

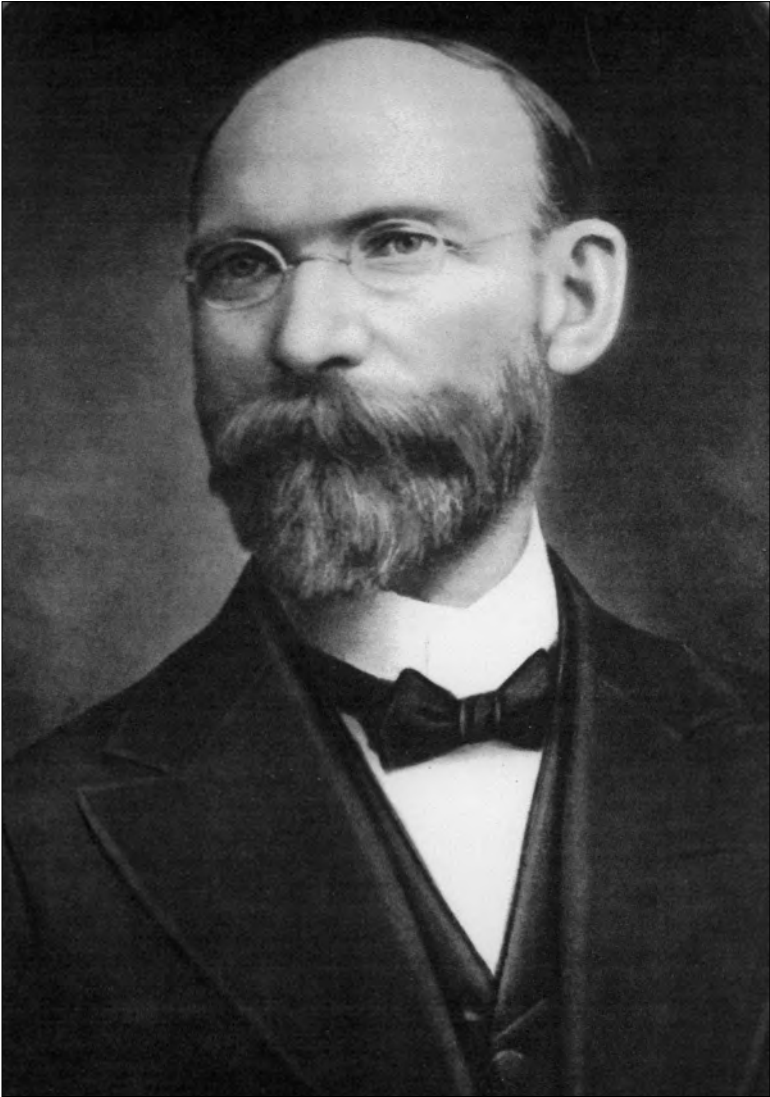
Mormonism's Last Colonizer

The Life and Times of William H. Smart



William B. Smart

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Uintah Stake president William H. Smart

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Contents

<i>Illustrations</i>		VI
<i>Preface</i>		VII
<i>Introduction</i>		1
One	Growing Up in Franklin	7
Two	Years of Trial and Torment	31
Three	An Aborted Mission	56
Four	A Repentant Sinner Finds Himself	75
Five	Putting a Shoulder to the Wheel	89
Six	On-the-job Training in Heber Valley	117
Seven	Making Indian Land Mormon Country	148
Eight	The Vernal Years	179
Nine	Civilizing the Reservation Lands	208
Ten	The Fourth—and Final—Stake Presidency	250
Eleven	Struggle and Failure in Leota	265
Twelve	Hard Times	286
Thirteen	The Final Years	305
<i>Epilogue</i>		316
<i>Appendix A</i>	Thomas Smart's Vision	320
<i>Appendix B</i>	Selected Correspondence from William H. Smart Papers	322
<i>Bibliography</i>		334
<i>Index</i>		340
<i>William H. Smart Journals, on CD</i>		inside back cover

Illustrations

Uintah Stake President Smart	II
Selection of Smart's journals	VIII
Sample of Smart's journal writing	IX
Anna Haines, prospective bride	37
Smart's Heber home	146
Uinta Basin Utes, 1868	154
Ute Indian delegation, 1905	155
Uintah Stake Presidency	176
Vernal Tabernacle dedication	183
Anna Haines Smart	184
Vernal, Utah, ca. 1910	206
Roosevelt High School	215
Roosevelt Utah, 1917	217
I. W. Odekirk's mercantile, Myton, 1915	220
Murdock Store, Duchesene, 1915	237
William and Anna Smart in midlife	239
Thomas Laurence Smart at father's home	288
The Smart family, 1933	297
William and Anna Smart in last years	312

Introduction

On September 25, 1910, forty-eight-year-old William H. Smart took pen in hand and, as he so often did during a ministry unique in Mormondom, wrote a prayer:

My Heavenly Father: Please awaken me to a full realization of the blessing Thou hast bestowed upon me in bringing me along thus far on the Journey of life. . . . Thou didst snatch me from the burnings, Thou didst in me choose a weak thing of the earth to confound the wise. . . . O Father May these my humble but fervent petitions find favor in thy sight even at this most critical time of my life when, having laid down my missionary labors in fields partially nurtured in developments, I now through Thy grace am called and chosen to go into the wilderness as it were, where with the native elements of earth, air and water and kindred resources before me Thou dost invite—yea bid—me to enter, and under Thy guiding hand and with such association as thou shalt be pleased to surround me with, to subdue and colonize the earth unto its reclamation and unto the salvation of Thy children who shall take root herein. Hear me O Father, in this hour of dire need and make me ever equal to my duties, and thine be the glory and honor both now and forever. Amen.

That midlife plea reflects not only his prayerful approach to the challenges he faced, but his motivation and zealousness, his sense of large destiny, his personality, and the style of writing and speech that characterized his adult life. It also speaks of what he had done and what he had yet to do.

His being “snatched from the burnings” referred to a youth and young adulthood of torment, guilt, depression, and failure—including a disastrously ineffective Mormon mission to Turkey and Palestine—caused, among other weaknesses, by his addiction to tobacco.

His transition from failure and self-doubt to total commitment and confident, effective leadership was a classic example of how a “weak thing

of the earth” can be magnified to work with and among, if not confound, the wise.

His “missionary labors in fields partially matured” included his presidency of the church’s Eastern States Mission and of the Wasatch and Uintah stakes in Utah, where he had labored not only for the spiritual salvation of his people but also to build the businesses and municipal services to serve their temporal lives. His future would include the same kind of efforts as president of two more stakes, Duchesne and Roosevelt. Altogether, he gave twenty-six years of his life and dissipated a substantial fortune in virtually full-time church leadership positions.

The wilderness he was called to subdue and colonize was the last extensive area of Utah land available for settlement. In the half century after arriving in the Great Basin, Mormons had occupied all other fertile valleys and had spilled into northern Arizona and southeastern Idaho. The church sent out its last colonies and in 1895 established stakes in northern Mexico and southern Canada, in both cases to provide havens for polygamists. But the 7,500-square-mile Uinta Basin in northeastern Utah was mostly Ute Indian reservation, locked up to whites.

By the turn of the century, white land-hunger made opening the reservation inevitable. As president of the Wasatch Stake, which then included the reservation lands in the basin, Smart could see it coming. At his persuasive suggestion, the First Presidency commissioned him to study the region, locate the best land and suitable townsites, and help the Saints settle there. This time, unlike with earlier settlements, there would be no colonizing call from church headquarters. Smart was pretty much on his own, with the few associates he could recruit—or the Lord would “be pleased to surround me with”—to help.

The tireless zeal with which he set about the task resulted in outraged accusations of Mormon land-grabbing. A federal investigation cleared him and the First Presidency of wrong-doing, though, and by the time the reservation was opened in 1905, he was ready. Settlement on reservation lands was overwhelmingly Mormon. With the reservation open, the church included its lands in the tiny Uintah Stake, with headquarters in the rough, largely non-Mormon frontier town of Vernal, just outside the reservation’s eastern boundary. There, as the new stake president, Smart set out to both modernize and Mormonize the town. The two goals meshed. His strategy was to build its business and municipal establishments, including the first telephone company, the newspaper, and a Mormon bank. His tactics then, as in other towns later, were to bring in Mormons to own or run them. When the recruit had no funds to invest, Smart would lend the money—and often lose it.

After five years, during which time he also labored to establish small Mormon communities on the former reservation, there were enough of

them to justify creation of the new Duchesne Stake. Smart became its first president. It was then, in 1910, that he wrote of going into the wilderness “to subdue and colonize the earth unto its reclamation and unto the salvation of thy children who shall take root herein.”

The journey meant leaving the fine two-story brick home he and his wife Anna had built in Vernal—the Uinta Basin’s first with indoor plumbing—for living conditions that steadily worsened as he followed his perceived mission to pioneer the colonization of even the most desolate parts of the basin. It meant frequent and long absences that left rearing the family mostly to Anna. It meant watching the substantial fortune he had amassed as a highly successful Cache Valley sheepman dissipate, drained by his misplaced faith in the future prosperity of the basin and his self-sacrificing zeal to put Mormons on its land and in its businesses.

He entered the basin a wealthy man (in 1918, even with his fortune in decline, his tithing was the sixteenth largest in the church)¹ and left it thirty years later in poverty. Unarguably the basin’s most powerful and influential man, with easy access to church and state leaders, he ended his ministry there as an itinerant promoter of genealogy, camping out or staying with church members and hoeing weeds to pay for his board.

Smart was a man born out of time. His life spanned two eras in LDS history, but he seems to have been committed to the first. During the first quarter century of Smart’s life, Brigham Young—and, to a lesser extent, his successor, John Taylor—struggled to build a political, economic, and social wall that would keep their Mormon empire pure. The railroad, the military, and federal government pressure ended that. By the turn of the century, industry—especially mining—and business were largely in non-Mormon hands, and Wilford Woodruff, the new church president, had opened a new era of cooperation and accommodation. Although vestiges of it remain, the “Mormon fortress” mentality was essentially gone. But not in Smart’s mind. He understood that his mission was to make the Uintah Basin into Mormon country, and he pursued it with the kind of suspicion of and antipathy toward non-Mormons that Brigham had held decades earlier.

A major element of Woodruff’s modernization program was his 1890 Manifesto supposedly ending polygamy. Like many others clinging to the past, Smart didn’t comply. Twelve years after this manifesto, he took a second wife. Even after the 1904 Second Manifesto made plural marriage subject to church discipline, he continued to practice it openly. As evidence of the church’s early-twentieth-century ambivalence about polygamy, at a time when one apostle was excommunicated and another disfellowshipped

1. Presiding Bishopric letter to Joseph J. Cannon, April 13, 1918, copy in possession of the author. The letter lists, in order of amount paid, the fifty-two members who paid a thousand dollars or more in 1917 tithing. Charles W. Nibley heads the list, Jesse Knight is second, and Smart is number sixteen.

for performing plural marriages, Smart continued in his calling as Wasatch Stake president, and became president, in turn, of three subsequent stakes. His polygamy ended only with the death of his second wife in 1923.

By the turn of the century, the various forms of cooperatives created under the United Order concept had vanished from Mormonism, but not from Smart's mind. He conceived, wrote of, and attempted to implement an elaborate cooperative plan involving his extended polygamous family and at least one other family; it withered under the practical scrutiny of his second wife. He proposed such a cooperative to his associates in Uintah Basin church leadership, and apparently won their approval. But there was no approval from a First Presidency that had moved beyond such ideas, so Smart finally gave it up.

The style and rhetoric of his journals—and the journals themselves—are reminiscent of earlier times as well. They may be compared to those of Wilford Woodruff as perhaps the two most extensive in the LDS archives. They cover similar lengths of time—Woodruff's fifty-three years from 1834 to 1887, and Smart's fifty-one years from 1886 to 1937. Although they were begun earlier, Woodruff's journals seem more modern in their straightforward, candid, comprehensive reporting of events. Smart's are more literary, almost biblical-sounding at times, more lengthy, more intensely personal, more self-revealing, more concerned not only with events but also his own relation to and sentiments toward them. While they often express Smart's feelings of unworthiness for his high and important callings, and ascribe to a higher power credit for his successes, there's no mistaking his effort to record his motives and actions in a favorable light.

Woodruff wrote that "I have never spent any of my time more profitably for the benefit of mankind than in my journal writing."² Smart, striding a much smaller stage, expressed no such pretension, but his journals have their own unique value. They present an intimate view of life in the second level of Mormon leadership, including frequent contact with the First Presidency, long before the church reached worldwide status (when he first became a stake president the church had only forty-eight stakes, with only one, in Canada, outside the United States). They are a primary source for research on Mormon involvement in the opening of the Ute Indian Reservation, on pioneer settlement of its remote and inhospitable lands, and on the struggle to survive there before and during the nation's worst depression.

Beyond this, they reveal a complex, compulsive, sometimes tortured, often physically ill man, unshakably convinced of the rightness of his calling and its divine source, who through that conviction summoned the willingness to place his incredible energy, his fortune, his very life on the altar.

2. Wilford Woodruff diary, March 17, 1857.

At age nineteen, Smart submitted himself to a phrenologist for analysis. Among his private papers is the resulting handwritten report. "You will not obtrude yourself upon other people," the analyst wrote, "but will stand on your own feet manfully." The second part of that prophecy proved true enough. But the first part could hardly be more wrong. Smart spent most of his life obtruding on other people, lecturing them, reshaping them, calling them to repentance, striving constantly to make bad men good and good men better.

From his journal, the recollections of basin old-timers, and Smart's own grandchildren a picture also emerges of his private, more human side. He lived in the burgeoning of the auto age but never owned a car or learned to drive one. His views on female decorum and style were nineteenth century as well. He forbade the use of makeup; a granddaughter recalls when he discovered a frosted-glass jar of face powder on her dressing table and hurled it through an unopened window. Modesty was mandatory. Woe to the granddaughter caught rolling down her stockings to above the knee; lectures were stern and long.

He was bald, mostly deaf, tall, and gaunt—the latter not surprising considering the simplicity and sparseness of his diet. He forbade pork in any form. In a rare show of independence, his wife served a pork roast to visiting apostle Francis M. Lyman. Smart was chagrined, quoting the Old Testament to prove this was wrong. Lyman's rejoinder became a family classic: "President Smart, the Children of Israel were forbidden to eat pork because it was too good for them." That apostolic reproof didn't change Smart's conviction. Bread and milk with honey remained a favorite meal because, he said on at least one occasion, it was what the Savior ate. His chronic gastrointestinal troubles may have been a more compelling reason, however.

Smart seemed to survive on little sleep. His presidency meetings and others frequently ran past midnight, and he usually awoke before dawn. Long early-morning walks before breakfast were customary. Often it was a walk to one of the many solitary places where he had built an altar to kneel, sing hymns, and pray for guidance and strength in meeting the challenges before him.

Singing was an important part of his persona. He and Anna invariably harmonized together at their daily worship. He frequently bemused a congregation by punctuating a sermon by singing, alone and unaccompanied, what he considered an appropriate hymn. Driving his buggy or, later in his impoverished years, riding his mule on his travels around the basin, he could be heard singing hymns. Discovering this proclivity for singing was a surprise to his grandson, who remembered as a child singing "Oh My Father" with his grandfather around the graves of his father and mother in the family cemetery in Franklin, Idaho, and concluding that grandpa, like Heber J. Grant, the church president he so greatly admired, was tone-deaf.

Elocution was a more polished talent. He studied it in high school and, for a couple of weeks in Boston, taught it during his brief classroom career; for many years he gave readings at social events. “Farmer John” and “Tell on His Native Hills” (about William Tell) were favorites. At such events, despite the dignity of his leadership position, he also danced with enthusiasm.

He was a stern and autocratic father, not sparing the rod. Among a grandson’s treasured mementos is the gold-headed walking stick Smart broke over the back of his second, most obedient son, Thomas Laurence. But, his youngest son, Joseph, remembered many lighter moments—casting handshadows of the American eagle and Bre’r Rabbit on the wall, telling tall tales, and singing nonsense ballads like “The Frog Who Would A-Wooing Go.” In his later years he was more reserved. His grandchildren remember him as austere and remote, seldom smiling, indulging in no grandpa-like things such as cuddling, tickling, playing games, or reading stories. Yet they recall his generosity, especially the way he celebrated his birthdays, not by receiving presents and having things done for him, but by giving presents to and doing for others.

Generosity was a word often used by old-timers who remembered how it shrank his fortune. Nevertheless, he was not universally loved. Gentiles and backsliding or lukewarm Mormons resented his single-minded zeal to build his own special kind of society. Even committed Mormons must have had their doubts as they watched grinding economic realities destroy the dreams he had encouraged in them. But pioneering demanded his kind of intensely focused, often arbitrary leadership. Pioneer leaders are more often respected than loved. Even his critics, though, had to know that whatever their early efforts in the Uintah Basin had cost them, Smart, one of Utah’s last pioneer leaders, had given far more.

For a man who built much of the community and business infrastructure not only of Vernal but of Roosevelt and Duchesne as well; who located, established, and nurtured—and in some cases named—many of the basin’s communities; who was arguably the primary moving spirit behind the creation of Duchesne County, Utah’s twenty-eighth, and the determination of its boundaries; who at one time controlled most of the basin’s newspapers; who gave land to build schools and his personal funds to keep them open; who raised the money needed to complete the Uintah Stake Tabernacle that is now the Vernal Temple, Smart is little remembered in the Uinta Basin today. Some thirty years ago, his son Thomas Laurence and a grandson donated a large framed portrait of him to the Vernal Daughters of Utah Pioneers, thinking it would find a place of honor in their small museum. Visiting there five years later, they found it gathering dust in a storage room.

Yet on the farms, in the towns, and especially in the churches where many worship, Smart’s legacy of self-denying service, though not widely recognized, is evident to those who know his history.

A Repentant Sinner Finds Himself

The next eight years saw profound changes in William H. Smart's life. His family grew from one infant daughter to four children. Despite his continued smoking, he resumed teaching at the church-owned Brigham Young College and filled various church callings, none of them positions of leadership. One crucial change was in his financial condition, and in the way he improved it. He returned virtually penniless from the failed Turkish mission. After three more years of struggling financially as a schoolteacher, he finally gave it up and became a full-time player in the then-burgeoning sheep industry. Within three years after that decision, he had achieved the financial independence that would enable him to spend his life in church service. More importantly, he seems during this time to have shed much of the indecision, vacillation, self-deprecation, and despondence that had plagued his life. And by the end of that period he had finally cast off his greatest burden—his addiction to smoking.

He began modestly enough, spending the summer following his return from his mission in the lowliest of occupations, herding his brother's sheep in the mountains above Franklin and Bear Lake. For that summer's work he earned \$100. In the fall, he took stock. After expenses, he reported to his journal, "all we have—besides our home—to commence with is \$50."¹

But he had a job, rejoining the faculty at Brigham Young College in Logan for \$1000 a year. His teaching load seems heavy and certainly eclectic: elocution, rhetoric, penmanship, bookkeeping, arithmetic, algebra, U.S. history, and civil government. Expenses were low; rent for a three-room house in Logan was \$6 a month, and he recouped part of that by renting

1. Smart, Journals, September 1, 1890.

out his house in Franklin for \$4. For a while, in his spare time he taught ten-week elocution courses in Logan, Franklin, Lewiston, Smithfield, and Hyde Park—at \$75 per course, regardless of the number of students. So the young couple struggled and made do.

Despite his addiction and personal torment during this stage of his life, he must have been an excellent teacher. In his autobiography, John A. Widtsoe, a distinguished scientist, university president, and Mormon apostle, wrote of entering Brigham Young College in 1889, at age seventeen. Of twenty-seven-year-old William H. Smart and three other special faculty members, he wrote: “They were not holders of high academic degrees, but their learning was sound, and their teaching ability surpassingly good. I have known none better. . . . The teachers simplified their subjects, and led the students onward by easy steps. There was no attempt to make a show of learning, or to confuse the student by requirements beyond their reasonable reach. It was real teaching.”² In Smart’s file of personal correspondence are no fewer than nine letters from Widtsoe, several expressing gratitude for his inspiration and help.³

Another testimonial about that help came to Smart’s son, Thomas Laurence, when he was a student at the college.

One day I was riding from town up to the college when a man sat down by me and put his arm around my shoulder. I turned and was astonished to see that it was John A. Widtsoe, the president of the college. He said, “Laurence, I have wanted to tell you something about your father.” He then told me that when he was a student at B. Y. College he had quit school in order to go to work and support his widowed mother; and that father convinced him that he could do much more for his mother by finishing his education. He went back to school and became one of the greatest authorities on irrigation, the president of the Utah Agricultural College and later of the University of Utah, and finally one of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the church.⁴

Nor was Widtsoe the only student helped by Smart. Young Laurence was elected class president, and in that capacity was held responsible for an inter-class fracas that spoiled a school dance and injured a student. Summoned to the office of George Thomas, the school disciplinarian, he later recalled that he was told: “You should be asked to leave school, but I cannot send the son of William H. Smart home.’ He told me that when he was a student [there] he had so much difficulty mastering the course of study he quit school and took a job herding sheep, and that father, his teacher, had gone

2. John A. Widtsoe, *In a Sunlit Land* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1952), 21.

3. Widtsoe to Smart, February 29, 1916, August 15, 1919, and April 16, 1921, Smart Papers.

4. Thomas Laurence Smart, “Personal History of Thomas Laurence Smart, December 5, 1873-April 27, 1980,” 20, typescript, undated, in possession of the author.

out in the hills, induced him to come back to school, and helped him with his studies. This man later became the president of University of Utah.⁵

But such accolades were far in the future. For now Smart's challenge was to put food on the table. At the end of 1890, he settled his accounts with the church in the customary Mormon way: "Paid my tithing for 1890. \$40 tithing orders [apparently the value of that much work pledged on church projects], and \$10 cash. We pay a monthly poor offering of 50 cents."⁶ If this amount represents the honest 10 percent the church asks of its members—and there is no evidence Smart was less than honest in his tithing, then or later—it is clear he was hardly getting rich. But that would soon change.

Change was also coming on a much broader scale, involving the church itself. Almost since its founding, and especially after the church relocated to the Great Basin, Mormon relations with the federal government, never good, deteriorated. Six times, beginning in 1849–50, petitions to Congress begged for statehood. Six times, even in 1887 after a Mormon-approved proposed state constitution prohibited polygamy, the petitions were denied; Congress also demanded that church leaders specifically disavow polygamy.⁷ And there was another major problem standing as an obstacle to statehood—the Mormon tendency of bloc-voting in support of its People's Party.

Throughout his long presidency of the church (1847–77), Brigham Young was implacable—and occasionally vitriolic—in defending the church and its practices against federal interference. His successor, John Taylor (1877–87), was no less obdurate. In Taylor's last public discourse, he declared that "I cannot as an honorable man . . . trample these holy and eternal obligations [plural marriage] under foot, that God has given me to keep, and which reach into the eternities that are to come."⁸ He then went into hiding for the final two and a half years of his presidency rather than yield to the government.

Wilford Woodruff, his successor, was more pragmatic. Although not sustained as president until April 1889, he was, as president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the de facto leader of the church from the moment of Taylor's death in 1887. Early in his ministry, and during the less-hostile administration of U.S. President Grover Cleveland (1885–89; 1893–97), he began the process of modernizing the church. His 1890 Manifesto, advising church members to refrain from practicing polygamy, ended federal efforts to disenfranchise Mormons, seize church property, and send

5. Ibid., 19–20.

6. Smart, Journals, January 5, 1891. For a discussion of tithing and the various ways of paying it in the LDS Church, see Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 133–45.

7. Edward Leo Lyman, "Statehood for Utah," in *Utah History Encyclopedia*, ed. Allen Kent Powell (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 529–30.

8. *Deseret Semi-Weekly News*, February 17, 1885, 1.

convicted polygamists to prison. Then, in 1891, the Mormon People's Party was quietly disbanded, and Mormons were encouraged to join either the Republican or Democratic Party, both of which had recently been organized in Utah.⁹ The intent was to divide their membership equally between the two parties. Indeed, tradition holds that some congregations were divided down the middle, assigning members sitting on one side of the chapel to be Republicans, and on the other side, Democrats.

Smart's journal entry for October 8, 1890, records these two seminal events, adding something of his own feelings.

Recently Pres. Woodruff has issued a Manifesto declaring his advice to the Saints is to discontinue entering into plural marriage in U.S. The same was received by vote by the Conference on the 6th at Salt Lake City. He says the sin will fall upon those who have caused it to be a crime in the U.S. He asserts having communed with the prophet Jos. Smith and that there is still communication between Heaven and the Saints. The Manifesto has caused many Saints to feel that through persecution we are becoming faint-hearted.

Smart's reporting, without comment, the president's assertion of communion with the dead Joseph Smith and with heaven concerning the polygamy issue leaves unclear how he himself felt about this claim. But the journal entry he had made on December 18, 1889, in the closing days of his Turkish mission, leaves no doubt that he was among those who felt that the church was becoming faint-hearted.

Of the division into political parties, on June 16, 1891, he wrote: "Instead of the Political parties Liberal & People, we shall now join issues with the two great parties of the nation, Democratic & Republican. The Saints are free to join either. Some of the leaders are going Republican, some Democratic. My present sympathies are with the Democratic Party."

The division into two parties proved to be anything but simple. In the church leadership councils, party affiliation became a source of conflict for decades.¹⁰ Among members, political affiliation still continues to fluctuate, and is seldom close to equality. As for Smart, his Democratic sympathies didn't last. Throughout his presidency of four stakes, he voted a straight Republican ticket and didn't hesitate to use his office to encourage others in that direction. He served a term as a Republican senator in the Utah legislature.

Smart's journal of April 1, 1891, notes two other events, one of world and one of national importance, but with an understatement that may reflect an incomplete awareness of what was going on, a provincialism born

9. Lyman, "Statehood for Utah," 530.

10. See Thomas Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986). Also see Edward Leo Lyman, *Political Deliverance: The Mormon Quest for Statehood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

of isolation, or both. First, he reports: "This has been a most extraordinary winter for its sickness. The disease la grippe or influenza has inflicted many, and the mortality has been great. It is less violent here now, but is going East. Recently in one week Chicago reports 920 deaths." The reference is to the so-called Russian flu of 1889–90. While far less deadly than the Spanish flu that would kill more than twenty million people thirty years later, it was worldwide and was the most devastating influenza epidemic up to that time. Beginning in central Asia in the summer of 1889, it spread north into Russia, east to China, and west to Europe, eventually striking North America, parts of Africa, and major Pacific Rim countries. By conservative estimates, 250,000 died in Europe, and the world death total was two to three times that.¹¹

Smart's other report was similarly understated.

There have been excitements among the Indians for some months past, they claiming the Savior has appeared to them. The Saints are charged by the U.S. as having worked this deception upon them to incite them to insurrection, but as an evidence of the falsity of this, the Indians are not inclined to war, but they say they are to come into possession of peaceful home in America and the Great Spirit is going to fight their battles.

That is an approximate description of the non-militant, quasi-religious Ghost Dance movement among western Indian tribes in the late nineteenth century. Claiming to have had contact with spirits of departed Indians and with the Supreme Being, a Nevada Paiute mystic named Wovoka—known to the whites as Jack Wilson—urged that dancing the traditional circle dance would cause the whites to disappear. The movement spread widely. Militant leaders among the Lakota Sioux, angry over the hunger and sickness of their people, seized on the dance as a symbol for the violent overthrow of the white man's rule, claiming that the sacred ghost shirt would protect them against soldiers' bullets. That led, on December 29, 1890, to one of the last Indian-white armed conflicts, the Wounded Knee Massacre.¹² Writing three months later, Smart must have known of the tragedy, which, unaccountably, he fails to mention.

On March 31, 1891, Smart took the first step on the path that would lead him to affluence and enable him to spend his life in church service.

Went to Franklin today and sold James W. Webster the house and lot which was given to me by father—the old homestead. The consideration is as follows.—\$300 Cash within fifteen days; a span of bays, one horse of which is five years old, [the] other a mare, four years old: Seven cows with calves to

11. Lehigh University, "History & Epidemiology," <http://www.lehigh.edu/jgm4/history.html> (accessed August 26, 2003; site no longer available).

12. Jerry Keenan, *Encyclopedia of American Indian Wars, 1492–1890* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 252–54.

be good average, not over four years old. . . . The mare is now lame in the left hind foot, and he is to keep her until well, and if she does not become entirely sound he is to pay me in her stead \$50 Cash.

Webster was his brother-in-law, having married his younger sister, Mary Jane, who had been born in that house. Smart's later involvement as a sheepman would be in partnership with Webster.

The Newest Sheepman

A month later, he took the next fateful step. Although still struggling financially to support his wife and daughter, he invested the entire \$300 in his brother Tom's infant sheep business. The terms were simple and based entirely on brotherly trust: "One year from shearing time next, whatever he has of mine, he is to pay me interest on according to the business of the past year. I have left him to divide the profits of this money in equity between us according to the relative value of my capital and his skill & labor."¹³ So now he was a capitalist, although on a most modest scale.

In the fall of 1890, a shepherd chipped off a bit of rock in the Bear River Mountains west of Cache Valley. It proved to be galena, assaying four hundred ounces of silver to the ton. When the snow melted the following spring, some fifteen hundred prospectors rushed into the area. The boomtown of La Plata, on the border of Cache and Weber counties, sprang up in days, and contained two stores, saloons, a barber shop, a post office, a boarding house, and dwellings—some sixty buildings in all. Half a dozen mines were opened that summer, with the ore hauled by wagon to the railroad at Ogden and shipped on to smelters in Salt Lake City.¹⁴

Smart joined the rush. On August 15, 1891, his journal reports: "I went to Laplata, the mining Camp where I remained the greater part of the time until the 15 of Oct. Prospects of lead and silver have been found in many places. . . . I have been taking charge until organization completed. Received \$140 for my services." But the neophyte capitalist wanted to be neither a caretaker nor a prospector. Borrowing \$500 from his brother, he invested it in the Sundown and Laplata Company.

For most investors, the risk didn't pay, as the small lodes were soon played out. The Sundown owners, of whom Smart was a minor one, drove a 190-foot tunnel under the original strike, but found nothing. No one else found a major ore body, and what ore was shipped turned out to average a miserly ten ounces of silver a ton. The silver panic of 1893 dealt the final blow to this enterprise, and by the summer of 1964, the last mine was closed. For Smart, that didn't matter; by good planning or, more likely, good luck, he

13. Smart, Journals, April 28, 1891.

14. Stephen L. Carr, *The Historical Guide to Utah Ghost Towns* (Salt Lake City: Western Epics, 1972), 18.

had sold his mining stock in the summer of 1892 for a \$1000 lot near the agricultural college in Logan.¹⁵ With 100 percent profit from a one-year investment, he was learning about the power of money to make money, and also about the risks involved.

His modest \$300 investment in his brother's sheep operation paid off as well. "During this year I have done fairly well under the arrangement," he confided in his journal on October 27, 1892. "Besides keeping my family and finishing paying up some accounts I made \$500 which I paid to my brother for amount borrowed into Laplata Mine."

Solvent now and seeing the possibilities, he entered the sheep business in earnest, on what seemed to be, for him, highly favorable terms: "In the fall of 1893 James W. Webster and I bought a band of sheep he putting in \$2360 and time against my time and we would divide profits equally. We paid for half of them \$1.90 and for the other half, which belonged to Thomas Smart, my brother, \$2."¹⁶ That would have been a small band, perhaps about a thousand sheep, but it was the beginning of the Smart & Webster Livestock Company that very shortly made Smart a wealthy man. One clause of the contract, rigorously adhered to throughout their association, was that before settlement of any other debt they would pay an honest tithing.

Smart spent parts of two more years teaching, which he characterized as unselfish public service: "My health being better and the Franklin schools being in a very bad shape I engaged to teach the advanced grade and be Principal of District. . . . Received \$90 per month." That school year, 1893–94, lasted seven months. The following year, with his wife working as his assistant for a combined salary of \$125 a month, the school continued for six and a half months before closing for lack of funds. He managed to put a positive spin on that unhappy ending, and added a bit of self-congratulation. "The schools are in good condition now," he told his journal, "and having thus done some good to my birth place I feel now to retire from the profession of teaching."¹⁷ For the next several years, he would give his major attention to raising and marketing sheep.

Smart's decision to become a sheepman could not have come at a more profitable time for him—or a more ruinous time for the mountain and desert ranges he would use. Sheep husbandry began in the Great Basin within a year of the Mormon pioneers' arrival, when a few small flocks accompanied the 1848 immigrants. The mountainous terrain and arid desert lands, both unsuitable for cultivation, proved ideal for sheep. The range was open and free, and Brigham Young encouraged the practice of raising sheep to provide homespun fabric to help his isolated people become self-sufficient.

15. Smart, Journals, October 27, 1892.

16. *Ibid.*, dated October 27, 1892, but obviously written later.

17. *Ibid.*

So the industry mushroomed, but the land paid a terrible price. The 1880 census, just thirty-three years after the Mormon arrival, recorded: "The once best grassed and most valuable pasture grounds of the territory present now scarcely a trace of their former abundant forage grasses or browse feed. . . . In 1880 there was not a single locality west of the Wasatch Mountains from Cache Valley to the basin of the Rio Virgin which did not exhibit effects of overgrazing."¹⁸

It got worse. As one range expert described conditions in the late nineteenth century,

vagrant stockmen roved about the region pasturing their flocks wherever they could find forage. Their "four-footed locusts" frequently denuded a whole range in a single passage. To protect themselves against these tramps, the resident stockmen grazed their animals more heavily each season than before. With the arrival of spring each grazier would drive his animals at once to the earliest green pasturage, then to the next, and the next, striving always to keep ahead of competing stockmen. This practice of early grazing became particularly destructive when the animals closely followed the retreating snow-line, cropping the earliest vegetative growth almost as soon as it appeared. . . . In many localities the range was so crowded that it was grazed continuously throughout the season. . . . Consequently many ranges were practically ruined.¹⁹

Despite such competition, Smart prospered. His journal-keeping was sporadic during this period, but his infrequent entries report remarkable growth. The thousand sheep with which Smart & Webster Livestock started business in the fall of 1893 had grown to 5852 by the spring of 1895.²⁰ That was while Smart was still teaching school. After he quit to give full-time attention to the sheep, the business mushroomed. That summer and fall, the partners "spent July in traveling through the Snake River country" and bought a quarter-section of land for \$1,350; "bought and sold sheep," borrowing \$22,000 in the process; in October "took about 8500 head, mostly lambs, to Shelton, Nebraska, to feed," and another 1,500 cull lambs to the Snake River to fatten before sending them to market. Total expenses for the year were \$49,268.81; the proceeds, \$52,196.51.²¹

The next year, 1896, in spite of a bad spring and poor lambing, he reported that they marketed about 12,000 lambs, received about \$12,000 for their wool clip, ended the year with "about 20,000 ewes . . . and some 4,000 tail end weathers and lambs," and showed a profit of \$5,106.45 for the year.

18. Langdon White, "Transhumance in the Sheep Industry of the Salt Region," *Economic Geography* (July 1926): 418–19.

19. *Ibid.*, 416–17.

20. Smart, *Journals*, March 27, 1895.

21. *Ibid.*, October 15, 1895.

They were expanding geographically as well as financially. Smart “spent part of the winter in the southern part of the State of Utah where I bought & wintered two bands of stock sheep.” The following summer, 1897, they were ranging their sheep not only in Beaver Canyon above Bear Lake, but also in the Snake River Range and the Teton Basin country. Their twelve bands totaled 35,755 sheep and lambs.

A December 18, 1897, letter from LDS Church headquarters enquiring about his willingness to serve a church mission would soon change Smart’s life forever. It caused him to reflect on his financial success and on his purpose in life.

This call was a great shock to me. Since making a business of sheep I had devoted my best energies to it and was anxious to accumulate wealth as rapidly as possible while giving it my whole time. For three years, or since I had been giving the business my time, we have been very successful. We commenced with very little credit & with one band of sheep & owing for them all as far as I was concerned. Our credit has gradually increased and also our herds until at this time we have 12 herds at home (range sheep about 31,000) and 6500 in Nebraska, and owe about \$50,000. . . . Just now at the receiving of the first letter I was negotiating for a loan of \$100,000 with which to carry out a scheme in my mind of handling merchant sheep the coming year, and I had received promise of it from Greer Mills & Co—Chicago on certain terms. I mention this to show to what extent our credit has grown, and also to show in what condition of mind and circumstances I was at the time. I had also built a permanent feeding plant at Chapman [Nebraska] a part of which was a line of corn crib, granary & grinding Elevator. . . . For our wonderful prosperity I have always given God the glory feeling always that He was helping us. I was ambitious for means that I might be able to get into circumstances where I should not have to be worrying about such things and that I might devote myself to the kingdom of God both by my means and by my own works. I know this is reversing things, but I must acknowledge it as true.²²

There were other factors in their success. One was Smart’s boldness, based on his confidence in his own abilities. He acknowledged as much: “At the commencement of this year’s [1897] business, my partner and I agreed that should we be worth \$60,000 in six years, or at any time previous that we should be equal partners in the business. He has about \$3000 more invested than I and he has agreed to enter into this arrangement believing my time to be that much more valuable to the business than his. I proposed it believing that I could so manage as to effect this gain.”²³

Another factor was his meticulous attention to detail. His journal records pages of what he calls “Observation Notes” of what he was learning about the

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., “Heading: Business Agreement.”

sheep business. There are twenty-four “notes” like these: “Moreno ewes are poor mothers, & poor mutton, hence coarser sheep more profitable.” “Never buy cheap article for breeding. Get what you want or don’t buy.” “Never send herds where you presume there is feed. Either hunt feed thoroughly, or give responsibility to herders entirely.” “A Corral 28 rds. around or 40 sq. rds. will loosely hold 2650 ewes and lambs.” “Move ewes and lambs morning and evening—otherwise lose lambs.” The process of lambing involved twelve additional “notes,” such as: “Have plans well matured and everything ready in season, & not leave things to last hour.” “Have stake ropes or fencing for bad cases.” “If ewes are hobbled better do so fore & hind so can be caught. I like staking better.” “Have ready good scare-crows & plenty of sacks or such things to lay lambs on if necessary.” “Grub enough to last.”²⁴

But the major factor in his success, except for, or perhaps part of, whatever divine guidance he may have received, was his impeccable timing. Smart and Webster rode the crest of the dramatic rise of the sheep industry in Utah, and by the time of its meteoric fall, the company was solidly established and continued to prosper. Its growth and profitability were typical of those of many Cache County sheepmen. In 1880, some 10,000 sheep roamed the county; by the turn of the century, the number had soared to 300,000. With free and uncontrolled grazing in the forests and on the desert lands to the west, profits multiplied. But it couldn’t last. The range was being ruined, the streams were polluted—full of silt, and often flooding—and the citizens were getting angry. William Peterson, a geology professor at Utah State Agricultural College, described conditions during that period.

In 1903 I undertook to map the glacial geology of the Bear River range as a special problem under the direction of the University of Chicago. I knew this range intimately and proposed to work it with merely a saddle horse and a pack horse. The area covered was from Blacksmith Fork Canyon to Soda Springs on the north and from Cache Valley on the west to Bear Lake Valley on the east. . . . As I had known the area, the tops of canyons and the high cirques had never been grazed, so I started with a small amount of grain, feeling that I could graze my animals as the work proceeded. I cannot over-exaggerate the conditions found. The first night out my animals were tied up to keep from wandering, because there was absolutely no feed available. I purposely visited the very head of the canyons, those areas which were most generally inaccessible, but greatly to my surprise sheep had been there and had transformed what had previously been a luxuriant growth of grass and flowers into a dirty, uninviting barren spot. Only one night do I remember I was able to graze the animals out and that was by partially building a trail that got the horses onto a ledge where sheep had not been able to climb. This was the only

24. Ibid., April 27, 1895.

night of actual grazing given to my animals during the six or seven weeks I rode the Bear River range.²⁵

Facing such conditions, the Cache County Commission called a public meeting to discuss the possibility of creating a forest reserve to save the land. The *Logan Journal* of February 18, 1902, reported the event: "Mr. Hillyard of Smithfield was afraid people would be prevented from getting wood from the mountains and thought reservoirs would conserve the water best. George Bell, being a sheep man, of course protested against the reserve." "Mr. Hobbs from Benson . . . thought the brush should be destroyed as it scratched his pants when he got out wood, and anyway, a timber reserve was a humbug. Prayer was the thing, just straight prayer and faith."

But those sentiments were in the minority. "President [James H.] Linford of the B. Y. College, made a telling talk in favor of the reserve, calling attention to the manner in which public health is being endangered by the grazing of large herds of sheep along our watercourses." Professor Swendsen argued that "sheep have eaten off all the weeds and grass, have destroyed the underbrush and trampled the earth solid along our watersheds. The result is that the moisture cannot sink to replenish the spring, but is carried away by spring freshets and is lost to us. Logan River is now lower than it has ever been." Jed Blair declared, "you can do one of two things, gentlemen, either take this land as a timber reserve and thus preserve it for the public, or let it remain as it now is and have it purchased by private individuals, then you will have a private reserve, upon which no citizen will dare to venture without permission. . . . What do you want? A public reserve with pure water and a beautiful canyon, or a private reserve, impure water and mountain deserts."

But Moroni Price gave perhaps the most compelling argument: "I've been here since the mountains were little hills, and not until recent years have I suffered for lack of a decent drink of water, but after seeing the dead sheep and other animals that continually find a burial place in our streams, I have about reached a decision to drink whiskey from now on." Given that sobering thought, the assembly almost unanimously approved a resolution to President Theodore Roosevelt urging creation of a public reserve in the watersheds of the Little Bear, Blacksmith Fork, Logan, Little Muddy and Cub rivers, "or so much thereof as may upon investigation be deemed expedient."²⁶

The investigation soon followed. Albert F. Potter, former associate chief of the Forest Service, arrived in Cache Valley on July 1. He spent the next four weeks meeting with Cache Valley stockmen and others and riding the ranges in question. His first meeting was with William H. Smart's

25. William Peterson, *Utah Centennial History Suite*, CD-ROM (Orem, UT: Timeless Software, 1998).

26. *Logan Journal*, February 18, 1902, 1 and 5.

older brother Thomas, with whom he spent two days riding Logan Canyon, Providence Mountain, and Spring Creek, where Smart ran his sheep. Smart, he reported, agreed that the range was severely overstocked. His solution was typical of local sentiment: keep out the itinerant herds “from Idaho and less favorable parts of Utah” and leave the grazing to “stock which are owned in the county.”²⁷ In the vast amount of country he covered by horseback, Potter discovered ample evidence of damage. In Cowley Canyon, he “saw much evidence of excessive sheep grazing, the range being very seriously tramped.” Above Meadowville: “All of this country has been very heavily grazed; most of the grass has been tramped out.” Up Blind Hollow: “This country has been very heavily stocked with sheep and much damage done in tramping the soil.” And so it went. His conclusion: “It is safe to say that 150,000 sheep were grazed in Logan River basin last year. From general appearance of the range I think the number allowed within the proposed forest reserve should not exceed 50,000. And it might possibly prove to be necessary to cut the limit down lower.”²⁸

From Cache Valley, Potter went south, spending the rest of the summer examining ranges covering almost the length of Utah. His report brought quick results. On March 29, 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt established the Logan Forest Reserve. In 1908, the reserve was renamed the Cache National Forest, and by World War I, fewer than a third as many sheep grazed there than at the turn of the century. Sheep culture would never again be as profitable. But that would not concern William H. Smart; his attention had turned to other, less worldly matters.

Making of a Real Missionary

Smart's response to his church's letter of December 18, 1897, asking if he would be available to serve a mission, started him on a new course. “I answered that it would be agreeable to my feelings, but asked them to be Judges as to the rest. I explained my connection with our business, general condition of affairs, told them I was not keeping the word of wisdom (smoking) etc.” The reply, dated December 29, advised that “I put myself in a moral and financial condition to fill a mission as soon as I could conveniently do so and report as soon as I was ready. I answered that I would do so.”²⁹

He quickly set about getting ready, engaging an agent, John Petrie of Chicago, to look after his business affairs, getting fitted for eyeglasses, and seeking “medical aid for a rectal trouble that has also pained me and retarded my work for a long time.” But his major problem—his addiction to tobacco—remained. That, at last, was about to change.

27. Albert F. Potter, diary, July 1, 1902–November 22, 1902, 1, typescript, copy at Logan District Office, U.S. Forest Service, Logan, Utah.

28. *Ibid.*, 9.

29. Smart, Journals, “Heading: Mission Notification, 1897.”

In Chicago on sheep business, while fasting and praying “to get more control of myself,” he met with LDS Church apostles Francis M. Lyman and Matthias F. Cowley, who were returning home from a mission tour. He recorded: “I was full to overflowing with mixed emotions of repentance, remorse and spiritual Joy, and I felt as though in some way I had been blessed to meet these brethren here and that they would be messengers unto me of strength.” That afternoon, “I went to the Church office and was administered to by the above apostles. Bro. Lyman was mouth and he promised me that if I would keep the commandments of God I should get well of my rectal trouble. After this Bro. Lyman admonished me to keep the word of wisdom and I gave him to know how I desired in my heart to do so.³⁰

For years, Smart’s life had been an agonizing series of repentances and backsliding. Over and over he had suffered, and succumbed to, the pains of withdrawal. As discussed earlier, his suffering was a classic example of the withdrawal symptoms described in medical literature. But this time was different. Whether through the apostolic blessing, because of self-confidence gained in his recent years of financial success, because, at age thirty-four, he had matured, or perhaps by a combination of all three, he now mustered the strength to quit—permanently. His triumph took one more day, though. On the day following the blessing,

Monday the 14th—Valentine Day—I continued my fast and also my smoking until about 5 p.m., when I took my last regular smoke. I fared pretty well until about the same time the following day or a little before, when I allowing myself to be overcome walked into a tobacco store, purchased a sack of tobacco, rolled a cigarette, threw the remainder back on the counter, lighted the cigarette and walked on. I had not gone far when I turned very ill—so much so that I could hardly proceed. I threw the cigarette down and recovering somewhat walked on. Still weak after walking a block further I decided to return to my room. Arriving at place where I left the cigarette I was tempted to pick it up and relight it. I mastered the temptation and walked on. It is now April 2nd and that is the last I have tasted; and may God grant I may never yield again.³¹

He never did. A year later, while serving as a devoted and highly successful missionary, he fasted four days in celebration of his year-long abstinence and recorded in his journal: “Yesterday [Valentine’s Day] was observed by myself and family as a day of thanksgiving for God’s blessings since and on last Valentine’s day, and invoking His blessings upon us in the future.”³² For years afterward he remembered Valentine’s Day as the day of his deliverance.

30. Ibid., February 13, 1897.

31. Ibid., “Heading: Victory Through God.”

32. Ibid., February 15, 1889.

Following that last cigarette, Smart's journal rarely speaks of sheep or other worldly affairs. He spent weeks in the Salt Lake Temple doing work for the dead ancestors whose names he had discovered in England with his father. That done, he wrote to church headquarters, "informing them that I was ready for a mission whenever they wished me to go. . . . On my return [from the church's April general conference] I found a letter desiring me to start for the Eastern States immediately after Conference." He would have received that letter about April 7 or 8, and wasted no time. His journal, dated April 11, 1898, records: "I with about forty others who had been called on missions convened in the Salt Lake City Temple to receive instructions and to be set apart for mission to the Eastern States."

Many of the instructions seem directed specifically to him, or, perhaps because of his past, these are the ones he most remembered and recorded. From Apostle John Henry Smith: "We must not allow ourselves to go away with sins burdening us down. . . . we must be on our guard for when habits are once formed we are prone to fall into them again." From Seymour B. Young of the First Council of the Seventy: "Don't be curious to see bad society or go where the Holy Ghost cannot enter. Keep the Word of Wisdom. Referred to blessings predicated upon keeping the Word of Wisdom concerning health and admonished us to live so that we shall inherit them." From Apostle Heber J. Grant: "Do not go to any place of ill repute. Keep far away from temptation like the Irish hack-driver away from the precipice." And, again from Apostle Smith, counsel that reflects the church position on polygamy in the years following the 1890 Manifesto: "Do not preach plural marriage is practiced or should be under existing conditions, but defend it as an eternal principle. Say we are keeping law of land and believe in law of God, but are not forsaking wives and children already given."³³

The next day, Smart "gathered our children around me and in company of my wife talked to them about my mission and admonished them to live pure lives while I am away so that their prayers in my behalf would be answered by God: to be obedient to their mother. I read to them the Word of Wisdom in the D. and Co., and gave them a special charge to keep scrupulously this word." The following day, April 13, he boarded a Union Pacific train for the next stage of his life.

33. Ibid., April 11, 1889.