

The Prophet advised against it, however. “lest we might excite the jealousy of our enemies.” Smith did instruct the Apostles to select an exploring company to go California “to select a location” for the settlement of the Saints.” Meanwhile, Lyman Wight and George Miller had been investigating the advisability of establishing Mormon colonies in the Wisconsin country where they had located their sawmills. Miller arrived in Nauvoo March 8 with a formal report. The colony at the “pinery” had had a very difficult season, and the Wisconsin brethren advised against further colonizing for a variety of reasons. But they had a specific proposal to make as an alternative. They wished to take the “pineries” colony to the “table lands” of Texas, and there establish, a Mormon mission. They would sell the mills, urge the friendly Indians to sell their lands to the government, and all go west together. Many things would thus be accomplished: the opening of the Church “in all the South and Southwestern States, as also Texas, Mexico, Brazil, etc., together with the West Indian Islands”; it would provide “a place of gathering for all the South (they being encumbered with that unfortunate race of beings the Negroes)”; and in general enable the colonists “to employ’ our time and talents in gathering together means to build according to the commandments of our Cod, and spread the gospel to all nations.” Both Wight and Miller wrote separate letters; but both were endorsed by a Committee of brethren at the mills, and the author’s signatures were therefore attached. One of the letters stated the general proposition as outlined above. In the other, the implications of the proposal were further explored. The Wisconsin Indian friends, “if counselled by us so to go,” had a strong desire to move to the Southwest, “where game is more plenty,” and would there aid in large-scale conversions of Indians. “This committee is therefore led to take a brief view of the south and western part of North America, together with the Floridas, Texas, West Indian Islands and the adjacent islands of the Gulf of Mexico, together with the Lamanites [Indians] bordering on the United Territories from Green Bay to the Mexican Gulf, all crying with one voice, through the medium of their Chiefs, Give us [your Gospel], for your ways are equal, and your righteousness far exceeds the righteousness of all the missionaries that we have yet become acquainted with....” Indian missions were a cherished objective of the Mormons, but they had never been extensive or successful. Here was a stirring prospect for a much-neglected responsibility. There would be in addition the advantage of evangelizing among southern slave-owners. “Are there not thousands of rich planters who would embrace the gospel, and, if they had a place to plant their slaves, give all the proceeds of their yearly labor, if rightly taught, for building up the kingdom...? We answer, Yes...” They were “well informed” that the Cherokee and Choctaw nations lying between Arkansas and the Red River owned “large plantations and thousands of slaves,” and that they were “very desirous to have an interview with the Elders, upon the principles of the Book of Mormon.” It would be far better to establish a kind of ‘Southern gathering’ where slaveowners could go with their blacks and keep them in lively exercise according to their former customs and habits.” The alternative, if such converts had to gather to Zion in the North, would be the necessity to abolish slavery and settle the southerner “in a climate uncongenial to his nature and entirely derogatory to his former occupations in life.¹ Here were proposals for kingdom building on a grand scale indeed. Convert gatherers could be sent out to such colonies which would become subcenters of Mormon populations. It would be a way of establishing ‘concert and reciprocity’ through the agency of the Kingdom between North and South. Furthermore, what could be done for planters, slaves, and Indians might be done for other kinds of converts too. The Miller-Wight letters struck fire in the Prophet’s heart. “Brother Miller, I perceive the Spirit of God is in the Pineries as well as here, and we will call together some of our wise men and proceed to set up the Kingdom of God by organizing some of its officers.”ⁱⁱ

Source: Flanders, Robert Bruce, *Nauvoo, Kingdom on the Mississippi*; Urbana 1965, located at Eastern Michigan University, Library of Congress number F 549.N37 F55. Copied by Janet Simmon, June 9, 1982.

ⁱ The letters were signed by Wight, Miller **Phinias Bird**, Pierce Hawley, and John Young, “Select Committee to write expressing the views of the branch of the Church at Black River Falls”;

Wight and Miller were “to write the views of the Committee,” but when each, wrote separate letters, it was “resolved that both productions be sent without alterations.” Joseph Smith’s History, 0:255— 260.

ⁱⁱ ~ Miller, Correspondence, p. 20.