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These letters elaborate on how Eliza Avery Clark, daughter of Hyrum Don Carlos Clark, married into the Wilford Woodruff family. Note Wilford was a dear friend to Ezra T. Clark. Avery married Abraham Woodruff, Wilford's son and apostle, as Abraham's second wife. Avery only had one child through Abraham, after Abraham's death from smallpox. Abraham's first wife Helen also died from small pox, both in 1904.

soul-searching, Owen determined to embrace post-Manifesto polygamy because he must have believed that the laws of God would eventually supersede those of the government despite the Manifesto's promise of the church's legal compliance. Indeed, Hardy quotes Owen from the clerk's record of a November 1900 quarterly conference in Colonia Juárez as stating "no year will ever pass, whether it be in this country, in India, or wherever, from now until the coming of the Saviour, when children will not be born in plural marriage. And I make this prophecy in the name of Jesus Christ." This prophecy underscores both his philosophical and practical commitment to plural marriage, as he was engaged to Avery at the time.

Owen's travel stemmed mostly from a new assignment he received from his father's successor, President Lorenzo Snow, in December 1899 to be a colonizing agent for the church. In January of 1900 President Snow gave Owen a mandate:

You are a committee of "one" and I want you to go right ahead to organize your Co. for your work in Wyoming and I want you to be Prest. of it. You know you have been sustained to do this work by me and the Twelve Apostles.

Owen enthusiastically accepted this assignment, stating that "I have had a desire all my life to be of use to my people in this line."

While this assignment came to Owen as an ecclesiastical responsibility, it was primarily an economic development task. The Bighorn Basin project developed partly out of the Carey Act. LDS Church leaders had been impressed by the Carey Act of 1894, whereby settlers had irrigated arid lands in the Greybull River area of the Bighorn. The original act stated that any person twenty-one years or older who intended to become a citizen of a western state such as Wyoming was entitled to land. Settlers in the Bighorn Basin purchased a perpetual water right from the Cincinnati Canal builders for the number of acres wanted, but not to exceed one hundred and sixty. After the canal was ready, the settlers had one year to cultivate at least one-sixteenth of their acreage and within three years to have cultivated no less than one-eighth. Having met these requirements, the settlers could then buy their land for twenty-five cents per acre. The opening for the church to become part of this settlement opportunity occurred when the Cincinnati Canal builders abandoned the project. Because William F. (Buffalo Bill) Cody owned most of the land and water rights near the Shoshone River and envisioned successful agricultural settlement in the area, he supported the church's interest in the canal project: