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THE PLAINS ACROSS

The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840–60

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The Mormon "Halfway House"

"It cost nothing to get in, but a great deal to get out"

The beleaguered Mormon faithful abandoning their Nauvoo, Illinois, homes in 1846 yearned for a respite from the Gentile harassment which had forced similar removals from other locations in previous years. Anxious for peace and tranquility, they hoped that the remote valley of the Great Salt Lake to which Brigham Young led them in 1847 would finally provide the isolation necessary to the development of a kingdom powerful enough to resist future tormentors. But even as the Mormons began their westward hegira, they encountered large numbers of Gentile emigrants likewise trailing west. In 1847 the relationships between Saint and Gentile traveling groups were amicable and mutually beneficial: the overlanders secured safe passage across the Platte River in exchange for goods so desperately needed by the destitute Saints that one of their leaders gratefully wrote, "It looked as much of a miracle to me to see our flour and meal bags replenished in the Black Hills, as it did to have the children of Israel fed with manna in the wilderness."

Thus began the dilemma which bedeviled Mormons for the remainder of the antebellum period. Trading with the Gentile throngs bound for Oregon and California or ferrying them across raging rivers was irresistibly profitable. But it guaranteed continued contact. And as long as the Gentile nation remained hostile to Mormon beliefs and practices, contact insured conflict. Friction was similarly assured by the steady stream of Mormon converts who yearly trekked to the Salt Lake haven on some of the same trails used by Gentile travelers bound for the West Coast. Indeed, the very existence of a sizable settlement relatively close to the Oregon-California Trail virtually precluded isolation, since thousands of overlanders eagerly detoured via the Saint oasis to rest, recuperate, reprovise, reoufit—and to satisfy their curiosities about Mormon manners and morals. The anti-Mormon reactions of some of the passing emigrants, and particularly the enthusiasm with which they were publicized, contributed significantly to the U.S. Army's 1857 march on the internmontane kingdom to chastise the Saints. Accordingly, an evaluation of the interaction between Mormons and overlanders may be as necessary to an understanding of the causes of the "Mormon War" as it is to proper assessment of the overland emigrating experience.

Brigham Young's plans for the desert mecca were ambitious, extending even to the acquisition of a seaport on the Pacific Coast. Initial explorations into the surrounding area were quickly followed by colonizing missions. Passing emigrants thus found not only an impressive city by the lake but also clusters of small communities presumably located to defend the inner cordon of settlements and to sustain the all-weather route to San Diego along the "Mormon Corridor." Within ten years of their arrival at Salt Lake, Mormon pioneer-missionaries under Young's close supervision had established ninety-six separate settlements. Outposts fanned out from the Salt Lake City axis in all directions: southwest along the corridor to San Bernardino, California, southeast to Moab, Utah, northeast to Forts Bridger and Supply, north to the Fort Lomhi mission on Idaho's Salmon River, and westward to Mormon Station in the Carson Valley. An impressive testament both to Young's aspirations and abilities, this extensive domain initially spanned some 1,000 miles from its northernmost to southernmost point and 500 miles from east to west. It incorporated one sixth of the territory of the United States.

Population growth was commensurate with physical expansion, reflecting both a high birthrate and a steady stream of incoming converts, many from Britain, Scandinavia, and other European locations. According to the 1850 census, Salt Lake City residents comprised about half of Utah Territory's total non-Indian population of 11,380. Ten years later Salt Lake City's 8,236 inhabitants represented only a fifth of the territorial settlers. Ogden (located on the site of Miles Goodyear's short-lived Fort Buenaventura), Provo, and Springville all boasted populations ranging between 1,000 and 2,000, and several other towns numbered nearly 1,000 residents. So many farms dotted the landscape that one 1860 traveler described the region north of Salt Lake as "thickly settled."

For this rapid growth the Saints were much indebted to the overland emigrants, whose timely transit had insured the viability of the Salt Lake Valley settlements. Extremely anxious to expedite their California journey in any possible manner, at least 10,000 forty-niners detoured via the Mormon oasis. They anticipated exchanging wagons, lame draft animals, household furniture, tools, clothing, and other excess supplies and provisions for a horse or mule and sufficient flour and vegetables to sustain them during the remainder of their journey. Thousands more traveled via Salt Lake in 1850 and in subsequent years. The impact of the resultant
transactions had an extremely salutary effect on the depressed valley economy—as contemporary Mormons clearly comprehended. Through what they believed to be the providential miracle of the gold rush, an inestimable amount of useful material was suddenly made available on extraordinarily favorable terms to a community struggling for survival.

Even that which overloaded overlanders had thrown away before entering the Salt Lake Valley was secured by canny Mormon pioneers whose scavenging parties ranged far out onto the plains. John D. Lee’s 1849 gleaning expedition eastward from Salt Lake City was only the best known of many such endeavors. As late as 1856 Mormons collecting debris were encountered along the Sweetwater River. Especially welcome were the tons of iron from abandoned wagons they brought back into the valley, as well as the treasures quarried from pseudo-emigrant graves. Many overlanders unable to bring themselves to throw away especially prized possessions (such as casks of brandy) adopted the tactic of burying the goods in question. The sites were identified with fake grave markers on the assumption that the specter of death would keep the goods safe until they could be retrieved at some future time. Some of these buried treasures were later sold to traders who returned to dig them up. But most were disinterred by Mormon scavenging parties familiar with the stratagem, who, according to Mormon functionary Almon W. Babbitt, “being somewhat inclined to marvellous deeds . . . gave resurrection to many bodies even before dissolution.”

Westbound forty-niners recognized so clearly what their passage through the Salt Lake Valley meant for the Mormon economy that they quite naturally assumed the Saints to be following an established policy of luring as many travelers as possible through the valley. Eastbound Mormons, Saints stationed at ferries and trading posts east of the valley, and Mormons circulating among the several outfitting points were all believed to be in league with the Mormon hierarchy to entice emigrants to Salt Lake by whatever means necessary. Suspicious gold seekers thus reported a host of dubious assertions pressed upon them: that the detour via Salt Lake did not lengthen the journey to California, that fire, drought, overgrazing, and/or marauding Indians made the non–Salt Lake City routes extremely precarious, that prudent travelers would not chance the trail beyond Salt Lake with their wagons. J. Goldsborough Bruff, after hearing such tales all along the trail, concluded that they were “Mormon lies” advanced to obtain valuable property cheaply. Bruff did not lead his company via Salt Lake. James Tolles’s company, which did detour through the Mormon capital, withstood strong pressures there to sacrifice wagons and baggage in favor of pack animals because “they [did] not fool us for we got too well acquainted with Mormon ways and principles in Nauvoo.”

It is doubtful that the Mormon leadership was committed to such a policy in 1849 or any other year. Certainly if there ever had been such a
policy it had been repudiated by 1850, as the Saint hierarchy recognized that thousands of passing emigrants were bane as well as blessing. Brigham Young's pronouncements, from the inception of the Salt Lake settlement, candidly revealed his preference that all Gentile travelers bypass the Salt Lake Valley. Within a week after reaching the valley in 1847 Young told the first Mormon arrivals, "We do not intend to have any trade or commerce with the gentile world." In July of 1850 Young publicly encouraged emigrants then in Salt Lake to write their stateside friends to "tell them to bring their supplies, and do not depend on this place for your bread." He also refuted the assertion supposedly advanced by Almon Babbitt that emigrants could secure supplies in Salt Lake, making it clear that Babbitt had been told "positively that we could not supply the emigrants with food."

Worried because of the still-precarious status of the Salt Lake experiment, Young particularly feared that valley Mormons would imprudently sacrifice crucial wheat and flour reserves in their enthusiasm to acquire specie and supplies. In 1850 and again in subsequent years, Young warned valley residents that if too much flour was sold or traded to transients, oversupply amounts would remain for the thousands of impoverished Mormon pilgrims arriving each fall. Utilizing speeches and yearly General Epistles, Young reminded the faithful that transforming the Salt Lake Valley into a "Garden of Eden" was a work of more than one or two years, that poor harvests and starvation remained ominously possible, and that misunderstandings were certain to abound. However, Saints found flour priced at five or ten cents per pound because Gentile overlenders had secured so much for two or three cents per pound during the summer. The Deseret News even threatened to publish the names of those who trafficked to excess with Gentile passersby or who sold flour too cheaply.

Young and other Mormon leaders also complained about such undesirable ramifications of overland traffic as travelers who abandoned sick or injured comrades in Salt Lake City, and those permitted their stock to run loose through city streets and cultivated fields. In the spring of 1851, rejoicing in the new fencing and quarantine regulations designed to prevent this, Young recommended that overlenders travel via Fort Hall rather than be inconvenienced by these regulations. In 1854 the Mormon leader urged emigrants to utilize every route for travel to the West Coast except those winding through the Salt Lake Valley, remarking that it was a real "blessing" so few travelers were choosing to travel through the city. By 1856 Young's anti-emigrant bias was well enough known to have spawned trail-side rumors, one emigrant diarist recording the tale that the Mormon mentor excommunicated all Saints who traded with Gentiles.

Despite Young's attempts to keep Saint-Gentile encounters at a minimum, curious overlenders and those in need of various supplies and services flocked to Salt Lake. In the valley energetic trading invariably ensued, since most Mormon residents welcomed the opportunities for profitable trade, Young's strictures notwithstanding. In 1853 the Deseret News deplored the great number of Mormons who had literally "run" after emigrants "begging" them to purchase flour at what News editor Willard Richards judged the ridiculously low sum of two and a half to three cents per pound. Lamenting the shortsightedness that discounted possible crop failures and starvation, the editor ruefully reported that overlenders were not even bothered to drive their teams to pasture or procure hay since flour could be obtained so cheaply.

Young's aversion to trading with overlenders appeared to lessen during periods of abundant harvest. In 1853 he specifically advised overlenders that most commodities could be purchased in Salt Lake for less than the cost of hauling them there. Nevertheless, Young and other Saint leaders never wavered in admonishing their brethren to charge high prices for what they sold to Gentile overlenders. That Young was at least partially successful in his exhortations seems clear from the report of an 1856 emigrant group mistakenly thought to be Mormon: "We bought flour at $6 a barrel, if they had supposed us gentiles it would have cost us five times as much."

In 1850 Young suggested that all gold seekers should be made to pay dearly since they were presumably en route to great wealth; three years later editor Richards similarly justified higher prices for overlenders "who have had no toil or expense in the matter [raising food stuffs in the valley], either by taxes, surveys, roadmaking, bridge or ferry fixins, &c, &c." He predicted that "gentleman travelers" would recognize such a practice as "reasonable." A year earlier Richards had pointedly explained the difference between being kind to strangers by sharing freely with destitute travelers who were penniless (which was encouraged), and selling flour for "nothing" to those who could well afford to pay higher prices (which was denounced). Additional editorials not only recommended charity for indigent travelers but specifically admonished the Saints to treat all passing overlenders with fairness, particularly those who had persecuted the Saints in the States, in the hope that some would be converted and remain permanently in the valley.

Although a few proselytes periodically remained to sojourn permanently with the Saints, a considerable number of overlenders passing through the valley vociferously condemned Mormon business and judicial practices as well as the already notorious religious customs. Before assessing the validity of their bitter complaints, however, a detailed review of the many varieties of Mormon-emigrant interaction in the Salt Lake vicinity is necessary.

Each spring valley observers carefully watched for the first Gentile arrivals of the year. Mormon entrepreneurs ventured far out on the trail to
sell vegetables, butter, milk, eggs, and chickens to oncoming emigrants. Usually the earliest overlanders appeared in early June, but in 1850 one speedy company reached Salt Lake City in late May. Emigrant arrivals generally continued unabated through August. During the peak gold rush years of 1849 and 1850 hundreds of weary overlanders rolled into the Mormon mecca daily, with late starters and slow travelers arriving throughout the fall. In 1849 nineteen starving late starters fought their way through snow six feet deep to reach Salt Lake City on December 1.

Since the earliest arrivals often jumped off from the frontier before spring grasses could sustain forage, they counted heavily on the Salt Lake oasis for re provisioning, as they had kept their stock alive on grain and flour. Even more dependent on the Mormon center were destitute travelers whose applications for aid at Fort Laramie had enabled them to secure provis ions sufficient only to reach Salt Lake.

For most of these “golden pilgrims,” as one Mormon dubbed them, reaching Salt Lake City meant a well-earned rest at what Benjamin Ferris, Secretary of Utah Territory, termed the “half-way house between the eastern and western portions of the continent.” Gold rusher Calvin Taylor’s comments on reaching the city are illustrative of its significance to overland emigrants: “This was a joyful occasion to us notwithstanding our prospects for the future, as it afforded an opportunity of present relief and of obtaining the rest we all so much needed.” With so many gold seekers pouring into Salt Lake City in 1850 the entrepreneurially inclined *Deseret News* editor offered to print their names, home addresses, and Salt Lake arrival and departure dates in the newspaper and to send a copy of that issue to a designated recipient in the States, all for twenty-five cents. An analysis of the more than 600 overlanders who chose this means of communicating their progress to relatives and friends reveals how important the Mormon halfway house was: the average length of stay in Salt Lake City was six and a half days. Virtually no traveler departed from Salt Lake without laying over for at least a day, while some remained nearly five weeks before resuming their westward pilgrimage.

Since most overlanders traveled via Salt Lake for purposes of trade, their week in the city was principally devoted to seeking out the best possible bargains. Initially, these negotiations were conducted only with resident Saints. But alert stateside entrepreneurs were quick to establish stores in Salt Lake City where transient travelers could procure merchandise identical to that available in Missouri and Iowa outfitting points. James M. Livingston and John H. Kinkead of St. Louis opened the first such establishment in the fall of 1849. Despite the eight or ten clerks they employed, the press of business with valley residents and overland emigrants was so great that travelers sometimes found it nearly impossible to complete transactions. According to local rumor the new merchants were able, after only two weeks of business, to pay their bills and send nearly $20,000 back to Missouri. The next year Livingston and Kinkead freighted sixty wagons of merchandise to Salt Lake City. However, their monopoly was short lived, since other non-Mormon merchants eager to tap the valley and overland trade quickly followed. Among them were Benjamin Holladay and Theodore F. Warner of Weston, Missouri. Opening their Salt Lake emporium in 1850, by the following year they were freighting equally impressive amounts of merchandise to Salt Lake City.

The isolation Brigham Young so desired was further precluded by the aggressive advertising these resourceful merchants conducted in the eastern states. In March, 1852, for example, Livingston and Kinkead, Holladay and Warner, and O. H. Cogswell, three of the many Salt Lake City “merchants and traders,” jointly advertised in the St. Joseph *Gazette* that every item the traveler might need was available in Salt Lake City at a fair price. These enterprising advertisers recommended outfitting lightly on the frontier and re provisioning in Salt Lake City. There was logic—and potential profit—in their suggestion: the most difficult portion of the trip could thus be made with relatively fresh animals whose effectiveness had not been reduced by needlessly pulling heavy loads during the easier half of the journey.

In addition to these commercial emporiums, a plethora of enterprising local merchants and artisans regularly advertised their goods and services in the columns of the Salt Lake City *Deseret News*. Local advertisers sought to incorporate emigrant endorsements into their appeals whenever possible. In 1850 the *Deseret News* carried the advertisements of three surgeon-dentists (one of whom also styled himself an oculist), several merchants, two sellers of fresh beef, the proprietor of an eating house, a hunter of stray stock, and two blacksmiths. One smith, A. L. Lamareaux, ingenuously advertised his “Emigrant’s Blacksmith Shop,” succeeding in mentioning every possible appealing feature. After referring to his excellent location on the overland trail north of Salt Lake City in the midst of choice grazing land, Lamareaux noted that butter, cheese, milk, and garden vegetables were readily available from surrounding farmers. Indeed, Lamareaux assured, emigrants could even earn money by working on a nearby road then under construction while their cattle were recuperating and smithwork was being done.

Year by year the number and variety of available goods and services increased. In 1851 a tanner, a turning and machine-shop operator, two more dental surgeons, two watchmaker-jewelers, two daguerreotype specialists, a lumber seller, and a grass and hay cutter began advertising in the *Deseret News*; the following year advertisements for bakers, milliners, and barbers appeared. By 1852, according to the *Deseret News* advertising columns, travelers could patronize several eating houses and hotels. In 1853 the United States Hotel owners advertised the only bar in the city, while variety stores and a “Straw Bonnit and Hat Manufactory” had also
been added to the many conveniences available in the fast-growing half-way house. By 1856 clothiers, weavers, druggists, sign painters, saddlers, and operators of vegetable markets were also actively engaged in trade.

Hotels and eating houses notwithstanding, a great many overland emigrants boarded with Mormon families during their stay in Salt Lake City. Others rented or even purchased vacant houses. Apparently these arrangements were made quite informally, usually with emigrants stopping at a progressive-looking residence to request board for the duration of their respite in the Salt Lake Valley. For the luxury of sitting down at a table to eat, of dining on such trail-rarities as vegetables and milk, and of the reasonable prices charged (fifty cents per meal was common), overlanders were most appreciative. Ansel McCall, in 1849, described his first meal with a Mormon family with obvious enthusiasm: “Our hostess, with dispatch, set before us a sumptuous meal of new potatoes, green peas, bread and butter, with rich, sweet milk. It is needless to say that the hungry wayfarers, who for months had not seen these delicacies, did ample justice to this bountiful repast. The memory of this feast will live with me forever.”

The total effect of all this was significant. To be able to interrupt the once-formidable overland journey for an extended sojourn in a large city where an emigrant could feast on memorable cuisine, board in a bona fide hotel, have a likeness made to send back to relatives, have his hair cut, his watch repaired, and even eyeglasses prescribed must have altered the attitudes with which travelers faced the overland journey. Certainly there were no other places on the overland trail where a gold rusher could write, “Tomorrow we leave civilization, pretty girls, and pleasant memories,” as James Hutchings did in 1849 when his outfit prepared to depart from Salt Lake City.

Overlanders needing these goods and services soon learned that most Mormons, in keeping with the admonitions of their leaders, bargained shrewdly. During the first years of the Salt Lake settlement the Saints placed highest priority on useful articles, preferring to exchange goods with passing emigrants on a barter basis rather than to sell for cash. Forty-niner Amos Josselyn, who reached Salt Lake City in mid-July, wrote to his wife, “We can trade groceries for anything that they have but they will not sell for money, for they have plenty and cannot buy what they want with it.” With many gold seekers so anxious to reach California that they wanted to exchange their oxen, wagons, and surplus supplies for faster-moving horses or mules with pack saddles, considerable trading material was available. The ensuing merchandise exchanges invariably redounded to the benefit of the valley residents, who were able to set prices, as one 1852 emigrant observed, at whatever “their consciences will allow.”

The resultant rates of exchange, when compared with stateside prices, reveal that most emigrants traded at a substantial loss. Wagons, for example, quickly glutted the market and brought little, if anything. But emigrants had to pay from $100 to $200 or its trade equivalent for fresh horses, mules, and even cattle. The extremely inexpensive charges for flour the Deseret News editor so bemoaned were apparently unknown prior to the summer of 1852, before which time the price for flour fluctuated considerably, ranging up to $25 per 100 pounds in 1850. That year, however, flour was almost equally expensive all along the trail. The Salt Lake prices of other commodities—such as bacon, beef, coffee, and sugar—were actually lower than at other trail trading stations.

Emigrants with an ample supply of desirable merchandise or funds usually had few difficulties in reoutfitting, although in 1850 a scarcity of provisions in the Salt Lake Valley forced many who had gone that way to depart empty-handed. Incoming overlanders who had little to trade and nothing with which to buy faced the greatest difficulties. Unless they arranged to proceed with other emigrants, their only recourse was to obtain employment until they were in a financial position to continue their journey. The existence of the rapidly growing Mormon settlement with its employment opportunities for destitute travelers or for those delaying their journey while traveling companions received necessary medical attention thus proved a boon to the overland emigrant.

Whether or not they compared Mormon prices with those demanded by other trail entrepreneurs, most overlanders were convinced that the Latter-Day Saints were possessed of considerable financial acumen. As the emigrants encountered Mormon outposts on their westward journey they offered a steady stream of comments: at the Mormon ferry on the North Platte River forty-niner William Kelly observed that the Saints were “always on the lookout for gain as well as glory—or salvation, more properly speaking”; after encountering a Mormon trader and his wife near Soda Springs, John Banks indicated that “the Mormons are alive to any means of acquiring wealth”; while another forty-niner asserted that if the traveler was “wily” he could “safely go by the Mormon city” to trade stock, rest, and reprovision. By 1853 some emigrants felt that Mormon prices had become so “exorbitant” that they encouraged oncoming overlanders to bypass the valley settlements completely since there remained “no advantage whatever” in traveling via Salt Lake City for reprovisioning or reoutfitting.

While the overlanders complained even more bitterly about the high prices various private entrepreneurs charged along the trail, doubtless what made Mormon prices seem burdensome to many was their longer stay at the Salt Lake oasis. The tempting assortment of available goods and services also helped loosen emigrant purse strings. John Hawkins Clark, whose company rested for nine days in the Salt Lake vicinity in 1852, probably summed up the reactions of most overlanders when he inscribed in his diary upon leaving the last Mormon settlement: “Visiting Salt Lake valley and city was something like taking in the Irishman’s show; it cost nothing to get in, but a great deal to get out.”
Although reoutfitting, resting, and recruiting stock were the most important reasons for a pilgrimage via the Salt Lake Valley, the Deseret judiciary was of comparable significance for emigrants with grievances arising from the overland trip. Even though disputes between Latter-Day Saints and some federal judicial appointees for Utah Territory helped bring on the "Mormon War" of 1857-58, it seems clear that the overland emigrants received fair treatment in the Church-administered lower courts, where their travel-oriented difficulties were adjudicated. Army officers Howard Stansbury and John Gunnison, after spending the fall and winter of 1849 in the spring and summer of 1850 in a scientific survey of the Great Salt Lake and surrounding area, both commented on the generosity, fairness, and impartiality with which passing emigrants were treated by the Saints in and out of court. Gunnison, seeking to explain why Mormon justice was receiving such a bad press, explained that overlanders losing cases often made vituperative remarks about the courts and Church leaders—usually the cause of additional fines for contempt of court. According to Gunnison, these dissatisfied litigants then unjustifiably "circulated letters far and near, of the oppression of the Mormons."

For obvious reasons, emigrant reliance on the Mormon judicial apparatus was primarily a feature of the gold rush years. A high percentage of gold seekers had formally organized into companies—complete with constitutions, bylaws, officers, and, most problematic for what transpired, jointly owned property. When the vagaries of human nature prevailed and the companies disintegrated in bickering and frustration—as most of them did—an equitable distribution of property was mandatory. It would not do for someone to be given a wagon without a draft animal or the means to procure one. Since disintegrating joint-stock companies or traveling partnerships were not always able to make these distributions to the satisfaction of all concerned, the presence in Salt Lake City of lawyers, courts, judges, and a police force capable of enforcing legal decisions was fortuitous.

Attorneys Hosea Stout, Henry G. Sherwood, and William Wines Phelps practiced frequently in the courts of William Snow and Aaron E. Farr during the summer of 1850, when emigrant litigation reached its apogee. The tribunals on occasion commenced their work at seven in the morning, often labored late into the night, and at least once remained in session until dawn on a particularly involved emigrant case. Hosea Stout's diary reveals that from early June through late August of 1850 he was almost continuously employed at law by passing emigrants. While court dockets were primarily jammed with property-distribution cases (which even a meticulous diarist like Stout finally found "not very interesting to relate"), there was a great variety of litigation.

The numerous breach-of-contract cases were vitally important to emigrants who had paid an agreed-upon sum to be transported to California only to be unceremoniously abandoned somewhere near Salt Lake City. While such lawsuits were occasionally dismissed for lack of evidence or false information, the verdict generally favored the plaintiffs. Frequently agreements were also reached out of court after legal proceedings had been instituted. Sometimes the aggrieved party was the entrepreneur, whose passengers had appropriated his outfit or had endeavored to depart without paying anything for their passage to that point. Periodically Salt Lake City police were dispatched to retrieve emigrants who attempted to flee the city without complying with the court's decision. In one instance Mormon constabulary traveled nearly 200 miles westward to apprehend thieves who had taken most of a small emigrant party's outfit. The stolen property was recovered and returned to the emigrants.

Overlanders also sought redress for other journey difficulties. One Iowa traveler was acquitted of the charge that he had abandoned a sick passenger, leaving him to die on the trail; another overlander brought suit against several emigrants operating a temporary ferry over the Weber River. They had guaranteed the crossing, but after accidentally losing the plaintiff's complete outfit in the river they refused to reimburse him for his loss. When the emigrant won his case the ferrymen threatened an appeal, until learning that other unfortunate patrons contemplated similar suits. Quickly paying the 75-dollar judgment, the ferrymen immediately departed for California. Other travelers sought judgments against dishonest emigrants who attempted to sell stock they did not own or requested the court's assistance in distributing the property of deceased emigrants. Stout reported that one overlander was fined $50 and costs "for selling sugar which had been fouled by the excrement of a man dying with something like the Cholera had ran on it & had been thrown away by the owners & gathered up by De[depay] and sold for 25 cents pr lb."

Assault-and-battery suits also came before the Salt Lake courts, as did emigrant actions against Jim Bridger and Louis Vasquez for selling horses without "vending the brand" (guaranteeing that the horse was not stolen by certifying that the brand was that of the seller), and against Thomas Moor and other Mormon ferrymen for overcharging emigrants at the Green River. Significant in the Moor case, as in several others, was the fact that Gentile emigrants did win suits against Mormons in Mormon courts. In 1849, for example, a Saint was found guilty of stealing a pair of boots from an overland emigrant, was fined $50, and was ordered to return the boots and pay the emigrant four times their value.

A substantial amount of litigation was also concerned with overland emigrants who ran afoul of local ordinances. Most common in this regard was stock straying into Mormon fields and gardens, an infraction subject to penalty by action of the May, 1849, Deseret legislature. A great many of these "trespass" cases came before the courts, and the fines could be burdensome: one emigrant was assessed $74 for the damage his cattle did in two vegetable gardens one July, 1850, night. On occasion emigrants
resisted the enforcement of these regulations. One such objector was the Reverend Alvin Mussett, whose cattle had been impounded after being found in a Saint's grain field. Mussett, threatening to shoot anyone trying to stop him, forcibly retrieved his cattle. He was then haled into court, fined $10 and court costs, and ordered to pay the cost of the destroyed grain. Reflecting the disdain of most Mormons for Missourians, Stout observed that the hot-tempered pastor was "a perfect specimen of the Missouri ministry." Occasionally it was not negligent emigrants but Mormon herdsmen who were fined for illegally pasturing emigrant cattle in community fields. Such entrepreneurs often arranged to herd travelers' draft animals (reported per-animal assessments rose from two cents in 1849 to twenty cents per day ten years later) while the emigrant attended to his provisioning and took in the sights.

In 1852 the Saints established a temporary hospital at the mouth of Emigration Canyon and appointed Dr. Jerer Clinton to enforce a quarantine law aimed at preventing oncoming overlanders from introducing diseases into Salt Lake City. That the regulation quickly became a dead letter was obvious from the observations of one of that summer's passing emigrants: "... the hospital building is barely large enough to hold the doctor, a barrel of whiskey and a few decanters... The doctor was busily employed in dealing out whiskey and appeared to have a good run of custom in that way, but how many sick emigrants he attended to I did not stop to inquire.

Most emigrants seemed blissfully unaware of Brigham Young's pacifying influence with area Indians, another notable Mormon contribution to overland travel. Perhaps overlanders did not acknowledge Young's important role because his overarching commitment to Mormon interests emboiled him in a great deal of controversy with Gentile Indian agents, or because a number of emigrants suspected that the Mormons occasionally directed Indian depredations against Gentile passersby. Yet Young's maxim that "It is cheaper to feed the Indians than to fight them" is well known and reflected his policies as ex officio superintendent of Indian affairs and governor of Utah Territory. And there is no gainsaying the fact that emigrants trudged through the Mormon domain with greater safety from Indian attack than elsewhere along the overland trail. Lieutenant John Gunnison aptly summed up the situation even before Utah became a territory, remarking that the Mormons were "more than an army against the Indians on the West."

Since Salt Lake City's importance to overlanders as a source of supply, justice, and security derived mainly from its geographical location, it was only natural that westbound emigrants also looked to the Saints for up-to-date information on the journey beyond Salt Lake City. After all, Mormon traffic between Salt Lake City and California had commenced with the settlement of the Salt Lake Valley, and with characteristic thoroughness the Saints had quickly familiarized themselves with their surroundings. Since by the early 1850s the ruts of the overland trail were too conspicuous for anyone to require much route information, it was the gold rushers who profited most from Mormon advice and the trails and cutoffs blazed or popularized by Mormon pioneers.

For the edification of overland travelers Mormon writers produced at least four travel guidebooks succinctly summarizing the latest information. The first to appear, William Clayton's The Latter-Day Saints' Emigrants' Guide, was probably also the most influential. Clayton carefully measured the overland trail on the north side of the Platte River by means of an ingeniously fashioned wheel roadometer while traveling to the Salt Lake Valley with the pioneer Mormon band in 1847 and returning that fall to the Kanesville winter quarters. Clayton's small guidebook, incorporating these mileage figures, was printed in St. Louis the following spring. For the portion of the trail it covered—from Kanesville to Salt Lake City—it proved to be one of the most reliable and highly praised of all gold rush guidebooks. At least two overlanders who traveled by its precepts termed it "perfect."

Ira J. Willis's Best Guide to the Gold Mines appeared in 1849. Though considerably less pretentious and precise, it was carefully studied by information-starved emigrants. Willis was also a seasoned western traveler, having marched with the Mormon Battalion in 1846 from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe and then to California, where the battalion volunteers were discharged in July, 1847. Willis remained in California another year, even working for a time at John Sutter's sawmill, before traveling to the Salt Lake settlements in the summer of 1848 with a small group of other battalion veterans. Their trip, made with loaded wagons, significantly altered subsequent overland travel since the battalion veterans pioneered two important new wagon routes. The Best Guide to the Gold Mines thus contained updated information on the trails between Salt Lake City and California unavailable in other travel guides. Some overlanders, however, found it too sketchy to be of much value. Willis's hand-written guidebook had been hastily prepared and consisted only of two folded sheets of paper sewn together. Apparently different抄ists were involved in reproducing the pamphlets, for word spellings varied. The guidebooks were sold, usually for $1, not only in Salt Lake City but along the trail as well.

Considerably more sophisticated were B. H. Young and J. Eagar's Emigrant's Guide, available in Salt Lake City in the summer of 1850, and Joseph Cain and Arieh C. Brower's Mormon Way-Bill, to the Gold Mines, published by the Deseret News in February, 1851. The Young and Eagar guidebook concisely traced the trail from Salt Lake City to San Francisco, while in forty pages Cain and Brower described the last half of the overland journey, from Pacific Springs to the California gold fields, likewise incorporating the most recent trail developments. The Cain and Brower
guidebook sold for $1 and apparently was available on the Missouri River frontier for sale to overlanders commencing the long journey.

While thousands of overland travelers used Clayton's guidebook, neither the Willis, Young and Eager, nor Cain and Brower volumes was disseminated as broadly. All four, however, affected the travel patterns of California gold rushers by publicizing variant trail routes either discovered or improved by Mormon travelers. Clayton's guidebook highlighted the overland trail on the north side of the Platte River, which emerged as the main travel thoroughfare in the 1850s. Cain and Brower were the only guidebook authors to mention the "Golden Pass Road" which served as an alternate trail through the Wasatch Mountains into the Salt Lake Valley during the 1850s. The Golden Pass Road was surveyed and cleared by Parley P. Pratt. Postings a large signboard to inform travelers of his new toll road, Pratt opened the route for travel about July 4, 1850. While Pratt's road afforded easier travel than the established trail, it was nine miles longer and difficult to keep in repair. Moreover, travelers resented the toll payments. Presumably for these reasons, after Pratt sold his toll rights in the spring of 1851 before departing on a Church mission, the Golden Pass Road lapsed into almost complete disuse and no longer remained a real travel option, despite the guidebook endorsement. During 1850, however, it had been heavily traveled. Perhaps 5,000 or 6,000 overlanders had traveled into the valley on the new road, enabling Pratt to collect $1,500 in tolls.

The major Mormon route innovations, though, occurred west of Salt Lake City, and were explained in the Willis, the Young and Eager, and the Cain and Brower guidebooks. These travel developments originated in the 1848 eastbound trip of Willis and other battalion veterans. Before that seminal journey overlanders had uniformly traveled into California along the Truckee River route. Despite losing three men to marauding Indians, the battalion explorers pioneered a new route along the Carson River, described that route to westbound overlanders encountered on the trail, and were principally responsible for what became the most popular travel artery into California.

Additionally, the battalion members entered Salt Lake City by a new trail described to them by westbound emigrants with whom they had shared route information. This was the Salt Lake Cutoff, an immediate boon to emigrants who traveled via Salt Lake City. It meant the long journey via Fort Hall or the hazardous trip via the Hastings Cutoff could now be avoided in favor of a shorter, easier route. Indeed, the new route was pioneered in 1848 by a small party of overlanders traveling by pack mule who had tried to exit from Salt Lake City on the Hastings Cutoff but who had returned to Salt Lake City after sudden rains transformed the salt flats into a muddy quagmire. They then blazed a new trail which intersected the main Oregon-California Trail at the City of Rocks. Samuel J.

Hensley, a seasoned overland traveler, was the leader of this pack-mule party. The eastbound Mormons he met traveled over the route, found it acceptable, and publicized its existence as the Salt Lake Cutoff or the Salt Lake Road. From then on it was utilized by most overlanders who traveled via Salt Lake City, although in the vast migration of 1850 possibly 600 or more men still struggled across the Hastings Cutoff.

There was yet another way to reach California from Utah. In 1849 and 1850 more than 1,000 gold rushers followed a southwestern route from Salt Lake City, many employing Mormon guides for the venture. These were overlanders who reached Salt Lake City relatively late in the traveling season, or cautious emigrants who feared that there was insufficient forage for their stock and returned to Salt Lake City after having journeyed two or three days on the Hastings or Salt Lake cutoffs. They were also travelers who had been obliged to spend considerable time in Salt Lake City while receiving medical treatment, or while pregnant wives were delivered of their offspring, or until sufficient funds had been accumulated to repropose for the later portion of the trip. No matter what the reason for the delay in their progress, however, all were extremely anxious to reach California before the fabled gold deposits had all been discovered. But the Donner disaster had made overland emigrants properly hesitant about attempting the precarious Sierra crossings of the California Trail too late in the travel year. Not looking forward to wintering among the Saints, such persons responded enthusiastically to the blandishments of certain Mormons—some of whom even ran advertisements in the Deseret News—that a safe all-weather route to California was at hand along what soon came to be known as the "Mormon Corridor."

Salt Lake City thus also served as a staging area for large numbers of emigrants determined to reach golden California without further postponement. Mormon elder Jefferson Hunt, who had journeyed to California and back over this trail in 1847-48, recommended the route so persuasively in the fall of 1849 that the owners of 100 emigrant wagons agreed to pay him $10 per wagon to pilot them over the southern route. Although a number of Mormon groups had already traveled safely over the trail, they had done so only with pack animals and loose stock. Because of the hardships they endured while inaugurating wagon travel along the corridor, forty-niners came to believe that Brigham Young was responsible for propagandizing the route so that gentile emigrants would forge a wagon trail to California for Mormon benefit. One forty-niner recollected Brigham Young's persuasive techniques: "The Sunday we were there he stated in his sermon that the Lord had come to him in a vision and told him that no emigrants starting after that time over the northern route to California would arrive there, but would leave their bones to bleach on the plains or in the mountains. Some trains were frightened and went by the southern route, though to their sorrow. We came safely through the
northern route, but by a tight squeeze.” Whether or not the forty-niners’ suspicions about Mormon motivations were true, it remained that most emigrants were desperate to reach California without delay, that the southwestern route was practicable, and that the forty-niners would have experienced a relatively uneventful journey on that trail had not many become captivated by the will-o’-the-wisp hope that a shortcut existed.

Most departing emigrants congregated at Provo, forty-five miles south of Salt Lake City. Here considerable Gentile-Mormon socializing took place, with gold rushers particularly enjoying dances attended by attractive Mormon belles. At least six discernible contingents of overlanders left Provo in 1849 on this southwestern course, but, characteristically, few arrived in California in the same group with which they began. First to leave was a company of over 100 packers. They reached Los Angeles in late October following a routine journey. The Gruwell-Derr company, composed of twenty-three wagons whose owners refused to pay Hunt’s guide fee, moved out just ahead of the Hunt party with a Mexican guide. After splitting into two sections, running out of food, and sending six men ahead to procure supplies in California, they ultimately received additional assistance from the Hunt contingent. The Gruwell-Derr travelers straggled into Los Angeles during December and January. Hunt’s “Sand Walking Company” was initially the largest, with slightly over 100 emigrant wagons, at least twenty Mormons (mostly packers), and approximately the same number of Gentile packers. The entire company wasted seven days early in the journey searching for a shortcut of which Hunt had heard but the existence of which he did not guarantee. After this sobering failure, Hunt stuck persistently to the regular trail, but those he was guiding had not yet soured on elusive cutoffs.

One of the emigrant packers, O. K. Smith, had a map, presumably of a direct route westward on which the mines could be reached in a mere twenty days with a saving of 500 miles. Smith had apparently secured this enticing information from mountaineer Elijah Barney Ward, who had traveled extensively in these regions and had been at the Bear River in 1849 encouraging emigration via Salt Lake. Hunt strongly advised against attempting the alleged shortcut. But the prospect of digging gold within twenty days was irresistible for everyone except the sixteen Mormon owners of seven wagons, who remained with Hunt on the regular trail and reached California shortly before Christmas. Eventually most of the emigrants—probably slightly over 500—thought better of their rash trailblazing attempts and returned to follow Hunt’s trail to California. The remaining overlanders doggedly persisted on “Walker’s Cutoff” in spite of seemingly impassable canyons and inadequate water. They suffered immeasurably as they struggled over rugged terrain to California. A few men died, some were never heard of again, and their ordeal in crossing Death Valley has become legendary.

Three additional 1849 contingents brought up the rear, all prudently remaining on the main trail: the Pomeroy company, a group led by Howard Egan, and one captained by S. D. Huffaker which temporarily joined the Egan group. Probably more than 100 emigrants traveled in these last companies, which reached California safely early in 1850. In retrospect, the success of the approximately 750 forty-niners who followed southwestern routes to California fluctuated in relation to their willingness to remain on the regular trail. Those who did fare quite well, some completing the entire journey in as little as ninety days. The 100 or more who stubbornly attempted the variant routes—and scholars have identified at least ten—suffered immensely. The survivors of the Death Valley tribulations spent a full four months in reaching California from the day they hopefully branched off on the twenty-day shortcut.

In 1850 impatient overlanders again launched out from Salt Lake City during the fall and winter on the corridor route, but few again attempted to improve its course. Joseph Cain advertised waybills in the Deseret News, while Barney Ward himself, now a baptized Mormon, offered to guide emigrants to Los Angeles for $10 per wagon or per company of five emigrants. The Deseret News editor endorsed Ward’s proposal, indicating that the “South Route” was “a good road” and that those who had traveled it the preceding year had gone through “safe and are satisfied that it is far pleasanter than the Northern Route.” The leaders of one ninety-wagon train sought unsuccessfully to obtain from Brigham Young a detailed report of the route made by a returning Mormon missionary party which reached Salt Lake City in August. This caravan left Salt Lake on October 8 but without Ward, whose interpretive skills had suddenly been needed to help the Saints alleviate an impending Indian conflict. The company made the journey in slightly over two and a half months, relying on a makeshift “memorandum” of the route given them by a friendly Salt Lake resident.

Throughout the 1850s there was considerable traffic along the route. In addition to overland emigrants there were Mormon settlers, missionaries, freighters, and mail carriers. And year by year more Mormon colonists settled along the corridor, so that when Jules Remy and Julius Brenchley traveled along it in 1855, Mormon towns stretched out for over 270 miles from Salt Lake City to Cedar City, Utah. They also found a recently raised Mormon fort at Las Vegas before arriving at the Mormon settlement of San Bernardino, California, one month after leaving Salt Lake City.

But not all overlanders who reached the Salt Lake oasis launched out again the same year to finish their journey to the Pacific Coast. In fact, westbound emigrants had so quickly recognized another of the attractive features of the Mormon halfway house that some forty-niners announced even before leaving the Missouri frontier in spring that they intended to winter in the Mormon settlements if for some reason they were unable to
complete their journey during the travel season. John D. Lee, on his 1849 scavenging mission east from Salt Lake, reported that dozens of oncoming emigrants frequently crowded around his wagon asking such questions as “What will be the chance to get fresh animals, Provisions, vegetables, Butter, cheese, &c. & could we winter in the valley? . . . Stop & write us a way bill.” A. W. Babbitt, arriving in Kanesville in early September with a load of mail from Salt Lake, reported that when he had left the valley 5,000 forty-niners were planning to winter there. Most of that number, however, ultimately continued on to California, many on the southwestern trail. Although precise statistics are scarce, it is certain that several thousand emigrants wintered in the Salt Lake Valley during the principal years of the gold rush. The peak probably was reached during the winter of 1850-51, when approximately 900 sojourned in the Mormon stronghold. Three years later only 200 “Winter Mormons” or “Winter Saints,” as these half-year residents were called, wintered in the valley. The number continued to dwindle, finally consisting largely of overlanders trailing large herds of cattle and sheep to California.

These temporary residents found the Mormon halfway house much superior to army posts or private trading posts, where a few gold rushers also waited out western winters. They were particularly attracted by Salt Lake City’s varied opportunities for employment, its medical facilities, its stock-grazing and outfitting services, its religious and cultural activities, and its all-important nearness to California. Yet despite all these advantages, many of the temporarily stranded Gentiles deeply regretted their decision to winter among the Saints. Indeed, the Latter-Day Saints’ treatment of the Winter Mormons was so controversial that it became a cause célèbre in the western press, thereby reinforcing the anti-Mormon attitudes already so widespread throughout America.

Nelson Slater and the Reverend J. W. Goodell were the principal publicists of the tribulations endured by the Winter Mormons. Slater, a New York–born schoolteacher, was forty-five years old in 1850 when, with his wife and three children, he interrupted his California trip to winter in the Salt Lake Valley. In 1852 with Philip L. Pratt he would co-author a much-used overland guidebook, but first he compiled a ninety-four-page indictment of the valley Mormons which he entitled, in the prolix fashion of the day, Fruits of Mormonism; or, A Fair and Candid Statement of Facts Illustrative of Mormon Principles, Mormon Policy, and Mormon Character, by More than Forty Eye-witnesses. The tract was published in Coloma, California, in 1851, and immediately became an invaluable resource for all newspaper editors, overlanders, and politicians sharing anti-Mormon sentiments. The Reverend Goodell also wintered in the valley in 1850-51 with his family. Becoming the spokesman for those Winter Mormons who trailed to Oregon, Goodell outlined their complaints in nine lengthy letters to the editor of the Portland Weekly Oregonian in the spring of 1852. These jeremiads were also widely disseminated by anti-Mormon travelers and newspaper editors, similarly serving to nurture anti-Mormon attitudes.

Both men emphasized that they represented a great many disgruntled emigrants. Slater carefully explained that the California-bound group had initially intended to write individual letters back to the States recommending that no one winter in the Salt Lake Valley except in the most unavoidable circumstances. However, while gathering in the Carson Valley preparatory to crossing the Sierras in the early spring of 1851, they had decided that the more influential course was to compile a complete and accurate summary of their experiences in pamphlet form which could be mailed to friends and relatives. While assembled in the Carson Valley a set of resolutions and a memorial to Congress describing their grievances were also drafted. Slater claimed that virtually all emigrants remaining in the Carson Valley signed the completed documents: “Nineteen out of every twenty of those to whom they were presented, signed them unhesitatingly, as expressive of their sentiments upon the topics mentioned in them.” The resolutions and memorial were appended to Fruits of Mormonism and called upon the Congress to abolish Utah’s territorial government and to establish in its place a military government “sustained by a strong garrison . . . [to] protect United States citizens, and secure to them their lawful and inalienable rights of life, liberty, and freedom of speech, guaranteed to them by the Constitution of the United States.”

According to Goodell, the Oregon-bound emigrants similarly made “a solemn pledge, that if they were ever again permitted to breathe the air of freedom, they would to the utmost of their power expose the corruptions of that [Mormon] people.” Indicating that his traveling companions were urging him to write “a faithful history” of their misfortunes, Goodell explained that already in the Salt Lake Valley the Oregon emigrants had appointed him chairman of a committee to draft a memorial to Congress “on the subject of our unjust and cruel treatment.” If prepared, Goodell’s memorial has to date not been uncovered. However, through the pages of the Oregonian he did request that all emigrants who had wintered in the Salt Lake Valley in 1850-51 and 1851-52 supply him with depositions detailing the injustices perpetrated by the Mormons so that he could forward them to Washington. And even though the main focus of Slater and Goodell’s fulminations remained on the winter of 1850-51, the western press continued to report “bitter” complaints by subsequent Winter Mormons through the winter of 1853-54.

In addition to the paucity of Mormon evidence on the subject, a principal difficulty in understanding the winter milieu in the Salt Lake Valley is the occasional contradictory testimony of the emigrants themselves. On the one hand, one unidentified forty-niner remarked, “When I first came into the valley there was a large number of emigrants here, that expected to stay till spring, but now all seem determined to go on, which is
mainly owing to the uncongeniality of feeling existing between the people.

the other hand, most gold rushers were agreed that the Saints treated them with considerable cordiality until the traveling season was so far advanced that none but the most foolhardy would still attempt to reach Oregon or California. Further, there is considerable evidence that, at least in 1850, the Saints went out of their way to encourage overlanders to winter in the valley. They had emphasized such inducements as high wages and steady employment, and underscored the lateness of the traveling season and the difficulty of all the trails leading to California.

Recognizing that many of their compatriots who had traveled through the Salt Lake Valley without incident might not believe their assertions, Slater, Goodell, and other disgruntled Mormon residents maintained that the Saints followed two policies with respect to emigrants: one in the summer, another in the winter. Thus, only in winter could a clear view of the “Mormon elephant” be seen. The discontented emigrants attempted to explain why they had been so strongly encouraged to winter in the valley, speculating that the Mormons had been motivated by the desire for capable artisans and laborers who, being transients, might be willing to work for less than permanent valley residents. Also influential, thought the overlanders, were the funds the Saints expected to raise by levying taxes upon temporary Gentile residents, as well as the concerted effort to inflate the actual valley population by enumerating Gentile transients in the 1850 census as valley residents, thereby speeding Utah’s entry to statehood. One disgruntled emigrant complained that the Mormons “followed the emigrants 100 miles to take the census. We contended that they had no right to our names, for we were not citizens of Utah Territory nor never would be. But our arguments availed nothing, and we will therefore be returned to the Government as Mormons, which will be a cheat.” Finally, since the Mormons did proselytize among the transient overlanders, it is probable that the missionary emphasis was of at least marginal significance as well.

The anti-Mormon chroniclers cited a host of illustrations to support their wide-ranging charges. One of the most frequently voiced complaints concerned the infringement of personal rights and liberties. Freedom of speech was an especially troublesome area, particularly critical observations about the Mormon religion and its prophets. Friendly Saints tried to warn emigrants of the dangers in speaking freely about religion: “Mr. Thompson, of Great Salt Lake City, warned me to keep my tongue quiet, and I found him best so to do; for, from the many examples I have heard of, there is danger of having one of these ‘destroying angels’ pounce upon one, when one does not know it.” Despite such warnings, a number of emigrants were arrested and fined for expressing opinions the Mormons judged to be offensive. Further complicating the situation were Saints who deliberately enticed emigrants into expressing their real feelings about Mormonism, and then took them to court for doing so. One fiery overlander was considered fortunate to have escaped with a $50 fine and $50 in court costs after having been provoked to say, as Goodell prudishly explained, “‘...if a man in the States should get as many wives as Brigham had, he would be called a notorious libertine.’ (This was not exactly the word he used, it was of similar import, but a little more offensive.)” Other Mormons represented themselves as returning Californians or apostate Saints in order to tempt Winter Mormons into damaging statements. Thus in fear of informers and reprisals, many emigrants despaired of even meeting publicly to consider their predication. In fact, those trailing to Oregon had become so accustomed to whispering whenever discussing Mormonism that they found themselves still whispering long after leaving the Salt Lake Valley.

Similarly, Winter Mormons were convinced—as was Indian agent Jacob H. Holeman—that emigrant letters mailed in Salt Lake City were routinely opened and those reflecting negatively on the Mormons destroyed. Holeman even took to sending some of his letters by private hands to ensure their safe delivery. Several emigrants claimed to have seen torn remnants of their own letters in or near the post office, and Goodell claimed that he had heard Mormons admit that the mails were being monitored in this fashion. A few overlanders who had written critically about the Mormons were subsequently threatened.

Winter Mormons believed that the Salt Lake City anti-swearing statute, which appeared in February, 1851, was similarly designed to entrap emigrants—after all, they were virtually the only ones prosecuted. Goodell, who could not countenance swearing, ruefully admitted that many emigrants paid for their verbal discretion by working on public buildings while emburried with ball and chain, but still could not quite accept that “the devil [was] punishing sin!” An emigrant correspondent of the Milwaukee Sentinel described this intriguing regulation in more detail in 1852: “...a man may commit what we call swearing—say hell and the devil, and all that sort of thing, as much as he pleases; but if he should put the usual prefix, and say ‘G—d d—n it,’ instead of simply ‘d—n it,’ he is walked before a magistrate and fined five dollars and costs. Several emigrants who have been mulcted to this tune think the distinction a very queer one, especially as the faithful all indulge in d—ning to their heart’s content, from the head of the Church down.”

Most emigrants avoided such fines but few bypassed what they considered an added violation of individual rights—the 2 percent personal property tax. Winter Mormons protested both this “unjust” tax (Slater resurrected the old “taxation without representation” maxim) and the manner in which it was often collected. According to Goodell, heavily armed policemen would appear without warning, evaluate Gentile possessions at inflated rates, demand immediate payment, and confiscate emi-
grant property if payment was not forthcoming. Goodell was taxed $18.80 for his two wagons, four yoke of oxen, four cows, and personal effects, while one Missouri emigrant with five wagons was assessed nearly $60. For those short on cash the tax meant parting with a wagon, precious draft animals, or other possessions. Hard-pressed overlanders particularly resented this tax because it jeopardized the successful completion of their journey.

The property tax was, however, only one among many ways in which the resources of Winter Mormons were exhausted. Indeed, many Winter Mormons were convinced that the Church not only supported but encouraged the use of any tactic—from extortion to murder—which prevented Gentiles from taking cash out of the valley. By midwinter of 1850 emigrants who had contracted for specific wages with Mormon employers in the fall began to receive payment in undervalued produce instead of in cash. Many ultimately received only a small fraction of the agreed-upon salary, if they were paid at all. Ezra Benson, one of the twelve Mormon Apostles, was regarded as an especially notorious offender who provided only partial remuneration and then walked away eschewing explanation and refusing further discussion. Slater’s *Fruits of Mormonism* specifically admonished emigrants to “avoid all business transactions” with the unscrupulous Benson.

Another indirect but fruitful means of appropriating emigrant resources was the “nuisance” lawsuit. Winter Mormons, as Slater and Goodell explained the stratagem, invariably lost, even while winning, since Gentile defendants and not the losing Mormon plaintiffs inevitably were assessed the court costs. If the emigrant could not pay, his possessions—usually the all-important draft animals—were attached. According to one disgruntled 1854 traveler, the warped tenets of Mormon justice extended even to the Green River ferry: “...there is an organized country here under the jurisdiction of the Mormons and also have officers of justice I will give an idea how they put their laws in force An emigrant having got drunk there one day shot one of their dogs they tried him and fined him 80 dollars he not having the money sold his mothers team to pay the fine.” Goodell related an experience of his own to illustrate the pattern. He purchased wheat at the rate of $3 per bushel throughout the winter, some of which local thieves stole from him. One Saint admitted the theft of three bushels of wheat and reimbursed Goodell accordingly. Yet the Saint suddenly demanded the return of his money just when Goodell and the Oregon-bound Winter Mormons were preparing to leave the valley. Accosted by an officer demanding $16 (including $7 for “costs”), Goodell insisted on a trial. The six Mormons comprising the jury surprised him with a verdict of “No cause of action.” But before Goodell and his family had returned to the outlying Oregon encampment, the plaintiff, who at the initial trial had admitted taking the wheat, appealed the case to the county court. Officers quickly returned Goodell to Salt Lake City, forcing him to leave his family stranded on the road in a raging blizzard. The jury was unable to agree on a verdict so a third trial was held, where once again a “No cause of action” judgment was rendered. The astonished Goodell then heard the judge assess him, and not the self-confessed thief who had instituted the proceedings, the court costs of $75. His teams and wagons were impounded until Goodell was able to borrow the money from a friend. If the incident occurred precisely as described, it was no wonder that Goodell left the Salt Lake Valley anxious to crusade against the Saints, or that the entire Oregon company halted briefly once beyond the reach of Mormon authorities for a round of speeches, gun salutes, and flag-flying—a “silabracion,” as one spelled it, at being “out of morminism.”

Incidents of this nature, and according to Goodell and Slater there were many, underscored another theme stressed by the anti-Mormon publicists—the absence of impartial justice for Winter Mormons. Some overlanders who wished to institute proceedings against Mormons had been prevented from doing so. Prominent Saints like Ezra Benson were assumed to be immune to litigation. Furthermore, emigrants were haled before magistrates (and sometimes so inconvenienced in the process that their departure from the Salt Lake Valley was considerably delayed) on all types of spurious charges. In these circumstances many Gentile sojourners acceded to virtually any Mormon demand, no matter how obnoxious, merely to avoid court proceedings.

Slater also accused Mormon officials of callously administering the estates of emigrants who died in the valley, thereby securing even more emigrant resources and greatly disadvantaging the family or traveling partners of the deceased. Another common allegation was that Mormons implicated in suspicious emigrant deaths were not even brought to trial. In this connection Winter Mormons frequently speculated about “Danites” who killed for the Church, and Indians who were thought to perform similar services for Saint leaders. These accusations were all incorporated in what was certainly the central assertion of Slater and Goodell: that U.S. citizens were systematically victimized in the Salt Lake Valley. Latter-Day Saints could and did, it was argued, cheat, swindle, extort, steal, and murder with impunity.

There was still more in Slater and Goodell’s bill of anti-Mormon particulars: the Saints were unpatriotic subversive guilty of treason. It was bad enough to be told the American flag could not be flown in the valley, it was even worse to listen to the profane harangues of Church leaders. Brigham Young, Ezra Benson, other Apostles, judges, sheriffs, and lay persons all were accused of publicly threatening to kill some or all Gentile emigrants, or of verbally abusing the U.S. government. Brigham, at the July 24, 1851, Mormon celebrations even put to a vote the proposition that all overlanders should be beheaded. The assembled Saints passed it
unanimously. The anti-emigrant rhetoric, as recorded by outraged overlanders, was indeed ominous:

If I had my way, I would cut your damned throats! [judge]
If I had my way, I would drown you in the Jordan river. [deputy sheriff]
I thank God that the time is not far distant, and I shall rejoice when it comes, that I shall have the authority to pass sentence of life and death upon the Gentiles, and I will have their heads snatched off like chickens in the door yards. [Judge at an emigrant's trial]

Hear it ye emigrants! if any of you say ought against the Mormons or their practices we will take off your heads! ... Yes! we will take off your heads! by the eternal God we will do it, in spite of all the emigrants! and all the United States! and all hell!!! [Brigham Young]

Only rarely did the Saints respond to these wide-ranging allegations, and then the reference was more likely to be tangential rather than a direct attempt at refutation. One such occasion was a *Deseret News* editorial of June 26, 1852, on the California gold worshipers who would soon again be passing through the city. “Know most assuredly,” admonished the writer, “that if your enemies speak evil of your good deeds, and write lying, slanderous letters concerning you, and priests and editors publish the same—that you shall be rewarded for all your righteous and benevolent acts toward them, while they shall have part among those who make and love lies.”

How justly and benevolently the Saints had in fact treated the overland emigrants—winter and summer—remains the unanswered question. Relatively few contemporaries attempted dispassionate assessments. Two who did were army officers Howard Stansbury and John W. Gunnison. They themselves had wintered in the valley, although a year earlier than Slater and Goodell, whose revelations they found unsatisfying. While among the Mormons they had been warmly received and fairly treated, and so, they disclosed, had all other emigrants in 1849-50. Stansbury's forthright explanation for all the furor was perceptive: "Too many that passed through their settlement were disposed to disregard their claim to the land they occupied, to ridicule the municipal regulations of their city, and to trespass wantonly upon their rights. Such offenders were promptly arrested by the authorities, made to pay a severe fine, and in some instances were imprisoned or made to labour on the public works; a punishment richly merited, and which would have been inflicted upon them in any civilized community."

Benjamin Ferris, who wintered in the valley in 1852–53, was another who did not accept *Fruits of Mormonism* "as conclusive proof upon the subject." While Ferris believed that "more cases of oppression, extortion, and direct plunder have been tolerated among the Saints than could be in any other civilized community on the foot-stool," he assumed that the 1850

sufferers had exaggerated their tribulations for purposes of emphasis. The newly designated Secretary of Utah Territory also believed that even if the Mormons had initially treated the emigrants severely, "a kindlier feeling" was evolving as Mormon memories of state-side persecutions faded.

Even more forcefully on the side of the Saints was the writer of the lead editorial in the May 28, 1851, *Daily Alta California*. Although viewing the Mormons as "great ninnies" in their religious beliefs, their civil and political acumen impressed the writer enough for him to assert that wayfarers living in the valley for half a year, competing with the Saints for jobs and produce, and benefiting from the existence of an orderly community, should expect to pay taxes. Moreover, the editoralist intimated that much of the Gentile-Saint strife was stirred up by the considerable criminal element in the gold rush—men who robbed their fellow emigrants, abused Indians, and no doubt acted similarly while among the Mormons.

These contemporary observers incisively identified both the shortcomings of the anti-Mormon publicists and most of the facts fueling the Winter Mormon controversy. Slater especially had fleshted out his diatribe with anti-Mormon rumors dating to the 1830s, many incapable of proof. Slater and Goodell's emphases were heavy-handed enough for readers to conclude that virtually all Gentiles wintering in the Salt Lake Valley had reason to complain of their treatment, which was not true. And, as both Goodell and Slater admitted, unprincipled overlanders did trail through the valley. Goodell acknowledged his fear that such persons would commit acts which would bring Mormon wrath down upon the innocent as well as the guilty. And Slater's compendium did include references to an emigrant who passed a counterfeit 5-dollar gold piece in the valley and another who struck a local Saint.

Moreover, the impressed emigrant protests against the property tax suggested an arrogant Gentile assumption that the primary purpose of the Mormon half-way house was to serve overlanders in distress—that the regulations of the Saints need not be taken seriously. There was little appreciation for the difficulties and expense involved in building a wilderness community or providing for the thousands of Saints arriving every autumn. Had more overlanders shared John Udell's conviction that "if travelers would manifest towards them [Mormons] a spirit of kindness, they would receive kind treatment in return, at all times," many unfortunate incidents could have been avoided.

 Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to dismiss either the general outlines of the Slater and Goodell fulminations or all their illustrative examples. Many of the specific incidents listed by Goodell and Slater can be corroborated in Mormon sources, although Mormon diarists naturally interpreted the causes and consequences differently. For example, both Slater and Goodell made much of the murder of Dr. J. M. Vaughan in Feb
February, 1851, in the settlements to the south of Salt Lake City, by Mormon M. D. Hambleton. The murder had been committed openly as Vaughan came out of a church service, the pretext being that Vaughan had seduced Hambleton's wife. Both Slater and Goodell claimed that Vaughan was a passing emigrant (from Missouri), that no evidence was brought forward to substantiate the seduction charge, that Hambleton was never even arrested, that no trial was held, that Brigham Young had publicly condemned and commended Hambleton's act in a kind of open meeting, and that the Mormon leadership then confiscated Vaughan's $2,000 for their own use. Hosea Stout's diary confirms the substance of the event, but adds interesting detail. Stout explained that he had helped prosecute Vaughan for adultery with the wife of a man named Foote in September and October of the previous year, but unsuccessfully. Further, Stout maintained that in the court of inquiry which investigated Hambleton's actions, Vaughan's seduction of Mrs. Hambleton "was sufficiently proven insomuch that I was well satisfied of his [Hambleton's] justification." Stout confirms that Brigham Young spoke in behalf of Hambleton. There is some additional doubt about whether Vaughan was a Missourian or should be regarded as a Winter Mormon—he having begun to advertise in the July 19, 1850, Desert News as "having located in G. S. L. City for the practice of his profession in its various branches." Whether this meant that he planned to locate permanently in the city or was merely planning to practice through the winter is as uncertain as his guilt in the morals charge. Slater and Goodell, however, were certainly justified in complaining of the informality with which a murderer was treated at law. But there is so much difficulty in ascertaining the truth about any specific incident precisely because of the impassioned prejudice with which Gentile and Saint faced each other throughout the nation as well as in the Great Salt Lake Valley. This religious and social intransigence was the root cause of most of the trouble.

The Latter-Day Saints had not been privileged to begin their desert kingdom tabula rasa, nor had that been their desire. Rumors of impending disasters and memories of previous atrocities colored the outlook of virtually everyone involved. In 1846, a year before the Mormon migration to the Salt Lake Valley even began, overland emigrants completely avoided travel on the north side of the Platte River because of rumors that 5,000 heavily armed Mormons were marching westward on that trail, intent on murdering emigrants and confiscating their property. In 1847 emigrants about to embark on their westward journey heard that the Mormons were out on the plains, had "joined three tribes of Indians, and are going to cut us all off."

Mormon trail tales continued to circulate freely in subsequent years. A favorite emigrant theme was that Mormons could never be trusted to tell the truth. One such distrustful group of 1848 overlanders refused to
believe the reports of the California gold discovery relayed by Mormon ferrymen at the Green River and resolutely trudged on to Oregon. Many overlanders were also convinced that the Mormons cooperated with and/or supervised Indians in thievery along the trail. “For honesty, purity, truthfulness, trustworthiness and honor, as between the . . . Indian and Mormon, give us the Indian by all odds,” reminisced one 1852 traveler. Many emigrants bypassed Salt Lake City in 1852 because of the rumor that it cost $150 in tolls and taxes to take one wagon through the Saints’ domain, and that valley residents could be expected to steal everything that remained. In fact, anti-Mormon stories and sentiments were so pervasive that a high percentage of overlanders expressed their surprise at not being mistreated, finding that, as one 1852 traveler wrote his brother from Salt Lake City, “These Mormons look and act like human beings.” John Clark observed in 1852 that “there are many hard stories related of these strange people that would in any other civilized community be hard to believe,” and a man named Radnor, who wintered with the Mormons “on terms of cordiality” in 1854–55, stated, “There is so much prejudice existing in the world against them, I can scarcely expect to remove it from the minds of any, but I consider it due to them to assert, that as a community, they are the most peaceable, law abiding, and moral people to be found anywhere.”

Given the prevailing prejudices, it is surprising that so much beneficial interaction between Saints and Gentiles did occur. A great many overlanders concluded, as a result of their encounters with the Saints, that the Mormons were much misunderstood and misrepresented, that they were really an honorable, intelligent, impressive people, perhaps even worthy of emulation. Wrote Edwin Hillyer, “I like the people very much, and should like to live among them.” The many letters to friends in the States expressing these favorable sentiments (“I was never in a better country, or among a better people in my life,” enthused one Virginian) certainly countered some of the anti-Mormon publicity and perhaps delayed the ultimate national confrontation. Some emigrant companies took it upon themselves to publish resolutions of thanks for assistance rendered them by Mormon travelers en route, others wrote letters of grateful appreciation for their treatment in Salt Lake City. In addition to describing the Saints as Good Samaritans, many emigrants admitted to being much impressed with the fruits of their few years’ labor in the valley. “It seems incredible,” mused John Benson in July, 1849; “I take off my hat to those who planned and executed it.”

Yet Benson was one of the surprisingly few emigrants willing to single out the Mormon leadership for praise. Even those who wrote negatively of Mormonism usually suggested that it was not the general population but the devious, unprincipled leaders who were most at fault. Some observations about polygamy were, of course, a necessity for most emigrant diarists and letter writers—especially the polygamy practiced by the Saint leaders. Emigrants particularly relished repeating rumors about the number of Brigham Young’s wives and children, and the requirements for anyone wishing more than one wife.

But it was the pulpit oratory of the principal Saints which most provoked passing travelers. Their bloody threats, foul language, and apparent blasphemy led many Gentile onlookers to conclude that the leading Saints were unmitigated charlatans. Typical was Addison Crane, who, after attending Sunday services at the Salt Lake City Tabernacle, rated the three speakers of the day in his diary: “The first of whom I thought mainly idiotic, the second evidently insane—and the last (Brigham Young) a knave. They preached Mormonism instead of Christianity—and Jo. Smith instead of Christ.”

For their part the Saints approached passing overlanders with equally intolerant attitudes nurtured by the survival struggles of the 1840s and 1850s. The rhetoric and incidents so disturbing to overland emigrants during the 1850s had been molded by memories of murderous Missouri and Illinois mobs. This desire to avenge past wrongs was important to most Mormons and is central to an understanding of the difficulties they visited upon the overlanders. William Yates, who sojourneled at Salt Lake City during the infamous winter of 1850–51, believed the feeling “that the people of the States treated them like dogs when they were there and now it was their time” underringed Mormon policy. Deputy Sheriff George Grant made the same point that winter, after arresting three overlanders just embarking on the southern route to California. The charges proved spurious, but the delay and expense forced the innocent men to winter in the valley. No matter, said Grant, as paraphrased by Slater, “the innocent must suffer with the wicked. . . . the Mormons had been treated in the same way in the states, having been abused and driven from place to place, when they were innocent.”

Subsuming even this general desire for retribution was a vituperative hatred of Missourians and Illinoisans. Gentile emigrants from those states could expect little pity when temporarily stranded in the Salt Lake Valley. Not when prejudices were so intense that one female Saint, while traveling to the valley, made it a special point to trample on the trailside graves of all Missourians. According to 1850 emigrant Calvin Taylor, the Mormons were “invoking curses upon them even to the fourth generation.” The San Francisco Daily Alta California speculated that Goodell’s Oregon-bound company had suffered so much because they were mainly Missourians. Forty-niner Jerome Howard, who did not hail from one of the offending states, had found the Mormons “hospitable and obliging” during his three-week stay in Salt Lake City. But he also wrote, “Perhaps some Illinoisans and Missourians who passed through their city would take exception to what I say, and well they might for the Mormons hold towards them a special hatred.”
Mormon threats against Missouri and Illinois "mobocrats" were legion. Apostle Orson Hyde, for example, publicly asserted that if God would forgive him for having permitted mobocrats to trail through the valley unmolested, "he would have them all killed hereafter." Elder John Taylor also publicly promised that the Saints would send past persecutors daring to enter Salt Lake City "to hell crosslots." Common too was the open and boastful talk that such persons could not get through the valley alive—and that many had not.

Mormons went out of their way to locate overlouds who had participated in the turbulent struggles of the 1830s and 1840s. One 1852 emigrant, for example, who had been active in evicting the Saints from Nauvoo, was recognized in Kanesville by a leading Mormon. The Saint questioned the emigrant closely on his travel plans before speedily traveling to Salt Lake City by horse-drawn carriage. Suspicious at his interest, the Illinois company determined to trail to Oregon so as to avoid the Mormon avengers whom emigrants commonly referred to as "the Destroying Angels." At the Green River crossing, however, several presumed Mormons stopped emigrant trains to inquire after the emigrant in question, W. P. Burns. The investigators even had a photograph of their quarry, but those asked always indicated that Burns would be found in a subsequent train, thus enabling him to slip safely through to Oregon. That others were not always so fortunate, as Slater, Goodell, and others ardently asserted, was partly substantiated by Hosea Stout's August 14, 1854, diary entry:

There has been an Examination going on before the Probate court since Friday last against H. B. Taylor for assertions made on the road East and in this place to one Mr Rayney stating that E. T. Benson & others were out there to rob, plunder & kill certain emmigrants That a plot had been laid to rob Mr Childs & kill him and that it was very common to kill strangers & take their cattle and other property and many other such things. Taylor at first denied the charge in toto but afterwards confessed it. Sunday he was cut off from the church & to day the examination was brought to a close and Taylor was acquitted from the fact there was no law made & provided against any thing charged to him

The emmigrants who had heard Taylor's reports were very much excited and alarmed for their safety.

Well aware of these rabid attitudes, most Illinoisans and Missourians prudently avoided the trails leading through the Salt Lake Valley. More philosophically inclined travelers tried to put this apparent Mormon fanaticism into its proper historical perspective. Forty-niner Charles Gray observed that "there appears to be a tinge of fanaticism as it were about all their actions, their looks & manners. I look upon them as the Puritans of the 19th century, men who had fled from persecution to a remote & distant region to enjoy unmolested their own belief." Nine years later a California-bound freight driver suggested that the Saints "excelled the old-time Puritans in ignorance, but not in fanaticism"; 1850 gold rusher W. S. McBride ranged further into the past in search of a suitable analogy for the despicable Mormon zealots: "They[re] reminded me of what history relates of the canting Round Heads of Cromwell's time."

Newspaper headlines throughout the 1850s made it clear that the intolerant extremism Benjamin Ferris had confidently expected to fade away had been accentuated instead. While the increasing virulence displayed by both Mormons and Gentiles focused on polygamy and Mormon defiance of federal courts and judges in Utah Territory, the travails of the overlouders while in the Mormon mecca was a strong tertiary force in bringing on the Mormon War. The influential report of Territorial Secretary B. D. Harris and Justices Lemuel G. Branderbury and Perry E. Broccus of the Supreme Court of the United States for Utah Territory not only lamented the unpunished murder of Dr. J. M. Vaughan but discoursed at some length on other forms of Mormon harassment and intimidation experienced by Gentile emigrants trailling through the Salt Lake Valley. As Mormon intransigence grew, irate letters from former overlouders recalling their own sufferings among the Saints began to appear in the pages of prestigious newspapers like the New York Daily Times. Western papers had been filled with similar letters during the early 1850s. Newspaper editorials calling for forceful chastisement of the Utah rebels likewise stressed the perils of the overland traveler when among the Mormons. And congressmen such as John Thompson of New York and William W. Boyce of South Carolina not only raged about the "scores" of peaceful emigrants murdered by the nefarious Mormons but invoked the specter of the end of overland emigrant travel to the West Coast if the centrally located Mormon empire was not quickly brought to heel.

Just as in the United States, the furor reached its zenith in the Great Basin kingdom in late 1856 and early 1857, aided by the emotional revivalism of 1856. The following year came the frightening news that a U.S. army was marching on the Saints' desert stronghold. Was it to be Missouri and Illinois all over again? Caught in the vortex of these pressures were the usual westbound emigrant caravans—although not as many as in the past—toiling through the Salt Lake Valley. Tragically, the first train of the year to strike out along the "Mormon Corridor" to California, captained by Charles Fancher, was composed of Missouri and Arkansas overlouders. Their journey south from Salt Lake City was a difficult one; area Indians were hostile, local residents refused to trade, refused even to let them drive through the city of Parowan. The Fancher party was forced to pioneer a new trail around the town. Deprived of trading for desired supplies, some train members took by force what they wanted. The Saints later claimed that some of the Missourians had also boldly vented their anti-Mormon prejudices while in the valley: bragging of having helped kill Joseph Smith, exhibiting what they claimed was the very weapon used, boasting of what the oncoming army would do to the obstreperous Saints. To further
insult their longtime adversaries some Missourians had allegedly named oxen for various Mormon leaders so they could whip and damn them while trailing through city streets. The Arkansans in the Fancher train were suspect because word had just reached Utah that the Mormon Apostle Parley Pratt had been murdered in that state.

The combination was volatile. Zealous local Mormons, assuming that they would be fulfilling the desires of the Salt Lake hierarchy, deliberately planned what became the greatest single tragedy of the overland trail. In league with area Indians, who attacked and then besieged the train for five days before the carefully executed massacre of September 11, the vengeful Saints with their Indian cohorts murdered perhaps as many as ninety-six persons, sparing only eighteen young children. This was the Mountain Meadows massacre. The Saints quickly turned their attention to making it appear an Indian responsibility, and, failing that, ultimately foisted the sole blame on John D. Lee so as to spare the Church further embarrassment.

Nelson Slater and the Reverend Goodell, had they penned their anti-Mormon briefs after Mountain Meadows, would have described that infamous event as only a larger-scale version of what the Mormons had been doing for decades, particularly to Gentiles wintering in the Salt Lake Valley. Those overlanders who trailed through the Salt Lake Valley in the summers, dining sumptuously and trading advantageously while admiring Mormon industry and kindness, would have termed it a bizarre and inexplicable aberration. The truth lay somewhere in between. Perhaps the greatest tragedy was that the irrational prejudices of the time prevented so many Saints and Gentiles from fully recognizing how much they both were profiting from the overland emigrant stopovers at the Mormon halfway house.