

## **Chapter 5**

### **THE GATES OF THE MORMON HELL OPENED! 1853-1860**

The period from 1853 to 1860 was one of decline for the Church in Britain. The number of conferences (an organizational unit in the British mission) peaked at thirty-three in 1855 and then began to numerically decline afterwards.<sup>1</sup> This coincided with a general decrease in church membership in the British Isles. The decade of the 1850s marked the largest drop in membership in the history of the British mission, with a fifty-five percent change in membership from 30,747 in 1850 to 13,853 in 1860.<sup>2</sup>

One of the major causes of this decline was, of course, the great number of people who immigrated to Utah.<sup>3</sup> For example, between the years 1856 to 1860, at least ten companies of British Saints sailed across the Atlantic and then traveled by handcart to the Utah Territory. Excommunication was another reason for the decrease in members. Although excommunication had been used as a process for weeding out the undesirables and apostates from the outset of the British mission, it became a more common practice during the turbulent decade of the 1850s. In addition to these other factors, the British Mission experienced a sharp decline in the number of baptisms.

The British members, as well as Mormons in other areas of the world, have been greatly affected by events occurring in the United States. Naturally, considering the theological makeup and hierarchial nature of the Church, this would be expected. This was particularly true concerning several events of religious, social, and political significance.