

Sorting out Carterville, Centerville, and Big Spring on Mosquito

MormonPlaces White Paper

Brandon Plewe, 18 July 2026

During the Mormon era of the region around Council Bluffs, Iowa, 1846-1853, the thousands of Saints who had not yet emigrated to Utah were scattered in dozens of settlements over seventy miles of the bluffs along the river and into the prairie to the east. A few of these settlements continued after most of the Saints left, but most have left no trace. This white paper is a small part of an effort to reconstruct this “lost geography.”

The abundant primary sources that have survived from this period, especially Church records and the *Frontier Guardian* newspaper, mention over 100 place names. In my research, which has built on the foundation of many previous scholars such as the late Gail Holmes, many of these have been firmly established as significant settlement locations with Church branches. Other place names have proven to not be distinct, but rather alternate names or nicknames for other settlements, or later towns founded after the Saints left. And a few still have great uncertainty about any aspect of their existence or location. At the moment, there are at least 59 distinct settlements (another 10 or so are uncertain) in this time and place, organized in at least 46 branch congregations (another 8-9 are still uncertain).

Of course, those uncertainties are the most interesting part of this project. This paper will investigate three that have proven to be especially confusing. The names Carterville, Centerville, and Big Spring on Mosquito all appear multiple times in primary sources. The sources clearly locate all three in a similar part of the valley of Mosquito Creek, just east of Kanessville (modern Council Bluffs). But the same people often appear in two of these or even all three around the same time, so they seem to be closely connected. Are they three separate settlements & branches, or just one?

The existence, membership, leadership, and location of Carterville are well established by dozens of sources, including a recently identified tithing record.¹ It was likely named after one or all of three brothers known to have lived there: Dominicus, John H., and William F.

¹ Kanessville Branch Financial Accounts, Church History Library LR 5081 21 V.1.

<https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/2ac45dab-754a-40a9-88b5-600c835bb108/0/0>. This appears to be mis-cataloged as Kanessville Branch: the record is missing a cover or any identifying information, but the member names align very closely with known members of Carterville Branch, including President James C. Snow, and does not match known members of Kanessville/Blockhouse Branch at all.

Carter, and it was probably the third or fourth largest town in the region, with at least 80 households at times. So, the question is what to make of the other two place names.

Big Spring on Mosquito

Let's first try to figure out Big Spring. To make matters even more confusing, there were two Big Spring settlement-branches. The more well-documented one was centered on a spring a mile or two northwest of Kanessville, at the edge of Iowa/Big Lake, which was later called Mynster's Spring, while the one we are more concerned with here was somewhere on Mosquito Creek, a couple miles east of Kanessville. There is some confusion between these, even at the time, because both were just commonly called "Big Spring."

For example, the Pottawattamie High Priest Quorum membership roll² lists several people under "Big Spring Branch" without distinguishing between the two. Some of these are distinguished in the minutes from which the roll was derived³, others are clarified in other sources (such as the branch records for the western branch), and some are still unclear as to which they belonged. Here is that list:

- William Manhard: Western? (Pottawattamie County deed #9)⁴
- Stephen Blackman: unknown (not mentioned elsewhere)
- John Carter: Mosquito (other records)
- James C. Snow: Mosquito (Carterville in other records)
- Perry Durfy: Mosquito?
- Jabez Durfy: Mosquito (1850 census near Carterville)
- Evan M. Greene: Mosquito-President (his diary)
- Job V. Burnham: Western?
- John Sweat: Mosquito (1850 census near Carterville)
- Dominicus Carter: Mosquito (other records)
- Ezekiel Lee: Mosquito (Carterville in other records)
- Partial Terry: Mosquito (Carterville in other records)
- Daniel Carter: Mosquito (other records)
- Stephen Perry: unknown (not mentioned elsewhere)
- Lyman Stevens: unknown (not mentioned elsewhere)
- William Ford: Mosquito (other records)

² The entire Council Bluffs region had a single quorum of high priests. Pottawattamie High Priest Quorum Roll. Family History Library film 7794 item 2, Church History Library LR 1764 22. The roll is at the end of the quorum minutes book, with pages ordered in reverse. <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/166b5a84-3e69-40f5-9774-1049977096a9/0/108>

³ Pottawattamie High Priest Quorum Minutes, Church History Library LR 1764 22, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/166b5a84-3e69-40f5-9774-1049977096a9/0/0>

⁴ Pottawattamie County deeds Book A, Family History Library film 1477340 p.9, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSL2-NHSV>

- Enos Curtis: Mosquito (HP minutes p.3, 2 Apr 1848)
- Gardner Snow: Mosquito-Bishop (HC minutes p.105)
- William Gardner: Mosquito (HP minutes p.5, 6 Aug 1848)
- Chauncey W. Porter: Western-Bishop (branch records), but “of same place” as William Gardner (HP minutes p.5, 6 Aug 1848)
- William J. Bennett: Mosquito (HP minutes p.6, 3 Sep 1848)

So most of these were likely in the Big Spring on Mosquito Branch, and thus important to the study at hand. In addition to this list, Big Spring on Mosquito appears in several instances in the primary sources, clearly distinct from the western Big Springs, but less clearly distinct from Carterville and/or Centerville:

- 8 May 1847: In his diary, Evan M. Greene mentions “Spring Branch on Muskeeto Creek,” over which he presides, listing a few members: Moses Tracy, David Colvin, Orlin Colvin, William Carter, Elizabeth Heward, Levi Savage.⁵
- 5 December 1847: After visiting Mill Branch, Church leaders visit “the branch sometimes called Big Spring Branch presided over by E.M. Greene.”⁶ Mentions Dominicus Carter and William F. Carter there, then lists about 20 members making donations.
- 15 July 1848: Among several bishops being called for branches across the region is “Gardner Snow: B.S. on Ms. Creek.”⁷ Carterville is not mentioned in this list of bishops.
- August 6, 1848: the high priest quorum accepts “William Gardner of Big Spring on Musqueto” and “Luke Johnson of Carterville Branch.”⁸ So both place names existed separately on this date. It is probably very important that this is the **last** primary source mention we have found of Big Spring on Mosquito, and the **first** mention of Carterville by name!
- Dec 22, 1849: A case is brought before the high council, appealed from the Carterville Quorum of Seventies, concerning an event that occurred June 1847. Several members are involved, most of whom are listed in membership rolls for both

⁵ Evan M. Green diaries, V.6 p.91-92, Church History Library MS 1442, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f0bd5af7-1a04-49d9-9723-70cc078c05c7/0/90>

⁶ Historian’s Office Journal, V.10 p.18, Church History Library CR 100 1, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/3d44a502-a2de-4325-98ca-ce906b8708ee/0/19>

⁷ High Council Minutes, p.105, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e7c9b225-a0b7-49e3-8d3c-ffe1d40738bf/0/0>. This practice of having branches with both a president and a bishop was somewhat unique to this situation, but it also occurred in wards in Utah during the 1850s. For more information, see Plewe, B. 2025. “This Branch of the Church: The Early Development of Local Administration in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Part 2: The Church in Flux: 1846-1851” *BYU Studies*, V. 64 #2 (Spring 2025), 13, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/issue/64-2>

⁸ High Priest Quorum Minutes, p.5. <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/166b5a84-3e69-40f5-9774-1049977096a9/0/16>

Carterville and Big Spring on Mosquito, including Evan M. Greene, who “was at that time pres’t of the Carterville Branch.”⁹

- 1850: in the U.S. Census, which did not identify settlements by name, but appears to have been geographically ordered, there are two batches of names matching most of the names from Big Spring on Mosquito Branch in 1847 (at least those who haven’t emigrated), families #1290-1296 and #1344-1352. Surprisingly, these are not mixed in with any of the clusters of other names tied to Carterville, but they are at either end of one.

Based on these sources, we are able to put together a list of documented member families of Big Spring on Mosquito, establishing that it was a relatively significant branch. For each, it is enlightening to consider what happens to them after the last mention of Big Spring in 1848:

1. James Bennett: later in Carterville
2. Elizabeth Bennett, widow of William J. Bennett: later in Carterville
3. Norman G. Blodgett: later in Carterville
4. Thomas Butterfield: emigrated 1849
5. Daniel Carter: emigrated 1850
6. Dominicus Carter: later in Carterville
7. William F. Carter: emigrated in 1850
8. David Colvin: not mentioned after 1847, emigrated 1852
9. Orlin Colvin: not mentioned after 1847, emigrated 1852?
10. Abraham Durfee: emigrated 1850
11. Jabez Durfee: left the Church
12. Perry Durfee: not mentioned after 1847, emigrated 1851
13. William Ford: not mentioned after 1847, emigrated 1851
14. David M. Gammet: moved to Coonville 1848
15. William Gardner: same as William Garner in Mill Branch?
16. Evan M. Greene, president: later in Carterville
17. John Heward: emigrated 1848
18. John Jelly: not mentioned after 1847, not sure who this was
19. Joseph Kelly: later in Carterville
20. Ezekiel Lee: later in Centerville (see below), emigrated 1850
21. Isaac Odekirk: later in Carterville
22. Levi Savage: emigrated 1848
23. Gardner Snow, Bishop: later in Centerville
24. James C. Snow: later in Centerville/Carterville as branch president
25. Jacob E. Terry: later in Carterville

⁹ Pottawattamie High Council Minutes 1846-1851, V.1 p.192-197, Church History Library LR 1764 21, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e7cfb225-a0b7-49e3-8d3c-ffe1d40738bf/0/0>

- 26. Parshall Terry: emigrated 1849
- 27. Moses Tracy: emigrated 1850
- 28. Benjamin Waldron: later in Carterville

So, of the 28 documented families in the branch, 12 are later members of Carterville (or Centerville?) Branch, 10 have left the area by the time we have good records for Carterville Branch in late 1850, and 6 are never mentioned in a branch after 1847. None are later listed in another branch in the Mosquito valley. It is therefore almost certain that sometime in the Autumn of 1848, Big Spring Branch was either just renamed Carterville or was absorbed by a new Carterville Branch.

One possible scenario is that Big Spring on Mosquito was an early (1846/1847) settlement cluster around a spring somewhere in the lower Mosquito valley (perhaps as far south as the current Iowa School for the Deaf and Blind), ¹⁰ with a branch covering the surrounding area. In 1848, a new town was built nearby (presumably centered around the homes of the Carter brothers Dominicus, John H., and William F.) called Carterville that soon became the center of the branch. The clusters in the 1850 census suggest that the original settlement may have remained, but relegated to a satellite of Carterville. A much simpler hypothesis is that the town of Carterville was itself the location of the spring, and just changed its name as it grew. Perhaps the renaming was an overt effort to avoid confusion with the other Big Spring Branch.

Centerville

A separate but related issue is the elusive settlement/branch of Centerville. A cursory glance at the sources suggests that this was in the same vicinity of Carterville, which begs the question of why there would be two neighboring settlements with such similar names. Well, upon closer inspection, it gets more complicated. Is it possible that these were the same settlement? Could it be as simple as bad handwriting? In many cursive hands, “ar” and “en” can look very similar.

First, let me dispel one supposed explanation. In some studies, the confusion has been attributed solely to a single difficult-to-read heading in the High Priest Quorum roll that looks like it could read Carterville or Centerville, and may even represent one being written over the other.¹¹ However, the image used is a scanned copy of the FamilySearch microfilm

¹⁰ For example, “Parley’s Spring” was somewhere around where Mosquito Creek left the bluff and entered the flats, and had settlers nearby. Letter from George A. Smith March 24th 1849, *Millennial Star*, V.11 #10 (May 15, 1849), p.154. <https://archive.org/details/MStarVol11/page/n161/mode/2up>

¹¹ <https://winterquartersbyu.earlylds.com/settlements/kanesville-area#Carterville>

photograph of the original record. In the much better image in the Church History Library, there is no confusion—it is very clearly written Carterville.¹²

Remember, starting in August 1848 (Luke Johnson in the high priest quorum, as mentioned above), the name Carterville appears too frequently to list. So here are the more rare sources that appear to refer to Centerville:

- October 10, 1848: Silas Richards sent a report to the First Presidency on the agricultural production of the various settlement-branches.¹³ The list includes a very clearly written “Centerville Branch, Ezekiel Lee, President, Gardner Snow Bishop.” Remember, Gardner Snow had been made bishop of the Big Spring on Mosquito Branch in July and both Lee and Snow joined the high priest quorum in 1848 from Big Spring Branch. The list of branches in this report is not at all complete, but neither Big Spring on Mosquito nor Carterville Branches appear, although the other Big Spring Branch is there.
- February 7, 1849: In an advertisement in the first issue of the *Frontier Guardian*, Dr. Luke Johnson is “of Centerville.”¹⁴ As noted above, the previous August he is “of Carterville.”
- September 5, 1849: A notice appeared in the *Frontier Guardian* about Israel Calkins “near Centerville.”¹⁵ He also appears in the supposed Carterville Branch tithing record in 1851 and is listed in Carterville Branch in the high priest quorum.¹⁶
- October 7, 1849: The high priest quorum receives “Elisha Voorhis of Centerville Branch,” but in the roll at the back of the same book written by the same scribe (presumably at the same time), he is listed under Carterville (there is no listing for Centerville).¹⁷
- October 27, 1849: At a high council meeting, Orson Hyde directs that “James Snow Pres’t of the Centerville Branch” [clearly written] attend a future meeting to resolve an issue with the Welsh Branch.¹⁸ However, when he attends on November 10 and

¹² <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/166b5a84-3e69-40f5-9774-1049977096a9/0/103>

¹³ Silas Richards to Brigham Young 10 October 1848, Brigham Young Office Papers: General Incoming Correspondence, Church History Library CR 1234 1 box 21 folder 13 pp.56-58, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/6de70c3b-2c3c-4f8e-9ce9-322c3a75f206/0/0>

¹⁴ Botanical Physician, *Frontier Guardian*, V.1 #1 (7 Feb 1849) p.2, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ff75d758-daf9-432a-8460-e7b8aef9aa62/0/1>

¹⁵ Strayed, *Frontier Guardian*, V.1 #16 (5 Sep 1849) p.2, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/efddb595-06b2-41ae-bc02-9646abbaaf8d/0/1>

¹⁶ P.17, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/2ac45dab-754a-40a9-88b5-600c835bb108/0/4>; High Priest Quorum roll, p.6, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/166b5a84-3e69-40f5-9774-1049977096a9/0/103>

¹⁷ Pottawattamie High Priest Quorum minutes, p.24, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/166b5a84-3e69-40f5-9774-1049977096a9/0/35>; High Priest Quorum roll, p.6, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/166b5a84-3e69-40f5-9774-1049977096a9/0/103>

¹⁸ Pottawattamie High Council Minutes, V.1 pp.180, 184, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e7cfb225-a0b7-49e3-8d3c-ffe1d40738bf/0/0>

the issue is discussed, it is clearly written “James Snow the president of the Carterville Branch.”

- November 28, 1849: a notice is included in the *Frontier Guardian* from Edwin Harley “on Musquito Creek, half a mile below Centerville.”¹⁹ The only other mention of Harley is in a high council meeting, September 13, 1851, as a party in a case appealed from an unnamed branch of “Pres’t J.C. Snow.”²⁰

I cannot find Centerville written in any source after November 1849, and there are numerous references to Carterville before, during and after this period. All of these 6 examples have three things in common: 1) all of the sources were contemporary documents written by people who lived in the area and should have known whether Centerville was a real place or not; 2) they are clearly written or typed as “en” not “ar”—it cannot be attributed to modern readers mis-transcribing the handwriting; 3) every person attributed to Centerville Branch is also attributed somewhere else to Carterville (or Big Spring on Mosquito). The third point would strongly suggest that they are the same branch, but the first two would seem to refute that, especially in some of the cases where the same scribe wrote both Carterville and Centerville. How is this to be solved?

The default option is that they really were two distinct settlements. This seems extremely unlikely given all of the people attributed to both, but not impossible.

A second possibility is that for a while (1848-1849), there was a single settlement-branch that was called both Carterville and Centerville by the locals, but eventually Carterville gained favor. This happened in other places at the time, such as Farmersville/Little Pigeon, Living Spring/Macedonia, and Perkins Camp/Pleasant Valley, but it seems very unlikely to have two candidate names that were so similar. Also, there is no mention of the two together or of a decision process (e.g., “at Carterville also known as Centerville”).

A third possibility, which makes the most sense to me, is that there was only one branch, Carterville, and that the original documents were always spelled that way, but that they were mis-transcribed in creating the documents available to us. The items in the *Frontier Guardian* were almost certainly typeset from handwritten submissions; it is possible that an apprentice typesetter misread “ar” as “en” and was not careful about ensuring the geographical correctness, even if he knew of Carterville but had never heard of Centerville. The high priest quorum minute book (including the membership roll) has a very consistent hand that suggests that it may have been a later copy; this possibility is strengthened by a historical note on the last page (p.45), but if it is a copy, it was apparently written by the

¹⁹ Strayed, *Frontier Guardian*, V.1 #22 (28 Nov 1849) p.3,
<https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/6d8550e2-8e4e-4600-9861-9ab7d494dd84/0/2>

²⁰ Pottawattamie High Council Minutes, V.2 September 13 1851 (image 38),
<https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/78c73aae-6d54-4d84-a94f-a908bd531cde/0/37>

same clerk (James Sloan) as the original. The Silas Richards letter and the High Council minutes may also be copies of lost originals, but the writing is much less consistent than the high priest quorum minutes, suggesting that they were written at different times by different scribes.

Conclusion

So, what should we do with these three entities? In my opinion, the most likely reality is they were all a single branch: Big Spring on Mosquito was its early (1847-1848) name, Carterville its later (1848-1852) name, and Centerville a recurring error. This seems to be more geographically plausible and fits the evidence better than any other alternative explanation, but it does not fit the evidence perfectly. It leaves several unanswered questions:

- Where was the Big Spring?
- How and when was Carterville built as a village?
- Why would the ar-en mistranscription have happened in the exact same way so often when other typos (other than variant name spellings) are rare and inconsistent?

Because of my lingering uncertainty, in Mormon Places, I plan to keep these as separate entities, but mark the existence of Centerville as unlikely, and same-as relationships between the three as highly likely.