Polygamy on the Pedernales

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Cutting the Wild Ram from the Flock

He had his bark afloat already rigged with the rudder fixed, and he meant to run it into heaven and would if [the Twelve] did not run their big Steam Boat in his way.

—Lyman Wight

While Zodiac grew in prominence, and Colonel Wight in stature, among the Texans, Brigham Young forged a consensus among the leadership to reorganize the First Presidency, with himself as Joseph Smith Jr.’s successor. This process placed the Wightite flock beyond the fold of Utah Mormonism. Elder Orson Hyde,1 on 7 October 1860, remembered that it was during February 1848 that “the Twelve” gathered and “the voice of God” proclaimed that Young should lead His church. Anecdotally, the apostle said many people “came running together where we were, and asked us what was the matter. They said that their houses shook, and the ground trembled, and they did not know but that there was

1. Orson Hyde, a longtime LDS apostle, was born in Oxford, New Haven County, Connecticut, the son of Nathan Hyde and Sally Thorpe. Baptized in September 1831 by Sidney Rigdon, he was later ordained an LDS apostle in 1835. Hyde attacked Rigdon later that year, was temporarily disfellowshipped, and, upon repentance, reinstated to the Twelve. Hyde, along with apostles George A. Smith and Ezra Taft Benson, presided at Winter Quarters from 1847 to 1850. Hyde edited the Frontier Guardian at nearby Kanesville, Iowa. See Jenson, LDS Biographical Encyclopedia, 1:80, and Lyndon W. Cook, The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith: A Historical and Biographical Commentary of the Doctrine and Covenants, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 109.
an earthquake. We told them that there was nothing the matter—not to be alarmed; the Lord was only whispering to us a little, and that he was probably not very far off.” Young described the incident as a “power [that] came upon us, a shock that alarmed the neighborhood. . . . Bro. Pratt had the spirit of God like the rest of us all . . . & believed” the divine will for Young to lead the LDS Church.³

The underlying theme of Hyde’s address and Young’s remarks, along with the stressing of God’s approval given in voice and thunder, suggests to the believer the unity and subordination of the Twelve to divine will. Neither Hyde nor Young, however, informed their audiences that the decision-making process in achieving apostolic consensus took several months. During his return from the Great Salt Lake Valley, Young believed “the tappings of the Spirit” led him to think the “Church ought to be now organized.” He approached his brother, Joseph Young, a presiding president of the Seventy, as well as Wilford Woodruff, a member of the Twelve, about the matter. Joseph Young, startled but receptive, wrote later that his brother “has suggested a new thought to me that the Church has the authority and can make a Presidency.” Apostle Woodruff believed that a revelation would be necessary for the Twelve to organize a new First Presidency.⁴

Young could count on Willard Richards, his first cousin; Heber C. Kimball and Amasa M. Lyman, relatives by polygamous relations; and Ezra Taft Benson, the newest apostle and dependent on Young for his promotion. This weakened the core group of five apostles who could have resisted the move: George A. Smith, Wilford Woodruff, John Taylor, Parley P. Pratt, and Orson Pratt. With John Taylor and Parley P. Pratt in charge in Salt Lake Valley, Young set out to win over Smith, Woodruff, and Orson Pratt to the idea that the time for a new First Presidency had arrived. Richard Bennett has succinctly recorded

3. Minutes of meetings, 4 April 1860, LDS archives.
4. Leonard J. Arrington and Ronald K. Esplin, *The Role of the Council of the Twelve During Brigham Young’s Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, Task Papers in LDS History No. 31 (Salt Lake City: Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1979); Wilford Woodruff diary, 12 October 1847, LDS archives; minutes of a meeting of the Twelve and Seventy, 30 November 1847, LDS archives.
the development of consensus. Wilford Woodruff’s diary entries from 15 November to 5 December 1847 have revealed that more than two weeks and several meeting were required to forge an apostolic agreement. Orson Pratt believed that a quorum of the Twelve (at least seven apostles) would be needed. Willard Richards, Young’s cousin, tellingly answered that Mormonism was led by a ‘theo-democracy,’ or rather, that God’s will, not popular majority rule, directed the church. Young worked on Pratt. He reminded him that Joseph Smith Jr. and Oliver Cowdery first had become apostles, then Smith became church president as the senior apostle. With Smith dead and Cowdery in apostasy, then he, Young, the senior apostle, should become President. Pratt bowed before the reasoning of Young. After five hours of fervent discussion on 5 December 1847, the new First Presidency was unanimously approved by the apostles assembled—Young as president of the church, with Kimball and Richards as his counselors. On 27 December 1847, Orson Pratt presented the motion, without prior notice, to the church membership. Quinn writes in *The Mormon Hierarchy* that the leadership ignored the “promise the apostles made in September 1844: ‘when any alteration in the presidency shall be required, seasonable notice will be given.’” He also points out that the church members, driven from Nauvoo and creating stable communities at Winter Quarters and Salt Lake City, had more important concerns than unfulfilled promises or internal conflicts. A new First Presidency undoubtedly benefited both individual members and the church body. First, a Young presidency established continuity to Joseph Smith, dead more than three years. Two, an organized First Presidency, autonomous and supreme to the Twelve, legitimized Young’s position as leader of the principal sect of Mormons. Third, President Young governed as the singular head of the LDS church and its membership. And, fourth, during this tumultuous era in Mormon history, the majority of believers again had one prophet, a leader in whom they believed, to guide their future in the wild unknowns of the American West.

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5. Bennett, *Mormons at The Missouri*, 210; Wilford Woodruff diary, 15 November 1847, 16 November 1847, 30 November 1847, and 5 December 1847.
In the meantime, George Miller further inflamed the fires at Zodiac against Brigham Young in early 1848. Already antagonistic toward the apostolic presidency generally and Brigham Young particularly, Miller urged Wight to write and publish a pamphlet titled *An Address*, attacking the authority of Young and the Twelve to order him to Salt Lake City. Wight argued for his independence from the Twelve, stating that only Joseph Smith Jr. or the president of the Fifty, John Smith, had religious power over him. Wight believed he had as much right to order the other eleven of his brethren to Texas as they did to call him to the Rocky Mountains. His mission from Joseph Smith, “who holds the keys of the Kingdom of the Almighty God,” superseded any instructions from the Twelve or the Fifty. Wight directly criticized Young and his apostolic supporters for wanting “to outstrip their predecessors,” and of being “consummately ignorant of all things pertaining to Time and Eternity.”

Wight believed the Twelve had not the power to replace him with a “long eared Jack Ass to fill a place which has never been vacated.” He then gifted the Twelve with “long ears and slanderous tongues,” once again asserting neither the Twelve nor the Fifty could remove him from his position. Wight concluded by condemning the Salt Lake leadership for oppressing “the poor, and the hireling in his wages.” The principle of tithing, in Wight’s opinion, permitted the rich to “increase in opulence by . . . wringing from the hands of the peasant his hard earnings.” Wight argued that Zodiac’s common-stock order, not Salt Lake’s tithing, was the proper road to salvation. He concluded firmly that economic communalism “was followed in the days of the Nephites, and in the days of Peter and John; and also in the days of Lyman, who feels himself abundantly able, through the grace of God,” and “that no other process of action will save men on the earth.”

Probably because of Orson Hyde’s anger at *An Address*, Peter Haws and Lucien Woodworth set out, at the apostle’s command,

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7. L. Wight, *An Address*, 16, 18–21, 23, 26. John Hawley, forty years later, noted that he had been “sent out empty” from the Wightite community in 1853.
8. Bennett, *Mormons at The Missouri*, 210, noted that Orson Hyde, “as President of the Church east of the Rocky Mountains” under the direction of Young and the remainder of the Twelve, presided over Winter Quarters and Council Bluffs at this time and for some years to come.
to Winter Quarters in the fall of 1848 to talk to their old friend and former companion. They had shared much history with Wight: membership in the Fifty, the experiences of the Wisconsin mills, the early days of organizing the Texas mission. The fact that they were sent indicated the Iowa church leaders desired to bargain with Wight with some sensitivity. Haws and Woodworth arrived in Zodiac after August 1848, because of their comments that Bishop Miller had left the community for good. They had little success. George A. Smith, on 31 October 1848, wrote to Parley P. Pratt that the messengers had little luck with the recalcitrant Wight, castigating him for being “drunk all the time they had been there.”

Orson Hyde, more than a year later, as editor of the Kanesville (IA) Frontier Guardian, opined that the Wight colony was doomed to failure because “poor Lyman can’t keep sober long enough to get on ‘the perfect right track.’” Haws and Woodworth were supposedly “disgusted with Lyman’s drunkenness and corruption.” His followers were spending nearly $15.00 weekly for liquor of the “choicest quality, costing about a dollar and a half a bottle,” to support Wight’s drinking. The charges are not substantiated by contemporary sources from Zodiac. One embedded reason for Hyde’s ire—patrilineal versus apostolic authority—did surface toward the end of the column, when Pratt fumed that William Smith and Lyman Wight had been exchanging letters.

The publication of An Address ended Young’s four-year policy of reconciliation toward Wight. The pamphlet resulted in his removal.

10. “Lyman Wight,” Frontier Guardian (Kanesville, IA), 14 November 1849, 2. Quinn, The Mormon Hierarchy, 417n71. Historians such as Quinn who follow the dating based on Heman Hale Smith’s “The Lyman Wight Colony in Texas” err in dating the visit of Haws and Woodworth. William Leyland’s journal remarks only that “two men from Brigham Young’s head quarters in Council Bluffs arrived in Zodiac” on 31 December 1848. Actually, the visit of Haws and Woodworth took place in the late summer or early August of 1848, as indicated by George A. Smith’s letter. Preston Thomas and William Martindale were the two unidentified messengers referred to by William Leyland. Smith’s claim for Wight’s drunkenness could only have come from Haws and Woodworth, for Thomas was surprised at Wight’s sobriety during his visit.
from the Twelve and loss of church membership. His opponents among the Twelve finally had the opportunity to drive him from the fold. Not only was he in communication with avowed enemies (such as William Smith), Wightite and Strangite missionaries were moving among the Mormons along the Missouri River and south. Wight’s missionaries in the Winter Quarters area argued that the Twelve could not discipline him, because Joseph Smith Jr. had sanctioned the mission to Texas. The Iowa leaders shuddered at the thought of any Mormons leaving with “Gone To Texas” written in charcoal on the doors of their huts. George A. Smith and Ezra Taft Benson described Wightism to Brigham Young as “the Texas Epidemic.”

Orson Hyde, as presiding authority at Council Bluffs, published an answer to Wightite defiance in To The Saints Scattered Abroad. George Miller was the inspiration, not the Lord, wrote Hyde, for Wight’s writing. An Address could not be “received with respect and cordiality” by Mormons. Wight, rather, should have written privately to the Twelve, and he should not, thundered Pratt, have referred to the other apostles as long-eared jackasses. Miller came in for further castigation, as Hyde rebuked Miller for leaving the church body rather than submitting to his ecclesiastical masters. Hyde next attacked Wight’s authority and his common-stock economy, letting all Mormons know that he had the same “power and authority that Bro. Wight” had, and warned Wight that he “is not yet so high that the voice of the Council [of the Twelve] cannot reach him and bring him down, and even put another in his place if they deem it necessary.” The heart’s desire of Lyman Wight, Hyde tellingly hit, was that he wanted a work exclusive of the Twelve, and Hyde predicted Wight’s single-mindedness would lead to his downfall. Joseph Smith’s mission to Lyman Wight, instead of the glorious purpose for which Wight always lauded it, instead was to reveal Wight’s fallibility, comparing him to King Saul, a curse on Israel. Hyde argued: “It is said not to be the nature of ‘the wild ram of the mountains’ to herd in the domestic fold, and if it does not yet appear that Joseph Smith gave to Lyman Wight his great mission with a similar motive to that with which the Lord gave a soul [meaning king] to Israel, I will confess my

11. George A. Smith to Brigham Young, 7 October 1846, Brigham Young Papers; Bennett, Mormons at the Missouri, 226.
mistake.” Speaking for his fellow Twelve, Hyde believed that they were “not at war with Bro. Wight’s mission, but,” instead, “his boasting and defying spirit.” He concluded with the ringing affirmation that all authority was invested in the First Presidency and the Twelve, who would inform the members of any authorized changes in church policy pertaining to immigration and gathering.\textsuperscript{12}

John E. Page, a former LDS apostle and at that time a prominent member of James Strang’s church at Beaver Island, Michigan, found Wight’s \textit{An Address} interesting and amusing. Having shared apostolic and evangelical duties at one time or another with most of the Twelve, including Young, Wight, and Hyde, Page knew how Wight’s epistle would affect certain apostolic egos. Page denigrated “the idea that is ignorantly held out by” Wight and others “that Joseph, the prophet’s son, will yet come up and take his father’s original place in the church, as the prophet to the church.” Page noted, however, that if he did not already believe that Strang was Joseph Smith Jr.’s successor, he would join Wight’s Texas common-stock colony rather than Young’s on Utah’s salt flats, because “I know that Lyman is neither proud nor lazy, and is content to enjoy an even slice with his friends.” Page believed Wight superior to Young, and would “choose Lyman for my captain and leader, for Lyman ‘as the saying is’ has a pluck as big as an ox, and is willing to live, fare and die on an equal footing with his friends.” If “the destiny of our country,” concluded Page, was “wielded by such men as Lyman Wight, these United States might become an earthly paradise, instead, as it is now, a region of the most accursed oppression.”\textsuperscript{13}

Page’s letter on “Lymanism” answered not only \textit{An Address}, but also an earlier letter from Orange Lysander Wight to President Strang of 22 August 1848. Writing from Mount Sterling, Illinois, the younger Wight, doing his father’s work among the Mormons of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, had traveled to Illinois by way of New Orleans. He visited various branches of the church, praising Zodiac as a gathering place. The younger Wight informed Strang that

\textsuperscript{12} Hyde, \textit{To The Saints Scattered Abroad}. Compare with the Orson Hyde leaflet, “To The Saints Scattered Abroad,” Journal History of the Church 69:1 August 1848.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Gospel Herald} (Voree, WI), 31 August 1848, 106, 107.
he would be leading a group to Texas the following year. Revealing an ironic faculty with words, he described that some were leaning towards Strangism, some toward Wightism, and others “to the salt land spoken of in Jeremiah xvii. 5, 6,” an obvious innuendo at Utah Mormonism, an echo of which Page repeated in his own article. The younger Wight preached the doctrine of his father, that is, succession of the church should pass to Joseph Smith Jr.’s posterity, and the common-stock principle should be the church’s economic order.\textsuperscript{14}

Strang had been interested in Lyman Wight as early as Mormon Coulee. He questioned Wight’s religious authority and mission to Texas in his newspaper. He did not disagree with the common-stock economy, but devoted several tightly knit pages of denial that the Smith sons had any right to succeed their father. He, Strang, had been set apart by Joseph Smith Jr. as his successor for Mormonism. Strang’s \textit{Voree (WI) Gospel Herald} printed another piece on 9 November 1848 that the Texas Mormons, subservient to Wight’s pretended prophecy, were building a “New Jerusalem” on the Pedernales, a land more suitable for grain cultivation and mining adventures.\textsuperscript{15}

John Hawley and Joel Simonds Miles had some success along the Missouri River and in Michigan. A few converted and were brought to Zodiac. The fruits of their labor proved tainted, however, for apostasy struck Zodiac, and Hawley’s converts “all left with the breakup crowd” of 1849.\textsuperscript{16} Lyman Wight continued to send out more missionaries to bring converts to the New Jerusalem on the Pedernales. Miles and Hawley, after their return to the Texas Hill Country, were sent on another mission, this time to the piney woods of East Texas. This distinct regional entity of 22,000,000 acres, ninety percent of it covered by a forest the size of Indiana, had little in community and industrial development but much in isolation and religious parochialism. The people, insular by custom and suspicious by nature, were a mixture of small plantation owners, millers, river men, stockmen,

\textsuperscript{14} Orange L. Wight to Pres. Strang, 22 August 1848, \textit{Gospel Herald}, 21 September 1848, 127.


trappers, and fishermen. Hawley and Miles wandered into this domain of evangelical, frontier Protestantism, preaching Mormonism’s gospel of restoration. They converted a man named Henry Baye, who had been hiding in the canebrake from his pursuers. Detected by his enemies, Baye and Miles escaped, while the pursuers captured Hawley. In apparent need of entertainment, the captors ordered Hawley to preach. He did so, was released, and ordered to leave the country. Hawley believed his Mormonism, not his preaching prowess, was the reason the East Texans cut off his mission. The two Wightites reunited, however, and continued to preach for a while longer before returning to Zodiac.

A spirit of disagreement came between the two missionaries. A female convert named Garberry had been bothered by evil spirits. The two young missionaries decided on a contest of prophecy and prayer to decide the issue. Each man had a vision. Hawley saw “a large tree just 60 feet high and on one side there was a large snake covering half the tree and the other side was covered with small ones. When I saw this I turned to Joel and he turned to me at the same time. I told him what I saw and he said just as he turned from me he saw a bedstead sitting before him with a good bed upon it but no one on it.” Neither quite knew what to make of their respective visions, so, deciding it was time to return to the Hill Country, they journeyed home to Zodiac.18

Texans were fair game for Mormon missionaries of all stripes. Utahns William Martindale and Homer Duncan faced some difficulties. Martindale, while “hunting and fishing for Israel” in Panola County in 1854 and 1855, was “deluged in protracted camp and revival meetings” railing against the Mormons. He wrote, “it seemed as if the devil well knew and had appraised his emissaries of the approach of the Elders and had fortified itself in with the usual material popularity and revivals.” In 1856, Duncan wrote that some Texans wanted to


mob the missionaries because of polygamy. He believed the outcry hypocritical, for the ministers derided polygamy “while every negro quarter is filled with blue-eyed children.” The missionaries had to hotfoot it for the county borders. Martindale was urging his few converts to flee East Texas, even if it was only to Kansas. He feared that “it seems to me this country is ripe for destruction, and it certainly will take fire to purify it from the corruption that is upon it.”

In 1848, Wight had other difficulties besides missionary work. Hyde’s rebuttal to Wight’s An Address reached Zodiac, and Wight knew his days as an LDS leader were over. A penultimate note concerning Wight’s membership was sounded during the Pottawatamie (Iowa) High Council conference that October. Apostle George A. Smith read certain portions of Wight’s pamphlet to local high priests and general authorities, concluding it was “a direct insult to this quorum of the twelve.” Robert Campbell read Orson Hyde’s rebuttal to Wight’s work. Wight’s name was submitted to the conference as an apostle, and was opposed by high councilors William Snow and Henry W. Miller, and apostles George A. Smith and Ezra Taft Benson.

George A. Smith believed Wight was not following Joseph Smith’s directions about the Texas mission and the role of the Fifty. George Smith said he loved Wight, describing him as “an old Lyon” in defense of Mormonism, but he believed Wight was wrongly relying on George Miller, and should not appeal to the Fifty. The Fifty, Smith believed, was responsible for the temporal affairs of the church, not its spiritual needs. Two other general authorities were harsher than Smith. President of the Seventy Joseph Young equated Wight’s actions with those of Sydney Rigdon, William Smith, and James J. Strang, all pretenders to LDS leadership. Apostle Ezra Taft Benson argued that the church had carried Wight long enough, and now “it is our business to bring him to a crisis.” The conference concluded that Wight was “directly at variance with the spirit and design of the mission given him by Joseph Smith.” An Address threatened the

19. William Martindale to Geo. A. Smith, 10 September 1856, LDS archives; Homer Duncan, Deseret News (Salt Lake City), 2 April 1856, quoted in Journal History of the Church, 119:2 April 1856, 4. Not all missionary labors were hazardous. For instance, Elder John Ostler wrote in May 1856 (Journal History of the Church, 120:12 May 1856) that he and Elders Duncan and Snedaker met by accident near “Waxahatchie, held a meeting and baptized two persons.”
harmony and unity of the church, and it attacked the “dignity and honor of the priesthood.” The conference stopped only at refusing to sustain Wight as an apostle; it took no action against his membership. The conference, however, did sanction George Miller, not only refusing to sustain him as bishop over the church, but also disfellowshipping him because of his “spirit of apostasy and dissension.”

George A. Smith and Ezra Taft Benson wrote to Brigham Young the same day the council censured Wight in the Iowa conference. They knew Young had borne “so long with him,” and might find their action hasty. They cited the pamphlet, Wight’s missionaries working among the LDS faithful in the Mississippi Valley, and his attack on their own apostolic authority. The Iowa leadership “did not feel contented to let the innocent be deceived.” Smith and Benson concluded by asking Young for both advice and his ratification of their action. They dispatched a second letter the next day, further justifying their actions, along with a copy of Wight’s pamphlet. Hyde lampooned Wight by suggesting wryly that he commanded “all people, saints and sinners, Democrats and Barnburners, tall and short, those that live in big houses or small ones . . . and every one else, to come to his standard.” Ironically, the general conference held that same day at Salt Lake Valley had sustained Wight as a member of the Twelve.

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20. Pottawatamie High Council conference minutes 1848–51, 7 and 8 October 1848, LDS archives. The Pottawatamie conference minutes, recorded in Journal History of the Church, 71:7 October 1848, 2, 3, 5, are slightly different than the original minutes. Smith’s “old Lyon” comment, for example, reads as “an old lion in a mire,” and Joseph Young is reported to have stated that many of Wight’s followers absconded from Nauvoo with items that did not belong to them.

21. George A. Smith and Ezra T. Benson to Brigham Young, Journal History of the Church 71:7 October 1848, 6; letter to President Brigham Young and Council, Journal History of the Church 71:8 October 1848, 2; History of the Church, 7:528. The general conference minutes at Salt Lake City, as recorded in the Journal History of the Church, noted that Heber C. Kimball successfully offered Lyman Wight’s name to the conference as a member of the Twelve, stating that Wight and his followers were doing well with their mills among the Comanche. Two pages later, the record tersely notes that fellowship had been withdrawn from George Miller and Lyman Wight, although the Pottawatamie High Council conference minutes are clear that fellowship had been withdrawn only from George Miller.
Brigham Young, having not seen *An Address* and possibly still unaware of the action at Winter Quarters, had decided to resolve issues with Wight. On 9 November 1848, he directed Preston Thomas to take William Martindale with him on a mission to Texas, one of their objectives being “to go and hunt up Lyman Wight. We want to know what he is doing, for it is all we can to get the people to hold on to him by faith and prayer. . . . Learn his purposes and intentions, and if he does not come up right soon,” Young continued, “the spirit of the Lord will say, ‘Clip the thread and he will go down at once.’”  

Thomas, Martindale, and James McGaw, during their trip to Texas by way of St. Louis, met with Lucius Scovil in the early part of December. Informed that they were to interview Wight at Zodiac, Scovil told them that Haws and Woodworth “had just returned from Lyman’s camp.” George Miller had left Wight and taken some people with him, it was reported, indicating dissension was occurring at Zodiac. Thomas and Martindale reached Zodiac the evening of 31 December 1848, and lodged with Wight. Thomas’s journal entries recorded much more than did his letter to Orson Hyde of 14 March 1849, to whom he underplayed the real bitterness Wight felt for the Twelve.  

The first evening, Wight seemed reluctant to talk. Instead, Thomas and Martindale met with the High Council of Zodiac and discussed the events at Council Bluffs. Wight “was perfectly sober and free from the influence of ardent spirit, a thing we hardly expected to find from what several persons had told us,” recorded Thomas. He was “in feeble health. . . . We had several interviews and much conversation with him, in all of which it was evident to us that he was alienated in feeling entirely from his quorum and the Church, pronouncing them all Apostates.” Wight talked spitefully about Brigham Young. “In all our interviews with Elder Wight,” continued Thomas, “he never expressed any good feelings toward any of the Church, except Elder Geo. A. Smith.” Wight was unaware of Smith’s letter to Parley Pratt accusing Wight of alcoholism, which would be published that week in the *Millennial Star*.  

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The following morning, Martindale and Thomas met again with Wight. The old apostle, “when hardly pressed by us concerning some passages in his pamphlet . . . would try to equivocate and put entirely a different construction upon them from the ideas the passages would naturally convey.” How could the Twelve have identified themselves as the “Aspirants” or “Bigots” mentioned in the pamphlet, Wight argued ingenuously, for “he considered the Twelve of heaven and not of earth and therefore, he could not of meant them.” The Wild Ram was semi-playfully butting the younger ones around. Then he grew more serious. He did not want fellowship with anyone who fellowshipped with Orson Hyde and W. W. Phelps, and he found offensive Brigham Young’s remarks that he was a coward for leaving Nauvoo in 1844. More importantly, Wight believed that Young had “usurped” the presidency of the church. Later in the day a feast was served, attended by several local Germans. This must have been a break from unpleasantness, for Thomas felt the Pedernales River, flowing by the community’s feast held on its banks, was “a beautiful pure clear mountain stream” because its rock foundations gave “great water power” for the mills.

A community/church meeting was held that evening. Wight preached on the common-stock principles of Zodiac, with side remarks directed against Young, the Twelve, and storekeepers in general. Thomas and Martindale, when they spoke to the audience, remarked that the real issue remained Wight’s unwillingness to follow the Twelve’s counsel. Taking the bit in their teeth, they informed the audience that An Address “did not meet the mind of the church, neither the mind of the Lord.” Wight had to come to Salt Lake City “and be united in feeling and hope.” The unspoken threat was clear. Wight exploded, vehemently asserting that

he was not going to take that wild goose chase away to Salt Lake City to please them, no he would see them all damned to the lowest hell before he would do it. He could not see why they did not let him alone and mind their own business and let them do so too.

postscript dated 31 October 1848 to letter dated 20 October 1848, Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star, 1 January 1849, 14.

He had his bark afloat already rigged with the rudder fixed, and he meant to run it into heaven and would if [the Twelve] did not run their big Steam Boat in his way.

The following day, before their departure, Wight told Thomas and Martindale that because of his age he considered himself president of the Twelve, and that they should come to him for counsel. Wight stated in the presence of others that he thought “them all apostates.”

In March 1849, Thomas wrote to Orson Hyde about the visit. He did not describe the level of Wight’s bile, for the point was moot. Orson Hyde appended to the Thomas-Martindale report his own summation to Young, simply repeating that Lyman Wight was disobedient, and that the Texas Ram had no use for either Hyde or Young, denying that the latter had the right to rule the Church. The letters sent from Council Bluffs to Salt Lake City the previous October, describing Wight’s behavior and accompanied by a copy of his pamphlet, finally moved Brigham Young to decisive action. On 3 December 1848, at Fort Douglas, John Smith, uncle of Joseph Smith Jr. and the senior member of the Fifty, announced publicly in the presence of President Young and Apostle Amasa Lyman that Wight and Miller were cut off from the Church, losing both their offices and their church memberships.

These dismissals, along with the earlier excommunications of apostles John Page and William Smith as well as other lesser leaders, removed all remaining major opposition to Young’s succession. Cutting off Wight and Miller also put all members of the Fifty on

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25. Ibid., 43–45. Wight may have been basing his argument on the fact that not only was he the oldest among the active apostles, but also that he had been appointed to fill David Patten’s office, who at the time of his death had been the senior apostle by age. Apostle Orson Pratt argued many years later that age among the Twelve did not equate with seniority. According to Pratt, the apostasy of Thomas Marsh, the oldest and senior member of the original Twelve, and the death of David Patten, to whose office Lyman Wight was appointed in 1841, did not give Lyman Wight the right to preside over the Twelve: “You shall be equal, showing respect to the oldest.’ They were arranged according to their ages, while all their successors were arranged, according to the date of their respective ordinations” (O. Pratt, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 19:5 October 1877, 119).


notice that they were expected to support President Young’s vision. Peter Haws, still a supporter of the Fifty’s prerogatives, complained at Council Bluffs in January 1849, following the Wight excommunication, that Wight held more power than the other apostles “did, ever did, or ever will. . . . Twelve men had swallowed up thirty eight,” a bitter reference to the emergence of the Twelve over the Fifty. A struggle, at times bitter in tone, ensued during the next two months in the high priest quorum meetings at Council Bluffs, as apostles Orson Hyde, George A. Smith, and Ezra Taft Benson forced the rebellious elements of the Fifty to heel.28

By March 1849, in little more than a year, Brigham Young had emerged successfully as the powerful leader of Mormonism’s largest sect. He had ended the apostolic interregnum and organized a new First Presidency. He had excommunicated apostles and others who opposed him. He had welded together a Twelve supporting his vision. His followers overwhelmed any in the Fifty who dared to challenge him. Young deferred the succession rights of Joseph Smith Jr.’s sons for the time being to the Twelve. Wight, now a minor irritant, appeared more than ready to remain outside the Utah church for the rest of his life, and, indeed, for years his followers were isolated in the wilds of the Texas frontier.

28. Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy*, 200; Pottawatamie High Council conference minutes 1848–1851, 20 January 1849, 6; George A. Smith and Ezra T. Benson to Brigham Young, Journal History of the Church, 71:7 October 1848, 6; Letter to President Brigham Young and Council, Journal History of the Church, 71:8 October 1848, 2; George A. Smith and Ezra T. Benson to Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards, 27 March 1849, LDS archives. “An Epistle of The Twelve,” as well as “First General Epistle of the First Presidency. . . .”, Journal History of the Church, 73:9 March 1849, and 74:9 April 1849, respectively, mention that Lyman Wight had been disfellowshipped rather than excommunicated. See the full proceedings of the Pottawatamie High Priest quorum minutes, LDS archives, for the concerns expressed by certain high priests and the church mandates required of them during the January, February, and March 1849 meetings. For example, in Journal History of the Church, 73:20 January 1849, 1, the following is recorded: “Brothers Haws and Woodworth professed to have greater power than another [sic] persons in the Church and would be subject to the authority thereof. The [Pottawatamie High] council decided that they be notified that unless they met with the council at its next sitting, they would be dissatisfied.” The council included apostles Hyde, Smith, and Benson, as well as Joseph Young, a brother of Brigham Young and one of the seven presidents of the Quorum of Seventies, all having been active in opposing Lyman Wight and his Texas mission.