Elwood Mead to Richard Lyman, Department of Reclamation Collection, NARA.

⁵⁸² Dennis McBride, “The Mormon Atlantis,” 89.

⁵⁸³ Florence Lee Jones, “St. Thomas Ends Second Cycle,” 1:1–8.



Figure 36: Moving a house from St. Thomas, 1938. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.



Figure 37: Abandoned foundation, 1935. Bureau of Reclamation, Office of Chief Engineer, Boulder Canyon Project, album 4. NARA Denver.



Figure 38: Abandoned house, 1935. Bureau of Reclamation Collection, UNLV Special Collections.



Figure 39: Abandoned schoolhouse, 1934. Bureau of Reclamation Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

Reminiscent of the first abandoning of St. Thomas, some discussed relocating the entire town to another location. One of the proposed sites lay in the Pahranaagat Valley on the ten-thousand-acre Greer Wright Ranch. The ranch included water rights from Crystal Springs and Ash Springs, the combined flow of them being enough to irrigate the land. Tellingly, not much of the area was under cultivation at the time, but was used as range for cattle. The owner lived in South America and proposed cutting up the acreage into one hundred acre lots for Mormon truck farmers.⁵⁸⁴

The other idea advanced for keeping the community intact in another location was moving St. Thomas residents to the Pahrump Valley. In April 1932, unidentified “Salt Lake leaders” inspected the Pahrump Ranch, owned by the Southern Pacific Railroad.⁵⁸⁵ The twelve-thousand-acre ranch, though fertile, was 135 miles away from St. Thomas and in the middle of nowhere.⁵⁸⁶ It is not clear if the people from Salt Lake did not close the deal or if St. Thomas residents refused to be involved, but the plan did not come to fruition.

News of the proposed move to Pahrump reached Harry Crain. Evidently, Crain harbored some bitterness over the appraisal process in the Moapa Valley, because his comments on the notion are acidic, as in this letter to Elwood Mead:

⁵⁸⁴ “Mormon Church May Buy Ranch in Nevada,” *Garfield County* (Utah), 24 June 1932.

⁵⁸⁵ “Clark County Ranchers May Lead In Colonization of Pahrump Area,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 6 April 1932, 1:4-5.

⁵⁸⁶ “Mormon Town May Be Moved to New Place,” *Denver Post*, 23 April 1932, and “Removing a Town,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 23 April 1932, 8:1-2.

My dear Doctor Mead: I am enclosing herewith a clipping from the Denver Post. I think with a little bit of study and a little bit of thought you can read between the lines of this scheme. I am willing to bet a dollar to a doughnut that this is a deal which is being fostered by the Richards and Brown people of Salt Lake City. It looks to me that they are having a rather poor luck in fleecing the poor, poverty stricken Mormons in the Moapa Valley, and are now resorting to this method to get another whack at the little bunch of money that they are destined to get from the government for their holdings in the vicinity of St. Thomas.⁵⁸⁷

Regardless of where they went, many of the departing residents left with great heaviness in their hearts. Vivian Frehner remembered that when he and his family left St. Thomas, he kicked the wall of their house on his last trip out the door. His mother heard the blow and came running. Vivian defensively stated that they were going to tear the house down in the morning. His mother said “That doesn’t make any difference to me, I want that home the way it was.”⁵⁸⁸

The government announced the results of the appraisal in October 1931. St. Thomas became a ghost town less than a year later. Apostle Richard Lyman, in one of his letters to Elwood Mead, related Robert O. Gibson’s sad report of the condition of the town. While discussing the situation in St. Thomas as both were attending General Conference, Apostle Lyman directed Bishop Gibson to advise members of the St. Thomas Ward to remain on their land until the government really needed the land and made an offer on it. Gibson replied that the community had been wrecked. Half the population had moved. The school had

⁵⁸⁷ Harry Crain to Elwood Mead, 25 April 1932, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

⁵⁸⁸ Vivian Frehner, Memories of Matilda Reber Frehner, 7.

lost two of its three teachers, and Church organizations were nearly paralyzed.

“Remaining,” Bishop Gibson said, “in a community as badly wrecked as St. Thomas is wrecked is extremely undesirable and unpleasant and well-nigh impossible.”⁵⁸⁹

The town was still six years from going under the water of the lake named after the man Lyman appealed to, yet the dam had already killed St. Thomas.

The Roaring Twenties did not roar for St. Thomas. Mining left the area, the county relocated the highway, the railroad began cutting back trips there, the survey of the Colorado proceeded, and a short distance into the next decade saw the town bought out and largely abandoned. Those who remained began quietly marking time, waiting for the water to reach them in their homes. The demise of the town could have been the subject of the T. S. Eliot poem “The Hollow Men,” going out “Not with a bang but a whimper.”⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁹ Richard Lyman to Elwood Mead, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA.

⁵⁹⁰ T. S. Eliot, “The Hollow Men,” *Selected Poems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964).

Chapter Eight: Coup de Grace?

St. Thomas resident Hugh Lord did not believe that the waters of Lake Mead would ever actually reach St. Thomas. Early in June of 1938, Lord went fishing, driving his car down the Muddy Valley and parking about one hundred yards from the water on a gentle slope. He had some success fishing, spending several hours out of sight of his car. About nightfall, he decided to pack up and go home. He went to where he thought he had parked his car, but it was gone. Looking out into the water, he discovered his car with the water swirling around his running boards. Driving back to St. Thomas, he began to reconsider his decision to remain.

We have previously discussed the decree of death for St. Thomas. Now, its execution: the disbanding of their ward, the salvage of buildings and railroad, as well as ongoing legal battles over land valuation. Plans for Lake Mead doomed St. Thomas, but it took several years before the reservoir filled and delivered the finishing blow. As journalist Jori Provas later described it, “St. Thomas did not die. It was murdered. Not maliciously, but definitely with aforethought. St. Thomas was surrendered, given up, sacrificed, if you will, for the good of the many.”⁵⁹¹ For some, their suffering was greater because the element of surprise was absent. They could sit and watch the water inexorably engulf their beloved homes.

Before the water arrived, there were things that needed to be done. One took place on May 14, 1933, when the St. Thomas Ward, which had once recovered

⁵⁹¹ Jori Provas, “The Death of a Town Called St. Thomas,” 12.

from virtual extinction, permanently disbanded. The program for the meeting called for that purpose included Bunker, Syphus, and other significant area names. At the end of the meeting, the members present raised their right hands to consent to the dissolution of the ward.⁵⁹² Many tears fell as the meeting ended and people returned to the business of leaving.



Figure 40: Old St. Thomas cemetery. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

Other more mundane, earthly matters required attention before water came as well. Valley residents and CCC workers of the Overton camp cut down

⁵⁹² Saint Thomas Ward Moapa Stake General Minutes, 1910–1933, CR 7798 11, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

trees.⁵⁹³ A few of those who stayed leased farmland from the government and grew crops up through 1937. Nevertheless, by 1935 the town was a virtual ghost town, with only a handful of people who believed that the water would not actually ever reach them.⁵⁹⁴



Figure 41: New St. Thomas cemetery main gate. Photo by Xela McArthur.

As St. Thomas residents evacuated, it was not just the living that made good their escape. In 1934, the government began preparations to move the cemetery in St. Thomas, as well as smaller burial grounds in Kaolin and Rioville. Though the federal government moved the bodies, they still needed permission from Clark

⁵⁹³ Elton Garrett, "Last St. Thomas Pioneers Graves Moved To Escape Waters of Lake," *Boulder City Journal*, 4 March 1935, 2.

⁵⁹⁴ Dustin George, "Tales of the Old West," *The Nevadan*, 6 September 1970, 27.

County to open the graves and transport them.⁵⁹⁵ Obtaining permission in late December, the government's mortician, Howell C. Garrison of Boulder City, moved the few bodies in Rioville, being the closest to the Colorado and subject to inundation earlier. Garrison moved the St. Thomas and Kaolin cemeteries in February and March 1935. The last graves, including Harry and Ellen Gentry's, arrived at their new final resting place on March 4. The most recent grave belonged to June Syphus, who had died in Las Vegas in 1931.⁵⁹⁶

Completion of Hoover Dam in 1935 began the final deathwatch of the town. One front page of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* stated Lake Mead's waters were "only" sixteen miles away from St. Thomas.⁵⁹⁷ Another front-page article a year later reported that the town would remain dry for at least another year since the water level was seventy-eight feet below the contour that would begin the flooding of the site.⁵⁹⁸ In 1937, twelve miles separated the water from the town, and the fields were still in use to grow crops.⁵⁹⁹ The railroad, whose arrival was heralded in 1912, was taken up by crews to save the valuable rails from the lake. In June 1938, the clock for St. Thomas ran out.

⁵⁹⁵ "Moving Graves to Start Soon," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 20 December 1934, 1:7.

⁵⁹⁶ Garrett, "Last St. Thomas Pioneers Graves Moved To Escape Waters of Lake," 2.

⁵⁹⁷ "Waters of Lake Near St. Thomas," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 3 July 1935, 1:1.

⁵⁹⁸ "St. Thomas Will Miss Flood Another Year," *Las Vegas Evening Review Journal*, 27 May 1936, 1:3.

⁵⁹⁹ "Moapa Valley Notes," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 1 March 1937, 6:3.



Figure 42: Union Pacific Railroad crew dismantling rails near St. Thomas. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.



Figure 43: Union Pacific workers taking up tracks. Edwards Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

Bureau of Reclamation engineers watched the water rise with great attentiveness. Recognizing the interest the public had in the story, they estimated the town's submergence as June 17, 1938.⁶⁰⁰ Heavier than expected runoff from snowfall in the Rockies made it clear that the town would not last that long. The last few holdouts finally admitted that the flooding was going to happen.

⁶⁰⁰ Kathy Atchley, "Death of St. Thomas," Nevada Day Program, 31 October 1962, Las Vegas City Library Vertical Stacks, Folder: St. Thomas, Las Vegas.



Figure 44: Dismantling a house in St. Thomas. Edwards Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

John Perkins, one of those who believed the water would never reach the town, spent several days trying to save as much as possible from the houses he bought from the government for salvage. By June 8, Perkins realized that he would not have time to save at least three or four residences he had planned to raze or move elsewhere.⁶⁰¹ About the same time, St. Thomas resident Hugh Lord contemplated the rising water on a fishing trip and rethought his wager against the arrival of the water.

⁶⁰¹ "St. Thomas Will be Completely Submerged Within Next 2 Days," *Las Vegas Evening Review Journal*, 8 June 1938, 1:6-7.

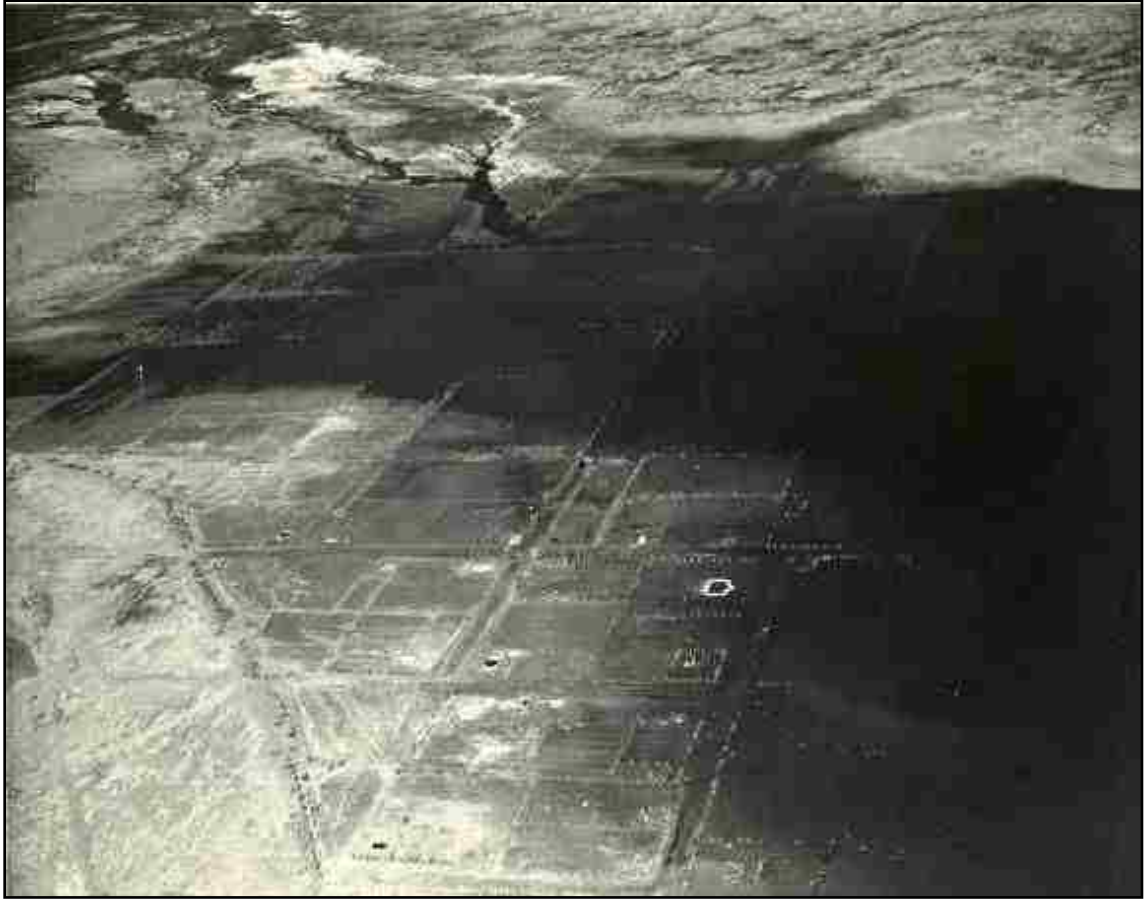


Figure 45: St. Thomas from the air, June 1938. Dorothy Dorothy Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

After returning to town, he sought out his friend and fellow holdout, Rox Whitmore, and told him that the time had probably come for them to leave.⁶⁰² Despite the fact that he once gave 10-1 odds that the water would not come, he spent the next several days getting every worker he could lay hands on to help him move his shop and vehicles to higher ground.⁶⁰³ On June 11, Lord awoke to water

⁶⁰² A. E. Cahlan, "From Where I Sit," 8:7-8, and "Hugh Lord to Make Dam Lake Force Him From His Dwelling," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 9 June 1938, 1:3-4.

⁶⁰³ "Hugh Lord, St. Thomas Pioneer, Finally Desert Ground to Lake," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 6 June 1938, 1:3-4.

swirling around his bed. The day to leave had come. Loading his last few possessions into a rowboat, he lit his house on fire and rowed away.



Figure 46: Building on fire in St. Thomas. There is no writing on the back of the photo to state if it is Lord's residence or not, though it fits with Lord's departure from St. Thomas. Pueblo Grande Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

Lord was not the only one forced out by rising waters. Frank Guetzill stayed with his herd of burros.⁶⁰⁴ The Bunker brothers, Brian, Berkeley, Wendell, Martin, and Vernon, all left on the last day of the town's existence, though they had already moved their belongings to Las Vegas previously.⁶⁰⁵ Interest in the event

⁶⁰⁴ Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy*, 53.

⁶⁰⁵ Kathy Atchley, "Death of St. Thomas."

was so keen, one reporter considered the fact that two of the holdouts were abandoned dogs newsworthy enough to warrant a front-page story in the *Review Journal*.⁶⁰⁶



Figure 47: Elbert Edwards picking figs from trees in St. Thomas. Edwards Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

⁶⁰⁶ "Two Lone Dogs Keep Vigil At St. Thomas as Lake Waters Rise," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 13 June 1938, 1:3-4.



Figure 48: Departing residents paddle past Hannig's Ice Cream Parlor. Edwards Collection, UNLV Special Collections.



Figure 49: Adobe home in St. Thomas. Manis Collection, UNLV Special Collections.



Figure 50: Water approaching town. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

Leland “Rox” or “Rock” Whitmore and his wife were the only other holdouts. Whitmore was the postmaster, and spent the last day of the town’s existence busily cancelling letters and postcards. The bags of mail he spent the day working on were the result of the efforts of one man. In June 1935, stamp collector H. D. Sterling made note of editorials in several newspapers saying that St. Thomas was going under the water soon. Because last day covers are valuable to stamp collectors, he hatched a plan. He designed a postcard showing the town going under and placed ads in philatelic papers and magazines, announcing the last day covers. Within a few days, Sterling’s mailbox overflowed with dimes, quarters, checks, dollar bills, money orders, and requests for credit. He carefully made out the orders to wait for the last day stamp and sent them to St. Thomas for a long vacation. When the town did not go under that year, more orders poured in.

Sterling began receiving mail of a different sort. One said, “I want my ‘ghost town’ covers. If you can’t deliver at once, then send my dime back.” Another read

“I sent you one dollar for covers from the Nevada ghost town...where are they? Either send me the covers or my dollar. The government takes care of cases such as yours.” By June 1936, Sterling answered 240 letters and refunded \$23.00. The next year the letters got even angrier. “My little boy sent you a dime for a ghost town or submarine cover and he didn’t get either. I am going to report your activities to the post office department.” “You send my half dollar back or you’ll be up there with the rest of the fish. You can’t stall me any longer. The dam is full of water and I know St. Thomas is under water.” Refund or no refund, the letters stayed in St. Thomas, where some of them ended up being chewed on by mice who had taken up residence in the post office. Sterling must have been mightily relieved when the day to cancel the mail that had been waiting for three years finally came.⁶⁰⁷

Sterling may have been happy, but it must have been a daunting task for the postmaster and his wife. They spent the entire day cancelling nearly five thousand postcards and letters sent them by Sterling and other philatelists around the world. When they finished, they had to wade with the mailbags to their waiting vehicle to take the mail up the valley. To put a note of finality on the affair, Whitmore threw the cancelling stamp out into the advancing waters of Lake Mead.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁷ A Cover Fan (H. D. Sterling?), “St. Thomas, Nevada, Last Day Cancellation,” *Western Stamp Collector* (16 July 1938), 7:1-3.

⁶⁰⁸ Florence Lee Jones, “Last Resident Deserts Home Saturday Night to Lake Water,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 13 June 1938, 1:2, and Kathy Atchley, “Death of St. Thomas.”

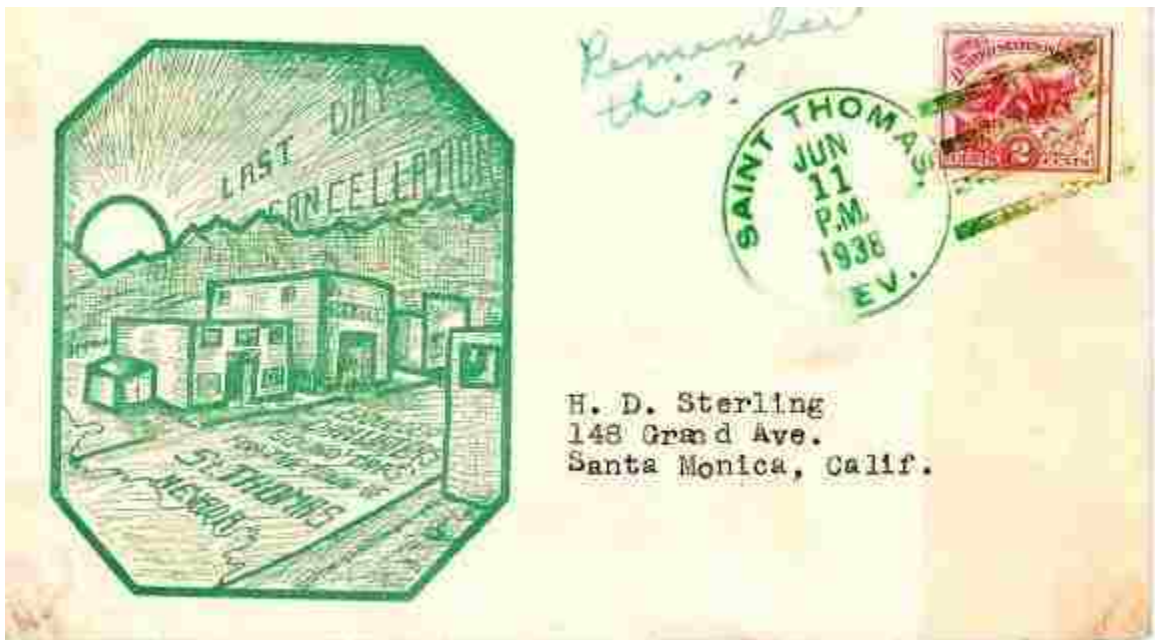


Figure 51: Last day cover with a message from Whitmore to Sterling. The engraving reads “Last Day Cancellation—Boulder Dam Waters Sound “Taps” for the Town of St. Thomas Nevada.” Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

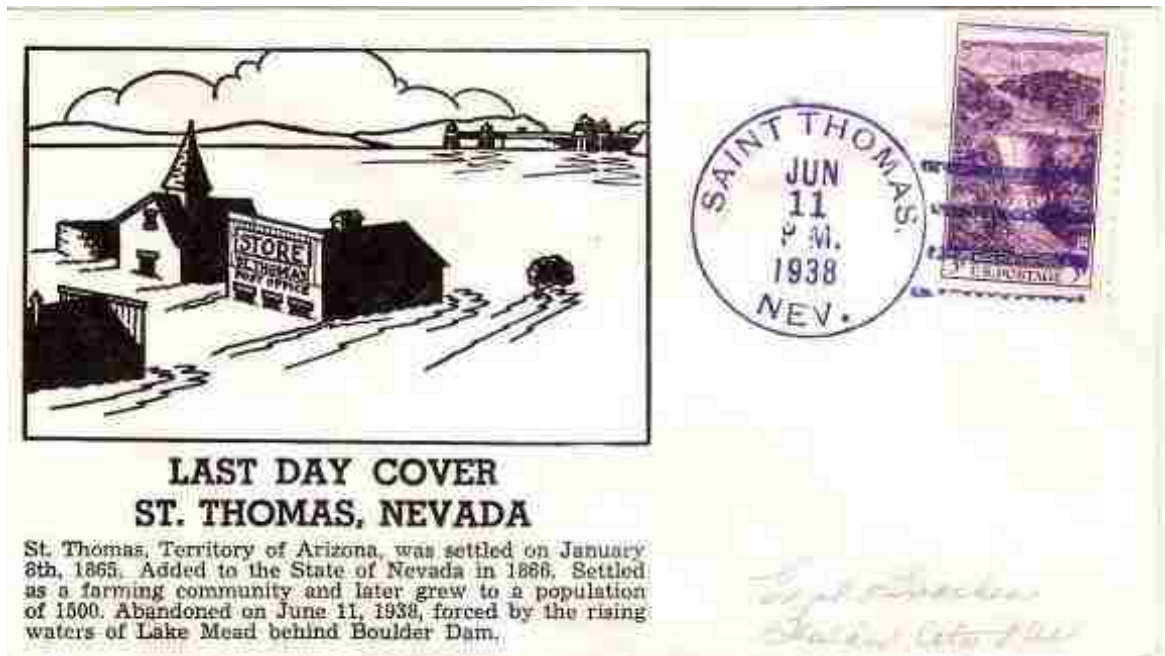


Figure 52: Last Day cover. Note the Hoover Dam stamp. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.

When the sun rose on the Moapa Valley on June 12, it did not rise on St. Thomas, buried by water and progress; the town was no more. In the seventy-three years of the town's existence, it died twice. This time, however, its passing appeared permanent. The death was even harsher for some by the fact that they still held legal title to land now under water. The next several years saw legal wrangling that refused to let St. Thomas rest in peace.



Figure 53: Foundation of the schoolhouse going under. Edwards Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

Landowners George E. Knauth, John F. Perkins, W. H. Ensign, T. M. Farrand, and Leslie R. Saunders of the Nevada Land and Livestock Company, among others, flatly refused to accept the valuations assigned by the survey. The matter was still unresolved in the summer of 1943, when Commissioner William E. Warne of the Bureau of Reclamation wrote to the chief engineer in Denver that the time had probably come to commence condemnation proceedings. The

landowners made it apparent they were not going to settle for what the government was willing to offer. The government avoided this step before because the likelihood that the cost of litigation would exceed the value of the land. Nevertheless, Warne felt that “the Government probably would be money ahead when one considers the time that has been consumed, and the time that will be consumed in the future, in unsuccessful negotiations.” Warne therefore requested that if he, the chief engineer, agreed, Warne should [sic] instruct the director of power to notify the owners that unless they accepted the appraised prices, condemnation proceedings would begin.⁶⁰⁹

District Council Richard Coffey responded to Warne that there was no need to begin condemnation proceedings. The thirty unresolved tracts were valued at only \$6,489.70, with the most valuable one being \$750. Coffey figured that the cost of condemnation proceedings against all the tracts would far exceed the value of the land. More importantly, Coffey stated, was that he was reluctant to cause the landowners any expense litigation would inevitably bring. Instead, those unwilling to accept the appraised price were welcome to file suit under the Tucker Act in district court.⁶¹⁰ Looking at some of the tracts, it is clear why the Bureau took this position. For example, tract 180, owned by George E. Knauth, was valued at only

⁶⁰⁹ William E. Warne to chief engineer, date unknown, Bureau of Reclamation, NARA, Denver. In the date line on the letter it reads “25,” and contains a notation that the letter was sent with the improper date. There is a Bureau date stamp of 8 October 1943, but it was clearly written before another letter on the same topic written 21 August 1943.

⁶¹⁰ District Counsel Richard J. Coffey to commissioner, 21 August 1943, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver. In the Tucker Act (1887), the U.S. Government waived its sovereign immunity from lawsuits.

one hundred dollars. Only 50 percent of the tract would ever be under the water, even when Lake Mead reached full capacity. At the time of Coffey's letter, no water had even reached it.⁶¹¹

The landowners received letters advising them of the Bureau's continued determination to use the official appraisal to guide compensation issues. Walker Young wrote to the commissioner explaining why he felt that the letters were a waste of ink and postage. The Bureau sent Ensign letters in 1934 and 1939 seeking a resolution. Ensign's reply to the 1939 letter read, "Why the people as a whole should take from one member at less than cost—as a policy of the present Administration—is too Nazi for me—for my ancestors helped in making the original U.S. Constitution."⁶¹² This language had clearly come from someone who was definitely not ready to settle.

The correspondence with John Perkins was more substantial, but no less firm. The twelve letters in Perkins' file all center on his dissatisfaction with the price established by Crain and Creel and the government's refusal to agree that the price of \$150 for his land was unjust. Perkins wanted \$500. A Mr. Littler, who worked in Young's office, contacted Perkins several times in 1942 on other matters, and each time asked when Perkins was going to sell his tract to the government. At

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² Walker R. Young to commissioner, 27 August 1943, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

every instance, Perkins replied, “When they decide to give me \$500 for it.” Young saw no other possible resolution besides condemnation.⁶¹³

By 1945, eight years after the town went under and fourteen after the publishing of the appraisal, the government grew tired of waiting. E. A. Moritz, [Bureau of Reclamation] acting regional director, decided that there was no reasonable prospect of obtaining the tracts belonging to Saunders and the Nevada Land and Livestock Company at a price satisfactory to the government and recommended condemnation proceedings. This time, the regional director approved condemnation, and the attorney general filed a Declaration of Taking, paying Saunders \$2,028.45 for his land.⁶¹⁴ Available Bureau of Reclamation Records are silent on the disposition of the other contested tracts, but similar treatment to Saunders is likely. St. Thomas could now rest in peace, at least for a while.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Bureau of Reclamation acting regional director to commissioner, 16 April 1945, Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA, Denver.

Part IV: Reclaimed

Chapter Nine: Sodden Phoenix

St. Thomas was scarcely under the water when people began looking anxiously forward to the time when it would emerge from the depths.

Fluctuations in water levels have exposed the town site several times. This chapter recounts these emergences and the reunions of former residents held when that happened. It also discusses the town's subsequent loss of Mormon identity and the creation of a new more inclusive one. It does this by discussing the differences in historic site administration between the LDS Church and the National Park Service, which controls the townsite today. I address the specific efforts the Park Service has taken to interpret and preserve the remnants of the onetime chief town on the Muddy. The town also seems to have taken on significance outside the boundaries of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. It illustrates how the interpretation of St. Thomas is similar to other formerly Mormon sites that are now part of national or state parks. Finally the chapter discusses how St. Thomas as it emerged from the water in 1999, possibly for the last time, has prompted questions about conservation, recreation, and the future of water in the region.

St. Thomas was finally legally laid to rest at the same time lower than average snowfall in the mountains allowed the town to emerge from the murky depths in 1945. Like gawkers around the scene of an accident, people began to flock to the town site to see what remained. Papers encouraged the pilgrimage with headlines like "St. Thomas Up from Watery Grave," and "Remember St.

Thomas? Here 'Tis Again, Back from Depths of Mead.”⁶¹⁵ The second headline blazed over a full-page spread of pictures in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*.

The foundations emerged from the water again in 1946 and 1947. By this time, the remains of St. Thomas became a tourist attraction. Behind the remains of Hugh Lord’s garage were the remains of three Model Ts and a 1913 Cadillac, and many people were photographed sitting in them. Others used their film to document fishing off foundations, climbing dead trees, and looking for lost treasures. One of these treasures included the cancelling stamp thrown into the water by Whitmore. The stamp is now in the possession of an area resident.

For some, visits to the site became an amusing yearly ritual. A tone of disappointment permeated Ed Oncken’s report to his readers in 1948 that the town was not going to make an appearance that year.⁶¹⁶ In addition to making occasional appearances from the depths, St. Thomas made the news again in 1951 when the county commissioners decided that the time had finally come to repeal the ordinance that prohibited animals from running free on its streets.⁶¹⁷ Apparently, fish were free to roam.

⁶¹⁵ “St. Thomas Up From Watery Grave,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 10 April 1945, and William S. Riley, “Remember St. Thomas? Here 'Tis Again, Back From Depths of Mead,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 23 May 1945, 10:1–8.

⁶¹⁶ Ed Oncken, “‘Ghost’ City of St. Thomas Not to Emerge from Lake Mead This Year,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, circa 1948.

⁶¹⁷ “Ordinance, So Help Me, Protects St. Thomas Beasts,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 21 February 1951, 3:6–7.



Figure 54: April 16, 1945. Playing in St. Thomas. Courtesy Boulder City Museum.



Figure 55: Fishing off the Foundation. William S. Russell photo, UNLV Special Collections.

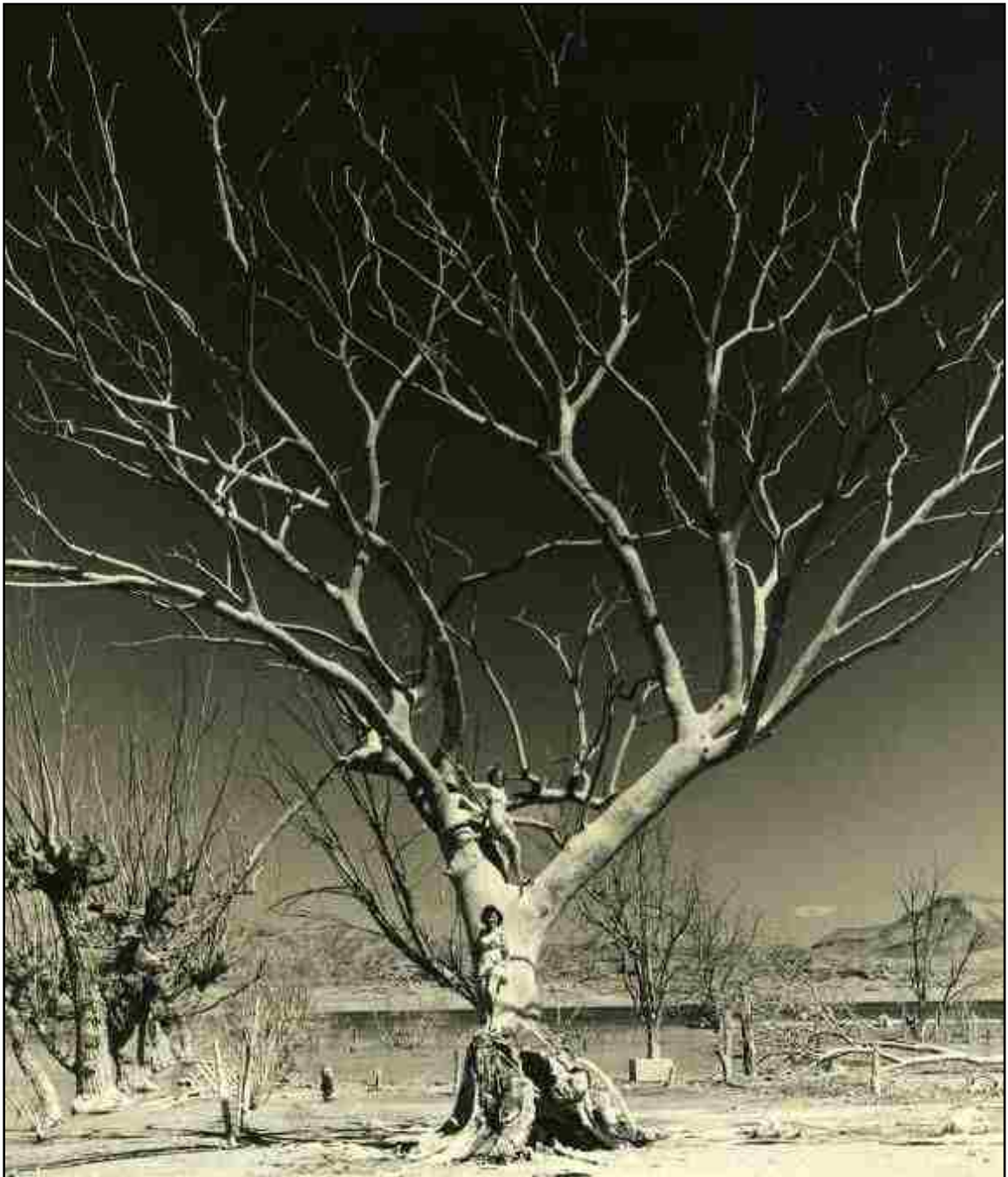


Figure 56: Tree. April 16, 1945. William S. Russell photo, UNLV Special Collections.



Figure 57: Treasure Hunting. William S. Russell photo, UNLV Special Collections.



Figure 58: Perkins Family in St. Thomas. Left to right, Mr. John F. Perkins' daughter, Mrs. Whitmore, his son Jack, and Mr. John F. Perkins, looking at the foundation of the former schoolhouse of St. Thomas. William S. Russell photo, UNLV Special Collections.

When St. Thomas emerged from the water in the 1940s, those that came to visit were old residents and the curious, but there was nothing organized about their visits. When the town resurfaced again in 1952, former residents organized a reunion. They held it around the foundation of the old schoolhouse. In the midst of the program, a young boy exploring a cistern fell in, interrupting the program as reminiscing gave way to rescuing. The cistern was only half full, but about six feet down to the water, the walls were vertical, and there was only a small opening at the top. Rescuers lowered another boy down through the opening headfirst, and

the boy who had been treading water grabbed the other boy's arms. Rescuers then pulled both boys out of the hole.⁶¹⁸ The reporter from the *Review Journal* covering the reunion did not report the cistern incident, but did say that a "good percentage" of the population of southern Nevada was born or lived at one time in St. Thomas. The article contains no clue as to what percentage they considered to be "good."⁶¹⁹



Figure 59: Albert Frehner speaking at the 1965 reunion. Relda Whitney Leavitt Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

The opportunity for another reunion of former residents of St. Thomas arose in late 1964.⁶²⁰ As chance would have it, low water enabled those interested in attending the one hundred year anniversary party of the arrival of Thomas S.

⁶¹⁸ Interview with Everett Syphus, St. George, 20 November 1974, as quoted in Laraine Graf, "They Came, They Saw, and Then They Went Elsewhere."

⁶¹⁹ "Old Ghost City of St. Thomas is Back," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 23 March 1953.

⁶²⁰ "Ghost Town Pilgrimage: A Visit to St. Thomas," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 30 December 1964.

Smith's party on the Muddy and the establishment of the town to do so on location. This was the last major gathering of former residents.

Several influential people from the town and surrounding area spoke at the reunion and shared stories about the good times they had in St. Thomas. Mr. Perkins, who lived in Overton, said that there were some very beautiful girls in the town, and he "pursued some of the[m] very diligently." At the end of one visit, he stole a horse in St. Thomas in order to get back to Overton. The owner, carrying a 30.30, rifle pursued him. Perkins escaped and later obtained forgiveness from the man.⁶²¹

Former Senator Berkeley L. Bunker, who was wearing an extremely beat up hat, also spoke. Bunker claimed that he buried the hat by his house when he was forced from the valley by rising waters. When he arrived that morning at the reunion, he dug it up and put it on. He also proceeded to speak of all the good times he had in St. Thomas.⁶²² Rather than lamenting the decision of the government to destroy the town, the reunion focused on the good grounding and wonderful times that those who had lived there enjoyed. The remnants of St. Thomas, according to those assembled, belonged fully to former residents and their descendents. This is not to say that they bristled at the presence of outsiders, but rather that they did not seem to think anyone else was interested. In the

⁶²¹ Transcript of the Centennial Celebration by former residents of St. Thomas, 8 January 1965, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections.

⁶²² Ibid.

twentieth century, this attitude prevailed every time water levels dropped enough for foundations to emerge.

A new century brought a new attitude towards the defunct town. Lake Mead hit an all-time high water mark in 1983. In the late 1990s, the West entered a drought. In 2002, five years into the drought, St. Thomas began to emerge once more from the depths. Very few people who lived in the town are alive today, and their descendants have no significant direct experience with the place. This left St. Thomas without a clear identity. John L. Smith asked the question in 2003, “Why was lowly, mud-caked St. Thomas so important, and what can we still learn from it?”⁶²³ What is the story of this sodden phoenix, which seems to continually rise from the ruins of its former selves?

The site is interpreted very differently from other sites significant in the history of the Latter-day Saints and owned by the Church. The LDS Church operates eighteen visitors’ centers, twenty-six historic sites, and runs six pageants. Each one of these sites or pageants is operated specifically to support at least one of the three main missions of the Church: to “proclaim the gospel, perfect the saints, and redeem the dead.”⁶²⁴ Most of the sites are used to “proclaim the gospel.” The missionaries who are called to run the sites invite visitors to learn more about the Church at a future date. In the case of visitors who are members,

⁶²³ John L. Smith, “Town’s Ruins Emerge From Water to Whisper,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 20 February 2003, 1B.

⁶²⁴ “Introduction,” *Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders’ Guidebook* Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, (2001), 1.

they ask for referrals for people they know who may be receptive to a visit from some missionaries.

Administrators at these sites have very little discretion as to how the properties are administered. Every aspect of the operation of the sites is scripted and administered from Salt Lake. According to Michael Madsen, in his dissertation “Mormon Meccas: The Spiritual Transformation of Mormon Historical Sites From Points of Interest to Sacred Space,” (Syracuse, 2003), the Church is actually *creating* meaning-filled spaces. As the Church expands far from the borders of Utah, more and more members have no familial link to the nineteenth-century pioneers. By placing an increased emphasis on these places, attempting to put the religion in place, they are creating a previously unknown sacred historical geography to enhance a trans-national sense of Mormon identity. Any site that does not support that mission is either de-emphasized or remade, as the Church “does not maintain museums to its former stages.”⁶²⁵

There are some sites that are significant to the Latter-day Saints, like the Kirtland Temple in Kirtland, Ohio, and the This is the Place state park in Salt Lake City that are not owned by the LDS Church. They have significant numbers of Mormon visitors as well. While there are descendents of St. Thomas residents who remember the stories told them by their elders, the town on the Muddy does not bring to mind for most members the same feelings of importance that Kirtland or This is the Place does. Though most of its history is concerned with members of

⁶²⁵ Mark Leone, “Why the Coalville Tabernacle Had to be Razed,” *Dialogue* 8 (Summer 1973): 34-5.

the LDS Church, the way that St. Thomas is interpreted is not focused on “Mormon” history. It is concerned with the history of Americans who happened to be LDS.

The National Park Service, which administers the site of St. Thomas, has taken the question posed by John L. Smith mentioned earlier very seriously. The NPS does this in a manner very different than the way that the LDS Church administers its historic sites. One of the reasons is the NPS directive to interact with the public in a practice they call “civic engagement.” Civic engagement, according to the Park Service, is “a continuous, dynamic conversation with the public on many levels that reinforces public commitment to the preservation of heritage resources, both cultural and natural, and strengthens public understanding of the full meaning and contemporary relevance of these resources.”⁶²⁶ Civic engagement is to be a “fundamental discipline and practice,” based on the idea that the preservation of the nation’s heritage is best served by a

⁶²⁶ National Park Service, “DIRECTOR’S ORDER #75A: Civic Engagement and Public Involvement,” <http://www.nps.gov/policy/DOrders/75A.htm> (accessed 13 April 2008). The National Park Service provides significant resources regarding civic engagement. The information is very easy to access from their website: www.nps.gov/civic/. Some of the titles available there include “Archeology and Civic Engagement,” “Keeping National Parks Relevant in the 21st Century,” “Learning to be Better Neighbors: Case Studies in Civic Engagement Between National Parks and Neighboring Communities,” and “Stronger Together: A Manual on the Principles and Practices of Civic Engagement.” Edward Linenthal, who worked for a few years with the Civic Engagement Program in the NPS, gives a brief overview of the topic in “The National Park Service and Civic Engagement,” *The Public Historian* 28:1 (Winter, 2007). The *George Wright Forum* contains several good articles on the subject including “Moving Public Participation beyond Compliance: Uncommon Approaches to Finding Common Ground,” 26:3 (2009), “The National Park Service and Civic Engagement,” 25:1 (2008), and “Whose America? Whose Idea? Making ‘America’s Best Idea’ Reflect New American Realities,” 27:2, (2010).

collaborative relationship between the NPS and American Society.⁶²⁷ This is very different than the top-down management of LDS historical sites.

This is not to say that the Park Service is not hierarchal. It has to comply with laws passed by Congress and follow the orders of the Secretary of the Interior, and the Director of the Park Service, as well as regional and unit directors. There is a clear decision-making chain of command. That being said, the *Guide to Managing the National Park System*, the operations manual for the entire park system, stipulates that policies are implemented through workgroups, consensus building teams, consultation with senior managers, and review and comment by affected parties and the general public. The manual reads: “Where there is a strong public interest in a particular use, opportunities for civic engagement and cooperative conservation should be factored into the decision-making process.”⁶²⁸

The interpretation of St. Thomas offered on the NPS website reflects their official policy towards presenting places to the public. The *Guide* says that:

Interpretation will encourage dialogue and accept that visitors have their own individual points of view. Factual information presented will be current, accurate, based on current scholarship and science, and delivered to convey park meanings, with the understanding that audience members will draw their own conclusions. Interpretation will also reach out to park neighbors, segments of the population that do not visit national parks, and community decision-makers to stimulate discussions about the park and its meanings in local, regional, and national contexts.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁷ <http://www.nps.gov/policy/mp/policies.html> (Accessed 13 August 2011).

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

The information available certainly does leave room for people to come to their own conclusions about the site. It does not mention the LDS Church or the mission to grow cotton, but rather a more generic “pioneer” legacy. Sixty years are summarized by the phrase “life passed slowly.” The government did not force people out, but they “sold their land, tore down their homes that had been lived in for generations and said goodbye to friends and neighbors.”⁶³⁰ The ultimate meaning of St. Thomas, according to whoever wrote the website text, is that it was a victim of a rapidly changing landscape and lifestyle in the desert. This willingness to allow website visitors to draw their own conclusions about the site is in step with the public history approach that the Park Service necessarily takes.

When the town emerged from the water at the beginning of the new century, the Park Service had all but forgotten about St. Thomas. Certainly, the site had emerged from the water before, but it had always gone back under relatively quickly. Its only visitors were fish and the occasional intrepid diver. As it became clear that the site was going to be out of the water for an extended period of time, perhaps permanently, and it was easily accessible for the public, local Park Service administrators determined that they needed more information about the site so they would know how to interpret it for visitors.⁶³¹

⁶³⁰ <http://www.nps.gov/lake/historyculture/stthomas.htm> (Accessed 16 August 2011).

⁶³¹ In 2006, they signed an agreement with Dr. Hal Rothman and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas to research and write a comprehensive special history study and a National Register of Historic Places nomination for St. Thomas. The study was to “document the chronological history, character and flavor of the town from its establishment to the present...[and] include historic photographs, oral interviews, historic plat maps, and field reconnaissance.” Great Basin Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit Task Agreement, National Park Service. Task Agreement

Meanwhile, the town has been in the public eye. One of the issues that the public was concerned about was the sudden influx of treasure hunters to St.

Thomas once word got out that it had emerged from the water. John L. Smith showed that the “civic” was “engaged” as he expressed anger about this. He wrote:

What compelling artifacts there might have been, according to published reports, probably were plucked by the curious not long after word spread that the ghost of St. Thomas was reappearing at the lakeside. That’s a shame. In a place where history is more cherished, such a sighting might have provided a chance for university graduate students to descend and begin excavation and cataloging of remnants of Nevada’s past. But Southern Nevada has been much too busy growing to care much about preserving its beginnings.⁶³²

The treasure hunting is justified by some who claim that the government dug up and took whatever artifacts they wanted in the 1920s, referring to the Lost City, so everything else is fair game. St. Thomas is in a recreation area, and some people want to dig things up in the name of recreation. This attitude made Darrell Wade of Mesquite livid. He challenged those who felt that way to extend their logic to a Native American site or a cemetery. Wade was emphatic to the notion that the town belonged to everyone and deserved protection so that everyone had the chance to enjoy it.⁶³³

J8R07060008. Copy in the possession of the author. Much of the research for this dissertation was performed under this contract. The results of that research will be made available to the public by the Park Service in early 2012. If the public is to be engaged in the interpretation of the history of St. Thomas, this report is essential.

⁶³² John L. Smith, “Town’s Ruins Emerge From Water to Whisper,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 20 February 2003, 1B.

⁶³³ Darrell Wade, “Letter to the Editor,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 5 July 2004, 6B.

The Park Service agreed with Wade, as his opinion mirrored established policy, and moved to make policies on how to deal with this specific site and determine which artifacts qualified as historically significant.⁶³⁴ To protect the site, the Park Service had to ban overnight camping near the site of St. Thomas. Scavengers descended on the town at night with metal detectors in search of old railroad ties and auto parts. Greed motivated some, who heard a rumor that a five dollar gold piece had been unearthed there. Rangers arrested more than a dozen people in 2004 for taking items from the protected area.⁶³⁵

Public historians also use the term civic engagement to describe the process of drawing in the public to interact with a site on a personal level. A gathering of historic site directors explained, “We hold in common the belief that it is the obligation of historic sites to assist the public in drawing connections between the history of our sites and its contemporary implications.”⁶³⁶ The challenge, then, of civic engagement is to make the transition from “representing history from singular perspectives to being centers for dialogue about how we can use history to build a better future.”⁶³⁷ The public has begun to do this with St. Thomas.

One of the most basic ways the public engages with St. Thomas today is through recreation. The St. Thomas Loop is a well-hiked trail. St. Thomas is an

⁶³⁴ Henry Brean, “Agency Hopes to Protect Sites,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 12 November 2005, 2B.

⁶³⁵ Scott Gold, “It’s a Historic Drought,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 October 2004, A1.

⁶³⁶ Liz Ševcenko and Maggie Russell-Ciardi, “Sites of Conscience: Opening Historic Sites for Civic Dialogue,” *The Public Historian* 30:1 (February 2008): 10.

⁶³⁷ Ševcenko and Russell-Ciardi, “Sites of Conscience,” 13.

easily accessible ghost town relatively close to Las Vegas and has been the site of many formal and informal hiking excursions. For the recreation minded, it provides another interesting destination to participate in recreation and learn at the same time.⁶³⁸

St. Thomas also serves as a center for dialogue about water in southern Nevada. A few months after the water level dropped enough to expose the concrete remnants of the town, John Smith said that the submergence of the town in 1938 was a symbol of the modern world of prosperity and plenty. Its reemergence reminds us of the fragility of life in Nevada: “Booms will bust, the most important oasis might one day be forgotten, the richest claims eventually play out, and water is never in great abundance in the desert.”⁶³⁹ When the Scripps Institution of Oceanography announced that Lake Mead, if current use patterns continue, could go dry in thirteen years, St. Thomas again served as a cautionary tale for southern Nevada and the use of water.⁶⁴⁰ This is very different from the “grow where you are planted” attitude the original inhabitants had for the town. While weather patterns certainly can change and submerge the town once again, muting its current significance as a “cautionary tale,” its history will serve the same purpose.

⁶³⁸ Ken Ritter, “An ‘Atlantis’ Rises From the Desert,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 August 2003, B1.

⁶³⁹ John L. Smith, “Town’s Ruins Emerge From Water to Whisper,” 1B. The issue was also discussed in Scott Gold, “It’s a Historic Drought,” A1.

⁶⁴⁰ Phoebe Sweet, “Lake’s Ghost Town Seen as a Warning,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 12 March 2008.

The town, given some exposure, could provide a good example for those interested in the small Mormon environmental movement. Since Utah statehood, Mormons have gained a reputation for enthusiastically embracing capitalism, often in ways that damage the environment. For evidence of this, one needs to look no farther than the massive damage to Utah's watersheds from unrestrained grazing and poor farming practices. Many scholars have conflated the profligate actions of some Mormons with a Church-wide indifference towards the environment. Historian Thomas Alexander addressed this by writing, "Mormons obviously damaged the environment over the years, but so did members of other denominations. Scholars, however, have insisted on treating Mormons as a monolithic religious sect, while considering members of other religious affiliations either as individuals or as members of secular organizations."⁶⁴¹ Environmental damage caused by Mormons has nothing to do with theology or official statements by Church officials, but from actions of members as citizens and business people. Since the 1890s, Alexander wrote, "many Mormons, like many other Americans, have simply chosen to unlink environmental concerns from religious beliefs."⁶⁴²

Many Latter-day Saints are also deeply distrustful of the modern environmental movement. They take exception to the idea of population control. They claim that since God gave man dominion over the earth, people can do what they please with the planet. Others, however, began to claim that as stewards, we

⁶⁴¹ Thomas G. Alexander, "Sylvester Q. Cannon and the Revival of Environmental Consciousness in the Mormon Community," *Environmental History* 3:4 (Oct. 1998), 501.

⁶⁴² Ibid.

have in many ways done a poor job and began looking for ways to be environmentally conscious and active from within a Mormon framework. In 2004, a group of these environmentally minded Mormons met at Brigham Young University to discuss the topic further.⁶⁴³

Using St. Thomas as a lens through which to look at water use and the environment fits in with the notion of “reclaiming” portions of history of modern usage. Many early Mormon leaders were “environmentally conscious” before that term had any real meaning. Both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young taught that

⁶⁴³ Convened in February of 2004, the symposium was entitled “Our Stewardship: Perspectives on Nature.” The proceedings were published in *Stewardship and the Creation – LDS Perspectives on the Environment* in 2006 by the Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center. Though the LDS Church has no official position regarding the environmental movement or environmentalism in general, its doctrine consistently affirms the role of human beings as stewards, stewards who will answer to God for how they use His creations. The book explores that relationship between theology and environmental stewardship. One of the volume’s most interesting chapters is Thomas G. Alexander’s “Stewardship and Enterprise: The LDS Church and the Wasatch Oasis Environment, 1847-1930,” which is reprinted from a *Western Historical Quarterly* article from 1994. Alexander traces the general development of Mormon environmental thought from the teachings of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, the economic integrations of Zion with the United States after 1890, and the effects that the Saints had on the environment of Utah up to 1930. Paul Alan Cox’s chapter “Paley’s Stone, Creationism, and Conservation” provides a unique analysis of why environmentalism is different in an LDS context than for most environmentalists. Many Christians hold science in contempt. Cox explains that LDS doctrine allows for the observations of scientists, including those who espouse evolution. For Cox, the elegance and intricacy of nature affirms his belief in God. He quotes Brigham Young, who said, “Our religion will not clash with or contradict the facts of science in any particular. You may take geology, for instance, and it is a true science...to assert that the Lord made this earth out of nothing is preposterous and impossible.”⁶⁴³ Other notable chapters include Craig D. Galli’s “Stewardship, Sustainability, and Cities,” which ties social justice with environmental responsibility, and Danielle Montague-Judd’s aptly titled “How Can Church Members Increase Their Environmental Awareness?” This book is far from the only work written on the topic of Mormons and the environment. Hugh Nibley, Jeanne Kay, Craig Brown, Thomas Alexander, Dan Flores, and others have written on the topic. Some of the more salient works are as follows. Dan L. Flores, “Zion in Eden: Phases of the Environmental History of Utah,” *Environmental Review* 7 (1983), 325-44. Hugh Nibley, “Subduing the Earth,” in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1978), 85-99. Hugh Nibley, “Brigham Young on the Environment,” in *To the Glory of God: Mormon Essays on Great Issues*, ed. Truman G. Madsen and Charles D. Tate (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 3-29. Thomas G. Alexander, “Stewardship and Enterprise: The LDS Church and the Wasatch Oasis Environment, 1847-1930,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 25 (1994), 341-64. Richard H. Jackson, “Righteousness and Environmental Change: The Mormons and the Environment,” in *Essays on the American West, 1973-1974*, ed. Thomas G. Alexander (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 21-42. Jeanne Kay and Craig J. Brown, “Mormon Beliefs About Land and Natural Resources, 1847-1877,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 11 (1985), 253-67.

the Saints should be good stewards of God's creations. They advocated for using no more natural resources than they needed. Any who abused their stewardship could sometimes even face sanctions for their actions. In an 1865 General Conference, Orson Hyde, who was an apostle and member of the First Presidency, chided the Saints, saying, "I find the longer we live in these valleys that the range is becoming more and more destitute of grass; the grass is...eaten up by the great amount of stock...and where once grew luxuriantly there is now nothing but the desert weed...there is not profit in this, neither is it pleasing in the sight of God...that we should continue a course of life like unto this."⁶⁴⁴

Modern Mormon environmentalists are keen to restore the environmental ethic of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and others. One of the ways they are doing that is by trying to correct the Saints' view of *dominion*. The idea of man's dominion comes from Genesis 1:28, which reads "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."⁶⁴⁵ Preeminent LDS scholar Hugh Nibley explained that this dominion is a contingent one. He wrote, "Man by his sovereignty over nature resembles God but he enjoys that authority only as long as he behaves in a godlike manner."⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁴ *Deseret News*, 16 November 1865.

⁶⁴⁵ KJV.

⁶⁴⁶ Hugh Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, ed. Don E. Norton and Shirley S. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 44.

The *Doctrine and Covenants* explains further. Section 121, verses 36-40

reads:

That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God. We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen.

The section becomes clearer when you realize that in LDS theology, all action is governed by the priesthood. Dominion, stewardship, and priesthood are all connected. Maximizing profits with no concern for environmental damage then seems to fall directly into the category of “unrighteous dominion.” Even within a LDS framework, present-day St. Thomas can serve as an environmental cautionary tale.

Regardless of the meanings St. Thomas holds for the individual reader, the town is clearly significant in the history of southern Nevada. The site was at one time considered a better place to settle than Las Vegas and ended up being one of the largest and most important towns in the area. It tells of how peoples’ lives are effected when the government moves borders and takes land, but also of the determination of those left behind to make things work. It is the story of small-

town America at the beginning of the modern era, and a reflection of how water and the federal government intersect in the West. A president, senators, and criminals all rested their heads there, as is appropriate for a town that, by virtue of being in a National Recreation Area, belongs to us all. St. Thomas, for being in the middle of nowhere, was certainly at the center of things.

Appendix A: St. Thomas Today Photo Essay

All pictures were taken by the author on November 3, 2006, and February 27, 2008. The aerial photos are from the 2006 visit.



Figure 1: The reason St. Thomas was abandoned, Hoover Dam from the air.



Figure 2: St. Thomas from the air, showing the confluence of the Virgin and Muddy rivers.



Figure 3: Looking north up the Muddy.



Figure 4: Lost City/Pueblo Grande excavation site.



Figure 5: St. Thomas looking west.



Figure 6: Head of the hiking trail through St. Thomas.



Figure 7: Legal warnings. The chimney of Hannig's Ice Cream Parlor is visible left of center and the schoolhouse remains are right of center.



Figure 8: Irrigation headgate.



Figure 9: First Frehner or Rox Whitmore home.



Figure 10: Highway 91.



Figure 11: R. E. Bunker house. This is the foundation that many people had their picture taken while fishing off of.



Figure 12: The area is littered with engine blocks and various pieces of machinery. Some of it was there when the town went under, some anchored buoys, and some are simply the detritus of seventy years under the water.



Figure 13: Foundations of Hugh Lord's garage. Note the tree growing in the grease pit.



Figure 14: Hannig's Ice Cream Parlor, the first to emerge from the water when levels drop.



Figure 15: Stumps of trees lining Highway 91.



Figure 16: Jacob Baver home and blacksmith shop.



Figure 17: Steps of the schoolhouse.



Figure 18: Initials in the concrete at the school.



Figure 19: Wildlife at the remains of Samuel Gentry's house.



Figure 20: Remains of Samuel Gentry's garage.



Figure 21: Gentry Hotel.



Figure 22: Gentry Store.



Figure 23: Old post office.



Figure 24: Concrete bridge over irrigation ditch.



Figure 25: Post office cistern, February 2008. Photo by author.



Figure 25: Cistern, Hugh Lord's garage, February 2008. Photo by author.



Figure 27: Possible sewer pipe at the Gentry Hotel, February 2008. Photo by author.



Figure 28: Plumbing in the school's cistern, February 2008. Photo by author.



Figure 29: Automobile spring reinforcing the concrete in Hannig's Ice Cream Parlor.

Appendix B: St. Thomas Population

Year	Population	Surnames	Single Adults	Native	Notes
1866	129				
1868	231	41			
1880	67	11	8	44	Singles were laborers, miners, and boarders
1900	43	10	7		
1910	93	19	4		
1920	170	24	4		
1930	194	39	12	4	4 surnames account for 70

Compiled from LDS census records and U.S. census records.

Appendix C: Petitions

The main body of Saints who elected to leave the Muddy drafted their letters to Congress and the Nevada Assembly on December 21, 1870. These records are found in the records of the Moapa Stake in the LDS Archives in Salt Lake City.

The petition to Congress is as follows:

A Petition to the Honorable: The Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress Assembled.
Gentlemen:—We, your petitioners, citizens of the Muddy Valley, State of Nevada would respectfully represent to your Honorable Body the following facts. Seven years ago we came to this valley and made the settlements of St. Joseph and St. Thomas and subsequently those of West Point and Overton. At the time of settling here the valley of the Muddy was included within the boundaries of Utah and Arizona and we expected to remain under the jurisdiction of one or the other of those territories. Subsequently your Hon. Body has seen proper to take off one full degree of longitude from Utah Territory and a slice of Arizona and attach the same to the State of Nevada, thus removing us within the jurisdiction of the state without our consent. It is well known to your Hon. Body and to the general public that this region is a vast alkaline desert destitute of timber and grass. Our object in coming here was the production of cotton for the clothing of ourselves and families and to aid our toiling brethren in the Territory of Utah to do the same.

We have expended at least one hundred thousand dollars in labor in constructing dams and irrigating canals. The little lumber we have been enabled to obtain has been hauled at least one hundred and fifty miles over a sandy desert at a cost of twenty dollars for every one hundred feet. We are far remote from any market or base of supplies. In addition to this and innumerable other difficulties we have had to feed an Indian population outnumbering our own and that too without the aid of one single dollar from the government. With the exception of some two hundred and fifty dollars furnished these Indians by Col. Hurd, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Territory of Utah.

A certain Captain Senton [sic] represents himself as a Special Agent of the government to the Pah-ute Nation but he has never done anything to alleviate their condition as your petitioners hereby testify.

We have constructed some one hundred and fifty dwellings, planted orchards and vineyards including about five hundred acres of cotton fields: and have done all in our power to establish homes in this valley. It now transpires that the boundary line of the state of Nevada is established and the authorities of that state demand of us the onerous tax imposed upon its citizens of three percent on all taxable property in gold coin for state and county purposes and four dollars in gold poll tax.

Being an agricultural people and far remote from any market and unable to convert our produce into cash we cannot pay those taxes. Therefore unless we obtain the relief sought for from your Hon. Body to cede back to the Territory of Utah and Arizona that portion of country detached from them and attached to the state of Nevada. And, as in duty bound, your petitions will ever pray.

The petition to the Nevada Assembly reads:

A petition to the Honorable Governor and Legislature, Assembly of the State of Nevada. Gentlemen:—Your petitioners respectfully beg to lay before your honorable body the following facts. Seven years ago we came to this valley and made these settlements of St. Joseph and St. Thomas, the former place being (as we firmly believe) in the Territory of Utah and the latter place being in the Territory of Arizona. Subsequently to making the settlements, Congress has seen fit to take one degree of longitude from Utah and a small portion from Arizona and attached it to Nevada. We still believed that the boundary line of Nevada would pass to the west of our settlements and we have in good faith paid taxes in Utah and Arizona. For the last two years the authorities in Lincoln County, Nevada have attempted to assess and collect taxes from us, but we have refused to pay taxes in Lincoln County until the boundary was established.

The boundary line is now established and it proves that our settlements are in Nevada. We wish your honorable body to consider our isolated condition. We are an agricultural not a mining people and we have had to contend with great difficulties in trying to subdue these alkaline deserts having expended at least fifty thousand dollars in labor on water sects, alone. We have been compelled also to feed an Indian population outnumbering our own and that too

without the aid of a single dollar from the government. We are far from any market and it is impossible for us to convert our produce into cash.

We therefore respectfully ask of your Honorable Body to abate all taxes assessed against us by the authorities of Lincoln County.

We also petition that your Honorable Body will, at the earliest practical date, organize a new county to be called Los Vegas County with the boundaries. . . . and as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray: that as you listen to and grant our petitions so yours may be granted.

One hundred and eleven names were attached to this petition. Citizens of St. Joseph, Overton, and St. Thomas.

Octavius D. Gass of Las Vegas carried the petition to Carson City. The Nevada Legislature never considered the petition in session.

Appendix D: Register of Graves Moved from St. Thomas, Kaolin, and Rioville Cemeteries

The following was a report from Construction Engineer Ralph Lowry to the acting commissioner of the Department of the Interior. The October 8, 1936, report was entitled “Final detailed reports as to removals and reburials in connection with cemetery operations—Boulder Canyon Project.” Bureau of Reclamation Collection, NARA Denver.

St. Thomas Cemetery

Grave #	Name of Deceased	Old Grave Opened	Reburial Date	Cemetery Removed to	Kind of Marker	Remarks
1	Exploration proved this was not a human grave. A pile of rocks marked the location.					
2	Joseph Edward Pearson	3/2/1935	3/2/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
3	Benjamin F. Bonelli	2/28/1935	3/1/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
4	William Frances Murphy	2/19/1935	2/20/1935	Overton, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
5	Mark Murphy	2/19/1935	2/20/1935	Overton, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
6	John R. Ward	2/23/1935	2/25/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
7	Unknown Infant	2/23/1935	2/23/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
8	Early Pioneer—Infant	2/21/1935	2/22/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
9	Early Pioneer—Child	2/21/1935	2/22/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
10	Early Pioneer—Child	2/21/1935	2/22/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave

11	Early Pioneer—Infant	2/22/1935	2/23/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
12	Early Pioneer—Female child about 6 years old with blond curls	2/22/1935	2/23/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
13	Early Pioneer—Infant	2/22/1935	2/23/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
14	Early Pioneer—Adult	2/21/1935	2/22/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
15	Early Pioneer—Adult	2/22/1935	2/23/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
16	Early Pioneer—Adult	2/23/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
17	Early Pioneer—Infant	2/23/1935	2/23/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
18	Early Pioneer—Child about 2 years of age	2/22/1935	2/23/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
19	Infant Daughter of Roxton Whitmore	2/25/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
20	Child of Roxton Whitmore	2/25/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
21	Exploration proved that this was not the grave of a human being.					
22	Early Pioneer—Infant	2/26/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
23	Early Pioneer—Child about 3 years old	2/26/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	No box or casket provided for original burial—remains consisted of dust only.

24	Early Pioneer—Infant	2/25/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	No box or casket provided for original burial—remains consisted of dust only.
25	Early Pioneer—Infant	2/25/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	No box or casket provided for original burial.
26	Early Pioneer—Infant	2/25/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
27	Owen Child—About 1 year old	2/26/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
28	Early Pioneer—Male Adult	2/26/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
29	"Sham" Belding	2/27/1935	2/28/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
30	Early Pioneer—Male Adult	2/26/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
31	Early Pioneer—Female Adult	2/27/1935	2/28/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
32	Jesse H. O'Donnell	2/27/1935	2/28/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
33	Jacob Bauer	2/27/1935	2/28/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
34	John Heuss	2/27/1935	2/28/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
35	Wellington Sprouse	2/28/1935	3/1/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
36	L. S. Dry	2/27/1935	2/28/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave

37	Early Pioneer—Male Adult	2/26/1935	2/26/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
38	Early Pioneer—Male Adult	2/26/1935	2/27/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
39	Early Pioneer - Male Adult	2/26/1935	2/27/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
40	Child of Washington and Amelia Bunker	3/1/1935	3/1/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
41	Melbourne G. Perkins	3/4/1935	3/5/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Concrete Vault Which Was Replaced In Kind
42	Jessie L. Perkins	3/4/1935	3/5/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
43	Harry Gentry	3/4/1935	3/5/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
44	Martha Ellen Gentry	3/4/1935	3/5/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
45	Eva Whitmore	3/4/1935	3/4/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
46	Solomon Wardell	2/28/1935	3/1/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
47	Henry Foxley	3/1/1935	3/1/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
48	Investigation proved the fact that this was not a human grave.					
49	Mathew Syphus	3/2/1935	3/2/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
50	Alfred Luke Syphus	3/4/1935	3/5/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
51	Mary Etta Syphus Bunker	3/4/1935	3/5/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard	Removed From

					Metal	Ordinary Grave
52	Elizabeth Syphus	2/16/1935	2/16/1935	Logandale, NV	Headstone & Footstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
53	Luke Syphus	2/15/1935	2/16/1935	Logandale, NV	Headstone & Footstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
54	Infant Child of Everett E. and Effie Syphus	2/15/1935	2/16/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
55	Jesse Glen O'Donnell	2/19/1935	2/20/1935	Overton, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
56	Lucile Gentry	3/2/1935	3/2/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
57	Rodney Roscoe Gibson	2/15/1935	2/16/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
58	Moses W. Gibson	2/15/1935	2/16/1935	Logandale, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
59	Mary E. Gibson	2/15/1935	2/16/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
60	Investigation proved the fact that this was not a human grave.					
61	J. Connelly	3/1/1935	3/1/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Old grave was provided with a concrete cap
62	Mary Ann Beebe	2/15/1935	2/16/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
63	Leroy W. Beebe	2/15/1935	2/16/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
64	Jane Whitney	3/1/1935	3/2/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Remains Consisted of Dust Only
65	John Abbott	3/2/1935	3/2/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
66	Merill Bunker	3/1/1935	3/1/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard	Removed From

					Metal	Ordinary Grave
67	Investigation proved the fact that this was not a human grave.					
68	Lottie Prince Bauer	3/1/1935	3/2/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
69	Vaughn Chadburn	2/23/1935	2/23/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
70	Imogene Chadburn	2/23/1935	2/23/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
71	Eveline Barney Peterson	2/19/1935	2/20/1935	Overton, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
72	Homer Pearson	2/22/1935	2/23/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
73	Kenneth Pearson	2/22/1935	2/23/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
74	Martha Dotson	2/14/1935	2/15/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal	Old grave was provided with a concrete cap
75	William A. Dotson	2/14/1935	2/15/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
76	Ormus Calvin Nay	2/28/1935	3/1/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
77	Anna Vilate Syphus Wittwer	2/15/1935	2/16/1935	Logandale, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
78	June Syphus	2/14/1935	2/15/1935	Logandale, NV	Headstone & Footstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
79	Mrs. Nickasaka (A Japanese Woman)	3/1/1935	3/1/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	In the casket was found a copper jar containing the ashes of her infant child cremated at East

						Lawn Cemetery, Sacramento, California, October 22, 1922. Reinterred with the mother's remains.
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Kaolin Cemetery

Grave #	Name of Deceased	Old Grave Opened	Reburial Date	Cemetery Removed to	Kind of Marker	Remarks
1	Jessie Sprague	2/14/1935	2/14/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
2	Ithamar Smith Sprague	2/13/1935	2/14/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
3	Sylvia Beth Riggs	2/18/1935	2/19/1935	Overton, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
4	Lyman N. Shurtliff	2/18/1935	2/19/1935	Overton, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
5	Lillian Diantha Roesberry	2/13/1935	2/14/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
6	Samuel H. Wells	2/13/1935	2/14/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
7	Amy Lewis	2/13/1935	2/14/1935	Logandale, NV	Standard Metal & Broken Headstone	Old Grave Contained Concrete Box
8	Samuel Newton Wells	2/13/1935	2/14/1935	Logandale, NV	Headstone	Removed From Ordinary Grave
9	Jay Kelly	2/19/1935	2/19/1935	Overton, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Concrete Vault, New Concrete Vault Furnished

10	June Burgess	2/18/1935	2/19/1935	Overton, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
11	Frances J. Iverson	2/18/1935	2/19/1935	Overton, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
12	Unknown Male Adult	2/19/1935	2/19/1935	New St. Thomas, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave
13	Stephen Thoral Huntsman	2/18/1935	2/19/1935	Overton, NV	Standard Metal	Removed From Ordinary Grave

All new graves were provided with concrete boxes and standard metal markers except for such graves as were already marked with headstones. This was done at government expense.

Rioville Cemetery

Name	Grave Opened	Reburial Date	Cemetery Removed to	Removed From	Location of Old Burial
Daniel Bonelli	12/13/1934	12/19/1935	"Mountain View," Kingman, AZ	Arizona	Rioville, Arizona, near Bonelli's Ferry and Bonelli Stone House near Colorado River
Unknown Child	12/13/1934	12/19/1935	"Mountain View," Kingman, AZ	Arizona	Rioville, Arizona, near Bonelli's Ferry and Bonelli Stone House near Colorado River
Merry Grigg	12/15/1934	12/19/1935	Hackberry, AZ	Arizona	Smith Ranch near Grigg's Ferry on Colorado River
W. L. Brooks	12/16/1934	12/19/1935	Hackberry, AZ	Nevada	Across Colorado River From "Smith Ranch" near Grigg's Ferry
Iven LeRoy Bundy	6/5/1935	6/13/1935	Mt. Trumbull, AZ	Arizona	About 1/4 Mile Downstream on South Side of Colorado River About 200 Feet From River Bank Near Pierce's Ferry

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- Kowalewski, Jane Percy. "Strange Bedfellows: Mormon and Miners in Southern Nevada." M. A. Thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1984.
- Larson, Andrew Karl. "Agricultural Pioneering in the Virgin River Basin." M. A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1946.
- Madsen, Michael H. "Mormon Meccas: The Spiritual Transformation of Mormon Historical Sites from Points of Interest to Sacred Space." Ph. D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 2003.
- Smith, Melvin T. "The Lower Colorado River: Its History in the Lower Canyons Area." PhD dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1972.

Curriculum Vitae

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Fields

General Fields: U.S. Since 1865; U.S. West; Public History; Latin America

Education

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada, ABD.
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada. M.A. in History, 2005
Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho. B.A. in History, 2003.
University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, Undergraduate Coursework in History,
1998
North Idaho College, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. A.A. in History, 1997.

Dissertation

Recovered from a Contracting Zion: The Evolving Significance of St. Thomas, Nevada. Completion in December 2011. Committee: Chair David Wrobel, Eugene Moehring, Andrew Kirk, David Holland, and Ronald Smith.

Publications

Centrally Isolated: St. Thomas, Nevada, In production at the University of Nevada Press.
The Buildings at the Center: LDS Tabernacles, contract offered by Kofford Books.
"Atomic Cheeseheads: The Nevada Test Site and the City of Las Vegas, 1951-56,"
Nevada in the West (September 2011).
"Building Zion," *Idaho Yesterdays* 47:1 (Fall/Winter 2005).
"The Buildings at the Center: Latter-day Saint Tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Region," (M.A. Thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2005)

Reviews

Edward Leo Lyman, *Amasa Mason Lyman*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009. In *Montana: Magazine of Western History* 60:4 (Winter 2010).

Teaching/Work Experience

Project Archivist, Special Collections, UNLV Libraries Special Collections, August 2010-present.
Author, National Register of Historic Places Register Nomination for St. Thomas, Nevada. January 2009.
Part Time Instructor, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, History 101 and 102, August

2008-2010.

Adjunct Professor, College of Southern Nevada, History 102, U.S. Since 1865,
August 2007-August 2008.

Project Historian, U.S. Park Service, August 2006-present.

Project Historian, Walking Box Ranch, Summer 2005.

Archival Researcher, Nevada Humanities Council, Summer 2005-Summer 2007.

Teaching Assistant, UNLV, HST 100, Empire, Dr. Michelle Tusan. Spring 2005.

Teaching Assistant, UNLV, HST 100, Citizens and Slaves, Dr. Andrew Bell. Fall
2003.

Conferences

Delivered paper at Western Historical Association conference, "Abandoned by a
Contracting Zion: St. Thomas, Nevada," Salt Lake City, October 23, 2008.

Delivered paper at Phi Alpha Theta regional conference, "The Colonial Dynamic:
The Xhosa Cattle-Killing and the American Indian Ghost Dance," 2005

Delivered paper at Phi Alpha Theta regional conference, "A Shadow, a Refuge, a
Covert From Storm and From Rain: The Rexburg Tabernacle 1911-2003,"
2002.

Academic Honors and Distinctions

Roman J. Zorn Award - Best Master's Thesis, UNLV History Department, 2005.

Best Paper by a Master's Student, Phi Alpha Theta Regional conference, Las
Vegas, Nevada, Spring 2005

University Recognition Award, Idaho State University, undergraduate, Fall 2002.

History Department Scholarship, Idaho State University, undergraduate, Fall
2002.

Dean's List, Idaho State University, undergraduate, Spring 2000 - Spring 2003.

Academic All-American, North Idaho College, undergraduate, Spring 1997.

Service

Interviewed by Phoebe Sweet for "Lake's Ghost Town Seen as a Warning," Las
Vegas Sun, March 12, 2008.

Interviewed by Charlotte Hsu for "Keeping His Work Alive," Las Vegas Sun, July 4,
2008.

Professional Development

Comprehensive Teaching Workshop, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Fall
2003.

Professional Organizations

American Historical Association

National Council on Public History

Phi Alpha Theta

Western History Association