Nineteenth-century Mormons differentiated little between temporal and spiritual concerns. The physical act of gathering to Zion showed their faithfulness more than attendance at Sunday meetings; discouraging Gentile influence by participating in community production efforts and shopping at church cooperative stores seemed nearly as essential as the payment of tithes. Living some distance from Salt Lake City merchants, the Birch and Morgan families undoubtedly relied more than townsfolk on bartering with neighbors. Similarly, rural conditions and distance from church headquarters probably influenced ward activities and the structure of meetings—but not essential ordinances or the importance of community worship and community work.

Millcreek Ward

The Birch farm was included in the Millcreek Ward, one of the original four country wards in the Salt Lake Valley. The ward was organized 16 February 1849 as part of the original Salt Lake Stake; ward boundaries incorporated the so-called “Ten Acre Survey” and all the land lying east of it. Westward it extended to the Jordan River. According to some historians, the ward for several years had the largest membership in the church.

Attendance at ward meetings was probably small, typical of attendance throughout the territory. In 1851 Brigham Young complained,

> Suppose I should appoint a meeting for tonight, about a dozen [members] would come, [and] without any candles. [But] if I were to say—level this stand for the band that we may have a dance, they would bring the stoves from their wives’ bedsides, and would dance all night, and the house would be filled to overflowing.

Historian Ronald Walker cites the ten to fifteen percent attendance at the Thirteenth Ward’s Sunday preaching services in 1870 and concludes, “Nineteenth-century Mormons simply refused to regard meeting attendance as a serious religious obligation.” Rather, the outward sign of their immigrating,
along with rebaptism and confirmation during church refor-
mations, manifested their commitment.\(^7\)

**A Family of Tithepayers**

Additional indicators of faithfulness included participation
in polygamy and payment of tithes.\(^8\) While we have no meet-
ing attendance figures for the Birches or Morgans, tithing
records suggest their church involvement. Throughout the
last twenty-five years of Francis' life, he seems to have been
consistently a full tithe payer, a practice carried on after his
death in 1875 by his surviving widows, Elizabeth and Mary
Ann. In like manner, stepsons John and Edward Morgan were
full tithe payers, as was also Francis' sister Elizabeth during
her second marriage (to Francis Brown) and later as a widow.

Although urged to pay tithing in U.S. currency, most Saints
had only labor and agricultural products to donate.\(^9\) One
pioneer recounted: “there was lots of exchanging going on
but not much money in circulation.”\(^10\) Tithing houses in each
community accepted in-kind payments and allowed settlers
to trade one kind of produce for another; the houses even
issued credit for surplus goods deposited and for work on
church projects.\(^11\) Although not official currency, this tithing
scrip could later be redeemed at the shops of local merchants.

Beyond trading at the tithing house, settlers bartered
with neighbors to obtain what they could not produce. For
example, a Nephi family with only three cows traded a small
quantity of milk and butter for a week’s loan of a neighbor’s
cows—which gave enough extra milk to supply their home-
made cheese press. The number of Birch and Morgan relatives
living in close proximity likely made barter among house-
holds more frequent and less formal, especially after Francis
and Edward married women whose families also lived in
Millcreek.\(^12\)

**Self-sufficiency in Zion**

To Brigham Young, the spiritual purity of his people re-
quired their economic self-sufficiency. Miners and travelers

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**Utah Money, 1853–1875**

Although U.S. currency existed in early Utah, it was always in short
supply and was primarily used for trade with the East. On 19 January 1858
the Deseret Currency Association (also called the Bank of Deseret) was
organized with Brigham Young as president. It began issuing scrip a month
later. These notes were backed by livestock but were rarely redeemed. To
get the scrip in circulation, it was used to pay church employees, to finance
public works, and to make loans to local merchants. On 9 July 1859 the
plates were confiscated by the U.S. Marshal. They were returned in a dam-
aged condition and were never used again. The scrip soon went out of circulation and all old scrip was
burned in 1867.

Gold made its way to Utah from California and later from Colorado, but even though the church con-
verted it into specie, few gold coins were found in the local market. Like U.S. currency, locally minted coins
were used for trade with the States. In 1864, Congress enacted a law forbidding private coinage of gold,
permanently ending such efforts in Utah.

That same year, the Great Salt Lake City Corporation began issuing notes in denominations of $0.25,
$0.50, $1.00, and $2.00. Several banks also issued their own drafts. In addition, workers on the Salt Lake
Temple earned temple scrip and employees of ZCMI earned ZCMI due bills, which also became forms
of currency.

Probably very little currency circulated among members of the
Birch family, but any currency in their possession likely was in the
form of a half-dozen or more different scrips.

Adapted from Alvin E. Rust, Mormon and Utah Coin and
Currency (Salt Lake City: Rust Rare Coin Co., 1984).
large mining camp” and brought prospectors by the hoards past the Birch’s Millcreek property. Eastern machinery lured farmers and eastern fashion lured the elite. Still, participation in self-sufficiency efforts had brought Saints together in yet another physical demonstration of commitment to their leaders and their faith.

Church Meetings

Over time, the proliferation of church gatherings throughout the week showed a continuing overlap of temporal and spiritual concerns. Weekday meetings came to include Thursday prayer meetings and monthly fast and blessing meetings; multi-ward priesthood gatherings in which men discussed crops, irrigation, immigration, road work, and building construction; and Relief Society work meetings, planning sessions for welfare needs, and “block” visits to ward members. Whether Birch and Morgan women participated in Relief Society is unclear but probable. Neighbor Isabella Pratt (another of the author’s relatives) reported to the Relief Society

Fuelled by the approaching transcontinental railroad, the church launched a new cooperative movement: Zion’s Cooperative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI). ZCMI produced boots, clothing, and furniture, and encouraged cooperative livestock and dairy herding. Keeping prices low and paying employees with store credit, ZCMI warehouses absorbed many independent retail establishments. The Relief Society spearheaded a “silk mission,” aiming to produce enough high-quality silk to make imported silk less desirable.

But pioneer self-sufficiency was short lived. By 1870 Utah’s silver and ore had attracted more than five hundred Gentile miners, and by 1874 a full quarter of the valley’s residents did not belong to the church. State Street linked the valley into what was described as “one
newspaper Woman's Exponent, 14 July 1876:

Millcreek Ward Relief Society is in a flourishing condition…. Our President is a woman that is alive to her duty at all times, in looking after the wants of the poor and needy; the Society owns a good meeting house well furnished and carpeted…. I believe the meetings to be productive of much good, and edifying to the sisters who attend them.¹⁹

For those who attended Sunday worship services, the program included formal preaching, partaking of the Lord’s Supper (“the sacrament”), and in later years, a morning Sabbath day school for children. Compared to twenty-first-century worshippers, pioneers experienced many more Pentecostal outpourings (such as visions, gifts of tongues), especially during prayer meetings. Without a church template for meeting format, meeting styles varied from ward to ward.²⁰

Francis and the Priesthood

At least one instance of Francis’ priesthood involvement has been documented. During his stay with the Birches, William Henry Jackson witnessed a healing ceremony. Francis, who had been ordained a seventy in Nauvoo, had called on his neighbor, Ephraim Scott, to help him administer a blessing of healing. In Jackson’s words:

After a few days we saw Elder Scott again. Brother Birch’s little boy Francis was desperately ill of a fever, and the elder’s assistance was required for the ceremonial “laying on of hands.” Mary Ann, the sick child’s mother, stood close to the bed, with the rest of us well in the background, [and] Scott and Birch approached. First they poured a few drops of oil on the boy’s head; then, with their hands touching it lightly, they rebuked the illness and sternly commanded all disease to be gone. After a long prayer everybody withdrew but the mother; then the elder informed Bill and me that, by virtue of Brigham Young’s direct communion with God, young Francis would be well again by morning. And in the morning young Francis was as bright as a new dollar. Bill and I were astonished; but the Birch family accepted the phenomenon as commonplace.²²

Jackson considered Francis’ faithfulness a byproduct of ignorance. Describing Francis as “a stooped and wrinkled Englishman, industrious, amiable, and totally illiterate,” Jackson surmised that the old man “perfectly exemplified the sturdy peasants imported by the Elders to develop the land without questioning their authority or the doctrines of the church-state they ruled.”²² It might have surprised the eastern visitor to learn that even as Birch descendents increased in educational attainment, their collective faith and participation in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would continue the legacy of their predecessors.

Endnotes

2. Walker, “Going to Meeting,” 140–42. Walker cites minutes from bishops’ meetings to suggest that some church leaders “found rural congregations to be generally less structured, less governable, and not as free with their time and donations in support of the church.”
7. Ibid.
8. Tithing is the basic contribution by which Latter-day Saints fund the activities of the Church. By revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the
Lord stated that members should pay "one-tenth of all their interest [increase] annually; and this shall be a standing law unto them forever" (Doctrine and Covenants 119:4). The law of tithing is mentioned in ancient scripture as well (e.g., Malachi 3:8–10).


12. It is clear from census records that the families of John, Edward, and Francis lived side-by-side for many years. The family of the Scott sisters (Edward's wives) were also neighbors (see William Henry Jackson's account, mentioned elsewhere in this section), and the parents of Mary Ann Green had settled in Millcreek as well. The parents of John's wife Ann Gillott (Joshua H. and Mary Butterly Gillott) were not Millcreek residents, at least in 1860. They are found in East Tooele City on the 1860 U.S. Federal Census for the Utah Territory, p. 322. I was unable to determine the location of the family of John's second wife, Riis Christena Nielsen.


21. The author's great-grandfather.
