

The State of South Carolina.

At a Convention of the People of the State of South Carolina, begun and holden at Columbia, on the seveneenth day of December, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty, and thence continued by adjournments to Charleston, and there by divers adjournments to the Twentieth day of December in the same year -

An Ordinance To dissolve the Union between the State of South Carolina and other States united with her under the compact entitled "The Constitution of the United States of America"

Be it enacted by the People of the State of South Carolina, in Convention assembled, do declare and ordain, and it is hereby declared and ordained, That the Ordinance adopted by us in Convention, on the twenty-third day of May, in the year of our Lord One thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight, whereby the Constitution of the United States of America was ratified, and also all Acts and parts of Acts of the General Assembly of this State, ratifying amendments of the said Constitution as the States of America, is hereby dissolved; and that the Union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of the United States of America, is hereby dissolved. Done at Charleston, the twentieth day of December, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty.

D. F. Jamison Delegate from Darlington President of the Convention

- List of names of delegates and members of the convention, including: Thos. C. Bell, Francis Pickens, James H. Hammond, etc.

Attest: Bay. J. Arthur Clerk of the Convention

This "Bill of Secession" was found in the house of Dr. Lamb, Secretary of State... [Small printed notice regarding the document's discovery and archival status]

South Carolina became the first state to secede when the state legislature voted 169-0 on December 16, 1860, to leave the Union. Other Southern states seceded in rapid order. Various rumors indicated the possible secession of Utah Territory, but Brigham Young did not seriously consider such an action. (Library of Congress)



CHAPTER 5

Craig K. Manscill

RUMORS OF SECESSION IN THE UTAH TERRITORY, 1847–61

Even before vital national questions climaxed in Southern secession, there was a history of distrust between Mormons and non-Mormons. Events over several years had created a widespread belief in the disloyalty of Brigham Young and his Great Basin Kingdom. Any group which did not wholeheartedly support one side in the war was distrusted by both the North and the South. Anti-Mormon sentiment accused the people in Utah Territory of having secessionist views. Francis Wootton, Utah's acting governor, replied to those charges:

At this time [1861] because of rumors which I observe to be in general circulation through the various presses of the country to the effect that Brigham Young had declared Utah independent and that the property of the government at Fort Crittenden . . . and other military stations of the Department of Utah have been violently seized and appropriated by the Mormons. Such

reports based on the idle and mendacious representations of the irresponsible parties, if unnoticed, may produce a false impression at Washington and lead to unnecessary troubles; therefore, I have deemed it my duty to give them an official contradiction.¹

This was not the first time rumors accused Brigham Young and Mormons of secessionist tendencies. The 1846 exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the frontier territories was the beginning of those rumors, and many dynamics in the 1850s led to further secession accusations. These dynamics included Young's theocratic government, opposition to the Utah War, and rhetorical outbursts as well as poor communication between the Mormons and Washington, anti-Mormon political pundits and Territorial appointees, Connor's California Volunteers, the Mormons' relationship with the Indians, and the Mountain Meadow Massacre. This essay will not address all of

these forces (some of which are reviewed elsewhere in this book), but it will look at the exodus, Young's theocracy and outbursts, and the Confederacy's attempts to woo the Mormons at the beginning of the Civil War.

Secession rumors began with the hurried 1846 Mormon exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois. Mormons had always been a hounded and harried people. From the April 1830 organization of the Church in Fayette, New York, its members had faced misunderstanding, persecution, and expulsion. Mormons surely expected America to suffer consequences for the persecution of the Saints and the murder of their prophet Joseph Smith. Brigham Young acknowledged: "The whisperings of the Spirit to us have invariably been of the same import, to depart, to go hence, to flee into the mountains, to retire to our strongholds that we may be secure in the visitations of the Judgments that must pass upon this land, that is crimsoned with the blood of Martyrs; and that we may be hid, as it were, in the clefts of the rocks, and in the hollows of the land of the Great Jehovah, while the guilty land of our fathers is purifying by the overwhelming scourge."² This feeling of collective hurt—an almost Old Testament-style wrath for their enemies—was a carryover from the Latter-day Saints' earlier sufferings from persecutions and murders in Missouri and Illinois. Coming to the forefront shortly after the martyrdom of their prophet, these expectations reached a crescendo by the time they left Nauvoo.

Illinois Governor Thomas Ford, who had known for nearly a year of Joseph Smith's

plans to colonize in the West, warned Mormon leaders that the federal government would oppose any such invasion of foreign soil.³ The Mormon leadership, particularly the council of fifty, considered all western



Thomas Ford (1800–1850) was Illinois's eighth governor (1842–46). As a ploy to lure the Mormons to evacuate Illinois early, Ford warned Brigham Young that the federal government would oppose colonizing plans on foreign soil in the West. (Wikimedia Commons)

territories to be potential destinations but confidentially favored a central location somewhere in the middle of the Rockies or along the eastern rim of the Great Basin. Rather than risk government interference, Brigham Young and the Twelve Apostles decided on February 2, 1846, to depart immediately—three months earlier than scheduled. They sought a place where neither the laws of the United States nor the sanctions of other religions could prevent them from freely living their religion. Their destination was viewed as a place of refuge that would ensure protection, isolation,

good health, and ample provision for a self-sustaining people of a rapidly growing, young American religion desperately trying to find its way. Brigham Young wrote to his followers at Mount Pisgah, Iowa, in the winter of 1847 regarding the plans to travel west: "This is a subject that has long attracted our attention and concerning which we have thought and felt deeply and well we might; for situated as the Church of Jesus Christ is, and has been, for a considerable length of time, the only human hope or prospect of her salvation, has appeared to rest on the removal of the Saints from a land of oppression and violence to some more congenial clime."⁴

Their Rocky Mountain plan owed much to Joseph Smith, a fact Brigham Young knew well. Speaking from the Salt Lake Valley

in 1848, Young reminisced, “We are here! Thank the Almighty God of Israel! Some have marveled when the Saints agreed to leave the States, but it was no sacrifice. From the days of Oliver Cowdery and Parley Pratt on the borders of the Lamanites [1831] Joseph Smith had longed to be here. . . . They would not let us come and at last we have accomplished it.”⁵ While some have argued otherwise, evidence indicates that, late in his life, Joseph Smith began to look to the Rocky Mountains as a probable place of refuge. In an 1845 letter, Governor Ford wrote, “I was informed by General Joseph Smith last summer that he contemplated a removal west; and from what I learned from him and others at that time, I think if he had lived, he would have begun to move in the matter before this time.”⁶

Nevertheless, the Mormons had no intention of broadcasting their destination—and for good reason. There was fear that their Missouri enemies might disrupt their march. Prudence dictated that they speak about the subject in a general, even oblique, manner. There was also concern that powerful senators, like Mormon-hating Thomas Benton, might influence Washington to send an army to obstruct their way. Washington was then settling the Oregon question with England and preparing for war with Mexico over California. Thus, the government might wonder at the intentions of a wounded and persecuted people moving en masse amidst an Indian population to some ill-defined homeland “beyond the states.” By keeping all their enemies guessing, the Latter-day Saints walked a fine line between defending themselves and giving the impression that they were seceding.

From the Omaha plains, Young looked into the frontier land of the Mexican-owned



James K. Polk (November 2, 1795–June 15, 1849), the eleventh president of the United States (1845–49), was known for his foreign policy. He met with Jesse C. Little on June 5, 1846, and offered to enlist five hundred volunteers in the Mexican War in order to placate the Mormons and retain their loyalty as U.S. citizens. (Library of Congress)

Great Basin, desperately hoping the future would ease the tragedies of Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Looking over his shoulder, Young may have wondered how American civil leaders perceived the Saints’ exit. Declaring his allegiance to the American Constitution, Young wrote U.S. President James K. Polk and explained that, although the Saints respected the American Constitution, his people would “rather retreat to the deserts, island or mountain caves than consent to be ruled by governors & judges . . . who delight in injustice and oppression.”⁷

However, not all Mormons were as concerned with showing their allegiance. In an editorial comparing the wickedness of

the United States to the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah, John Taylor wrote: “We owe the United States nothing: we go out by force as exiles from freedom. The Government and people owe us millions for the destruction of life and property in Missouri and Illinois. The blood of our best men stains the land, and the ashes of our property will preserve it till God comes out of his hiding place, and gives this nation a hotter portion than he did Sodom and Gomorrah. ‘When they cease to spoil they shall be spoiled,’ for the Lord hath spoken it.”⁸

Threats of secession were also used as leverage in favor of the Mormon cause. Jesse C. Little, the presiding Church officer in the East and official Church agent in Washington, met Thomas S. Kane in Philadelphia during May 1846 while Elder Little was seeking means to transport eastern Saints to upper California by ship. Kane, a young adventurer who became an articulate, self-appointed guardian for the interests of the Saints, suggested the political tactic that Elder Little later used to persuade President Polk to aid the Mormons. Armed with letters of introduction from Kane and others, Elder Little sought an audience with Polk. Little had been told by Brigham Young to seek government contracts to build blockhouses and forts along the Oregon Trail. Failing that, he was authorized to embrace any offer

that would aid the emigration. Elder Little’s first hope was for a shipping contract, which would provide money as well as inexpensive transportation. His request was timely, for the government needed to send supplies around Cape Horn for its forces in California. Former postmaster general Amos Kendall told Elder Little that he would urge the cabinet to authorize one thousand Mormons to travel by sea and another thousand overland to California.⁹

When five days passed without a response, Elder Little addressed a personal letter to Polk. He threatened, as Kane had suggested, that lack of federal aid to help the Mormons migrate “under the outstretched wings of the American Eagle” might “compel us to be foreigners.”¹⁰ This was indeed a clever ploy, for the Mormons had no intention of becoming disloyal, but the government had heard

rumors of British interest in the Pacific Coast. It was not impossible that an independent Mormon state might gain the support of England, which would certainly complicate American interests in the West.

As an alternative, Polk asked Little in a meeting on June 5 if the Mormons would offer five hundred volunteers to enlist after the Mormon exiles reached California. That request, the president confided in his diary, was a move to placate the Mormons and retain their loyalty. “The main object of taking them into



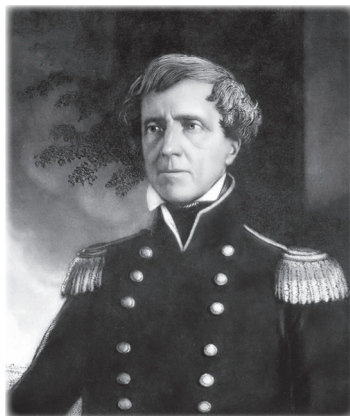
Tokens such as these were minted throughout the Civil War, primarily in the North, by businesses and individuals to promote national union and decry secession. (Courtesy of Kenneth L. Alford)

service would be to conciliate them,” admitted Polk in his diary.¹¹ Kane’s strategy worked. Little pressed for an immediate enlistment, but the request was turned down. Two days prior to the June 5 meeting, orders had been sent by Secretary of War William L. Marcy to Colonel Stephen W. Kearny (later brigadier general) authorizing the Mormon enlistment in vague terms. Even though President Polk apparently intended the enlistment to take place in California, Kearny interpreted his instructions differently and, on June 19, ordered the enlistment to take place immediately as the Mormon exodus was crossing Iowa. Thus the way was paved for an important episode in Mormon history—the march of the Mormon Battalion.

Polk intended to win the Mormons’ loyalty by enlisting a Mormon military, appeasing Little and Young’s request for federal aid, and sympathizing with the plight of the Mormon suffering and history, thereby ensuring that the Mormons did not turn against the United States and establish their own independent country. Leverage or not, Little’s tactic not only opened the way for the mustering in of the Mormon Battalion but also left the impression with President Polk that the Mormons may secede.

Brigham Young’s establishment of a theocracy—or theo-democratic society—in Utah led to further rumors of secession. Most Americans in the mid-nineteenth century considered theocracy an already-turned page from

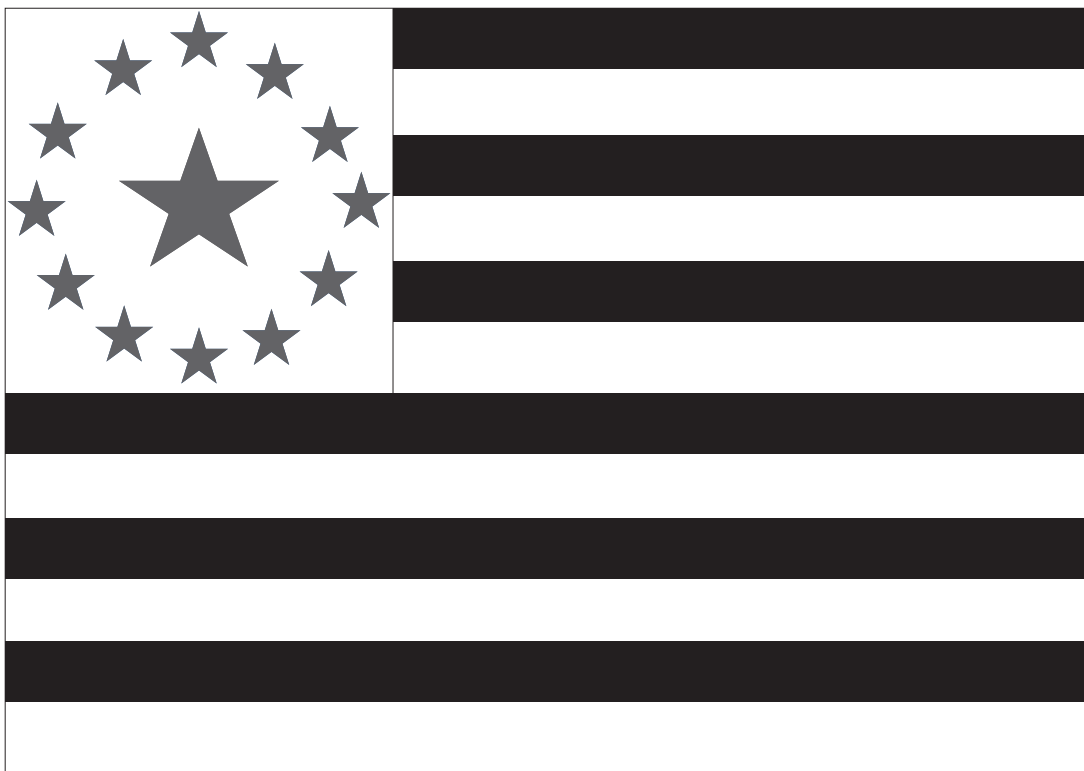
John Winthrop’s Massachusetts Bay Colony two hundred years before. The Mormons, however, were still determined to create a religious commonwealth. During the first days of their settlement, they spoke of a land of promise held in reserve by the hand of God that fulfilled the promises of Isaiah 2:2–4; 11:10–12. Other sermons insisted on the need for a strict Christian piety—Sabbath-keeping, honesty, and order and righteousness. Outsiders willing to obey this new standard would be accepted, but those who would not obey it were expected to go elsewhere. As a symbol of the new society, members of the first pioneer party in the Salt Lake Valley were rebaptized and reconfirmed as members of the Church. “We had as



Stephen W. Kearny (1794–1846) was one of the foremost antebellum frontier officers of the United States Army. At President James Polk’s request, Kearny ordered the immediate formation of a battalion of volunteers from the Mormons who were in Iowa traveling west during the Mormon exodus. (General Land Office Research website, Department of Landscape Architecture, Iowa State University)

it were entered a new world and wished to renew our covenants and commence in newness of life,” explained one of the men.¹²

Young had come west, hoping to establish his society under a favored constitutional theory of the time: popular sovereignty. Presidential candidates Lewis Cass, in 1848, and Stephen A. Douglas, in 1860, took the idea of neighborhood majority rule and applied it to the western territories. They hoped to quiet the rising storm in Washington over expanding slavery in the territories. Cass and Douglas argued that a community was ready for self-government from the moment it was settled; majorities in the territories should be allowed self-government—and should not be required to live by federal administration.



The flag of the kingdom of God was first suggested by Joseph Smith as early as June 22, 1844. The flag was a symbol of the political kingdom of God established in the Great Basin by Brigham Young in 1847. (No photographs of original flags exist; this artistic representation, courtesy of Julie M. Ogborn, is based on contemporary reports.)

Extending this thinking, if power lay with the people in a territory, then Utah Mormons had a right to establish their theocracy and maintain their practice of polygamy.

The pioneers called their new community *Deseret*, a name that was meant to set it apart as the kingdom of God—a religious and political government which, when fully established, might prepare for Christ’s coming reign. “All other governments are illegal and unauthorized,” said a Mormon theoretical tract. “Any people attempting to govern themselves by laws of their own making, and by officers of their own appointment, are in direct rebellion against the kingdom of God.”¹³

Associated with Young’s theocracy was the “flag of the kingdom of God,” furthering the

perception of secession.¹⁴ A flag is designed to proclaim intentions and represent a cause, and it almost has a voice of its own. The Mormon flag was designed under Joseph Smith’s direction as early as 1844.¹⁵ By the time Brigham Young led the first pioneer company toward the Great Basin in the spring of 1847, the Saints viewed this flag for the mountain haven of the Saints as the flag of the political kingdom of God. While it is debatable how early the flag was posted, there is evidence that the flag was given public display in 1859 when William Henry Knight attended the Fourth of July celebration in the Salt Lake Valley.¹⁶ In a letter to his mother on July 7, 1859, Knight wrote, “The Mormons were celebrating the day with a flag of their own, firing cannon and marching

about to Yankee music.”¹⁷ The stripes of the Mormon flag were blue and white, and in the upper left corner was a circle of twelve stars with one large star in the center.¹⁸ Other versions of the flag had three stars in the center of a circle of twelve stars.¹⁹

When the Mormons migrated into the Great Basin, they had no charter from any existing government. The job of civil government and good order in the community was left entirely to them for a few years; however, their hopes for a quiet society in Utah were dashed with the coming of a federal territorial government. The American territorial system enacted in 1787, known as the Northwest Ordinance, required settlers to gain self-government and statehood through a step-by-step process. Territories were virtual colonies—not unlike colonies under British rule before the American Revolution. Citizens in the territories were denied the right to self-government that most white males elsewhere took for granted. Federal officials often focused on their personal careers and not on the welfare of the citizens. Territorial government placed the Mormon community and their theocracy on a collision course and led to new rumors of secession. During 1850, as many as sixteen federal officials left their positions in the territory in “frustration, fright, or both.”²⁰ Neither appointed federal officials nor outside observers understood the Mormons. One such observer, W. M. F. Magraw, who lived briefly in Utah, wrote President Franklin Pierce in October 1856, claiming that there was “no vestige of law and order” in the territory and that the “so-styled ecclesiastical organization” was “despotic, dangerous and damnable.”²¹

The Mormons saw two rival kingdoms or cultures that opposed each other: a worldly kingdom that supported territorial government

and oppressive appointees, and the kingdom of God, which established a theocracy to purify the saints in preparation for the return of their Savior. One was religious and local; the other was civil and national. The issue was not just law and religion but *whose* law and religion. As troops marched toward Deseret, Brigham Young took to the pulpit. His rhetorical outbursts, printed in Mormon publications, found their way to Washington—leading to fresh rumors of secession and contributing to the dispatch of federal troops to Utah in 1857. “The Lord is . . . bringing to pass the sayings of the Prophets faster than the people are prepared to receive them,” Young said. “The time must come when there will be a separation between this kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. . . . The time must come when this kingdom must be free and independent from all other kingdoms.” Young asked the congregation, “Are you prepared to have the thread cut to-day?”²² During the 1857 Silver Lake celebration,²³ Heber C. Kimball, Young’s First Counselor, framed the dilemma that faced the Mormons. “If we will not yield to [the government’s] meanness,” he said, “they will say we have mutinized [sic] against the President of the United States and then they will put us under martial law and massacre this people.”²⁴

Rumors of secession reached a crescendo when Brigham Young became the target of remarks by territorial officials (such as the associate supreme court justice W. W. Drummond, Utah chief justice John F. Kinney, and Utah surveyor general David H. Burr). These officials reported that Young was “more traitorous than ever” and was responsible for the killing of Lieutenant John W. Gunnison in 1853 and the death of Territorial Secretary Almon W. Babbitt in 1856.²⁵ Newspaper campaigns across the nation mounted against

the Mormons. The April 29 issue of the *American Journal*, published in 1859, “made the outlandish claim that one hundred thousand Mormons were poised to fight the U.S. government, aided by two hundred thousand ‘spies and emissaries’ and three hundred thousand ‘savage’ Indian allies.”²⁶

Once the Confederate states became a reality, Confederate leaders had high hopes that the western territories would be relatively easy to enlist in their cause. Secession strategists projected that the Mormons in Utah Territory had good reason to join their cause. Richard Vetterli, in *Mormonism, Americanism and Politics*, argued that the position of the Mormons in Utah Territory presented a more promising ally than any other of the six territories.²⁷ Southern strategists assumed that the Mormons would favorably lean toward the South. It was assumed that Mormons were bitter over their treatment by the United States and were “on the eve of revolution.” Vetterli listed the following reasons for favoring Utah’s secession to join the Confederacy: (1) the federal government had refused to grant the Saints redress for indignities suffered at the hands of the mobocrats in Missouri and Illinois; (2) Congress had refused multiple petitions for Utah statehood and instead had granted territorial status, thereby giving Congress the right to appoint unacceptable federal officers; (3) unfounded reports of rebellion and secession drove the President of the United States to send an army to Utah; (4) Governor Cumming had been sent by the President to relieve Brigham Young as governor of the Utah Territory—Young was

respected, loved, and accepted by the Mormons, but Cumming was an outsider from Georgia; and (5) both Mormons and Southerners were advocates of popular sovereignty, which protected the institutions of slavery and polygamy as domestic issues that should be decided by the people, not by the federal government.²⁸ While these reasons seem applicable to the Mormon situation, there is no evidence that the Mormons had any significant negotiations with the Confederacy. E. B. Long’s research concluded, “The myths and rumors of emissaries coming to Utah from the South, which have persisted over the years, have little substance.”²⁹

Despite compelling reasons for Utah’s secession, Southern strategists underestimated the allegiance Mormons had to the Union and the divinely inspired Constitution of the United States. “We have had our difficulties with the government,” Church leaders declared, “but we calculate they will be righted in the government or we will endure them!”³⁰ Utah chose to stand by the Union. In one of the first telegraphic messages sent east from Salt Lake City, Brigham Young proclaimed, “Utah has not seceded, but is firm for the Constitution and laws of our once happy country.”³¹

The multiple dynamic forces at work during the 1850s and early 1860s led to a widespread image of Mormon disloyalty. The Mormon passion for self-government, both religious and secular, sometimes made them appear like secessionists, but it was an inaccurate portrayal. The Mormons were loyal to the United States and the Constitution, but also to Brigham Young, their Church, and their God.

NOTES

Thanks to Julie M. Ogborn and John Weist for their research and editing assistance.

1. E. B. Long, *The Saints and the Union: Utah Territory during the Civil War* (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 40.
2. "Brigham Young to the Saints at Mount Pisgah and Garden Grove, Iowa Territory, January 27, 1847," *Selected Collections: From the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 1, disc 2, vols. 17 and 18, 30–31.
3. Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 126–27.
4. "Brigham Young to the Saints at Mount Pisgah and Garden Grove, Iowa Territory, January 27, 1847," 30–31.
5. Ronald K. Esplin, "'A Place Prepared': Joseph, Brigham, and the Quest for Promised Refuge in the West," *Journal of Mormon History* 9 (1982): 85.
6. Hyrum L. Andrus, "Joseph Smith and the West," *BYU Studies* 1–2 (1959–60): 135; see also Helen Mar Whitney, "Scenes in Nauvoo," *Woman's Exponent* 11, no. 8 (September 15, 1882): 161.
7. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 3 (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 414.
8. "To Our Patrons," *Nauvoo Neighbor*, October 29, 1845.
9. Sergeant Daniel Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War, 1846–1847* (n.p.: 1881), 112.
10. Edward W. Tullidge, *Life of Brigham Young; or, Utah and Her Founders* (New York: Tullidge and Crandall, 1877), 50.
11. "The Diary of James K. Polk," *Chicago Historical Society's Collection*, vol. 1 (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1910), 446.
12. Dean L. May, *Utah: A People's History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 60.
13. Orson Pratt, *The Kingdom of God* (Liverpool: R. James, 1848), 48.
14. D. Michael Quinn, "The Flag of the Kingdom of God," *BYU Studies* 14 (1973): 109; see also William P. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 1* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 230. MacKinnon associated secession with a flag unfurled on July 24, 1857, at the Silver Lake celebration.
15. Ronald W. Walker, "'A Banner Is Unfurled': Mormonism's Ensign Peak," *Dialogue* 26 (1993): 73; *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), 6:528.
16. William Henry Knight was born in Harmony, Chautauqua County, New York, on April 19, 1835. He was an immigrant bound for California who attended the July 4, 1859, celebration at Silver Lake up Little Cottonwood Canyon.
17. Quinn, "Flag of the Kingdom of God," 111.
18. Quinn, "Flag of the Kingdom of God," 111–12.
19. Quinn, "Flag of the Kingdom of God," 114.
20. David L. Bigler, *Forgotten Kingdom: The Mormon Theocracy in the American West, 1847–1896* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1998), 59.
21. W. M. F. Magraw to Mr. President, October 3, 1856, *Executive Documents Printed by Order of the House of Representatives during the First Session of the Thirty-Fifth Congress* (Washington, DC: James B. Steedman, 1858), 2.
22. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 5:98.
23. The celebration commemorates the arrival of the Mormons into the Salt Lake Valley on July 24, 1847. Silver Lake, today called Brighton, Utah, is at the top of Little Cottonwood Canyon in the Wasatch Mountains.
24. Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 5:88.
25. "Dreadful State of Affairs in Utah," *New York Herald*, March 20, 1857.
26. Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 28.
27. Richard Vetterli, *Mormonism, Americanism, and Politics* (Salt Lake City: Ensign, 1961), 515–17.
28. Vetterli, *Mormonism, Americanism, and Politics*, 516.
29. E. B. Long, *Saints and the Union*, 274.
30. Vetterli, *Mormonism, Americanism, and Politics*, 517.
31. Edward W. Tullidge, *The History of Salt Lake City and Its Founders* (Salt Lake City: published by author, 1886), 250. See also Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon, 1892–98), 2:30.