Building The Kingdom Of God

Alpheus Cutler and the Second Mormon Mission to the Indians 1846–1853

by Danny L. Jorgensen

In March 1844, the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith organized a secretive parapolitical Council of Fifty for the purpose of establishing a theocratic Kingdom of God on earth. High Priest Alpheus Cutler, the fourth ranking member of the council and a participant in Smith's secret Anointed Quorum, was appointed to a committee responsible for restoring the Lamanites (Indians) to Zion. Although Smith's murder in June 1844 severely disrupted these plans, the Latter-day Saints' hopes and ambitions for the millennial Kingdom survived. In part, those ambitions became the welcome task of Alpheus Cutler whose mission to the Indians in Kansas was approved in 1847 at Winter Quarters (present-day Nebraska) by Mormon leader Brigham Young.

Over the next several years, Cutler and a few Latter-day Saint followers conducted missionary work among Native Americans southwest of Fort Leavenworth, operating a mill, providing education, farming, and preaching the gospel. Their beliefs and activities led to bitter antagonism between

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Mormon prophet Joseph Smith restoring the Lamanites to Zion.
the Mormon High Council at Kanesville (present-day Council Bluffs, Iowa) and a branch at Silver Creek, Iowa, where Father Cutler, as he was respectfully known, presided. The growing discontent among High Council members peaked in 1851, and Cutler and some of his associates were cut off from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Their Kansas mission, like previous Mormon ministries to the Indians, also produced conflict with area Christian missionaries and federal agents, but produced few, if any, converts. Unable to secure title to farms and improvements on Indian lands in Kansas, the Cutlerites, as they were called, returned to southwestern Iowa in 1853. There, Cutler and a group of about two hundred former Mormons, having been left with few alternatives, formed the schismatic Church of Jesus Christ (Cutlerite).

Alpheus Cutler and his Kansas Indian mission are almost unknown outside of Mormon history. Within this specialized field of study, Cutler’s consequential roles in early Mormonism have been neglected and depreciated. Father Cutler, with a few of his more illustrious associates, has received passing mention in Mormon histories, but, despite the significance of the Native American to Latter-day Saint theology, his Kansas Indian mission is almost completely unknown.

“Except for one brief mission in 1830,” erroneously observed one historian, “the Mormons did no proselyting among the Indians before 1854.” Writer Richard E. Bennett probed Cutler’s Indian doctrine and related activities, but like most pertinent scholarship he focused on Cutler’s alleged apostasy. Unfortunately, Cutler’s formation of a schismatic church has been permitted to obscure the study of preceding events. Reflecting an overwhelming scholarly consensus, Bennett concluded: “While at Winter Quarters they [the Mormons] made few, if any, attempts to proselyte among their Indian neighbors and refrained from manning missions and schoolhouses among any of the tribes.”

A study of this little known Latter-day Saint mission to the Indians serves to illuminate this episode in Kansas history, and a series of important, interrelated events: Cutler’s role in early Mormonism, the unique millennial temple theology in which Cutler’s activities were fully grounded, and certain aspects of the process whereby the doctrines, goals, and organization of this new American religion developed after the assassination of its founder.

Following the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, Alpheus Cutler was part of the prophet’s elite inner circle, headed by Brigham Young, which assumed leadership of the largest single body of Latter-day Saints. Cutler’s Indian ministries exemplified the Mormons’ unique beliefs about American natives and their ambitious plans for enacting the political Kingdom of God. Opposing Cutler’s ideals were apostle Orson Hyde and the Mormon High Council who perceived the Kansas mission as an obstacle to

the paramount goal of relocating the Latter-day Saints to the Salt Lake valley in Utah; the High Council defined Cutler’s beliefs and the claims of his followers as heresy. His eventual defection from Utah Mormonism, as marked by his formation of a schismatic movement, does not diminish his contributions to early Mormonism or, perhaps ironically, his leadership of the second Mormon mission to the Indians. This Latter-day Saint Indian mission is not a major episode in the history of Kansas, but it is significant and neglected. The Cutlerites and other Mormons left lasting traces in Kansas, and this analysis and interpretation of Cutler’s Indian mission in Kansas should provide a basis for further study.

SAVING THE “RED MEN OF THE FOREST”

Early Mormonism attached a very special historical and religious significance to the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Americas. The organization of the church in April 1830, as the restoration of the original church of Christ, was nearly coincident with the publication of the Book of Mormon. Believed to be Joseph Smith’s translation of ancient golden tablets provided by God, this work is a biblical-like narrative of middle eastern peoples who migrated to the New World. According to this record, Native Americans received religious instruction from Jesus Christ following the Crucifixion. They eventually lost faith in Christianity, however, and became “loathsome.” The Mormons assumed a special responsibility for redeeming their descendants who were referred to as Lamanites and identified as American Indians. Commissioned to preach to the Lamanites, the first Mormon missionaries departed New York in October 1830. They met with Indians along the way, and eventually established friendly relations with Delaware Indians west of the Missouri River. Federal agents, however, saw these missionaries as “disturbers of the peace” and shortly ordered them out of Indian Territory (Kansas).4

Mormon efforts to save the “red men of the forest” were intimately intertwined in complex ways with a unique, syncretic Christian restorationism. Unlike other American restorationists, the Mormons drew heavily upon the Old as well as the New Testament. This church was to be restored by divine revelation through a modern-day prophet and include other pre-Christian elements and patterns. The Mormons, not wholly unlike other Americans, believed they were a chosen people of the House of Israel, ordained of God to gather for the building of the city of Zion, the Kingdom of God, in preparation for the Second Coming and the Millennium. The fusion of these ideas, according to historian Richard L. Bushman, led to the belief that “the people of the earth, the Indians especially but not exclusively, were to be taught faith and repentance, and gathered to the city of Zion, where they could weather the tribulations and prepare themselves for the Second Coming.” Mormon belief in Zion was given a concrete focus in July 1831 when Joseph Smith reportedly received a revelation from God identifying Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, as the “land of promise” and “center place.”

Early Mormon efforts to convert the Indians and include them in Zion rarely were successful.5 Ironically, their neighbors’ hatred for Native Americans and fearful images of friendly relations between the Saints and Indians contributed to the Mormons being driven out of Jackson County in 1833, as well as their expulsion from Missouri in 1839. Immediately thereafter the Saints became preoccupied with constructing the Mormon city (Nauvoo, Illinois), missionary work among Anglo-Americans and the British, and the continued orga-


izational and theological development of their new religion. Indian visitors to the Mormon city were common, and Joseph Smith frequently communicated with them, sometimes through Elder Lewis Denna, an Oneida and one of a very few early Indian converts. In spite of other Americans' persistent fears of Mormon collusion with the Indians, the Nauvoo Saints did not conduct extensive ministries among Native Americans.

As “prophet, seer, and revelator,” Joseph Smith led this initially fluid, loosely organized religious movement by way of charismatic power and authority. By the middle 1830s, the church had a president (Joseph Smith), two counselors, a quorum of twelve apostles, several councils of seventy, bishops, a patriarch, a high council, and various other functionaries. Congregations (branches) of the Saints were organized by wards, composing “stake” of the larger tent of Zion. Within substantially independent and self-sufficient frontier communities, the duties of the priesthood and authority for more secular and mundane affairs commonly overlapped, and Mormon society became increasingly theocratic.

At Nauvoo, Smith’s attention to the restoration and Zion initially focused on the introduction of radically new theological elements. He concentrated on restoring the patriarchal order of the holy priesthood, especially temple ordinances and rituals: baptism (by proxy) for the dead; endowments (washings, anointings, ceremonies); celestial marriage (eternal and plural marriage); the law of adoption (sealing people together for eternity); and the fullness of the priesthood (keys and sealing powers, later called the second anointing). Portions of the emergent Nauvoo temple theology, especially its most secret elements, initially were introduced by Smith to a very few highly trusted associates. Counted among the select group was Alpheus Cutler.

**FATHER CUTLER \nORDAINED AND ANOINTED**

Born February 29, 1784, in Plainfield, Sullivan County, New Hampshire, Alpheus Cutler was a veteran of the War of 1812. In 1833, the Cutlers were converted to Mormonism, and Alpheus was ordained an elder. Shortly thereafter they moved from Silver Creek, New York, to Kirtland, Ohio, so that Alpheus could use his skills as a stone mason in building the “House of the Lord” — Kirtland Temple. He attended the School of the Prophets (Smith’s study group), assisted with compiling the *Doctrines and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints*, and in 1835 was ordained a High Priest. About 1836, the Cutlers moved to Ray County, Missouri, where Alpheus was called to build a temple.

Cutler attained eminence in the Nauvoo church and performed many varied tasks including service on the Nauvoo High Council, a principal governmental body of the church and city. Alpheus was


present in July 1843 when the radical, new revelation on celestial marriage was read before the High Council; unlike other members, he did not dissent. During Smith's lifetime the innermost circle of Mormon leaders, a collection of thirty-six men and twenty-nine women, called the Anointed Quorum, secretly received temple ordinances. Cutler officially was listed as the seventh member of this elite, informal group. Accompanied by his wife, Lois, Alpheus received an endowment from Joseph Smith in October 1843, and about a month later they received the ultimate ordinance: the fullness of the priesthood. It was through the greater priesthood, Smith believed, that he had been given the keys to the gospel and the Kingdom, and that he was elected by God to reign with Christ as a king and priest in Zion. The Mormon prophet passed his authority for restoring the fullness of the priesthood and related sealing powers along to the anointed who also were crowned kings and priests, queens and priestesses.

The Cutlers, like all of Smith's secretly anointed inner-circle, became involved in newly defined patterns of celestial marriage and kinship. Alpheus, like the other members of the most holy, anointed order, probably was sealed to the Mormon prophet as a son by way of the law of adoption. Following Smith's death, the Cutlers participated in celestial and plural marriage. A daughter Clarissa was married to apostle Heber C. Kimball in February 1845, and her sister Emily also married Kimball in December 1845. "Sister R" (Luana Hart Beebe Rockwell) was married to Alpheus as a plural wife in August 1845. Alpheus and Lois Cutler (his first wife) were sealed together for eternity in January 1846, and the following day, Luana was sealed to Alpheus. Five additional women, Margaret Carr and her sister Abigail, Sally Cox, Daisey Caroline

13. Kimball, The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball, 133; Stanley B. Kimball, "Finding a Great-Great Grandmother: Clarissa Cutler Kimball" (unpublished essay, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, 1979). [Hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives]; Family Group Records (Salt Lake City: Family History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1984); Clare B. Christensen, Before and After Mt. Pisgah (Salt Lake City: 1979), 176; Cook, The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 255; Abraham Kimball, Finding A Father: Gens for the Young Folks (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1881), and Abraham Kimball, "Reminiscences and Journal, 1877-1889," LDS Church Archives; see also Lawrence Foster, Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). The contemporary Cutlers deny that Alpheus was a plural marriage participant.

McCall, and Henrietta Clarinda Miller entered into plurality and were sealed to Father Cutler in February 1846. Cutler, like most contemporaries of this stature, probably also had men sealed to him. In these ways, Mormon marriage partners, children, extended kin, and adopted non-relatives were bound together for time on earth and eternal kinship relations in the celestial world.
At Nauvoo, Smith organized a secret Council of Fifty and gave them primary responsibility for politically enacting the Kingdom of God on earth. The Mormon theocracy, it was envisioned, eventually would encompass the entire country and ultimately the whole world. Smith’s principal assignment to the Fifty was his election to the American presidency, but he also gave the council other Kingdom-building responsibilities. They were to pursue long-standing Mormon grievances against the state of Missouri deriving from their expulsion, possible locations for settlement in the West, and plans for the redemption and restoration of the Lamanites in Zion.

Alpheus Cutler attended the provisional meeting of the Council of Fifty on March 10, 1844, and he officially became a member of the group when it was formally organized the following day. Except for the chairman (Joseph Smith, and later Brigham Young), council members were ranked by age. By this principle, sixty-year-old Cutler was the fourth ranking member of the Fifty. Council rules limited its members to one committee. At the time of Smith’s assassination, most of the apostles were in the eastern states campaigning for their prophet’s election to the presidency. Other members were assigned to explore and identify western locations for Mormon settlement. Cutler was appointed to a committee responsible for Lamanite ministries.

16. Quinn, “The Council of Fifty and Its Members,” 169-83; Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances,” 149-68. Cutler’s followers later claimed that he was ordained by Smith through revelation to exclusive authority for Mormon Lamanite ministries.
March 1845, Oneida Indian Lewis Denna became a member of the Fifty, and "the first Lamanite who has been admitted a member of any quorum of the Church." A longtime friend of Cutler's, Denna subsequently undertook several modest Fifty expeditions to the Indians.

At the time of the martyrdom of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum in June 1844, Cutler was captain of the prophet's bodyguards, and he helped bury their bodies in unmarked graves. Prior to the return of the apostles to Nauvoo, he unofficially served as a church spokesman and leader. After the return of the apostles from the East, he served as a liaison between them and Emma Smith, the prophet's widow. Cutler was very familiar to Nauvoians as a close associate of the fallen prophet and a member of the High Council. But few of the Nauvoo Mormons, and fewer of the Saints outside the city, knew much about the Council of Fifty, and even less about Cutler's appointment to Lamanite ministries. The twelve apostles, although only nine of its members remained together, were the only visible remnant of the Mormon theocracy. In acknowledging the apostles' temporary leadership, Alpheus recognized the very theocracy to which he was less visibly but intimately linked in highly significant ways. No doubt Cutler planned and was expected by the apostles to perform important roles in the subsequent Mormon organization.

Cutler, like other close associates of the apostles, particularly the Council of Fifty, helped organize the Mormon exodus from Nauvoo beginning in February 1846. He traversed Iowa with the Camps of Israel as the captain of a company, arriving at the Missouri River in June 1846. After writing for Brigham Young's counsel, he crossed the river and founded Cutler's Park, one of the first Mormon encampments. The Mormon leadership gathered at this site, erected a city of wagons and tents with streets and public areas, and established their headquarters. The principal leaders were organized in family, kinship, and religiously inspired clan groupings reflecting the law of adoption.

Later that summer, Father Cutler helped select another site on the Missouri River about three miles to the east for the major Mormon encampment that winter.

In August 1846, Cutler was sustained as president of the Municipal High Council, originally of Cutler's Park and later Winter Quarters. Ultimately, the apostles were in charge of the Missouri camps; but, from April through October 1847, the leading members of this body were en route to and from the Salt Lake valley. At Winter Quarters, president Cutler worked closely with Brigham Young and the apostles. In September and November 1846, he corresponded as the Mormon spokesman with federal agent Thomas Harvey regarding the occupation of Indian lands. He dealt with Indian leaders concerning Mormon/Indian relations, the Saints' loss of cattle to Indians, and related matters.

Having established a settlement in the Salt Lake valley, Brigham Young returned to Winter Quarters in October 1847. Before leaving Salt Lake, however, Young had secured the backing of pioneer leaders for a reorganization of the First Presidency, and at Winter Quarters he negotiated the endorsement of the remaining leaders and members.

On November 10, 1847, a group of Oneidas appeared before the Mormon High Council seeking assistance, but apparently this was not the first time the Indians had requested Mormon aid. In a previous meeting of the apostles and others on November 8, 1847, this matter was considered. Talking about the Indians' request, Brigham Young reportedly said, "That pleases me—let Father Cutler be the man to preside there." 20


REDEEMING ZION

About noon on December 2, 1847, Alpheus Cutler and James Willard Cummings departed Winter Quarters by wagon to explore opportunities for a Mormon mission to the Indians of Kansas.21 According to Cummings, they crossed the Missouri River and then Mosquito Creek, traveling by way of Lindon, Savannah, St. Joseph, Weston, Markham’s tavern, and Fort Leavenworth before arriving at Solomon Averett’s [or Everett] on December 11. They met Oneida leader Lewis Denna that morning, and “[l]oward evening we went over to Calvin Averett [sic] where Lewis lived.” Cutler and Cummings spent Sunday, December 12, at Averett’s conversing about the mission and making plans to visit a mill site about fifteen miles away. Denna reported that several Indian leaders had visited him, “to confer with him to take some measures to get the six nations to come there.”

The following day, Denna and Calvin Averett accompanied Cutler and Cummings about twenty miles away to a proposed mill site on Little Stranger Creek, a tributary of the Kansas River. According to Cummings, they “found a beautiful country for farming, [and] plenty of good timber.” They traveled around this area the next day, found it well suited for a large settlement, and returned to Averett’s where they discussed future plans. According to Cummings, Denna and Averett were to consult the Delaware chief and see the Indian agent about a permit to build a mill. The land in question belonged to the Delawares, although several related groups and some Oneidas had been living on this reservation. Whether the Delawares were being asked for permission to build a mill to be financed by other Indians, or for permission and some or all of the expenses is unclear. Once everyone was agreed, according to the plan, Denna would contact them. Cutler and Cummings departed on Thursday, December 16. More or less retracing the previous route, they arrived at Winter Quarters on Christmas night.

On December 28, 1847, Cutler met with the Mormon council and voted in favor of reorganizing the First Presidency of the church with Brigham Young as president. The next day Cutler enthusiastically reported to the council that prospects were very favorable for a mission to the Lamanites. Hosea Stout, Mormon chief of police, noted that Cutler’s report “was as good or better than we could expect. A great prospect of much good resulting from the works there.”22 Cutler planned to secure government contracts for building and operating mills and schools, provide other forms of assistance to the Lamanites, and preach the gospel and seek converts. He also discussed with Young and some of the apostles the possibility of organizing the Indians for armed resistance should the United States Army or a militia be sent against them. Cutler described:

a Lamanite “alliance” of several thousand Indians along the Missouri River that could be marshaled into some kind of army of redemption. Such a force could level Fort Leavenworth in six hours, Cutler thought. “The Indians know all about the adjournment at Far West and understand all about our matters,” he continued, and went on to speculate what a distressing power such an alliance could have on Missouri.23

The economic possibilities of Cutler’s proposal appealed to Young. Yet provoking Indian warfare was an ace that Young hoped he would not have to play.

By the spring of 1848, further Mormon migrations to the Salt Lake valley and ongoing difficulties with Indian agents over settlements west of the Missouri led to the dissolution of Winter Quarters. Orson Hyde, the new president of the apostles and the High Council at Kanesville, assumed responsibility for the Saints remaining in the Iowa and Missouri River region. Cutler moved to Silver Creek in March where he rejoined family as well as friends, and undertook leadership of a branch of Saints. Nothing indicates that Father Cutler felt that his leadership responsibilities had been diminished; just the contrary, he apparently was excited by the opportunity finally to pursue the Lamanite mission.

21. Record of James Willard Cummings, LDS Church Archives, Andreas, History of the State of Kansas, 1:950, reported that Solomon Averett was “a half-breed Kaw Indian.”


23. Bennett, “Lamanism, Lymanism, and Cornfields,” 50, quoted from the December 28, 1847, meeting of the First Presidency, the twelve, the high council, and others.
In April 1848, before departing Winter Quarters, Young wrote Cutler and encouraged him to continue west.24 This is the first hint that the Mormon leadership may have been concerned about Father Cutler's activities. Alpheus responded on April 23 that he would "start as soon as circumstances will permit."25

While some of his family and supporters remained continuously at Silver Creek, Father Cutler and a few associates traveled back and forth between the Iowa camp and the Kansas Indian Territory, where Lewis Dena and perhaps a few other missionaries had established a camp. Rumors about Cutler's mission disturbed the Mormon High Council at Kanesville, and in early September 1848 a committee of brethren arrived at Silver Creek to investigate.26 Although not completely satisfied, they did not find anything specifically wrong. They worked out a plan for Brother Bird to accompany Father Cutler and Bishop Calkins on a visit to the Indian mission. During this trip Calkins and Bird had an argument about the council's authority to supervise Cutler's mission, and Bird reported back to the council that he had been prevented from fulfilling his responsibility.

A PROMISE OF LOYALTY
A QUESTION OF HERESY

In November 1848, Orson Hyde wrote a letter to the Silver Creek branch advising them to comply with the directives of church authorities and cautioning them about unsanctioned beliefs and activities.27 Hyde’s letter offended the Silver Creek Saints' republicanism. Defining it as tyrannical, they resolved to ignore it. Further rumors that the Silver Creek branch was defying the council's authority provoked a meeting at Kanesville in

December 1848, Cutler said very little, but Bishop Calkins contended that Alpheus had been given exclusive authority for the Lamanite mission by Brigham Young and that he was accountable only to him. He questioned the authority of the High Council to interfere with a Council of Fifty member, and he quarreled with several brethren. In spite of bitter differences, a compromise in which Cutler played a mediating role was worked out between the High Council and representatives from Silver Creek. Within a month, however, Calkins once again became embroiled in conflict with the council when he disputed the terms of the compromise.

Apparently Cutler did not openly defy the High Council or other church authorities, nor did he teach inherently heretical doctrines. He labored under the conviction that Joseph Smith had appointed him as a member of the Fifty to the important task of

24. Brigham Young to Alpheus Cutler, April 21, 1848, LDS Church Archives.
25. Alpheus Cutler to Brigham Young, April 23, 1848, LDS Church Archives.
Lamanites ministries, and that his mission had been sanctioned by Brigham Young. By this time, Cutler outranked every member of the Fifty except John Smith and chairman Brigham Young. Without exception the supposedly heretical beliefs attributed to Cutler reflected Nauvoo Mormonism and all were entirely orthodox.

Rumors, speculations, and misunderstandings regarding Cutler’s teachings and activities, however, are understandable. Many of the Saints knew or were told of his relationship with Joseph Smith, but most of them knew nothing of the Quorum of the Anointed, and Alpheus probably was not at liberty to provide much, if any, explanation. Council of Fifty activities, similarly, were obscured by secrecy. Many of Cutler’s co-religionists no doubt found his edicts strange, confusing, and even shocking. This situation very likely was compounded by multiple, different interpretations of these beliefs and the spread of ideas by repeated retellings and reinterpretations. Some of Cutler’s associates, moreover, were extremely zealous. Their sense of having privileged access to highly significant sacred information and the way they presented it offended other Saints.

Orson Hyde and George A. Smith were the only authorities in Iowa who could have been expected to be familiar with Cutler’s claims and some teachings. Cutler probably anticipated that they would defer to him, refrain from giving him direct orders, or at the very least not oppose him. They may have understood the situation differently. Their fundamental aim was to see that the remaining Saints in Iowa and along the Missouri continued west as soon as possible. Mormons remained scattered throughout this area, and some of them were unable or becoming increasingly unwilling to leave. Defections, schisms, dissenters, and recent problems with Council of Fifty members were perceived as a serious threat to the successful relocation of the church in the West. This larger situation colored Hyde’s perceptions of Cutler and his supporters.

While Brigham Young endeavored to employ the talents of the Fifty, his reorganization of the First Presidency in 1847 greatly assisted the emergent principle of apostolic succession. As lesser ranking members of the Fifty, apostles Hyde and Smith obviously benefitted from a definition of the apostles as the undisputed ruling quorum of the church. It seems likely that they, like many other Mormons, sincerely believed in this principle, and they probably were particularly sensitive to Bishop Calkin’s contention that their authority over Cutler, as a high ranking Council of Fifty member, was not absolute. This situation was complicated further by their knowledge that Cutler was one of the anointed. Had Cutler been a less significant figure their problems with him would not have seemed so difficult, and they would not have been so careful in defending their actions to president Young. The claims of Cutler supporters tested the authority of the High Council, and strengthened their resolve to gain compliance no matter the cost.

At the April 1849 conference of the church in Iowa, the case against Cutler and Calkins was presented by Orson Hyde. Father Cutler and Bishop Calkins did not attend. Over the next few years, Cutler apparently remained at the Kansas mission. William Redfield of Silver Creek attempted to defend them arguing that Father Cutler “always sustained the heads of the Church,” and he will “make full return to the authorities here” as soon as he returns. “If Bishop Calkins taught wrong things,” Redfield continued, “it was private, and not in public.” Finally, he challenged, “let those who have said anything against the Branch prove it.” Motions before the conference to disfellowship Calkins until satisfactory retractions were forthcoming, and to suspend Cutler’s mission pending further investigation, both carried unanimously.

In an October letter to Cutler, Young glowingly described developments in the Salt Lake valley; he offered assistance to the Iowa Saints in moving west; promised Cutler a house; and he counseled Alpheus to come to Zion with his family by the next season reassuring him that he would be welcomed in a spirit of peace and fellowship. Hyde, however, was more...


29. Orson Hyde, ed., Frontier Guardian, May 2, 1849, 2; Miscellanea Minutes Collection September 7, 1849, LDS Church Archives; Journal History, September 7, 1849, September 4, 1850. George Smith presented the charges against Cutler, Calkins, and the Silver Creek Saints at the September 1849 Conference in Salt Lake City. Brigham Young indicated that “there is no trial before the Church concerning the Silver Creek Branch, where Father Cutler resides,” followed by a brief explanation of his authorization of this mission. With the remark that “this has been turned into an under current of lies, and has destroyed his [Cutler’s] influence,” Young sanctioned the actions of the Iowa Conference and High Council.

30. Brigham Young to Alpheus Cutler, October 21, 1849, LDS Church Archives.
demanding of Cutler than Young had been. At the April 1850 Iowa Conference, Hyde pressed a resolution that directed Cutler to move to the Salt Lake valley, appear before the High Council, or face disfellowship. During the fall of 1850, the High Council at Winter Quarters disfellowshipped and cut off members of the Silver Creek Branch and other Mormons associated with Father Cutler. Cutler responded by writing Young in June 1850, and referring to the work Young appointed him to do, reported that another year or two were needed to complete mills under contract. Cutler defined this as a matter of honor to himself and the church, and indicated that once the work was complete he would go wherever Young directed. Since it was Young who appointed him, Cutler noted, he was appealing his disfellowship directly to him.31

32. Alpheus Cutler to Brigham Young, June 13, 1850, LDS Church Archives.

**A VISION ABANDONED**

By 1849, Cutler and some followers had established a settlement immediately west of the Grasshopper (later Delaware) River, just south of the present-day Perry Lake dam.33 Located in present-day Kentucky Township, Jefferson County, Kansas, it was called Mormon Mills, then Indian Mills, and finally Thompsonville. The country was "gently undulating," although "too rough for cultivation" in some places. The many streams were level, forming fertile valleys of "rich black loam" with an average width of about one mile. Above the streams and valleys were "high,  

from Missouri and the Munsees from Ohio began moving into the area west of the Missouri and north of the Kansas rivers. By 1838, about 1,050 Delawares lived on the reservation, and in 1839 about four hundred Indians, a mixture of Mahican Housatonic of Massachusetts, Oneidas, and Christianized Munsees, commonly referred to as the Stockbridge Indians, or simply Christian Indians, from Lake Winnebago, Wisconsin, located seven miles southwest of Fort Leavenworth on Delaware lands. In 1851, the Kansas Agency was established for Delaware, Munsee, and Stockbridge Indians (among others) living along the Kansas and Missouri rivers.36


As a member of the High Council, Orson Hyde opposed Cutler's ideals and, in 1850, was a major force behind cutting off the missionary and his followers from the church.

The Delaware reserve had been established by a treaty of 1829, and about a year later the Delawares

gently rolling prairies." It was "about 18 per cent bottom land, 82 per cent upland [constituting] 10 per cent forest, and 90 per cent prairie." The forests contained oak, hickory, ash, walnut, hackberry, elm, maple, and cottonwood. The area contained an abundance of limestone, "suitable for building," and an "excellent quality of sandstone." Located on the Delaware reserve, the site was the end of white civilization and the beginning of the Santa Fe and Oregon trails; the whites in the region were mostly trappers, hunters, explorers, missionaries, and federal agents.

Apostle George A. Smith, like Hyde, believed Cutler was defying the authority of the High Council.

In 1846, another group of mostly New York Indians departed from homelands in the East for Indian Territory. Of the 213 Indians who undertook this trip, sixty-two deserted to Canada, and many others died. The Indian representatives who showed up at Winter Quarters requesting Mormon assistance probably were from this company, although some of them may have been part of the earlier assembly of New York Indians. Weakened by sickness and death, they attempted to develop small farms with only modest success. Extremely unhappy and demoralized, they reportedly appealed to friends in the East for assistance, and received help from the Quakers for their return east. Leaving eighty-two dead in the West, ninety-four members of this group started back to New York in 1847–1848. Six or seven of these Indians, along with about ten of them who were too ill to travel, apparently remained to dispose of their holdings. Another group of New York Indians arrived at the Osage River Agency in 1852, but Lewis Denna’s hopes of attracting large numbers of the six nations to a Mormon mission were not realized.

The first Stockbridge Indians constructed rough-hewn log cabins, and developed small farms where they raised corn and vegetables. They reportedly “were good citizens, industrious and enterprising,” setting a good example for other Indians. In 1849, the Delawares objected that they received no compensation for the Christian Indians, recommending to federal agents that land should be purchased for them. These Indians tended to be educated as a consequence of extensive exposure to missionaries. Increasingly, Native Americans on the Delaware reserve were interacting with white travelers and traders. By 1851, federal agents reported that even the Christian Indians had become addicted to drunkenness. In the summer of 1851, about forty Delaware, Shawnee, Munsee, and Stockbridge Indians died of cholera, and another thirty-two died from whiskey and disease. By 1853, only about eighteen to twenty of the Christian Indians remained alive on the Delaware Reservation.37

Missions had been established on the Delaware Reservation in Indian Territory during the early 1830s. This was the location of the first Mormon mission in 1830–1831 and of the Baptist Mission established at the same time.38 In 1832, the Methodist Episcopal Church established a Delaware mission at the White Church community five miles north of Delaware Crossing on the Kansas River. They claimed 108 Indian converts, including Delaware leaders and ministers, Charles and James Ketchum. The United Brethren (Moravians), who had worked among these people in Green Bay and Canada, founded a mission in 1837 that included most of the Christian Indians, Munsees, and some Stockbridges on the north bank of the Kansas River near the town of Munsee. Protestant missionaries, wrote historian Joseph R. Henry, expected the Indians “to embrace the Gospel, to adopt white ways, to give up hunting for farming, and to reject polygamy, gambling, and alcohol.”39

The treaty creating the Delaware reserve included promises to provide various forms of assistance with agriculture, schooling, and other projects. About 1834, a mill was constructed for the government at the site of Cutler’s later mission. Used to grind corn for the Indians, it eventually fell into disrepair and was abandoned.40 When Cutler and his followers arrived in 1846, he probably contracted with the Delawares through their agent to rebuild or build and operate a mill. The Mormon missionaries built or rebuilt a water-powered mill, used it to grind corn and, less successfully, to process flour. Solomon Averett subsequently used this mill, called the Mormon mill, for grinding corn. Cutler and his followers also constructed three or four log cabins, and they cultivated around fifteen or twenty acres of land.

The Mormon families who participated in the Indian mission were the Dens, Cutlers, Murdocks, Pattens, Taylors, and perhaps the Calkins. Some families, like the Calkins, probably did not permanently reside at the Lamanite mission, and others may have come and gone from 1847 to about 1853. As many as sixteen to twenty-two adults and eighteen to thirty children, or a total of thirty-four to

fifty-two people participated in this Indian mission in Kansas at some time.\footnote{41}

The Cutlerites' descendants reported that a treaty was enacted with the Indians, chiefs were presented copies of Book of Mormon, and a few Lamanites were baptized.\footnote{42} None of these Indians, however, continued any known association with Cutler's group. Even so, in blessing Cutler's followers, patriarch Pliny Fisher constantly emphasized their responsibilities to preach, teach, and redeem the "red men of the forest." Emily Wilmot was blessed "to teach the children of the forest the things that belong to their peace and they will delight to call you mother and you will be made to rejoice in seeing them flocks to the standard of King Immanuel." Peggy Patten was assigned to "teach the children of the forest the true principles of the gospel & help to gather them even to the land of Zion." Many other Cutlerites were given similar blessings to help "gather up the honest in heart even amongst the red men of the forest in teaching them the pure principles."\footnote{43}

Missionary life was exceptionally difficult for these Latter-day Saint pioneers. By one account, "their sufferings and poverty were terrible."\footnote{44} They reported conflicts with the Indian agents, most of whom also were Christian missionaries. Milling operations were the source of constant complaints by the agents.\footnote{45} The Mormon mill did not operate dependably, and conflicts may also have arisen over expenses and repairs. Other missionaries were not pleased with the rival Mormons generally, and plural wives among them very possibly were another source of difficulty. The agents and Protestant missionaries had attempted with some success to discourage Indian polygamy. They certainly were familiar with rumors of Mormon plural marriage and were concerned that it might provide a bad example to the Indians. Insofar as plural wives were visible among the Mormons, it must have disturbed them.

Difficulties continued as many of the Indians on the reserve had died or moved away. Plans for the six nations never developed, and most of the other Indians on the Delaware reserve who were inclined toward white religion already were Christians and affiliated with other missions. Many of the Indians had established farms, and they already were living like white settlers. Since the Mormon mission was on Delaware lands, the Cutlerites were unable to secure title to property or improvements.

Illness and death further compounded the severe hardships experienced by the Mormon missionaries. The cholera epidemic of 1851 took the life of Clarissa Cutler Kimball Fletcher, and perhaps other members of the party.\footnote{46} Henrietta C. Cutler died about this same time, possibly from cholera or childbirth. Emily Cutler Kimball Pratt died in March 1852 during childbirth, although her baby, Emily Miranda Pratt, survived. Henrietta, Clarissa, and Emily "were buried just south of the [later] Kirby farm, in the edge of the timber, and tombstones giving their names, and of the native sandstone rock, were erected."\footnote{47} Several infants also were buried in this mission cemetery. "[In that desolate Indian country," Rachel Murdock left behind "her aged mother [in-law] and little Martha in lonely graves." Furthermore:

On the homeward journey, while fording a stream, little four month old [Caroline] Eliza's long dress became drenched in icy water. She contracted a cold and one morning a few days later . . . a little grave was made beside the trail, and Rachel had to go on . . . and leave her baby beside the way, with no casket, no headstone, buried even worse than the Indians buried their dead.\footnote{48}


\footnote{43} Pliny Fisher, "Book of Patriarchal Blessings," 25, 54, 35, 37, 48, 66, RLDS Church Library and Archives.

\footnote{44} Tucker and Tucker, "The Story of Rachel.

\footnote{45} John G. Fitch Collection 1834-1895, rolls 1 and 2, State Archives, Kansas State Historical Society.


\footnote{47} Andrews, History of the State of Kansas, 1:499. Although this history misattributed the names of these women, this mistake is understandable and easily corrected. See Kimball, "Finding A Great-Great Grandmother," 11-13.

Greatly discouraged by late 1852 or early 1853, Cutler and his followers abandoned their Lamanite mission in Kansas. Alpheus more than likely was aware that in April 1851 he and some of his associates had been cut off from the church. In spite of his excommunication, Cutler sustained relationships with church friends in the Salt Lake valley. In November 1851, Daniel H. Wells wrote him concerning the death of a friend, former Latter-day Saints’ president Frederick G. Williams, and encouraged Alpheus to come west. The end of this letter also contained a note from Brigham Young asking Cutler to come to the valley. In September 1852, Brigham Young wrote to him, “With feelings of sweet regard I again embrace an opportunity of communicating with you, always concerning a lively interest in whatever concerns your welfare.” With great affection, Young once again urged Father Cutler to join the Saints in the valley. Young felt that Alpheus had been foolish, but even as late as 1856 he expressed affection and sorrow for him. In spite of his excommunication, Cutler would have been welcomed back had he moved to the Salt Lake valley.

During the spring of 1852, a committee of Silver Creek Saints located the site of a new settlement in southwestern Iowa. About thirty-five to forty

49. Daniel H. Wells to Alpheus Cutler, November 28, 1851, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives.
50. Brigham Young to Alpheus Cutler, September 14, 1852, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives.
51. Minutes of a meeting of LDS leaders, August 24, 1856, Thomas Bullock Minutes Collection, LDS Church Archives.
52. Jorgensen, “Antecedents of the Cutlerite Schism of 1853”; Jorgensen, “The Old Fox”; Fletcher and Fletcher, Alpheus Cutler and the Church of Jesus Christ, chapter 1; Alpheus Cutler filed for land at Manti May 30, 1853, according to Walter Farwell, Shenandoah Evening Sentinel, January 27, 1972.
Latter-day Saint families moved to this village which was given the *Book of Mormon* name Manti. In September 1853, Cutler proceeded to reorganize Joseph Smith's religion by re-baptizing his followers into the Church of Jesus Christ (Cutlerite). Acknowledging Joseph Smith as a prophet of God, they took the Bible, *Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants*, and the Constitution of the United States as a basic platform of faith. Cutler’s claims, as filtered through the several generations of Cutlerites, were that he had been ordained by Smith to a secret quorum of seven men who were entrusted with the

keys and authority of the priesthood, and appointed exclusively to Lamanite ministries. The murder of Joseph Smith, the Cutlerites maintained, signaled God’s rejection of the Mormon church, but not the priesthood or the Kingdom.

After waiting for the six higher ranking quorum members to die or apostate, Cutler reportedly received a heavenly sign, two half moons with their backs together, fulfilling Smith’s prophecy that required him to reorganize the church. While these claims clearly are unorthodox and heretical from the standpoint of Utah Mormonism, they were at least publicly announced only after Cutler had been excommunicated and decided to form his own movement. It would appear these claims were used to justify, not create, the Cutlerite schism.

**THE FORGOTTEN KINGDOM OF GOD**

Although no more successful than the first, the second Mormon mission to the Lamanites is a significant event in early Mormonism and the history of Kansas. It reflects the Mormons’ special interest in Native Americans and, surprisingly, their willingness and ability to launch a missionary endeavor even while fleeing nearly halfway across the North American continent. This previously little known mission reveals ambitious Mormon plans for recruiting portions of the six nations to the Delaware reserve, as well as an unutilized strategy for enlisting the Indians in armed resistance against federal authorities. A number of Mormon families participated in this Kansas mission, and they left a mill (or mills), cabins, farms, and a cemetery at what became Thompsonville. Though obviously sketchy, this description of the second Mormon mission to the Lamanites increases existing knowledge of this event, and it provides a beginning for further inquiry into the activities of these and other Mormons as well as their relations with Indians, federal agents, and other missionaries.

Leaving Kansas in 1853, the Cutlerites returned to Iowa and founded a frontier community which flourished until the railroad passed them by for what became Shenandoah. Although the rival Josephites (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) recruited more than one-half of them, a Cutlerite colony on the Platte River led to the subsequent town of Blockton, Iowa. Following Cutler’s death in 1864, his most devout followers moved over five hundred miles north to Minnesota to minister there to the Indians and to avoid further involvements in the Civil War. They founded a utopian community at Clitherall, established a treaty with the Chippewas, and became the first permanent white settlers of Otter Tail County. During the late 1920s, a younger generation of Cutlerites fulfilled a previous dream of returning to the first Mormon Zion by establishing a branch of their church at Independence, Missouri. Today, three Cutlerites remain in Minnesota, and about twenty members sustain a congregation in Independence.

In retrospect, Alpheus Cutler emerges a curious, paradoxical, enigmatic figure. The Cutler historians have remembered the Old Fox, as he was dubbed by Orson Hyde and George Smith, as a once respected Mormon high priest who became obstinate and defiant; a strange, disobedient heretic and apostate. An odd relic, he seemingly lost touch with the realities of Nauvoo Mormonism as represented by Brigham Young. Arrogantly, he chose to march to a self-composed tune. The Alpheus Cutler who has been forgotten and neglected was remarkably different: Father Cutler, aged and wise; the devoted, trustworthy, anointed follower of Joseph Smith; adopted son of the prophet; Nauvoo high councilman and temple builder; a ranking member of the secret Council of Fifty; loyal supporter of the Mormon apostles; founder of Cutler’s Park, perhaps the first city in Nebraska; president of the Winter Quarters’ High Council; affectionate friend of Brigham Young; and Lamanite missionary. Like his mission to the Lamanites, Alpheus Cutler is obscure and mysterious, tragic and heroic.

Attempts to restore the Lamanites to Zion, although strong and ambitious, were not successful. In part, because of this unyielding commitment, Cutler and his followers were cut off and their goals denied; tragically, perhaps, they would not be part of the national and eventually international force impressively established by what became Utah Mormonism. Alpheus Cutler has been nearly excluded from the prominent histories of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Indian mission—his dream for building the Kingdom of God—is all but forgotten.