

# THE LION AND THE EMPEROR:

## *The Mormons, The Hudson's Bay Company, and Vancouver Island, 1846-1858*

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WELL DOCUMENTED in the history and lore of both the American and the Canadian West are the adventures of that great fur-trading enterprise, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), and the religious migration of Brigham Young and his persecuted Mormon followers (the Latter-day Saints) from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847.<sup>1</sup> Relatively unknown, however, is the relationship between these two giants of the West, their interchanges of commerce and correspondence, and their mutual interest in that "Eden" of the Pacific – Vancouver Island.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this article is to document their relationship from the Mormon arrival in the Great Basin in 1847 until the so-called Utah War of 1857-58 and to show, from original sources, that, for a period of time, the HBC and the British government took the possibility of a Mormon exodus to the Island very seriously and laid contingency plans for it. Such a threat gave the British Colonial Office and the HBC another valid reason to move ahead with the later colonization of Vancouver Island.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The authors gratefully acknowledge research funding from the Religious Studies Center and the Department of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University that made this study possible. We wish also to thank the Hudson's Bay Company Archives at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Manitoba, for permission to quote from its collection.

<sup>2</sup> The first scholarly study on Vancouver Island and the Mormons was J.B. Munro's "Mormon Colonization Scheme for Vancouver Island," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 25, 3 (July 1934): 278-85. Munro's short article was little more than a collection of scattered documents and lacked analysis and interpretation. Better studies on the topic are Robert J. McCue's "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Vancouver Island: The Establishment and Growth of the Mormon Community," *BC Studies* 42 (Summer 1979): 51-64 and, even more relevant to this study, his "British Columbia and the Mormons in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Mormon Presence in Canada*, ed. Brigham Young Card et al. (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1990), 35-52. McCue's focus has been on Mormon missionary efforts and Church growth on the Island and public perceptions after 1880.

<sup>3</sup> The impact of this possibility on the HBC and on the British government is quite absent from leading research in the field, including Margaret Ormsby's *British Columbia: A History*

"A POLICY OF CONCILIATION":  
TRADE WITH THE VALLEY

Well known in American religious history is the founding of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by its prophet-leader, Joseph Smith, Jr., in upstate New York in 1830. Claiming modern revelation, a new book of scripture, and prophetic leadership, from its inception the Church encountered fierce opposition. Driven out of their New York, Ohio, and Missouri homes, the "Saints" eventually found temporary refuge in Nauvoo, Illinois, on the banks of the Mississippi River. Before the death of Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, at the hands of a mob in the summer of 1844, Mormon missionaries had taught their new gospel throughout much of eastern America, in Upper and Lower Canada, and in the Maritimes. In fact, it was their success in Toronto, where they converted such English immigrants as John Taylor and Joseph Fielding, that prompted church leaders to dispatch missionaries to Great Britain in 1837 – a decision that resulted in the conversion of more than 57,000 British souls before 1852.<sup>4</sup>

After Smith's death, forty-five-year old Brigham Young, that "Lion of the Lord," as he was referred to by his followers, recognized that their only hope for survival as a church and people was to quit Nauvoo and find a new home, a new "Zion" somewhere in the Rocky Mountain west, where, as one of their poets said, "none would come to hurt or make afraid." Thus was born the famous mass exodus of the Latter-day Saints across the Great American Desert to the Salt Lake Valley. Pending word from their leaders on the results of this forced march westward, thousands of British converts waited for the signal to continue their migration to the United States.

Brigham Young and his vanguard pioneer company finally reached the Great Basin in July 1847 behind schedule, too late to plant a successful summer crop and running low on supplies. Coming on behind was the "Emigration Camp" of almost 1,500 men, women, and children,

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(Toronto: Macmillan, 1958); Jean Barman's *The West beyond the West* (Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1996); and, perhaps most surprisingly, Richard Mackie's "The Colonization of Vancouver Island, 1849-1858," *BC Studies* 96 (Winter 1992-93): 3-40.

<sup>4</sup> James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whitaker, *Men with a Mission, 1837-1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 323. The most comprehensive study of Mormon conversion in Great Britain during the nineteenth century is found in P.A.M. Taylor, *Expectations Westward: The Mormons and the Emigration of Their British Converts in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965). For a study of the early Mormon missionary work in eastern Canada, see the author's "A Study of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Upper Canada, 1830-1850" (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975).

by far the largest single company of overlanders yet to cross the “wide Missouri,” with the cautious expectation that their leaders had found them a new home, a new haven, and a new “Zion” in the West. Before their arrival in September, hundreds of acres lay planted, a fort stood erected, and a new settlement was rising from the valley floor. Young, meanwhile, had started back to the Missouri River, leaving the aforementioned John Taylor, now an apostle in the Church; his colleague, Parley P. Pratt; and John Smith in charge of the settlement. With winter coming on and provisions running dangerously low, they deemed it prudent to trade for essentials, if not with the well known mountain man Jim Bridger, whose famous trading post (more than 100 miles to the east) they had already passed en route to the valley, then perhaps with Richard Grant of the HBC at Fort Hall (some 200 miles to the north).

News of the advancing Mormon migration preceded their entry into the valley. Peter Skene Ogden, chief factor for the HBC at Fort Vancouver, had already heard of their coming from Oregon-bound emigrants and other informants. Ogden, a seasoned trapper and trader who had spent his life in the wilds of the Northwest and who may well have been the first White man to explore the Great Salt Lake, was no more pleased to hear of the Mormons than he was to count more Oregon settlers.<sup>5</sup> “Parties of single men preceding the great body of American emigrants traveling towards this country from St. Louis are now beginning to arrive,” he lamented, well aware of their impact on the declining fur trade in the area. “They report that 700 wagons are upon the road to the Willamette and 600 more, belonging to the Society of the Mormons, who intend forming a settlement on the borders of the Great Salt Lake, but these numbers are probably exaggerated.”<sup>6</sup> Hence it came as no surprise to Ogden, his capable chief assistant James Douglas, and other members of the Board of Management of the HBC at Fort Vancouver that their happy subordinate and chief clerk at Fort Hall, Richard Grant (more commonly

<sup>5</sup> Born in Quebec in 1794, Ogden had entered the service of the North West Company at age seventeen. After the merger of the North West Company and the HBC in 1821, Simpson asked him to revitalize the Snake Country trade and expeditions. He visited and explored the Great Salt Lake regions in 1825. Promoted to chief factor in 1834, Ogden was given command of the New Caledonia District in 1835 and was later appointed to the board of management in 1845. He died in Oregon City in 1854 at sixty-four years of age. See *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), vol. 13: 660-62; T.C. Elliott, “Peter Skene Ogden, Fur Trader,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 11, 3 (September 1910): 355-97; and Dale L. Morgan, *The Great Salt Lake* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1947), 72-74.

known as “Captain Johnny Grant”), soon reported on the opportunities for trade with the new settlers.<sup>7</sup>

A fifty-three-year-old native of Montreal, Grant had spent his life in the fur trade, having served in the Saskatchewan, Athabasca, and Peace River Districts before taking charge of Fort Hall in 1842. Grant visited the Mormons late in the fall of 1847, opened up trade, and returned with a letter of understanding from John Smith (one of the Mormon interim leaders in the valley) to the board of management. “There will be many articles of trade we shall need and be obliged to buy from some quarter,” Smith wrote in his letter of 7 December,

before we can manufacture the same at home and will also be obvious to you, that from our inland position, it will be difficult to bring goods to us, and from the same cause our produce will avail us but little in exchange for your commodities ... still, there is and will be more or less money in our midst and probably no inconsiderable share of peltry; we therefore at the request of Captain Grant, respectfully solicit your Honourable Board, to furnish us, as soon as convenient, a list of articles of use and necessity in our position, with the prices annexed calculated for this City.

After listing several articles required – sugar, coffee, cotton cloth, woolen goods, gun powder, and other needed items – Smith concluded with a pledge: “in case you see fit to send your goods direct to this place ... we will [use] our influence to turn the channel of trade in your favor, to the utmost extent that your prices will warrant, when compared with what can be done in other directions.”<sup>8</sup>

Excited at the prospect of kindling a profitable new trade, Grant journeyed to Fort Vancouver to seek, among other things, authorization for large-scale trade with his new neighbours. Grant’s letter to Sir

<sup>6</sup> Peter Skene Ogden to Sir George Simpson, 1 September 1847, in “Sir George Simpson Correspondence Inward, D5,” reel 3M78, D5/20, F. 185, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives located in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada (hereafter cited as HBCA/PAM). In this same letter, Ogden reported on the recent massacre of Dr. Marcus Whitman and his family, who were among the earliest American settlers in Oregon.

<sup>7</sup> Sir James Douglas, “father” of British Columbia, was born in Scotland in 1803. At age sixteen he apprenticed with the North West Company at Fort William and became a clerk with the HBC in 1821. He served at Fort St. James and Fort Connolly before becoming accountant to Dr. John McLoughlin of the Columbia Department in 1830. He became a chief trader in 1839. He was appointed to the board of management, which replaced McLoughlin’s one-man rule, in 1845. He died at Victoria, British Columbia, in 1877. See *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), vol. 10: 238–41. See also Herman A. Leader, “Douglas Expeditions, 1840–41,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 32, 1 (March 1931): 1–3.

<sup>8</sup> John Smith, Charles C. Rich, and John Young to the Board of Management of the Hudson’s Bay Company, 7 December 1847, reel 3M80, D5/21, F.520–521, HBCA/PAM.

George Simpson, governor-in-chief of Rupert's Land and of all the HBC's territories, accompanied the one sent by the board and sheds new light on – and is perhaps the earliest outsider account of – the burgeoning settlement. “At the Salt Lake is already a population of principally, I may say, all Mormons exceeding 3,000 souls [the actual number was then 1,681, with thousands more expected the next season],” he wrote enthusiastically.

The work they have done there since their arrival in July last, is hardly to be credited without being seen. They have already built up for their present residences about 600 adobe or sunburnt brick houses besides three or four mills underway, with a wall enclosing the place above the Mile Square. From what I have seen ... I found them the reverse of what they are generally represented particularly by the folks of the Eastern States. They appear to me to be what I found them – a moral good set of people, polite in their demands and ready to pay for what they get. I visited the city on business in the beginning of this month, and was introduced to the leading members[,] politely received and brought back about 600 dollars for supplies that I sent back after my return. Their community being desirous of transmitting their business matters with the British merchants in preference to doing so with Americans. The leading members applied to me to know whether or not the H. B. Company would be willing to undertake to supply the settlement with sundry articles which they now and hereafter may require. Not being authorized to decide I requested them to address the Board of Management on the subject, and a council was assembled for the purpose and when invited to attend I did so. Two of their elders, leading characters, Messrs [Parley P.] Pratt and [John] Taylor (the latter an Englishman), both visited England last year to make application to the British Government regarding the settling of Vancouver's Island. So far as they gave me to understand (rather a private matter) their mission met with encouragement from such as were spoken to on the subject, and it is supposed settlers will come out. They appear to place great confidence in the British Government and if they are to be believed, they are much more attached to that side than any other, and very likely might be of use in case of being required hereafter.

Grant concluded his letter by allaying any fears for his personal safety at the hands of the Latter-day Saints. “Rest assured there is

none for us British subjects. I consider myself and [those] under my charge safer among them than among the Oregonites, therefore be not anxious about the property or myself on that score.”<sup>9</sup>

Members of the board, however, were unimpressed. They believed the Mormons had “the character of being a knavish set,” with “peculiar opinions,” unreliable and untrustworthy.<sup>10</sup> Consequently they flatly refused Grant’s proposal and urged against any further trade. “We have not the means of engaging in such speculations. And even if all other circumstances were favourable [we] would not advise such a measure,” they wrote.

The expense and risk attending an inland transport of 700 or 800 miles of difficult road [from Fort Vancouver to Fort Hall] would be enormous, and the advantages uncertain. The Mormons moreover have a different character for honesty and are not, it is to be feared, overstocked with wealth; but it is needless to take up your time with other reasons against such a plan, entirely foreign to our business. We intend to decline their proposals.<sup>11</sup>

The real disagreement between the board and Grant probably had less to do with the Mormons than it did with the entire Oregon question. Since the signing of the Oregon Treaty in June 1846 – in which Britain had ceded all of the Columbia to the United States while retaining all of Vancouver Island for the Crown – the HBC retained only vaguely defined hunting and “possessory rights” in the new American Oregon. Already in the process of removing from Fort Vancouver near the mouth of the Columbia River to Fort Victoria on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, the board of management saw no future in holding

<sup>9</sup> Richard Grant to Sir George Simpson, 31 December 1847, in “Sir George Simpson Correspondence Inward, D5,” reel 3M79, D5/20, F.713-715, HBCA/PAM.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Skene Ogden and James Douglas to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee of the Hudson’s Bay Committee, London, 20 September 1847, in “London Correspondence Inward from HBC Posts, All,” reel 160, A11/70, F.272, HBCA/PAM.

Grant’s young son, who went along with his father on this and later visits to Salt Lake City, recalled some of his experiences in the fledgling Mormon capital:

I went to Salt Lake two hundred miles away with my father, who was taking tea and tobacco there to the Mormons. With my outfit I bought a horse from the Ute Indians. This was the first horse I ever owned. At Salt Lake I saw Brigham Young [on a later visit] who received us well. He was a very pleasant man to talk to, a stout man, light haired, fair of skin and freckled and rather plain looking. The Mormons at first had houses built with [adobe] ...but it was not long before they were replaced by stone houses. They were a thrifty class of people, energetic and industrious.

*Very Close to Trouble: The Johnny Grant Memoir*. Ed. Lentil Mackle (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>11</sup> James Douglas to Sir George Simpson, 10 March 1848, in “Sir George Simpson Correspondence Inward, D5,” reel 3M80, D5/21, F.423, HBCA/PAM.

on to Fort Hall and Fort Boise, now square in the path of American migrations to Oregon.<sup>12</sup> The future of the HBC lay to the north, in British territories, where the fur trade had always been more profitable anyway. As Ogden argued in a later letter to Simpson: "We could never owing to the heavy outlay in transport open a profitable trade with the Mormons nor do I entertain such a favourable opinion of them as friend Grant does ... I would strongly advocate the propriety of abandoning the Snake Country more particularly so if beaver continues unsaleable ... but to convince Squire Grant of this would require more eloquence than I can command."<sup>13</sup>

For his part, Grant took the broader view, seeing more of an opportunity for profits in trading goods with settlers than in trapping a declining stock of furs. "As the old adage goes, make hay while the sun shines," he wrote. "If we have not the means of assisting and in some measure satisfying the emigrants to and from the United States to Oregon and California it may expose the Hudson's Bay Company to the hatred and censure of the public in the States, and prove injurious in the end."<sup>14</sup>

Simpson's carefully worded response is most revealing and is consonant with his successful management of the "Great Monopoly" over the years – a monopoly that had bested every other fur-trading company on the continent, Canadian or American.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes referred to as the "Little Emperor" for the way he had master-managed the legendary success of the British fur trade in North America since becoming governor-in-chief in 1826, Simpson saw the Mormons and, indeed, the entire Oregon business, as secondary to his greater purposes. An immensely practical businessman, he foresaw the inevitable American settlement of Oregon and the decline of the fur trade there. His primary purpose in maintaining an HBC presence in the Columbia

<sup>12</sup> For one of the finest current studies of the British fur trade in the West, and of the HBC's Pacific operations in particular, see Richard S. Mackie, *Trading beyond the Mountains: The British Fur Trade on the Pacific, 1793-1843* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), chap. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Skene Ogden to Sir George Simpson, 10 March 1849, in "Sir George Simpson Correspondence Inward, D5," reel 3M85, D5/24, F.366, HBCA/PAM.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Grant to Sir George Simpson, 31 December 1847.

<sup>15</sup> George Simpson, who master-managed the British fur trade in North America for decades, was born in Scotland in 1787. In 1809 he was a clerk in a London mercantile firm engaged in overseas trade. He began his meteoric rise with the HBC when he reported for managerial duty at Norway House, Lake Winnipeg, in June 1820 at thirty-three years of age. After the merger of the rival North West Company and the HBC, Simpson became governor-in-chief of the HBC in 1826, a post he held until his death in 1860 at Lachine, Quebec. Two of many excellent works dealing with Simpson and the HBC are E.E. Rich's *Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870* (New York; Macmillan, 1960), 3 vols., esp. vol. 3: 432-68; and Douglas MacKay's *The Honourable Company: A History of the Hudson's Bay Company* (New York: Tudor, 1938), 175-218.

and Snake River country for as long as he did was to reduce the supply of fur-bearing animals, to dissuade American competitors from coming into the area, and to postpone the inevitable American migrations for as long as possible. As one noted scholar has pointed out, the HBC remained in Oregon after 1846 primarily to sell its posts to the US government and feared that a premature abandonment would weaken its bargaining position for eventual American compensation.<sup>16</sup> For these very reasons, Simpson had not objected to John McLoughlin's purchase of Fort Hall in 1837 from its American founder Nathaniel J. Wyeth.<sup>17</sup>

Consequently Simpson disagreed with Ogden and Douglas on closing the posts, at least at that time. "While the business of the Snake Country covers its expenses we think it is desirable that the establishments of Fort Hall and Boissee should be maintained as the abandonment of them would bar any claim we might have to compensation should an arrangement be made with the US government for the cession of our posts" under the Treaty of Oregon.<sup>18</sup> Simpson recognized, rightfully as it turned out, that the US government would eventually have to compensate the HBC for taking over its possessions in the Columbia as determined in the Oregon Treaty. Until that time, even though the Snake Country operated at a loss or, at best, on a break-even basis, he would bide his time and maintain HBC posts in hopes of eventually exacting as high a payment as possible from the United States.<sup>19</sup>

As to the Mormons, Simpson was more concerned with what they *might* decide to do in the future rather than with any amount of trade that Grant or any other of his "adventurers" could conduct with them. With reference to John Smith's proposal, Simpson instructed Ogden and Douglas "to decline his proposals unless he be in a condition to show that the Society can pay in cash, furs or any other marketable commodity that would be sufficiently remunerative for any goods with which they may be furnished." But since Grant spoke in such "high commendation of their ability, orderly conduct, and habits of industry, and as from their numbers and organization they are likely to become a very formidable body it is desirable every proper means of conciliation should be observed in our dealings and communication with them."

<sup>16</sup> John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 108-09.

<sup>17</sup> Mackie, *Trading beyond the Mountains*, 106-07.

<sup>18</sup> Sir George Simpson to Board of Management, 28 June 1847, in "Sir George Simpson Correspondence Outwards (Generally), D4," reel 3MII, D4/36, F.47, HBCA/PAM.

<sup>19</sup> Negotiations for American payment to the HBC for its possessions in Oregon were long and protracted and were not finally settled until 1869, with the payment of \$450,000 to the HBC. See Galbraith, *Hudson's Bay Company*, 251-82.



Simpson's policy of "conciliation," even at the considerable labour and cost of Grant's continued trading with the Mormons, stemmed from his fear of what later Mormon intentions might cost the HBC. He continued:

The location they have selected seems favourable, as far as regards the means of obtaining a living, but their inland position will prevent their carrying on an export trade, to any extent, so that in their present situation they can merely look to providing themselves with a base subsistence. And as it is not in the nature of man to be long satisfied with such a state of inaction, it is more than probable they will at no distant period, move from their present settlement, and having had it in view before crossing the mountains to direct their steps to Vancouver Island, we are not without apprehension they may follow up their original intention.

It is no easy matter to obtain an influence over so numerous and head strong a people, but if we are at all successful in that respect with the Mormons, every endeavour [should] be used to divert their attention from that quarter, withholding assistance of every description, whereby they might visit or examine the Island. We are tho[ugh] more deeply interested in their absence from Vancouver Island, as there is some prospect that the Hudson's Bay Company may obtain a grant thereof under certain restrictions and reservations from the Government.<sup>20</sup>

Always looking ahead, Simpson was concerned that Brigham Young and his many followers (whom Simpson estimated worldwide at "about 20,000 in all") would likely quit their desert home in search of a place better suited to agriculture, more abundantly timbered, more open to export trade, and yet still relatively isolated – in short, a place like Vancouver Island.

He elaborated upon his position in a later letter written from Norway House on the northern shores of Lake Winnipeg, after a council with all his chief factors, to HBC headquarters in London:

From the number and organization of their people, it is evident they [the Mormons] will become very formidable and, in due time, be in a condition to give law to Oregon; it is therefore highly desirable that we should conciliate them by every proper means within our power; and to that end, I have suggested to the Board of Management

<sup>20</sup> Sir George Simpson to the Board of Management, 24 January 1848, in "Sir George Simpson Correspondence Outward, D4," reel 3M11, D4/37, F.17-118, HBCA/PAM.

that we should provide them with a few supplies from time to time for which we have reason to believe they have the means of paying in money. Agriculture, however, will be their principal occupation but situated so far in the interior ... they are not likely to remain satisfied with that state of inaction.

He continued:

I am very apprehensive they may follow up their original intention before leaving Wisconsin and direct their steps to Vancouver's Island, from whence it would be quite impossible for us, even if assisted by the natives, to dislodge them. The persecution they have experienced in the United States has given rise to a feeling of hostility on their minds towards their countrymen, while, on the contrary, it is said they are favourably disposed to British interests, so that they might hereafter become useful partisans in the event of difficulties with the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Simpson's policy of conciliation soon proved providential for the Latter-day Saints. Their expectations for a bountiful harvest in 1848 were quashed with the early frosts and cricket infestations of that year. None had expected their harvest to be so scanty. Several attempts to secure provisions from Fort Bridger were unsuccessful because of deep mountain snows. In November of that year, upon request of the settlement, Grant arrived in the valley with pack horses "laden with skins, groceries and other goods."<sup>22</sup> On this later visit, Grant gave another fine snapshot description of the progress of settlement.

My Mormon friends so far show no sign of disturbing us. I have visited them three times since last spring. The result of my three trips was bringing back between eleven and twelve hundred dollars ... they have had excellent crops and are improving fast in their building and settling the country – several hundred more have found the others at Salt Lake and its neighbourhood. Gold coins and gold dust appears to be flush with them and several parties of them have gone back to California for a fresh supply.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Sir George Simpson to the Governor, the Deputy Governor, and the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company, London, 24 June 1848, in "London Correspondence Inward from Governors of HBC Territories, Sir George Simpson, A12," reel 199, A12/4, F.136-137, HBCA/PAM.

<sup>22</sup> Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 58 (extracts from the History of Brigham Young, 1848).

<sup>23</sup> Richard Grant (Fort Hall) to Sir George Simpson, 4 January 1849, in "Sir George Simpson Correspondence Inward, D5," reel 3M 84, D5/24, f27, HBCA/PAM.

A SHARED INTEREST  
IN VANCOUVER ISLAND

Upon what information did Simpson base his fears? First of all, Mormon leaders had discussed the Island as one possible destination before leaving Nauvoo in February 1846. In a widely circulated 1845 epistle in which he urged the gathering of his people, Brigham Young observed that “there are said to be many good locations for settlement on the Pacific, especially Vancouver’s Island, near the mouth of the Columbia.”<sup>24</sup> And, according to some leading scholars, there were “many current reports in Illinois in 1845 that the Mormons had chosen Vancouver Island as their future home, the metropolis to be situated at Nootka.”<sup>25</sup> Although Young never considered the Island as anything but a temporary gathering place for some of the British Saints, any observer, aware that the Mormons were about to leave, may have arrived at a different conclusion.<sup>26</sup>

Second, word of their flight into the far west circulated throughout the various customs houses of New York in February 1846 when the Mormon adventurer and sometime maverick Sam Brannan charted the ship *Brooklyn* with 238 Mormon passengers bound for some unknown destination on the west coast. Six months later, after a voyage of 24,000 miles by way of the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), where the HBC also maintained a post, the ship eventually landed at Yerba Buena (San Francisco). Had California not been secured by the United States by the time of the *Brooklyn*’s arrival on 30 July 1846, where else but the Columbia or Vancouver Island might they have gone?<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, to raise funds for the impending exodus, Young had quietly deployed agents to Washington to negotiate various government contracts to carry mail in the far west, to build forts along the Oregon Trail, or to staff a military regiment to assist in pending United States-Mexico difficulties. Evidence further indicates that what few friends

<sup>24</sup> *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo) 1 November 1845, 1,019.

<sup>25</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft. *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*, vol. 26, 238 and vol. 19, 134. See also McCue, “British Columbia and the Mormons,” 36.

<sup>26</sup> For more on Brigham Young’s interest in Vancouver Island, see my “‘We Might Have Gone to Vancouver’s Island’: The Mormon Exodus, British Emigration, and the Pacific North-West,” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Western Canada* (Provo, UT: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University), 13-34.

<sup>27</sup> One school of thought says that, if the USS *Portsmouth* had not seized Yerba Buena two weeks earlier, then Brannan would have laid claim to that part of California for an independent Mormon entity. He had even fashioned a flag for that purpose. See Will Bagley, *Scoundrel’s Tale: The Samuel Brannan Papers*, ed. Will Bagley (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1999), 18.

the Mormon cause had in Washington (e.g., Colonel Thomas L. Kane of Pennsylvania) seemed to think that, if President Polk had listened to such Mormon-haters as Missouri senator Thomas H. Benton and sent an army to block their exodus west, then the Mormons may well have veered northward into British territories.<sup>28</sup> In a revealing letter dated 29 May 1846, indicating why he wanted to represent the US government in negotiations with the Mormons, Kane wrote to his brother that he felt compelled to act “as I began to see signs of something which even to my eyes looked like English tampering with their leaders. I became oppressed the more ... when two days ago I saw a letter which disclosed kind assistance to the emigrant parties from the Hudson’s Bay Company.”<sup>29</sup> The day previously, 28 May, Kane had met privately with President James K. Polk and “told him all” he knew of the Mormons and “of Her Majesty’s interference.” As a result of that meeting, Polk sent Kane to the Mormon encampments then huddling by the Missouri River to secure Mormon loyalty, considering his offer to be of “the highest and most praiseworthy patriotism.”<sup>30</sup>

However, the most concrete evidence Simpson may have had of Mormon designs on Vancouver Island was an 1846 petition, or “Memorial,” to Queen Victoria, signed by more than 13,000 British Latter-day Saints and measuring 168 feet long. The petition was drawn up in hopes that the British government could be persuaded to sponsor wide-scale emigration to the western shores of Prince Rupert’s Land. Entitled “Memorial to the Queen for the Relief, by Emigration of a Portion of Her Poor Subjects,” it read, in part, as follows:

Your memorialists are moved to address your Majesty by the unexampled amount of abject, helpless, and unmerited misery which at present prevails among the labouring classes of this country ...

Your memorialists believe that, if a part of the poor and destitute portion of your Majesty’s loyal subjects were sent to the Island of Vancouver, or the great territory of Oregon, through your Majesty’s gracious interference and Royal aid, they might there find a field of labour and industry, in which, after a short period, they could not

<sup>28</sup> The United States did eventually invite the Mormons to contribute a 500-man battalion to serve in the US Army of the West against Mexico.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas L. Kane to Elisha Kane, 29 May 1846, the Thomas L. Kane Papers, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. For more on this topic, see my *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846–1852: “And Should We Die ...”* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 52–55. Precisely what alleged communications from the HBC Kane was referring to have not yet been discovered. Considering the HBC’s negative attitude towards settlement of any kind within its territories, any offers of assistance on its part probably extended to trade, not settlement.

only benefit themselves but ... raise a revenue that would more than balance the expenditures of the present emigration.<sup>31</sup>

Their request was not an idle exercise. When asked earlier what appropriation should be sought from the British Parliament “in peopling Vancouver’s Island,” Young had responded: “a certain number of acres to each immigrant.”<sup>32</sup>

Another, more widely publicized, plan for Vancouver Island settlement was that put forth by James Edward Fitzgerald, a leading British proponent for government-sponsored overseas colonization for that lower class of trained labourers, farmers, and artisans who had the requisite skills but who lacked the funds to emigrate. Particularly taken with the advantages of Vancouver Island, “pointing it out as the future home of a great people,” Fitzgerald called on the government to charter a new settlement grant and to transport at least 2,000 families to that distant shore.<sup>33</sup>

There may well have been other such petitions.<sup>34</sup> The fact is a systematic plan of emigration and colonization had for several years been discussed in Cabinet but never laid before Parliament as an official government measure. What brought everything to the fore in 1846 was the great Irish potato famine, which was fast reaching its peak of unparalleled misery, discomfort, and starvation for hundreds of thousands of labourers and farmers throughout the Emerald Isle. The cry for help and the crush to emigrate to England, America, Australia, the Canadian colonies – anywhere – were reaching hysteric proportions in the winter of 1846-47. And the British governments of Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel and, later, of Prime Minister Lord John Russell were pressed to the limit to provide government relief in the forms of public works, shipping Indian corn from the United States to Ireland, setting up soup kitchens, and so on.

<sup>31</sup> *Millennial Star*, 20 November 1846, vol. 8, p. 142. Also quoted in J.B. Munro, “Mormon Colonization Scheme for Vancouver Island,” *Washington Historical Quarterly* 25, 3 (July 1934): 278.

<sup>32</sup> *Journal History*, 16 and 31 July 1846, Church Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter referred to as CHD). See also Richard E. Bennett, *We’ll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846-1848* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997), 63, n. 50.

<sup>33</sup> James Edward Fitzgerald, “Proposal for the Formation of a Colony in Vancouver’s Island on the West Coast of North America,” 3 May 1847, PAM. See also Fitzgerald’s *An Examination of the Charter and Proceedings of the Hudson’s Bay Company with Reference to the Grant of Vancouver’s Island* (London: T. Saunders, 1849).

<sup>34</sup> For more on the various schemes and petitions for emigration at this time, see Wilbur S. Shepperson, *British Emigration to North America: Projects and Opinions in the Early Victorian Period* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957).

The year before, in 1845, 90,341 emigrants – many of them Irish – had sailed from Britain, over half of them bound for the United States. By contrast, in just the first seven months of 1846, the corresponding number had risen to 110,196, with thousands more clamouring to get away.<sup>35</sup> Most emigrants were either sponsored by family members already overseas or had the financial means to make the journey, whereas the great push for emigration in the winter of 1846-47 came from the Irish poor and destitute, many of whom were facing starvation.

Pleas for government-sponsored emigration schemes echoed throughout Parliament and the corridors of the Colonial Office – indeed all across England. And, although the governments of both Robert Peel and his more protectionist successor, Lord Russell, had been traditionally opposed to funding such schemes at public expense, desperate times called for new and untraditional measures. Wrote Earl Grey, British secretary of state for the colonies, to Lord Elgin, governor-general of Canada, in December 1846:

In consequence of the distress which unhappily prevails in Ireland and parts of Scotland, a very large emigration may be expected at the earliest moment when the season will admit of it. Her Majesty's Government, therefore, have deemed it incumbent upon them to deliberate on the measures best calculated to prevent either suffering amongst the emigrants, or any undue pressure upon the provincial territories.<sup>36</sup>

Lord Grey's ambitious plan called for a start-up fund of 50,000 pounds from the public treasury – 100 times the amount for such purposes suggested just two years before – to enable entire neighbourhoods of the most impoverished and working poor to emigrate immediately, as a body, into newly reconstituted villages of at least 300 people in land tracts in the Canadian provinces (Canada West [Ontario], Canada East [Quebec], and the Maritimes). These tracts were complete with log houses, schools, churches, and farm acreages. Grey hoped his plan would do much to alleviate Irish suffering, stem

<sup>35</sup> House of Commons, *Papers Relative to Emigration to the British Provinces in North America* (London: Printed by W. Clowes and Sons, Stamford Street, 1847), 3 (these papers were presented to both Houses of Parliament by command of Her Majesty, February 1847). Since 1825, the total number of British emigrants was 1,337,000. See House of Commons, *Further Papers Relative to Emigration to the British Provinces in North America* (London: Printed by W. Clowes and Sons, Stamford Street, 1847), 9 (these papers were presented to both Houses of Parliament by command of Her Majesty, June 1847).

<sup>36</sup> House of Commons, *Papers Relative to Emigration to the British Provinces*, 3. For a comprehensive study of British emigration during the Irish famine, and of Earl Grey's emigration plans in particular, see *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History, 1845-52*, ed. R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (New York: New York University Press, 1957), 319-52.

the tide of American-bound emigration, and strengthen the Canadian provinces. A.J. Buchanan, superintendent of emigration in Quebec, while applauding Grey's plan, called for a special public works program of his own – 25,000 men “to be employed in the construction of the Quebec and Halifax Railway to be guaranteed employment for two years” and given a grant of fifty acres of land per family along the route of the proposed railway.<sup>37</sup>

The full Cabinet, however, refused to fund such colonization schemes on the grounds that present township distributions in Upper Canada would not allow for the transplantation of entire villages, that the local economies could not possibly provide sufficient employment to so many newcomers (especially in the winter), and that such a plan would set an unacceptable and exorbitantly expensive precedent for the public funding of whole-scale emigration.<sup>38</sup> Despite the sufferings and pleadings of a starving people, Parliament, whether Whig or Tory, was handicapped by a commitment to a *laissez-faire* liberalism that frowned upon the use of public funds for expensive relief measures. In the end, by the spring of 1847, Parliament reduced its commitment for emigration assistance from 50,000 to 10,000 pounds “for the relief of such emigrants, and for forwarding those who are destitute to places where their labour may be in demand.”<sup>39</sup>

There were other factors that negated the colonizing of Vancouver Island. The costs of transportation to such a distant locale – 150 days by sail – were substantially more than they were to Halifax or Montreal. Furthermore, British title to the Island had only recently been secured and it was without society or well-established government. However, the biggest impediment to serious settlement there of any kind – by Mormons, Irish, or English – was the HBC, just as it had once been at the Red River Settlement (Winnipeg, Manitoba) and wherever else its interests and those of settlement collided.

At the same time that the Mormons and Fitzgerald were making their requests, Sir John Pelly, governor of the HBC in London, was already petitioning Parliament for exclusive, or monopoly, rights to the entire Island, if not as replacement territory for its losses in the Columbia (as negotiated in the Treaty of Oregon) then as guarantee of future profits in the fur trade on the Pacific Coast. Since the HBC was the only established British presence in the area, it still represented the most effective bulwark to any further American claims to territories

<sup>37</sup> House of Commons, “Further Papers Relative to Emigration to the British Provinces,” p.7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

north of the 49th parallel, the newly established British-American boundary. Furthermore, the financial strength of the HBC was far greater and more reliable than any other independently sponsored plan of colonization. Though British popular opinion ran heavily against the HBC (or the "Monopoly," as it was derisively called), in the end it was the interests and actions of the HBC that effectively undercut any effort by the Latter-day Saints, Fitzgerald, or any others to lay claim to the Island.<sup>40</sup>

In 1849 Parliament granted the HBC exclusive property rights to Vancouver Island for ten years on such specific conditions as establishing a settlement of British colonists within five years; using funds from land sales to improve roads, schools, and the like; and retaining civil authority in the person of a governor to be appointed by the Colonial Office. If these terms were not met, then the grant would be revoked.<sup>41</sup>

Richard Blanshard served as the first appointed governor of Vancouver Island but only for a very short time, opposed as he was by the HBC as well as by the Colonial Office. He was replaced by James Douglas who, as former chief factor of the HBC at Fort Vancouver, had the confidence of Sir George Simpson. Under Douglas, only a few HBC retirees settled on the Island, primarily due to the stringent labour conditions imposed on potential immigrants.<sup>42</sup> And although the little colony boasted good relations with Native peoples, new coal discoveries in Nanaimo in 1852, and an active salmon-fishing enterprise, settlement remained sparse. By 1858 the total White population was less than 1,000. Though these numbers soared with the 1858 discovery of gold on the Fraser River on the Mainland, it was not until the Colonial Office engineered British Columbia's entry into the Confederation of Canada in 1871 that Island settlers finally acquired the same political rights enjoyed by their counterparts in eastern Canada.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> As Fitzgerald put it in his presentation to Parliament:

If Earl Grey supposes that there are no other parties in this country who have an interest in colonizing the North-west coast, or who are capable of doing it, he has made a blunder unusually great, even for his Lordship ... We do believe that sooner or later, there will be a Colony there, and if there be, it will not be a feeble infant. The country, the climate, the position, all point it out as the home of a strong and enterprising race; and however it may be tormented by the caprice of a Colonial Office, or by the monopoly and tyranny of a trading company, time will be when it will rise above both the one and the other. (James Fitzgerald, "Vancouver's Island." Petition to Parliament [1848], PAM)

<sup>41</sup> See Barman, *The West beyond the West*, 53-54; see also Frederic William Howay, *British Columbia: The Making of a Province* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1928), 104-06.

<sup>42</sup> Mackie puts the number of new settlers by the end of 1850 at a maximum of 160. See Mackie, "Colonization of Vancouver Island," 21.

<sup>43</sup> Hugh M. Johnston, *The Pacific Province* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1996), 69.



THE UTAH WAR OF 1857-58  
AND VANCOUVER ISLAND

Meanwhile things were about to turn nasty south of the border in Utah Territory where, once more, a series of events riveted British attention to Mormon intentions. Since 1847, the Mormon settlements had flourished along the Wasatch front so that by early 1851 the population in the Salt Lake Valley numbered 11,354. Two years later that figure had reached almost 30,000, of whom 10,000 resided in Salt Lake City.<sup>44</sup> Several smaller, satellite settlements had also been springing up south of Salt Lake, eventually extending the “Mormon Corridor” south and west to Carson Valley, Las Vegas, and San Bernardino, California.

With the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Fort in 1848 by a work crew that included Mormon battalion veterans of the Mexican War, the year 1849 witnessed the largest overland emigration up to that time in American history. Many of the California-bound argonauts traded goods and products in Salt Lake at greatly reduced prices for foodstuffs, supplies, and other essentials. While Captain Grant of the HBC had continued to come down from Fort Hall to the valley in 1848 and 1849 with pack horses laden with skins, groceries, and other goods, by 1850 he himself admitted that his trading opportunities there were virtually over. “The Mormons are now getting too rich and extensively supplied in goods and other necessaries at a much cheaper rate than a peddler on a small scale like myself can afford to sell,” he wrote.<sup>45</sup> Later, in January 1851, he regretfully wrote to the chief governor that

the day for dealing with the Mormons is now over. They have of their own, very fine and well supplied stores, selling numbers of articles at a far cheaper rate than is even done at Vancouver for cash, and my prices, though the Board [of Management] does not consider them high enough, would have no chance there in the present days. Their gold dust, they themselves turn into coins of 5, 10 and 20 dollar pieces. Of such articles as they required, sugars and teas with a goodly supply for women’s [ware], have been taken to their settlement. The first and second year in the valley a good deal of cash might have been got from them; that day is, however, past. The firm of Irvingston and Kintthead at the Mormon City sold goods to the amount of \$10,000 in one day at the opening of their store.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah, 1854-1886* (San Francisco: History Company, 1889), 328.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Grant to Sir George Simpson, 22 February 1850, in “Sir George Simpson Correspondence Inward, D5,” reel 3M 90, F.335. HBCA/PAM.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Grant to Sir George Simpson, 31 January 1851, in “Sir George Simpson Correspondence Inward, D5,” reel 3M 94, D5/30, F.183-184, HBCA/PAM.

For his part, a disappointed Richard Grant was furloughed by the HBC later that year and, in 1853, was given full retirement – ill health (rheumatism) being assigned as the reason, though he lived for another decade.<sup>47</sup>

Under the leadership of Grant's successors, Neill McArthur and William Sinclair, Fort Hall suffered from poor management, lack of support from the board of management that was intent on its demise, increasing Native hostilities, recurring floods, and declining revenues until it was finally abandoned in 1856, but not before Brigham Young made a little known effort to purchase it.<sup>48</sup>

The reasons for the Mormon interest in Fort Hall are not well known. As their settlements continued apace outward from the Salt Lake Valley, first to the south and west and later to the north into Cache Valley and southern Idaho, Fort Hall may have been a natural acquisition. During the so-called Salmon River Mission of 1855-56 into present-day southeast Idaho, a mission designed both to make new settlements and to proselytize among the Bannock and Shoshone tribes, Benjamin F. Cummings, E. Robinson, and P.G. Taylor met with McArthur "relative to the purchase" of Fort Hall "as he was anxious to sell it for the Hudson's Bay Company." McArthur ultimately concluded that "he was not prepared to make the sale ... in a manner that would be altogether safe for the purchaser and wished a postponement of the business until he could get further instructions from the officers of the company" – instructions which he never obtained.<sup>49</sup>

Young's interests may have had as much to do with military strategy as they did with settlement. War clouds were once again advancing

<sup>47</sup> Praised by most overland emigrants as helpful, courteous, with a "portly frame and jovial dignity – a ready-made representation of Falstaff," Grant never returned to his native Canada. After his first wife died, he married a woman named Helene Kitson, widow of William Kitson. Grant and his family resided for a time at Cantonment Loring, just north of Fort Hall, before moving to Hell Gate Ronde. He died in Walla Walla (Washington), 21 June 1862. For more on Grant, see T.C. Elliott, "Richard ('Captain Johnny') Grant," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 36, 1 (March 1935): 1-13. For additional information on Grant and Fort Hall, see Jennie Broughton Brown, *Fort Hall on the Oregon Trail: A Historical Study* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Publishers, 1932); and Louis S. Grant, "Fort Hall under the Hudson's Bay Company, 1837-1856," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 41, 1 (March 1940): 34-39.

<sup>48</sup> McArthur has been criticized for his "incompetence" and his "ruination" of Fort Hall. His "desertion in 1854 was an appropriate conclusion to the Snake country trade" for the HBC. See Galbraith, *Hudson's Bay Company*, 108.

<sup>49</sup> Journal of Benjamin F. Cummings, 19 November 1856, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. See also Journal History, 25 November 1856, CHD. For more on this topic, see John D. Nash, "The Salmon River Mission of 1858," *Idaho Yesterdays* 11, 1 (Spring 1967): 24; and Leonard J. Arrington, *History of Idaho*, 2 vols. (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press and State Historical Society [Boise], 1994), vol. 1, 165-82.

on the Mormon Zion in 1856–57, with President James Buchanan’s 1857 decision to send an expeditionary force of 2,500 soldiers – later reinforced to include nearly one-third of the US Army – to put down what he had been led to believe amounted to Mormon insurrection, insubordination, and open defiance of the law. Even if his sources were prejudiced against the Latter-day Saints, Buchanan well understood the public outcry against Mormon polygamy, which was first publicly announced in 1852. Responding to a new and rising Republican party that was convinced that Buchanan and his Democratic party were soft on those “twin relics of barbarism – slavery and polygamy” (as the 1856 Republican platform phrased it)– Buchanan bowed to pressure. He dispatched his forces to put down the alleged insurrection, to replace Brigham Young with a new territorial governor, and to restore order in the West.<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile British attitudes towards the Latter-day Saints had also hardened in direct proportion to the growing success of Mormon missionaries in England since 1837 and, more especially, after the 1852 public proclamation condoning the practice of plural marriage.<sup>51</sup> “The reports from America were fuel for the anti-Mormon activists in Britain,” one scholar has noted. “The summer of 1857 witness many acts of vandalism and harassment, from window breaking and defacing of literature to heckling speeches and physically intimidating members on their way home from meetings.”<sup>52</sup>

And if the anti-Mormon rhetoric appearing in the *London Times* in 1857 and 1858 is any reasonable gauge of public opinion, then the British attitude was distinctly critical: “Mormonism is the most forbidding,

<sup>50</sup> Two of many good studies of the Utah War are Norman F. Furniss’s *The Mormon Conflict, 1850–1859* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960); and *The Utah Expedition, 1857–1858*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark, 1958) – a documentary history. The most recent study of this conflict is Richard E. Poll and William P. MacKinnon’s “Causes of the Utah War Reconsidered,” *Journal of Mormon History* 20, 2 (Fall 1994): 16–44. A discussion of the various exodus alternatives considered by Brigham Young during the winter of 1857–58, including that for Vancouver Island, may be found in William P. MacKinnon’s *At Sword’s Point: A Documentary History of the Utah War of 1857–1858*, in *Kingdom of the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier Series*, David Bigler, ed. (Spokane, Washington: The Arthur H. Clark Co., forthcoming).

<sup>51</sup> Church membership in Britain stood at 1,600 in 1840, 7,500 in 1842, and 33,000 in 1851. After that, baptisms failed to keep pace with emigration, backsliding, excommunications, and death. See Taylor, *Expectations Westward*, 19–20. The number of Mormon emigrants who left Britain for the United States between 1840 and 1852 numbered approximately 12,300. See M. Hamlin Cannon, “Migration of English Mormons to America,” *American Historical Review* 52 (1946–47): 441.

<sup>52</sup> Richard D. Poll, “The British Mission during the Utah War, 1857–58.” In *Mormons in Early Victorian Britain*, ed. Richard L. Jensen and Malcolm R. Thorp (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989), vol. 4 in the Publications in Mormon Studies Series, p. 229.

the most disgusting and the most stupid subject of the day,” began one of many such articles in the *Times* as the paper’s American correspondents paid close attention to the US Army’s advance on Utah.

The enormous credulity of the Mormonites in their capacity of followers is all a trait of human nature as old as the hills. Here is a succession of elements and ingredients, then, making up in combination the phenomenon of Mormonism ... Sensuality ... the prophetic element ... the expectation of an earthly paradise ... and the 19th century impulse for emigration.<sup>53</sup>

And in a later article: “The monstrous institution of polygamy is so repugnant to European feelings that it will probably be abandoned when it has lost the attraction of novelty.”<sup>54</sup>

Mormon defectors also added fuel to the fire by spreading malicious rumours of violence and female abduction. For instance, George Turnbull, a former officer at church headquarters at 42 Islington in Liverpool, told so wild a story of 300 armed missionaries returning to the United States to aid in the pending Utah conflict that even the American ambassador to Great Britain became concerned. “I deem it my duty to inform you that a company of Mormons are just about to leave the country, armed and equipped to join their confederates in Salt Lake Valley,” wrote Turnbull in early February 1858. With promised reinforcements from elsewhere, “they all intend to start together across the plains from some northern point in or near the border of Canada.”<sup>55</sup> Though American officials monitored Mormon emigrant ships, no such militia was ever

<sup>53</sup> *London Times*, 5 January 1858, 6.

<sup>54</sup> *London Times*, 2 February 1858, 8. A careful study of the *Times*, however, reveals yet another reason for British unease, if not antagonism. Accepting at full value American published reports that Young was acting in some kind of open defiance to American law, the Mormon threat was seen as less religious than political, a

hierarchy which is at the same time ecclesiastical and social [which] disclaim[s] among themselves the political equality which is at the base of all American institutions ... Mr. Buchanan will [not] fail in his immediate object of re-establishing his authority in Utah; but he will have created a precedent which may embarrass his successors for many generations. To most American statesmen it will be a new discovery that they may find within their own borders republics which cannot be included in the Union, a religion which it is necessary to persecute. (*London Times*, 2 February 1858, 8)

It is ironic that both Brigham Young and James Buchanan had earlier served their respective institutions in London, the former as head of the Mormon Church in Great Britain and the latter as US ambassador to the Court of Saint James.

<sup>55</sup> George Turnbull to the Honourable G.M. Dallas, United States Ambassador, London, 4 February 1858, dispatches from US Ministries to Great Britain, M30, roll 67, Secretary of State Papers, National Archives and Records Services of the United States of America, College Park, Maryland (hereafter referred to as NARS).

found – only a group of some sixty-five unarmed missionaries being recalled to Utah to be with their families in the pending difficulty.<sup>56</sup>

Whether reacting to real or rumoured information, as Mormon resistance stiffened against Buchanan's advancing army, the British government, and, more especially, the HBC, grew increasingly concerned that, rather than fight, the Mormons would evacuate their valley home and flee elsewhere – very possibly to Vancouver Island. One unidentified press correspondent reported in the *Times* that, during his recent stay in Salt Lake, "a leading man told him that in the event of the expedition attacking they would hoist the British flag and that would stimulate their English resident brethren" and that the "English Government with whom they were in secret communication had confidently assured them that she would come to their rescue."<sup>57</sup> Other accounts, this one via the British Consul in Buffalo, New York, had 30,000 Mormons removing the coming Spring "into British Territory, about the head waters of the Saskatchewan ... via Red River, the Lakes and Lake Winnipeg."<sup>58</sup> While there was no truth to either story, London was nevertheless watching matters very closely. Shortly after Mormons of the Utah Territorial Militia (Nauvoo Legion) had destroyed seventy-eight wagons of army supplies and provisions, Lord Napier, British minister to Washington, dispatched a fifteen-page communication to Lord Clarendon, foreign secretary, outlining his concerns. "The vulgar impression has hitherto been that the Mormons would abstain from open rebellion, but this feeling has been shaken" by news of the provision trains. Every indicator now pointed to civil war, he reported, "and no one can with confidence predict the issue of the present campaign though the eventual subjection of the Territory does not admit of doubt." Enclosing copies of recent New York newspaper accounts, Napier concluded with this concern:

It will not escape your Lordship's attention that it is reported that the Mormons intend hereafter to break up from Utah and force their

<sup>56</sup> Beverley Tucker, US Vice Consul at Liverpool, to G.M. Dallas, 12 February 1858 and 19 February 1858, dispatches from US Ministries to Great Britain, M30, roll 67, Secretary of State Papers, NARS. See also Poll, "The British Mission," 229-41.

<sup>57</sup> *London Times*, 29 December 1857, p.7.

<sup>58</sup> J. Roake to the British Consul in Buffalo, 14 January 1858, in "London Correspondence with Her Majesty's Government, Colonial Office," reel 51, A.8/8, F7, p. 140, HBCA/PAM. Roake further wrote:

I take it for granted that Her Majesty's Government don't want such a nest of vipers as Brigham Young and his Saints to squat down in the glorious region of the Saskatchewan, which in fact is the very best unoccupied portion of the continent, one that will soon be required for the settlement of a Christian people.

way across Oregon and Washington Territories to Her Majesty's possessions. This rumour cannot be found in an accurate knowledge of the designs of the Mormon Chief but it is accredited by their previous emigration from Nauvoo to the Salt Desert and the journey, however arduous, might perhaps be accomplished by scattered parties ... Her Majesty's Government may consequently prepare the authorities of the Hudson's Bay Company for an attempt of this kind.<sup>59</sup>

The British government took the Mormon threat seriously for several reasons. Their petition of 1846 was well remembered. Simpson himself had predicted a decade earlier that they would eventually seek a better home, one more open to coastal trade and more amply supplied with natural resources. While the Mormons might choose Mexico rather than Vancouver Island, the "British possessions, though more distant, were less exposed to eruption from U.S. emigrants and filibusters turn more to the South than the North."<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Brigham Young would almost certainly evacuate his people rather than risk a war with the United States. And there was the factor that a significant percentage of the Latter-day Saints in Utah were former "British subjects by birth" (and were presumably sympathetic to British interests) and that John Taylor (a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and Young's successor as president in 1877) had already communicated his leanings, as Richard Grant had reported in his 1847 letter.<sup>61</sup> And the prospect of "another exodus," as Napier stated, rather than appearing a daunting exercise, "was consistent with their previous proceedings and with the spirit of their enthusiasm."<sup>62</sup> In fine, the British had concluded from all these reasons that a Mormon exodus for Vancouver Island would be entirely consistent with their past statements, present difficulties, and future requirements.

<sup>59</sup> Lord Napier to the Earl of Clarendon, 16 November 1857, Foreign Office 5, vol. 674, Public Records Office, London, England. Available in photostat format in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC. The article to which Napier referred appeared in the 14 November 1857 edition of the *New York Herald*, and it said, in part, "We think it a safe conclusion this his [Young's] scheme is to beat back the present government expedition and to evacuate Utah in an Israelitish Exodus ... Should they pass over into the dominion of Victoria, let them go – for most of them will thus be returning to their first allegiance."

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Napier had said earlier that "the Mormons would be rapidly overtaken by American emigration should they choose their future seats on the Mexican frontier. Her Majesty's possessions in the centre of the Continent would offer a more solitary and secure resort." Lord Napier to Earl of Clarendon, 19 November 1857, in "London Correspondence with Her Majesty's Government, Colonial Office," reel 51, A. 8/8, F.76-77, p. 139, HBCA/PAM.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Grant to Sir George Simpson, 31 December 1847. Previously cited.

<sup>62</sup> Lord Napier to Sir George Simpson, 30 January 1858, in "London Correspondence Inward from Governors, Sir George Simpson," reel 206, A. 12/9, F.45, HBCA/PAM.

Meanwhile Napier's dispatches from Washington set off a flurry of diplomatic correspondence. The very last thing that either the British government or the HBC desired was to contend with an unwanted landing in force of a large number of irritated religionists. For the HBC, then trying to renegotiate its 1849 Vancouver Island monopoly treaty, the stakes were especially high. But what to do about just such a possibility became a major issue and underscored a subtle difference between Her Majesty's government and the HBC with respect to the future of the Island. "It is obvious that if these people present themselves in large numbers," wrote John Shepherd, governor of the HBC in London in a letter to the Colonial Office, that "Mr. [James] Douglas [governor of Vancouver Island] will have no means at his disposal to prevent the establishment of a Mormon Settlement within the British Territory, but I beg to assure you that the Hudson's Bay Company [is] far from desiring their presence, and will do all in [its] power to prevent such a settlement."<sup>63</sup>

The HBC's hurried dispatches overseas, while providing only the vaguest instructions in the case of an actual advance, were nonetheless clear in their denunciations. "The presence of these lawless and immoral people is, in the opinion of the Governor and Committee, most undesirable," reported one London communiqué to Governor Douglas,

whether for the interests of the Hudson's Bay Company or for those of the colonists in Vancouver's Island, and I am to request that you will do all in your power to discourage and prevent them from settling within British Territory and ... to withhold from them every facility, should they make their appearance on the Northern side of the Boundary Line.

Should these people present themselves in overpowering numbers it will become your duty to represent [to] Her Majesty's Government the state of affairs in order that such measure may be adopted as they may consider most expedient.<sup>64</sup>

Lord Napier, in a similar letter from Washington a day later, warned Simpson "to be prepared for the possible contingency of an invasion by the Mormons."<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> John Shepherd, Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, to the Right Honourable Henry Labouchere, Colonial Secretary, 24 December 1857, in "London Correspondence with Her Majesty's Government, Colonial Office," reel 51, A8/8, F.48, pp. 81-82, HBCA/PAM.

<sup>64</sup> William Gregory Smith, Hudson's Bay Company Secretary, to James Douglas, Governor of Vancouver Island, 29 January 1858, in "London Correspondence Outward, Official," reel 43, A.6/33, F.44, pp. 73-74, HBCA/PAM.

<sup>65</sup> Lord Napier to Sir George Simpson, 30 January 1858, in "London Correspondence Inward, Governors," reel 206, A.12/9, F.45, HBCA/PAM.

Simpson dismissed Napier's rumours of a Mormon removal to the headwaters of the Saskatchewan out of hand but admitted that a "removal of these people to some of the Pacific Islands seem more probable. But I hardly know how we are to prepare for such a contingency. I believe our best protect[ion] against the threatened invasion is the surable [miserable?] temptation our cold Northern regions hold out to the 'Saints.'"<sup>66</sup>

The instructions issued to Governor Douglas by the HBC on the one hand and by the Colonial Office on the other differ slightly but significantly and reveal what might have happened had the Mormon invasion materialized. As far as the HBC was concerned, settlement by these or any other people – especially Americans – was still totally unacceptable and outside its policy of "selected colonization." The directive issued by Henry Labouchere, colonial secretary, however, recognized the reality that no British army could be deployed to prevent their coming. Anxious to see more signs of settlement than the HBC had heretofore allowed, Labouchere gave more sensible, conciliatory instructions, leaving the door ajar for such possible settlement. "There is no reason ... why they should be subjected to different treatment from other political exiles," he said. While no rights of occupation whatever were to be granted them as refugees, "you will remember that the soil of this territory belongs to the Crown," not to the HBC. He continued:

If, however, individuals or families, flying from Utah should peacefully apply for admission into Vancouver's Island, the case is different. Much must be left to your discretion, and to that of your advisors in the Colony ... The acquisition of land for purposes of settlement under the ordinary rules is not in the view of Her Majesty's Government to be refused merely because the parties applying have been members of that territorial community against which the arms of the U.S. Government are now directed. But this can only take place on the supposition that such immigrants submit themselves entirely to the Laws of England ... Polygamy is not tolerated by those laws; and if any attempt should be made to continue the disgraceful scandals of that system, I rely on the good will of the Legislature and authorities to devise means by which such abuses may be effectually suppressed.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Sir George Simpson to Lord Napier, 9 February 1858, in "Sir George Simpson Correspondence Book Outwards, General," reel 3M33, D.4/77, F.407-408, HBCA/PAM.

<sup>67</sup> The Right Honourable Henry Labouchere, Colonial Secretary, to James Douglas, Governor of Vancouver's Island, 1 February 1858, in "London Correspondence with Her Majesty's Government, Colonial Office," reel 51, A.8/8 F.69-70, pp. 124-35, HBCA/PAM.



Responding to both his company and governmental superiors in early April, Douglas reported that they had been indeed “watching the progress of the political movements in Utah with the closest attention,” but he was relieved to report that “we have not as yet received intimation of the approach of any body of Mormons to any part of Her Majesty’s dominions on the Coast.”<sup>68</sup> Two months later, with news of the political solution to the conflict, Napier announced the following: “Your Lordship will be happy to learn that they have not selected the territory of the Hudson’s Bay Company as the land of promise.”<sup>69</sup>

The Mormon invasion never came. No concrete evidence has yet been found to suggest that Brigham Young ever gave serious thought to quitting Utah and the United States for either Vancouver Island or Mexico. With the help of Colonel Thomas L. Kane, a long-standing friend of the Mormons and unofficial emissary of President Buchanan, a peaceful settlement to the Utah War was reached. Through negotiations between Young and Buchanan’s two official commissioners, Alfred Cumming of Georgia replaced Young as territorial governor, a blanket pardon was extended to Utah’s entire population, and the army arrived in peace to an emptied Salt Lake City ready for the torch. Though the city had indeed been evacuated, with as many as 30,000 residents having moved south into the Provo area, they came streaming back to their homes in July 1858 after all threat of war had passed. The army, meanwhile, established a garrison in the desert forty miles south of Salt Lake City and remained there as the nation’s largest military establishment until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861.

For the next twenty years, until Young’s death in 1877, Mormon emigration from Great Britain and Scandinavia continued, and new settlements expanded throughout the inter-mountain West. Public pressure against Mormon polygamy intensified in the 1880s, resulting in an era of persecution and political action against the Latter-day Saints and causing many of its leaders to go underground. John Taylor, who succeeded Young as president, never let go of the Canadian possibility and, as partial answer to the persecution of his times, directed Charles O. Card and others to explore northward into Canada and

<sup>68</sup> Governor James Douglas to the Right Honourable Henry Labouchere, 6 April 1858, in “London Correspondence with Her Majesty’s Government, Colonial Office,” reel 51, A.8/8 F.86-87, pp. 158-59, HBCA/PAM.

<sup>69</sup> Lord Napier to the Earl of Malmesbury, 15 June 1858, in “London Correspondence with Her Majesty’s Government, Colonial Office,” reel 51, A.8/8, F.94-95, pp. 174-75, HBCA/PAM.

evaluate the possibilities of at least a small settlement. Card eventually established a satellite settlement not on Vancouver Island but in Cardston, southern Alberta, in 1887. Said Card as he fled US marshals and crossed into British Columbia: "I took off my hat, swung it around and shouted 'in Columbia we are free.'"<sup>70</sup> Soon afterwards, in 1890, under direction of Wilford Woodruff, Taylor's successor, the Latter-day Saints renounced plural marriage in a move that eventually lessened persecution and misunderstandings, established more congenial relations and improved public perceptions, led to the granting of statehood for Utah in 1896, and prepared the Church for its phenomenal growth in the twentieth century. Today, some 2,500 Latter-day Saints reside on Vancouver Island.

The above account does more than merely provide an understanding of what might have been. The fact is that for several years Brigham Young and, more particularly, some of his fellow leaders showed more than a passing interest in settling Vancouver Island. It is also now known that Sir George Simpson and those associated with him in his fur-trading enterprise were very well aware of the Mormon predicament and had formulated opinions and policies concerning them if, indeed, they actually did abandon their Utah possessions for the north. Likewise it is also clear that the British government did not have precisely the same vision as did the HBC for the development of Vancouver Island. Anxious to see more British settlement in the North American West, and notwithstanding very strong British anti-Mormon sentiments of the time, Parliament would have been more liberal than the HBC in accommodating such a possible Mormon arrival.

<sup>70</sup> *The Diaries of Charles Ora Card: The Canadian Years, 1886-1903*, ed. Donald G. Godfrey and Brigham H. Card (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 12.