

Mormon Settlement of the Forestdale Valley

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ABANDONED LESS THAN SIX YEARS after its founding, the Mormon settlement in the Forestdale Valley, on what is now the Fort Apache Indian Reservation in east-central Arizona, continues to raise questions. The settlement in the Forestdale Valley, 60 miles south of Holbrook, near present-day Show Low, was one of the earliest attempts to expand Mormon colonization farther south in Arizona Territory. When the Mormon colonists arrived in Forestdale in 1878, they settled an area they believed was public land. The Mormons invited several Apache families to return to their farms, in hopes of converting them to Mormonism. These missionary attempts failed, and the Apache families demanded the removal of the settlers.

Because the Apaches had used the valley before the Mormons arrived, Indian Agent Tiffany at the then White Mountain Indian Reservation, ruled that the valley was part of the reservation and, in 1879, asked the Mormons to leave. In contrast, D. E.

Adams, one of the Mormon colonists in Forestdale, suggests that Corydon Cooley, a wealthy local rancher and farmer, was responsible for the Mormons' removal because Cooley feared the Mormon production of corn in Forestdale would spoil his own market in Fort Apache. Adams felt that the Apaches became hostile because of Cooley's influence.

In 1880, General Carr, the new commanding officer at Fort Apache, assured the Mormons that the colony was not inside the boundary of the reservation and that they could return to Forestdale. The next year, 20 Mormon families returned to Forestdale and built a church. There is some indication that increased tension on the reservation had made the colonists fearful. When the Apaches returned to the valley in 1882 to plant their summer fields, officials at Fort Apache ordered the Mormons to leave, and

the settlers decided to abandon Forestdale.

One Apache consultant related a different account of the events in Forestdale. He recalled that the Mormon settlement had many houses near plum orchards and cornfields and that the local Apache chief told the Mormons to leave the valley. The Apache families then divided the Mormon homes and fields among themselves, while the chief took possession of the only two-story house. One September, all of the Apache families went to nearby Whiteriver

for a big fair. While they were gone, an Apache set fire to all of the houses, but apparently not the church, which was the only building remaining in 1901 when archaeologist Walter Hough, of the Smithsonian Institution, visited the valley.

In 1939, the building locally known as the "temple" was still standing, and Frederick Scantling, a University of Arizona student of archaeologist Emil Haury, collected samples from four of the logs in its walls, all

of which proved to be from ponderosa pines cut in 1881, which corroborated its reported construction during the second attempt to colonize the valley. At some point, this building also disappeared, perhaps scavenged for its timbers, which may yet be found incorporated into other historic structures in the area. Although none of the original Mormon structures remain at Forestdale, it is possible to recognize some of the areas where they were located. Oral history and documentary evidence show that the Mormons were farming near water sources, and two plum orchards frame the eastern end of the valley. Apache and Mormon consultants have said that the Mormons planted these orchards. There is also a scatter of Mormon-era artifacts between these two orchards. The plum orchards now stand as the most visible evidence of what proved to be the brief Mormon occupation of the Forestdale Valley.



The Forestdale "temple" in 1941 (photograph by Emil W. Haury, courtesy of the Arizona State Museum, Negative No. 665).