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## Orson Hyde

Orson Hyde is numbered among the great leaders of early Utah history. Raised as an orphan in poverty and self educated, he later filled many positions in Utah with distinction and success. He was a convincing and eloquent orator with a compelling desire to excel. As a Mormon apostle he became one of the most scholarly leaders in pioneer times. His boldness and energy frequently made him the subject of criticism from his superiors. In 1838 he was excommunicated from the church, but after making sincere reconciliation he was reinstated the next year.

He kept no diary or journal during the Utah period, but his voluminous letters, reports, and speeches as well as the comments of others have left a veritable paper trail up to the time of his death.

He served forty-three years as a Mormon apostle, twenty-eight years of which were as president of the Quorum of the Twelve. In addition to his literary contributions, he was a farmer, supervisor of Utah immigration, wagon-train master, irrigation specialist, founder of new Utah settlements, railroad planner, sawmill operator, participant in the Utah War councils, regent of the University of Deseret, legislator, newspaper editor, Indian fighter, peacemaker, lawyer, judge, and statesman. Few men can exceed his list of accomplishments.

Orson Hyde was born 8 January 1805 in Connecticut. After the death of his mother, while his father was away fighting in the War of 1812, he was raised by neighbors, who took him to Ohio where he came under the influence of Sydney Rigdon. In 1831 he joined the LDS Church. After filling several Mormon missions and participating in Zions Camp, at age thirty he was ordained an apostle. He crossed the Atlantic in 1837 with Heber C. Kimball to start the LDS British Mission, which later produced many Utah immigrants. He is best remembered for his solo mission to Jerusalem in 1841, where he dedicated the land of Palestine for the return of the Jews. This was the longest and perhaps the most dangerous mission performed by an early church elder. There is a popular myth that Orson Hyde was of Jewish ancestry, but careful investigation has uncovered no evidence this is true.

Hyde's first major contribution to Utah's settlement began with his appointment to head the Mormon colony at Winter Quarters (Iowa/Nebraska) from 1847 to 1852. In this capacity he served as mayor and probate judge of this frontier town with a population at times in excess of 16,000. His chief effort was in organizing and sending immigrant trains to Utah. He also left his mark on this early settlement with his three-year editorship of his newspaper, the *Frontier Guardian*. He himself led two large pioneer wagon companies across the plains to Utah in 1850 and 1852. This last event was when he

closed Winter Quarters and brought along all who were willing to travel, including his own families.

He organized and directed the Utah territorial expansion into the Fort Bridger area, founding Fort Supply in 1853 and organizing Green River County (now in Wyoming) with officers from Salt Lake City in 1854. In 1859 he conducted evening schools for adults in English grammar. Wilford Woodruff was one of his students.

Under appointment from Brigham Young, he moved to Carson Valley, Utah (now Nevada), and established an outpost on the western edge of the Utah Territory from 1855 to 1857. As the presiding officer and probate judge, he led the colony and built and operated a sawmill. He very nearly froze to death in fetching parts for this mill over the mountains from California in mid-winter, but survived with the loss of a toe. This settlement was abandoned at great loss with the advent of the Utah War in 1857.

He gave much advice on how to improve Utah's agriculture. He gained some of his knowledge from observing crop irrigation in Syria and Lebanon while on his Palestine mission. He was the chief influence behind the incorporation of the Provo Canal and Irrigation Company in 1853 and was an early advocate of controlled range grazing. In 1861 he remarked that in the past "there was an abundance of grass growing all over these benches . . . like a meadow. Now nothing but desert weed, sage and rabbit bush."

With the approach of Johnston's Army in 1857, he participated in the Utah War councils. After moving his extensive families to Provo in the Move South, he assisted in the peaceful settlement of the dispute and the establishment of the army at Camp Floyd in Rush Valley, west of Lehi.

In 1860 he was called to preside as stake president over the settlements in Sanpete County, where he served seventeen years, until the time of his death. He was elected and served twelve years in the Territorial legislature, the last part as the president of the Utah Senate. In 1861 he recruited and sent fifty Sanpete families to settle St. George, Utah. In Sanpete he was a wheat farmer and Indian agent, and he fought in the Black Hawk Indian wars, finally helping establish peace, after the deaths of more than 100 whites. During this period he made frequent trips to Salt Lake City to participate in territorial and church councils.

Two years prior to the death of Brigham Young, the seniority among the twelve apostles was reorganized. Orson Hyde had been next in line to become president of the church after Brigham Young. During this reordering of the apostles, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff were moved ahead of Orson Hyde to reflect the proper seniority when Hyde was readmitted to the quorum in 1839, rather than his original standing based on his ordination in 1835. Were it not for this action, Orson Hyde instead of John Taylor would have succeeded Brigham Young. There is no record of any ill will on Hyde's part over this adjustment in his status.

Orson Hyde was the husband of seven wives, who bore him thirty-two children, only

seventeen of whom survived pioneer conditions to reach adulthood. His health started to decline in 1868; but he kept active until his death at the age of 73, on 28 November 1878 in Spring City, Sanpete County, Utah.

**Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A Hilton**