FLDS raid in Texas: How did this happen?

2 say changes in church may be behind the troubles

By Carrie Moore and Elaine Jarvik
Deseret News

Two weeks after 416 children were removed from the YFZ Ranch in Texas following allegations of child sexual abuse, the leader of the FLDS Church remains in jail in Arizona as his followers deal with the public consequences of private practices that he ordered and perpetrated after becoming leader of the group five years ago.

Warren Jeffs — who was convicted in September of rape as an accomplice for forcing an underage girl to marry her adult cousin — has directed the affairs of the Fundamentalist LDS Church since 2003, following the death of his father, Rulon Jeffs.

With that change in power, decades of living in relative harmony with their own Utah-Arizona border-town communities began to unravel as Jeffs sought to control personal property, family relationships and marriage within the community on an unprecedented scale, according to two authors who have written about the sect. Within two years of taking control of the group, Jeffs landed on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list before his capture in 2006 and subsequent criminal conviction.

The authors agree that Jeff's determination to wield control made him into something of a God-like figure among his followers, who seem to have taken his directives as divine decrees that bound them to do his bidding, regardless of the potential consequences.

Though he renounced his own leadership from prison during his criminal trial, calling himself a "false prophet" and "one of the most wicked men on the face of the earth," he later rejected those assertions, and followers regularly visit him in prison. Many observers believe he continues to direct the affairs of the FLDS group from behind bars.

Modern polygamy started in 1929

Modern roots of polygamy in Utah and the United States can be traced back to 1929 to men said to have been "set apart" by Lorin Woolley, who in turn claims to have been secretly authorized by early LDS Church President John Taylor to perform plural marriages. Mormon fundamentalists believe that Taylor had a revelation in 1886 to continue the practice of plural marriage, a contention that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints says is wrong.

Woolley then undertook naming a "Council of Friends," also known as the "Council of Seven," that included Leslie Broadbent, John Y. Barlow, Joseph Musser, Charles Zitting and Louis Kelsch. When he succeeded Woolley and Barlow in seniority, Barlow ordained several other men, including Rulon Jeffs, father of Warren Jeffs. Barlow started the United Order of Short Creek on the isolated Arizona-Utah border in 1940. Not long after Barlow died in 1949, his successor, Joseph Musser, was treated by a Salt Lake polygamist naturopath, Rulon Allred, for a series of debilitating strokes. When Musser ordained Allred "first elder," this angered other council members, who then split from the group.

When Musser died, his line went to Allred, who before him "followed similar goals. For Warren to waltz in, excommunicate people (he felt were a threat to his authority) and build a temple — those are brand new ideas and thinking which makes everything unpredictable with him."

As word of Jeff's mistreatment of his own followers began to leak out in media reports, many of them moved to what is now the YFZ Ranch in Eldorado, Texas, constructing their first temple and shunning outsiders and the media. But with the fate of the FLDS children now in the hands of Texas authorities, the world press is both intrigued and baffled by polygamy's modern-day complexities as the women seek out reporters in unprecedented ways.

How did the FLDS community evolve to include allegations of widespread child sexual abuse from what some saw in the early 1990s as a religious offshoot group determined to continue plural marriage after the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints outlawed the practice for its members in 1889?

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Hales, who has studied fundamentalist Mormons for years, has a theory.

“The tendency of polygamy ... is to create narcissists of men and co-dependents of women. It’s a very fertile field for sexual exploitation and perversion. Beds in the temple ... there’s a tendency to exalt the man. If he doesn’t get what he wants from wife one, you can see him going to wife two.”

Jeffs’ quest for control built on a family legacy of power based in the idea that the FLDS leader would one day personally help usher in the second coming of Jesus Christ.

And Jeffs took it a step further, Hales said, recalling a recent conversation with an insider who has dealt extensively with current FLDS practice and had access to personal communications to and from Jeffs.

“When you get leaders like him thinking he has displaced Christ ... Reading through some of those letters it dawned on him (the insider) there were no references to Christ. Warren sees himself as their intermediary with God.” Such a view is “the trajectory of the narcissism,” he said.

“When left unchecked, men can become very controlling. The FLDS are an extreme example. They are by far the worst, particularly among the leadership, which is why the whole group will crumble, because you can’t sustain it,” Hales said.

Stephen Singular is the author of a new book yet to be published. He suggested said, adding to the notion that “he’s above the law, and he only answers to God’s law.”

Elden Kingston
Kingston Economic Order

Paul Kingston
Davis County Cooperative Society

John Y. Barlow
United Order of Short Creek (1940)

LeRoy Johnson

Rulon Jeffs
Renamed FLDS (1991)

Warren Jeffs

Lorin Woolley

AUTHORITY: Lorin Woolley says he was secretly authorized by LDS Church President John Taylor to perform plural marriages. The LDS Church says this is not true.

Joseph Musser

Ruion Allred

J. LaMoine Jenson

Marlon Hammon and Alma Timpson
Centennial Park (1984)

A. Dayer LeBaron

Joel LeBaron
The Church of First Born in the Fullness of Time

Ervil LeBaron
The Church of the Lamb of God

Ross LeBaron
The Church of the First Born

Tom Green

British Columbia, Canada.
Still other polygamous leaders, such as Jim Hymen, of the Church of the First Born, who left the FLDS in 1957, and George Printz, who organized the Church of the Lamb of God in Idaho, have emerged as they continued their efforts.

festo in 1890, advising Latter-day Saints to refrain from plural marriage.
Because polygamy contin-

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organized under the name Apostolic United Brethren (AUB), headquartered in the south end of Salt Lake County. Allred was later shot to death by order of rival polygamist leader Ervil LeBaron, head of the Church of the Lamb of God, also in Salt Lake County. The question of who has "priesthood authority" is still the main difference among today's various fundamentalist groups.

Other splinter groups include Centennial Park, begun by Marion Hammon and Alma Timpson in 1964, the Nielsen-Naylor group (a splinter from Centennial Park), and Winston Blackmore's group in Bountiful, British Columbia, Canada. Still other polygamous leaders, such as Jim Harmon of the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days, in Manti, say they receive their authority by "direct manifestation."

"We don't even mention them in the same breath," says Anne Wilde of the pro-polygamy coalition Principle Voices. "They're so radical."

There are also many "independent" polygamists who follow no leader at all. Some independents, as well as the Davis County Cooperative Society (known informally as the Kingston group), the AUB, and the Nielsen-Naylor, are now members of Principle Voices. — Elaine Jarvik and Carrie Moore

western Canada, and in tiny outposts scattered around the Intermountain West.

Despite the imprisonment of the movement's most visible leader, polygamous fundamentalism appears to have a staying power that makes it unlikely to disappear anytime soon.

Anne Wilde, a polygamous widow and a director of the pro-polygamy group Principle Voices, says there are currently some 37,000 people (including children) who are fundamentalist Mormons — and the number has stayed fairly consistent in the recent past.

The term "fundamentalist Mormons" is a name that the LDS Church finds objectionable, but one that the fundamentalists say is fitting. It is the mainstream LDS Church, they argue, that strained from the faith's original doctrinal underpinnings when LDS Church President Wilford Woodruff revoked polygamy in 1890, advising Latter-day Saints to refrain from plural marriage.

Because polygamy continued in secrecy to a small extent, a second "official statement" on the practice was issued by LDS Church President Joseph F. Smith in 1904, ending authorization for plural marriages on pain of excommunication from the church. Current LDS leaders acknowledge the practice as part of their early history, and LDS scripture still contains passages that fundamentalists use to defend its continuation.

In the first few decades of the 20th century, several LDS Church members — including a few leaders who were excommunicated as they continued to advocate polygamy and/or practice it. Some were later reinstated in the church, while a handful split from the faith to form their own groups under separate leadership. The ins and outs of these complex relationships are documented in Hales' 500-page book, which recently received the best book award in 2007 from the John Whitmer Historical Association.

Back in Texas, where Singular was attending the hearing on Thursday that will determine what happens next to the FLDS children removed from the Eldorado compound, the consequences of Jeffs' edicts — and his followers' willingness to adhere to them — are playing out now, he said.

After multiple interviews with teenage boys expelled from the sect and women who have left on their own, Singular said they eventually come to understand "how much they've summoned over people's lives and how the people allow that to happen — and that they are both culpable. People who have broken away from it realize that."

E-MAIL: carrie@desnews.com