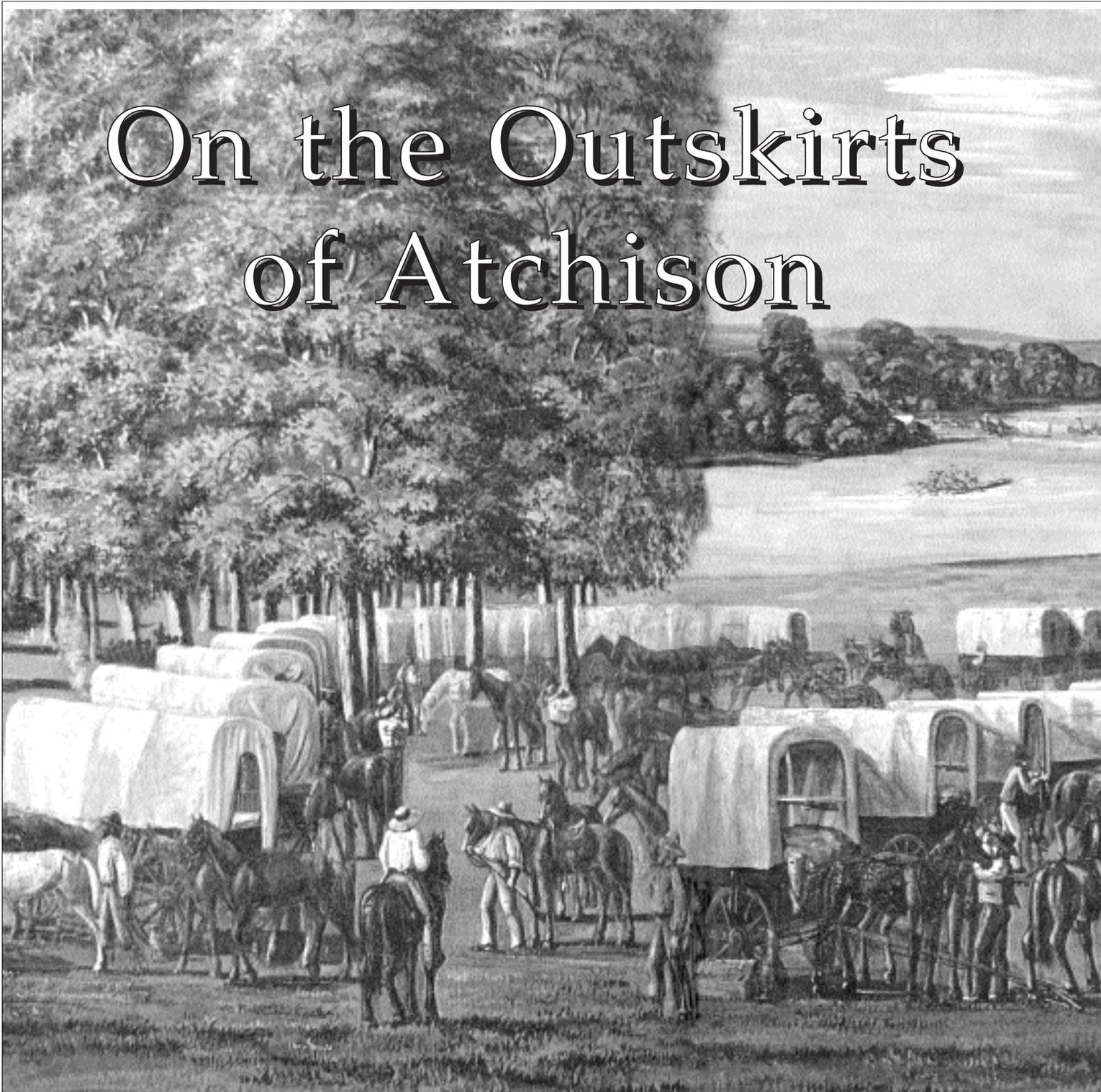
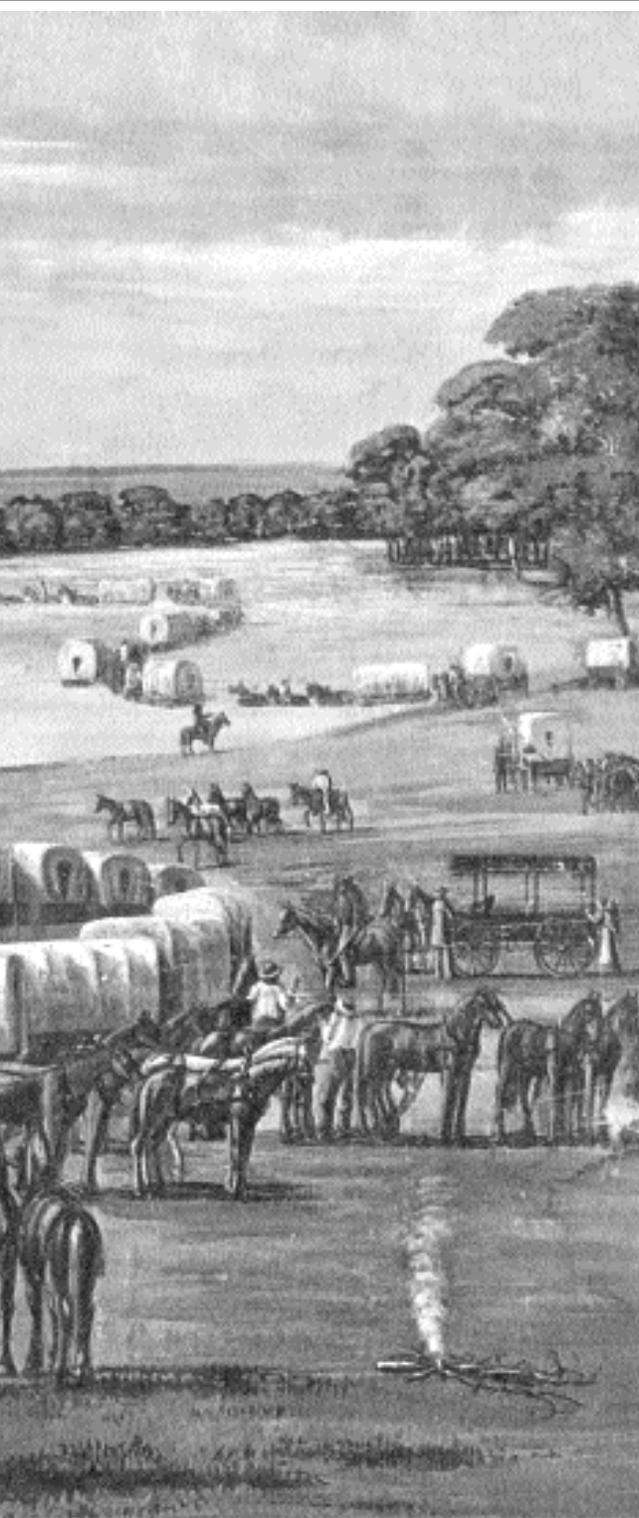


On the Outskirts of Atchison



The Imprint of Latter-day Saint
Transmigration at Mormon Grove



Mormon immigrants prepare to depart an outfitting post on the Missouri River, where they temporarily resided before moving on to the Salt Lake valley.

by Fred E. Woods and Melvin L. Bashore

The Mormon presence in Atchison was short-lived. They came; they went—and after they left, the story of their brief stay was never fully told. Each entity—Atchison and the Mormons—had something the other needed. Atchison was looking to attract business and settlers while the Mormons needed a place where their migrating people bound for Utah could find temporary employment in order to purchase overland supplies. Their brief time together proved a mutual advantage for these two entities. For Atchison, the influx of Mormons helped jump-start its commerce and provided labor to begin building streets and other necessary improvements in the infant Kansas town. The Mormons helped lay the groundwork both economically and physically in Atchison's early beginnings. For thousands of Mormon converts in 1855, Mormon Grove on the outskirts of Atchison was a temporary haven and material aid to them as they made their way west.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) was organized in 1830.¹ Joseph Smith was its first prophet and his revelations and teachings attracted adherents. Despised and persecuted wherever they tried to settle, these early Mormons were first driven from Ohio, then Missouri. They were next forced from their sanctuary in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846. It was while residing there that converts from abroad began to emigrate to the American Mormon gathering place. During 1840–1846 members from Great Britain first congregated to Nauvoo. Scandinavian converts did not commence emigrating in sizeable numbers until after 1852. By that time, the Salt Lake valley in the arid West

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had been established and designated as the Mormon mustering place. Various outfitting posts were selected each year where the incoming immigrants could assemble. Such locations included: in Iowa—Kanesville (1848–1852) and Keokuk (1853), and in Missouri—Westport Landing (in the Kansas City vicinity) (1854). The designated post during 1855 was Mormon Grove, which lay only four and half miles west of Atchison, Kansas. Such changes in outfitting posts and routes were influenced by concern for the incoming converts, and arrangements were made according to the safest and most economical routes possible.

The year 1855 was a transitory one for Mormon migration, as the established route had been diverted to bypass the port of New Orleans and the Mississippi River. Prior to 1855 the vast majority of the transatlantic Mormon immigrants had taken this route. Following the emigration year of 1854, Brigham Young directed his Mormon emigration agent in Liverpool, England, to “ship no more to New Orleans, but ship to Philadelphia, Boston and New York.”² Although several boatloads of Mormon immigrants disembarked in Philadelphia and Boston in the mid-nineteenth century, New York soon became the port of choice and served as the primary port for Mormon immigrants from 1855 to 1890.³

Jane C. Robinson Hindley was one of more than two thousand European Mormon converts who spent about two months at the Mormon Grove outfitting site during 1855. She felt the magnetic pull of the Latter-day Saint gathering and, therefore, left her home in England with, as she put it, “the fire of Israel’s God burning in my bosom.” Hindley embarked from Liverpool along with 430 other foreign converts aboard a Mormon-chartered packet ship called the *Siddons*. Landing in Philadelphia, she traveled by rail to Pittsburgh and then down the Ohio River by steamer to St. Louis, where she paid thirteen dollars for cabin passage aboard the steamboat *Polar Star*, which took her on a five-day voyage up the Missouri River to Atchison.⁴ Some work

had already been done preparing the Mormon Grove camp, but three simple sentences in Hindley’s diary offer an indication of the reciprocally advantageous relationship between Atchison and the Mormons. She wrote:

May 23rd we have just arrived at Mormon Grove it is a delightful place.

May 24th went to see the farm was very much pleased with it. . . .

May 28th went to town and bought some More provision for the plains [*sic*].⁵

The Mormon immigrants to Atchison were different from those who had come to make Atchison their home. The Mormons’ religion was perceived as strange. They followed a living prophet—Brigham Young—the American Moses.⁶ From England and Scandinavia, their speech and dress marked them as foreign-born. These immigrants were being obedient to the request of their prophet leader who, in 1852, said that new converts should “gather, without delay, to Zion.”⁷ They came in waves of hundreds; and, after they stepped off the steamboat docks at Atchison, they carted their meager belongings four and a half miles west—to the fringes of frontier Atchison—to their temporary camp at Mormon Grove in the spring and summer of 1855.

Mormon Grove—the place they settled—is still rural. It is still on the western periphery of Atchison even after almost 150 years of community development and expansion. Yet the Mormon presence in a fledgling Kansas river town in 1855 was not accidental or haphazard. Atchison, at the bend of the river, was in its infancy and needed development. It required workers to lay out its streets and an influx of money to buy goods from its stores. Atchison businessmen were not averse to asking the Mormons to use Atchison as an outfitting and goods freighting station. Although evidence is sketchy, that is what appears to have happened to bring the Mormons to Atchison in 1855.

1. For general histories of the Mormons, see Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1979); James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

2. *Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 16 (October 28, 1854): 684.

3. See Fred E. Woods, “Norfolk and the Mormon Folk: Latter-day Saint Immigration through Old Dominion (1887–90),” *Mormon Historical Studies* 1 (Spring 2000): 74–75.

4. Jane Charters Robinson Hindley, “Journals 1855–1905,” vol. 1, 11–14, Church Archives, Family and Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

5. *Ibid.*, 17.

6. See Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

7. “Seventh General Epistle of the Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” *Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 14 (July 17, 1852): 325.

Jane C. Robinson Hindley (far right) was one of the more than two thousand European Mormon converts who lived at Mormon Grove near Atchison during 1855. When she arrived there in May of that year she wrote of the site, "it is a delightful place."

The Atchison Town Company, comprising eighteen ambitious entrepreneurs, had organized the nucleus of the small town the previous year.⁸ The town was named for David R. Atchison, a distinguished Missouri senator from 1843 to 1855. At great risk to his political future, Atchison previously had assisted the Mormons by restraining armed aggression against them at the height of anti-Mormon tensions in Missouri in 1838.⁹ After assisting in establishing the town, Senator Atchison relinquished his interests in it. In February 1855 the enterprising town financiers published a small proslavery newspaper, the *Squatter Sovereign*, in the interests of promoting the development of Atchison. The newspaper reported that in the fall of 1854 it was "called on, as well as written to by several individuals interested in the Salt Lake Trade, and Emigration, on the subject of making Atchison a starting and outfitting point for Salt Lake, California and Oregon."¹⁰ The article noted many of the natural advantages Atchison had for emigration. These evident assets included its desirable location on a bend of the Missouri River farther west than any other outfitting point, fine grazing grounds, abundant good water, and a healthy situation. Thus, by the fall of 1854, only weeks after Atchison was conceived as a commercial real estate venture, discussions were under way with individuals in Utah that would quickly benefit the development and future of the fledgling town.

In late August 1854 Brigham Young directed Milo Andrus, a Mormon leader residing in St. Louis, to find a place on the western frontier where the oncoming European em-



igrants could safely and temporarily settle before continuing on to Utah. He specifically named Kansas as a possible settlement and outfitting location. In his opinion, the immigrants would there have an opportunity "to labor for Cattle, provisions &c, in the healthier localities of Upper Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, & Kansas." In previous years early-arriving shiploads of immigrants had been "unhealthily crowded into rooms at St. Louis," where they found it difficult to obtain short-term work.¹¹

Three weeks later Erastus Snow, who supervised Andrus and general emigration matters in the St. Louis region, wrote to President Young, "What say you about a settlement on Kansas River?"¹² Accompanying his letter, he included an informative newspaper article describing the geography of Kansas. It seems evident from a later letter that Snow had not known at this date of the Mormon prophet's similar interest in investigating Kansas for a prospective outfitting place. When he learned of Young's interest in sending the early-arriving emigrants beyond St. Louis closer to the frontier, he decided to take a scouting

8. For a brief history of how the town company selected and developed the town of Atchison, see William G. Cutler and Alfred T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, vol. 1 (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 369-71.

9. For a study of the Mormon conflict in Missouri, see Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987). For a study of Atchison's role as an independent negotiator during the Mormon troubles in 1838, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Atchison's Letters and the Causes of Mormon Expulsion from Missouri," *Brigham Young University Studies* 26 (Summer 1986): 3-47.

10. "Town of Atchison Kansas Territory," *Squatter Sovereign* (Atchison), February 20, 1855.

11. Brigham Young to Milo Andrus, August 31, 1854, Brigham Young Office Files (LDS Church Archives, transcript).

12. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, September 21, 1854, St. Louis, *ibid.* (typescript).

tour up the river. He wanted to sound out the feelings of the people in the various frontier settlements about “receiving and employing” the Mormon immigrants. He also wanted to explore the prospects for “makeing [sic] a settlement in Kansas Territory.” He was encouraged by the response of the local people in the established frontier towns along the Missouri River. He noted that “there seems to be a friendly feeling towards our people or rather towards our trade and money, among business men in general.” He anticipated that many of the English immigrants might be able to secure employment to help defray the costs of their outfitting. He also sent a new map of Kansas and Nebraska to President Young.¹³

On February 17, 1855, Milo Andrus and forty others left St. Louis bound for the western Missouri River frontier. Some were looking for employment, others were assisting in gathering stock, but most importantly, they wanted to make final preparations for the spring emigration.¹⁴ Before mid-March they made a public announcement that they had decided “after mature deliberation” to make Atchison the general outfitting place for the 1855 Mormon emigration. Instructions were quickly conveyed to leaders of oncoming groups of emigrants to ship for and land at Atchison. The Mormon agent wrote under a date of March 20 that he had located four claims comprising 350 acres in a hickory grove approximately four miles west of Atchison that could be used for a general camping ground. He praised it as being a “healthy location” on high prairie land, which included 200 acres of open land for farming.¹⁵

This “mature deliberation,” which resulted in the Mormons selecting Atchison for their outfitting place, had its genesis in the fall of 1854 discussions between influential Utahns and Atchison businessmen. It appears these discussions, augmented by Snow’s visit to the Kansas region, caused the Mormons to decide to outfit at Atchison at least as early as January 1855, with the understanding that certain developments would be undertaken by the Atchison Town Company to prepare for the Mormon immigrants. Two weeks prior to Andrus leaving St. Louis to finalize

plans for the spring emigration season, it was reported that “extensive preparations” were being made in Atchison “for the accomodation of the Mormon emigrants.” Large warehouses reportedly were being constructed, and merchants were enlarging their stores to house more goods and supplies.¹⁶

Andrus evidently went to Atchison to make certain that preparations were under way as promised and to finalize Mormon Grove business. Some of the forty men aboard the steamboat from St. Louis were accompanying Andrus to help in making preparations at Atchison for the emigrants. When Andrus found that the necessary improvements were well under way and that land had been secured where the emigrants could temporarily live, he gave final approval for Atchison to be “the outfitting point.” It was not until then that the Mormons officially approved and announced to their people that Atchison would be the place of assembly and outfitting for the 1855 emigration.

Referencing the earliest conversations that set in motion the decisions bringing the Mormon emigrants to Atchison in 1855, one can only wonder about the identity of those unnamed individuals who called on and wrote to the Atchison Town Company in the fall of 1854. Likely they were Salt Lake freighters or merchants. No documentation has been found that would specifically identify who they were, but it is reasonable to suppose it could have been agents of Livingston and Kincaid, a large non-Mormon freighting firm in Salt Lake. Another even more likely individual is Thomas S. Williams, a faithful Mormon who worked for the firm of J. M. Horner.¹⁷ In 1854 Williams superintended three separate J. M. Horner and Company trains that departed from either Weston or Leavenworth for Salt Lake. His last train with eighteen wagons loaded with goods did not arrive in Salt Lake City until November 7.¹⁸ This was a very late arrival, and Williams was so convinced that he could ship freight in less time from Atchison than from any other Missouri River location that he chose Atchison from which to exclusively ship all his goods in 1855. Unlike Williams in 1855, Livingston and

13. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, October 29, 1854, Lexington, Missouri, *ibid.* (typescript).

14. *St. Louis Luminary*, March 3, 1855, 58.

15. “The Point of Outfit for Our Spring Emigration,” *St. Louis Luminary*, March 31, 1855, 74, reprinted in *Squatter Sovereign*, April 17, 1855.

16. “The Mormons,” *Squatter Sovereign*, February 3, 1855.

17. For references to the overland freighting business of both Livingston and Kincaid and T. S. Williams, see “Atchison an Outfitting Point,” *ibid.*, June 12, 1855; Cutler and Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 373.

18. “The Last Train,” *Salt Lake City Deseret News*, November 9, 1854.

The Missouri River town of Atchison, photographed here in about 1860, was in its infancy when the Mormons arrived there in 1855.



Kincaid shipped their first train out of Leavenworth. It took them four days to negotiate the muddy roads from Leavenworth to a point on the military road just five miles west of

Atchison. The benefits of shipping from Atchison were evident, and they moved all their remaining freighting goods to ship from there.¹⁹ Williams's conviction that Atchison was the better shipping place makes it more plausible that he was the voice of influence in the fall of 1854 in suggesting that the Mormons investigate Atchison as an outfitting site for their emigrants.

The benefits of shipping from Atchison rather than freighting from Leavenworth were touted in Atchison's newspaper. In a bit of journalistic boosterism, the *Squatter Sovereign* noted that a freighter could "save nearly a week's travel over a very bad road."²⁰ Its location on the great bend of the Missouri River made it at least twelve miles farther west than any other outfitting locality on the river. This location, coupled with its nearness to the old military road, made Atchison an obvious choice for freighters and others traveling west.

By 1855 the Mormons had chalked up eight years of experience moving their people across the plains. Heretofore, the established outfitting posts from which they had departed had some drawbacks. Sometimes, by the enticements of attractive employment opportunities, emigrants wavered in their faith and stopped short of continuing on

to Utah. Occasionally, apostates who had become dissatisfied with Utah, Brigham Young, or Mormonism dissuaded others from going farther west. Many of these disaffected Mormons resided near these established outfitting towns and were a worry for the Mormon leaders. This was especially true of Florence, Nebraska. Used as one of their principal outfitting sites from 1853 to 1863, Mormon leaders ostensibly decided against outfitting in Florence in 1864. According to one passing Mormon migrant, they feared that close contact with the apostates was undesirable and might be the cause of influencing "perhaps others to apostatize."²¹ The leaders were also concerned that their people would be preyed upon by smooth, slick-talking sharpsters whose practiced ways often duped the innocent, unwary, and trusting.

When the Mormons debarked from their steamboats in 1855, Atchison was little more than a bend in the river. After the town was surveyed in the fall of 1854, a number of lots were sold, but very little building construction was begun. Most of the lots were purchased by the principal businessmen in the Town Company for real estate speculation. One Scottish Mormon immigrant alighting at Atchison remembered, "There was then but few inhabitants in this part of the west there was only some three houses in

19. "Atchison an Outfitting Point," *Squatter Sovereign*, June 12, 1855.
20. "Salt Lake Trade," *ibid.*, July 1, 1856.

21. H. N. Hansen, "An Account of a Mormon Family's Conversion to the Religion of the Latter Day Saints and Their Trip from Denmark to Utah," *Annals of Iowa* 41 (Summer 1971): 722.



The Kansas town of Atchison was named for a U.S. senator from Missouri, David R. Atchison. At the height of Mormon tensions in Missouri in 1838, Atchison had assisted the Saints by restraining armed aggression against them.

Atchison was a hotbed and de facto territorial headquarters for the proslavery advocates. Senator Atchison's reputation as a rabid proslavery man attracted to the town people with similar interests and desires to see Kansas become a slave state. The Mormons were detached from the national slavery controversy.²⁵ They posed no threat to either pro- or antislavery factions who were assembling in the territory. Their intentions to make their stay in Kansas Territory only temporary was sufficient to bid them welcome by both political factions. Even the Mormon practice of polygamy was not an issue for the proslavery advocates in Atchison. They recognized that both polygamy and slavery, the "twin relics of barbarism," were being targeted for elimination by powerful national forces. At issue was the sovereign right of a people in a state or territory to determine and protect their own vested cultural practices: polygamy for the Mormons and slavery for the South.²⁶ An editorial article in Atchison's newspaper admonished its readers not to join the national crusade against polygamy: "let us but once join in the attack upon the Mormons, then farewell to the rights of the south."²⁷ The people of Atchison, sympathetic to the plight of the beleaguered Mormons (if not to their polygamous beliefs), were willing to tender the Mormons an earnest welcome.

The Mormon migrants who arrived at Atchison in the early spring provided a labor pool of which the town founders took full advantage. It was a reciprocal arrangement: the cash-strapped Mormon emigrants needed work, and the town needed workers. They resided temporarily in a tent camp on the western outskirts of Atchison until the Mormon Grove camp was secured and developed. It is likely that some died and were buried near this temporary

the town."²² Even by the spring of 1856 Atchison "contained [only] probably forty houses."²³ The influx of a few thousand Mormon emigrants in the area in 1855 dwarfed the permanent town population. The population of Atchison did not even reach five hundred until about 1859. In actuality, Atchison was little more than a promising "paper town" until the Mormons decided to make it their outfitting site and freighters decided to make it their supply post.²⁴ The size of the river town was likely an attractive factor for the Mormons in selecting Atchison for an outfitting post. It was small and undeveloped. It had not yet attracted the kind of people or enticements that would prematurely halt the travel of their Utah-bound faithful.

22. Archibald McFarland, "Reminiscences," (LDS Church Archives, photocopy of holograph, 9). For a descriptive history of those three homes, see "First 'Squatter' on Site of City," *Atchison Daily Globe*, December 8, 1927.

23. "First 'Squatter' on Site of City."

24. Cutler and Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 373. For reference to Atchison being a "paper town" during its infancy, see Walker D. Wyman, "Atchison, A Great Frontier Depot," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 11 (August 1942): 298.

25. For a comprehensive historical overview of Mormon policies and practices regarding African Americans, see Lester E. Bush Jr., "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8 (1973): 11–68.

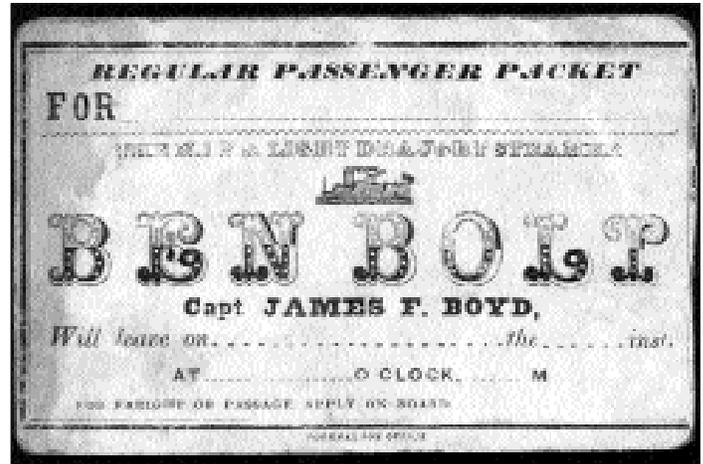
26. For an article discussing the advent of the "twin relics" slogan and the double-pronged targeting of Mormon polygamy and Southern slavery, see Richard D. Poll, "The Mormon Question Enters National Politics, 1850–1856," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 25 (April 1957): 117–31.

27. "Utah," *Squatter Sovereign*, February 3, 1855.

Passenger ticket for the steamboat Ben Bolt, which carried Mormons up the Missouri River to Atchison in 1855.

campground. The newspaper reported that Mormons were “busily at work digging out the foundations of our numerous buildings, and grading our streets.”²⁸ Another reported that the town committee was willing to give the Mormons “all the labor at their disposal.” He noted that many of the available jobs were not suited to the occupational skills of the emigrants, such as weavers and cotton spinners. However, Mormons were being hired to make fence rails, construct the warehouse, grade streets, and build the boat landing dock.²⁹ A teenage British convert arrived with his family at Atchison on April 9, 1855. He quickly found employment in the town and across the river after setting up his tent two miles west of the town. He wrote that Atchison “was just laid off[f] for a city, but there was onley [sic] about 6 houses there then and no landing for the boat. But we got off her all right.” In just a few days, he started to work, “making a landing for boats and streets, some working at saw mill and at different kinds of work.” He worked about six weeks in Atchison and then ferried over to the Missouri side of the river with a few others where he worked for a week. He returned when boatloads of emigrants began arriving and the Mormon Grove camp was established.³⁰

The local trade for cattle and oxen and other outfitting supplies boomed. The demand for cattle exceeded the supply as the local newspaper reported: “Immense droves of work cattle have been driven and sold to the emigrants and merchants for Salt Lake and yet more are wanted.”³¹ Local businesses had not anticipated the demand for their goods would be so great. The newspaper reported: “The emigrants as a general thing, purchased their supplies here



and none of our merchants had goods sufficient to meet the demand.”³² These positive reports notwithstanding, some essential items were purchased by Mormon immigrants prior to their arrival in Atchison. An old settler recalled years later that the Mormons “brought their wagons on the steamboats and also brought their oxen to move . . . out to the Grove. They had their boxes to haul their goods in, made to fit their wagons.”³³

Other goods and supplies apparently were purchased at Atchison. At this early stage of development, Atchison had very few merchants. In the fall of 1854 the George T. Challiss Store was the only Atchison merchandising establishment open for early squatters and passing emigrants. While passing through Weston on business, Challiss met the Atchison Town Company president, Peter T. Abell, who invited him to see how setting up business in Atchison could be profitable. Abell also offered Challiss many inducements if Challiss agreed to build a store in town. Challiss consented and built a store and adjoining warehouse, both a hundred feet long constructed at the foot of Commercial Street. Shortly thereafter, George Challiss was joined by his brother Luther, and they went into partnership as they had done in Boonville, Missouri, the previous spring. Although the Challiss partnership was dissolved a few months later when George decided to open another store on Commercial Street, each of the brothers profited handsomely in selling supplies to the two thousand Latter-

28. “Emigrants,” *ibid.*, March 27, 1855.

29. Richard Ballantyne to Erastus Snow, April 14, 1855, in “Extracts of Letters from Richard Ballantyne,” *St. Louis Luminary*, April 28, 1855, 90.

30. Charles Ramsden Bailey, “Autobiography,” in *Charles Ramsden Bailey: His Life and Families*, by Jay L. Long and Betsy W. Long (Midvale, Utah: Eden Hill, 1983), 24.

31. “Our City,” *Squatter Sovereign*, June 5, 1855.

32. “Business of Atchison,” *ibid.*, June 26, 1855.

33. W. J. Andrews to George J. Remsburg, February 10, 1910, in “Memoranda of Mormon Grove,” *Atchison Daily Globe*, December 3, 1910.



In 1854 Brigham Young directed Milo Andrus (left), a Mormon leader in St. Louis, to find a site on the western frontier where Mormon immigrants could safely settle. In February 1855 Andrus arrived in Atchison and shortly thereafter announced that this town would be the outfitting place for the 1855 Mormon migration.

morning I got 50 pounds of Corn Meal \$150, one bag of Shorts 80 pounds \$250 Cents, 12 pounds of Bacon \$100." Only a week and a half later he noted, "This day I went to Ateson [Atchison] and bought a Basket Bottle to carry water upon the Planes \$125 for the same, two tin to drink 5 cents each."³⁶

The Atchison Town Company was intricately involved with Mormon leaders in arranging for temporary quarters. According to nineteenth-century Kansas historian William G. Cutler, "[T]he town company sold the Mormon Immigrant agents a section of land which had been purchased from squatters."³⁷ This parcel of ground was described in the local Atchison newspaper as being "just back of town" when in actuality it was four and a half miles northwest of Atchison.³⁸ In May 1855 Milo Andrus arrived at Mormon Grove with 550 head of oxen and cows that the Mormons would use in crossing the plains. He found that a small cabin had already been built which they intended to use for storing provisions. A vegetable garden was planted next to the cabin. The day after his arrival he "started the hands to ditching in the farm," noting that "nearly one mile of the ditch and sod fence" was completed.³⁹ This sod fence later attracted the attention of a reporter for the *New York Daily Tribune* who stopped at Mormon Grove during his travels in early 1856. He initially "had no intention of stopping, but something in the appearance of the place arrested me." He was particularly fascinated by the neat sod fence, which he said looked as if it were constructed "on a more scientific plan" than usual fences of that sort.⁴⁰ The Mormons also plowed and "planted about five acres of corn, potatoes, and garden vegetables."⁴¹

day Saint emigrants who passed through Atchison in 1855. So successful were his Atchison ventures as merchant, banker, and ferry operator, that Challiss moved to the East Coast in 1861 where he proceeded to amass a fortune.³⁴

Newspaper advertisements informed travelers about outfitting and brought trade to businesses like the Challiss store. In the *St. Louis Luminary*, a Mormon organ, an advertisement counseled each emigrant "to have, when they leave Atchison, one hundred pounds breadstuffs, and a few pounds bacon or dried beef, and as much sugar, tea, coffee, and dried fruit as they calculate to eat during a three month's journey over the Plains."³⁵ Although no known Mormon emigrant accounts specifically mention the Challiss stores, there are accounts of Mormons purchasing supplies in Atchison. The journal of William Knox provides an idea of some of the items the travelers may have purchased at the Challiss store for their overland journeys. Writing on May 8, 1855, Knox scribbled, "This

34. "First 'Squatter' on Site of City." For a biographical sketch of Challiss, see "Territorial Legislature of 1857-58," *Kansas Historical Collections* 1907-1908 10 (1908): 205.

35. "Notice to Our Emigrants," *St. Louis Luminary*, April 14, 1855, 82, reprinted in *Squatter Sovereign*, May 15, 1855.

36. William Knox, "Journals 1847-1864," vol. 3, May 18, 29, 1855, LDS Church Archives.

37. Cutler and Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 371.

38. "More Emigrants," *Squatter Sovereign*, May 1, 1855.

39. Milo Andrus to Erastus Snow, May 22, 1855, *St. Louis Luminary*, June 2, 1855, 110.

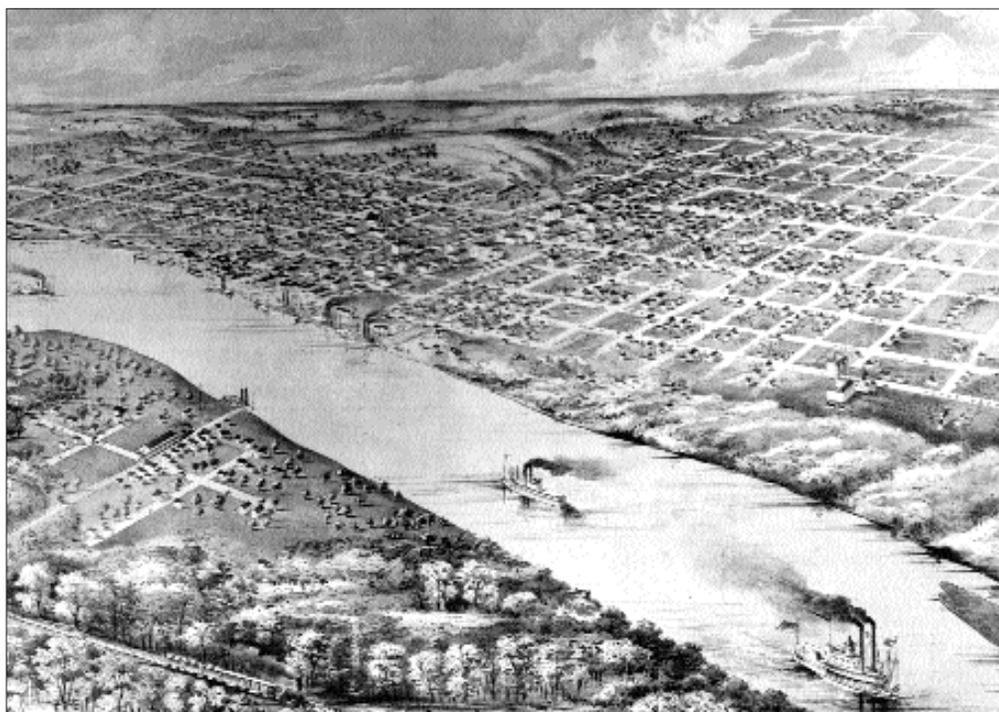
40. Article written by a newspaper reporter on January 11, 1856, appearing in the *New York Daily Tribune*, January 24, 1856, quoted in "Bypaths of Kansas History," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 10 (February 1941): 102.

41. Milo Andrus to Erastus Snow, May 22, 1855, *St. Louis Luminary*, June 2, 1855, 110.

Located on the bend of the river, Atchison was the farthest west Missouri River town. Due to its location and the influence of Mormon immigrants, it became a major shipping point for goods going west to the Salt Lake valley and beyond.

After the emigrants arrived, they divided according to nationality and therein by overland company. The camps were organized with rows of tents framing streets and alleys between them, the whole arrangement presenting “a city-like appearance”⁴² These camps also were grouped into ecclesiastical branches that were presided over by church leaders. By mid-June a ditch and log fence had been built “around the P. E. Fund Farm,” and Andrus reported “that about 30 to 40 acres is ploughed and planted and the teams still ploughing for wheat and other grain.” On June 20 the camp was visited by nineteen eastbound missionaries from Utah. They were able to serve them some of the first vegetables grown on their farm including onions, peas, and radishes. They ate sitting on the ground under “an awning of wagon covers.” Andrus reported that the health of the camp was “remarkably good though in some instances among so vast a crowd we have some sickness.”⁴³

The sickness referred to probably was cholera, which afflicted the Mormon emigrants—not only at Mormon Grove but also at various other places along their journey west. Some even died along the four and a half-mile stretch



between Atchison and Mormon Grove. One local observer wrote, “I saw several of the Mormons die of the cholera in their wagon beds before they got started for the Grove.”⁴⁴ Cholera decimated the Mormon immigrants in 1855. It was said, “[I]n that season, as many as sixteen persons were buried in one grave at this same Mormon Grove.”⁴⁵ The day after arriving at Mormon Grove, British convert Henry Clegg’s wife died. The day following, his “Lovely son” died and was buried “next to his dear Mother.” Widowed with a surviving six-year-old son and sick himself, Clegg wrote: “I went worse and worse and for severale days was brought to deaths door I cannot describe my situation nor the hardships I endured must be felt to be known.”⁴⁶ Cholera persisted on the Plains from 1849 to 1855. Its peak came during the gold rush years when at least six thousand may have died from its effects.⁴⁷

Despite these trials, the Mormons devoted time to celebrate Pioneer Day. Held annually on July 24, it commemorates

42. “More Emigrants,” *Squatter Sovereign*, May 1, 1855.

43. Milo Andrus to Editor, June 21, 1855, *St. Louis Luminary*, July 7, 1855, 130. The “P. E. Fund” (Perpetual Emigrating Fund) was a revolving fund that was organized in 1849 to aid emigrants in gathering to the Salt Lake valley. Funds were gathered to aid the emigrants, who expected to repay the fund upon their arrival in the Salt Lake valley. Approximately thirty thousand foreign converts were aided by the fund in the nineteenth century. See Fred E. Woods, “Perpetual Emigrating Fund,” *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, ed. Arnold L. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 910. In an 1855 map of Atchison County, both the Mormon Camp and PEF Farm are drawn by the surveyor.

44. W. J. Andrews to George J. Remsburg, February 10, 1910, in “Memoranda of Mormon Grove,” *Atchison Daily Globe*, December 3, 1910.

45. “Days of Ox Teams,” *Deseret Semi-Weekly News* (Salt Lake City), June 14, 1887.

46. Henry Clegg, “Diary,” May 28–30, 1855, microfilm, LDS Church Archives.

47. Herbert C. Milikien, “‘Dead of the Bloody Flux’: Cholera Stalks the Emigrant Trail,” *Overland Journal* 14 (Autumn 1996): 9; Roger P. Blair, “‘The Doctor Gets Some Practice’: Cholera and Medicine on the Overland Trails,” *Journal of the West* 34 (January 1997): 63, 65.



In 1854 George T. Challis (far left) owned the only Atchison merchandising establishment open for early settlers and passing immigrants.

Purportedly most of Atchison's residents were friendly toward the Mormons, even if the primary motive was based on economic reasons. One Mormon observer was happy to report that "the citizens who are interested in the welfare of the town, and who have invested capital for its improvement, are friendly towards us." He mentioned that, in particular, the town committee was most in favor of them being in Atchison. The few citizens who were "hostile" to them held little influence. The Mormons hoped their brief stay would not be marred by troubled relations with local settlers. They hoped this could be accomplished "by minding our own business, and letting theirs alone."⁵⁰

Public perceptions of Mormons were influenced by negative press and inflamed by anti-Mormon rhetoric. Citizens of Atchison were surprised when their associations with the Mormons proved amicable and pleasant. The *Squatter Sovereign* complimented the Mormons for the way "they have conducted themselves." It attested, "We have [not] the first dispute or quarrel to hear of, and no bad feelings between the citizens and these people have taken place." To many this was surprising "considering the prejudices of the Missourians and the Mormons against each other, this result could have hardly been expected." The newspaper article credited "the good behavior on the part of the Mormons, and their strict attention to their own business, gave no room for misunderstanding."⁵¹ The "prejudices of the Missourians and the Mormons against each other" referred to the troubles the Mormons experienced in Missouri in the 1830s. It is readily apparent that the eastern Kansas experience was very

orated the initial entry of the Mormons into the Salt Lake valley in 1847. During a spirited Pioneer Day celebration, more than eight hundred people marched through the avenues of Mormon Grove. Flags and banners, ornamented with decorative needlework, were flown from wagons and tents. Following the procession, they assembled on the ground west of the farm to listen to speeches and poetry recitations. It was reported that everyone "seemed to take a lively interest in the celebration, and considering the circumstances, made a much grander display than was expected."⁴⁸ Such gatherings even attracted the non-Mormons. W. J. Andrews said he used to go to Mormon Grove "to hear the Mormon preacher preach." He also used to trade with the Mormons, exchanging "vegetables for Bibles and clothing."⁴⁹

48. "Celebration on the 24th of July," *St. Louis Luminary*, August 18, 1855, 154.

49. "Memoranda of Mormon Grove," *Atchison Daily Globe*, December 3, 1910.

50. Richard Ballantyne to Erastus Snow, April 14, 1855, *St. Louis Luminary*, April 28, 1855, 90.

51. "The Mormons," *Squatter Sovereign*, May 29, 1855; also reprinted in *St. Louis Luminary*, June 9, 1855, 115.

George Challis was joined by his brother Luther in operating a store and large warehouse on Commercial Street in Atchison. Both brothers profited well from selling to the Mormon emigrants who came to Atchison in 1855.

different from what the Saints had previously experienced on the other side of the river during their seven-year stay in western Missouri (1831–1838).

The concentrated Mormon presence in the Atchison area lasted from February through July 1855. As companies with several hundred people in each were readied, they moved out onto the prairies to begin their march westward. The Mormon annual immigration statistical report for 1855 indicates that eight companies, 2,030 emigrants, 337 wagons, 2,433 oxen, 319 cows, 86 horses, and 8 mules had journeyed from Mormon Grove to Utah.⁵² Deaths at Mormon Grove were considerable, but they continued to mount even after these companies moved out onto the plains. Before reaching Utah, these eight companies tallied 120 deaths after departing from Mormon Grove, at least fifty of which were attributable to cholera.⁵³

Every year brought some European emigrants who had insufficient means to continue all the way through to Utah. They usually traveled with the organized Mormon companies as far as their funds would take them. Sometimes they got only as far as the Atlantic Ocean port of arrival. They stopped there and sought jobs to try to earn sufficient funds to continue their journey. Mormon leaders intended for Mormon Grove to be a stopping place for those Saints who were too poor to go any farther in the 1855 emigration year. Peter Olsen Hansen, the leader of the Danish contingent, described this arrangement at Mormon Grove: “we helped to make a farm for some who were to remain there for want of means.”⁵⁴ One of his diary entries

52. “Report,” *St. Louis Luminary*, August 18, 1855, 155.

53. Melvin L. Bashore, “Mormon Trail Deaths, 1847–1868” (forthcoming).

54. Peter Olsen Hansen, *An Autobiography of Peter Olsen Hansen, 1818–1895*, comp. Leland Hansen Ashby (Salt Lake City: Leland Hansen Ashby, 1988), 113.

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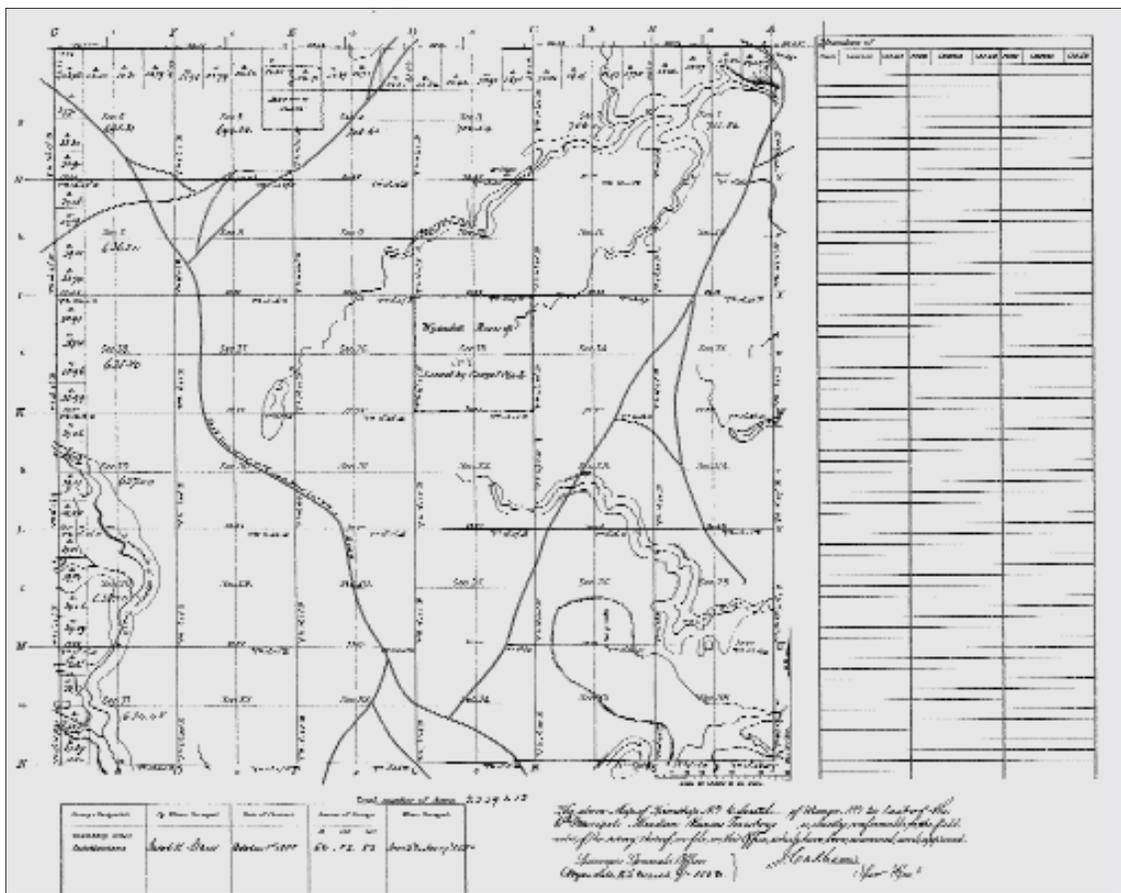
reads: “commenced making ditch [home? or fence?] for the poor.”⁵⁵ A church statistical report noted that sixty-seven Mormons were living at Mormon Grove in the fall of 1855.⁵⁶ The Welsh and Scandinavian Mormons continued to live separately from the English and Scots after the bulk of the immigrants left the Mormon Grove camp. In early June 1856 a group of east-bound Mormon missionaries stopped at Mormon Grove. They found very few poor Mormons living at the Grove. One of the missionaries reported: “I found 2 Welch families and 4 Danish settled here, but they are imposed upon by the gentiles and have no liberty.”⁵⁷ Another missionary reported to Brigham Young that the poor Mormons had lost their land to Kansas squatters: “Bro. Snows clame at ‘Mormon Grove’ is covered over with Squatters, who point to their muskets as the law.”⁵⁸ Truman Angell, another of the missionaries,

55. Peter Olsen Hansen, “Diary,” May 30, 1855, microfilm, LDS Church Archives.

56. “Statistical Report,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 20, 1855, 190.

57. Henry I. Doremus, “Diary,” June 9, 1856, 20, microfilm, LDS Church Archives. “Gentiles” was the term that Mormons used for non-Mormons.

58. George A. Smith to Brigham Young, June 17, 1856, St. Louis, Brigham Young Office Files (LDS Church Archives, typescript).



This 1855 map by the Surveyor General's office, of the northeast corner of Atchison County, marks the location of "Mormon Farm." It can be seen in the upper left portion of the map, on the border of sections four and five. The town of Atchison, although not showing, is located in section thirty-six.

appointed for 1856 was Iowa City, Iowa. Church leaders suggested that Mormon migrants travel by rail to Iowa City, which was at this time the terminus of the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad. Rail travel not only avoided the threat of disease often spread by

wrote in his journal that the poor families were "put in jeopardy all the time." They found two poor Welsh families occupying the log house that had been built the previous year next to the farm as a storehouse. Although the Mormons in 1855 had obtained a pre-emption right to the surveyed four sections of land, these poor Welsh families were hard pressed to defend themselves or their rights. Angell wrote that "during the excitement in Kansas many mobocrats . . . came on the Saints claim." They saw it as an opportunity to swindle the poor Mormons out of their land: "they put up claims on the Grove; being asked their authority to do so they pointed to their rifles."⁵⁹ For these destitute Mormons who could not continue farther "for want of means" in 1855, the poor did indeed get poorer.

Only a trickle of Mormon emigrants left from Atchison County the following year, and they were simply remnants from the previous emigration season. The outfitting post

river travel, but it also provided a faster and more economical route. Here thousands of Latter-day Saint migrants picked up inexpensive handcarts with which to travel across the plains to the Mormon Zion.⁶⁰ Although Mormon immigrants ceased passing through the Atchison vicinity, for several years most west-bound freight wagons continued to carry goods from Atchison to their destination in the Salt Lake valley. More than half of all the overland freight trains leaving Atchison during the 1858 freighting season were destined for Salt Lake City.⁶¹ This continued to greatly impact Atchison's economy and perhaps even eclipsed the impact of the 1855 emigrants. Utah served as an important market for the Atchison freighters for more than a decade.

60. Thirteenth General Epistle of the First Presidency issued October 29, 1855, "Church Emigration: XVIII, Emigration from Europe in 1856," *Contributor* 14 (November 1892): 17.

61. For more information on overland freighting from Atchison, see Sheffield Ingalls, *History of Atchison County* (Lawrence, Kans.: Standard Publishing Co., 1916), 158-73.

59. Truman O. Angell, "Journal," 30-33, microfilm, LDS Church Archives.

In 1856 the Mormon outfitting post moved from Atchison to Iowa City, Iowa. There, as depicted in this painting, the Latter-day Saints made handcarts with which to travel across the plains to the Mormon Zion.



Kansas historians have generally recognized the important role the Mormons played in Atchison's early history. William G. Cutler attested that the trade of the Mormon emigrants was so constant and continuous "that Atchison derived as much benefit from the adjacent town [Mormon Grove] as though it had been permanently a portion of her own corporation." He noted that the "actual outfitting was all done in Atchison and this fact first established her business career."⁶² Peter Beckman concurred: "A small but significant Utah trade gave Atchison its first real growth in 1855."⁶³ In Walker D. Wyman's view, Atchison's rise "was due more to the patronage of overland freighters than to outfitting emigrants, but the latter nevertheless furnished a significant segment in its economic history."⁶⁴ In the historical record, the brief stay of the Mormons on the outskirts of Atchison in 1855 has been generally noted and recognized but never fully recounted in either Mormon or Kansas history.

In 1986 a historic marker was erected at Mormon Grove. The interpretive sign is headlined "Mormon Grove: The City That Disappeared." Although the "city" may have "disappeared," its history had not yet fully surfaced. Its story has received more attention in Kansas history than in Mormon history. While Mormon history has literally relegated Mormon Grove to a sentence or brief paragraph, Kansas history has lacked the richness of Mormon primary sources to enrich and add texture and detail to the history of one of its earliest towns.⁶⁵ It is a story grounded in Kansas of several thousand people who settled in Utah—who for a brief time found a hospitable home on the Kansas side of the Missouri River. In the main, it is the story of indulgence, of giving and receiving between two very different communities of frontier people, and their wonder at being able to get along with each other. 

62. Cutler and Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 371.

63. Peter Beckman, "Atchison's First Railroad," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 21 (Autumn 1954): 154.

64. Walker D. Wyman, "Atchison, A Great Frontier Depot," *ibid.* 11 (August 1942): 297.

65. A single-paragraph entry for "Mormon Grove" appears in Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Co., 1941), 537. More recent Mormon reference works make little or no mention of Mormon Grove. These include Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History and Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992).