

"Truth without Love is too hard; Love without Truth is too soft"

Living Faith Church

Through

the

Maze

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Spying Out Polygamy in Utah

Early autumn snowflakes played in my headlights as I headed downhill into Utah, into Snowville, on Interstate 84. I drove through Ogden, Salt Lake City, Provo and stopped at Payson.

A weary eight-hour drive from Boise had me looking forward to a good night's sleep and a decent start for Cedar City the next morning. It was 2:00AM by the time I turned the bedcover down and settled in.

Something wasn't right. I got up turned on the lights and saw, on my sheet, several long, black hairs. Closer inspection unveiled lots of tiny, curly hairs as well.

What to do? I travel "heavy." I had dragged two suitcases, a computer, a jacket, and a couple of sacks of miscellaneous junk up to the second floor and I couldn't

bring myself to change rooms. So I examined the top of the top sheet, which seemed clean. I slept between the top sheet and the bedspread.

In the morning I complained to deaf ears. They said

I was certainly mistaken and, in any case, if there really had been a problem I should have handled it the night before. They would have come up and changed the sheets.

"You mean," I said, "I would have had to get dressed, call the desk and wait for someone to come up at 2:30AM and change the sheets?"

I was in Utah!

Cedar City

The Cedar City I remembered from forty years ago still exists. It takes up a dozen blocks downtown, but the modern city has swallowed it up. California has backed up through Las Vegas, St. George,

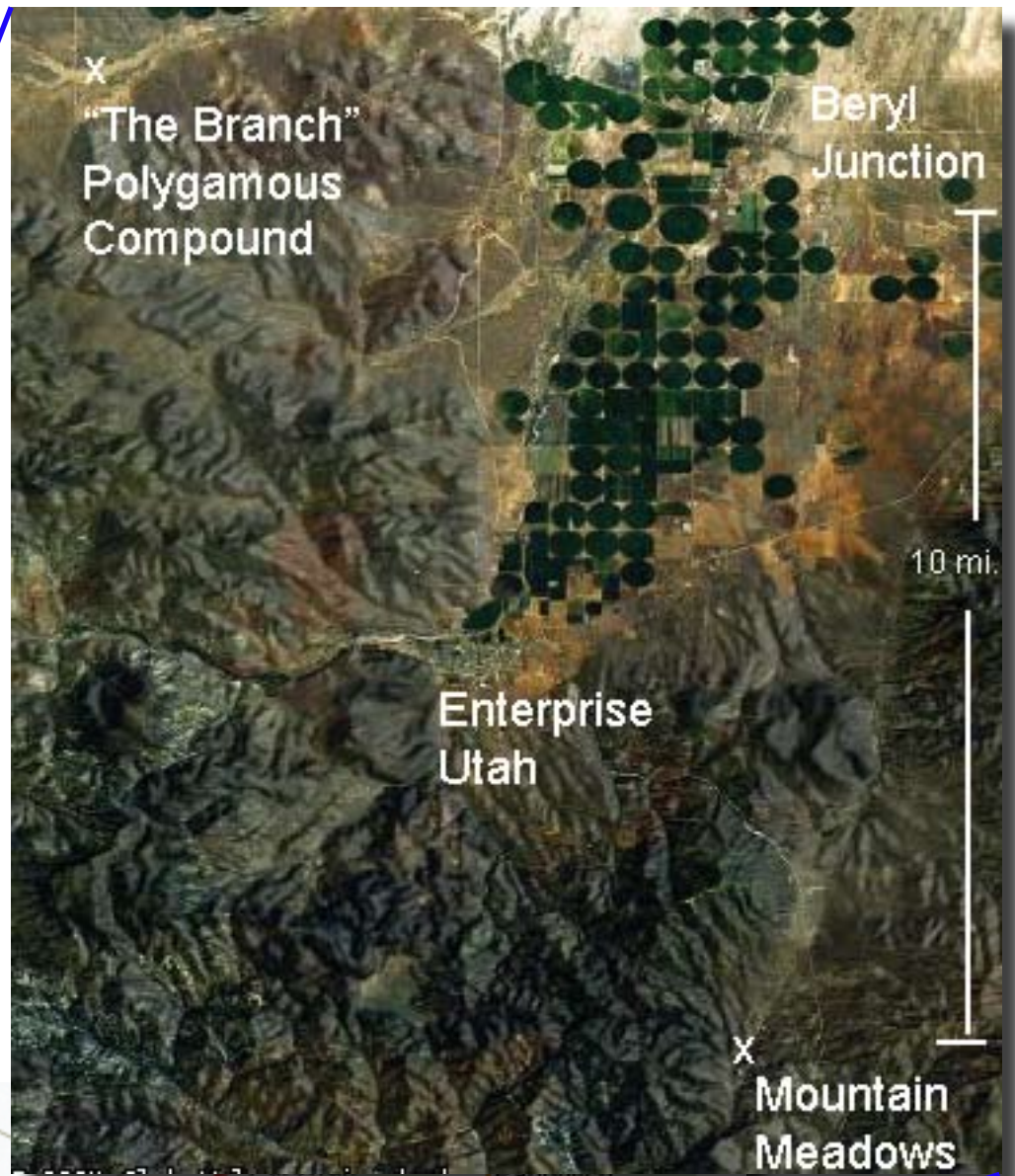


and into the streets of Cedar City: Applebees, Holiday Inn Express, multiplex theaters...

After supper I met with Sharon and David (from last quarter's newsletter "To Sharon With Love.") We spent three hours together and I got to know both of them quite well. David is still clinging to Mormonism, but I can say with some confidence that Sharon has left.

Beryl Junction, The Branch, and Mountain Meadows

My plan was to drive to the site of the infamous Mountain Meadows Massacre where the Mormon Militia, under command of John D. Lee, murdered at least 127 men, women, and children on September 11, 1857. Up until Timothy McVeigh bombed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Mountain Meadows stood as the worst massacre of Americans by Americans in our history. The Francher wagon train, which was passing through Utah on its way from Arkansas to California, had been camped in Mountain Meadows when it was attacked by a combined force of White





Viewing “The Branch” via Sattelite Temple is circled in Red

men and Indians. John D. Lee, the Captain of the Mormon Militia, under a flag of truce, rode into the circle of Francher’s wagons and promised the pioneers he could get them safely back to Cedar City. After he disarmed them, he and his men shot them down in cold blood. A handful of children survived, but many children and women were massacred.

The Mountain Meadows story has always fascinated me, but I had never been there. Seeing the site was what had detoured me through that part of Utah.

Beryl Junction

When I reached Beryl Junction where I was to turn south off highway 56 unto highway 18, I noticed a sign that said “Beyrl Baptist Church two blocks.” Now that intrigued me! I was in unmistakably Mormon back-country; sure, there may have been some nonMormons in Iron County, but not enough to support an Evangelical church. I had to see this!

Sure enough, a very nice church

building nestled in a grove beside a modular home I assumed was the parsonage. I assumed right.

I knocked on the door and was admitted into a living room occupied by six children and their mother. Nancy Jankovsky is the wife of Pastor George Jankovsky. They have served the church for more than five years. Thirty people attend on Sunday: people from California who have retired to Iron County. Pastor Jankovsky is recovering from surgery and was unavailable.

Nancy told me that they were treated pretty well by the polygamists, but both the Jankovskys and the polygamists are ignored by the regular Mormons: “We and the polygamists are minorities,” Nancy said.

The Jankovsky kids are home-schooled, surrounded in the living room by a circle of older Macintosh computers. They are very well spoken, mature beyond their years.

Nancy tells me that they have baptized several people during the last year and they have had one convert from the polygamists, a girl named Teena.

During the conversation, they mentioned the Harker polygamist sect across the road just north of Beryl Junction. Harker owns

a large dairy and has two impressive homes which obviously can house several families.

They’ll Shoot You!

Then the oldest boy mentions “The Branch,” a polygamist sect seven miles west of Beryl Junction. “They have built a large temple shaped like a pyramid,” he says. “Don’t go up there,” Nancy says, “They’ll shoot you!”

I promised Nancy that our newsletter readers would pray for her husband, and for their work in Beryl. If you want to contact them, you can write them at 162 N 200 W, Beryl Ut 84714

The Harker Compound

I went back to Beryl Junction, had a hamburger at the cafe on the crossroads, then headed up the road to the Harker place. I drove into the large circular driveway. Nobody was around, so I snapped a few pictures and drove off. Discretion, I thought, is often the better part of valor. But there was no way I was going to miss the Pyramid Temple.

The Branch

As I drove the lonely road west through the scrub cedar and sagebrush, I kept my eye on the line of hills ten miles south of the highway, almost too far to make out any bulidings, but then I saw what I thought might be a group modular homes on the mountainside. I took the first dirt road off the highway, but it soon petered out amid hayfields and huge pivot irrigation systems.

Back on the highway, a car was pulled off the side of the road. Three older ladies were in the car and a fourth was outside retrieving mail from a rural mail box. I pulled up to her, leaned out of my window and said, “How do you get to that compound up there?”

She wouldn’t look at me, just jumped back into the car and it fled. I didn’t think I was that scary.

Further up the highway a dirt road ran straight as an arrow towards the mountains. As I drove south off of Highway 56, thebuildings began to take shape. There was the Temple!

The compound is divided into two

areas separated by a mile or two. The main cluster of housing is on the east and the temple and a few more buildings are on the west. The road ends in a set of locked gates not far from the temple.

I parked at the gate and snapped away. Again, not a soul was in sight.

I learned, from ex-polyg-



**Main housing area of the compound is on the east (left in the picture).
The Temple is barely visible on the hill.**



“The Branch”



amist J. R. Llewellyn, that this group is known as “The Righteous Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints.” It was founded by a Natur-
opath, Gerald Peterson, Sr.

Peterson broke off from the Apostolic United Brethren, the second largest Mormon Fundamentalist (polygamous) group—about 7,000 members. That group is headquartered in Bluffdale, Utah under the leadership of Prophet Owen Allred (brother of Rulon Allred, the former leader, who was shot to death in 1977 by Rena Chynoweth, the youngest wife of cult leader Ervil LeBaron.

Gerald Peterson, Sr. said that the ghost of Rulon Allred appeared to him and restored the Mormon Priesthood. Later, Adam (yes, the one from the Garden of Eden) appeared to Peterson and ratified the ordination. When Peterson died, his son, Gerald, Jr., took over leadership and leads the group to this day.

After snapping my pictures of the

Pyramid Temple, I returned to the highway, I headed for Mountain Meadows.

Mountain Meadows

Mountain meadows is what spurred my trip to Iron County. That and to meet Sharon and David.

I have always been interested in the gruesome story of the massacre,

ever since seeing a picture of John D. Lee, taken moments before his execution. The Territory of Utah convicted him ten years after the crime. They took him to the site of the massacre, sat him on the edge of his coffin and shot him through the heart, Blood Atonement style.

I am fascinated with sites like this. For example, I have spent hours at Custer Battle-

field, where the General met his fate. It is an eerie place. Don't get me wrong, I doubt if the ghosts of Indian and Cavalry Troopers are milling about the grounds. But it is eerie nonetheless. I suppose Omaha Beach and Mai Lai emit their own spiritual scent.

I was not disappointed. I spent a long time walking among the granite stones engraved with the names of those massacred. Their ages are carved beside their names: Mary Lovina Baker, age 7 (her parents, George and Minerva, aged 27 and 27 respectively, were also murdered—as were their wards, Melissa and David Beller, ages 14 and 12.) Her granddad, and uncle also were on the list. As was Alexander Francher, the leader of the wagon train and his wife, Eliza, and their seven children, ages 7-19.

Colorado City

Leaving Mountain Meadows, I drove through the spectacular Snow Canyon State Park with the Red Mountains to the west. In St. George I swung by the Temple and got a lovely shot of a bride on the steps of the Temple in full gown.

By the time I got to Hurricane, Utah and headed southwest on Highway 59 towards the twin towns of Hildale, Utah and Colorado City, Arizona, it was sunset. I called my daughter, Jaime on my cell phone (she is in South Carolina and the scribe who is transcribing all of the ancient and modern books on polygamy into text for my database). She said, "I told you not to go there after dark!"

And what an experience it was to ride into this community of ten or more thousands of Mormons in the gloaming. If Custer Battlefield and Mountain Meadows has an ambiance, then Colorado City was fetid. This was not my first time in Warren Jeff's Empire, but I had forgotten the shock. The only thing I can compare it to is crossing the border into Tijuana, Mexico.

On this Saturday night, the streets were alive with automobiles. I can only assume Saturday night in Colorado City is a combination of socializing and buying last minute groceries before the Sabbath.



I visited the site of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, where the Mormon Militia murdered 127 men, women, and children of the Francher wagon train were murdered on 9-11-1857. Until Timothy McVeigh bombed the Murrah Federal building in Oklahoma City, Mountain Meadows was the largest slaughter of Americans by Americans outside of the Civil War.



Sharon, who I featured in my last newsletter—"To Sharon with Love," and her husband David. I spent three hours with them on my trip. David has not yet left the Mormon Church, but I can safely say Sharon is out!



Beryl Baptist Church and nearby Harker polygamous Compund

None of the streets have curbs, many are unpaved. Most of the houses are two and three stories and dismally unfinished, like the unfinished Winchester mansion in San Jose, 160 rooms with stairways going nowhere. True some of the homes are mansions, but most are big, blocky, breeding pens.

I stuck out like a dude on a cattle drive: I was the only guy in town with a short-sleeved shirt. Thankfully, I had changed from my shorts into Levis. I wandered from store to store, buying a bunch of grapes, trying to order a piece of fried chicken (the girl behind the counter explained they didn't have anything but six old chicken strips, but there were ten people in there eating chicken. She also looked at me like I was Chubacka.)

I drove over to the large church building. The door was chained and padlocked, but looking inside I could see a sandwich board which read: "No weapons, cell phones, cameras, or tape recorders."

As I crisscrossed the ever-darkening town (maybe 15 thousand people live there) a was struck by this thought: "This will never change. Fifty years from now Colorado City will be exactly as it is today." As accepted as an Amish community in Pennsylvania or Iowa.

Once the United States Supreme Court legalizes gay marriage, polygamy will automatically be decriminalized. Think about it.

Maybe I am wrong. Maybe Colorado City will no longer be strange at all. *Maybe all of Utah will look like Colorado City!* ■

