Those days was days of order to do as we was told and in this we was well schooled.

—John Hawley

As the Latter Day Saints gathered in Nauvoo during the first week of April 1845 for their semi-annual General Conference, only a few knew the Wightites had begun their journey to Texas the previous month. John Hawley later wrote that when leaving Wisconsin, the group “entered into [a covenant] and that was we would have to take as Lyman said ‘the orders of God’ and those days was days of order to do as we was told and in this we was well schooled.”¹ The covenants taken that day were serious affirmations of a true believers’ community. These covenants held the Wightites together for almost thirteen years.

Flatboats were built in the lengthening daylight. One Wisconsin history records that the boats were stolen. In fact, the Wightites settled their debts with the logging firm of Myrick & Miller, giving up some horses and oxen to extinguish any liabilities. Then the colonists fired their log cabins and left. On the night of 27 March 1845, while singing “Let Zion in Her Beauty Rise,” the immigrants boarded the homemade water craft and sailed the next morning. Selling their clothing along the way for food and supplies, after three hundred miles, they stopped at Duck Creek, some miles north of Davenport,

Iowa, on 13 April 1845. William P. Eldridge, a prosperous local settler and a member of the local Baptist congregation, was converted there by Lyman Wight and joined the group in its journey. Eldridge became instrumental in re-outfitting the colony so that each group of twenty-one settlers had a small wagon and a small team. The outfits were much like those used by the Pontiac Branch that Wight had shepherded into Zion’s Camp in 1834.²

Soon after the end of General Conference, Brigham Young knew the Wightites were but a little more than a hundred miles distant and heading for Texas. Samuel Bent left Nauvoo on 17 April 1845, carrying a conciliatory but patronizing letter from the Twelve. Bent, senior to Lyman Wight in the Fifty, had been instructed to read the communiqué to the entire company. The assembled company heard from Bent that spiritual concerns in Nauvoo were going well. Counseled against going west, the Wightites, instead, were instructed to return to Nauvoo and receive the blessings associated with finishing the Temple.³

The Wightites demonstrated a literary ability to patronize equally as well as what they received. Samuel Bent reported his failure to Brigham Young on 29 April 1845, and delivered a letter signed by Otis Hobart, the Pine Company clerk, which informed the Twelve that the immigrants were doing well. Having decided to proceed by land, they had sold the boats and had purchased wagons and teams. Hobart carefully continued that the colonists had received “our much esteemed friend Bro. Bent,” who had read the letter to the company. The clerk noted that Ira S. Miles had been dispatched earlier to Nauvoo to apprise the Twelve “of our present situation and our future prospects.” “A unanimous vote thanks was then taken,” Hobart continued, “in behalf of the Twelve for their kindness. . . . We now bring our letter to a close by saying to you that we shall ever sustain and consider you as our friends. More anon.” The message was clear—the Wightites used a clerk’s letter to answer the Twelve’s missive.

³ Letter from Brigham Young & 12 to Lyman Wight, Journal History of the Church, 44:17 April 1845; History of the Church, 7:395, 400–401.
The Wightites were going on to Texas. More than two years would pass before Brigham Young again contacted Wight.4

Wight and his followers did not recognize the authority of Young and the Twelve to direct their movements. If the Wightites had known the events of a church financial conference held two weeks earlier at Nauvoo, Brigham Young may not have received even the courtesy of a reply. Present at the meeting were church officials, including the Twelve and the local bishops, who, among other matters, decided the bishops would sell the Maid of Iowa, the steamboat the Wisconsin lumbermen thought that they were to receive in return for the lumber rafted to Nauvoo the previous summer. Forty years later John Hawley reported a conversation he had with Brigham Young about 1860, the gist being that Young told Hawley Bishop George Miller had sold the Maid of Iowa out from under the Wightites. Young implied that he had no or little responsibility in the matter. The Wightites began distrusting Young’s administration of economic affairs, and it would rankle them for decades. Both John Hawley and George Montague mentioned the Maid of Iowa matter more than forty years later, and Pierce Hawley, living in the Cherokee Nation, refused rebaptism into the LDS Church in 1856, unlike other family members, because he still could not forgive Brigham Young for evidently stealing Wightite property. The elder Hawley affirmed his belief he would be better off waiting for Joseph’s sons to assume their roles as successors to their father than follow the lead of Brigham Young.5

Singing praises to God and “to Joseph the Prophet and Seer, the Angel of the Seventh and Last Dispensation of God on earth,” wrote Lyman Wight, his followers moved on 12 May 1845 with eighty-two oxen, eight wagons, a cart, and several tents. Stopping occasionally to work for provisions, the following six months found Wight’s little group journeying through Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, and Indian Territory. In the first part of November, they crossed into Texas. Lyman

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Wight and David Monroe scouted for a location where the group could spend the winter. On 19 November 1845, the trekkers stopped at the site of abandoned Fort Johnston, near Georgetown in Grayson County. They wintered near present-day Dorchester, an area still called Mormon Grove.\(^6\) They were the first sizeable group of Mormons to enter the Republic. Two years earlier, Elder William Steffey, ordained by Willard Richards to preach the Mormon gospel in the Republic while on a business trip, was the first Mormon recorded to enter Texas.\(^7\)

About 150 persons had been organized into twenty-one households at the beginning of the trek. The deaths of four heads-of-household resulted in the dissolution of those family organizations: they were Donald Sutherland, William Ballantyne, John Hineckson, and Truman Brace. At least four new households were formed during the journey: William Eldridge, the Baptist elder who joined the colony in Iowa, as well as three more family units near Mound City, Kansas. On 27 September 1845, Bernice Monroe was married to Charles Bird, Eliza Curtis to George W. Bird, and Marion Sutherland to William Curtis.

Others married during the journey. Lyman Wight took Mary Hawley as his fourth wife, having earlier that year, if not in 1844 at Mormon Coulee, wed Mary Ann Hobart. These two marriages linked the families of Pierce Hawley (the patriarch) and Otis Hobart (the company clerk) to the Wight group. His third wife, Jane Margaret Ballantyne, had brought the extensive Scots in-kin family group of John Ballantyne into Wight’s circle of relations. Sometime during the trek, Joel Simonds Miles married Patience F. Curtis as a plural wife, who joined her husband and his wife Delilia in their household. Patience may have been the young plural wife with whom John Hawley had been enamored.\(^8\)

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Death and hardships struck the Wightites. Levi Lamoni Wight remembered the trek’s privations for the rest of his life. Many years later he described the expedition as one of “hunger, thirst, and fatigue, accompanied with a few snake bites and quite a number of deaths.” He remembered two small boys, stricken by pangs of hunger, fighting over a gar’s head. At least eight colonists, and possibly more, died. Death destroyed the Hinckson family. John Hinckson lost an infant, then his ten-year-old daughter, and finally his wife during a ten-week ordeal. He then simply disappears from Wightite history. The Sutherland orphans had to be distributed among various households. Truman “Father” Brace and William Ballantyne lost their wives. Ballantyne’s newborn child died the day following its mother’s death. Ballantyne lost his father-in-law the following month.

Heman C. Smith, an RLDS historian, gave a different account of the Sutherland and Ballantyne deaths. Smith, a grandson of Lyman Wight and born at Zodiac, Texas, in 1850, recorded that at least four people died during the trek in 1845. Two babies, the grandmother of one of the dead infants, and David Sutherland all died between 12 July 1845 and 30 October 1845. At Thompson’s Fork, four miles to the east of Grande River, an infant born to the Hinckson family died. In the last week of September, an infant born to the Ballantynes died, and so did its grandmother, Jane Menzies Sutherland. The baby was buried in her arms. On 30 October 1845, David Sutherland, the infant’s grandfather and husband of Jane Menzies Sutherland, died near the Verdigris and Arkansas rivers.9

A little more than a week after the burials of Jane Menzies Sutherland and her unnamed granddaughter, General Conference was held at Nauvoo. The Wightites were far out of touch with the church in Illinois. The names of the Twelve were offered to the membership, and the motion to sustain Lyman Wight once again was opposed. A. W. Babbitt said, “I cannot conscientiously give my vote in his favor. My reason is this: If there is a council in this church that

ought to be united, and act in unison as one man, it is the Council of the Twelve.” Wight, he continued, “has not acted in unison with the Twelve, nor according to their counsel,” and his “teachings have been contrary to the counsel of the church, and his conduct calculated to destroy it.” However, Heber C. Kimball, first counselor to Brigham Young, advised moderation, suggesting, “the case of Brother Lyman Wight lay over for the present.” The conference supported Kimball’s resolution. Kimball, however, did tell the assembled conference that he did not favor the “Common Stock Business Religion.” Kimball believed each man was responsible for his own affairs.10

The Wightites wintered in the new state of Texas, which had just joined the Union.11 The final move to winter quarters was made about 24 November 1845, with them staying at Fort Johnston until the following April. John Hawley recalled they worked for the local Texans and Native Americans, while repairing their own equipment for the trek in the spring. James Tyson, a prosperous Choctaw, had the millers build a beautiful two-story home that stood for many decades. Life continued on the frontier as it had in Wisconsin; the colony was graced in February 1846 with the birth of John Ammon Taylor, son of Eleanor and John Taylor.12

By the end of April 1846, the colonists were again on the move. They crossed the Trinity River near Dallas on 30 April, and swam their animals over the Brazos River near Marlin in Falls County several days later. On 6 June 1846, they settled four miles north of

11. Fort Johnston (or Johnson), located in northern Grayson County, was built in 1840 as a small outpost of the Republic of Texas. It has been identified in historical sources by both names. The site has been located west of Fink. Abandoned and reoccupied several times, Lyman Wight’s party wintered there in 1845–46. See Gerald S. Pierce, “The Military Road Expedition of 1840–41,” *Texas Military History* 6 (Summer 1967), and Gerald S. Pierce, *Texas Under Arms: The Camps, Posts, Forts, and Military Towns of the Republic of Texas, 1836–1846* (Austin: Encino Press, 1969).
Austin, at the foot of Mt. Bonnel near the falls of the Colorado River. They immediately set about building a water-powered mill. Viktor Bracht noted that the name of the mill site near Austin was Sycamore Springs. The falls and the rapids provided an adequate supply for the mill, while the millers dammed the mouth of a deep ravine through which ran water from a large spring. In seven weeks, the mill was up and turning a large water wheel made of cypress and oak timbers.

Brigham Young, meanwhile, knew little more than that the Wight party had left Duck Creek, Iowa, a year earlier. He believed they were somewhere in Indian Territory. By the end of 1846, several of Brigham Young’s associates received false information that Wight’s colony was causing trouble in the Indian territories. According to Colonel Thomas D. Kane, a friend of the Mormons, a large body of their people was enjoying a “comfortable existence” somewhere on the upper waters of the Arkansas River. “No doubt,” concluded Kane, it must have been the Wightites. Orson Spencer confidently informed Brigham Young that Wight’s group had been living with the Creeks but “had been driven away by them.” The Nauvoo Municipal High Council, a week later in January 1847, wrote to apostles Orson Hyde, Orson Pratt, and John Taylor that Wight was located near the “land of the Big Blue.”

Wight’s followers, in the meantime, besides milling and building their community, had been engaged in getting along with their neighbors in Austin. Ferdinand Roemer, a traveler from Germany,
reported the local concern about the newcomers. He wrote, “this peculiar, communistic, religious sect had been driven away by an enraged populace of Illinois from their former home in Nauvoo on the Mississippi,” supposedly for “repeated robberies and murders committed by individual members.” Although the Texans, a people somewhat familiar with violence, felt uneasiness about the reported bloodthirsty nature of their new neighbors, Governor James Henderson and others, like frontiersman and businessman Noah Smithwick, felt differently. The water-powered gristmill at Sycamore Springs was the first industrial operation in the Austin area, and it started grinding corn on 30 July 1846. It is difficult to overstate how much mechanically ground cornmeal improved local attitudes among the Austinites about these peculiar outsiders. Not only was the mechanized mill at Sycamore Springs the first on the frontier, but its rigging also powered woodworking machinery for milling chairs, tables, wooden dishes, and other items. The Mormon operation benefited the entire community, for the people had been handmaking furniture and laboriously grinding corn with steel hand mills. The Wightites became involved in the local construction trade as well, building the new jail and some new houses in the capitol.¹⁶

The Mormons’ limited contact with the larger community went well. Wight did not neglect his religious duties, as he preached twice at Noah Smithwick’s, as well as elsewhere in Austin. Smithwick, who came to know the Mormons as well as any Texan, wrote in his memoirs that “they were a novelty in the religious world. . . . The neighbors all gathered in and listened with respectful attention while the Elder expounded the doctrine of the Latter Day Saints, being careful to leave out its more objectionable features.” Some, believed Smithwick, may have been concerned about their reputation as “a lawless band.” A faction developed with the intent to drive Wight and his followers from Texas. Smithwick, however, argued the newcomers had the strength “to stand off the Indians, and, it being their policy to isolate

their communities which relegated them to the outskirts of civilization, I was willing to utilize anything that formed a barrier against the savages. I therefore counseled [against] hostilities till some overt act called for their expulsion.”

The Houston Telegraph reported that summer that Lyman Wight’s people “have lately settled near Austin, are erecting a large flouring mill . . . about three miles above that city.” The newspaper suggested that the Mormons could “confer lasting . . . benefit,” although it had been “feared their presence would be but a precursor of evil.” The paper’s conflicted hopes echoed the feelings of Smithwick and others. The Mormons might have had a bad reputation in the West, but Wight’s colony also had a mechanical mill and had done nothing wrong, as yet. Machinery trumped morality among the Austinites. The clamor soon stilled for their expulsion.

The Austin Texas Democrat reported on 17 June 1846, under the headline “Mormons,” that Elder Lyman Wight preached on the Book of Mormon and the role of the Native Americans in the new land. Having been told that the gospel of Jesus Christ was the inheritance of the Indians, the reporter asked Wight to “read Buffalo Hump [a Comanche chief leading raids on Texan farms and villages] and his party a few lectures.” The newspaper recorded later that fall that the Wightites seemed to be “honest hardworking people.” Polygamous relations at Sycamore Springs must have been well hidden from Texan notice, for Richard Lamb Isom, quoting from Frank Brown’s “Annals of Travis County,” wrote that it was “not remembered that [the Mormons] practiced polygamy.” Brown noted also that the citizens’ initial prejudice vanished, and the newcomers were considered a good addition to the frontier community. Wight could brag rightfully in 1848 that the governor and other leading citizens had become pleased to have the Mormon millers as part of the community.

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19. Texas Democrat (Austin), 17 June 1846 and 7 October 1846; Frank Brown’s “Annals of Travis County,” quoted in Richard Lamb Isom, “What Became of Joseph Smith’s Early Associate Lyman Wight” (photocopy of typescript manuscript, n.d.), 16, LDS archives (Isom’s work purports to be a “creative history” of the Lyman Wight colony); L. Wight, An Address, 13.
Levi Lamoni Wight recalled playing as a boy of ten on the “little hill,” the site of the new state capitol. He and other children from the Springs attended school in Austin with the children of the Metz household, where some of the men boarded while working on the jail. Two colonists, both family heads, are known to have died at Austin. On 27 September 1846, Jeremiah Curtis Sr., age fifty-one, passed away, and John Ballantyne, a father-in-law to Lyman Wight, died the following month. The family units continued with Ruth Stratton Curtis, the wife of Jeremiah, and Andrew Ballantyne, the eldest son of John, becoming household heads. Ruth Stratton Curtis is the only woman known in the colony to have functioned in such a capacity. Three babies (Lyman Spencer Smith, Rollondo H. Wight, and Amelia Minerva Wight) were born to the colony that year. Rollondo H. was Lyman Wight’s daughter by Mary Ann Hobart, while Amelia Minerva (John F. and Rosina Wight Miller) and Lyman Spencer (Spencer and Anna Christina Wight) were his grandchildren.

Three arranged weddings were celebrated on 4 July 1846—John Hawley (age 22) and Harriet Hobart (age unknown), George Hawley (21) and Ann Hadfield (16), and John Young (about 31) and Priscilla Hawley (14). Hawley’s “Autobiography” offers insight into the unusual pattern of Wightite marriage, including monogamous unions, which these were. The intended mates had little if any voice in the choice of their partners. The younger Hawley recalled “father and Lyman made a selection of girls for George and myself and a man for my sister Priscilla. This being the order of the Patriarchs, the girl selected for me was a daughter of Oates Hobart and her name was Harriet. . . . When July the 4th came, I with George and Priscilla was married by Lyman Wight. Here we began a life of Patriarchal orders.” Lyman Wight was very concerned in creating eternal family units through marriages and adoptions that would last beyond the grave.

The patriarch, Pierce Hawley, gave the candidates a blessing of family lineage before they were married. John’s father, supposedly having the power to determine ancestral heritage through the authority of his office, blessed him with the knowledge that he was

a descendent of the Hebrew tribe of Ephraim and descended from the royal blood and lineage of Joseph of Egypt. Many special requirements, reminiscent of Old Testament dicta, surrounded Wightite marriage and family practices. Described as “the law of Moses corrected and revised,” the decree included self-restraint in sexual habits. One feature of the “law of impurity” required men to forego intercourse with their wives for eight days during her menstruation. Childbirth required an absence of relations between spouses: thirty-three days if a male child, and sixty-six days if a female child.\(^\text{21}\)

If the Mormons in Texas were practicing restraint in matters temporal, Lyman Wight, nonetheless, cut quite a figure in frontier fashion. The leading Mormon of Austin had become a local personage of regard, having made giant strides in appearance as well as have coming hundreds of miles from Wisconsin. A Methodist minister described Wight as a dark-bearded and black-headed man, standing over six feet, weighing more than 200 pounds. His attire included polished black boots, black broadcloth, a black hat, and holsters for two revolvers strapped across his middle. Several bodyguards escorted Colonel Wight whenever he was in public. Black mules pulled the French-style carriage, which always carried a rifle in an attached boot.\(^\text{22}\)

Even though accepted by the larger community, Wight was considering relocating his colony farther west. Several reasons prompted the move. Although high water had washed out the mill, the colony was not forced to move because it was quickly rebuilt and soon operating again. Viktor Bracht noted in 1847 that both the Mormon mills, the


\(^{22}\) Josiah Clifton, quoted in C. C. Booth, “Lyman Wight—in Early Texas,” Improvement Era 62 (January 1954): 27. This article was based, in part, on a letter from C. C. Booth to Rufus Hardy in 1930. Josiah Clifton, Booth’s grandfather, told him that “Lyman Wight was often asked to address the senate when he came to Austin, and was always well received by the governor and senators.” The Wild Ram was of “very commanding appearance, over six feet, about 200 pounds, and very handsome; wore a beard that he kept in perfect condition.” He kept his hair long, groomed himself well—a Prince Albert coat, freshly-polished boots—and armed himself with two six-guns and a knife. Sprightly mules pulled a carriage dressed “with glittering harness, trimmed with brass and silver.”
older, rebuilt one at Sycamore Springs and the newer one at Zodiac, Gillespie County, were assisting the German immigrant communities, providing “our colonists in the upper county with cornmeal.” The publicly stated need to move, Lyman Wight later wrote, was that the location of Sycamore Springs was “too limited for our society, (having had frequent accessions),” and “we concluded to sell it, and move seventy-five miles up in the Valley of the Pedernales.” Unstated needs, including a private setting hospitable to the village’s family system, apparently influenced Wight’s decision, echoing the Smithwickian assertion that Wight’s people sought after isolation for their communities.23

Two parties from Sycamore Springs searched to the west for a permanent place. The first party, which left 19 October 1846, consisted of John Taylor, Spencer Smith, Meacham Curtis, and William Curtis. They returned to Sycamore Springs on 14 November 1846, reporting a location on the Pedernales River “with plenty of good water and timber and abounding with game and honey.” Roemer recorded, while the first party was still exploring, that “three elders of a Mormon colony, who had settled near Austin, came to Herr von Meusebach [the German leader of Fredericksburg]” and “asked for permission to settle a company of forty-six families on the grant of the Verein colony.” Some of Roemer’s acquaintances had been impressed with “the industry, order and frugal mode of living of these people. As a matter of fact I did not hear one word of complaint against them during my stay, on the contrary, their behavior was exemplary, although they were at first watched with suspicion.” Roemer believed a few black sheep were responsible for the terrible reputation of the entire Mormon body. He continued that the Mormon “elders were not given an unqualified promise to their petition; however, a contract was signed with them whereby they agreed to build a mill at Fredericksburg similar to the one they had built at Austin.”24

Roemer’s account agrees generally with the records in the Solms-Braunfels Archiv, located at New Braunfels, Texas. A Tr. Bromme

23. L. L. Wight, Reminiscences, 6; Isom, “What Became of Joseph Smith’s Early Associate,” 15; Bracht, quoted in Fischer, Marxists and Utopias in Texas, 103; L. Wight, An Address, 14; Smithwick, Evolution of a State, 172.
reported to Herrin Carl, Grafen zu Castell, that a party of Mormons arrived in October 1846 in the Fredericksburg area. The director of Fredericksburg, an F. Schubbert, recorded in his official record that he was reviewing a Mormon petition to settle near Fredericksburg and build a mill.\textsuperscript{25} Schubbert wrote, “Korn is necessary without it this place cannot exist. There is nothing of it in the ground yet, and I have no seed.” A Mr. Wurzbach earlier had contracted to build a mill in the Fredericksburg region, but in Schubbert’s opinion “Wurzbach will not set up a mill in three years. If I take care of the matter, I have the Mormons set up a saw mill within six weeks. We are not able to mill corn or wheat yet because we have no grain.” Schubbert later recorded that he had “accepted” the Saints “as immigrants of the association.” In order to receive lands of the German Emigration Company, the Mormons would have to have their debts recorded at the county court house.\textsuperscript{26}

The Mormons planned to move in the early part of 1847. An advance party of John Taylor, Lyman Wight, Orange Wight, John Miller, William Curtis, John Curtis, John Hawley, and David Monroe moved out first. The site recommended by the earlier exploring party was ignored, for the group initially selected a small creek about twelve miles east of Fredericksburg. A one-hundred acre farm was cultivated near Grape Creek, probably under the direction of George Bird, and construction of a mill site was begun, then, surprisingly, abandoned. The reason for abandonment, although farm operations continued on Grape Creek, probably had to do with the logical fact that the German leadership wanted the mill much closer to Fredericksburg. They succeeded, for records from the

\textsuperscript{25} Solms-Braunfels Archiv, 3:29 and 146–51 (transcription by Rudolph Leopold Biesele, 1934–35), original at Bienecke Library, Yale University, and typescript copy at Sophienburg Archives, New Braunfels, TX. These extensive journals, of which very little has been translated into English, consist of documents, letters, business accounts, newspaper cuttings, and other materials pertaining to the experiences of the German Emigration Company, and are a rich documentary source for the German settlements in Texas during the Republic and after. The Department of Archives and Collections, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, has provided the translations from the Solms-Braunfels Archiv for this work.

\textsuperscript{26} Solms-Braunfels Archiv, 31:67, 68; 43:96/146, 99/149, 101/151.
Solms-Braunfels Archiv note, “The Mormons have delivered their first flour shipment and are now installing their mill in Piedernales. It should be ready in six weeks, a grist and saw mill. They said that the corn will be sold for at least” four cents a pound. The Germans hoped the mill eventually would be moved to Fredericksburg. Director Schubbert informed his superior, “Col. Whight [sic] from the Mormons was here yesterday to receive here by the city 10 city lots and wheat ready for milling, and then they will set up the mill right here. I told him that I would inform you about it and so I asked for detailed instructions about it.” The German hope remained unfulfilled, as the Wightites built on the banks of the Pedernales River, about three miles east of Fredericksburg.27

On 1 May 1847, the new mill site on the banks of the Pedernales, seven miles west of Bird’s farm, was established. The milling and farming community of Zodiac (as the new community was named) rested on an intermittent flat-to-rolling terrain of stony clay soils. Stands of juniper, mesquite, and live oak grew among the undergrowth of brushes and grasses. The advantages of the location were notable. Foliage grew close and thick at times along the streams and creeks, offering shade, water, timber, and fertile soil. Another 200 acres were cultivated in land that Levi Lamoni Wight thought fruitful and full of game.28

The issue of slavery also may have influenced Wight’s decision to move. Although his writings reflect little interest in the slavery issue, other than its economic advantages to the church, some of his followers felt differently. RLDS historian Heman Hale Smith echoes the comments of Levi Lamoni Wight that settling near Fredericksburg offered the Mormons not only security, but also neighbors who were thought to be freesoilers in sentiment. The mill property at Sycamore Springs was sold for $1,500 and the move to the Pedernales River was completed. The journey of two years appeared to be at

27. Ibid., 41:192, 205.
an end. The Wightites worked quickly. By the middle of June, they had added a gristmill, some rude homes and shops, and planted more crops.\(^{29}\)

John Schmidtzensky, a local German farmer and politician, passed an oral tradition about Zodiac on to his family. A political opponent of Wight and a keen observer and participant in the affairs of Gillespie County, he served it as a commissioner during the period of the Zodiac community. The Mormons, according to this tradition, built Zodiac on the north bank of the Pedernales River next to the original Austin-Fredericksburg road. They drew water from a well eighty-one feet deep. About twenty-five houses, corrals, and other buildings, as well as the mill, were built in the first year at Zodiac. The houses stood about fifty feet apart, constructed of upright poles set into the ground. The settlers then filled cracks in the sides with a plaster made of straw, adobe, and rock. The roofs were finished in the same fashion. Fitted, flat rocks made the flooring.\(^{30}\)

Noah Smithwick, the Texas frontiersman who knew many of the Hill Country Mormons and later led several families of them to California, found them much like other Texans, who all shared a wide range of human foibles and frailties. He described their society as one sharing communally in

the perfect equality of all members. . . . All titles of respect were disregarded, men and women being universally called by their first names. And these first names, by the way, were perhaps the most striking peculiarity about the Mormons. The proselytes were permitted to retain their Gentile names, but those born in the fold

\(^{29}\) L. L. Wight, *Reminiscences*, 13; L. L. Wight, “Autobiography,” 264; Isom, “What Became of Joseph Smith’s Early Associate,” 15; Bracht, in Fischer, *Marxists and Utopias in Texas*, 103; H. H. Smith, “The Lyman Wight Colony in Texas,” 12; Darrell Debo, *Burnet County History*, for the Burnet County Historical Commission (Burnet, TX: Eakin Press, 1979), 23. See L. Wight, *An Address*, 4, for his assertion that the conversion of the slave owner could result in “turning over his yearly proceeds into the hands of the trustee in trust for the whole Church.” Implicit in this statement is Lyman Wight’s common-stock philosophy of a communal economy directed by the presiding elder.

received their baptismal names from the Book of Mormon; and have no counterpart elsewhere. There were Abinadi, Maroni, Luman, Lamoni, Romali, Cornoman and many others equally original.

He noted some gender disparity in name giving, possibly because “women cut no figure in the Book of Mormon; at any rate, there was nothing distinctive in the names of the girls.”

The great trek was over. Ironically, the attempt to escape the jurisdiction of the United States came to naught, for Texas had joined the Union about the time the Mormons arrived in Grayson County in November 1845. A diffident welcome by the Texans improved as the Wightites gained favor for their mechanical abilities and quiet ways. In their new village in the buffer zone between white settlements and native tribes, only time would tell if they would survive.