Bishop George Miller and Zodiac: 1848–1849

their was [n]ever a meaner man to profess religion
—Levi Lamoni Wight

Bishop George Miller came to Zodiac early in 1848, left once and returned, then left for good in the fall of 1849. An able bureaucrat, once the second bishop of the LDS Church, and a member of the Council of Fifty and the Anointed Quorum, he was an irritable man who vented his spleen against those whom he disliked. His writings (1855) were not kind to Wight, generally critical of him and his labors in Wisconsin and Texas. Because of this, his generally favorable observations about the prosperity of Zodiac add balance to its evaluation. Additionally, his comings and goings give some insight within the Mormon community as a whole, and to the history of Zodiac and its people during these two years.¹

Miller had stayed in Nauvoo and followed Brigham Young’s leadership after Wight had gone to Texas. Still a bishop and serving as a captain of fifty in the migration from Nauvoo in 1846, Miller’s company wintered with that of James Emmett. They combined into a small encampment of fourteen families that fall, some distance from Young and most of the LDS camps. Away from the immediate direction of Young, Miller attempted to create a common-stock economy for his little group. Most of his followers disagreed, and

¹. Miller, Correspondence of Bishop George Miller, 10, records the bishop’s bitter recollection of Henry W. Miller’s attempt to circumscribe the other’s authority at the Wisconsin sawmill.
many returned to the main body at Winter Quarters. Young was displeased both with the vulnerability of Miller’s encampment to attack by unfriendly native tribes, and also with James Emmett’s earlier unwillingness to obey counsel. Young, however, did not take action against them. Miller and Emmett, as members of the Fifty, considered themselves the equals of Young and the other apostles. Young was busy organizing the LDS for winter on the Missouri River, and they also may not have obeyed an order to return.2

Miller, in character, was unhappy with Young’s leadership. Hosea Stout repeated a Miller tirade about Brigham Young to Willard Richards, a cousin and his strong supporter in the leading councils of the Church. When informed of the outburst, Brigham Young stated that Miller and Emmett would leave the Church. He believed that Miller and Emmett were in “the shadow of the deceased Joseph Smith, not the living Quorum of the Twelve.”3

Andrew Jensen, an assistant historian of the LDS Church, wrote many years later that Young could not manage the fractious bishop, and threatened him with disfellowship “from the camp unless he repented.” The historian Juanita Brooks, editor of On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, made a note that although Miller had rendered great service as an advance guard—“it was wonderful for the mass who followed to cross streams on bridges that he had built and roads that he had improved”—that tension continued to grow between the bishop and the apostle. Miller believed that Young wanted to succeed Joseph Smith Jr. as church president. Young supposedly had discussed a revelation with Miller, the gist being the necessary reorganization of the First Presidency with Young as the new church head. Miller found such a presumption revolting. Although Miller continued to advise the Saints “to heed to [the] Council” of the Twelve as late as August of 1846, he, nonetheless, was spreading dissension among any who would listen. When Young complained to Miller that such behavior had caused the murder of Joseph Smith, Miller replied that it was effrontery for Young to

compare himself with Smith, as similar as a toad comparing itself to an ox.  

Young recalled Miller to the main camp in early 1847, and replaced with him Erastus Snow. The bishop argued that Young was interfering with a mission given to him by Joseph Smith. Shades of Wight! This must have grated on Young. Hosea Stout recorded in his diary for 2 April 1847 that he went in the evening to

Dr. Richard’s office on business. Bishop Miller was there. He had met the Twelve there to relate to them his plans in relation to going to the south. He wanted to go and settle between the Rio Grande and the Neuses river and make a treaty with Mexico & have them give us land &c But this was in dispute now between the United States & Mexico and [it] was [now] the great thoroughfare for both armies.

Stout himself “thought it a pretty ‘dry’ job.” Nevertheless, Miller oriented his compass to the south and abandoned the western journey under Young. Miller and his followers began an arduous, eight-month journey to find his son’s family at Zodiac. Young believed that Miller’s “wild and visionary” views risked his group to anti-Mormon mobs. Nonetheless, when Miller and his followers left the camp, no action was taken against their church memberships.

Several who followed Miller, not surprisingly, had ties to Zodiac. Besides the polygamous Miller family, the party included Daniel Newell Drake and wife Cynthia Parker Johnson (a daughter of Zodiac’s Heber Johnson and Sally Goodale), her fourteen-year-old sister Sylvia, and two young daughters; it is not known if Sylvia was a plural wife to Daniel Drake. Other families included those of Joseph and Lucy Matilda Johnson Kelting, another sister to Cynthia Drake and Sylvia Johnson; Lewis Anderson; the widow Nancy Daniels and

her four children; Alexander and Jeanette “Jessie” Ballantyne Hay and their children; and brothers E. B. and Richard Hewitt. Miller moved his family group and some others to Plattesville, Missouri, where earlier he had been offered a large construction contract. On arrival, however, he discovered that Alpheus Cutler, another member of the Fifty, had taken the contract because Cutler had told the investors Miller was not coming. When Richard Hewitt and Joseph Kelting, whose families had been several days behind Miller’s main party, arrived, the wagon train moved on south, then west to Tahlequah, the capitol of the Indian Territory, where they arrived on 9 July 1847. Many found work. William Leyland, son of Sophia Wallace Leyland, one of Miller’s wives, labored as a printer’s devil at the Tahlequah (OK) Cherokee Advocate. During the Mormons’ stay in the capitol, Miller allegedly upset the various ministers with his preaching.

On 16 December 1847, the Miller party started for Texas, $1,200 richer. Crossing the Red River near Warren and passing within four miles of Dallas, the Millerites crossed over the Brazos River. Traveling became more difficult, as the oxen and cattle wasted with a disease causing blood in the urine, which greatly weakened the animals. When the party arrived at Austin, nearly sixty percent of the animals were either dead or dying. After struggling another thirty-five miles west of the capitol, the party could go no further. Miller sent Lewis Anderson and William Leyland to Zodiac for help.

Leyland’s journal recalls the general gladness when they reached the farm of George W. Bird on Grape Creek. Bird, who at first mistook them for a couple of “Dutch boys,” fed and sent them on to Zodiac. A relief party started back, which included Orange Lyndersan Wight, John F. Miller (the eldest son of Bishop Miller), and Ezra A. Chipman. Renewed with healthy livestock and provisions, the Miller party was moving again when Lyman Wight and his wife Harriet met the wagon train on the evening of 30 January 1848.

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8. Miller, Correspondence of Bishop George Miller, 34–35.
apostle explained the common-stock principles that ruled the community of Zodiac to Miller’s party. Wight insisted these principles were the same as those communal precepts of the New Testament primitive, apostolic church. The newcomers agreed to abide by the village’s rules, and were accepted into the Zodiac community.

Zodiac, according to Miller, was verging on prosperity when his party arrived. The “common stock association” of about 150 people “under the control of Lyman Wight” operated a sawmill, a grist mill, a turning lathe, a blacksmith shop, and a wagon-making enterprise. Miller noted the people had “extended every kind of hospitality and aid in helping me build a cabin or cabins suitable for the convenience of my family.” He believed, however, that Lyman Wight’s lack of business ability contributed to the growing liability of about $2,000 to Austin businesses. Once established in the community, Miller refused to live by the common-stock order. He remembered reaching an agreement with the Wightites to “let them have the use of my wagons, and other property, and money to a small amount, amounting in all to eight hundred and sixty dollars, and putting our labor with theirs until such time as I could make it convenient to leave them and go by myself.” Miller later denied agreeing to the Zodiac economic order. This is flatly contradicted by his stepson William Leyland, whose journal carries a statement that Miller earlier had promised to live by the rules of Zodiac’s economy.10

Again unable to lead yet unwilling to follow, Miller left Zodiac in the summer of 1848.11 Wight said that Miller and any who left with him would “go out empty.” Hard feelings infected the community. Miller’s stepson, William Leyland, wrote that some of those who left Zodiac were spreading “false stories.” The defections destroyed marriages and split families. John Hawley’s wife left him. Some of Miller’s own family sided with Wight against their patriarchal head, including his eldest son, John F. Miller, son-in-law to Wight. So did every family member of Miller’s plural wife, Sophia Wallace Leyland

11. This description of Miller’s attitude began with Orson Hyde, To The Saints Scattered Abroad—Greeting: Beloved Brethren And Friends (photocopy of pamphlet, 1 August 1848), RLDS archives. Compare with the Orson Hyde leaflet, “To The Saints Scattered Abroad,” Journal History of the Church 69:1 August 1848.
Miller. William Leyland and his three sisters moved into the Wight household, and their mother sought sanctuary in the home of Pierce Hawley, where she died that November.12

Feelings in Zodiac remained bitter toward Miller. William Leyland hated Miller for the poor treatment he and his mother had received since she became Miller’s plural wife in Nauvoo. After her death, Wight eventually adopted William and cared for his three sisters. One of the Leylands’ adopted brothers, Levi Lamoni Wight, wrote that he did not think “their was ever a meaner man to profess religion” than Miller.13 Miller, feeling abused, counseled the Wightites about their errors, in his opinion, on adoption, lineage, and marriage. Wight had trouble being counseled by Miller. The bishop wrote in his memoirs that “Lyman would, by innuendoes, allude to the facts that I had in a friendly way advised them to abstain from. I plainly saw the handwriting on the wall, and full discovered that the war was on.” A village consensus formed, and Miller was encouraged to leave.14

The former bishop did not thrive after moving to Austin. He hired several Germans freighters with a promise to pay them in corn, then he hired out to build a millrace in order to pay those who moved him and his family. Miller’s confused writings assert Wight sent assassins to kill him as well as a wagon and some mules to help him finish the millrace. The owner of the millrace, having suffered damages because Miller could not finish the work on time, attached the wagon and mules but not the assassins. Miller next made an unsuccessful attempt to farm several miles north of Austin. In the spring of 1849, Lyman Wight sent Orange Wight and John Miller to Austin to meet with the bishop. They encouraged him to return to Zodiac, with the inducement of a farm some miles from Zodiac (probably the Grape Creek acres) on half-shares, the assistance of teams and provisions,

13. Note, however, in the Joseph Fielding journal, Spring 1847, Book 5:126, LDS archives, that Joseph Fielding, a fellow member of the Fifty with Miller and a fervent follower of Young, wrote in his diary that “he was dear to me in the office he held, he was indeed a fine man, and I hope to see him again in our midst.”
14. Miller, Correspondence of Bishop George Miller, 41–43.
and the direction of the Grape Creek branch of the church. Miller agreed, and returned to Gillespie County in February 1849.\textsuperscript{15}

Zodiac’s prosperity, despite George Miller and his troubled life, continued throughout 1849. Terry Jordan, in \textit{German Seed in Texas Soil}, mentions briefly the roles of freighting and the military in the economic development of Gillespie County. On land leased from John Twohig, on the west bank of Barron’s Creek, about two miles southeast of Fredericksburg and two miles west of Zodiac, the first Army post was constructed. The primary purpose was to enforce treaties with the Comanche and other tribes, and it quickly became an economic windfall for the two villages. Referred to at first as “the Camp near Fredericksburg,” then Camp Houston, it was renamed on 10 March 1849 in honor of Major Martin Scott, a battle casualty of the Mexican War. The compliment of troops during the next five years fluctuated from a few squads to two companies. The Census of 1850 enumerated Company K, 8th Infantry, at the post. A military inspection in August 1853 revealed that the fort had twenty-one buildings, including an officer quarters, enlisted barracks, structures for munitions and ordinance supplies, livestock, maintenance, the quartermaster, and medical facilities. The War Department ordered the closure of the fort on 29 December 1853.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite the growing commerce of the frontier village, George Miller soon became unhappy again, and started investigating the claims of James Strang to Mormon leadership. Writing to Strang in Michigan on 12 June 1849, Miller informed the Great Lake prophet of his history. He included the Wisconsin lumber company and its mission to Texas, his priesthood callings in the church, and how the murder of Joseph Smith changed matters. Miller concluded that, after arguing with Brigham Young, he had arrived in Texas in search of his son, and there he still resided, “an isolated, frail being.”


Along with his complaints to Strang, Miller was once again sowing unrest among the Wightites. Richard Hewitt, who had traveled to Texas with Miller, apparently had been receiving instruction from Miller on polygamy. Miller, a polygamist himself and still angry about Wight’s interference with his plural family, attacked not the principle itself but rather how Wight and other leaders, such as Brigham Young, were mismanaging it. Miller had told Hewitt that polygamous “whoring would send them all to hell,” again indicating his ability to hold a grudge while hypocritically complaining about others’ similar marriage practices. Hewitt, confused about the practice, penciled an addendum on Miller’s letter inquiring about Strang’s mind on the matter. Strang may have indicated some hope to Miller that he could continue his marriage practices, for he took his own first plural wife on 13 July 1849, less than a month after Miller wrote to him. Strang’s answer apparently pleased Miller, for he, according to RLDS historian Heman Hale Smith, “went to Strang, on Beaver Island, Lake Michigan.” Hewitt, however, did not follow Miller into the Strangite camp.17

Strang published Miller’s letter of June 1849, but not the Hewitt addendum, in his newspaper, and he wrote that October to invite Miller and his family to Michigan. Miller would later write that prophetic visions from Joseph Smith Jr. confirmed his correspondence with Strang. Having saved about $500, and obtaining animals and wagons, Miller prepared to leave. Never doubting his own anointings

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17. Miller, Correspondence of Bishop George Miller, 45; George Miller to James J. Strang, 12 June 1849, with addendum by Richard Hewitt, quoted in H. H. Smith, “George Miller,” 230, 231, 232. See also John Quist, “Polygamy Among James Strang and His Followers,” John Whitmer Historical Association Journal 9 (1989): 34. The Quist article, interesting and informative concerning Strangite polygamy, has a couple of flaws and should be handled accordingly. Quist attributes Hewitt’s remark on “whoring” to Miller, when it is Hewitt who is quoting Miller; the quote was directed to all Mormon congregations that practiced polygamy rather than just Wight’s group. Sarah Wallace Leyland Miller did not leave with her husband in October 1849, not because she refused to do so, but because she had no choice. She died the previous year. See also photocopies of pen-written extracts of the Voree (WI) Record, 1, 2 “1 and 2”, the Strangite church official record in the hand of Wingfield Watson, president and high priest of the Strangite church (a photocopy of a hand-copied set of notes by Van Dyke Jr., 1909), LDS archives.
and callings, Wight, according to H. H. Smith, encouraged Miller’s departure from Zodiac. He even assisted Jarvis G. Miner and his “large family of children who had eaten much more than they had earned” to go with Miller. Miller recalled that Wight told him that Miner and his brood had cost him and the village hundreds of dollars, “and he could not, consistent with the rights of the company, give him anything; . . . but if I would haul him away, that he would add a yoke or two of oxen to my outfit.”

Only a few people left Zodiac with Miller. Again, several members of his family did not support him; William Leyland and John F. Miller remained at Zodiac with Wight. Joining Strang in September 1850, Miller soon became a prominent figure in the Strangite church, assisting its reorganization the next spring and summer. He continued in polygamy, sealing others in Strangite-Mormon ceremonies for time and eternity. In August 1855, Miller promised the readership of the *Voree (WI) Northern Islander* that he would complete in the future “my narrative, as subsequent events are fraught with some of the most thrilling incidents of my life.” It was another promise he failed to keep. He died the following year while preparing for a trip to California.

Miller’s departure did not hinder the growing affluence of the Mormons. The sawmill cooperative had been supplying most, if not all, of the lumber and shingles for construction at Fort Martin Scott. The only other regional mills at the time were the old Wightite site at Sycamore Springs, and one other mill constructed by Wight’s people for a third party near Austin. Those two were located more than sixty miles from the fort over poor frontier roads. Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Staniford, post commander from December 1849 to October 1852, approved an “Estimates of Materials and Labor Requiring to Complete the Post of Fort Martin Scott” for finishing five buildings—an officer’s quarters, a guard house, band quarters, a hospital, and a magazine. The estimated cost of construction totaled

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18. H. H. Smith, “The Lyman Wight Colony in Texas,” 20; Miller, *Correspondence of Bishop George Miller*, 44.

19. V. Smith, “Two Widows of the Brick Row,” 209; Miller, *Correspondence of Bishop George Miller*, 48, 50; *Voree (WI) Record*, 1, 2 “1 and 2”. For further information on Miller’s journey to Michigan, see Miller, *Correspondence of Bishop George Miller*, 44–50.
$5,882.88. The Zodiac mill was the only place where the 32,234 board feet of lumber and the 65,000 shingles, estimated at $2,588.38, forty-four percent of the cost of reconstruction, could be obtained. The Mormons and Germans would have competed in providing labor, which included a master workman and twenty mechanics for two and a half months at a projected labor outlay of $2,437.50, another forty percent of construction expenditures. The mill undoubtedly supplied the post’s lumber needs throughout its existence. In 1853, an inspection report recorded that more than 21,000 feet of lumber were still stored at the post. The same report also noted that the “buildings . . . are of a better description than at most of the posts in Texas.”

The anticipated arrival of another company of troops in 1851, coupled with the construction of the new post at Fort Mason, promised the best market ever for the agricultural produce of the area. Terry Jordan has noted that the settlers brought “corn, hay, cured meat, vegetables, and butter” to the fort “to sell for cash or to barter for sugar and coffee.” The millers at Zodiac cashed in, supplying 2,000 bushels of corn at $1.10 per bushel. The importance of the post’s requirements for subsistence, maintenance, and construction cannot be overestimated in evaluating the trade and industry development of antebellum Gillespie County.

The California gold rush of 1849 created other opportunities in the freighting and wagon-building industries for Wightites and Germans alike. Fort Martin Scott was a starting point for many wagon trains, and Orange L. Wight remembered they earned money by outfitting immigrant outfits destined for California. The Upper Emigrant Road, initially routed to Fredericksburg from San Antonio, thus passing Zodiac to the west and permitting travelers to access Fredericksburg for supplies, had been redrawn in 1848 to accommodate the economic growth of the Wightite community. The new route moved on an axis from San Antonio to New Braunfels to Zodiac to Fredericksburg—further spurring the Mormons’ freighting

### Table 6
The Products of Industry Schedule, Census of 1850, Gillespie County, Texas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Type of Operation</th>
<th>Capital Value</th>
<th>Value of Gross Product</th>
<th>Source of Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lyman Wight &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Sawmill</td>
<td>$2,125</td>
<td>$4,250</td>
<td>Flutter-type waterwheel &amp; saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Goodale &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Grist mill</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
<td>1,700 bushels</td>
<td>Waterwheel &amp; mill stones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fredrick Kuhney</td>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>$550</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
<td>Hand power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Schmidtzensky</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>$750</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
<td>Hand power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick. S. Mosel</td>
<td>Wheelwright</td>
<td>$475</td>
<td>$1,800</td>
<td>Hand power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred A. Winkel</td>
<td>Turner and cabinet maker</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$1,700</td>
<td>Hand power</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7
The Agriculture Production Schedule, Census of 1850, Gillespie County, Texas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total in County</th>
<th>Wightite Number/Value (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unimproved acres</td>
<td>2217</td>
<td>1500 (67.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved acres</td>
<td>8407</td>
<td>5100 (60.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash value of farms</td>
<td>$23,570</td>
<td>$9,800 (41.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of farming implements and machinery</td>
<td>$3,978</td>
<td>$495 (13.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of livestock</td>
<td>$10,873</td>
<td>$4,176 (38.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of animals slaughtered</td>
<td>$1470</td>
<td>$590 (40.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and wagon-construction industry. The census of 1850 noted that Zodiac, besides the three millwrights and a miller, included eight carpenters, five freighters (waggoneers), and two wagon makers.\textsuperscript{22}

Mormon communitarianism in Texas reached its zenith during the census year of 1850. The high waters that spring had washed away the dam,\textsuperscript{23} but the Mormons rebuilt it. The suggestions by Sarah Curtis that the Germans had developed a vibrant and dominant regional economy by 1850\textsuperscript{24} are contradicted by the census of 1850. The inhabitants of Zodiac, with less than twenty percent of the population, overwhelmingly dictated the county’s industry, agriculture, and commercial life. Three schedules from the census clearly reveal that the Mormons of Zodiac were not only prosperous but the leading settlers in the Hill Country as well. Table 6, opposite, based on the Products of Industry Schedule for Gillespie County, reveals the common-stock cooperatives possessed the only mechanical means of production west of Austin, and monopolized regional lumber manufacturing and grist milling. The hand-powered activities of the craftsman at Fredericksburg certainly reflect attributes of industriousness and efficiency, but not the substantial German recovery stated by Curtis.\textsuperscript{25}

The Social Statistics Schedule is another indicator of Mormon economic dominance in the Texas Hill Country. It includes the number of schools, teachers, and students, and per capita worth in terms of church property. Gillespie County had four schools, two of them


\textsuperscript{23} L. L. Wight, \textit{Reminiscences}, 18.

\textsuperscript{24} Curtis, “A History of Gillespie County,” 28, 36–37, 42, 71–72; population schedule, census of 1850, Gillespie County. The census of 1850 enumerates only slightly more than 160 Mormons living in the community of Zodiac in September. Some families have not been enumerated, such as those of Jonas Killmer, Levi Kimball, and Joel Simonds Miles; they may have been operating the church’s cooperative farm on Grape Creek after George Miller departed for Michigan.

\textsuperscript{25} Products of industry schedule, census of 1850, Gillespie County.
at the “Latter Day Saints Community.” The Wightites employed two of the county’s six teachers, and had forty of the 137 pupils. Church property was enumerated as follows: 400 Roman Catholics at $1.25 per capita; 800 Protestant Germans at $0.63 per capita; 150 Methodist Episcopal at $0.67 per capita; and 150 Latter Day Saints at an overwhelming $10.00 per capita worth of church property. The large difference in the proportion of Mormon religious property wealth can be partially accounted for in that much of the Wightite wealth was invested in the large, two-story building at Zodiac. This functioned as a multipurpose center—school, storehouse, church, and temple.\textsuperscript{26}

The Agriculture Production Schedule for Gillespie County notes the dominance of the Mormon common-stock companies in farming and livestock. Of the forty-one farms in Gillespie County, Lyman Wight & Co. owned three. Table 7 (page 100) reveals the totals, values, and percentages of the acres, machinery, and animals possessed by the religionists compared to their neighbors. These farms contained more than sixty percent of the improved as well as the unimproved acres in the county. They had almost forty percent of the value of the livestock and more than forty percent of the cash value invested in the farms and the animals slaughtered for food. Only in farming machinery and equipment did the cooperatives dip slightly below the county’s percentile average per capita. Additionally, the cooperatives owned almost a fourth of the horses, asses, and mules in the county; more than thirty percent of the swine raised and the Indian corn grown; more than forty percent of the milch cows, working oxen, and other cattle; and more than seventy percent of the sheep, wool production, and bushels of barley. Lyman Wight’s folks grew all of the wheat and produced all of the honey and beeswax in the county. Their farms, however, failed to produce any of the county’s harvest of 169 bushels of peas and beans, 20 pounds of tobacco, and 260 pounds of cheese. The Mormons did grow 20 of the 111 tons of hay.\textsuperscript{27}

Not all observers, however, were impressed with either the Mormons or the Germans. Ebenezer Swift, the fort’s assistant surgeon who hailed from Massachusetts, recorded that:

\textsuperscript{26} Social statistics schedule, census of 1850, Gillespie County.
\textsuperscript{27} Agricultural production schedule, census of 1850, Gillespie County.
About two miles from us on opposite sides are the towns of Fredericksburg and Zodiac. The former contains 1000 the latter 200 inhabitants. . . . The former is Dutch; the latter Mormon; the former the more honest; the other the more thrifty, both poor, very poor. They enjoy none of the luxuries of life save filth and indolence, and have but few of what are called necessaries. They furnish the garrison partially with butter, eggs, and vegetables and get drunk with they [sic] soldiers. They chiefly belong to the lowest grade of society and compose the last link of humanity.

Swift’s own living and working conditions may have contributed to his feelings about Gillespie County. He lived, according to Coker and Humphrey, “in a tent without a flap,” leaving him to the mercy of the elements, and found his operating ward situated under “a tarpaulin-covered log building without proper floors or windows.”

John Bartlett’s first-hand observations contradict Swift’s opinion. Success attended the community that summer, despite another large storm in July that washed out the mill again, flooded the community, and immersed some of the crops. The colonists repaired the mill quickly. Almost 5,000 bushels of corn were ground in 1850, at a gross value of $4,500. The net profit that summer alone came to $600, a goodly sum for frontier Texas at that time. John Bartlett, writing a travelogue on the new Southwest, visited Lyman Wight & Co. in November. He and his companions discovered the colony, “which glories in the name of Zodiac,” to be “under the especial care of Elder Wight, as designated by the faithful, though among the more worldly sinners he bore the appellation of ‘Colonel.’” The “signs of prosperity,” Bartlett thought, were “an example of industry and thrift which” other Texans “might advantageously imitate.” Zodiac had “well built houses, perfect fences, and tidy door-yards, [and] gave the place a home-like air, such as we had not before seen in Texas.” Bartlett and friends took dinner with Wight and considered the fee of three dollars for dinner and corn for a dozen horses “a modest demand,” which, in Bartlett’s opinion, placed the prices “between Victoria and Indianola” in poor comparison. He may have been aware that Wight exaggerated when stating that “he was the

first settler in the valley of the Piedernales [sic], and for many miles around.” Colonel Wight, as always, remained concerned with economic matters. He told Bartlett that “his crop of corn this year would amount to seven thousand bushels, for which he expected to realize one dollar and twenty-five cents per bushel.” Lyman Wight & Co. further prospered when Bartlett rented a team and wagon, so that he and his friends could transport the needed corn to Fredericksburg for his horses.29

Lyman Wight and his frontier Mormons, by the end of 1850, had created an oasis of prosperity in two and a half years on the western edge of the Texas borderlands. Despite their aloofness, their industriousness helped them become the leading millers and commercial agents of the region. In their community was erected the multi-purpose, water-powered mill that, along with the cooperative farms, anchored their prosperity. They served the needs of the locals, the military, and those plying the western immigrant trail. Commentators as different as George Miller and John Bartlett believed that the community was on the verge of being very successful. The members of Zodiac had work, and their children had school. The Wightites survived on the frontier, and they were beginning to prosper.

29. Texas Historical Records Survey, Inventory of the County Archives, No. 86, Gillespie County (Fredricksburg) (San Antonio: Texas Historical Records Survey, 1941); Jackson, Mills of Yesteryear, 44; John Russell Bartlett, Personal Narrative of Exploration and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora, and Chihuahua (Chicago: Rio Grande Press, 1965; reprint of 1854 edition), 58, 59.
Family of George Hay and Minear Hay: back row, standing, left to right, Virginia Hay Curry; John Curry holding their child; Mary Hay; John Hay; husband of Georgiana Hay; Georgiana Hay; wife of Willie Hay; front row, seated, left to right, George Hay; Virginia Minear Hay; Ora and Ola, twin daughters; Willie Hay standing between them; Lydia Paklehymen Minear Curtis; Willie Hay
Orange L. Wight Family

Mill on Hamilton Creek
John and Sylvia Hawley (1899) 50th anniversary photo