The Making of Saints:
The Mormon Town as a Setting for the Study of Cultural Change

BY DEAN L. MAY

Aerial panorama of Ogden shows an evolved Utah townscape. Utah State Historical Society collections, U. S. Forest Service photograph.

Late in 1852 Mormon apostles Erastus Snow and Franklin D. Richards traveled to the remote frontier settlement of Cedar City, Utah, to check on the progress of missionaries who for a year had been attempting with little success to develop an iron industry in response to a call from Brig-

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ham Young. Snow’s report to the Deseret News on the progress of the mission was optimistic, but indicated that his hopes for the community went well beyond success in the smelting of iron. “We found a Scotch party, a Welch party, an English party and an American party,” he wrote, “and we turned Iron Masters and undertook to put all these parties through the furnace, and run out a party of Saints for building up the Kingdom of God.” Brigham Young often sought to counter the materialistic appeal of California by insisting to his followers that the less fertile Great Basin was “a good place to make Saints.” He illustrated his point on one occasion with a powerful metaphor that compared the incoming population to clay on a potter’s wheel, men who “have got to be ground over and worked on the table, until they are made perfectly pliable and in readiness to be put on the wheel, to be turned into vessels of honor.”

These are typical of many expressions of Mormon leaders in the nineteenth century, indicating that the paramount task they set for themselves in their new environment was a social one—building the heterogeneous harvest of converts arriving each fall from all parts of western Europe and the United States into a unified, harmonious, orderly community. More important than reducing the rich ores of Cedar City to sorely needed strap iron and nails was the task of putting the disparate crew of workers “through the furnace” that they might emerge “a party of Saints for building up the Kingdom of God.”

Also typical of the Mormons was the fact that such regeneration was not entrusted solely to the workings of God’s spirit upon the prepared heart of the faithful. An intricate network of offices and institutions was devised, limiting opportunities for backsliding and antisocial behavior, constraining the convert with strong filaments of obligation and association, leading him unremittingly along the strait path towards Sainthood. Central to these purposes was the doctrine of the gathering, a concept which since Joseph Smith’s time meant moving not just to a locality but into a compact town or village where a community of the faithful was established. It was “the duty of the brethren,” the prophet said in 1838, “to come into cities to build and live, and carry on their farms out of the cities, according to the order of God.” The community accordingly be-

1Deseret News, December 25, 1852.
came for Mormons the nexus of those institutions that were to be active agents in the building of Saints. Asked in 1882 if it would be proper for Latter-day Saints to settle on individual farmsteads, President John Taylor explained that:

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 out 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.4

So persistent were the forces perpetuating this form of settlement that in 1937, nearly a century after initial settlement of the Salt Lake Valley, Mormon settlers near Malta, Idaho, founded a new community according to the traditional pattern.5

In many respects the Mormon town has been unlike other western towns; and although popular local histories abound, detailed historical studies of the possible influences of town life in giving a distinctive shape to Mormon society are rare. During the last decade historians have applied new methods to the study of community life in colonial New England and elsewhere, greatly changing our view of early society in America. This paper reviews significant past studies of the Mormon town and then describes the work of several historians who have applied the techniques of the "new social history" to New England towns, suggesting how their work opens important possibilities for similar studies of early Mormon communities. What is offered here is not a finished study of Mormon towns but rather a proposal that many such studies be done and a suggestion as to what their primary concerns might be.

THE MORMON TOWN

Beginning in 1849 and continuing to the present an extensive bibliography of literature on the Mormon town has grown up. Scholars as well as authors of popular travel accounts have stressed various distinctive aspects of Mormon town life, according to their particular interests and often in response to national concerns that seemed at times to have made the Mormon experience instructive and relevant. Most of these writers were content to describe what they felt were distinctive aspects of Mormon group life, but a few went beyond this to attempt an explanation of how Mormon society evolved historically into the forms they observed. William K. Smythe, for example, an avid promoter of irrigated agriculture during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, drew ingenious

The following list is by no means comprehensive, but includes important works dealing with Mormon town life. Early travel accounts include: William Kelly, Across the Rocky Mountains... (London, 1852); Howard Stansbury, Exploration and Survey of the Great Salt Lake... (Philadelphia, 1852); John W. Gunnison, The Mormons, or, Latter-day Saints, in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake... (Philadelphia, 1852); S. N. Carvalho, Incidents of Travel and Adventure in the Far West... (New York, 1857); William Chandler, A Visit to Salt Lake... and... Mormon Settlements in Utah... (London, 1857); Richard F. Burton, The City of the Saints... (New York, 1862); Elizabeth Wood Kane, Twelve Mormon Horses Visited in Succession on a Journey through Utah to Arizona... (Philadelphia, 1874); and Philip S. Robinson, Sinners and Saints... (Boston, 1883).


ly upon Frederick Jackson Turner to argue that the regeneration of a decadent "gilded" America depended upon the successful development of irrigable lands in the Intermountain West—America's last frontier. His model for this ideal society was the Mormon village. "Utah as it appeared to the eye of the delegate," he wrote in 1891, after attending the first National Irrigation Congress in Salt Lake City, "is the arid region as we hope it will soon appear to the eye of the world." "If you ask me for an example of what might be accomplished in this line," a colleague, Thomas F. Walsh wrote,

I point you to the irrigated valleys of Utah. These were settled by comparatively poor men... They live on small farms. They enjoy economic independence by the simple method of producing the variety of things which they consume. They live chiefly in villages and so have social advantages not usually within reach of farming communities... I love to think of those green oases among the Utah mountains. If dark hours shall ever come to the Republic, the dwellers in those lovely valleys will know nothing of it except by hearsay.8

Evolving their own crude variation of Turnerian environmentalism, the irrigation enthusiasts concluded, as Smythe phrased it, that "the economic institutions of Utah are the natural outgrowth of the conditions of an arid land. Utah is the product of its environment... The forces that have made the civilization of Utah will make the civilization of western America." Though Smythe's faith in the irrigation ditch as an agent of social regeneration seems in retrospect naive and simplistic, his work was nonetheless, for its time, forward-looking and significant. He was among the first to attempt a more or less systematic description of Mormon town life. Perhaps more importantly, he drew upon the most recent theories of social development to offer a "scientific" explanation of how, in past time, the peculiar qualities of Mormon society had emerged.

More recently, several scholars have centered their work upon precisely those questions Smythe raised in the 1890s. They have attempted to describe aspects of Mormon life that are thought to set the group apart as a distinctive American subculture and to explain how this subculture emerged. The first, and most important of these began in 1948 when anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn and sociologist Talcot Parsons joined with others in planning a major research endeavor known as the "Comparative Study of Values in Five Cultures" project, sponsored by the

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2Irrigation Age 17 (1902): 370-71.
3Smythe, Arid America, pp. 52, 56.
tinctively different in values as in physical appearance from non-Mormon areas in the American West. Aside from well-known aspects of the physical landscape, centering in the nuclear farm village settlement pattern, Mormons have been observed by outside scholars to place greater stress on unity and solidarity within the community than is the case in non-Mormon communities, avoiding competition, promoting cooperative enterprise, placing a higher value on group achievement than on individual achievement and on developing virtue and doing good over other achievement goals. In addition, Mormons have a uniquely cotenon church/community structure and an unusually strong patriarchal family structure.\textsuperscript{19}

Such a description raises several immediate questions, of course, for it seems to read more like a sociologist's "ideal type" than a description of reality. Does it hold true for Mormon communities in the distant as well as more recent past? Does it describe an urban congregation or ward as well as a rural village ward? Are we observing expressions of a value system only, or does Mormon behavior accurately reflect the value system? These are important questions, worthy of the attention now being given them by sociologists and other scholars. For the moment, however, let us suspend disbelief, and accept the description we have offered above as being at least broadly accurate for many Mormon groups during some periods in towns and villages spreading across a large area in the Intermountain West.

If we were to do so we would be brought to conclude that Brigham Young and his associates had in some measure succeeded in their paramount task—the making of Saints. The critical question of Mormon history is not precisely that of Crèvecoeur, "What then is the American, this new man?" But we might appropriately ask a more modest question, "What is this new variety of American, this Mormon?" or, more significantly for the historian, "Whence this Mormon?" During the last 150 years a readily distinguishable variety of American has arisen in our midst, under our very eyes, as it were, and has been perpetuated in some localities to the present. The matrix within which this process took place

Laboratory of Social Relations of Harvard University and supported by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation. Between 1949 and 1955 a veritable army of social scientists descended upon the five cultural groups occupying the southern edge of the Colorado Plateau in western New Mexico: Zuni, Navajo, Spanish, Mormon, and Texan. The Mormon village of Ramah, named Rimrock in the publications of the project, thus became an object of intensive scrutiny. Altogether sixty-eight separate pieces were published by members of the research team, including their summary work, *People of Rimrock—a Study of Values in Five Cultures*, which appeared in 1966. One member of the team, Thomas F. O'Dea, published *The Mormons* in 1957, a fruit of the project that occupies in the sociology of the Mormons a position comparable to the work of Leonard J. Arrington in their economic history.

The “Comparative Study of Values in Five Cultures” project has left us with a fascinating and detailed description of society in a Mormon village of the 1949–55 period. It is an important recent supplement to the more spare and statistical work on Mormon villages of the 1920s and 1930s by Lowry Nelson. It shares with Nelson, however, the sin of omission common to both anthropological and sociological work, a failure to examine the processes of change over time. Of scholars in these disciplines only John L. Sorenson and Mark P. Leone have sought to detail historical developments in Mormon village life. Their work, one hopes, will point the way for future students whose studies, in the aggregate, could broaden both the geographical and chronological scope of Mormon community studies.

The work of Leone and of participants in the five cultures project supports the proposition of geographers Donald W. Meinig, Richard V. Francaviglia, and others, that there exists a Mormon culture region, dis-

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was the Mormon community, a community peopled by immigrant and American-born. The varied body of converts from England and other parts of western Europe was not primarily agrarian but consisted of large numbers of skilled craftsmen, tradesmen, and factory workers. For many, their only common experience as Mormons to the time they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley was their conversion and their long journey to the Rocky Mountains. After a brief stay in Salt Lake City they generally settled in small farming villages. There, cast into close association with other Mormons, in formal church gatherings and in less formal daily associations, they began in earnest the process of becoming Saints—of developing the unique character later scholars described in Ramah and in other Mormon villages. In detailed studies of life in Mormon villages of the past one has a rare opportunity to discern and analyze the processes that contributed to the building and perpetuation of a distinctive subculture.

**NEW COMMUNITY STUDIES**

Useful models for the study of Mormon communities have been supplied by historians of colonial America such as Philip Greven, John Demos, Kenneth Lockridge, and Michael Zuckerman. Richard Bushman's work, although not centering on a specific community, is also important to the kind of study being proposed here, as is the work of Richard T. Vann on early English Quakers. The distinguishing feature of the work of these scholars is that they have painstakingly interwoven the impressionistic and anecdotal genre of community history familiar to us with detailed analysis of changes over time in the economic and social conditions of community life. As historian Rhys Isaac put it, such studies give one the rare opportunity of directly approaching a central problem in American history, "the relationship between articulated ideology and the unsystematized awareness of social structure and process that we refer to as experience."

There are several reasons why similar work in the study of Mormon communities has barely begun. First, historians are reluctant to invest

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the extra time needed to familiarize themselves with the techniques of collecting and analyzing raw social data and then to do the work. Second, academic institutions closest to the Mormon church archives, accustomed to seeing the historian's only expense as the purchase of books and 3-by-5 notecards, have not allocated funds for programming, keypunching, and computing essential to such work. In addition, the quality and consistency of Mormon records is by no means uniform. Before 1907 vital records, for example, were kept or not kept in local ward minute books according to the diligence or caprice of whoever was serving as ward clerk. They have not been systematically deposited in a central archive from the beginning but have drifted in over the decades from the attics and trunks of church members. Moreover, the LDS Historical Department has not, until recent years, aggressively pursued the task of cataloging its holdings, preparing registers of important collections, and making them available to scholars. Important progress in all these areas is now taking place, and there is the prospect a few years hence of at least knowing what is available and how to find it. Even when this is done, however, the social historian will find serious gaps in the Mormon records due to the haphazard manner in which they were kept and preserved.

The problem is aggravated by the fact that for much of the nineteenth century there was no separate civil record kept for many communities except for the federal census. Until towns became incorporated, virtually all local concerns were taken up in ward councils, with only a residuum being referred to county probate courts, for which there are few surviving records, or to higher ecclesiastical councils, which tended to be more systematic in record keeping. Neither minute books of town meetings nor registration of vital events can normally be found in continuous series for Mormon towns as they can for New England towns. Nevertheless, the ward records for some localities are complete and very detailed. Financial records of various kinds are available that offer a uniquely comprehensive outline of the economic activities of many localities. In addition, amateur genealogists have completed what Mormons call "family group sheets" for most Mormon families, making it possible to reconstitute the demographic structure of entire communities at a fraction of the time and expense normally involved in such projects. Finally, Mormon diarists have left a very rich and valuable pool of resources, soon to be made more useful and accessible through the Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies prepared by Davis Bitton.17 In summary, it

17To be published in Provo, Utah, by Brigham Young University Press.
is probably true, that despite deficiencies, the materials available for the study of Mormon communities are more complete and varied and certainly more centrally accessible than is the case for communities in most areas of the western United States.

Hoping, then, to exploit the riches of the Mormon collection and to work around its paucities, scholars have begun a study of the town of Kanab, settled in 1870, on the then southernmost border of the Mormon domain. Data have been drawn from the manuscript federal censuses of 1870 and 1880, from a local census taken by the Kanab United Order in 1874, which included assessments of land and property values for each head of household, and from "family group sheets"—family reconstitution forms in the archives of the Genealogical Society of Utah. These data have been backed by a sizeable body of ward minute books and a good collection of diaries. Thus far, indicators of household size and structure, population structure, distribution of wealth, completed fertility at age of marriage, and other basic demographic characteristics of the Kanab population of 1874 have been calculated. These preliminary data have been published elsewhere, and need not be detailed again here. The study is useful, however, in pointing out two or three significant problems that have interested other historians of small rural villages of colonial New England and that the Mormon experience might help illuminate.

Probably the most sophisticated and ambitious of recent studies of small farming communities is Philip J. Greven, Jr.'s Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts. Greven has found that the men who settled Andover in the 1640s rapidly established a closely integrated community characterized by strong family relationships, with fathers maintaining authority over mature sons through control of abundant farming lands. The citizens of Andover were remarkably healthy and the wives surprisingly fecund. Stability characterized the community until the eighteenth century when the population began to exert pressures upon the available supply of land. No longer dependent upon fathers who had little land to offer in any case, the sons began to marry at earlier ages and to move from the ancestral

"Dean L. May, "People on the Mormon Frontier: Kanab's Families of 1874," Journal of Family History 1 (December 1976). The author is also collaborating with Mark Skolnick, Lee L. Bean, and others in a major demographic study, with the goal of building and analyzing a file of family reconstitution data to include nearly every Mormon family ever to have had a demographic event in Utah. In this interdisciplinary effort, the author will be focusing especially upon town and community studies and upon migration of Mormons within the Intermountain area. A description of the project together with early data on nuptiality and fertility is in M. Skolnick, L. Bean, D. May, V. Arbon, K. de Nevers, and P. Cartwright, "Mormon Demographic History I: Nuptiality and Fertility of Once-Married Couples." (Submitted to Population Studies, September 1976)."
home into unsettled areas. Patriarchal authority declined, mobility replaced stability, the population became less healthy and less fecund. Greven suggests further that the intense religious commitment of the Puritans, perhaps a product of dislocations suffered by the fathers of those who settled Andover, was refreshed by the experiences of the fourth generation. Younger sons, unsettled by the encroachment of population on land in the eighteenth century, tended to people localities that enthusiastically supported the religious revivals of the 1740s.19

Like the settlers of Andover, the first citizens of Kanab were impelled by a conscious desire to establish a cohesive, stable community. Almost immediately, however, the Mormon patriarchs were deprived of the instrument that permitted the men of Andover to maintain authority over their sons. An extravagant estimate, extrapolated from census data on population and farm acreage, indicates that farms in Kane County could not have averaged more than 14.5 acres of tillable land per family. By 1880 there remained in the whole county only 1,160 acres of unimproved lands yet to be cultivated, not counting stock grazing acres, or about three additional acres per family if the land were distributed evenly among them.20

This suggests that the pressures Greven saw destroying family and community solidarity after 100 years of settled life in Andover were at work in Kanab by the end of the first decade of settlement. In 1880 there were 109 young men in the village between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, threatening—were they to establish farms of their own—to reduce already limited resources of land and water below a subsistence minimum. Had all established independent farms in the area during the succeeding decade, they would have more than doubled the number of households in the community.21

How did communities with severely limited resources accommodate such growth? It is reported that in Ephraim, many holders of twenty-

19Michael Walzer has related the rise of Puritanism to family disintegration in Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics (Cambridge, Mass., 1965). See also Christopher Hill, Society and Puritanism in Pre-revolutionary England (New York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1964). The implications of this thesis for Mormon history are fascinating, for if it should prove that maturing cohorts of youth were repeatedly being forced to leave home and build anew elsewhere we would find the same disorientation repeating itself and, as Greven proposes, leading to a renewed search in each generation for order and community, with an accompanying reinvigoration of the religious value system.

20Calculated from U.S. Census data for 1880. Total persons in Kane County (3,065) was divided by persons per household in Kanab (5.2) to estimate the number of households in the county (595.26). This figure was multiplied by two-thirds (a conservative estimate of the number of landholders). Total acreage of agricultural land in the county, improved (6,923 acres) and unimproved (1,160), was then divided by the estimated number of landholding households (397).

21Data gathered by the author from the U.S. manuscript census.
acre parcels voluntarily relinquished five of their acres to provide land for new immigrants. But such incidents were probably exceptional; and in any case, there were limits, both practical and moral, to this kind of selflessness. Did fathers distribute land evenly among their sons? Were first sons favored and younger sons forced to settle elsewhere? What effects did forced emigration of the young have upon family cohesiveness, kinship ties, or the perpetuation of religious values and sentiments? These questions cannot be answered today, but available data can yield answers through the type of detailed study now being done.

The Kanab experience permits one to ask some interesting questions of Greven. The overcrowding which in Andover led in four generations to the decline of community and family cohesiveness was present in Kanab almost from the beginning of settlement. Yet descriptions of Mormon villages in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are strongly reminiscent of those Greven used to describe Andover in her halcyon years. Did Kanab achieve, in the absence of the paternal whip of land control which made Andover so tranquil, a similarly stable and cohesive society? If so, then could it be that Greven’s stabilizing mechanism is altogether too simplistic and that there were more important forces working in Andover that have not yet been identified?

John Demos, in his study of family life in Plymouth colony, likewise raises questions that one might profitably ask of the Mormon family in the nineteenth century. Small, cramped houses with limited living space made it necessary for family members to suppress hostilities and resentments which then were vented in their relationship with those outside the family. It was perhaps typical of life in Plymouth, Demos suggests, that “a man cursed his neighbor in order to keep smiling at his parent, spouse, or child.” If this economics of hostile impulses is valid, then what might one look for in attempting to discern the relationship of Mormon family and village community? The impression from Mormon diaries is that community harmony and solidarity was a supreme value and that the socially imposed restraints upon open expression of anger against one’s brother and sister Saints were as severely limiting as they were in the houses of Plymouth. When discord surfaced, the bishop or other priesthood officers arranged a face-to-face meeting of the disputing parties and the matter was usually settled by expression of mutual repentance and promise of future brotherly feelings.


Demos, A Little Commonwealth, pp. 49–51.
James L. Bunting of Kanab was furious at officers of the farming cooperative whose horses had strayed into a commonly fenced field and destroyed part of his crop. When he later refused to turn his improvements (presumably a portion of his harvests) into the cooperative institution, the secretary brought him before a bishop’s court on charges of unchristianlike conduct. The bishop did not sustain the charges but concluded that Bunting nevertheless was in need of repentance and should turn in his improvements to the cooperative. Bunting did so and made public apology, recording the whole matter in his diary without a hint that his public apology did not represent his real feelings. If community solidarity were consistently achieved through such means it would follow from Demos’s logic that pent-up hostilities would find their release in some other manner—perhaps contentiousness in the home, the beating and mistreatment of animals (which the Saints were constantly enjoined against), or in a ritual hatred and distrust of Gentiles. Or could it be that Demos’s proposal is too limiting in its implications and that in the monolithic Mormon town social constraints imposed by endless preaching and mutual watchfulness actually lowered the level of hostility rather than forcing it into more socially acceptable outlets?

On another question, Demos has argued eloquently that the family in colonial society carried numerous social burdens that since have been parcelled out to other institutions in society. The family, he said, was a school, a business, a vocational institute, a church, a house of correction, a welfare institution, an orphanage, an old folks home, and a poorhouse. The local Mormon church or ward intervened directly in management of several of these social concerns, assuming in some cases responsibility for what one would feel today are personal family matters, such as marriage and family structure. Was the Mormon family then, diminished by the church’s assumption of power in such matters? One might suspect that in polygamous families, social and economic concerns would loom large as factors favoring stability, muting the growing emphasis in other American families on romantic love as the primary cement of stable family relationships. But if many social responsibilities already were partially assumed by the church, what social roles remained for the family in Mormon society, and what was the nature of the network relating individual to family, to community, to outside church authority? Research-

—James Lovett Bunting Diary, April 19 and October 5, 1878, Archives Division, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

ers have only begun to ask such questions of the Mormon community and as yet can offer no answers with confidence.

Michael Zuckerman, in his study of New England towns in the eighteenth century, raised questions especially relevant to the Kanab experience. Brigham Young called settlers to Kanab in 1870 under the express condition that their new community be characterized by “cooperation in all things.” Cooperation in laying out the townsit, in building fences and canals, and in other activities did take place; and in 1871 a cooperative farming association was organized. However, diarists recorded some dissatisfaction with those arrangements; and when the communitarian United Order was introduced in late spring 1874, the town began to break into two factions, divided primarily over whether a full communal organization or a loosely structured producers’ cooperative was most desirable. Bitter controversy continued for four years and feelings remained high for decades thereafter. 26

Interesting in the Kanab experience, however, is not the fact that there was controversy but how the settlers responded to it. Clearly the disharmony occasioned by the United Order experience was seen by all sides as grievous calamity. The bishop suspended administration of the sacrament or communion for several months. Priesthood teachers did not visit their families. A new bishop was called from outside the community to assume leadership of the ward as well as of the United Order. When he was released no bishop was chosen for several months because, as one high church official put it, “the people were not united.” 27 The community avoided a secession, as had happened when the Orderville founders broke away from Mount Carmel, only by assuming the burden of a prolonged inner agony. This response to such an experience would have been unheard of in non-Mormon western settlements where faction and the excesses of individualism were accepted daily fare.

Zuckerman came to the conclusion that “children who grew up in provincial Massachusetts grew up in a society which insisted on concord and consensus; as they grew they became, subtly, almost irresistibly, people who could live in such a society.” 28 It may safely be said that the many children of Kanab also grew up in a society that insisted on con-

27 Kanab Ward Historical Record, Book A, August 7, 1877, LDS Archives. The speaker was Apostle Erastus Snow.
28 Zuckerman, Peaceable Kingdoms, p. 72.
cord and consensus. In 1874 the terms apparently described more accurately what the citizens felt ought to be rather than what was. Yet, if the descriptions of Mormon society in other provincial towns are valid for Kanab, one would be forced to conclude that the children did eventually realize in some measure the harmonious society their fathers wished for. If so, it would be enlightening to know more about the processes which brought so happy a conclusion.

Zuckerman asks by what authority harmony was maintained in New England towns. He concludes that the town meeting provided a forum where problems were discussed and disputed until consensus, not a majority decision, prevailed. If a man later went against town meeting decisions to which he had publicly assented, he faced strong community disapproval. In Kanab, meeting after meeting was held to discuss the United Order. Virtually all men of the community were asked to express their feelings each time, in a ritual that surely was cathartic and lowered the level of tension in the town but more importantly committed the heads of household in public to support the aims of the United Order leaders. The process was almost exactly the same as that described by Zuckerman in the New England town meeting.

Public opinion offered an important means of insuring compliance to town resolutions in New England villages. In Newburyport an agreement not to buy foreign tea was enforced "by the threat of publishing the names of unrepentant offenders as 'pests of society and of ye Country.'" Such sanctions were important in Mormon towns as well. In Brigham City, Utah, for example, priesthood officers were reportedly placed at the doors of private business establishments in competition with the town-owned cooperative store. No sanction was used other than to take down the names of Saints who patronized the private store, but this was sufficient to close it down. Similarly, in Salt Lake City the stake high council compelled reluctant members of a canal association to pay their assessment by threatening that unless payment were made soon defendants would "be cut off from the Church and their names published."

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Ibid., pp. 154–86.

2Quoted in ibid., p. 240.

3Arrington, Fox, and May, City of God, pp. 447–48; the minutes of the General Council of the United Order of Box Elder County, July 20, 1880, LDS Archives, contain a unanimously carried resolution to "disapprove, discountenance, and disfellowship all persons who would start an opposition store or who would assist in erecting a building for that purpose."

4Minutes of the Salt Lake Stake High Council, September 7, 1871, ms., LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.
According to Zuckerman, when accommodation could not be reached between factions in the New England town and outside arbitration failed there was no alternative but separation, as the cases of Anne Hutchinson, Roger Williams, and Thomas Hooker illustrate. In the Utah village of Mount Carmel a dispute over the United Order was resolved in precisely this manner and peace and harmony restored to the new community and the old. This same sequence of events led to the founding of Bunkerville, Nevada, as a communal United Order village.³⁸ Some leaders of Kanab wished to separate as well, but higher church authorities would not permit it, a decision that kept the village in anguish long after peace had been restored in Mount Carmel. Ultimately several prominent participants in the controversy did separate, joining the new community of Orderville.

By now it should be obvious that studies of New England colonial villages offer the student of the Mormon community more than just fresh methods and provocative questions. There emerges from the writings of these scholars and others a general description of town life that sounds hauntingly familiar to the student of the Mormon community. Kenneth Lockridge, in his study of seventeenth-century Dedham, Massachusetts, has concluded that “the founders of this community set out to construct a unified social organism in which the whole would be more than the sum of the parts. To a considerable degree, they succeeded.”³⁹ Michael Zuckerman called his New England towns of the eighteenth century, “Peacable Kingdoms,” maintaining that “consciousness of community, in Massachusetts, continued at least three quarters of the way through the eighteenth century as a prime value of public life, and abiding core of provincial culture.” The study, he concluded, had nourished his “notion that other-oriented communalism is central to a comprehension of the American experience.”⁴⁰ Richard Bushman observed that “In the last quarter of the seventeenth century the Puritan rulers of Connecticut valued order above all other social virtues... Community order occupied most of the rulers’ field of vision.”⁴¹ These scholars do not agree upon when the integrated, well-ordered society of colonial New England began to disintegrate nor upon what forces led to its dissolution. Some place the limits of the harmonious communal order at the edges of the nuclear

³⁸See Chapter 13 of Arrington, Fox, and May, City of God.
⁴⁰Zuckerman, Peacable Kingdoms, p. vii.
⁴¹Bushman, Puritan to Yankee, pp. 3-38.
family, others at the edge of town. But all have concentrated upon understanding the connection between “order and growth, authority and meaning” in the colonial New England town. And all agree that for some periods of time and at some level an extraordinarily harmonious society was realized.

One cannot help but be reminded of the letter Asael Smith, Joseph Smith’s New England–born grandfather, left to his family as a final summary of the wisdom of his years. In one paragraph he asked his descendants to “Bless God that you live in a land of liberty” and to “hold union and order precious jewels.” He apparently did not perceive in 1799 that the first value, “liberty,” might come to be in opposition to the second two, “unity and order.” It is perhaps significant that Joseph Smith’s visions were above all organizing and unifying in their influence upon himself and upon a family divided in religious faith. “If you are not one you are not mine,” the voice of Smith’s God thundered to his followers on one occasion. “My house is a house of order,” it affirmed on another. The two terms of the phrase “United Order,” the Mormon name for a perfect communal society, seem in this context more than historical accident. Unity and Order were the key values Smith’s successor Brigham Young sought to effect within the farming communities whose founding he directed.

Thus, one suggests that studies of Mormon towns should be directed toward those elemental questions addressed implicitly or explicitly in the work of historians of early America. It would be important to test in the Mormon setting Greven’s hypothesis that scarcity of natural resources, such as land or water, can be destructive of family authority patterns, leading to instability and disharmony in local communities. One needs to understand better the relationship suggested by Demos between family harmony and community harmony, asking, of abundant evidence in Mormon towns, if conscious efforts to suppress hostility in one sphere do, in fact, lead to increased expressions of hostility in other spheres. Much would be learned by examining, as Zuckerman did in New England towns, the instruments of social control in Mormon communities. Were the citizens of Mormon towns ever successful in achieving the harmonious society their leaders dreamed of and, if so, how?

One intriguing, and perhaps critical, difference exists between what has been learned through the study of New England towns and what

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*Doctrine and Covenants, rev. ed. 1923, 38: 27; 132: 8."
might be learned through the study of Mormon towns. Greven, Demos, Zuckerman, and Bushman all seem to be describing communities that began in Eden. These scholars sought to identify and understand the forces of disintegration. Mormon towns inevitably began outside the Garden. It may be that in studying Mormon towns one will be discovering and observing forces that led to reintegration.

One is dealing, then, with a central theme of the American experience: the tension between the wish to preserve order and the libertarian ideologies loosed during the Revolution. And one has in the Mormon community what promises to be an endlessly rewarding historical specimen; for it is a society that, true to the advice of Asael Smith and the visions of his grandson, consciously and in some measure successfully, reversed the historic trend of American attitudes toward order and authority. The history of Joseph Smith's spiritual descendants could not be captured in the phrase Puritan to Yankee; Puritan to Puritan might be more appropriate, or perhaps even Yankee to Puritan.