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From Brutal Ally to Humble Believer: Mormon Colonists' Image of Pancho Villa

Brandon Morgan

From Brutal Ally to Humble Believer

MORMON COLONISTS' IMAGE OF PANCHO VILLA

Brandon Morgan

During the Mexican Revolution, a small group of Mormon settlers from the United States inhabited the northern part of Chihuahua, unwittingly placing themselves in the heart of revolutionary violence and fervor.[1] Between 1911 and 1915, the Mormon colonists interacted with Mexican revolutionary general Francisco "Pancho" Villa on various occasions. Villa sometimes quartered his men at Colonia Dublán, Chihuahua. During his stays, the Mormons saw him as a friendly, benevolent man prone to bouts of rage and violence. They differentiated between the Villistas, who robbed and plundered, and Villa himself, who repaired any damages done by his men to the colonists.

The settlers did not blame Villa for threatening to attack the colonies after his raid on Columbus, New Mexico, on 8 March 1916. From the Mormons' point of view, the U.S. government had betrayed Villa by recognizing his enemy, Venustiano Carranza. Therefore, he had every right to turn against Americans. Despite their sympathetic perception of Villa, the colonists in Colonia Dublán still feared that he intended to kill them all on 13 March 1916. They believed that the hand of providence miraculously saved them when he turned his men away from their colony.

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In 1919 an encounter between Bishop Joseph C. Bentley, Elder James E. Whetten, Al Tietjen, Mexican general Felipe Angeles, and Villa led Mormons to believe that Villa was inclined to join their faith. Regardless of Villa's violent behavior, the Mormons revered him as a hero. They saw him as a Robin Hood of the Mexican people, and dismissed his cruel tirades because of his otherwise good nature. His interest in their faith and his posthumous baptism further augmented the Mormon image of Villa. To Mormon colonists, Villa loomed large as a protector, a friend, and a legendary example of the power of their religion to change the lives of even the most violent and unruly men and women.

Most major scholars of the Mexican Revolution either ignore or only tangentially refer to the Mormon colonists. Historians John Mason Hart and Alan Knight mention the Mormons as Americans who owned acreages in Chihuahua and were occasional victims of threats and violence in their syntheses of the revolution.[2] Mormon scholars Thomas Cottam Romney (a former resident of Colonia Juárez) and F. LaMond Tullis published historical surveys of the religion's presence in Mexico.[3] Both make note of Villa's kindness to the colonists, but spend no time exploring how such kindness was perceived by the Mormons. Historians devoted to the study of Villa, such as Clarence Clendenen and Friedrich Katz, likewise have neglected the circumstances behind the revolutionary's interactions with the colonists.[4] Katz recognizes the presence of the colonies in Villa's Chihuahua, but not Villa's relationship with them. And Clendenen merely repeats the interactions between the general and the Mormons prior to the battle of Agua Prieta in 1915 as narrated by historian Raymond J. Reed in his master's thesis.[5] Only historian Bill L. Smith deals with the relationship between Villa and the colonists in any detail. A full chapter of his doctoral dissertation is devoted to the subject.[6] Although he marvels at the Mormons' respect for Villa despite his brutality, Smith does not attempt to analyze the reasoning behind the peculiar relationship. The present essay adds to the body of literature by engaging the question of why the colonists seemed to adore Villa in spite of his violent actions.

This study does not attempt to weigh evenly Mormon and non-Mormon sources; rather it explores the Mormon colonists' worldview through their perceptions of the infamous Villa. In order to understand the Mormon colonists' image of Villa, I have consulted oral histories as well as archival records. My focus is on the Mormon colonists' perceptions of historical events. Discrepancies in oral history reports add to the story of how the colonists viewed

Villa. Thus, letters and news dispatches written by the colonists as events unfolded augment my source base. The illustrations that accompany this article come from *Saved by Faith and Fire*, a children's book created for a Mormon audience in 1984.[7] These drawings add a visual dimension to the Mormon colonists' image of Villa and the way he is still remembered by some members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

To place Mormon relations with Villa within the larger narrative of the Mexican Revolution, I rely on many of the secondary sources cited above since the colonists typically did not consider such matters. The most pressing concern to them was the protection of their lives and property from the revolutionary violence that engulfed Chihuahua between 1910 and 1917. In general they remember Villa as the Mexican military leader who most consistently sheltered them from destruction by other revolutionary factions. I focus on the Mormon settlers' recollections of certain events, as well as their explanations of these events in terms of their deep-seated religious beliefs, rather than what may or may not have actually occurred. By 1919 they had come to believe that Villa was inclined to convert to Mormonism because he recognized their religion's ability to change his life.

Villa is a complex historical figure. Separating Villa the man from Villa the myth is a difficult undertaking. As Katz has posited, three legends shroud the memory of Villa. First, the white legend paints Villa as a generally good man, while also mentioning a few of his faults. Second, the black legend depicts him as an evil villain, a cold-blooded murderous bandit. Third, the epic legend portrays him as a noble hero who constantly battled for the rights of Mexican peasants.[8] These differing perceptions of Villa have created a mythologized, larger-than-life historical figure. Interestingly, Mormon colonists' image of the man incorporates bits and pieces of all three legends. They were well aware of his brutal nature. Colonist Earl Stowell commented on Villa's harsh treatment of his men, "it didn't bother Villa at all to shoot a man."[9] Such brutality was nearly always justified in the Mormons' minds because Villa needed to maintain order among his troops. The Mormons appreciated that discipline; they believed it was Villa's harsh punishments that protected them from the whims of his men. Villa was their protector, a good man with some faults, who they remembered as a heroic figure.

The practice of polygamy led Mormon settlers to northwest Chihuahua in the mid-1880s. The U.S. government began passing legal measures that made life in the United States difficult. The Edmunds Act of 1882 and the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 were anti-bigamy measures explicitly aimed

at the Mormon Church. Both acts led to the confiscation of virtually all Church landholdings in Utah and the American West. Church president Brigham Young instructed Daniel W. Jones to lead the first missionaries into Mexico where they could preach to the Mexican people and also seek out lands suitable for colonization. In 1876 Jones and his party spent the majority of their Mexican journey in the state of Chihuahua. They believed lands in the Galeana district near Casas Grandes would be suitable for homesteading sites. Young and his successor, John Taylor, negotiated with Mexican president Porfirio Díaz for the purchase of one hundred thousand acres in 1884 and 1885. When Luis Terrazas, Chihuahua's political and economic strongman, and other prominent hacendados (large-scale ranchers) challenged the Mormon claim to the lands in 1885, a Mormon delegation led by Anthony W. Ivins appealed personally to Díaz for redress. Díaz was determined to populate northern Mexico with foreigners in an attempt to modernize his country. He granted Mormons the right to practice polygamy unmolested in the Chihuahua colonies.[10]

Mormon polygamy and industry did not go unnoticed by other Mexicans in northern Chihuahua. By the early 1890s, Mormons had established six small colonies in the Galeana district, and one in northeastern Sonora. Colonias Juárez and Dublán, established in 1885 and 1887 respectively, were the centers of population, industry, and ecclesiastical activity. Colonias Pacheco, Díaz, Garcia, and Chuichupa were smaller and collectively referred to as the "mountain colonies." Colonia Oaxaca was located in Sonora.[11] By 1900 the Mormon colonies economically rivaled the Mexican oligarchy. Mormons controlled most large and midsized commercial enterprises in the area of Casas Grandes. They also owned five of the seven flour mills in the region.[12]

When the Mexican Revolution broke out in 1910, the Mormons were well entrenched in Chihuahua. Revolutionary fervor was most ardent in Chihuahua during the early stages of fighting. Revolts protesting government expropriation of village *ejido* lands had plagued the state since the 1890s.[13] Mexican president Francisco Madero's pronouncement of the Plan de San Luis Potosí augmented the unrest.[14] During the first year or so of the Revolution, the Mormon colonies were generally left untouched. Both federal and revolutionary factions agreed to respect Mormon neutrality.

During the Orozco Rebellion of 1912, however, lush Mormon agricultural fields and well-stocked stores were too tempting to be overlooked by combatants. The colonies were located near the Casas Grandes district, an

area known for its strong allegiance to revolutionary general Pascual Orozco.[15] *Colorado* troops under the command of José Inez Salazar began to molest the colonists in June 1912. (Orozco's troops were known as *Colorados* due to a red armband worn as part of their uniform.) The Mormons referred to them as Red Flaggers. Starting in June, Salazar began to levy supplies, horses, ammunition, and foodstuffs from the colonists. Most of the time, such items were taken by force. The Mormons patiently bore the afflictions placed on them by Salazar's Red Flaggers. Their policy was to "turn the other cheek," and to hand over any supplies demanded of them. This policy reached a breaking point in July 1912 when Salazar demanded that the colonists hand over all weapons and ammunition to his men. If they were to maintain neutrality, he reasoned, weapons were unnecessary.

On 26 July 1912, stake president Junius Romney met personally with Salazar.[16] Salazar informed him that he was withdrawing all guarantees that had formerly been extended to the Mormons. He would no longer "protect" their lives and property. If they did not turn over all their firearms to his men, he threatened to take vengeance on the colonies' women and children.[17] Immediately following this meeting, the Mormon colonists began a retreat to the United States. They remember the event as the Exodus of 1912. During the remaining days of July, women and children were transported north to El Paso, Texas, and Douglas, Arizona. By mid-August, the colonies were completely evacuated.

In *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (1938), Mormon historian Thomas Cottam Romney, a colonist himself, described the revolutionaries' demand for Mormon firearms as "the spark that ignited powder which had long been accumulating." He also explained the underlying cultural tension between Mormons and Mexicans in the Galeana district. From the Mormon perspective, the two peoples were fundamentally different. Since the Mormons were of "Nordic extraction," they were naturally less emotional and more practical. On the other hand, the Mexicans were largely "Latin," given to emotion and little practicality. Most of the Mexicans lived in serfdom, while the Mormons remained independent. The colonists believed that their "methods of farming, of business, and of travel were on a higher plain than that of their neighbors."[18] In Romney's mind, these attitudes drove a permanent wedge between the two groups of people and fostered great resentment toward the Mormons by their neighbors.

The Mormons certainly held a paternalistic attitude toward Mexicans. Stowell recalled his father "buying" a Mexican laborer named Trinidad Saenz

out of debt peonage. His father paid off Saenz's debt, allowing him to work for the Stowell family. Instead of being subjected to debt peonage, Saenz now received a dollar per day, as well as an eight-hour work day and room and board.[19] As indicated by Romney, the Mormons did not view Mexicans as social and economic equals. The Mexican work ethic was generally viewed as inferior to their own.[20] Further, Mormons believed Mexicans to be the descendants of a people known as Lamanites in the Book of Mormon. The Lamanites belonged to the House of Israel but had fallen away from the truth. The Mormon mission was to be their "nursing fathers and mothers," in order to return them to the true faith.[21] Despite the racist overtones of this paternalism, many Mexican laborers befriended their Mormon employers. During the Exodus, in Colonias Juárez and Dublán, Mexicans who had long been employed as agricultural laborers by certain Mormon families stayed behind to care for their employers' holdings. Saenz was one such man who chose to remain behind. Both colonies were reestablished by early 1913, largely due to the efforts of the agricultural laborers.

The Mormons' first reported dealings with Villa around the time of the Exodus. According to Alma Walser, who resided in Colonia Juárez, Villa left a few men to guard the colony against Red Flaggers just prior to the Exodus. Although this story does not correspond with other recorded events of the time period, it illustrates the way in which Mormons remembered Villa.[22] According to Walser, Villa left the guard for their protection after Salazar's men confiscated their firearms. He fondly remembers "Ponchie's" concern for them. Eleven Villistas were ordered to guard the area immediately around Colonia Juárez. Walser stated that the guard was there to keep the colony from "ruin, and stealin', and [to] protect property." The presence of the guard did not calm all fears. The colonists still decided to evacuate the colony. Miles Romney and Lorenzo Taylor made secret trips to the other colonies to inform them of the planned Exodus. They did not want the revolutionaries to know what they were up to.[23]

By September 1912, some of the Mormons began to return to their homes in Chihuahua. Anson B. Call, bishop of Colonia Dublán, and Bentley, bishop of Colonia Juárez, were among the first members to return to the colonies. Records are unclear about whether their first meeting with Villa occurred before or after the Exodus. Call and Bentley approached Villa while at Casas Grandes to request that rebel soldiers be ordered to take only saddle horses and to leave work horses for the colonists. Although willing to hand over horses to revolutionaries, they wanted at least enough animals to

work their fields. When Villa first met them, he flew into a rage, "telling them to go back to the United States where all 'Americanos' belonged and let 'Anty' Taft take care of them." The bishops informed Villa that they were both naturalized Mexican citizens, a revelation that pacified him. He graciously granted their request to leave workhorses with the colonists. Villa then mentioned that his men needed blankets and bedding and was disappointed to learn that the store at Colonia Juárez sold only grocery items. Bishop Bentley offered to take up a collection of blankets for Villa's men but Villa replied that he did not wish to steal the blankets and would gladly pay for them.[24]

This exchange highlights the fact that the Mormons understood that Villa was a violent revolutionary leader, but also a man of brutal integrity. Fearful of Villa's aggressive reaction, Call and Bentley approached him cautiously. After Villa's verbal tirade, the Mormon bishops were able to assuage Villa's anger and gain their objective. Colonist Harvey H. Taylor remembers Villa as a "square shooter and a man of his word."[25] Taylor regarded Villa as a violent man, but also as a reasonable leader.

All reports of Mormon interactions with Villa prior to 1916 are quite positive, as were Villa's dealings with most Americans between 1910 and 1915. During this time period, Villa became known as a Mexican Robin Hood. In an effort to encourage official relations with the United States, he protected Americans as well as many Mexican peasants from other revolutionary forces.[26] Mormon colonists viewed Villa as their personal protector. Although Villa and his men often visited the colonies and took "what they could find that they needed," Bishop Bentley characterizes them as "more considerate and helpful tha[n] other groups who constantly passed through the colonies and robbed and plundered." He always offered payment for goods taken from the Mormons by his men. More importantly he "dealt misery to the Mexicans who had in any way taken part with the Red Flaggers."[27] Harvey Taylor recalled that, "If we were ever treated badly or unfairly or lost something of value and could get to Villa we would always get redress."[28] Bishop Bentley's son Joseph, who was a teenager during the early 1910s, remembers interactions between teenage colonists and teenage Villistas. They would often engage in physical contests, such as wrestling and racing. In short Villa and his men maintained amiable relations with the colonists, while most other revolutionary factions did not.

The colonists frequently referred to the exact discipline Villa demanded of his troops. Such discipline offered protection from Villista raids and

depredations. According to Taylor, this habit was one of Villa's strongest qualities. When the Mexican leader's men stepped out of line, swift consequences always followed.[29] Stowell recounted an incident, most likely apocryphal, in which Villa used excessive force in dealing with his men. Villa and his men stole cattle from the hacienda of Terrazas and then offered to resell him his own cows with the purpose of extorting money and supplies. While herding Terrazas' cattle, a few Villistas wore through their shoes, bruising and bloodying their feet. Due to the pain, five of them asked permission to leave. In response Villa executed all five on the spot. Stowell dismissed such brutality as necessary to Villa's intense system of discipline.[30] Although many Mexicans despised the general for murdering their husbands, brothers, sons, and friends, the colonists praised him for his strict control over his men.

Jesse M. Taylor also mentioned Villa's strict management of his troops. According to Taylor, when Villa took the town of Ascensión, Chihuahua, he gave orders that his men abstain from all liquor, and he closed the saloon. When twenty-two of his men violated this order, he had them summarily executed at the local cemetery. He did not want to kill them, but they had disobeyed his orders. Taylor opined, "[H]e had to do it; he had to be that way or he couldn't control them."[31] Villa's actions were required to maintain order. Mormons also likely supported his anti-alcohol measures.

Mormons feared that without such discipline, the Villistas would commit atrocities against them. Their fears were justified; when Villa was not present his men did threaten the colonists in various ways. Anson B. Call Jr. recorded an incident that highlighted the Mormon distinction between Villa and Villistas. During one of Villa's stays in Colonia Dublán, a Villista major and a lieutenant took up residence at Bishop Call's home. When Villa left town, the lieutenant remained behind. Anson Jr. asserted that only the "hostile" Villistas stayed after their general left. With Villa gone, the lieutenant took back spurs given to Anson Jr.'s brother Charlie by the Villista major. He and the other remaining Villistas stole money, food, blankets, and valuables from the Calls and other members of the community. He even tried to assault Anson Jr.'s sisters, but Bishop Call refused to allow him access to the attic where they were hiding. The lieutenant threatened to kill him, but Bishop Call responded, "By the power of the holy priesthood which I have, you'll never go upstairs." At this the man turned to leave, shooting a lamp out of Bishop Call's hand. A stray bullet shattered the kitchen window, causing a shard of glass to cut Anson Jr. above the eye. When he saw

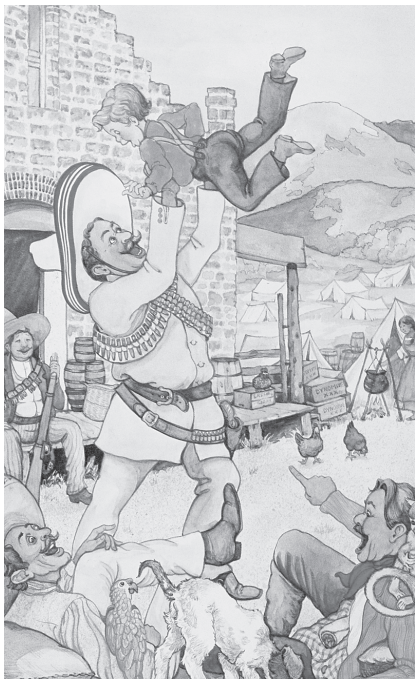
the blood, he thought he had been shot.[32] Although Villa was kind to the colonists, his men were not always benevolent.

Bishop Bentley also recalled the feared Villista Rudolfo Fierro, a ruthless man who the colonists believed intended to kill them all. In October 1915, as Villa and his men approached Colonia Dublán, Fierro was dragged into the Dublán reservoir by his horse and drowned in the water. Bentley interpreted his death as an act of divine providence. Yet, Bentley felt safe with Villa in the area. He limited the Villistas' atrocities against the colonists and he ordered his troops to pay for Mormon crops.[33] In spite of his brutality toward his enemies and his troops, Villa had shown the colonists his kinder side.

Along with providing protection from Villista troops, Villa eliminated other revolutionary groups that threatened the colonies. Jesse M. Taylor recounted an incident in which Villa sent troops against Colorados that had been harassing colonists. The Red Flaggers had also kidnapped a small group of Americans and held them for ransom. When Taylor apprised Villa of the situation, he suggested that Taylor return to Colonia Díaz, this time accompanied by his troops. Taylor then led Villistas under the command of Porfirio Talamantes to Nuevo Casas Grandes. Talamantes and his men killed all the Red Flaggers, including their leader, José Parra.[34]

Previous interactions between Taylor and Villa illustrate Villa's softer side. When the Orozco rebellion broke out, Taylor was employed by Francisco Madero as a cattle handler. Shortly after the Battle of Ciudad Juárez in 1911, Villa passed through Casas Grandes. While in the area, he confronted Taylor about killing cattle. Taylor provided documentation that showed it was part of his job. Villa then left him to his work. He told Taylor that "the war [was] over and there [was] going to be peace." Villa mentioned his need for a saddle, inferring his intention to take Taylor's. Taylor talked him into riding with him to the next camp to buy a saddle, and they conversed freely as they rode. Taylor remembered Villa being "as good and pleasant as any guy." Once Taylor had secured a saddle, Villa "took out a roll of greenbacks that would choke a mule," offering to repay him. Taylor told him payment was unnecessary. From that point on the two men had "lots of dealings."[35]

Taylor again spoke personally with Villa when Villa and his men were staying in Colonia Dublán, sometime in early 1913. At that time, Taylor lived in Colonia Díaz and transported sugar throughout northern Chihuahua to earn a living. When he passed through Colonia Dublán, he was



ILL. 1. SEVERAL COLONISTS, SUCH AS ARA O. CALL, REMEMBERED VILLA'S FONDNESS FOR CHILDREN
(Illustration courtesy Saved by Faith and Fire, *ISBN 0-941518-46-9, Copyright 1984 Frances B. Perry. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. Published by Perry Enterprises, 3907 North Foothill Drive, Provo, Utah, 84604)*

taken to speak with Villa, who had ordered that anyone passing through be brought to him. Taylor fondly remembers Villa taking off his hat and playing with his seven-month-old daughter, Jessie.[36] Ara O. Call also spoke of an instance as a small child in which Villa picked him up and held him.[37]

Taylor consistently viewed Villa as a friend and protector, even following the revolutionary's aborted campaign to eradicate the colonies in March 1916. Although his friend Lemuel Spilsbury and several other Mormon colonists acted as guides for the Pershing Punitive Expedition in 1916, Taylor refused to participate out of loyalty to Villa. He summed up his view of Villa: "I don't think Villa was a bad man. He was an angry man. When he said anything, he meant it. It was just like our army. If you are in the army and they tell you to do something, you had better do it. That was the way with Villa. He had a lot of bad men with him. He got blamed for a lot of stuff he didn't do . . . I would go with him on it. I think he was alright. I think his word was as good as his note."[38]

Villa is also fondly remembered by the Mormons because they supported the Mexican Revolution. The colonists desired a better future for poor Mexicans who were "being driven like the days of Cortez on the haciendas of the rich."[39] Villa and the revolution promised to bring democracy and freedom to impoverished Mexicans who would then be able to embrace Mormonism and their lineage as Lamanite descendents of the House of Israel. In 1976 Lorna Call Alder, Bishop Call's daughter, reflected on the meaning of the Mexican Revolution. She justified any hardships faced by

the colonists as a small price to pay when compared to the benefits of the revolution. She believed that the upheaval was brought about by the hand of God to "give land, education, and freedom to the masses of people" in Mexico. Alder argued that just as most Mormons praised the American Revolution because they believed it was part of God's plan to facilitate the restoration of the gospel, they should also give thanks for the revolution in Mexico.[40]

The colonists were also critical of the U.S. government for formally recognizing the government of Carranza and destabilizing their revolutionary champion. Ara Call recounted Villa's efforts to close off Pulpit Pass in Sonora. Without access to the pass, Carrancista forces would be forced to march as far south as Guadalajara in order to find a route back to Sonora. Any pursuit of the Villistas would have been virtually impossible. But the U.S. government allowed Carranza's men to travel from El Paso, Texas, to Nogales, Arizona, on the Southern Pacific Railroad, giving Carrancista forces a decisive advantage at the battle of Agua Prieta. Villa's men were routed, left desperate and suffering. Call recounted that Villa "felt that Uncle Sam had no business interfering with such things, and I am inclined a little to agree with him."[41] The colonist understood why Villa resented Americans.

Alder was also sympathetic toward Villa for the same reasons. Although she did not understand why Villa and Carranza were opposed to one another, she acknowledged Villa's outrage at U.S. aid to Carranza in the battle of Agua Prieta. According to Alder, that episode "made Villa so cross at the United States [and] why wouldn't he be?" Although she was frightened by Villa's threats against the colonists following the Columbus raid and suffered from recurring nightmares in subsequent years, she did not blame Villa for his rage against Americans.[42]

While most historians cite the battle of Agua Prieta, fought on 1 November 1915, as the event which turned Villa decisively against all Americans, he actually still respected the Mormon settlers immediately following the battle. Bishop Bentley's contemporary writings mention another stay by Villa and his men at Colonia Dublán on 10 November 1915, more than a week after Agua Prieta. The colonists allowed Villa to bring his men back to the colony so that they could recuperate from the devastating defeat. Although Bentley lamented the loss of horses and grain to the Villistas, he dismissed the men's actions as "necessary measures." He was quite pleased that many Villistas attended special religious services, held in Spanish for their benefit, during their stay in Colonia Dublán. He does not mention specifically

whether Villa attended, but Bishop Bentley was certain that "good seed ha[d] been sown that [would] bring forth good fruit in time to come."[43]

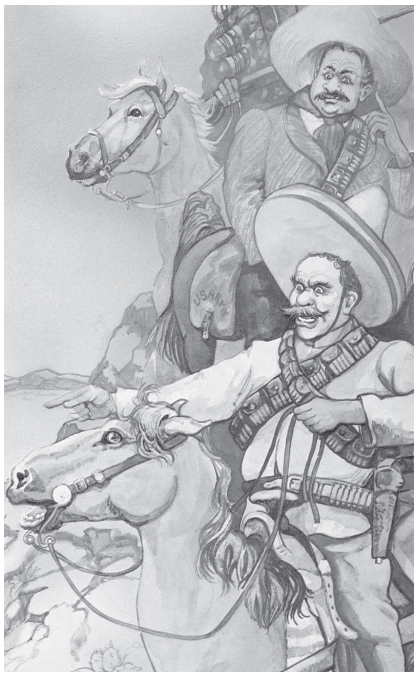
There are various possible explanations for Villa's continued kindness toward the Mormons. First, Villa likely remembered his prior meeting with bishops Call and Bentley in which they disclosed their Mexican citizenship. Villa clearly knew the Mormons had come from the United States to settle in Mexico, but he may have felt the Mormons' inclination to become naturalized Mexican citizens demonstrated their dedication to Mexico. The Americans who most drew Villa's ire were businessmen exploiting the Mexican people. In Villa's mind, the Mormons may have fit into a different category.

Second, the Mormons constantly gave whatever goods and supplies they could spare to Villa and his men. Almost every Mormon account dealing with Villa makes mention of this fact. Villa may have realized early on that the easiest way to take goods from the Mormons was to ask for them. He also built a trusting rapport with Mormon leaders. The Mormon colonies were a dependable logistical base for Villa's army; destroying Mormon colonies would have only hurt his army and his cause. Although these explanations seem probable, there is not enough evidence to explain decisively Villa's motives.

Despite the Mormon colonists' adoration of Villa, he reportedly turned on them after the attack on Columbus. By 9 March 1916, the day after the Columbus attack, the Mormon colonists received word that Villa was headed in their direction. He was apparently so incensed by his defeat that he was determined to murder all Americans in his path.[44] Bishop Call met with Colonia Dublán's ecclesiastical leaders to discuss the best course of action for the colonists. Some wanted to attempt an escape to the United States, but others feared that in doing so, they would run right into Villa. Others wanted to seek the protection of Carrancista forces, but feared the loss of Mormon neutrality. After praying about the matter, Bishop Call told the group he felt inspired that they all should return to their homes, turn out the lights, and go to bed as if all was well. One anonymous colonist retorted, "Well, that would be a damn fool thing to do." But all the colonists in Colonia Dublán followed the instructions of their bishop. During the night of 13 March 1916, some reported feeling a sense of peace, while others felt great anxiety.[45] The following morning came without incident. An investigative party found tracks left by Villista horses near the town. The tracks showed that the men had circled Colonia Dublán and then passed it by. The colonists attributed their salvation to the hand of God.[46]

Among the several descriptions left by the colonists explaining Villa's rationale that night, two major theories emerge: Villa was either discouraged from attacking by lights in the colony or by the voice of God. Reports made by Mexican friends in Villa's army at that time were the source material for most Mormon information. Various colonists remember the account given by Maximano Rubio, Roberto Salgado, and Ramón Quintana, Mexicans who had been impressed into Villa's army and were with him the night he abandoned his attack on Colonia Dublán. The three men gave a signed statement of the night's events to Walser and Delbert Brown. According to their account, the Villistas approached Colonia Dublán around three o'clock in the morning of 13 March. Villa reported seeing lights burning in the town, although none of his men, including the three informants, saw any lights. When his men told him there were no lights in the town, Villa became angry, reiterating that there were indeed lights on and fires burning. He declared there must be many soldiers in the town and ordered his men to change direction.[47] The majority of the colonists remembered this version, which was popularized for Mormon children in *Saved by Faith and Fire*.[48]

Theodore Martineau provided another perspective on Villa's decision to bypass Colonia Dublán. Villa's secretary, who Martineau does not name, reportedly told him it was "Villa's intention to slaughter the colonists as he had done in Columbus just a few days before." Villa was desperate to give the United States a reason to intervene in Mexico. He believed an intrusion would enable him to rally Mexicans to his cause against a new common enemy, the United States. But as the Villista troops looked over Colonia



ILL. 2. PANCHO VILLA OUTSIDE COLONIA DUBLÁN WITH HIS MEN
(Illustration courtesy Saved by Faith and Fire, ISBN 0-941518-46-9, *Copyright 1984 Frances B. Perry. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. Published by Perry Enterprises, 3907 North Foothill Drive, Provo, Utah, 84604)*

Dublán the morning of 13 March, Villa went for a walk and had a change of heart. He had reportedly been impressed by "some unseen power" that "any such act upon his part would bring upon himself the vengeance of a just God."[49] In this account, the miracle was the direct influence of God on Villa.

While these varied narratives of the salvation of Colonia Dublán relate different ideas of what Villa was thinking, all attribute his decision to abandon his attack on the colonists to divine intervention. This consistency indicates the colonists' belief that God was on their side, and also that God was working miracles on the heart of Villa. The Mormon colonists knew of his brutal nature and his fits of anger and rage, but in his general dealings with colonists between 1911 and 1915 he had been gracious and amiable. He had repeatedly guarded them from atrocities committed by other rebel factions and his own troops. Furthermore, he championed the revolution, which would allow the Mormons to expand their faith in Mexico.

If the date of Villa's arrival in Colonia Dublán given by Bishop Bentley is correct, Villa arguably never changed his attitude toward the colonists. He was still treating them respectfully following Agua Prieta, the beginning of his most ardent anti-American sentiment according to Villa historians.[50] Villa's peaceful visit to Colonia Dublán in November 1915 and his failure to eradicate the colony in March 1916 further suggest that his feelings toward the Mormons may never have changed. If there is any truth to accounts about the night of 13 March related to colonists by Villistas, Villa may have been creating excuses not to attack the colony. His stated objective of killing the inhabitants of Colonia Dublán may have been solely for the benefit of his men. It is also possible that Villa did have a change of heart. His desire to force U.S. intervention through his anti-American actions has been widely substantiated. He may have remembered the colonists' consistent kindness in providing aid and decided at the last minute not to attack. Whatever actually occurred, the Mormons believed that Villa had been touched by the power of God.

The idea that God had influenced Villa gained further credence in 1919. In early March of that year, Whetten, the president of the Chihuahua mission, decided to visit Mormon missionaries laboring at Namiquipa. Al Tietjen and Bishop Bentley accompanied him. Mexican friends advised them to "keep clear of Villa" at all costs; he was still in the habit of executing Americans. Despite their decision to take a more circuitous route to Namiquipa,

they were stopped by a Villista captain, who had about fifty men at his command. The captain received orders from Villa to bring the men to the main camp near Cruces in Chihuahua.[51]

On the morning of 9 March 1919, General Angeles, Villa's artillery commander and military confidant, invited the three Mormons to eat breakfast with him.[52] Angeles asked them about their religion, commenting that most Mexicans were Catholic. Bentley and Whetten proceeded to teach him the basic Mormon beliefs concerning the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ through the prophet Joseph Smith and his translation of the Book of Mormon. The Mormons soon realized that Villa was also in the room with his back to them. Several times he turned around to listen to their conversation.[53] They gave Angeles a copy of the Book of Mormon. Angeles seemed thoroughly interested in their message, telling Villa "the Mormons have established, by teaching people, what you are trying to do with the rifle. There need to be colonies all over Chihuahua." Turning back to Bentley and Whetten, he stated, "If I ever get out of this alive, I'm going to join your church."[54]

Villa also appeared to take great interest in their teachings. He told Bentley and Whetten that he "respected the Mormon people for the good they were doing in the Country and believed them to be a good people," although, until that day, he had not known much else about them. He continued, "Now I can only blame you for not telling me sooner." Villa indicated that his life would have been markedly different had he learned about the Mormon faith earlier. He might not have been such a violent, angry man.[55] According to Whetten, he then asked, "How about this religion, is there any chance for me?" Whetten responded that although he did not specifically know Villa's situation, there was always a "chance for a man to quit what he was doing and do better." Villa told the men that most of the horrible rumors circulating about him were untrue. He had done some bad things, but not to the extent suggested by his reputation.[56]

After this encounter, the idea that Villa was inclined to Mormonism began to circulate in the colonies. Jesse Taylor remembered hearing talk of colonists preaching to Villa. He was given a Book of Mormon, which "they said he carried . . . to his death."[57] Bentley mentioned the encounter in a letter to U.S. consul Edward A. Dow in 1919, indicating that this Villa story was not simply created during the oral history interviews from the 1950s to the 1970s. The colonists sincerely believed that Mormon kindness toward Villa had resulted in his acceptance of their faith.

The Mormons felt that their religion could alter people's lives on a grand scale. They strove to live as Jesus Christ; by turning the other cheek when assailed by revolutionaries in Mexico, the colonists believed their actions would influence their assailants. Colonist Nelle Spilsbury Hatch illustrated this belief in her short chronicle, "Fruits of the Revolution." Spilsbury Hatch recounted the story of a young Villista captain who had been offended by Americans in 1914 when he was unable to purchase weapons in the United States. Deciding to vent his frustrations on the inhabitants of Colonia Juárez, the man forced his way into Orson Hawkins's home in search of weapons. Hawkins assured the captain that his home contained no weapons, but when the man found a scabbard in a closet, he accused Hawkins of lying and demanded to have the gun to which it corresponded. Orson bravely asserted that the scabbard belonged to his brother-in-law, and he had forgotten it was there. When the captain threatened to kill Hawkins over the matter, he told the Villista there was no sense doing it on an empty stomach and invited the man to eat breakfast with his family. When the family commenced eating in the Villista's presence as though nothing were wrong, he was impressed. After eating with the family, he left them in peace.

In 1942 while serving as a missionary in Puebla, Hawkins's oldest son, Thomas, unknowingly encountered the Villista captain, now a middle-aged man. The man applied for baptism, and during the course of a pre-baptismal interview, he showed Thomas a picture and asked if he could identify it. Thomas replied that it was a photograph of his father and inquired where the man had obtained it. He responded that he had stolen it from the Hawkins home many years earlier while serving in Villa's army. He took it because he believed Orson Hawkins was lying to him, but as he left Colonia Juárez that day, he vowed to return after the war in an attempt to find out what gave the family "the fortitude to be friendly and cooperative while being stripped." The man was baptized into the Mormon Church the following day.[58]

This story exhibits Mormon ideas about the power of their religion. Their kind examples humbled hardened men. The colonists also knew Villa to be a hardened man who exhibited a softer side. Their kindness to him and his men was reciprocated in their early interactions. Although he apparently intended to turn against the Mormons in 1916, Villa's encounter with them in 1919 showed them that their efforts were fruitful. The Mormons had touched Villa. Whetten and Bentley circulated the idea that Villa desired baptism into their religion, but he was unable to receive it prior to his assassination on 20 July 1923.[59]

Despite the fact that Villa was not baptized prior to his assassination, the colonists were still hopeful that Villa would convert to their faith. Mormons believe in baptism for deceased persons. Anyone who has died without receiving baptism may be baptized by proxy in any of the Mormon temples around the world. Mormons believe that the spirits of dead congregate in a place known as the Spirit World. There, they are taught the truth (the Mormon religion), and if they are so inclined, they are given the opportunity to accept baptism. Since they no longer possess a physical body, the baptisms must be performed by the living on behalf of the dead. Although a baptism may be performed on behalf of someone who has died, the deceased person does not have to accept his or her baptism. The deceased are given that choice in the Spirit World. If they choose not to accept the ordinance, then no harm has been done. If they do accept the baptism, according to Mormon belief, they are then able to obtain eternal life in the presence of God and his son Jesus Christ.[60]

In rare instances, Mormons have had visions in which deceased persons have visited them, requesting baptism. For example, in the late 1800s Church president Wilford Woodruff received such a vision in the St. George Utah Temple. Some of the United States' founding fathers, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, appeared to him and asked that they be baptized. Their request was urgent because without the ordinance of baptism they could not progress in the hereafter. Woodruff then personally attended to the matter, acting as proxy for their baptism.[61]

A similar experience was related by Whetten, concerning Villa. Whetten reported having a dream in the fall of 1965 in which Villa appeared to him. In his dream, Villa stood by his bedpost and asked, "Do you remember me?" Whetten responded that he did. They conversed about the circumstances of their prior meeting in 1919, while Villa was still alive. Villa asked if Whetten remembered what he had told him after the Mormons had taught him the gospel. Whetten recalled Villa telling them "if the Mormon doctrine had been explained to [him] in [his] early youth, that [his] life would have been entirely different." Villa then told him he still felt that way, but that he needed Whetten's help to receive baptism into the Mormon Church. Whetten promised him he would do everything in his power to see that the baptism was carried out.[62]

In 1966 Whetten visited Villa's widow, Luz Corral, and asked her for permission to baptize her late husband and obtain genealogical facts about Villa. She told him that her husband's life had been altered by his encounter

with Whetten and Bentley so many years ago. Corral wanted to know what they had told him that had such a major affect on him. Whetten then spent the next three hours teaching her the gospel. His teachings inspired her, and she readily gave her permission for the baptism of Villa. Whetten also arranged for Mormon missionaries to begin regular lessons in her home. Then, on 1 March 1966, Whetten was baptized on behalf of Villa in the Mesa Arizona Temple.[63]

Throughout their dealings with Villa, the Mormon colonists in northern Chihuahua viewed him as a benevolent, yet troubled man. Although he burdened them by taking their food and provisions in order to provide for his army, he paid for such things whenever possible. Villa protected the Mormons' right to their property and possessions. On several occasions, Mormons went to him seeking redress for wrongs perpetrated by other revolutionaries and Villistas. Each time Villa rectified the situation by returning their stolen goods or paying them for their troubles. Villa became a hero to the colonists. They did not fault him for attacking Columbus or threatening to attack Colonia Dublán. As far as the colonists were concerned, Villa had been wronged by the U.S. government and had a right to be angry. The events of 1919 and the mid-1960s convinced the colonists that Villa felt a desire to join their faith. His story exemplified the power of their religion to change the lives of even the most brutal people.

Notes

1. *Mormon* is a non-pejorative nickname used by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
2. John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 49; and Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. 1, *Porfirians, Liberals, and Peasants*, Cambridge Latin American Studies series (1986; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 328.
3. Thomas Cottam Romney, *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (1938; repr., Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005); and F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987).
4. Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Clarence Clendenen, *The United States and Pancho Villa: A Study in Unconventional Diplomacy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1961).
5. Raymond J. Reed, "The Mormons in Chihuahua: Their Relations with Villa and the Pershing Punitive Expedition, 1910–1917" (master's thesis, University of New Mexico, 1938).

6. Bill L. Smith, "Impacts of the Mexican Revolution: The Mormon Experience, 1910–1946" (PhD diss., Washington State University, 2000).
7. Frances Burk Perry, *Saved by Faith and Fire* (Provo, Utah: Perry Enterprises, 1984). The children's book is based on the diaries of Bishop Anson B. Call.
8. Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, 3–8.
9. Earl Stowell, Canute Breinholt, Alma Walser, Charles Burrell, and Wives, p. 32, folder 9, box 93, Mormon Colonists in Mexico Interviews Oral History Project, BYU Archives Oral History Interview, 1960–1964, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah [hereafter TPSC, BYU].
10. Smith, "Impacts of the Mexican Revolution," 27.
11. "Articles, notes, letters, diary excerpts relating to the Mexican Colonies," folder 3, box 1, Nelle Spilsbury Hatch Research Papers, TPSC, BYU.
12. Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, 91.
13. Ibid., 18. *Ejido* lands are tracts held communally by various indigenous groups throughout Mexico.
14. The Plan de San Luis Potosí was a document issued by Francisco Madero after the fraudulent election in which Porfirio Díaz defeated him for the Mexican presidency. The Plan declared the election null and void and placed Madero in power as provisional president. It also set a date and time (6:00 PM on 20 November 1910) for a revolution to break out against the dictator. As stated by Alan Knight, the plan was "a call to arms for the revindication of constitutional rights." See Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, 77.
15. Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, 319. Pascual Orozco was the military leader most instrumental in the success of the Madero revolution. He and Villa commanded the revolutionary victory at Ciudad Juárez in 1911 that forced Díaz from power. Once Madero became president, however, Orozco quickly became disillusioned with the new national government; he expected political and monetary rewards that were not granted to him. In March 1912, the discontented general assumed the leadership of a revolt in the state of Chihuahua and declared his opposition to Madero's leadership. Orozco's rebellion garnered much support from the population surrounding the Mormon colonies and reignited the violence of the Mexican Revolution. See Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, 139–46.
16. A stake president is an ecclesiastical leader in the Mormon Church. He generally is called to preside over a geographical area, consisting of smaller divisions, known as Wards. Bishops lead the Wards and are responsible to the stake president. President Junius Romney was the main ecclesiastical leader in the colonies in 1912.
17. Romney, *Mormon Colonies*, 176.
18. Ibid., 146.
19. Earl Stowell, Canute Breinholt, Alma Walser, Charles Burrell, and Wives, p. 7.
20. Smith, "Impacts of the Mexican Revolution," 14.
21. Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 22:6.
22. It seems unlikely Salazar would have had such liberty to persecute the colonists if Villistas had been in place.

23. Earl Stowell, Canute Breinholt, Alma Walser, Charles Burrell, and Wives, pp. 48–51.
24. Joseph T. Bentley, *The Life and Letters of Joseph C. Bentley: A Biography* (Provo, Utah, 1977), 184.
25. Ibid., 202.
26. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 50; and Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, 211.
27. "Letters, notes, historical articles by Joseph Charles Bentley, 1884–1917," folder 4, box 1, Nelle Spilsbury Hatch Research Papers, TPSC, BYU.
28. Bentley, *The Life and Letters of Joseph C. Bentley*, 202.
29. Ibid.
30. Earl Stowell, Canute Breinholt, Alma Walser, Charles Burrell, and Wives, p. 32.
31. Jesse M. Taylor Oral History Transcript, 10 November 1959, p. 20, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, LDS Polygamy Oral History Project, TPSC, BYU.
32. Anson B. Call Jr. Oral History Transcript, 17 July 1976, pp. 7–8, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, LDS Polygamy Oral History Project, TPSC, BYU.
33. "Starving Constitutionalist Soldiers under the Command of Pancho Villa arrived in Colonia Dublan," folder 4, box 1, Nelle Spilsbury Hatch Research Papers, TPSC, BYU.
34. Jesse M. Taylor Oral History Transcript, pp. 18–19. Different sources mention Taylor's meeting with Villa in either June 1913 or November 1914. Romney places the event in November 1914, while the diary of J. J. Walser and a letter from Bishop Joseph C. Bentley to Elder Anthony Ivins record the encounter in June 1913. Since the June 1913 date is taken from Walser's dated diary and Bishop Bentley's dated letter to Ivins, it seems likely Villa was in Colonia Dublán in June 1913. Of course it is also possible Villa was there on both occasions. Both Walser's diary and the letter from Bentley to Ivins are located in folder 4, box 1, Nelle Spilsbury Hatch Research Papers, TPSC, BYU. See also Romney, *Mormon Colonies*, 223.
35. Jesse M. Taylor Oral History Transcript, p. 5.
36. Ibid., p. 18.
37. Ara O. Call Oral History Transcript, 9 September 1971, p. 3, Weber State College Oral History Project, TPSC, BYU.
38. Jesse M. Taylor Oral History Transcript, pp. 20–21.
39. Smith, "Impacts of the Mexican Revolution," 61.
40. Lorna Call Alder Oral History Transcript, 28 June 1976, p. 4, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, LDS Polygamy Oral History Project, TPSC, BYU.
41. Ara O. Call Oral History Transcript, p. 4; and Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, 526.
42. Lorna Call Alder Oral History Transcript, p. 6.
43. For Bentley's accounting of the date and events, see "Starving Constitutionalist Soldiers." For the date of the battle of Agua Prieta, see Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, 526; and Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. 2, *Counter-revolution and Reconstruction* (1986; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 334.
44. James H. Marineau, "Suspense in Colonies," folder 2, box 2, Nelle Spilsbury Hatch Research Papers, TPSC, BYU.

45. Ara O. Call Oral History Transcript, p. 5; Lorna Call Alder Oral History Transcript, p. 7; and Marineau, "Suspense in the Colonies."
46. Ara O. Call Oral History Interview, 5; and *The Diary of W. Ernest Young* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1973), 135.
47. *The Diary of W. Ernest Young*, 137–38.
48. Perry, *Saved by Faith and Fire*.
49. Romney, *Mormon Colonies*, 240.
50. Clendenen, *Unconventional Diplomacy*, 213; and Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, 526–27.
51. James E. Whetten, "Captured by Villa's Forces in Cruces, Chihuahua (1966)," MS 13603, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah [hereafter ACJCLDS].
52. Villa had great respect for Gen. Felipe Angeles due to his formal training in artillery, general knowledge of overall military strategy, and his close ties to Madero. The presence of Angeles in Villa's camp provided a level of legitimacy that the Villista group otherwise lacked. See Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, 277–279, 680–715.
53. J. C. Bentley to Edward A. Dow, American Consul in Ciudad Juarez, 31 March 19[19], folder 9, box 1, Nelle Spilsbury Hatch Research Papers, TPSC, BYU.
54. Whetten, "Captured by Villas Forces."
55. James E. Whetten to W. Ernest Young, 3 December 1964, in Walter Ernest Young, "A Brief Sketch of the Lives of Francisco (Pancho) Villa and Felipe Angeles [ca. 1966]," MS 3976-1, ACJCLDS.
56. Whetten, "Captured by Villa's Forces"; and J. C. Bentley to Edward A. Dow.
57. Jesse M. Taylor Oral History Transcript, p. 21. Taylor gave his oral history interview in 1959, seven years before James Whetten began publicly speaking again of his experiences with Villa in 1919.
58. Nelle Spilsbury Hatch, "Fruits of the Revolution," folder 8, box 1, Nelle Spilsbury Hatch Research Papers, TPSC, BYU.
59. Mormon colonist Walser had his own opinions about Villa's assassination. He saw Villa as a martyr, murdered by his own government. Following the Revolution, Villa posed a problem to the Revolutionary government. According to Walser, the United States refused to recognize the Mexican government "as long as Villa was alive." Although he was given a large hacienda to pacify him, Villa still posed a threat to the government. The result, from Walser's point of view, was that the "Mexican government maneuvered it to kill [Villa]." See Earl Stowell, Canute Breinholt, Alma Walser, Charles Burrell, and Wives, p. 74.
60. For more information regarding Mormon beliefs about baptisms for the dead, see D. Todd Christofferson, "The Redemption of the Dead and the Testimony of Jesus," *Ensign*, November 2000, 25–28.
61. Ezra Taft Benson, "Our Divine Constitution," *Ensign*, November 1987, 4.
62. Whetten, "Captured by Villa's Forces."
63. James E. Whetten to W. Ernest Young; and Whetten, "Captured by Villa's Forces."