

This Branch of the Church

The Early Development of Local Administration in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Part 3, Administering an Expanding Territory, 1852–1859

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A primary concern of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the spiritual and physical welfare of its members, and local congregations have always been the primary mechanism for that ministry. However, the structure and leadership of local administrative organizations has changed significantly over the history of the Church, most significantly under its first two presidents, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. During these years, the terms and structures that are familiar to us—wards, presidents, bishops, stakes, and so on—emerged, but so did many practices that did not survive the 1877 Priesthood Reorganization.¹

This is the third article in a series evaluating the evolution of local Church administration from 1830 to 1877. The first two articles covered the administration of Joseph Smith Jr., then the temporary sojourn along the Missouri River and the early settlement of Deseret.² This installment covers the period from 1852 to 1859, when the flavors of local and regional ecclesiastical organizations in Utah Territory multiply almost as rapidly as the settlements.

1. William G. Hartley, “The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877: Brigham Young’s Last Achievement,” in *My Fellow Servants: Essays on the History of the Priesthood* (BYU Studies, 2010), 227–64.

2. See Brandon Plewe, “This Branch of the Church: The Early Development of Local Administration in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Part 1, The Emergent Church, 1830–1845,” *BYU Studies* 64, no. 1 (BYU Studies, 2025): 45–80; Brandon Plewe, “This Branch of the Church: The Early Development of Local Administration in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Part 2, The Church in Flux, 1846–1851,” *BYU Studies* 64, no. 2 (BYU Studies, 2025): 139–69.

During the 1850s, settlement in Utah Territory followed several trends: the core settlements in each valley bred multiple satellite settlements; new cores were established; and several outlying settlements were abandoned or consolidated (temporarily or permanently) during the conflicts of the Walker War (1853–1855) and the Utah War (1857–1858). Over time, this resulted in a relatively consistent pattern of a series of settled valleys (typically corresponding to counties or stakes), each consisting of a core city surrounded by several smaller towns.

One would think that this consistent settlement pattern would also have a consistent ecclesiastical administration. However, this did not happen. Instead, several different practices took hold.

Terminology Varies and Evolves

The primary challenge with finding an underlying consistent administrative philosophy and practice from the available evidence is a seeming morass of inconsistent terminology, especially during the 1850s. William Hartley summarized this situation by writing that various terms were used “imprecisely and interchangeably.”³ However, this simplification ascribes a level of irrationality to the Saints of that day and their leaders—that they just used words without thinking about what they meant. Is it possible to find patterns in the evidence that suggest a logical set of definitions for the words they used, even if they are very different from our own meanings, and even if different people had different meanings?

A couple of these have already been discussed, including the general sense of *branch* as any organized subunit of the Church regardless of size or structure, and the general sense of *stake* as any significant, officially designated, permanent place of gathering regardless of size or structure. In the early 1850s, the meanings for these two terms were clearly still foundational, as discussed in the previous article in this series.

By the end of the 1850s, the alternative particular meanings of these terms had become dominant: the *branch* as only the smallest, simplest organized subunit of the Church, and the *stake* as only a large regional, multilayered subunit of the Church. The general meanings gradually declined over the decade. Someone calling a ward “this branch of the Church” would have sounded anachronistic by 1860, and the concept

3. William G. Hartley, “Brigham Young and Priesthood Work at the General and Local Levels,” in *Lion of the Lord: Essays on the Life and Service of Brigham Young*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter (Deseret Book, 1995), 358.

did not appear in the 1877 Circular.⁴ But during the decade before 1860, both sets of meanings were common, leading to our confusion.

The term *ward* went through a similar transition in the 1850s. As discussed in the previous article, to Joseph Smith, like many from the Eastern Seaboard, a ward (in what we might call a general sense) was a neighborhood or division of a city. In Nauvoo, Winter Quarters, and 1849 Salt Lake, this neighborhood concept doubled as a convenient way to organize the ministry of the bishops.⁵ The term *country ward* found in Salt Lake and Davis Counties was likely called that only because they were originally defined by a subdivision of the counties, not as distinct settlements.⁶ The meaning of *ward* first shifted in these country wards during 1849–1850, since they were the first wards that were led solely by a bishop and operated as distinct ecclesiastical congregations in every sense.

Beyond the Salt Lake Stake, the term *ward* appeared very rarely during the early 1850s. If a visiting authority formally organized a congregation, it was usually called a branch even if a bishop was being called.⁷ As discussed in the previous article, this was especially common in Utah Valley in 1850–1852, where distinct settlements were rapidly multiplying, but the county was not formally subdivided into wards with defined boundaries as in Salt Lake.⁸

That said, the most common phrasing at the time simply equated the settlement and the congregation; a leader was usually called the bishop or presiding elder of the settlement without specifically calling it a branch or a ward. As long as every resident was a Latter-day Saint and the settlement functioned as a single congregation, the differences appeared unimportant and the local residents rarely made any clear distinction.

4. Brigham Young, John W. Young, and Daniel H. Wells, “Circular of the First Presidency,” July 11, 1877, page 2, typescript, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://ia800800.us.archive.org/9/items/circularoffirstp00unse/circularoffirstp00unse.pdf>.

5. Plewe, “This Branch of the Church [. . .], Part 2,” 143–61.

6. See History of Brigham Young, February 14, 1849 [image 25], holograph, Historian’s Office History of the Church (draft), 1845–1867, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d59029d8-79e7-4dc9-b345-467b8bacac50/0/24>.

7. For example, in 1851, Benjamin Cross was ordained “a bishop over Payson Branch.” Payson Branch, Meeting Minutes, March 23, 1851 [image 41], holograph, Historian’s Office General Church Minutes, 1839–1877, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/db67f77a-df95-407a-bbee-434c660d8870/0/40>.

8. See Plewe, “This Branch of the Church [. . .], Part 2,” 163–69.

The same pattern of ecclesiastical-civic equivalence was common at the regional level. Once the stake clearly included all the settlements in a valley (which usually coincided with a civil county), the terminological distinction became muddy. It was very common for stake presidents and presiding bishops to be referred to as “president in [X] county” or “bishop in [Y] valley.”⁹ It was not that residents were confused about the difference between the civil government and the ecclesiastical administration; it is just that the difference was not usually important enough for distinct terminology.

By the mid-1850s, the term *ward* had become accepted by the membership as the de facto standard term for any distinct congregation led by a bishop. Without evidence of official policy statements on local administration prior to 1877, it seems that the widespread adoption of the title of *ward* is as much a convenient accident as an intentional change. By early 1852, leaders in Great Salt Lake City,¹⁰ accustomed to the workings of the Salt Lake Stake, seemed to assume that if they were talking to bishops, they were talking about wards. Thus, the widespread use of *ward* for settlements beyond the Salt Lake Valley is initially found in collective reports, sermons, and epistles from Church headquarters—not in the records of individual congregations. An early example of this is an April 1852 statistical report produced by the Church that lists wards and bishops without making any distinction, even though the individual reports submitted by congregational leaders show a variety of terminology.¹¹ Within a year or two, these semiannual statistical reports show almost all bishop-led local congregations calling themselves wards.

While it remained common to refer to settlements (as discussed above) rather than wards, some of the outlying settlements used formal

9. For example, Isaac Morley is named “President of the church in Sanpete County.” “Record of Bishops Meetings, Reports of Wards, Ordinations, Instructions, and General Proceedings of the Bishops and Lesser Priesthood, 1851 to 1862,” 48 [image 64] (January 18, 1853), holograph, Presiding Bishopric Bishops Meeting Minutes, 1851–1884, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d6ef2526-92a6-45f5-9906-6879ac3353b3/0/63>; T. W. Ellerbeck to Elder Abram Hatch, July 29, 1869, holograph, Letterbook 11:675 [image 1417], Brigham Young Office Files, 1832–1878, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/967db140-f060-437f-b583-794f7affa2d0/0/1416>.

10. As mentioned in part 2, this was the original name of Salt Lake City. See Plewe, “This Branch of the Church [. . .], Part 2,” 152.

11. Bishops’ Reports [compendium], 1852 April, images 1–6, holograph, Bishops’ Reports 1848–1866, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f667e21d-c265-4247-af91-9d4fce693508/0/0>.

titles in reports they sent to Church headquarters as early as 1851.¹² Formal titles were more common where the name of the congregation differed significantly from the name of the city, with the congregation often retaining an earlier name after the city was renamed. The most persistent examples outside the Salt Lake Valley are Box Elder Ward at Brigham City, North Willow Creek Ward at Willard, Kays Ward at Kaysville, and North Canyon Ward at Bountiful, although even these were not used consistently.¹³

One aid to understanding the apparent lack of rigor in using categorical terms and titles is to look at how a settlement-congregation changed as it matured. There are some patterns to this process, although they are not always consistent. Throughout this period, new settlements tended to follow a similar trajectory.

Phase 1: Informal Settlement. A group of families arrived in a new place with one man taking the lead, having been called either informally (usually in the *ad hoc settlements* discussed in part 2 of this article series) or formally as presiding elder (usually in the *called settlements*). In part 2, I called this a *presided settlement*,¹⁴ but at the time, they would not have called it anything except an informal place name.¹⁵ They may or may not have held Sunday meetings in one of their cabins.

Phase 2: Branch. Eventually, a regional or General Authority might come and approve or replace the presiding elder, perhaps creating a more formal branch organization by assigning two counselors to the presiding elder. This was often when the settlement was officially given a name and a town site surveyed. Or this might not ever happen, and the de facto leader was eventually just assumed to be officially presiding as the town emerged organically. At this point, the settlement was usually (but not necessarily) called a branch.

12. For example, a set of reports in 1851 includes several variants: “Kays Ward,” “the branch at Provo City,” “Springville” (a branch), “Settlement West of Jordan,” “Stake of Zion at Ogden City,” and “Pleasant Grove Ward.” See Reports, 1851 September, images 1–13, holograph, Bishops’ Reports, 1848–1866, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f384a527-25c9-4399-b9d9-770fcaad5caf/0/0>.

13. Bishops’ Reports, 1852 April, images 1–30, holograph, Bishops’ Reports, 1848–1866, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f8e49375-cc4e-4fab-9ec7-1e7dfe8112ee/0/0>. This also includes several variants, such as “Springville Branch,” “Provo City Stake,” “Branch at Manti City,” and “Weeber [*sic*] Stake.”

14. Plewe, “This Branch of the Church [. . .], Part 2,” 161–62.

15. These initial names were usually a simple description, such as “Willow Creek.” Bishops’ Reports, 1852 April, image 27.

Phase 3: Acting Bishopric. Sometime later, the president (or a replacement) was given authority to collect tithing, after which he was commonly called a bishop (or more formally, an *acting bishop*).¹⁶ Again, someone may have visited to make a formal appointment, or a letter from Salt Lake was received with an appointment, or the title was gradually adopted without formal appointment. During this period, the place was occasionally called a ward, or a branch, or a town, or nothing.

Phase 4: Formal Ward. Eventually, the acting bishop (or a replacement) was formally ordained and set apart by a General Authority, including ordaining him a high priest if he was not already one. At this point, if the congregation was called anything, it was usually called a ward, at least after about 1854 as the general use of *branch* declined.

The details of this pattern varied widely from one settlement to another. North Ogden is a good example of a formal and quick transformation. The nascent settlement, which had been informally led by Thomas Dunn as presiding elder for its first few months, was formally organized as a branch with Dunn appointed as president by the stake president on December 22, 1852. Then Brigham Young ordained him the bishop of the “North Ward of Ogden City” on February 21, 1853.¹⁷ South Willow Creek (now Draper) took a few years (1851–1856) to make the transition, without any known organizational meetings. During these years, it is only occasionally called a ward or a branch, and William Draper Jr. is sometimes called “presiding elder” and sometimes called “bishop.”¹⁸ At the other extreme, many of the settlements in Bear Lake

16. For example, “Tithing Book Kept by Franklin J. Davis, Acting Bishop at Council Point Pottawattamie Co. for 1851 and /52”, image 4, holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/3d9028d7-679d-477f-948d-21895668d8c8/0/3>.

17. Thomas J. Dunn, Journal, images 68–69, holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/4981191f-e8e5-483c-9d38-3405546f870d/0/67>; Brigham Young, Certificate of ordination of Thomas Dunn, February 21, 1853 [image 3], holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/eca6dd9d-a040-4111-a885-8e5b732b07aa/0/2>.

18. “Report of the Bishops,” in “Minutes of the General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [. . .] October 6, 1853 [. . .],” *Deseret News*, October 15, 1853, page 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2579576>; “Officers in Great Salt Lake County, October 1853,” in “Winter Quarters (Neb.) High Council Minutes 1847–1848, Also Norway Branch (Illinois) General Record 1844–1845, and Utah Territory Officers 1853,” image 85, holograph, Winter Quarters Municipal High Council Records 1846–1848, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/0ddc178b-8238-4ee7-aca4-b0dce74a6659/0/84>. Here, sixteen months later, the same settlement is

Valley languished in an informal semiorganized state (phase 2–3) for twelve years or more, with no known formal organizing meetings and very few ordained bishops prior to the 1877 Reorganization.

Therefore, in the many places where the transition was informal, like Draper and the Bear Lake settlements, it is impossible to assign a precise date when the presided settlement became a branch or when the branch became a ward or even when the presiding elder became an acting bishop.

The Salt Lake City Wards Become Wards

In the Salt Lake Stake, the semiorganized wards in Great Salt Lake City gradually evolved into modern-looking congregational wards by the mid-1850s. This evolution was not a centrally planned program. Instead, it appears that individual wards experimentally added activities and responsibilities. Ward records prior to 1856 are incomplete, so it is difficult to know when and where each new program was invented and implemented, but a few examples follow:

- Business meetings were held, often monthly, with the bishop and priesthood holders. These were focused on the physical needs of the ward in keeping with the scriptural responsibilities of the bishop and Aaronic Priesthood holders (D&C 107:68), such as fencing, road building, and water distribution. Early examples include the Seventh and Seventeenth Wards in Spring 1849.¹⁹
- Log schoolhouses were the first ward buildings, with a few built as early as 1849²⁰ and most others by 1852.²¹ These gave members the opportunity to meet in larger numbers for a wider variety of purposes. The schools themselves began around the same time. For example,

titled “South Willow Creek Branch or Ward” and Draper is called “presiding elder and bishop” in Bishops’ Reports, 1852 April, image 8, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f8e49375-cc4e-4fab-9ec7-1e7dfe8112ee/0/7>.

19. Seventh Ward, Pioneer Stake, Seventh Ward General Minutes, 1849–1922, 1s:2, Church History Library; Seventeenth Ward, Salt Lake Stake, Seventeenth Ward General Minutes, 1849–1978, 12:3, Church History Library.

20. Mary Barraclough, ed., *15th Ward Memories* (Utah Printing Company, 1961), 9; *Book of Remembrance of Sixteenth Ward—Riverside Stake* (Sixteenth Ward Book of Remembrance Committee, 1945), 11.

21. For example, the Fourteenth Ward in January 1851. Wilford Woodruff, “Journal (January 1, 1847–December 31, 1853),” January 1, 1851, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed June 30, 2025, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/znN2>.

the First and Tenth Ward schools were organized in November and December 1850.²²

- Weekly prayer meetings occurred on Wednesday or Thursday evenings. For example, the Seventh Ward began in November 1849.²³
- Monthly meetings occurred for blessing children and confirming baptisms. Again, the Tenth and Seventh Wards were early adopters (September 1849 and January 1850, respectively).²⁴

These practices were soon adopted by the other wards; for example, the First Presidency reported that most wards had schools by November 1851.²⁵ Prayer meetings on Wednesday evenings also became common during 1851.²⁶ By 1853, most of the city wards were holding monthly fast meetings (usually the first Thursday evening) and priesthood quorum meetings.²⁷

Stake and general leaders soon endorsed and encouraged ward programs. On June 24, 1851, Brigham Young called for monthly meetings for the blessing of children.²⁸ In late 1851, Stake President Daniel Spencer and President Young suggested temporarily having Sunday meetings in the ward schools during the winter as opposed to the open-air bowery.²⁹

Most of the city wards began keeping regular minutes in the mid-1850s, coinciding with a wave of new bishops being called.³⁰ Their minutes document the organization of ward-level teachers quorums charged

22. Tenth Ward [Salt Lake Stake] General Minutes, 1849–1977, 6:46 [image 44], Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/flb08c04-1269-4ea7-97ba-64ed4d2acdd9/0/43>; First Ward [Salt Lake Stake] Minutes and Record of Members, 1850–1851, 13, microfilm, Church History Library.

23. Seventh Ward [Pioneer Stake] General Minutes, 15:11, Church History Library.

24. Tenth Ward [Salt Lake Stake] General Minutes, 6:44–45 [images 42–43]; First Ward [Salt Lake Stake] Minutes and Record of Members, 1.

25. Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richard, “Sixth General Epistle of the First Presidency,” *Deseret News*, November 15, 1851, 2, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2578143>.

26. Historical Department Office Journal, 1844–2023, 14:362 [image 193] (November 5, 1851), holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/bc04fe2c-dc46-4e7d-8bfe-ab1120057348/0/192>.

27. “Record of Bishops Meetings, Reports of Wards,” 66 [image 84] (August 2, 1853), holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d6ef2526-92a6-45f5-9906-6879ac3353b3/0/83>.

28. “Record of Bishops Meetings, Reports of Wards,” 4 [image 18] (June 24, 1851).

29. “Record of Bishops Meetings, Reports of Wards,” 19 [image 35] (November 30, 1851).

30. Half of the nineteen city bishops were replaced in 1856 alone. See Presiding Bishopric Bishops Meeting Minutes, 1851–1884, Church History Library.

with visiting the members,³¹ and the emergence of Sunday evening “worship meetings.”³² Only a few wards were meeting on Sundays in 1854, but most held weekly meetings by 1856, even though a citywide sacrament meeting was still held in the Tabernacle each Sunday morning.³³

These many new activities demanded more meeting space, and during the late 1850s, most of the wards built meetinghouses separate from the schoolhouses. A final step in the evolution of the city wards was the granting of authority to the bishops over all members and matters in their wards, including Melchizedek Priesthood holders. On November 25, 1857, Stake President David Fullmer, in reprimanding high priests who claimed that they answered only to their quorum president, stated that “the bishop presides over everything in his ward.”³⁴ The Melchizedek Priesthood quorums were still organized at the stake and general levels, but the bishop now had clear authority over individual priesthood holders.

The Dependent Congregation Is Born

The Salt Lake Stake pioneered an organizational structure called the dependent congregation, which was common for decades but does not exist today. The first instances of this were in the country wards of the Salt Lake Valley, where members were often scattered across their farmland rather than concentrated in towns. The West Jordan Ward, covering the entire west side of the valley, quickly became unmanageable, with members centered around three clusters: Fort Herriman, North Jordan (resettled at the abandoned New Wales settlement discussed in

31. The first that can be documented was the Third Ward in October 1856, but a few others appear by the end of the year. Third Ward, Liberty Stake, Teachers Quorum Minutes, Third Ward General Minutes, 5:1, Church History Library; Fifteenth Ward, Riverside Stake, Fifteenth Ward General Minutes, vol. 19 (1856), Church History Library.

32. Eighth Ward, Liberty Stake, Eighth Ward General Minutes, 5:1 [image 6]; Thirteenth Ward, Ensign Stake, Thirteenth Ward General Minutes, vol. 1 (1854–1859), Church History Library; Wilford Woodruff, “Journal (January 1, 1854–December 31, 1859),” January 27, 1856, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed June 30, 2025, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/6ZL>.

33. The original tabernacle on Temple Square was built in 1852 and used until the current tabernacle was completed in 1875. Ronald O. Barney and W. Randall Dixon, “Church Headquarters,” in *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History*, ed. Brandon Plewe, S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard H. Jackson, 2nd ed. (BYU Press, 2014), 114–15.

34. “Record of Bishops Meetings, Reports of Wards,” 178 [image 200] (November 25, 1856).

part 2,³⁵ now Taylorsville), and Archibald Gardner’s Jordan Mill (now West Jordan). The bishop’s solution was to hold Sunday meetings in each of these clusters and give them each subordinate leaders.³⁶ The first two bishops lived in the North Jordan area, so the other two settlements were organized as the “Herriman Branch of West Jordan Ward” and the “Mill Branch of West Jordan Ward” in late 1852.³⁷ In 1859, when Archibald Gardner became bishop, the mill area became the core of the ward, and the “North Jordan Branch of West Jordan Ward” was organized instead.³⁸

This approach was repeated for a short time in Mill Creek Ward in the early 1850s, when it had east and west branches in the main part of the ward, and some form of dependent organizations in the Sugar House area and on the eastern bench (the future East Millcreek Ward).³⁹ Gradually, the practice would spread in the coming years, wherever and whenever a settlement was too large to have no meetings or organization, too small to support a full ward organization, and near another ward that could provide assistance. It was even authorized and standardized in the 1877 Circular: “There are small settlements where only a few families reside—too few to be organized as a Ward. For such a settlement the bishop, to whose Ward it belongs, should appoint a priest to preside, if there is one; if there is not, a teacher can be appointed to take charge of the church affairs in the settlement . . . in every settlement, however small, meetings and Sunday schools should be strictly maintained.”⁴⁰

At the extreme, the wards in the St. George Stake had twenty-three dependent branches after the stake was reorganized under the 1877 policy.⁴¹ For decades, they continued to be organized when the situation

35. Plewe, “This Branch of the Church [. . .], Part 2,” 164–65.

36. “Record of Bishops Meetings, Reports of Wards,” 45 [image 61] (December 21, 1852); Joseph Harker, *Reminiscences and journal, 1855–1895*, 44 [image 25] (1852), holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/a062efe6-35e2-4ad5-871d-1db64960f46f/0/0>.

37. Harker, *Reminiscences and journal*, 44 [image 25].

38. “John Bennion,” in Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (Andrew Jenson History, 1901–36), 3:597.

39. “Officers in Great Salt Lake County, October 1853,” image 84; Charlene Miller and Alice Edvalson, comps., *150 Years of History of the L. D. S. Sugar House Ward, 1854 to 2004* (n.p., 2004), 1–2; *Autobiography of Julian Moses: Born 11 April 1810 Norfolk, Litchfield, Connecticut, Died 12 April 1892 Salt Lake City, Salt Lake, Utah* (n.p., n.d.), <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/832001>.

40. “Circular of the First Presidency,” 2.

41. *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, circa 1903–1906, 1877* (Book B Continuation), 163–65, holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist>

warranted. At the end of 1930, there were still about fifty to sixty dependent branches in the Church, and the practice did not fully end until the 1950s.

These smaller units were never called dependent branches during this period. Instead, the phrasing “[X] branch of [Y] ward” was used consistently; this conformed to the general branch metaphor (that is, it had to be a branch of something). Occasionally, they were referred to as “attached” to the neighboring ward; the term *dependent* did not become common until the 1900s.

Dependency was also commonly used as a temporary solution, even for wards. One situation was where a ward had been designated by Church leaders but was too small to be self-sufficient. Another was when a bishop moved away, died, or was called on a mission, and a replacement could not be found in the ward. In these cases, the smaller ward could be attached to an adjacent ward (or more precisely, to an adjacent bishop) until the situation improved. This happened in Kanyon Creek Ward (Sugar House), alternatively attached to the First or Mill Creek Wards from 1849 to 1854;⁴² the Fifth Ward, attached to the Sixth Ward from 1849 to 1853 and 1860 to 1877;⁴³ Spanish Fork Ward, attached to Springville Ward in 1865–1866;⁴⁴ and Little Cottonwood Ward (Union), attached to South Cottonwood Ward (Murray) from 1865 to 1877.⁴⁵ Unlike later permanent mergers such as the Twelfth-Thirteenth Ward (1908) and the Sixth-Seventh Ward (1922), these were still considered two wards, just sharing leadership. For example, in 1860 Brigham Young instructed Sixth Ward bishop William Hickenlooper, “I wish you to take the oversight of

[.org/assets/85a81abd-04ff-4221-91ad-0ef6587855ff/0/162](https://www.lib.utah.edu/assets/85a81abd-04ff-4221-91ad-0ef6587855ff/0/162); “St. George Stake Conference,” in “Correspondence,” *Deseret News*, January 2, 1878, 14, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2629536>.

42. Miller and Edvalson, *History of the L. D. S. Sugarhouse Ward*, 1–3.

43. Brigham Young to T. W. Winters, July 9, 1860 [image 8], holograph, Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e075d080-0f07-4eeb-b5d4-026b12c1d0cb/0/7>; “Registry of the Names of Persons Residing in the Various Wards, [. . .] 1852,” image 12, Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f6a446c9-db6e-4f99-8da4-8ca12227b2b5/0/11>.

44. A. Johnson to Bishop E[dward] Hunter and council, May 15, 1866 [image 11], holograph, Captain A. H. Scott Outfit Reports, Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company Outfitting Reports, 1866, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/a165f3f9-21fc-42fd-8a85-b6a9abf4b4f2/0/10>.

45. For example, in 1866, Brigham Young addresses “Bishop A. Cahoon, Little Cottonwood Ward,” even though he was primarily the bishop of South Cottonwood. Brigham Young to Andrew Cahoon, August 8, 1866, holograph, Letterbook 9:91 [image 184], Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/954ebbd5-0620-40f5-86f3-97fa7dbab8f6/0/183>.

that [Fifth] ward, as Bishop, in addition to your own, until wisdom shall dictate some other arrangement,” and thereafter his jurisdiction is consistently called “the Fifth and Sixth Wards.”⁴⁶

Congregational Stakes Become Regional Stakes

Beyond the Salt Lake core, the mother settlements in each valley, where congregational stakes were organized in 1851 (see part 2),⁴⁷ had many children during the 1850s. By 1860, there were nine settlements in Weber County (Ogden), thirteen in Utah County (Provo), eight in Sanpete County (Manti), and seven in Iron County (Parowan). In each of these areas, the same question quickly arose: Did the presiding authorities of the main settlement also have authority over its new children, or were the satellites independent units with autonomous leadership?

In each county, there was a period of some vagueness, but eventually, the first option held sway as each stake presidency, bishopric, and high council assumed regional jurisdiction and the four stakes (Ogden, Provo, Manti, and Parowan) operated much like Salt Lake. The stake in Ogden was calling itself the “Weber Stake” to include the first outlying branches (as far north as Willard and Brigham City) in early 1852.⁴⁸ The Parowan Stake was officially reorganized to include the new settlement of Cedar City on May 12, 1852.⁴⁹ The stake at Provo City was extended over the rest of the county during the temporary presidency of George A. Smith in the summer of 1852 (see p. 225).⁵⁰ Even the stake at the San Bernardino, California, colony included a subsidiary ward nearby starting in 1853.⁵¹ Sanpete was probably the last congregational stake in Church history where the stake presidency and high council in Manti did not

46. Brigham Young to William Hickenlooper, July 9, 1860, holograph, Letterbook 5:564 [image 1169], Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/adcl14c8-073a-494e-98cf-c9d00a054123/0/1168>.

47. Plewe, “This Branch of the Church [. . .], Part 2,” 163–67.

48. Bishops’ Reports, 1852 October, image 3, holograph, Bishops’ Reports, 1848–1866, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/feeb487e-5e0e-468d-9c85-06c172bb0e24/0/0>.

49. Woodruff, “Journal (January 1, 1847–December 31, 1853),” May 12, 1852, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/M8xm>.

50. Compare the April 1852 statistical report of “Provo City Stake” covering only the city, with that of “Provo Stake” in October covering the entire county and its wards. See Bishops’ Reports, 1852 April, image 21 (April 4, 1852); Bishops’ Reports, 1852 October, image 27.

51. This was at the former mission about five miles from the main ranch. San Bernardino Branch Journal, 137 [image 142] (May 26, 1853), holograph, Church History



FIGURE 1. The St. Louis Stake, 1854-1858. Based on data from <https://mormonplaces.byu.edu>.

consistently exert authority over neighboring Ephraim until 1855.⁵² That said, it was common for these stake authorities to focus much more attention on the central city, only occasionally exerting authority over the rest of their county settlements (further discussed in the next article).

These were soon joined by several other new regional stakes, organized for a variety of reasons but all sharing a very short life. The first was in St. Louis, Missouri, organized in November 1854 (see fig. 1).⁵³ This

Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/12c1b4e9-61db-407b-8694-e612e9304bb2/0/141>.

52. For example, Elijah Averett to Brigham Young, January 29, 1855, holograph, Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=f61cfa18-2f5a-4ff4-a25d-450604a24160>.

53. Saint Louis Stake Historical Record, 1852-1856, 189 (November 4, 1854), holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/a627690d-69ef-4686-bc14-e90ac5a36c2b/0/0>.

was the first stake that did not meet the primary criterion of a stake as a permanent place of gathering; throughout the stake's existence, its members were encouraged to emigrate to Utah. Perhaps this is the first evidence of the original general meaning of *stake* starting to drift. Instead, the St. Louis Stake appears to be a pragmatic reaction to the inability of thousands of local Saints to leave immediately. It had gathered many migrating converts who could not afford to continue West, but who could find work in the westernmost large city in the United States or the many coal mines in the surrounding area. By 1856, the city itself had seven wards with ordained bishops and several wards and branches nearby. In keeping with the pattern in the West, these began as semiorganized wards but were soon meeting and functioning on their own. In addition to hundreds of British Saints, St. Louis had enough speakers of Welsh, German, and Italian to have separate branches at times, and enough Danish immigrants for their own ward.⁵⁴ However, eventually most of the Saints were able to emigrate, and the St. Louis Stake was disorganized and returned to mission-style branches by 1859.⁵⁵

The second short-lived stake began in May 1855 when the Parowan Stake was divided by Brigham Young to form a stake headquartered in Cedar City with Isaac C. Haight as president.⁵⁶ It was to include all the territory from Johnson Springs (Enoch) south. This was not the result of Parowan Stake becoming too large to manage—it was left with only three settlements. Rather it was likely created with the intent of more directly overseeing the nascent missions to the Paiutes based in Fort Harmony and Santa Clara and the further settlement of the desert valleys of the Virgin River, including Washington in 1857 and Toquerville in 1858 (see fig. 2).⁵⁷

54. "St Louis Stake," *The Mormon*, May 3, 1856, 1; Saint Louis Stake Historical Record, 1852–1856, 130 (January 27, 1854).

55. Saint Louis Stake Historical Records, 1847–1862, 80 (August 3, 1859), holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/2e90bfe7-6c3d-4dd1-b7a3-9b0b9b5677e3/0/0>.

56. Wilford Woodruff, Synopsis of journey of President Young and company while on their visit south, 5 [image 6] (May 20, 1855), holograph, Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ea6dab4a-600f-4001-b105-050632a26592/0/5>.

57. William H. Crawford to Editor, *Deseret News*, May 7, 1857, holograph, Historian's Office Collected Historical Documents, circa 1851–1869, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/057efceb-1703-41e6-bbe8-90fb397ae66/0/0>; *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, 1847–1869* (Book A), 60 [image 63],

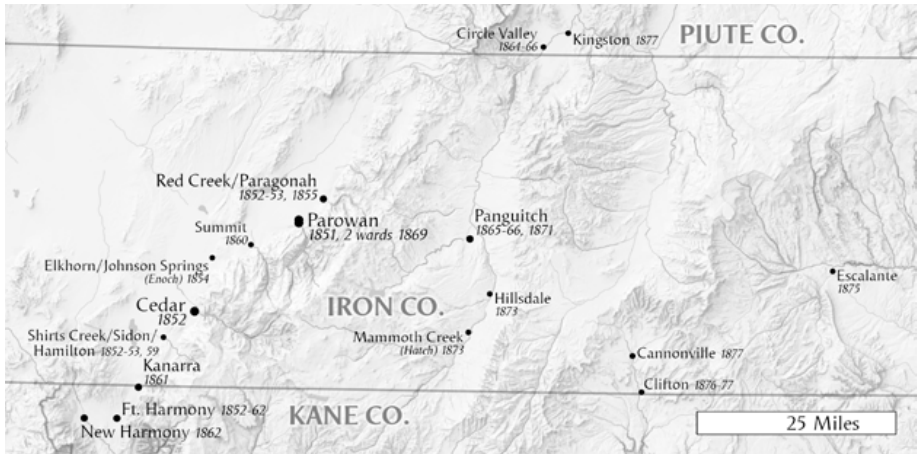


FIGURE 2. Congregations in Iron County, 1851–1877. Based on data from <https://mormonplaces.byu.edu>.

After the tragic massacre at Mountain Meadows of passing pioneers by members of the Cedar City and Harmony Wards in September 1857,⁵⁸ most of the stake and ward leaders who had been involved went into hiding, and the stake was recombined with Parowan Stake in July 1859 with a new bishop in Cedar City.⁵⁹

The third new stake was in the Carson Valley at the western edge of Utah Territory near modern Reno, Nevada. Individual Saints had moved to the area in the early 1850s to set up resupply stations for migrants to California, which was successful enough for Brigham Young to decide to establish the area as a permanent western anchor point for this tent of latter-day Israel. Apostle Orson Hyde was sent to oversee the expansion in 1855, and in September 1856, he organized a stake with three branches before he returned to Salt Lake. However, the stake lasted only a year, as the area was largely abandoned in September 1857 in anticipation of the Utah War.⁶⁰

<https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/3faee6c9-545e-42fd-9c67-41745a5e3622/0/62>.

58. See Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

59. “History of Brigham Young for the Year of Our Lord 1859,” 618 [image 646] (July 31, 1859), holograph, Historian’s Office History of the Church, 1839–circa 1882, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/a56f3efa-3e22-4d0f-94bd-06623694e03c/0/645>.

60. “Record of the High Council of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Organized in Carson Mission October the 4th 1856,” 1:23–24 [images 25–26] (August 1,

Dual Leadership Blossoms and Dies (Almost)

In early 1852, it looked like the practice of each ward having both a presidency and a bishopric was taking hold and could become the standard policy, at least beyond the Salt Lake Stake. Although there was no official policy statement issued during the 1850s, Brigham Young appears to have thought of this as the most doctrinally ideal form of leadership at both the stake and ward level.⁶¹

Dual-leader wards were especially popular in Utah County, where joint presidencies and bishoprics were called in 1851 and 1852 in Payson, Dry Creek (Lehi), Spanish Fork, Springville, Pleasant Grove, and Alpine (see fig. 3). Most of these were called by Brigham Young or the Apostles, so the pattern had clear authorization. It was soon replicated in other settlements, including Fillmore (1851), Nephi (1852), Mt. Pleasant (1853), Ephraim (1855), Beaver (1856), and Willard (1856).

However, dual leadership was not practiced church-wide and never to our knowledge in Salt Lake Stake. Even in most wards with a single leader, he was often referred to as “the president and bishop” during the 1850s, suggesting that there were still two roles, just held by the same person. An extreme case of this dual role philosophy was in Nephi, where Jacob G. Bigler acquired both roles in 1855 and called different counselors for his presidency and his bishopric.⁶² Occasionally in a dual-leader situation, there were simultaneous references to the “president [or presiding elder] of the branch” and the “bishop of the ward” in the same place, suggesting that there were two coincident organizations of a branch and a ward in the same settlement,⁶³ but this was too rare to believe it was official policy.

In the earlier incarnations, especially in Iowa, it seems clear that the president was the primary authority, with the bishop serving in a specialized role. However, in Utah, the bishop usually had his own counselors

1857), holograph, Carson Valley Stake High Council Minutes, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/4cc4fc0b-8047-4f86-bcb0-b13fbb4d1500/0/0>.

61. Brigham Young, “Duties Connected with the Aaronic and Melchisedek Priesthood,” in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, Eng., 1855–86), 9:279–81 (April 7, 1862); Brigham Young, “Authority of Bishops—Branch Organizations—Assisting the Mail and Telegraph Companies,” in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:96–98 (April 7, 1862).

62. “Diary, Jacob G. Bigler, April, 1855, to October, 1855,” typescript by David L. Bigler, 22 (September 23, 1855), accessed June 24, 2025, FamilySearch.org, <https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/18668483>.

63. For example, Pleasant Grove in July 1852. See T. Bullock, “Visit of President Young and Suite to Utah County,” *Millennial Star* 14, no. 40 (November 27, 1852): 630–31.



FIGURE 3. Congregations in Utah County, 1849–1877. Based on data from <https://mormonplaces.byu.edu>.

and a quorum of teachers who continually visited the members (in the same role as future home teachers). The bishopric also commonly held “bishop’s courts,” judging civil disputes and disciplinary actions, while the ward president was often only visible when presiding over Sunday worship services.

This frequently led to confusion about who was really “in charge” of the ward or branch, both among the members and among the leaders themselves. A common dispute was whether the bishop had the authority to discipline the ward president, an elder, or another Melchizedek Priesthood holder; or whether each quorum should regulate itself, with the bishop having disciplinary authority only over Aaronic Priesthood holders, women, and children. As more issues came up to decide, the

confusion and rivalry grew, becoming a concern in almost every settlement that had two leaders.

A few cases nearly erupted into civil wars, usually fueled by some important decision on which the bishop and president disagreed. Members chose sides, requiring an Apostle to come adjudicate. Notable examples of this include Palmyra/Spanish Fork and Nephi, which each took almost two years to resolve (1853–1855).⁶⁴ Another lengthy feud was in Willard (1857–1859), where even a visit by Brigham Young and two Apostles could not produce a satisfactory resolution. However, the meeting did feature some fruitful policy discussion:

John Taylor asked who is the greatest the President of [or] the Bishop. President Young said the Bishop should attend to his own business & let the Presidents alone & the Presidents should attend to his Business & let the Bishops alone, but they should

The President should say to the Bishop can I do any thing for you & the Bishop should say to the Presidt can I do any thing for you & they should mutually help each other President Young asked can a Bishop try a President Answered yes. can a President try a Bishop John Taylor thought there might be cases whare a President Might try a Bishop.⁶⁵

In most other cases, the issue was resolved more quietly when one of the leaders passed away or moved to a new settlement and the other assumed both roles.⁶⁶ Dual leadership largely disappeared by 1858, when the same person served both roles in almost every ward and was usually referred to only as bishop. By 1862, only Spanish Fork Ward and maybe Fillmore can be documented as still having a separate bishop and president, and even they appear to have been temporary situations.⁶⁷

64. For Nephi: Martha Spence Heywood, *Journals, 1850–1856*, images 120–26, Church History Library. Transcribed in Juanita Brooks, ed., *Not By Bread Alone: The Journal of Martha Spence Heywood, 1850–1856* (Utah State Historical Society, 1978); and W. Woodruff and T. Bullock, “Minutes of Meeting at Nephi to Investigate the Conduct of Bishop Heywood,” May 25, 1854, image 60, Historian’s Office General Church Minutes, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/435983e1-2d15-47b0-b35f-21328378bbc2/0/60>. For Spanish Fork: Brigham Young to Bishop John L. Butler and the Brethren of Palmyra and Spanish Fork, May 29, 1856, Letterbook 2:744, 746 [images 1521, 1523], Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/7a67fc61-ea19-4673-96d6-fd4d49d329ee/0/1522>.

65. Woodruff, “Journal (January 1, 1854–December 31, 1859),” November 2, 1858, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/mwMr>.

66. For example, George A. Smith, “Our Home Correspondence,” *Deseret News*, March 21, 1855, 4, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2571140>.

67. Spanish Fork Ward, Utah Stake, Spanish Fork Ward Record, 1852–1864, Church History Library.

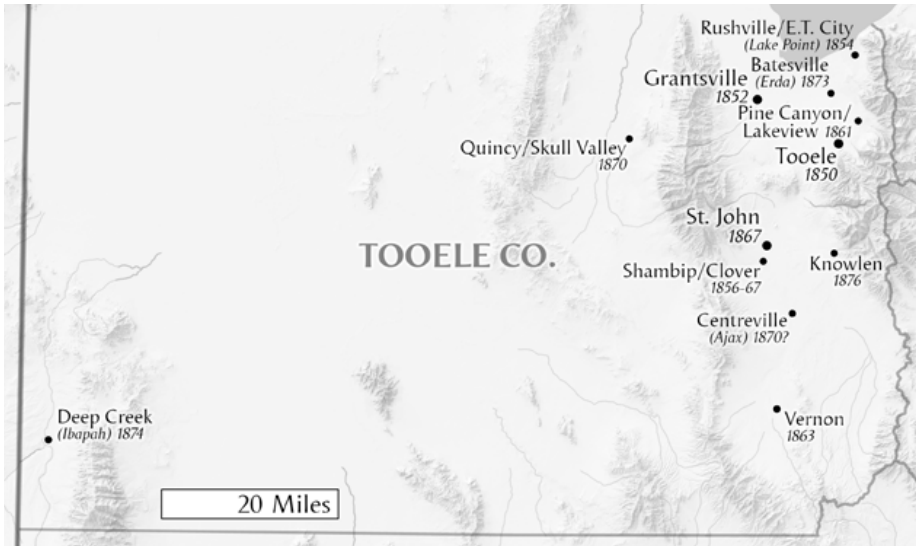


FIGURE 4. Congregations in Tooele County, 1851–1877. Based on data from <https://mormonplaces.byu.edu>.

The Regional Bishopric Emerges

In addition to the continuation and evolution of the Nauvoo-era administrative structures, a unique situation in Tooele Valley led to a new innovation. Here, two significant settlements, Tooele and Grantsville, were founded, each large enough to warrant its own bishop by 1853.⁶⁸ However, these two settlements alone were insufficient to warrant a full stake structure, even after E.T. City (now Lake Point) was added, but they were too remote to be effectively managed by another stake (see fig. 4).

The solution was that John Rowberry (already acting bishop of Tooele) was ordained in January 1853 as a bishop “to preside over the settlements in Tooele County, known as Tooele Ward.”⁶⁹ Though the specific organizational structure is unclear due to scant local records, Rowberry had direct authority over the settlements of Tooele and E.T. City and reported directly to the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishop. Grantsville had its own bishop at first, possibly reporting to Bishop Rowberry. Starting in

68. Woodruff, “Journal (January 1, 1854–December 31, 1859),” March 19, 1854, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/gwD>.

69. “Record of Bishops Meetings, Reports of Wards,” 50 [image 66] (January 18, 1853).

1864, Rowberry's authority would be extended over all of Tooele County,⁷⁰ which included at least eleven congregations by 1877.

Regional presiding bishops had existed in stakes since Kirtland, but in this case, Rowberry was the sole authority without any other stake organization. We will call this structure a *regional bishopric*, because it was not given a categorical name at the time. Occasionally Rowberry's jurisdiction was called his diocese, akin to the regional domain of a bishop in Catholicism and other churches, and the term was occasionally used for the domains of other bishops.⁷¹ However, *diocese* was used inconsistently and never by Church leaders, so the usage looks more like a colloquialism than an official term. Regional bishoprics proliferated during the 1860s before being eliminated in the 1877 Reorganization, so we will return to them in the next article.

New Apostolates Appear

As discussed in the previous article, what I named the regional *apostolate* had first appeared in 1846 when Orson Hyde presided over a stake-like organization in Iowa.⁷² It reappeared a few times during the 1850s when apostles were called to settle in outlying areas, but the exact organization structure took several different forms.

In areas outside the Utah core, the resident Apostle had a broader role than being a local leader. Both San Bernardino (presided by Amasa Lyman and Charles C. Rich, 1851–1857) and St. Louis (presided by Erastus Snow, 1854–1857) had a separate stake organization with a stake president, high council, and bishops. In these cases, the official role of the Apostle was to preside over the Church in a much larger area, similar to the mission president of later decades. Lyman and Rich were “Presidents of the Church in Southern California,”⁷³ while Snow was “President over

70. Brigham Young to John Rowberry, June 15, 1864, Letterbook 7:216 [image 457], Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/867b28d5-f5ea-44bb-b228-516179bc010a/0/456>.

71. “Correspondence,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 31, 1869, 4, <https://news-papers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=23155842>; “Presiding Elders and Bishops,” *Deseret Evening News*, September 16, 1873, 4, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=23161496>; “Insurrection at Tooele,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 26, 1874, 4, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=12954836>. Rowberry is also called the “Bishop and President of the Stake” once in 1853, but this is in a church-wide report and is likely an oversight. “Tooele County [Officers], Oct. 1853” in “Winter Quarters (Neb.) High Council Minutes 1847–1848,” image 90.

72. Plewe, “This Branch of the Church [. . .], Part 2,” 143.

73. Richard R. Hopkins, “Minutes,” *The Western Standard*, April 26, 1856, 2.

the Western, and Southern part of these United States.”⁷⁴ That said, these apostles attended local meetings and frequently involved themselves in local affairs, essentially rendering each stake president as a figurehead. Orson Hyde was in a similar situation in the Carson Valley once the stake there was organized in 1856,⁷⁵ although Hyde’s particular title and authority was never made clear before he left in 1857.

In Provo, some members were having difficulty with President Isaac Higbee, and the apostle George A. Smith (recently returned from presiding over the settlement of Parowan) was called to preside over the existing stake in July 1852 (with Higbee as a counselor).⁷⁶ Unlike the organization from the previous year, Smith called leaders and held conferences in several settlements, making it clear that his stake jurisdiction was over the entire county. In fact, he stated that September, “I was appointed by the Presidency of the Church to preside over the Saints in Utah County.”⁷⁷ At the next stake conference in October, Higbee was resustained as stake president, and Smith took on the unique title of “traveling presiding high councilor of this county” (with Higbee as a counselor).⁷⁸ The next year, in October 1853, it was again George A. Smith as president of the stake with Isaac Higbee as first counselor and “president of [Provo] branch,” with his own counselors.⁷⁹

Although Smith was fiddling with the terminology as he went along, the overall hierarchy appears to have been consistent: Smith presided over the entire county with Higbee as a counselor, while Higbee presided over Provo City (and its four wards) with his own counselors.

74. “St. Louis April 6th 1855,” in Saint Louis Stake Historical Record, 1852–1856, 244–45.

75. Carson Valley Conference Minutes, September 28, 1856, holograph, Historian’s Office Minutes and Reports (Local Units), 1840–1886, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/96c96437-a971-4bf8-8507-3fb580cd3ffd/0/0>.

76. Thomas Bullock, Evansville (Lehi), Provo, and Battle Creek (Pleasant Grove), 1852 July 15–19, images 27–29, holograph, Historian’s Office General Church Minutes, 1839–1877, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/7e0a8a20-b217-49f7-a91e-85464412d924/0/26>; Thomas Bullock, “Visit of President Young and Suite to Utah County,” *Millennial Star* 14, no. 40 (November 27, 1852): 630–31.

77. George A. Smith, “Prosperity of Utah County, Utah Territory: Letter from Elder G. A. Smith,” *Millennial Star* 14, no. 42 (December 11, 1852): 668.

78. Provo Stake (Utah County) Conference Minutes, October 1–3, 1852, 3, holograph, Historian’s Office Minutes and Reports (Local Units), Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/34be37fe-aa7f-4f5a-be44-c0ac5b77f086/0/2>.

79. “Utah County [Officers] Oct. 1853,” in “Winter Quarters (Neb.) High Council Minutes 1847–1848,” image 91.

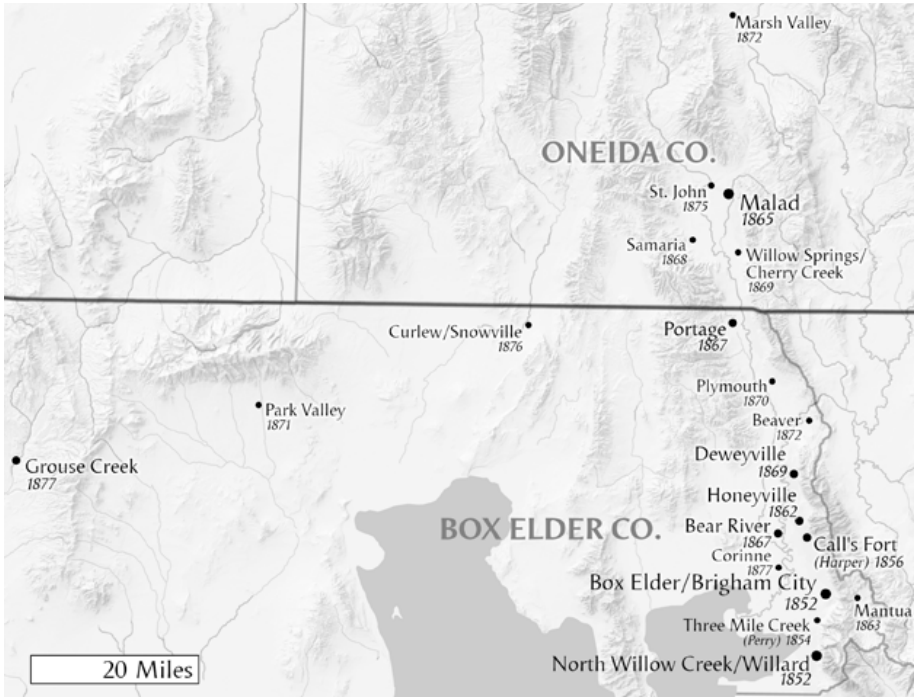


FIGURE 5. Congregations in Box Elder County, 1852–1877. Based on data from <https://monplaces.byu.edu>.

Presiding Bishop Elias Blackburn and the high council may have also had jurisdiction beyond Provo, but this was rarely exercised.⁸⁰ This arrangement lasted less than two years; George A. Smith was called as Church Historian and Recorder in April 1854 and left Higbee as the sole president of the now county-wide stake.⁸¹

Box Elder County had a similar arrangement (see fig. 5). The North Willow Creek (Willard) and Box Elder (Brigham City) Wards were

80. For example, in a dispute between the Provo High Council and the president of Payson in January 1852, Brigham Young recognizes the high council's authority. See Brigham Young to James Pace and others of Payson, January 26?, 1852, Letterbook 1:40 [image 135], Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f7d18c09-51a0-42c6-8c73-10960c772d45/0/134>; Brigham Young to Asahel Perry, February 3, 1852, Letterbook 1:42 [image 139], <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f7d18c09-51a0-42c6-8c73-10960c772d45/0/138>.

81. "Minutes of the General Conference," *Deseret News*, April 13, 1854, 2, <https://news.papers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2580233>.

organized in 1852 under the jurisdiction of the stake in Ogden. Sometime after Apostle Lorenzo Snow arrived in May 1855, he organized a stake with himself as president, counselors, and a high council.⁸² References to this area as a stake are rare: In fact, stake conferences are not documented until June 1867.⁸³ The bishop of Box Elder Ward appears to have also served as a regional presiding bishop. Snow would remain as president until 1877, and there is little evidence that it functioned much beyond Snow's personal leadership.

The Unclear Jurisdiction of Salt Lake Stake

Many historians believe that during this time, the Salt Lake Stake had a higher authority or standing than the other stakes.⁸⁴ The most common evidence was that stake officers were sustained in general conference, along with (and often intermingled with) General Authorities and officers. Like Kirtland and Nauvoo, it appears that the distinction between general and local administration near the Church headquarters could be somewhat muddy. For example, Edward Hunter was both the Presiding Bishop over the entire Church and over Salt Lake Stake; his monthly bishops council meetings were almost always attended only by Salt Lake City bishops (even the bishops of the country wards in the valley were rarely in attendance), and the business was generally local.⁸⁵

Did the Salt Lake Stake (especially its high council) exercise practical authority over the wards and stakes beyond Salt Lake County? The evidence is very inconsistent, suggesting that it was not a settled matter,

82. Vaughn J. Nielsen, *The History of Box Elder Stake* (Pat's Print Shop, 1977), 1–2; Andrew Jensen, “Brigham City First [sic] Ward,” vol. 1, image 25, typescript, Brigham City Ward Manuscript History and Historical Reports, 1851–1888, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/02839e97-42f2-4b75-9754-f770d675bd8e/0/24>.

83. “Minutes of a Conference Held in Brigham City,” *Deseret News*, June 26, 1867, 1, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2599658>; “Two-Days’ Meetings,” *Ogden Junction*, March 16, 1874, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=23761839>.

84. Examples include Lynn M. Hilton, ed., *The Story of Salt Lake Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 125 Year History, 1847–1972* (Salt Lake Stake, 1972), 155; Morgan Utah North Stake, *Morgan Stake, 1877–1981: An Ecclesiastical History of Morgan County from the Inception of the Morgan Stake in 1887 to Its Division in 1981* (Publishers Press, 1988), 10; and Hartley, “Priesthood Reorganization of 1877,” 229.

85. See “Record of Bishops Meetings, Reports of Wards.” The bishops’ meetings coinciding with general conference were often attended by bishops coming in from all over Utah.

even in the mind of Brigham Young. The following cases suggest a broad jurisdiction for the high council, at least over Davis County:

- 1858, Tooele County: Brigham Young brought a charge against the bishop and some residents of Grantsville to the Salt Lake high council.⁸⁶ It is not clear whether this was because he considered the council as a general appellate court, or if he considered Tooele Valley as part of the Salt Lake Stake, or whether they were just the most convenient venue to consider an issue at the moment.
- 1859, Davis County: The Salt Lake high council was appealed to and decided a case involving the bishop from Centerville.⁸⁷
- 1863, Davis County: Brigham Young instructed Salt Lake Stake President Daniel Spencer to have the high council decide on a case appealed from the Farmington Bishop.⁸⁸
- 1868, Davis County: Brigham Young discussed a case from North Canyon Ward (Bountiful) that had been appealed to the Salt Lake high council, then to him.⁸⁹
- 1871, Weber County: Ogden Stake President Franklin D. Richards mentioned a case before the Salt Lake high council concerning the Ogden city council.⁹⁰

Conversely, these cases suggest that the Salt Lake high council did not have appellate authority:

- 1852, Utah County: a dispute in Payson involving Branch President James Pace was decided by the Provo high council then appealed directly to Brigham Young.⁹¹

86. Brigham Young to Heman Hyde, January 14, 1858, Letterbook 4:27 [image 111], Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/08168c23-bef7-41bb-90e4-446caa2cc86e/0/110>.

87. Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1854–December 31, 1859)," April 16, 1859, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/y877>.

88. Brigham Young to Daniel Spencer, December 11, 1863, Letterbook 6:724 [image 1493], Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/0c8e23c5-4d6a-446f-8d81-108a52bd39c4/0/1492>.

89. Brigham Young to John Stoker, January 28, 1868, Letterbook 10:617 [image 1302], Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/873e43de-f5b9-4a8a-bfaa-be07a5fd18f/0/1301>.

90. Franklin D. Richards, Journal, September 15, 1871, vol. 19, image 284, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/0e85f984-0c03-4385-a367-91431b6c0a30/0/283>.

91. Young to Pace and others of Payson.

- 1855, Davis County: A dispute between members and leaders in Farmington is appealed directly to Brigham Young rather than to stake authorities.⁹²
- 1859, Weber County: A case decided by the Ogden high council was appealed to, and decided by, the First Presidency.⁹³
- 1860, Weber County: A case appealed from the Ogden high council (or “High Council of the Weber Stake”) was decided by the First Presidency.⁹⁴
- 1860, Davis County: Brigham Young asked Ogden Stake President Lorin Farr to take care of a matter in South Weber, because “the distance to this place would put the parties to much inconvenience.”⁹⁵
- 1870, Utah County: Brigham Young visited Springville to decide a case involving the bishop, appealed from the Provo high council. After his decision, “President Young said a Bishop could not be tryed ownly By a High Council & the first Presidency,” suggesting that the proper order was clear to him at the time.⁹⁶
- 1870, Sanpete County: The First Presidency agreed to hear a case appealed from the Manti high council.⁹⁷
- 1872, Davis County: Brigham Young decided a case in Farmington appealed directly to him from the bishop’s decision.⁹⁸

92. Gideon Brownell to Brigham Young, January 24, 1845 [1855?], holograph, General Correspondence, Incoming, 1840–1877, Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ed548503-8af3-451b-8743-e8c0de74a0f6/0/0>.

93. Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Daniel N. Wells, Decision by the First Presidency, August 20, 1859, Letterbook 5:216–17 [image 487, 489], <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/adc114c8-073a-494e-98cf-c9d00a054123/0/486>.

94. First Presidency to Lorin Farr, August 6, 1860, Harold F. Nufer Collection of the Lorin Farr Papers (1820–1906), L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

95. Brigham Young to Lorin Farr, September 1, 1860, Letterbook 5:591 [image 1223], <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/adc114c8-073a-494e-98cf-c9d00a054123/0/1222>. This may just have been placing South Weber under the direct jurisdiction of the stake in Weber County.

96. Wilford Woodruff, “Journal (October 22, 1865–December 31, 1872),” October 25, 1870, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed June 30, 2025, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/DkRy>.

97. Brigham Young to the President of the [Manti] High Council, May 27, 1870, Letterbook 12:152 [image 378], Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/c91a2db1-a2f0-470d-ac3a-324c44e06cd1/0/377>.

98. Woodruff, “Journal (October 22, 1865–December 31, 1872),” August 25, 1872, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/PN7W>. The narrative is crossed out; not clear why this happened.

- 1872, Utah County: Brigham Young told a Springville resident that the proper course of appeal for his bishop's decision is to the high council at Provo, then to the First Presidency.⁹⁹
- 1873, Millard County: When a visiting home missionary mentioned the concept of appealing a decision to the Salt Lake high council, Stake President Thomas Callister clarified, "This cannot be done. But we may appeal from any high council to the first presidency of the Church." This suggests that he may have been aware of a set policy that was not widely known.¹⁰⁰

Other cases show some confusion or inconsistency, even in the mind of Brigham Young, on the stake's authority.

- 1852, Utah County: A matter in Payson had been decided by the Provo high council, then appealed directly to Brigham Young, who agreed to decide the case at general conference, alluding to the conference itself having appellate authority. But then the case was heard by the Salt Lake high council.¹⁰¹
- 1866, Weber County: A man had appealed a ward decision to Salt Lake Stake President Daniel Spencer. The First Presidency advised him to return the case to the "High Council of the Stake where [he] resides, . . . and, until he appeals to that High Council, he cannot bring his case to the <general> High Council of this for a re-hearing."¹⁰² The emendations in the letter, replacing "of this" [stake?] with "general," are curious. Was this referring to the Salt Lake Stake high council acting as a general high council, the Quorum of the Twelve, or the First Presidency?

We can see that the policy was unclear. It is possible that the decision on whether a case was heard by the Salt Lake high council or the First Presidency was simply a matter of who was more available at the moment.

99. Brigham Young to Joseph S. Wing, June 12, 1872, Letterbook 13:102 [image 295], Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d67ba765-d117-4513-aec2-2cdf8cbfd9/0/294>.

100. Meadow Ward General Minutes, 15:16, Church History Library.

101. Young to Pace and others of Payson; Young to Perry; Thomas Bullock to Benjamin Cross, February 4, 1852, Letterbook 1:43 [image 141], <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f7d18c09-51a0-42c6-8c73-10960c772d45/0/140>.

102. Brigham Young to Daniel Spencer, February 26, 1866, Letterbook 8:135 [image 321], Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/b3c72fee-6f44-4ce6-8a9f-5cf38b6153d1/0/320>.

The dates of both types are interspersed, although the majority of cases beyond Davis County did not report to the Salt Lake high council, especially during the 1870s.

This confusion culminated in 1876 when Brigham Young concisely stated something like a general policy at one of Bishop Hunter's bishops council meetings: "Some have entertained the idea that the High Council in this [Salt Lake] Stake of Zion had jurisdiction over all other stakes. This is not so. The High Council of Weber Co., or any other stake would have just as much right to call in question the decisions of the High Council of this Stake of Zion, as this High Council theirs, both are equal in authority. . . . All these quorums and authorities are under the direction of the First Presidency."¹⁰³

In conclusion, at the close of 1859, the Church in Utah Territory included several modern-looking stakes (Ogden, Salt Lake, Provo, Sanpete, and Parowan) led by a presidency and high council. Each stake coincided more or less with a valley and county and consisted of several wards led by bishops. Three other similarly modern stakes had come and gone. But this did not mean that local administration had arrived at a permanently modern state; Box Elder County was an apostolate under Lorenzo Snow, and Tooele was a regional bishopric. As will be discussed in the final installment of this series, these and other novel structures would proliferate during the 1860s and 1870s before being eliminated by the standard practices installed in the 1877 Priesthood Reorganization.

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103. Presiding Bishopric, Minutes, 1862–1879, 397 (October 19, 1876), holograph, Presiding Bishopric Bishops Meeting Minutes, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e9b0c4cc-2d99-497a-b4ce-f5afe97ea098/0/0>.