

The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, based in Arizona and Utah, is believed to be the largest polygamist group in the country. The 10,000-member church openly promotes plural marriage and has been subject to allegations of forced marriages, abusing the welfare system and wife swapping. If large numbers of the polygamist church's followers do end up in Eldorado, residents fear the group could dominate the town of 1,955 about 45 miles south of San Angelo. "They could easily come in here, bring in several thousand followers and take over the hospital board and other elected positions if they wanted to," said Randy Matkin, editor of the Eldorado Success and head of the Schleicher County Hospital District board. "That is what concerns us."

Locals note that the Fundamentalist Church of Latter Day Saints initially tried to hide its purchase of the 1,691-acre ranch last year. And the scale of the construction there leads many to question whether church elders were truthful when they said the ranch will be used as a retreat for 200 members. As part of their beliefs, church members interact with the outside world as little as possible. Followers could not be reached for comment for this article, but their lawyer, Rodney Parker, said the allegations are nothing more than religious persecution.

**Polygamist towns**—The twin cities of Colorado City, Ariz., and Hildale, Utah, where the church is based, are dominated by the polygamist group. The church owns the houses and controls the police and the schools, even though most children of its members are home-schooled. The group believes that the mainstream Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints strayed from its true beliefs when it renounced plural marriage in 1890. The fundamentalists broke away from the church and have defiantly practiced polygamy ever since.

Eldorado residents became upset in March when they learned that the group had bought the property. One City Council member even suggested the devil had come to town. The Alarm has largely subsided, replaced by apprehension. Residents still grab copies of the Success as soon as they're placed in the racks and call the sheriff when they see large trucks headed to the church compound. From Country Road 300, a two-lane road that surrounds the ranch, the construction is largely out of view. The only evidence of the budding community is a no-trespassing sign and guard shack. The top of a cement batch plant tower is the only visible structure.

But it's a different picture from the air. Five buildings, including three large structures, that appear to be living quarters, have been erected in a matter of months. Workers laid another large foundation in mid-June. Getting a clear picture of what this activity means is difficult.

Warren Jeffs took over leadership of the church after his father, Rulon Jeffs, died in 2002. This year Jeffs purged about 20 church elders, including several rivals, leading some observers to think that the move to Texas is a search for greener pastures.

The church already has a community in Bountiful, British Columbia, and there are rumors of another outpost in Mexico.

One author and former member says the group has changed since Warren Jeffs became the leader.

"The biggest thing I've noticed since Warren Jeffs took over is the wife swapping—taking wives from one man and giving them to another," said Benjamin Bistline, who wrote *The Polygamists: A History of Colorado City, Arizona*, a nonfiction account of the church's history published by Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Agreka Books.

Under Jeffs, the group has changed some of its beliefs, said Bistline, who left the church in 1980.

"I've always defended the polygamists," Bistline said. "They're very moral people. But now, since he has taken over, there is more corruption, more abuse of women."

Bistline, who lives just outside Colorado City, said he believes that some young women are forced into marriage to keep them in the fold. Moving to Texas may increase the hold on them, he said.

"I think as isolated as it is down there, it will be much harder for the young people to escape," Bistline said.

Religious persecution. Rodney Parker, the church's lawyer, disputes allegations of abuse and forced marriages, saying that detractors take the group's beliefs out of context.

"With regard to the marriage issue, it's very messy, very complicated," Parker said. "There are marriages between the ages of 16 and 18, and occasionally younger, but they're not commonplace. They're being used by critics to imply that's what the church is about and nothing else. It's grossly inaccurate, a deliberate falsehood. None of these girls are being held prisoner."

Parker also argues that attempts to prosecute polygamists will not withstand legal challenges.

"I think polygamy is constitutionally permitted," he said. "All manner of sexual relationships are now being permitted. To somehow single out this one and say it's illegal doesn't make any sense."

Schleicher County Sheriff David Doran, who has visited Colorado City and the Eldorado property, has been trying to learn about the group and calm locals' concerns.

"They have very different beliefs, but they have a nice town up there in Colorado City, and they let me see everything," Doran said. "I talked to women and young children, and everyone was open and polite. I'm trying to do everything in my power to keep a line of communication open to them."

Yet Doran agrees that the group will do whatever Jeff asks.

"If he gives them an order, whatever it is, I'm sure they'll follow it," Doran said.

Flora Jessup, a Phoenix woman who grew up in the fundamentalist church, has been a vocal critic of the sect. It was she who alerted Eldorado residents that the church had bought the ranch.

"They're very good at putting on a face to the public," said Jessup. "They're told to 'keep sweet.' It is a mask that is portrayed by the community. If you do not portray it right, there is punishment."

She said Eldorado residents shouldn't let their guard down.

"You never get a clear picture of what is going on in these communities," Jessup said. "What you see in public and what is happening in private are two totally different things."

A closed society. In Colorado City, the incorporated town is run as a closed society, said Buster Johnson, a Mohave County, Ariz., supervisor from Lake Havasu City.

"They won't be coming into town and kidnapping children or causing any problems," Johnson said. "But they will try and get every bit of government assistance that they can."

Johnson noted that 66 percent of Hildale residents receive Medicaid. The average in Utah is 6.5 percent, he said.

Some critics have referred to the tactic as "bleeding the beast," a method by which the sect siphons financial resources from non-believers.

Parker, the group's attorney, said that's false.

"That doesn't mean, however, that they don't take advantage of what they're legally entitled to," he said.

Parker said the ranch will be "a new place to get away from the pressure here in Utah.

In that sense, it's a place of refuge, but I think that's about as specific as I can get."

The group is already at odds with the state of Texas over environmental permits. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality issued cease and desist orders to the group in May for failure to obtain permits for a rock crusher, concrete plant and sewage treatment facilities, and for lacking a storm water runoff plan.

When a Star-Telegram reporter and photographer flew over the compound in June, the concrete plant appeared to be in operation.

"I think we'll be out there within a week," John Steib, the commission's deputy director of the office of compliance and enforcement, said Thursday. If there are violations, the agency could impose fines of \$10,000 a day. As for local residents, many say they will tolerate the church as long as no one is harmed. "The only time we're ever going to know is if someone comes in and swears up a complaint," said Justice of the Peace Jimmy Doyle. "If they keep it locked up, I don't know if anyone can get out of an 8-foot, deerproof fence."

#### ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will recognize Members for Special Order speeches without prejudice to the possible resumption of legislative business.

#### SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

#### ORDER OF BUSINESS

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take my special order at this time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

#### SMART SECURITY AND WASTED RESOURCES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Government Accountability Office issued a report stating that the Pentagon will need an estimated \$12.3 billion to pay for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan through September.

The extraordinary amount of money needed to pay for our major military operations is not surprising. What greatly troubles me, once again, is the sheer unwillingness of the Bush administration to adequately plan and prepare for those military operations. The additional \$12.3 billion is triple, triple the amount that General Richard Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of