And There Came Prophets in the Land Again: the Life of Joseph Smith III, 1832-1914, Mormon Reformer. (Volumes I and II).

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AND THERE CAME PROPHETS IN THE LAND AGAIN: THE LIFE OF JOSEPH SMITH III, 1832-1914, MORMON REFORMER. (VOLUMES I AND II)

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col. PH.D. 1982

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AND THERE CAME PROPHETS IN THE LAND AGAIN: THE
LIFE OF JOSEPH SMITH III, 1832-1914,
MORMON REFORMER

VOLUME I

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of History

by
Roger D. Launius
B.A., Graceland College, 1976
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1978
May 1982
We thank thee, O God, for a Prophet
To guide us in these latter days;
We thank thee for sending the Gospel
To lighten our minds with its rays;
We thank thee for every blessing
Bestowed by the bounteous hand;
We feel it a pleasure to serve thee,
And love to obey thy commands.

When dark clouds of troubl: hang o'er us,
And threaten our peace to destroy,
There is Hope smiling brightly before us,
And we know that deliv'rance is nigh;
We doubt not the Lord nor his goodness,
We've proved him in days that are past;
The wicked who fight against Zion
Will surely be smitten at last.

We'll sing of his goodness and mercy;
We'll praise him by day and by night;
Rejoice in his glorious Gospel,
And bask in its life-giving light;
Thus on to eternal perfection
The honest and faithful will go;
While they who reject this glad message,
Shall never such happiness know.

William Fowler, 1863

A church without a Prophet is not the church for me;
It has no head to lead it, in it I would not be;--
But I've a church not built by men,
Cut from the mountain without hands;
A church with gifts and blessings--O, that's the church for me.

Anonymous, 1845
Dedication

This dissertation is for the three Ladies in my Life
Vianne, Dana, and Sarah
Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Joseph Smith III was the son of Joseph Smith, Jr., the Mormon Prophet. Born in late 1832, as a boy young Smith learned the Mormon faith from his father and experienced some of its hardships and trials as the church founded a succession of settlements at Kirtland, Ohio, Far West, Missouri, and Nauvoo, Illinois. Young Joseph witnessed and, in some measure, participated in the events that culminated in his father’s murder by a mob in Carthage, Illinois in 1844.

After the prophet’s death a number of would-be successors put forth their claims to the presidency of the church, but in the struggle for power Brigham Young succeeded in assuming leadership over most of the membership. The other contenders formed splinter groups of Mormons and each tried to bring Joseph III into his movement because of his prestige as the son of the prophet. During the 1850s remnants of these Mormon factions coalesced to form the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. During those years young Joseph acquired an education and engaged in a number of political and business ventures with indifferent success. Acceding to the Reorganization’s repeated overtures, Joseph finally agreed to accept the leadership of the church, and on April 6, 1860 became its president.

During his fifty-four year tenure as president Smith built the Reorganization into a major Mormon church. His main objectives were to consolidate the movement under his leadership, give it a strong central administration, and purge it of radical doctrines, such as plural marriage.
By the time of his death in December 1914 Smith had largely accomplished these goals. He had assisted in the anti-polygamy struggle of the Gilded Age, had converted several thousand Mormons to his sect, and had built an administration that would continue to function effectively after his death.

The main source of material for this dissertation was the papers of Joseph Smith III, located principally in the Reorganized Church archives in Independence, Missouri. Additional important sources were the papers of other Mormon leaders, newspapers, and government documents.
Chapter 1

BEGINNINGS IN KIRTLAND AND FAR WEST

Joseph Smith III was a man of religious conviction who believed he above all others in Christendom had a mission. During his long life, from 1832 to 1914, he worked zealously for what he referred to as a reorganization of the “fulness of the gospel” that had been previously brought to the earth through his father, Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of Mormonism. This had been a pure gospel during his father’s lifetime, Smith believed, but it had been corrupted after his father’s violent death at the hands of a mob in Carthage, Illinois on June 27, 1844. Various leaders within Mormonism claimed leadership of the sect, splintering it into a number of factions. These factions espoused various doctrinal ideas, many of which were repugnant to Joseph Smith III. Smith became the head of one of these factions which became officially known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.¹

As such he accepted the title “Prophet, Seer, and Revelator” to the organization, a title his father had once held, and assumed direction as the legitimate “Vicar of Christ of Earth.” From this lofty

¹Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints became the official name of Smith’s faction within Mormonism in 1872 when its first legal incorporation took place. See “Articles of Association,” True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 19 (November 1, 1872), 690-93. Previous to this time the church had been known by a variety of names: Josephites, Reorganites, the New Organization, and the old official name of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The Reorganization, however, shunned the use of the name, Mormon, because of its identification with the faction headed by Brigham Young headquartered in Utah.
position within the Mormon hierarchy Smith began to present his views on the true faith in the Mormon world. Slowly at first, and then with increasing confidence and vigor, he began to mold the "new organization" of the church into a powerful force in Mormondom. This organization gradually came to occupy a special niche in the religious setting of nineteenth-century America. Under Smith's capable, although cautious, leadership it adhered to certain distinctive beliefs that Smith considered the basis of his father's work. These included the Book of Mormon as sacred scripture from ancient America, the spiritual authority of the ordained priesthood, the hope for the establishment of a utopian society upon the earth prior to the coming of the millennium, and the legitimacy of modern revelation from God to a prophet directing the affairs of the church. On the basis of these doctrines, Smith's Reorganized Church attacked the theological teachings of other Mormon factions, particularly those embraced by the followers of Brigham Young, such as plural marriage, the purpose of temples as places of exotic rituals, and the belief in a progressive God.

The Reorganized Church under Smith, then, began to occupy a unique place in American religion. Its adherents were the people in the middle, standing as a buffer between hardcore Mormons of the Great Basin and the great body of Protestants of the rest of the United States. Never satisfied with being called Protestant, nor with being identified with Utah Mormons, Smith guided his movement along a religious tightrope between the two opposing theologies, never allowing himself or his organization to journey too far off center for fear of its losing its identity and ceasing to exist as an independent movement. Smith dreaded the prospect of being absorbed by one or another of the churches and
The Mormon religion that so dominated Smith's life began before his birth. His father founded the church in 1830, and directed its affairs until his death. During that time it grew from a small sect of about one hundred believers in the Book of Mormon and the prophetic mission of Joseph Smith, Jr., into a tightly organized church with a complex, if at times unusual, theological system which claimed a following of almost 200,000 communicants.  

During his early life, young Joseph, as he was known by almost all Latter Day Saints, became intimately associated with his father and his church doctrine. He continued this close relationship throughout his adult life, for Smith to a very large extent lived under the shadow of his father's accomplishments.

Joseph Smith III was born on November 6, 1832 in an upper room of the general store run by Newel K. Whitney at Kirtland, Geauga County, Ohio. He was the first surviving child of Emma and Joseph Smith, Jr. He did, however, have an adopted sister—Julia Murdock—who was almost two years older than he. By the time of Joseph's birth his father was already a living legend. The elder Smith was born in Sharon, Vermont in late 1805. His religious experiment began as a result of the general spiritual ferment known as the "Second Great Awakening" which swept the country in the early nineteenth century. The movement was especially strong in western New York. Having moved there with his family in 1816

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2"Correspondence between Gen. Joseph Smith and the Hon. Henry Clay," Times and Seasons (Nauvoo, Illinois), 5 (June 1, 1844), 547.

3Joseph Smith, "The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith (1832-1914)," in Saints' Herald, 81 (November 6, 1934), 1413.
Smith was exposed to the Awakening by itinerant revivalists who traveled through the region. From an initial divine revelation as a young boy in the early 1820s Smith was, by his own statement, subsequently almost constantly in contact with heavenly beings. On September 22, 1827, on instruction from of these messengers he went to a hill near his Palmyra, New York farm where he found buried plates "unto the likeness of gold" on which were engraved a record supposedly detailing the history of some ancient inhabitants of America. Smith brought these plates home and during the next three years translated them through what he called "the gift and power of God" from their forgotten language into English.

When the work was finished it was published as the Book of Mormon. Its publication signaled the beginning of a new sect of millennial zealots under Smith's leadership. As a record of the dealings of God with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas, the book solemnly told the story of two groups of Hebraic peoples who migrated to the Western Hemisphere. The first migration supposedly occurred about 2,000 B.C. under the leadership of a prophet named Jared. The religious history of the Jaredites, as they were called, was told in only one section of the Book of Mormon. The second migration made up the bulk of the account, telling of the voyage and settlement of another group in America about 600 B.C. Led by Nephi, these Israelites established an advanced civilization in Central and South America. The Nephites had many dealings with God, as recounted in the work, which reached their climax with the visit of Jesus Christ to them in America following his crucifixion and resurrection in Palestine. Unlike His reception in the Middle East, Christ was accepted by the Nephites as the physical incarnation of Jehovah. His visit precipitated a two-hundred-year golden age which saw the formation
of a Christian-utopian community where everyone loved his fellow men.

From this utopian society the Nephites slowly degenerated into internal division and religious war. In this war the Nephites were opposed by the followers of Laman, a group of dissenters, who eventually destroyed the magnificent Nephite society in a long and bloody conflict. Before the last battle, however, one of the Nephites buried an account of his people's history in a hill called Cumorah, where it was to remain until a servant chosen by the Lord should bring it forth. Joseph Smith, Jr. was the servant whom the Lord chose to find the writings of this civilization and to whom He gave the ability to translate them.4

In the midst of the excitement over his religious experiences, Joseph Smith, Jr. was married. In October 1825 Josiah Stoal, a prosperous farmer from South Bainbridge, New York, asked the youth, whose visionary powers had already become quite well known, to help him find a lost silver mine in the Susquehanna Valley. Stoal promised Smith high wages and room and board for his services. Joseph Smith returned to South Bainbridge with Stoal who hired a room for him with Isaac and Elizabeth Hale in Harmony, Pennsylvania, not far from the supposed site of the mine. While staying with the Hales Smith met their daughter Emma, a schoolteacher, who, at the age of twenty-one was considered to be well on her way to spinsterhood. The young people carried on a passionate courtship which culminated in marriage, against the wishes of the Hale family.

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4Elva T. Oakman, The Book of Mormon (Independence, Missouri: n.p., 1972), 5-9; Joseph Smith, Jr., "History of Joseph Smith," Times and Seasons, 3 (March 15, 1842), 726-28; Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi (Palmyra, New York: E. B. Grandin, for the Author, 1830), passim.

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on January 18, 1827.5

By the time of the publication of the Book of Mormon in March 1830 the Smiths had been married for three years but had no children. They had lost a child in 1828. In 1831 Emma gave birth to twins, but they too only lived a short time. She and Joseph then adopted twins, but one of them died in early 1832 as well. The birth of the strong little Joseph in November 1832, thus, caused great joy in the Smith family. Indeed, the entire church rejoiced with the prophet and his wife in the baby’s birth. The members lavished gifts on the boy as though he were the long-awaited heir to a throne.6 Smith made a business trip to New York City shortly before the baby’s birth. From there he wrote his wife of the baby’s anticipated arrival, “My breast so fills with all the feelings and tenderness of a parent and husband, and could I be with you I would tell you many things.”7 He arrived back home, “immediately after the birth of my son, Joseph Smith, the third.”8


7Joseph Smith, Jr. to Emma Smith, October 13, 1832, Joseph Smith, Jr. Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).

8Smith, History of the Church, 1:295.
Joseph Smith III’s parents moved to Kirtland, Ohio in February 1831, after missionaries had converted a large number of people. Included were some very influential protestant ministers, among whom was the prophet’s right-hand man, Sidney Rigdon. Kirtland was a dingy suburb of Cleveland consisting of only a few stores and shops, a grist mill, a post office, one hotel, and a few civic buildings when the Smiths moved there.

When writing his memoirs as an old man Joseph III was able to remember little of the years in Kirtland, but what he remembered was pleasant. As a toddler he followed on the heels of older children, trying to do everything they did. On one occasion, after watching them fishing in the Chagrin River just north of town, he went home and demanded a pole and hook and line so that he could fish. Emma Smith extracted a bent pin and a length of string from her sewing supplies, tied the pin to one end of the string and the other to a willow twig, and sent the lad off to fish. By some stroke of luck Joseph hooked a minnow. He pulled it out and ran home shouting at the top of his lungs, “I’ve got one, I’ve got one.” But he was disappointed to learn, when he asked his mother to clean and cook the minnow, that his catch was too small.

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Although young Smith had little appreciation for the events happening around him and his family, he early understood that his father was a religious leader of some importance in the Western Reserve as well as a civic leader in Kirtland. Acting in both capacities Joseph Smith, Jr. built a large building, known as the Kirtland Temple, which served the community as a school and auditorium and the church as a house of worship and office for church officials. Between 1833 and 1836 the building of the Temple absorbed most of the efforts of Smith’s followers. Latter Day Saint men in Kirtland were expected to donate at least one day in seven to its construction, and on any given day some twenty-five of them could be found on the site cutting stone, woodworking, painting, and performing other necessary tasks.  

Joseph Smith, Jr., although president of the church, took a regular turn as one of the foremen in the stone quarry. On one occasion, probably in 1835 or early 1836, the prophet took young Joseph to the Temple site with him. Smith and the other workmen kept the boy busy running errands or doing various small jobs. At the end of the day, as father and son walked back home, the prophet turned to Joseph and said,

“you were a good helper today, and the Lord will reward you in heaven.”
Family tradition states that the boy stopped, looked his father in the eye, and said, "if its all the same to you, Pa, I’d like to have my reward now like the rest of the men."13

When the Temple was completed the Mormons staged an elaborate dedication service to mark its formal opening. Thereafter the structure occupied an important place in the life of the church, the community, and young Joseph. In December 1836, for example, his grandfather, Joseph Smith, Sr., called the boy into the Temple for a special blessing. As later recalled by Joseph’s grandmother, the blessing alluded to some future responsibilities the lad would have within the leadership of the church.

The blessing read as follows:

I lay my hands upon your head to bless you Your name is after the name of your father you are Joseph the third you shall live long upon the earth And after you are grown up you shall [have] wisdom knowledge and understanding And shall search into the mysteries of the Kingdom of God Your heart shall be open to all men And your hand shall be open to relieve the wants of the poor. You shall be admired by all who shall behold you you shall be an honor to your Father and Mother And a comfort to your mother you shall be a help to your brothers and you shall have power to carry out all that your Father shall leave undone when you become of age And you shall have power to wield the Sword of Laban."14

Although no one left evidence prior to the death of Joseph Smith, Jr. in 1844 that this blessing had special significance, some realized during


14Joseph Smith, Sr., Blessing of Joseph Smith III, remembered by Lucy Mack Smith, Summer 1845 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah). This blessing has been published twice. See Saints’ Herald 51 (June 8, 1904), 526, 56 (July 29, 1905), 702.
the crisis of leadership in 1844 and 1845 that the statement "you shall
have power to carry out all that your Father shall leave undone" could
well be interpreted as a designation of the boy as his father's successor,
and Smith recognized it as such later.

Joseph Smith III, as a mere child, did not understand the diffi-
culties that forced his father and most of the other Mormons out of Kirtland
in early 1838. The Saints had not been accepted by the non-Mormon community
from the beginning and relations between the two deteriorated steadily.
The situation was considerably aggravated when a bank organized by the
Saints in Kirtland declared bankruptcy during the Panic of 1837. The
Mormons had organized their institution—the Kirtland Safety Society Anti-
Banking Company—as a wildcat bank after it had been refused a charter
by the state legislature in late 1836. Joseph Smith, Jr. served as the
cashier while his right-hand man, Sidney Rigdon, acted as president.
Although it had only about $21,000 in specie deposits, the bank issued
some four million dollars in bank notes. The bank's putting so much
currency in circulation caused a boom in the local economy. During
the Panic, however, those holding notes tried to exchange them for specie
and the bank was forced to close its doors.

The bank's failure caused widespread apostacy by church members
and increased opposition from non-Mormons. Many people in the Kirtland

15 Peter Temin, The Jacksonian Economy (New York: W. W. Norton and
Company, 1969), 3-36; Scott H. Partridge, "The Failure of the Kirtland
Safety Society Anti-banking Company," Journal of Economic History, 30
(December 1971), 848-53; Marvin S. Hill, Larry T. Wimmer, and Keith C.
Rooker, "The Kirtland Economy Revisited: A Market Critique of Sectarian
Economics," Brigham Young University Studies, 17 (Summer 1977), 391-475;
Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate (Kirtland, Ohio), December 1836;
area lost all their money when the bank closed and they blamed the prophet personally. Levi Hancock, one of Smith's stalwart supporters, wrote that feelings were so intense against the prophet that "it was terrible the abuse he suffered from thousands of his pretended friends." There were even attempts to kill Smith during the fall of 1837, and he had to hide out in various places to avoid capture. The Temple became the site of fist fights between the pro- and anti-Smith factions. When Smith and Rigdon were indicted for engaging in illegal banking practices in December 1837, the two men felt compelled to leave Kirtland. On the evening of January 12, 1838 Smith and Rigdon left for a new Mormon settlement in northwestern Missouri known as Far West. They rode to the little community of Norton, Ohio, about sixty miles southwest of Kirtland and stayed with some Saints until their families could join them. Two days later Emma Smith and Phebe Rigdon arrived in hurriedly packed wagons to join their husbands for the trek to Far West. They set out the next day, reaching the new Mormon headquarters on March 14, 1838. There Smith and his traveling companions were welcomed by hundreds of Latter Day Saints who had emigrated to Missouri a few years earlier and were delighted to have the prophet coming to live among them.

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They quickly erected a handsome frame house for the Smith family in the center of the town near the temple square. 18

Far West had been established in 1836 by the Mormons after their having been twice forced to leave places in western Missouri where they had tried to settle. They had first come to Jackson County, but in 1833 had been driven from their homes by an anti-Mormon mob. At the invitation of sympathetic residents of nearby Clay County, they had located across the Missouri River just north of Jackson County. By 1836, however, the non-Mormons in Clay County wanted to get rid of the Saints. On June 26 they held a public meeting in Liberty, the county seat, where their leaders announced that the county had extended only "temporary asylum" to the Saints, and that it positively refused to offer them permanent sanctuary. The church leaders did not want to be driven from their homes in Clay County as they had been in Jackson, and so they agreed to leave peaceably as soon as they harvested their crops and sold their land. They moved northward, settling in an unpopulated section of the state. As a result of the Saints' movement to this virgin land, the state legislature passed an act organizing it as Caldwell County, as a special haven for the Mormons. Far West became the county seat, and by Smith's arrival had grown into a frontier boom town of almost 5,000 people. 19

18Smith, History of the Church, 3:1, 9; Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 81 (November 6, 1834), 1414.
As the Saints began the creation of a Mormon citadel at Far West the few non-Mormons in the area soon realized that the sect was rapidly assuming political control of the region. Church members became county clerks, judges, magistrates, and militia officers. More disconcerting to the non-Mormons was their belief that the Saints would create a theocracy in which the church would control the state, and in which non-Mormons would be second class citizens. Some remembered one of Smith’s declarations which demonstrated the Mormon attitude toward non-members.

And inasmuch as mine enemies come against you to drive you from my goodly land, which I have consecrated to be the land of Zion, even from your own lands after these testimonies, which ye have brought before me against them, ye shall curse them; and whomsoever ye curse, I will curse, and ye shall avenge me on mine enemies, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. Let no man be afraid to lay down his life for my sake; for whoso layeth down his life for my sake shall find it again. And whoso is not willing to lay down his life for my sake is not my disciple.

The non-Mormons quickly came to realize that the Saints did not intend ever to lose control of the local government or to leave their new houses peacefully. Many believed they even planned to extend their power throughout the Missouri Valley. One observer recorded that “God had decreed all Upper Missouri to be theirs, and they intend to have it--

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20 McKiernan, Sidney Rigdon, 83.

peacably, if the Missourians would move off, if not, they would take it by the sword."  

Little Joseph Smith III was too young in the summer and fall of 1838 to remember the odd way in which a war between the Mormons and the Missourians had developed in such a short time, but was aware of the hardship that it placed upon the church and, more importantly, upon his family. Without a doubt the Mormon War that he lived through influenced his life, making him all the more cautious and less zealous to press the differences between his religious movement and society at large.

The Mormon War of 1838 emerged out of long-term antagonism between the Saints and the Gentiles of northwestern Missouri. This antagonism was in part a struggle within the church itself. It came to a head when Smith and Rigdon decided to purge the church of dissident elements. They began complaining publicly during the summer "of the ill treatment that had been received from dissenters," and announced that they were determined to bear it no longer, "for they had rather die than suffer such things." Rigdon, as Smith's spokesman, asserted repeatedly that for the members "to get protection and favor from God, they must become one, and be perfectly united in all things; cleanse themselves of every kind of pollution."  

22 James H. Hunt, A History of the Mormon War: With a Prefix, Embracing the Rise, Progress, and Peculiar Tenets of Mormon Doctrine with an Examination of the Book of Mormon, also, the Trial of the Prophet Joe Smith, and his Brethren for High Treason, Murder, &c., with the motions of the Counsel and Decisions of the Court in each Case: Together with an Account of the Attempted Assassination of Ex-Governor Boggs (St. Louis; Missouri: the Author, 1844), 184.

23 John Corrill, A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints (Commonly Called Mormons) Including an Account of their Doctrine and the Discipline with the Reasons of the Author for Leaving the Church (St. Louis Missouri: the Author, 1839), 29.
The campaign to enforce orthodoxy within the church reached a zenith on June 19, 1838 when Rigdon preached what has been termed the "Salt Sermon" on the square at Far West. His text was Matthew 5:13:

"Ye are the salt of the earth. If salt hath lost its savor, it is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the foot of man." Rigdon urged the faithful to seek out and report for punishment members who were working to destroy the sect from within. Reed Peck, a member of the audience, wrote that Rigdon excited the crowd to a frenzy as he proclaimed:

[It is] the duty of the Saints to trample them under their feet. He informed the people that they have a set of men among them that have dissented from the church and were doing all in their power to destroy the presidency, laying plans to take their lives and etc., accused them of counterfeiting lying cheating and numerous other crimes and called on the people to rise in masses and rid the county of such a nuisance. 24

Although most of the church members in Far West agreed with Rigdon's sentiments, some did not. John Corrill, especially, opposed the hard line taken by the church's Presidency. "This scene I looked up on with horror," he commented, "and considered it as proceeding from a mob spirit." 25

There arose out of the enforcement of orthodoxy by Smith and Rigdon a para-military organization known as the Danites. Secretly organized by an extreme Mormon zealot, Dr. Sampson Avard, the Danites sought to enforce the orthodoxy prescribed by the prophet. Their activities soon became well known in western Missouri and were promptly condemned by Mormon and Gentile alike. One Mormon, Oliver Cowdery, was shocked that Smith could sanction the activities of the Danites, activities that included "Depredations

24 Reed Peck, "Mormons So Called, Quincy, Adams County, Illinois, September 18, 1839," 24-25, Special Collections (Marriot Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah).

25 Corrill, Brief History, 30.
upon Gentiles and the actual assassination of apostates of the Church."\(^{26}\)

Opposition to the Mormons grew stronger following another oration given by Sidney Rigdon in Far West on Independence Day. It was a day of celebration and the Saints gathered at the town square early in the morning. The Smith family, including little Joseph, was there. The theme of Rigdon's address was: "Better, far better, to sleep with the dead than be oppressed among the living." Speaking in the heated and rhetorical style for which he was famous, he declared that the Saints had been driven from place to place by force, but henceforth they would stand and meet mob violence with violence of their own. Rigdon summarized the Mormons' position and determination in what has since been called the "Mormon Declaration of Independence":

We claim our own rights, and are willing that all others shall enjoy theirs. No man shall be at liberty to come into our streets, to threaten us with mobs, for if he does, he shall atone for it before he leaves the place; neither shall he be at liberty to vilify and slander any of us, for suffer it we will not in this place. We, therefore, take all men to record this day, that we proclaim our liberty this day, to one another, our fortunes, our lives, and our sacred honors, to be delivered from the persecutions which we have had to endure for the last nine years, or nearly that time. Neither will we indulge any man, or set of men in instituting vexatious law-suits against us, to

\(^{26}\)Ibid., 30-32; Documents Containing the Correspondence, Orders, etc., in relation to the disturbances of the Mormons; and the evidence given before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the State of Missouri, at the Court House in Richmond, in a criminal court of inquiry, begun November 12, 1838 on the trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and others, for high treason and other crimes against the state (Fayette, Missouri: Published by Order of the General Assembly, 1841), 103-06, 138-39; Gaylor, "Mormonism in Western Illinois," 29; Hunt, History of the Mormon War, 216; David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ (Richmond, Missouri: the Author, 1887), 27-32; Oliver Cowdery, Defense in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints (Norton, Ohio: Pressley's Job Office, 1839), 2; Leland H. Gentry, "The Danite Band of 1838," Brigham Young University Studies, 14 (Summer 1974), 421-50.
cheat us out of our rights; if they attempt it, we say woe unto them! We this day, then proclaim ourselves free, with a purpose and determination that never can be broken--no, never! No never!! No never!!

Little Joseph, who probably understood little about what was happening, joined in as the excited Mormon audience cheered, "Hosannah, Hosannah, Hosannah! Amen. Amen. Amen." When Rigdon's sermon was published in non-Mormon papers however, it polarized the people even more than had been the case previously.27

The Mormon War, which many thought unavoidable, erupted on August 6, 1838. That was election day at Gallatin, the seat of nearby Daviess County. Gallatin was a sleepy village consisting of a few houses and three saloons. It was close enough to the Mormons in Caldwell County to have developed really strong anti-Mormon feelings, but it was far enough away so that there were so few Mormons living there that they could be safely manhandled by anti-Mormons if they wished to do so.28

William Peniston, a candidate for the state legislature and an arch-enemy of the Latter Day Saints, was determined to keep the Mormons living in Daviess County from voting in this particular election in order


to secure the election of himself and his friends. Across the street from the polls he climbed atop a barrel and began an anti-Mormon tirade, casting all Mormons as horse-thieves, liars, and counterfeeters. He boasted that he had helped drive the Saints from Jackson County in 1833, and that he would do the same in Daviess.\(^\text{29}\) When one Mormon attempted to vote, a brawl began and "some were badly hurt from clubs and boards that were used on both sides." No one was killed but by the next day rumors reached Far West "that they were gathering on both sides [for battle] in Daviess, that two Mormons had been killed, and that the citizens would not let the Mormons bury them."\(^\text{30}\)

When the Saints in Far West heard that some of their brethren had been killed in Gallatin Joseph Smith, Jr. began organizing a band of armed men which ultimately numbered 150 to march on the town and dispense "justice." When they reached Gallatin on August 8 they found that no one had been killed, but, according to John Corrill, "instead of returning home again, as they ought to have done, they took a notion to make the citizens agree to live in peace, and not come out in mobs."\(^\text{31}\) To that end the prophet took his force to the home of the anti-Mormon justice of the peace, Adam Black,\(^\text{32}\) and forced him to sign an affidavit stating:

\(^{29}\) "Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," August 6, 1839 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).

\(^{30}\) Corrill, Brief History, 33-34.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 34; Reed C. Durham, Jr., "The Election Day Battle at Gallatin," Brigham Young University Studies, 13 (Autumn 1972), 36-51.
I, Adam Black, a Justice of the Peace of Daviess County, do hereby certify [sic] to the people called Mormon that he is bound to support the constitution of the state and of the United States, and he is not attached to any mob, nor will not attach himself to any such people, and so long as they will not molest me I will not molest them.

As soon as the Mormons departed, however, Black went to nearby Richmond, Missouri and entered a formal complaint against Smith and his accomplices before state and federal officials. 34

On August 10, the Richmond Judge, Austin A. King, whose brother-in-law had been killed by the Mormons in a riot in Jackson County in 1833, issued a writ for the arrest of Smith and other leaders of his band on the charge of insurrection. King advised the sheriff who was to make the arrest that if the Saints resisted, "then command assistance of the citizens, and if they were resisted by a superior force, then call for the militia." 35 The sheriff arrested Smith without incident. On September 7, Smith, with his attorneys, David R. Atchison and Alexander W. Doniphon, well-known lawyers from Liberty, appeared before Judge King, and he ordered Smith released on $500 bond. According to Corrill, however, this "did not satisfy the people of Daviess," and "the excitement grew worse and worse." 36

From this point on relations between the Mormons and Gentiles grew increasingly tense. Stories of property and crops being destroyed or men being assaulted and women attacked were common on both sides. Some of them

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34 Conkling, A Joseph Smith Chronology, 115.

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were undoubtedly true, but most were not. Both Mormon and non-Mormon militia units began patrolling to keep order, but still provocative incidents took place. In September anti-Mormon forces laid siege to the Mormon settlement of Dewitt, in western Carroll County. The skirmishes and bushwhackings reached their height on October 25 at the "Battle of Crooked River." Rumors had spread throughout the area, even to the governor's mansion, that the Mormons were in open rebellion against the state. Taking upon themselves the duties of law enforcement, a militia force under Samuel Bogart began patrolling the southern part of Caldwell County. When Apostle David W. Patten, nicknamed "Captain Fearnought" because of his bravery, heard about the militia, he organized a force of seventy Mormons and marched on it. They attacked Bogart's camp at dawn, quickly pushing the Missourians across the river and looting their camp. Although the battle lasted less than thirty minutes, seven men, including Patten, were seriously wounded. The Mormons carried Patten back to Far West where he was given the best care possible. Young Joseph Smith III later recalled visiting the house where Patten lay dying, and of watching through the door as his wound was cleaned with a silk handkerchief, "either by drawing through the wound or being used in some other manner." The Apostle reportedly exclaimed with his last gasping breath to those around him, "Whatever else you do, O! do not deny the faith."  

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38 Smith, History of the Church, 3:84.  
As a result of the battle at the Crooked River, relations between the Mormons and the non-Mormons in northwestern Missouri became even worse than they had been. On October 27, 1838 Governor Lilburn W. Boggs issued what the Mormons called the "Extermination Order." Addressed to General John B. Clark of the state militia, it authorized him to raise as many troops as necessary, to march to Richmond with all possible speed, and "to reinstate the citizens of Daviess in their homes." Boggs' order proclaimed: "The Mormons must be treated as enemies and must be exterminated or driven from the state, if necessary for the public good." Not all Missourians approved of Boggs' action. When he saw the order, David Atchison, one of the militia commanders, resigned his command in disgust, declaring "the age of extermination is over." Boggs, however, quickly replaced Atchison. Boggs had taken part in the expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County in 1833, and was understandably disliked by the Saints who considered him just a little lower than Satan. Parley Pratt thought that the governor should have been put in solitary in the state prison instead of the governor's mansion at Jefferson City because of his attitude toward the sect.

When it became clear that the state government considered the church in rebellion, the Mormons took refuge in Far West to avoid what they feared would be annihilation. Far West became a hive of great

40The complete text of this order is reprinted in Corrill, Brief History, 41; Smith, History of the Church, 3:175.

41Kansas City (Missouri) Journal, June 5, 1881.

42Parley P. Pratt, History of the Late Persecutions Inflicted by the State of Missouri upon the Mormons (Mexico, New York: Office of the Oswego County Democrat, 1840), 14.
activity with wagons racing along the dusty streets, barricades being hurriedly thrown up, and supplies being quickly laid in for the expected battle. Emma kept her children off the streets, away from the hustle as much as possible, but Joseph liked to sneak off and watch the men working at building defenses. At that point news reached the town that on August 30 a contingent of the Livingston County militia had attacked a group of Mormons at the village of Haun’s Mill in eastern Caldwell County, killing nineteen and wounding several others. According to the reports, young and old alike had been murdered in the surprise attack. One of the boys, ten-year-old Sardius Smith, was killed by Wilbur Reynolds, one of the Missourians, who bragged that the child kicked and squealed when the bullet took off the top of his skull. “Nits will make lice,” Reynolds coldly argued, “and if he had lived he would have become a Mormon.” The massacre was the most brutal incident in the entire conflict, and drove home the point to the Mormons that nothing less than unconditional surrender would stop the bloodshed.43

The day after the massacre two thousand state troops surrounded Far West and demanded the Mormons’ unconditional surrender. The Saints refused and stalled for time. General Samuel Lucas, commanding the Missourians, waited, then sent a second surrender demand, promising that if the Saints would give up Joseph Smith, Jr., Sidney Rigdon, and a number

of other important church leaders he would guarantee the safety of the city. He also declared that he would see that the Saints were safely escorted out of the state. The Mormon leaders considered the offer and rejected it because it would jeopardize the life of the prophet, but Colonel George M. Hinkle, commanding the defense of Far West, handed over the officials on the afternoon of October 31 to assure the town's safety. Joseph Smith, Jr., who refused to accept Hinkle's action until forced to do so, ever after considered the Colonel a traitor to the sect and never forgave him for turning him over to the Missourians.

Lucas placed the prisoners under heavy guard, and then, according to Parley Pratt, "the general officers held a secret council, which they dignified a Court Martial, in which, without being heard, or even brought before them, we were all sentenced to death." Lucas then ordered General Alexander Doniphon to "take Joseph Smith and the other prisoners into the public square of Far West and shoot them at nine o'clock tomorrow morning." Doniphon refused. "It is cold blooded murder," he declared, "I will not obey your order. My brigade shall march to Liberty tomorrow morning at eight o'clock, and if you execute these men, I will hold you responsible before an earthly tribunal, so help me God!" Doniphon's threat prevented the execution, and General Lucas thereafter decided to await orders from Boggs. Joseph Smith III never forgot what Doniphon had done for his father in preventing his execution, and never missed

44 Corrill, Brief History, 42.
45 "Journal History," October 31, 1838.
46 Pratt, History of the Late Persecutions, 21.
an opportunity to commend him for his courage.  

During the following week Missouri troops arrested another 136 Mormon leaders and set up a military government in Far West. The militia occupied the entire county and enforced a martial law. Periodically confrontations between the Mormons and the Gentiles took place. On November 2, the troops occupying Far West rioted and plundered the city, and the Saints who were left there accused the militia of, among other things, rape and arson. Emma Smith, who had remained in Far West after her husband had been taken away, tried to maintain her domestic routine with the laughing, swearing, rustic Missouri militia walking about the city. And she tried to protect her children from the conflict by keeping them inside the house as much as possible.  

The Mormon prisoners, including those whose lives had been saved by Doniphon’s refusal to execute them, were ordered taken to Richmond to stand trial for treason in mid-November, but were allowed to visit their families at Far West before being loaded into wagons for the twenty-mile trip. Parley Pratt recalled seeing Sidney Rigdon "taking leave of his wife and daughter, who stood at a little distance in tears of anguish inexpressible." Joseph Smith III later remembered, also, that when his father was brought to say good-bye to his family, he left

48 Pratt, History of the Late Persecutions, 22; Corrill, Brief History, 44; Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 81 (November 9, 1934), 1414; Brodie, No Man Knows My History, 242.  
49 Pratt, History of the Late Persecutions, 23.
his play and ran toward his father hoping for a final embrace and a few words of encouragement. As he reached him, however, he "was roughly pushed away from his side by a sword in the hand of the guard and not allowed to go near him." The boy later bitterly wrote "My mother, also, was not permitted to approach him and had to receive his farewell by word of lip only. The guard did not permit him to pass into the house nor her to pass out, either because he feared an attempt would be made to rescue his prisoner or because of some brutal instinct in his own breast."  

The prophet was taken away all too soon for his family and held until November 24 in an unfinished jail in Richmond during arraignment.  

While there he wrote an affectionate and touching letter to his family.

We are prisoners in chains and under strong guards for Christ's sake and for no other cause; although there have been things that might seem to the mob to be a pretext for them to persecute us; but on examination I think that the authorities will discover our innocence and set us free; but if this blessing cannot be obtained, I have this consolation, that I am an innocent man, let what will befall me.

I received your letter, which I read over and over again; it was sweet morsel to me. Oh, God grant that I may have the privilege of seeing once more my lovely family in the enjoyment of the sweets of liberty and sociable life; to press them to my bosom, and kissing their lovely cheeks would fill my heart with unspeakable gratitude. Tell the children that I am alive, and trust I shall come and see them before long. Comfort their hearts all you can, and try to be comforted yourself all you can. There is no possible danger but what we shall be set at liberty, if justice can be done, and that you know as well as myself. Lawyer Reese, and we expect Doniphon, will plead

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50 Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 81 (November 6, 1934), 1414.  
51 Pratt, History of the Late Persecutions, 23.
our cause. We could get no others in time for the trial. They are able men and will do well, no doubt.

Tell little Joseph he must be a good boy. Father loves him with a perfect love; he is the eldest—must not hurt those that are smaller than he, but comfort them. Tell little Frederick Father loves him with all his heart; he is a lovely boy. Julia is a lovely little girl; I love her also. She is a promising child. Tell her Father wants her to remember him and be a good girl. Tell all the rest that I think of them and pray for them all. . . O, my affectionate Emma, I want you to remember that I am a true and faithful friend to you and the children forever. O, may God bless you all. Amen.

P. S.—Write as often as you can, and if possible come and see me, and bring the children if possible. Act according to your own feelings and best judgment, and endeavor to be comforted, if possible and I trust that all will turn out for the best. 52

This letter deeply affected the entire Smith family, especially young Joseph, who even reproduced it in the history of the church which he wrote in 1896. 53

On November 13 Smith and others went before a judge for the first time. At the end of the arraignment, a thirteen-day session, most of the prisoners were released. A few of the most important, however, were sent to the jail at nearby Liberty on December 1. Among them were Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Lyman Wight, a Mormon militia leader. 54 The cell in which they were held was an underground dungeon twenty-two feet square. The walls were four feet

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52 Joseph Smith, Jr. to Emma Smith, November 12, 1838, Emma Smith Bidamon Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri). This letter is also reproduced in Hill, Joseph Smith, 247.


thick at the base, made of stone and wood, and generally considered escape-proof. The prisoners were lowered into it through a trapdoor in the middle of the guard’s room. Had the prisoners not been allowed to use the guardroom above to recuperate from illness, they quite probably would not have survived their incarceration. 55

Emma Smith visited her husband at least twice while he was in this jail, taking young Joseph with her each time. The boy remembered that in the first visit, on December 8, his mother dressed him snugly in his warmest clothes and tucked him into the sled belonging to John Daley for the trip to Liberty. When they arrived at the prison they were allowed to visit the prophet in the guard’s room above the cell. At the prophet’s request, his family was permitted to stay with him overnight. They were joined by Sidney Rigdon and his family, as well as Erastus Snow, one of the church leaders. Snow delighted all by singing several ballads, two were rather humorous, although a bit morbid. “One was called The Massacre at the River Raisin, and described the butchering of Americans by Indians in Michigan in 1813,” during the War of 1812. The second, called the Mobbors of Missouri, was a parody on the recent Mormon War, condemning the exploits of the Missourians. It was of course, sung to the tune of the old folk classic, the Hunters of Kentucky. 56

The Smith family also visited Joseph in jail again on the night

55 Davis, Story of the Church, 282.
of December 20. On one of these visits, Joseph III later recalled, his father "with another, laid his hands upon my head and blessed me, as his eldest son, to the blessings which had come down to him through the blessings of his progenitors."57

Lyman Wight, one of the witnesses, retold the event in a letter to a newspaper in 1855:

Now, Mr. Editor, if you had been present when Joseph Smith called on me shortly after [we] came out of jail [into the guard’s room] to lay hands on the head of a youth and heard him cry aloud "You are my successor when I depart," and heard the blessing poured on his head, I say had you heard all this, and seen the tears streaming from his eyes, you would not have been led to blind fanaticism or a zeal without knowledge.58

While visiting Joseph in jail, Emma and he made plans for the future. They decided that she should take the children and move with many of the other Saints to Quincy, Illinois, a town that had offered asylum to the battered sect. Accordingly, toward the end of January 1839 Emma and the children packed their belongings and prepared to leave Far West. Jonathan Holmes and Stephen Markham, friends of the family, offered to drive the Smiths to Quincy. They loaded the wagon, hitched to it a pair of matched black horses, and left the ruined city in search of a better life. Moving slowly over the frozen earth the Smith wagon made the 150-mile trip to Quincy in two weeks. One of the horses, young Joseph recollected, died during the journey, but

57 Ibid.; Joseph Smith, "Pleasant Chat," True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 14 (October 1838), 105; Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:505.

58 Lyman Wight to Editor, Northern Islander, July 1855, Lyman Wight Letterbook (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 21-23.
otherwise they reached the Mississippi River without mishap. They were
aided by sympathetic farmers in the eastern part of the state who received
them hospitably and gave them food and warm places to sleep.59

The Smith family crossed the frozen Mississippi River on
February 15, 1839. Markham and Holmes told Emma to take her children
and carefully follow the wagon across. They unloaded some of the
wagon's freight, unhitched one of the horses, and cautiously tested
the ice, and Emma and the children walked behind. Joseph described
the crossing:

Carrying in her arms my brothers, Frederick and Alexander
(the latter born the preceding June), with my sister,
Julia, and myself holding onto her dress at either side,
my mother walked across the frozen river and reached the
Illinois shore in safety. This, then, was the manner of
our passing out of the jurisdiction of a hostile State
into the friendlier shelter of the State of Illinois,
early in 1839.50

At half past ten that night the Smith wagon rolled up in front of the
house of George Cleveland in Quincy. A friend of the Mormons although
not a member of the sect, Cleveland and his wife welcomed Emma and
her children into their home. Emma and her children stayed with the
Clevelands for the rest of the winter, awaiting Joseph's release from
prison.

60Ibid.; Ann Davis, "Spiritual Experiences," Autumn Leaves, 4
(January 1892), 18; Andrew Jenson, Latter-day Saints' Historical Record,
8 (September 1890), 735.
Chapter 2

BOYHOOD IN NAUVOO, 1839-1844

It snowed continuously for three days after Emma Smith and her children arrived in Quincy, and the city was virtually buried in the blizzard. It was frigid in a way that only residents along the upper Mississippi can appreciate, and one waft of the harsh wind chilled the bones. Quincy was paralyzed. Nothing moved, nobody worked, everything was still. The only sign of life was the smoke coming out of the chimneys, and it too was quickly dissipated in the wind. Young Joseph Smith liked being snowbound. Warm and cozy in the snug little home of George Cleveland, he could play games with his brothers by the fire, listen to the adults tell colorful yarns, and help the women with a few chores around the house. It was a delightful holiday, at least for children.

When the blizzard ended the Quincy menfolk cleared the walks and streets and resumed normal activities.

Quincy had become a Mormon community during the winter. By the end of January 1839 some 5,000 Latter Day Saints had taken up winter quarters there and more arrived daily. The people of the little town were very friendly toward the Mormons from Missouri, giving them food, clothing, shelter, and solace. Young Joseph liked to go down to the town square when it was not too cold to greet the new arrivals and
renew acquaintances with his Far West playmates. Emma went with him sometimes but the sight of the ragged, tired refugees depressed her terribly. They were the lucky ones. Reports came in daily of many others who had died on the trail. Women, children, old men, even some healthy young men had escaped the attacks of the anti-Mormon mobs only to find a roadside grave in the frozen earth.

Among those who arrived in Quincy from Missouri was Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Lyman Wight, and others who had been held by Missouri officials. He however, did not come until spring. He was held in the Liberty Jail all winter. In April it became apparent to Smith that the local judge, the sheriff, and the guards were willing to allow them to escape in order to avoid a lengthy, messy, and unpopular trial. Given an opportunity Smith and his cellmates overcame the guards and fled for Illinois, arriving in Quincy on April 22, 1839.

The hospitable people of Quincy could not provide for all the Saints' needs, and the church leaders quickly organized a relief effort of their own. They moved those who had nowhere else to go into a huge camp outside town and provided them with the necessities of life.

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The leaders also began making plans for the future. They needed land for a new settlement away from non-Mormons where they could live and worship in peace. Even before the return of the prophet church officials had explored the possibility of buying a huge tract of land along the Mississippi River about fifty miles north of Quincy. In April they called a General Conference, which sanctioned the purchase, and began planning for the church's removal to the new property.3

The Saints chose their land well from a purely economic viewpoint. The owners were speculators who had failed in trying to promote a settlement on the land and were eager to sell. The church negotiated favorable terms including liberal credit arrangements.4 Moreover, the land they purchased was strategically located on the river, at the head of the Des Moines Rapids, a twelve-mile system of submerged limestone protrusions that prohibited river navigation during much of the year.5

The head of the rapids was a natural terminus for river traffic to and

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3Smith, History of the Church, 3:260-65; Robert Bruce Flanders, Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 12-13; Dimick B. Huntington, Statement of Joseph Smith, Jr.'s Landing at Quincy, Illinois, April 22, 1839 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah); Donna Hill, Joseph Smith: The First Mormon (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1977), 262-54.

4The land purchases were extremely complex. They are best explained in Flanders, Nauvoo, 23-56.

from the upper Mississippi. The Missouri legislature recognized the potential of this site in 1830 when it tried to annex it for the state's use. The legislature's memorial said that the site "in future times will be of immense importance to the commerce of the whole western valley." It went on to predict that a "great commercial city will spring up in that wilderness, to serve as the great entrepot of the Upper and Lower Mississippi."  

The city the Saints chose to build rested upon a huge limestone jetty around which the river made a great bend. Overlooking it from the east were jagged cliffs which had long served Indian and white navigators as landmarks. When Joseph Smith, Jr. and his family finally arrived at the new townsite, he found that, although it was overwhelmingly beautiful to look at, most of the acreage was a wilderness thick with trees and underbrush. Furthermore, the land upon which they proposed to erect the Mormon town was so marshy that it was almost impossible to get through with wagons. Nonetheless, overtaken with the scenic majesty of the area, Smith decided to build the Mormon citadel there. While standing on the bluffs overlooking the jetty, Smith decided to call it Nauvoo which he said was a transliteration of the Hebrew phrase meaning "beautiful place."  

The Saints began moving to Nauvoo during the hot summer of 1839.

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6 Senate Documents, 2nd Sess., 21 Cong., No. 71, 4 as cited in Flanders, Nauvoo, 40; Jacob Van Der Zee, "The Half-Breed Tract," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, 13 (April 1915), 160.

laying foundations and erecting rudimentary buildings. The marshes were breeding grounds for malaria-infested mosquitoes, and within a short time the Saints were suffering from an epidemic. During it Emma Smith and her four young children opened their house, a two-story blockhouse that had been built as a trading post thirty-five years earlier, as a hospital and began caring for the sick. When she ran out of space in the blockhouse Emma erected a tent outside to accommodate others. Young Smith, only six years old, had to work hard carrying water from a tiny spring near the house to the patients.

The long days and hard physical labor in nursing the yellow fever patients soon wore down the lad’s normally high resistance, and he fell victim to the disease. His mother tried several cures, including “Sappington’s Pills,” a fine wood fiber molded into a round pill and coated with a bitter covering, and a patent medicine called “Dovers’ Powder” whose principal ingredient was opium. None of these worked, and little Joseph finally threw off the illness by means of rest and a careful diet prescribed by a newly-converted physician named John M. Bernhisel. The doctor became a lifelong friend of Emma Smith’s because of his opportune arrival in 1839 and his tireless work with the malaria patients, especially young Joseph. The lad suffered intermittent attacks of fever and chills for the next six years, almost all coming

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after exertion in hot or humid weather.  

Despite the misery of the swamp fever, the Saints at Nauvoo pulled together and built a city that exceeded anything they had ever dreamed of previously, and which became one of the most important towns on the western frontier. The legal status of the Mormon mecca was defined by a charter drafted in 1840 by a new convert to the church, John Cook Bennett. Bennett had ambition, ability, energy, savvy, and intelligence. He was a master of the art of flattery, and has been described as a "man of rather pleasing address, calculated to make a favorable impression on the minds of most people." Short, dark, and Napoleonic-looking, Bennett pompously invaded Nauvoo and impressed the Mormons. Most were awestruck by his list of titles: doctor, lawyer, thirty-third degree Free Mason, Quartermaster General of the Illinois Militia, and Brigadier General of the Invincible Light Dragons of Illinois. He was also, although few in Nauvoo were aware of it in 1840, an unmitigated rogue. Governor Thomas Ford of Illinois aptly described Bennett as "probably the greatest scamp in the western country," and a man of "debauched, unprincipled, and profligate character." 

In early 1840 the prophet sent Bennett to the state capital at Springfield to lobby through the legislature the charter he had drawn.

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10 The Return (Davis City, Iowa), June 1890.

11 Thomas Ford, History of Illinois from its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847 (Chicago, Illinois: C. S. Griggs and Company, 1854), 82. That some were not impressed with Bennett's elegant manner is evident from Joseph Smith III's account of his mother's reactions. See Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (January 15, 1935), 281-86.
up. Bennett got it through the legislature in December 1840 by suggesting to both members of the Whig and Democratic parties, in turn, that the Mormons would support the candidates of each. Since the Mormon vote was large enough to assure victory to whomever it was given, the legislators of both parties voted for the Mormon charter.12

The purpose of the Nauvoo Charter was to protect the Mormon community from the abuses it had suffered in Missouri. It granted the town virtually complete autonomy in its "very broad and liberal" interpretation by church officials. Nauvoo's legislative and executive powers rested solely with the mayor, four aldermen, and nine councilors. The mayor and aldermen also served as judges of the municipal court, so that essentially five men controlled the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. High church officials, of course, served in these secular offices and ruled Nauvoo according to Mormon concepts. It became, in essence, a Mormon theocracy.13

The Nauvoo charter also provided for the organization of a fifteen-hundred-man militia, presumably for the protection of the western frontier. This militia--the Nauvoo Legion--was used by the church as a means of guaranteeing the city's continuing autonomy in

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12 Times and Seasons (Nauvoo, Illinois), 2 (January 1, 1841), 266-67, 2 (January 15, 1841), 281-86.

Illinois. Bennett, as Quartermaster General of Illinois, equipped the unit with the best material available. Indeed, he sent equipment to the unit that had originally been intended for use by troops in other parts of the state. Bennett also drilled the Legion relentlessly, until it was the finest militia force in Illinois, and some even considered it on a par with regular army units. The fear of its use ever colored the manner in which non-Mormons in Illinois treated the Saints at Nauvoo.

The Legion became one of the great status symbols of Nauvoo. It represented security and power in a nation that often derided the Mormon sect. It was, moreover, a signal to the United States that the Mormons would not allow such a tragedy as the Missouri war to take place again. Joseph Smith, Jr. became heavily involved in the affairs of the Legion. The Illinois legislature, seeking to gain Smith's favor, appointed him lieutenant general in the state's militia. Smith made Bennett his second-in-command, and other Mormon leaders soon decided to follow the lead of the prophet in supporting the Legion.

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14 Times and Seasons, 1 (September 1840), 175; Ford, History of Illinois, 257; Brodie, No Man Knows My History, 271.

15 Sangamo Journal (Springfield, Illinois), January 21, 1842; Millennial Star (Liverpool, England), 3 (January 1843), 39; Bennett, History of the Saints, 293; Klaus J. Hansen, Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 51.

15 Josiah Quincy, Figures from the Past (Boston, 1883), as quoted in William Mulder and A. Russell Mortenson, Among the Mormons: Historic Accounts by Contemporary Observers (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), 135; Smith, History of the Church, 4:309-10.
Smith enjoyed the pomp and ceremony of military parades and reviews, the strutting about in ornate and splendid uniforms, and the respect accorded the military officers. Smith held public maneuvers at every opportunity in order to show off the Nauvoo Legion to both the Saints in the city and visiting dignitaries. Nevertheless, neither Smith nor the vast majority of the Mormons had any knowledge of military affairs. They left all but the most basic activities to Bennett. In 1842 Bennett wrote of his commander's military knowledge: "Joseph Smith, the Lieutenant General is a military novice of the first water and magnitude, scarcely knowing the difference between a general and corporal—if it only has the 'ral' as the suffix, Joe is there with content."17

The adults had no sooner joined the Nauvoo Legion than the Mormon children began to emulate them with a martial spirit of their own. The boys, among them Joseph III, decided to form a military club modeled upon the Legion. Under the command of a young convert named Bailey, the club soon swelled to more than five hundred members. The boys learned close order drill and became as disciplined as their fathers. Armed with wooden swords and a banner that read, "Our fathers we respect; our mothers we'll protect," the boys took a prominent part


in the city's military festivities. The prophet encouraged his son's participation, and even helped organize activities for the boys. 

One time, instead of taking part in the periodic public drills, the boys' troop staged a mock attack on the Legion as it marched through the dusty streets. The boys, moving in proper military order, marched as a phalanx from a nearby forest toward the Legion, making a tremendous racket by banging "tin pans, pails, sticks, and whatever other noise-makers they could muster!" The Legion commanders began to laugh as they saw the boys marching out of the woods, but quickly picking up on the situation, Bennett ordered the cavalry to charge the boys, pick them up, throw them over their saddles, and bring them back. Young Joseph delightedly wrote of the cavalry charge:

When it approached the oncoming hosts, Commander Bailey quickly formed his little band into a compact square and commanded a halt. As the horsemen came nearer, all of a sudden the young company with a shout set up a lively beating upon drums and pans and such a vigorous waving of branches and poles that the horses refused to charge them. Their riders became very much disconcerted. The Commanding General ordered another troop to try it, but they had no better success.

Realizing that the boys were making the powerful Legion look foolish in front of the local Saints and outside spectators, Joseph Smith spurred his almost deaf horse, Charley, toward the column of boys. Leaving his bodyguard of sixty hand-picked men, the prophet trotted toward the troop, the ostrich feathers in his chapeau blowing in the breeze. Since his horse was not frightened by the racket, he easily scattered the boys.

and ended the afternoon's fun. 20

Nauvoo, despite its militaristic leanings brought on by acute paranoia, was not Sparta, nor even Prussia. Many within the community during the 1840s were deeply troubled by the apparent love of war evidenced by some of the residents, and they refused to join the Legion or support its activities. 21 Emma Smith, for one, opposed the Legion and all it stood for, and asked little Joseph to leave the boy's troop after the mock battle with the Legion. She later told her husband that she disapproved of the emphasis placed on the military in Nauvoo. 22 Young Joseph Smith later agreed with his mother and denounced the martial spirit displayed by the people. "Looking back along the pathway," he wrote, "I feel it was a pity that such a spirit crept in among them, however, and a still greater one that the leading minds of the church partook of it." 23

Under the protection of the Nauvoo Charter and the Legion the Mormon community became a bustling metropolis almost overnight. The Saints reported that the city had a population of 10,000 by 1842, and there were another 6,000 Latter Day Saints living outside the city limits. 24 At its peak in 1844, Nauvoo boasted a population of over 12,000 in the city and an additional 8,000 Saints in the surrounding

21 The Return, February 1890.
23 Ibid., 81 (December 25, 1934), 1533.
24 Pooley, Settlement of Illinois, 513; Ford, History of Illinois, 229, 313.
With the growth of population came economic growth and development as well. The fruits of free enterprise could be readily seen from the steps of the Smith house. By 1841 the city possessed a booming building trade complete with construction firms, stone quarries, cement companies, lumber yards, brick manufacturers, and hardware producers. During the early 1840s the Saints built "1200 hand-hewn log cabins, most of them white-washed inside, 200 to 300 good substantial brick houses and 300 to 500 frame houses." In addition to the construction of homes and businesses by individuals, the church undertook two huge construction projects: the Nauvoo House, a large, brick four-story hotel for the use of religious investigators visiting the city, and the Nauvoo Temple, a great limestone edifice to be used by the church members as a house of worship and secret place in which to hold religious rites. Both were started in 1841, but neither was completed by the time the church withdrew from Nauvoo in 1845. These building projects did, however, provide jobs for the unemployed, and, as such, amounted to public works projects.

A number of manufacturers established small shops in Nauvoo. They made textiles and clothing, straw products, matches, soap and candles, leather goods, wagons, and rope. Craftsmen plied their trades in the Mormon mecca as well. Included among them were tanners, blacksmiths, silversmiths, a goldsmith, watchmakers, ironmongers, a coffin maker,

a gunsmith, several potters, and a few wainwrights. The city also contained foundries, baggage firms, grist mills, slaughter and butcher shops, and stationers. The city also provided a variety of commercial and professional services. It had nine law firms, three notaries public, two surveyors, three physicians, three newspapers, and a number of professional teachers.  

There were, in addition, thirty-five general stores in Nauvoo in 1842, the most important of which was Joseph Smith, Jr.'s Red Brick Store. It was housed in a two-story brick building on Water Street not far from his home. The prophet stocked the store with every conceivable item sold by frontier merchants, and enjoyed running it himself until he found late in 1842 that it took too much time away from his church affairs. Besides the store itself, the building contained a number of offices, making it essentially a church office building as well. Joseph Smith maintained an office and research room on the second floor, and the Bishopric had an office where tithes could be paid and property could be registered. The construction committee for the Nauvoo Temple held its meetings and kept offices in the building, and various members of the church's leading quorums used its facilities whenever in town. Moreover, the second floor contained a large council room used for both religious and secular meetings.

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28 Ibid., 19 (June 20, 1857), 391.
29 Richard P. Howard, "The Joseph Smith Store: Church Headquarters at Nauvoo?" Saints' Herald, 119 (October 1971), 34.
Young Joseph Smith had many pleasant experiences in his father's store, which became something of an afternoon visiting place for the boy. He recalled one particular incident when he went to the store to escape, in typical boyish fashion, some chores assigned by his mother, and found that his father had spent most of the afternoon wrestling with loungers. The grassy turf outside the red brick building had been dug up and stomped down by the wrestlers and the excited spectators. As the boy entered the shop, he heard the men gossiping about the wrestling matches, and learned that his father had thrown, in turn, everyone in the store. Young Smith was proud that his father was strong and rather athletic. When young Joseph arrived his father was waiting on a customer, looking immaculate in his white flannel coat and vest. No one would have ever guessed that he had been wrestling all comers. After a short while Cornelius P. Lott, a farmer, came in to buy some staples. Although rather old and greying, Lott was strong and muscular and always ready to demonstrate his strength. Indeed, Lott always carried a threatening-looking blacksnake whip that seemed to challenge all comers. The prophet's eyes lit up as Lott walked in and he exclaimed: "Here! I have thrown down pretty nearly everybody about the place except Brother Lott, and I believe I can throw him down, too!" The old man, accepting the challenge, cackled in a high, squeaky voice: "Well, my boy, if you'll take it catch-as-catch-can you can't throw old man Lott!"

Smith took off his coat and vest, and Lott discarded his whip,

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and he and Lott went out to the wrestling area, followed by the loungers who formed a ring around them. The prophet and Lott went at it hard, each trying his best to throw the other. In spite of his relative youth, the best Joseph could do was take Lott to his knees. All the onlookers cheered their champions, with little Joseph yelling for his father. After a few minutes the prophet conceded to Lott, and was ribbed by his friends about his failure to best an old man. "In the midst of the jibes," young Joseph remembered, "I heard the old man pipe out again, 'I told you, my boy, that you couldn't throw old man Lott!'" 31

The most important thing that happened to Joseph III at the Red Brick Store was a special blessing he received from his father in the council room on January 17, 1844. Joseph Smith, Jr. had called several church leaders to the store for a special meeting, without telling them its purpose. Most of the Twelve Apostles were away on missions, but the local leaders and other general authorities in the city were asked to attend. As they sat around the large conference table at one end of the room, Joseph and his eleven-year-old son entered. Hyrum followed shortly with a bottle of consecrated olive oil. Finally Joseph's personal scribe, Thomas Bullock, came in with writing materials and closed the door. Joseph began to explain that he had been led by revelation to appoint and bless his son as his successor in the prophetic office of the church. Those present were to witness the blessing.

31Ibid., 81 (December 18, 1934), 1614.
Hyrum then pulled a chair away from the table and set it in the middle of the room, put young Joseph in it, and asked the men to gather around. Using the consecrated oil, the church leaders anointed young Joseph's head, while his father placed his hands on the boy's head, and prayed, as the scribe noted:

Blessed of the Lord is my son Joseph, who is called the third,—for the Lord knows the integrity of his heart, and loves him, because of his faith, and righteous desires. And, for this cause, has the Lord raised him up;—that the promises made to the fathers might be fulfilled, even that the anointing of the progenitor shall be upon the head of the son, and his seed after him, from generation to generation. For he shall be my successor to the Presidency of the High Priesthood: a Seer, and a Revelator, and a Prophet, unto the Church; which appointment belongeth to him by blessing, and also by right.

Verily, thus saith the Lord; if he abides in me his days shall be lengthened upon the earth, but, if he abides not in me, I, the Lord, will receive him in an instant, unto myself.

When he is grown, he shall be a strength to his brethren, and a comfort to his mother. Angels shall minister unto him, and he will be wafted as on eagle's wings, and be as wise as serpents, even a multiplicity of blessings shall be his.

Amen.32

Concerned that he might not live much longer, Smith had thus designated his oldest son as his successor, and had revealed his choice to a chosen group of church leaders.

Although carrying a special blessing, young Joseph continued to live as a normal boy. He took part in games and other forms of recreation as well as in the religious events of the community. One of his favorite sports was horseback riding, at which he became quite proficient. At other times his boyish mischievousness took over and he found himself in trouble. Following the example of the prophet and other men in the community who had formed a chapter of the Masonic Lodge in 1842, Joseph and some of his friends organized a secret society of their own. As Smith later recalled, this society provided them "a good deal of fun, as fun was rated among us." Although starting as a simple organization, it soon developed elaborate initiation ceremonies that included relatively malicious hazing. On one occasion Jack Allred, a big bully, asked to be accepted into the club. The members hesitated, but were intimidated into allowing him to join. They determined, however, to teach Allred a lesson, and appointed a committee, consisting of little Joseph and two friends, to devise a humbling induction ceremony. According to Smith,

the plan was to lead him into the schoolhouse blindfolded, take up the trap door, and four boys hold a sheet over the opening into the cellar. Then as he approached the spot, another boy, armed with a pillow borrowed surreptitiously from some mother's supply, was to strike him down into the hole. We would clamp the door shut and then all engage in a wild Indian dance and hullabaloo over his head!

But the plan miscarried. When the pillow-bearer hit Allred causing him to fall into the cellar, he struck his head on a beam cutting a gash in it. The boy sat screaming in the dank cellar for some time until the boys

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upstairs worked up courage enough to let him out. Mends were later
made when the boys made Allred the principal performer in a talent
show held for their parents. 34

Although Nauvoo was a frontier community, young Smith received
a reasonably sound education. The prophet, unschooled as he was, considered
education the single most important requirement for success in any
endeavor, and tried to plan well for his children's education. 35
Accordingly, soon after arriving in Nauvoo, he hired a teacher for his
and the neighbors' children. He turned one room of his house into a
school room for them. When the number of pupils became too large for
the room Smith moved the school into a small eight-by-eight log cabin
near the river, which he had refitted for the purpose. Young Smith
later described it:

The little log house was fitted with the necessary seats,
writing-table, and fireplace for heating—and we had our
first real school. The floor was made of heavy planks
sawed from oak timber... The seats were formed of the
outside cuts called slabs, made of convenient size, with
holes bored in the ends into which were inserted legs of
such length as to raise the various seats to the proper
heights for the children of differing ages.

There he learned writing, spelling, and grammar. Learning through repi-
tition and rote memorization, Smith described his studies as "torture."

Joseph was a good student. He excelled in spelling, winning
nearly every "spell-down" in the school, and also did well in geography,

35 Times and Seasons, 3 (January 15, 1842), 362-63, 6 (January 1,
1846), 1078-79; Leonard J. Arrington, "The Latter-day Saints and Public
Education," Southwest Journal of Social Education, 7 (Spring-Summer
1977), 9-25.
history, and literature. He later claimed that he "could commit to memory the Sunday school lessons and lengthy declamations, and had something of a taste for phrases, and could spell any word I ever saw to read it." He was weak in mathematics, however, failing to master basic arithmetic, and having much difficulty with geometry, algebra, and theoretical mathematics. He freely admitted, "The intricacies of figures bewildered me."

Although Joseph proved to be a generally receptive and eager student, he sometimes engaged in horseplay when he should have been studying. On one occasion Smith and a friend returned late from lunch after being caught in a sudden cloudburst. When asked to explain their tardiness the boys told the teacher that the ground "was terribly muddy, and for every step forward we slipped two backward!" With a serious face the teacher asked, "How did you ever manage to get here at all, if that were the case?" The boys flippantly replied, "Why, we just turned around and walked the other way!" Although the class let out a burst of snickers, the teacher failed to see the humor, and whipped each of them with what Joseph called "Assistant Birch."^36

During the time that young Smith was growing up in Nauvoo a cloud hung over his family, and it greatly affected the boy. While some officials in Missouri had allowed Smith to escape from jail in the Spring of 1839, others believed that the state should bring him back from Illinois to stand trial so that the state's honor could be vindicated. Escape, they claimed, should never by construed as a pardon, especially for one so prominent as Joseph Smith, Jr. During the early 1840s the

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Missouri Attorney General made several attempts to extradite Smith in order to try him on the charge of "open rebellion against the state." 37

To hide from these Missouri officials when they came to Nauvoo the prophet had secret compartments built into his homes. As young Smith later recalled, the blockhouse contained a secret door in the cellar which led to "a vaulted place, with a dry floor of brick and bricked walls, and was large enough for a couple of people to occupy, either sitting or lying down, affording a degree of comfort for a stay of long or short duration as was necessary." When Smith built the "Nauvoo Mansion," the name he gave to a large, two-story dwelling completed in 1843 for his family, the northeast upstairs bedroom contained a secret ladder to a compartment in the attic large enough to house several men for an extended period. Young Joseph and his brothers played in these hideouts from time to time, pretending they were hiding from the Missourians. So general did the knowledge of these hideouts become that they were not really very secret after a while. Still, all the Mormons thought they were necessary, according to young Joseph, to foil the "so-called officials from Missouri seeking to arrest him on trumped-up charges and from whom he had reason to expect harsh and unfair treatment." 38

Although the extradition attempts ultimately failed, Joseph Smith, Jr. came close on several occasions to being sent back to stand trial. On June 5, 1841 the Adams County, Illinois sheriff arrested

37 Flanders, Nauvoo, 104; Smith, History of the Church, 5:57; George R. Gaylor, "The Attempts of the State of Missouri to Extradite Joseph Smith," Northwest Missouri State College Studies, 19 (June 1955), 8.

38 Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 81 (December 18, 1934), 1811-12.
Smith on a warrant from Missouri in a small town south of Nauvoo.

Four days later Smith was brought before District Judge Stephen A. Douglas at Monmouth to determine the validity of the warrant. Douglas, who had political ambitions in western Illinois, had been courting the Mormon vote, and most spectators thought he would throw the case out of court to gain Smith's favor. The anti-Mormons in Monmouth organized surly crowds to attend the hearing in the hope of intimidating Douglas into granting the extradition. Smith also tried to sway the judge. He brought in Emma and their children so that their dramatic appearance would gain sympathy for Smith. During the course of the proceedings the audience rioted, and Douglas ordered the sheriff, a known anti-Mormon, to reestablish order. When the officer hesitated, Douglas fined him for insubordination and ordered another to carry out the order.

Afterward the two parties presented their cases, and Douglas adjourned the session to consider the evidence. The next day he dismissed the case on procedural grounds. As a result of his decision, Douglas understandably gained the open admiration of the Saints, but many non-Mormons accused him of deliberately courting the Mormons in order to forward his political career.

A more serious attempt to take Joseph Smith, Jr. back to Missouri left another lasting impression on the prophet's son. Smith and his family had gone to Lee County, Illinois, about 130 miles northeast of

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Nauvoo, in the summer of 1843 to visit relatives. While there Smith was surprised and seized by a Missouri posse and a Hancock County constable with a view to his extradition. Smith immediately obtained legal assistance in nearby Dixon, Lee County seat, and sent his family back to Nauvoo for help from the Nauvoo Legion. In their hurry to get home, Emma and the children traveled almost nonstop for three days in their carriage on the rough Illinois roads. Adding to the unpleasantness of the trip, in his haste to get back into the carriage after one rest stop, Joseph crushed two fingers in the carriage door. He later wrote that when his mother washed his hand with disinfectant the pain was so intense that "it seemed like pouring that solution right into my heart at least this was the sensation produced."

When they finally reached home Emma notified the Nauvoo Legion commander of what had happened, and he quickly dispatched a cavalry unit to Dixon. Military intervention proved unnecessary, however, since by the time the militia got there Smith had already secured a writ of habeas corpus returnable to the district court of Judge Douglas meeting in Quincy, or the "nearest tribunal." While being escorted to Quincy by the Legion Smith suggested to his lawyers that the nearest tribunal was not really at Quincy but the municipal court of Nauvoo. The lawyers agreed that the writ did not stipulate that it had to be a district court and accepted this vagueness in the wording. Over the protests of the arresting officers, the party changed course for Nauvoo. When they arrived in the city Smith pressed for a dismissal of the warrant in the municipal court and received it promptly.

Immensely displeased with the outcome of the affair, some of
the Missourians entered the city and began to search for the prophet with the hope of kidnapping him and taking him back to Missouri. They staked out his house and office, so Smith decided to leave Nauvoo until the situation cooled down, taking young Joseph with him. They went to the home of Bishop Edward Hunter outside Nauvoo, and returned to the city only after the Missourians had finally gone. This unpleasant affair, of course, further convinced young Smith that his father and the Mormon church were being persecuted. It also convinced him that the wisest course for the Saints was to do everything possible to maintain proper and peaceful relations with those outside the church. Later, as president of the Reorganized Church he tried hard to avoid misunderstandings between members of his sect and the non-Mormon community.

One final difficulty between Joseph Smith, Jr. and Illinois law deeply influenced the prophet's son. It arose within the ranks of the Mormon church itself in 1844, and eventually led to the prophet's death. A number of important Latter Day Saints, led by William Law, a Counselor to Joseph Smith in the First Presidency since 1841, left the church because they were convinced that the organization had departed from the true principles of the gospel. The dissenters included, in addition to William Law, Wilson Law, his brother and a Brigadier General in the

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41 The events of this extradition attempt are related in Flanders, Nauvoo, 233-35; Smith, History of the Church, 5:440-98. Young Smith's recollections are found in Joseph Smith, "What Do I Remember of Nauvoo?" Journal of History, 3 (July 1910), 334-35; Hill, Joseph Smith, 324-34.

Legion; Austin Cowles, a member of the Nauvoo High Council; James Blakeslee, a leading missionary; and Robert D. Foster, Chauncey Higbee, and Charles Ivans, all prominent businessmen. These dissidents worked to expose what they considered the evils of the church in a newspaper called the Nauvoo Expositor. On June 7, 1844 they issued their first and only number. In it the editors affirmed that they know of a surety, that the religion of the Latter Day Saints, as originally taught by Joseph Smith, which is contained in the Old and New Testament, Book of Covenants, and Book of Mormon, is true; and that the pure principles set forth in those books, are the immutable and eternal principles of Heaven, and speaks a language which, when spoken in truth and virtue, sinks deep into the heart of every honest man. But they then charged that the church had strayed from these principles, and they demanded a radical reformation of the church.

The publication of the Expositor raised a furor among most of the Mormons, who took it as a personal affront. Smith, as mayor of the city, and the city council shared their indignation, and met to take action against the publishers of the Expositor. After much debate they passed an ordinance against libeling citizens of Nauvoo, and then declared the Expositor in violation of the ordinance and ordered its

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43. Flanders, Nauvoo, 308; B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1955), 2:221-33; Joseph Fielding, Diary, 5:25-26 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah); Sarah Scott to Father and Mother, June 16, 1844, in Scott H. Partridge, ed., "The Death of a Mormon Dictator: Letters of Massachusetts Mormons, 1843-1848," New England Quarterly, 9 (December 1936), 595.

44. Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor, June 7, 1844.

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press destroyed as a public nuisance. Smith dispatched the city
city marshal, John P. Greene, to destroy the press, empowering him to use
the Legion if necessary. By eight o'clock that evening Greene had
reported to Smith that the press, type, paper, and all available copies
of the paper had been destroyed.45

The Expositor’s backers fled to Carthage, the county seat,
swearing that they would bring Smith and his cohorts to justice for an
abridgment of their first amendment rights, willful destruction of prop-
erty, and creating a public disturbance. They obtained a warrant for
the prophet’s arrest on these charges. News of the controversy soon
spread throughout the outlying areas of the county. Most people were
outraged that the Mormons could so seriously abridge the rights of
others, and all the anti-Mormon groups quickly coalesced to oppose them.
For the first time since the Mormons had come to Illinois, the people
of the state were clearly divided into pro- and anti-Mormon groups. The
Warsaw Signal, a vehemently anti-Mormon newspaper published a few
miles south of Nauvoo, sounded a clear battle call for those who dis-
liked the Saints:

We have only to state that this is sufficient! War and
extermination is inevitable! CITIZENS ARISE, ONE AND
ALL!!! Can you stand by, and suffer such INFERNAL DEVIILS!
to ROB men of their property rights, without avenging them.
We have no time for comment! everyman will make his own.
LET IT BE WITH POWDER AND BALL!46

45Smith, History of the Church, 6:432-48; Dallin H. Oaks,
“The Suppression of the Nauvoo Expositor,” Utah Law Review, 8 (Winter
1966), 862-903; George R. Gaylor, “The Expositor Affair:’ Prelude to
the Downfall of Joseph Smith,” Northwest Missouri State College Studies,
25 (February 1951), 3-15.

46Warsaw (Illinois) Signal, June 12, 1844.
Citizens' committees were formed in Hancock County to bring Smith to trial, influential citizens of the county placed pressure on Governor Thomas Ford to assist in apprehending the Mormon prophet. Ford was convinced, as he told the legislature later, that he had to intervene to preserve peace within the state:

No leading man of either party could be arrested without the aid of an army, as individuals of both parties were justly afraid of surrendering for fear of being murdered; and when arrested, each trial was likely to lead to a civil war, and... as a conviction was impossible... the administration of criminal justice was completely at an end, whilst the Mormons remained in the country.47

In the light of this situation, the Governor quickly moved to bring in a militia force from outside the area, one presumably neutral, that would see that order was preserved in Hancock County.

Joseph Smith realized too late that this method of handling the Expositor problem was a step toward disaster.48 Learning that the


48 Popular attacks against unpopular presses and publishers had often occurred in American history. Illinois, for instance, experienced no fewer than sixteen such acts between 1823 and 1867, including the famous lynching of the anti-slavery editor, Elijah Livejoy, at Alton in 1837. The Mormons had suffered such attacks twice previously in their history. Although violence was accepted, Smith failed to realize that the destruction of the Expositor was not the action of an anonymous mob, but rather of a legally constituted government. The government's leaders could be held accountable for their actions. The use of legal means to carry out an illegal act proved disastrous. Richard Maxwell Brown, Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 29; W. Eugene Hollon, Frontier Violence: Another Look (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 25; Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1976), 335-36.
governor was intervening and that he would be arrested, Smith bade farewell to his family and fled across the Mississippi River. From there he wrote a hasty note to his wife and children on June 23. He told Emma to be prepared to look after their family alone for an indefinite period, and informed her from whom she could collect debts and of property that she might wish to sell if she needed cash. "I do not know where I shall go, or what I shall do," he confided, "but shall if possible endeavor to get to the city of Washington." He concluded his note with a personal message. "May God almighty bless you, and the children, and Mother, and all my friends. My heart bleeds."  

The whole Mormon community at Nauvoo was deeply troubled and confused by the Expositor incident and the prophet's flight to the territories. As Vilate Kimball wrote to her husband:

Yesterday morning (although it was Sunday) was a scene of confusion. Joseph had fled and left word for the brethren to hang on to their arms and take care of themselves the best way they could. Some were tried almost to death to think Joseph should leave them in the hour of danger. Hundreds have left the city since the fuss commenced. . . . I have not felt frightened amid [it all] neither has my heart sunk within me, until yesterday, when I heard Joseph [wrote] and sent word back for his family to follow him, and Er Whitneys family were packing up, not knowing but they would have to go, as he is one of the city council.

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Suddenly, on the evening of June 23 Smith returned to Nauvoo and offered to give himself up to the state authorities, if the governor promised to protect the city. Ford was happy to do so, anything to calm the tension in the county. The following morning Joseph and Hyrum Smith and seventeen others voluntarily set out for Carthage to turn themselves over to Governor Ford’s forces. Vilate captured the essence of the situation in another note to her husband:

Joseph went over to the river out of the United States, and there stopped and composed his mind, and got the will of the Lord concerning him, and that was, that he should return and give himself up for trial. He sent a messenger immediately to Carthage to tell the Governor he would meet his staff at a big mound at eight o'clock this morning in company with all that the ritt demanded. They have just passed by here, on their way thare. My heart said Lord bless those Dear men, and preserve them from those that thirst for their blood. Their giving themselves up is all that will save our city from destruction. The Governor wrote that if they did not do so, our city was suspended upon so many caggs of powder, and it needed only one spark to tulch them off, so you can see how he feels. That will be the fate of our dear Brethren the Lord only knows, but I trust he will preserve them.51

The fear that the prophet would never return alive filled the thoughts of his family. Joseph’s widow recalled in 1856 that when he returned from Iowa “I felt the worst I ever did in my life, and from that time I looked for him to be killed.”52 The premonition of impending disaster also overtook the prophet. John Taylor’s official account of the affair recorded that when Smith left for Carthage he told those around him: “I am going like a lamb to the slaughter; but I am as calm

51 Ibid.
as the summer's morning; I have a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward all men—I shall die innocent, and it shall yet be said to me, he was murdered in cold blood." Although young Joseph understood little of what was so dramatically unfolding about him, he remembered that everyone was uneasy about his father's future.

Early on the morning of June twenty-eight, word arrived in Nauvoo that a mob of over one hundred men had stormed the jail where the Mormon leaders were being held and killed the prophet and his brother late the previous afternoon. Porter Rockwell announced the tragic news as he galloped through the city on his mare shouting, "Joseph is killed—they have killed him! Goddamn them! They have killed him!" During the course of the day details of the murders came out. The lynchings had been committed by a band of carefully organized conspirators who had taken advantage of a lack of sufficient guards at the jail. The Governor who had been in Carthage with militia from outside the county, withdrew on the 27th, and the few guards he left at the jail were easily overpowered and then Smith quickly killed.

Young Joseph remembered that the city fell into a awful quiet


54 Smith, "What Do I Remember of Nauvoo?," 335.

55 Anson Call, "Life and Record of Anson Call," 27 (Harold E. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah).

after news of the murders became common knowledge. Where once the streets of Nauvoo had teemed with life, there now was only quiet suffering. Without the prophet Nauvoo appeared to have no real leader who could take charge in the emergency. A few Mormon radicals demanded that the city council order the Nauvoo Legion to march on Carthage and punish it for the deaths, but no one was willing to give such an order. Of the church leaders left in Nauvoo, only Willard Richards, of the Council of Twelve Apostles, possessed the presence of mind to call upon the Saints to remain calm and avoid conflict with the non-Mormons as the situation could quite easily explode into open warfare. The vast majority of the Mormons obeyed him.

On the afternoon of June 28 the bodies of the prophet and his brother were returned to Nauvoo, and young Joseph remembered watching his father’s followers carry the rough coffins containing the bullet-riddled corpses into a huge dining room at the “Nauvoo Mansion” where they would be on public display. On June 29, thirty-nine hours after their martyrdom, the house was opened to allow the Saints to view their leaders one last time. The people “commenced assembling at an early hour,” reported Dr. B. W. Richmond, “and the surrounding country swarmed with men and women during the whole day.” As Richmond described it:

The scene around the bodies of the dead men was too horrible to witness. Hyrum was shot in the brain, and bled none, but by noon his face was so swollen—the neck and face forming one bloated mass—that no one could recognize it. Joseph’s blood continued to pour out of his wounds, which had been filled with cotton, the muscles relaxed and the gory fluid trickled down on the floor and formed in puddles across the room. Tar, vinegar and sugar were kept burning on the stove to enable persons to stay in the apartment. In order to see the bodies, thousands passed in at one
door and out at another, from morning till night they came and went, and in the house for the livelong day the lament of sorrow was heard.39

The family bore up relatively well under the difficult circumstances. Young Joseph’s mother went in to view the bodies as soon as they had been readied. “After leaning over the coffin [of her husband],” Smith later wrote, “she placed her hand upon the cheek of my father, and in grief-stricken accents said, ‘Oh, Joseph, Joseph! My husband, my husband! Have they taken you from me at last?’” After that, young Joseph walked over to the coffin, dropped to his knees, kissed his father on the cheek, and exclaimed, “Oh, my father, my father!” Then he retreated to another part of the house, barely able to see through his tears.58

The next day the Saints held an elaborate funeral for the Smith brothers. They were ostensibly buried in a tomb on the bluff overlooking the river, but because of a fear of vandalism these caskets contained only stones. The bodies were secretly buried in the basement of the unfinished Nauvoo House. Young Smith was present at the clandestine burial, and snipped off a lock of his father’s light-colored hair as a souvenir.59 A few months later, in the early fall of 1844, Emma Smith, heavily pregnant with the prophet’s last child, and a black manservant named simply Cleveland, removed the bodies from the Nauvoo

57 Deseret News (Salt Lake City, Utah), November 27, 1875, evening ed.


House basement in the dead of night and reburied them beneath the brick floor of the cellar in Joseph's old school room. She swore Cleveland to secrecy, and told no one of the second burial until 1879 when she lay dying in Nauvoo. At that time she revealed the location to her oldest son.  

The Mormon people lost their prophet on June 27, 1844, but Joseph lost his father. The importance of Smith's death upon the life of his son cannot be over-emphasized. It changed the direction of his life. It was to a very real extent, the end of the beginning.

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60 Joseph Smith, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," Saints' Herald, 26 (October 1, 1879), 289-90.
Young Joseph Smith was almost twelve years old in the summer of 1844. He stood tall and straight, wore his hair long, and like his father possessed the characteristic Smith Roman nose, jutting jaw, large hands, and penetrating eyes. The days following his father's burial had numbed the boy's senses, for it still seemed impossible that his father and uncle were dead. Yet Joseph had witnessed the secret burial in the basement of the unfinished Nauvoo House. Certainly, he was not gullible enough to believe the report being circulated by some Mormons that his father would arise, Christlike, on the third day, descend from heaven, "attended by a celestial army, coursing the air on a great horse," and lead the church back to Zion.¹

Instead of dealing in such speculation, young Smith worried about more mundane affairs. As the oldest surviving male in his family he had to assume the leadership. It was a great responsibility, but Joseph accepted it and executed his duties with vigor. The experience forced the lad to grow up almost overnight. Between his father's death and the first part of 1846 young Smith developed many of the views and

attitudes with regard to church personnel and doctrines that he was to hold in later years. During this time much of Smith’s antipathy toward Brigham Young, his resistance to Mormon Temple concepts, his disgust with the authoritarianism exercised by church officials, and especially, Smith’s abhorrence of the doctrine of plural marriage were first nurtured. He also learned many of the secular skills he would need to succeed in life.

When the various church officials heard of the prophet’s death they returned to the city of the Saints from the mission field in order to plan for the future. The more important of these officials, the one surviving member of the First Presidency and the members of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, began arriving in July. Parley P. Pratt, Apostle, philosopher, theologian, poet, and historian, was the first official of consequence to return to Nauvoo. He found all manner of confusion and speculation over the future of the church, especially over who should assume responsibility for its affairs. He counseled caution, telling the Saints that the Lord would provide an answer to their problems, but that nothing should be done until the rest of the Twelve returned.

Pratt’s counsel was timely, for Nauvoo had been overrun by individuals, both trusted leaders and young upstarts, who were seeking

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the power once held by Joseph Smith as president of the church. 4

Several important Nauvoans put forth the name of Sidney Rigdon to succeed Smith. Rigdon had been a zealous defender of the faith, and a staunch supporter of the prophet during the 1830s, but he had been pushed into the background in favor of younger, more astute, and more progressive Mormon leaders during the 1840s. By early 1844 Rigdon had been almost completely cast out of the Mormon prophet’s inner circle, although he still retained his official title, and had retired to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. 5 After Smith’s death, Rigdon returned to Nauvoo. Arriving there on August 3 he immediately began to form a plan to win the succession to the presidency of the church. He and his supporters scheduled a church conference for Tuesday, August 6, in order to receive endorsement of Rigdon’s claims before most of the Apostles arrived, but they later rescheduled the meeting for August 8. Rigdon spent the days before the conference addressing the Saints concerning the succession. 6 He claimed that he was not trying to usurp power, but was acting in accordance with a revelation that he had received commanding him to return to Nauvoo and present himself as

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4 One astute study found evidence supporting at least eight ways in which Mormon officials could justifiably assert a claim to the presidency. See D. Michael Quinn, “The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844,” Brigham Young University Studies, 16 (Winter 1976), 187-233.


6 Orson Hyde, Speech of Elder Orson Hyde, Delivered Before the High Priests’ Quorum, in Nauvoo April 27, 1845, Upon the Course and Conduct of Mr. Sidney Rigdon, and Upon the Merits of His Claim to the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Liverpool, England: James and Woodburn, 1845), 12.
an interim leader, to protect the church from ambitious men who would lead it into apostacy. Rigdon, therefore, asked that he be accepted as "guardian" of the church until the prophet's true successor arose. Some even contended that Rigdon planned to serve as "guardian" until young Joseph Smith III came of age, acting as a regent for him. While Rigdon's claims were supported by several influential Latter Day Saints in the city, who saw his "guardianship" as a means of enforcing some order on the movement, they were opposed by the powerful Twelve Apostles under the leadership of Brigham Young.

Young was Rigdon's principal rival for the chief office in the church. He was a man on the rise. Solidly built, with a broad face and long brown hair, Young had a powerful attraction for almost everyone he met. Able, ambitious, and oftentimes arrogant, Young was as capable as any man in the church. As such he could be an opponent of tremendous resourcefulness, and Joseph Smith, Jr. had long followed the practice of keeping him, and others like him, in distant areas so that he could be master of his own religious house. Smith had twice since 1837 sent Young to Great Britain on proselyting missions for that reason, and usually managed to keep him in the eastern United

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States away from Nauvoo the rest of the time.  

Before Young returned to Nauvoo, on August 4, the Twelve who had arrived in the city held a meeting at the home of John Taylor, one of the Apostles who had been with Joseph at the time of his death. They invited Rigdon to attend, but he refused, declaring that "the object of my mission is to visit the Saints and offer myself to them as a guardian."^ The Apostles were trying to buy time, waiting for the arrival of Brigham Young, who as president of the Quorum could initiate formal action under church law for the settlement of the succession question. Finally, on the evening of the sixth Young arrived, stepping off a riverboat onto the north wharf at Nauvoo. Dusty and haggard after weeks of travel, Young sent a boy on to his home with his few belongings and went directly to the Taylor house. Taylor quickly called in all of the Apostles, and Young began asking them for information. Pratt told him how Rigdon had come to Nauvoo and was attempting to endear himself to the Saints, and how he had called a meeting of the church members for April 8 where he would try "to warm himself in as President of the whole Church."\(^1^\) After hearing about Rigdon's plans Young told the Apostles that they would have to stop

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^10"Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," August 3, 1844 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).

him. The Twelve, he advised, should take over management of church affairs as a unit, like the Apostles did at the time of Christ's ascension into heaven in Biblical times.  

The Smith family took no part in the activities of either the Rigdon or the Young factions during the first few days of August, Emma staying as far away from a political embroglio as possible. They did not even attend the churchwide conference on August 8. The conference was held in a grove near the half-completed Nauvoo Temple above the city. Brigham Young ran the conference and manipulated it to suit his ends. Rigdon spoke at ten o'clock, preaching his belief that he should serve as "guardian" of the church to the assembled Mormons for ninety minutes. Although his logic may have been faultless, Rigdon's old oratorical fire was gone, and as he sat down he knew he could not win. Nonetheless, Rigdon called for a vote upon his "guardianship" to be taken, but Young vetoed the call with the harsh declaration, "I preside here," and dismissed the Saints for dinner.  

Young later described his thoughts during this conference:

this day is long to be remembered by me, it is the first time I have met with the Church at Nauvoo since Bro Joseph and Hyrum was kild--and the occasion on which the Church was caule somewhat painful to me, Br Rigdon had come from Pittsburge to see the brothren and find out if they would sustain him as the leader of the Saints . . . this grieved my hart, now Joseph is gon it seed as though manny wanted draw off a party and be leaders, but this cannot be, the

12Brigham Young, Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801-1844, ed. Eldon J. Watson (Salt Lake City, Utah: n.p., 1960), 171.
church must be one or they are not the Lords; the Saints looked as though they had lost a friend that was able and willing to council them in all things; in this time of Sorrow my hart was filled with compastion.14

It was thought by many during this conference that while Young wanted nothing but the very best for the church, he fully believed that he, as the head of the Quorum of Twelve, should take charge of the church for the present. 15

By two o’clock that afternoon the Saints had returned to the grove near the Temple eagerly awaiting the next round of oratory. Young Joseph wanted to hear what would take place during the afternoon session, especially after friends had come by the Smith mansion during the noon-hour to tell Emma of the events of the morning. Joseph knew that the fate of the church was being decided and he wanted to see the history-making event, but Emma flatly refused. She told him they had too many chores around their property to waste time gadding about town, and sent him off to clean the stable. Although Joseph was a generally good boy Emma checked carefully to make sure he had not dashed off to the conference. She had no intention of lending credence to any of the day’s proceedings by having any member of her husband’s family present. She did not trust Brigham Young, knowing that he was extremely ambitious, yet she was not in a position of power and leadership in which she could

14Brigham Young, Journal, August 8, 1844 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).

combat him openly.

In the meantime, Young began to speak to his audience of some 10,000 Saints. "Attention all!" he shouted against a blustering wind.

When every eye had turned to meet his he continued:

For the first time in my life, for the first time in your lives, for the first time in the Kingdom of God in the nineteenth century, without a Prophet at our head, do I step forth to act in my calling in connection with the Quorum of Twelve . . . Apostles whom God has called by revelation through the Prophet Joseph, who are ordained and anointed to bear off the keys of the Kingdom of God in all the world, . . . The Twelve are appointed by the finger of God. Here is Brigham, have his knees ever faltered? Have his lips ever quivered? Here is Heber and the rest of the Twelve, an independent body who have the keys of the priesthood . . . They stand next to Joseph, and are as the First Presidency of the church.

Young then ridiculed the claims of Rigdon:

You cannot fill the office of a prophet, seer, and revelator: God must do that. You are like children without a father and sheep without a shepherd. You must not appoint a man at your head; if you should, the Twelve must ordain . . . You cannot take Elder Rigdon and place him above the Twelve . . . I tell you there is an over anxiety to hurry matters here. . . Do you want the Church properly organized, or do you want a spokesman to be chief cook and bottle-washer? . . . If [Rigdon] now wanted to be a spokesman to the Prophet, he must go to the other side of the veil, for the Prophet is there, but Elder Rigdon is here. Why will Elder Rigdon be a fool? Who knows anything of the priesthood, or of the organization of the Kingdom of God. I am plain . . . Now if you want Sidney Rigdon or William Law to lead you or anybody else, you are welcome to them; but I tell you in the name of the Lord that no man can put another between the Twelve and the Prophet Joseph . . . All that want to draw away a party from the Church after them, let them do it if they can, but they will not prosper.16

Following Young’s speech others made brief comments on the succession question. Young then put the question to the congregation: "Do you want

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16 Smith, History of the Church, 7:231-36.
Brother Rigdon to stand forward as your leader, your guide, your spokesman?” The result was a resounding “no.”\textsuperscript{17} Young smiled slyly and then asked if the church would support the Twelve in their calling, “and the vote was unanimous, no hand being raised in the negative.”\textsuperscript{18}

It was natural that the Nauvoo Saints should support the Twelve in this crisis. First, it had long been a routine practice at every conference to sustain the various church officials in their posts. The vote asked for by Young called for nothing more than this. Second, Rigdon had long been out of favor with the prophet and other church leaders even to the point of leaving the church headquarters under a cloud. Third, over 4,000 members of the Nauvoo church population were immigrants from Great Britain in 1844. The British mission had been under the administration of the Twelve since its inception in 1837, and at one time or another virtually all of the Twelve had served there. Many of these Nauvoo emigrants had been converted to Mormonism by a member of the Quorum, and many more knew at least one of the Apostles intimately. Certainly they trusted members of the Twelve, whereas Rigdon was largely unknown to them, as was the silent family of Joseph Smith. It was natural

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 7:240

\textsuperscript{18}Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs, Diary, August 8, 1844 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah); Times and Seasons, 5 (September 2, 1844), 638.
that the English converts in Nauvoo would support men that they knew and trusted.

Some of the Saints at the meeting were also motivated by what they claimed was a spiritual vision attesting to the prophetic calling of Brigham Young. Those few who described the experience stated that Young seemed to assume Joseph Smith's voice, appearance, and personality as he spoke at the meeting. This supernatural phenomenon was only described well after the event, however, the earliest account having been written in March 1846 when George Laub remembered, "when President Young arose to address the congregation his Voice was the Voice of Bro. Joseph and his face appeared as Joseph's face, & Should I not have seen his face but heard his Voice I should have declared that it was Joseph."

Young did not wait long to begin exercising the authority of the

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Twelve. On the day after the meeting he issued a series of executive orders firmly placing the administrative machinery of the church in his hands as President of the Twelve.\(^2^1\) He managed Nauvoo and the church business with a skill not seen since before the prophet's death, and most of the Nauvoans were happy that the city seemed to return to normal. He and his lieutenants came to feel so secure in their newly achieved control by January 1845 that one of the lieutenants, Heber C. Kimball, wrote to William B. Smith, the younger brother of Joseph Smith, Jr. and a member of the Twelve, back East:

As regards matters here, all goes well. There never was more union in the Church than at the present time... For the Saints here in the City of Nauvoo and in the regions round about have their confidence in the Twelve as a body, and in those that are placed to lead them... And this is increasing daily to the astonishment and surprise of everyone. For there is a spirit now existing in our meetings that a person can scarcely enter them before there is a spirit of love and union that overwhelsm their mind, which draws tears of joy in floods from their eyes.\(^2^2\)

In spite of Kimball's belief about Nauvoo, the reality was somewhat less happy. Nauvoo was fractured into several different groups, each with its own ideas concerning the succession and proper leadership. Not long after the August 8 conference Isaac Scott, a Mormon convert from New England, wrote to relatives about the small groups of dissidents in the city. One of the dissident groups was led by the prophet's widow, Emma Smith. As far as Scott was concerned Emma was an apostate

\(^{2^1}\)Smith, History of the Church, 7:247-52; Flanders, Nauvoo, 320.
\(^{2^2}\)Heber C. Kimball to William B. Smith, January 9, 1845, William Smith Collection (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).
who sought the destruction of the church, and assigned her and her followers to the depths of hell for their sins. As early as August 18 Brigham Young began speaking publicly against division within the church, and the real danger that could come to the movement if it were allowed to continue. He was, most assumed, principally concerned with the relationship of the Twelve to the prophet’s family.

Even before Young had begun to assert his authority in Nauvoo in August, young Joseph Smith had been aware from rumbles among his friends that a huge internal struggle was developing between his mother and Brother Brigham, but Emma had shielded it from her children as much as possible. There is no evidence that Young and Emma Smith harbored ill-feelings toward each other prior to the death of the prophet. After the martyrdom, however, the two developed strong animosities toward each other, arising, largely as a result of the problem of the succession and the difficulty she had in accepting the linking of her husband’s name with plural marriage.

During the late summer of 1844 a number of people in Nauvoo, Emma Smith among them, came to realize that Brigham Young intended to

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23 Isaac Scott to Father and Mother, Addenda, in Partridge, ed., "Death of a Mormon Dictator," 600.
24 Jacobs, Diary, August 18, 1844.
25 Robert Bruce Flanders, "Brother Brigham and Sister Emma," March 1976, Unpublished Address, John Whitmer Historical Association Lectures (Graceland College, Lamoni, Iowa), developed the concept that Emma Smith and Brigham Young had competed for the time of the prophet and developed a real hatred for each other prior to his death as a result of this rivalry. This has been rather successfully challenged in Valeen Tippetts Avery and Linda King Newell, "The Lion and the Lady: Brigham Young and Emma Smith," Utah Historical Quarterly, 48 (Winter 1980), 83-86.
become the prophet, in fact if not in name. Aware of the many instances of one sort or another in which the prophet had designated his son as his successor, they were determined to prevent Young from assuming control over the church. These people failed to form anything more than a loose coalition, however, because most of the Saints were unaware that the prophet had indicated that Joseph III was his chosen successor, and those that did believed that a twelve-year-old boy could not lead the church. Many of these people were, therefore, willing to accept Young as their leader, if only for the time being.

Emma Smith, however, firmly believed that her son had been chosen successor to the prophetic office by divine authority. Believing that Brigham Young wanted to rob him of that office, she attempted to forestall that possibility before most of the Twelve had even returned to Nauvoo. Apparently Emma tried to place her son in a position to take control of the church in the future by moving to have him appointed as trustee-in-trust for the church corporation. His father had held this position and it gave him a large measure of control over the financial affairs of the organization. Once appointed, young Smith would have held tremendous power, and it would have been extremely difficult to revoke it, especially from the son of the prophet.26

26 The term "trustee-in-trust," which is used only by the Mormons, seems to have been a corruption of the common legal phrase, "trustee in trust for . . ." The position was created at a general conference of the church held in Nauvoo on January 30, 1841. Joseph Smith, Jr. received authority to act in this capacity for life, his successor to be the president of the church. He was vested "with plenary powers . . . to receive, acquire, manage or convey property, real, personal, or mixed, for the sole use and benefit of said Church." Smith, History of the Church, 4:286-87.
On August 1 Emma called for a special meeting of William Marks, head of the prestigious Nauvoo Stake, and other church leaders in the council room of her late husband’s store, "to try to nominate and appoint a trustee in trust for the whole church." Emma pleaded with the assembled men to name someone—presumably her son—trustee as quickly as practicable because "delay would endanger much property of a public and private character, and perhaps cause the loss of scores of thousands." Parley Pratt, who attended the meeting on behalf of the Twelve, opposed the move telling them plainly that the appointment of a trustee in trust was the business of the whole church, through its general authorities, and not the business of the local authorities or any one stake of the Church, and that therefore, it could not be done till the remainder of the quorum returned.

The group argued for hours, but, as Pratt recorded, "the council finally broke up without accomplishing anything." After the failure of this effort, which demonstrated that she had no real political power within the church, Emma Smith took no further direct action to try to secure the office of prophet for her son.

Even those who did not know that the prophet had on several occasions designated his son as his successor should have been able to deduce that he intended for Joseph III to be the next head of the church. In 1841 the prophet had revealed that the Lord had said to him: "In thee, and in thy seed shall the kindred of the earth be blessed." In addition, between 1833 and 1844 Smith had called several of his

27Pratt, Autobiography, 335.

28Book of Doctrine and Covenants (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1970), Section 107:18c. See also the promise made to the Smith family in Section 84:3.
closest relatives to high office in the church. From such evidence it appears likely that he wished to pass his position on to his son.\(^{29}\) Moreover, there seems to have been a rather common belief among both Mormons and Gentiles around Nauvoo that young Smith would succeed his father. A history of Illinois, published in 1844, reported on this subject: "The Prophet, it is said, has left a will or revelation, appointing a successor; and, among other things, it is stated that his son, a lad of twelve years, is named as his successor."\(^{30}\)

During the fall of 1844, as various elements among the Mormons began to gripe about the course the church had taken regarding leadership, some individuals began to whisper about the various occasions on which the prophet had set apart his son to succeed him. During 1845 the whispers became louder, as some churchmen stepped forward to oppose Young's leadership, claiming that he had usurped far greater authority than had been granted by the conference. That summer Joseph's grandmother began to circulate a copy of the blessing her husband had given their grandson, Joseph III, in Kirtland in 1836, noting that it was a positive statement that God wanted the lad to succeed his father.\(^{31}\) Others spoke of the hasty blessing Joseph Smith, Jr. had given his son during the winter of 1838-1839 in the Liberty jail when it looked like

\(\text{(Footnotes)}\)


\(^{30}\) Henry Brown, History of Illinois (New York: J. Winchester, 1844), 489.

\(^{31}\) Joseph Smith, Sr., Blessing of Joseph Smith III, as remembered by Lucy Mack Smith, Summer 1845 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).
he would have a lengthy prison term, or possibly be executed for treason. 32

A few even spoke of the official blessing in the Red Brick Store in January 1844 and the one or two public declarations of young Joseph as the chosen successor that his father had made in the spring and summer of 1844. 33

While various individuals made statements supporting young Joseph's claims to the presidency and thus to the leadership of the church, Brigham Young acted very coyly toward the Smith family, never claiming to be a prophet, refusing to accept the status of president of the church and successor of Joseph Smith, Jr., but declaring that God would call His successor in His own time and manner, and for the Saints

32 Lyman Wight to Editor, Northern Islander, July 1855, Lyman Wight Letterbook (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 24; W. W. Blair, One Wife or Many? (Lamoni, Iowa: n.p., n.d.), 14-16; Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 2:789-91; Saints' Herald, 52 (November 1905), 1213-14; Flanders, Nauvoo, 312; Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1975), 238.


There is evidence to suggest that Smith made a verbal reference or physical gesture to young Joseph during a sermon in Nauvoo on January 21, 1844. Wilford Woodruff, Journal, January 21, 1844 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).
not to worry about the matter. Young's actions, at first, could be interpreted to mean that he intended to step down when young Smith came of age, allowing him to assume the presidency. By 1845, however, it was becoming increasingly clear that Young dearly wanted to rule the church.

The strongest and most influential supporters of young Smith's claim to the prophetic mantle began to increase their opposition to Young's activities in Nauvoo during 1845. Led by Lucy Mack Smith, young Joseph's grandmother, Lyman Wight, a member of the Twelve, William Smith, Joseph's uncle, Seventy George J. Adams, and Bishop George Miller, the dissidents vented their displeasure over the situation in the Mormon stronghold. George J. Adams, who was away on mission service in June 1844, claimed to have been initially relieved when he first heard that the prophet had designated his successor. When in August he learned that Young and the Twelve were assuming control, he accepted it as an expeditious measure but soon grew disgusted with their actions. In mid-1845 he wrote to an associate:

i have suffered much persecution since I left Boston [and returned to Nauvoo] and much abuse because i cant support the twelve as the first presidency i cant do it when i know that it belongs to Josephs son--Young Joseph who was

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ordained by his father before his death. 36

George Miller, who personally disliked Brigham Young and called him a "stupid blunderer" on at least one occasion, noted that there were frequent attempts to influence the Twelve "with regards to Joseph leaving one to succeed," but they did not listen. Every time the matter was brought up Young passed the succession question off as something to be dealt with at a time when the church was not in such a period of crisis. 37 Lyman Wight believed, and repeatedly asserted, that instead of handling the succession question as had been done in August 1844, "every quorum should have been called together and had a conference and called for the young prophet to be consulted with and prayed for him." 38 Lucy Mack Smith was especially upset over Young's actions, and took the opportunity to accost the Twelve's president in a Nauvoo street in early 1845 begging him not to rob the boy of his rightful place in the church. He gave the matron a reassuring answer:

Don't worry or take any trouble, Mother Smith, by doing so you are laying the knife to the throat of the child. If it is known that he is the rightful successor of his father, the enemy of the Priesthood will seek his life. He is too young to lead this people now, but when he arrives at mature age he shall have his place. No one

36 George J. Adams to A. R. Tewkesbury, June 14, 1845 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).

37 Wingfield Watson, comp., Correspondence of Bishop George Miller with the Northern Islander from his First Acquaintance with Mormonism up to Near the Close of his Life (Burlington, Wisconsin: n.p., 1916), 23, 30.

38 Lyman Wight to Sanford Porter, December 7, 1855, Lyman Wight Letterbook, 38.
shall rob him of it.\textsuperscript{39}

In spite of Young’s apparently innocent attempt to maintain order, the dissenters centering around the family of the prophet became increasingly skeptical that he would honor his pledge to allow the boy “his place.”

The most vocal opposition to Brigham Young came from William Smith. Smith was a consistent proponent of the concept of lineal succession, that is, presidency by birthright, and often claimed that his brother’s eldest son had the right to inherit the prophetic office. Smith began writing letters stating this belief as early as August 1845. In one he declared:

some people would fain make us believe that the Twelve are to be the perpetual heads of this Church to the exclusion of the Smith family, but every one who had read the book of Doctrine and Covenants must be aware that Priesthood authority is hereditary and descends from father to son and therefore Josephs oldest son will take his place when he arrives to the age of maturity.

Smith also lamented the interference of the Twelve with the succession principle. “There seems to be a severe influence working against the Smith family in this place,” he wrote to a friend, “which makes our situation very unpleasant and I must say that I have seen more oppression

\textsuperscript{39}Lee,\textbf{ Mormonism Unveiled}, 161. Joseph Smith wrote in an 1894 letter that he heard about this same incident in Nauvoo in the summer of 1845. Joseph Smith to H. Smith, November 1, 1894, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 433-34.
and ingratitude here in one month than in the East in one year."

Contributing to the estrangement of Emma and the entire Smith family from the church under Brigham Young's control, besides Young's efforts to deny the succession to young Joseph, was the more open and widespread practice of plural marriage in Nauvoo, and the attribution of its origination to Joseph Smith, Jr. in 1845 and 1846. It was undoubtedly the most important factor affecting Emma Smith's continued ill-will toward the church under Brigham Young. While Emma Smith might have been willing to accept Brigham Young's promise that he would deal fairly with her son when he came of age, she absolutely refused to accept any connection of the doctrine of plural marriage with either the Smith family or her dead husband. She believed it was an evil practice based upon lust, and she never accepted Young's claim that it had been originated by her husband. This is what she taught her children and what young Joseph Smith believed, as he wrote in his memoirs many years later:

To admit that my father was the author of such false theories as were being taught, or that he practiced them in any form, was not only repulsive in itself to my feelings and strongly condemned by my judgement, but was contrary to my knowledge of, and belief in him, would serve to neutralize at once the intention I had formed to redeem his memory for false accusations and make honorable in the sight of men the religion for which he became a martyr, and would result in utter failure on my part to accomplish that which I felt divinely urged to do.\[41\]

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40 William Smith to Jesse C. Little, August 20, 1845, William Smith Papers (Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah). For other examples of this mentality see Calvin P. Rudd, "William Smith: Brother of the Prophet Joseph Smith" (M. A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1973), 123; William Smith to Lewis Robbins, October 5, 1845, November 7, 1845, January 27, 1846, William Smith Collection; Millennial Star, 7:134; William Smith to Emma Smith, November 21, 1845, William Smith Collection.

According to the commonly held belief concerning the origin of plural marriage, on July 12, 1843, Joseph Smith, Jr., in the presence of two witnesses, dictated a revelation commanding the church hierarchy to enter into marriage covenants with Nauvoo women, although the men were already legally married at the time. Most students of Nauvoo polygamy assert that the writing down of this revelation was simply a formality, for Joseph Smith had already married several women, and had taught the idea to his chief associates. He had the revelation recorded at that late date because he believed that it was time to begin a more open practice of the doctrine. He reportedly commented that it was time finally to give the Saints meat whereas they had only gotten milk before.

Hyrum Smith supposedly took a copy of the document to Emma Smith, who was completely opposed to her husband's teachings on the subject of marriage, in order to convince her that it was the will of God. Although Emma never left an account of this meeting, and positively denied her husband's practice of such a theology on her deathbed, others recorded

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42 Journal of Discourses, 3:266.


in later years that she severely chastized Hyrum and sent him back to her husband completely chagrined. When he returned, Joseph skeptically commented, "I told you you did not know Emma as well as I did," and put the document in his pocket. Later, after copies had been made, Joseph allowed Emma to burn the original revelation, hoping that it would soothe her anger. Brigham Young told the story of this incident to a congregation assembled in Utah. "Emma took that revelation," he declared, "supposing she had all there was... went to the fireplace and put it in, and put the candle under it and burnt it, and she thought that was the end of it, and she will be damned as sure as she is a living woman."  

If the traditional interpretation is accepted, Emma's objections to the revelation made little difference. Joseph Smith continued to teach and practice the doctrine, and authorized Hyrum Smith to present the plural marriage document to the Nauvoo High Council on August 12, 1843. According to one of the members present, after the Patriarch had read the revelation he said, "Now, you that believe this revelation and go forth and obey the same shall be saved, and you that reject it shall be damned." Some of the men--William Marks, Austin Cowles, and Leonard Soby--did reject it and soon divided the council into pro and anti-polygamy factions. 

Very few of the Latter Day Saints in Nauvoo had any first-hand

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45 Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," Historical Record, 6 (July 1887), 226.
46 Journal of Discourses, 17:159.
knowledge of plural marriage prior to the death of the prophet. These murky beginnings have made it very difficult for historians to separate fact from fiction. Indeed, there is no more difficult subject in all of Mormon history than plural marriage because of the religious and social stigma attached to it. Some Mormon factions openly embraced polygamy and practiced it until pressure from the United States government and moral crusaders forced them to stop or at least go underground during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Those who accepted the doctrine adamently insisted that Joseph Smith, Jr. originated the concept at the command of God, and was one of its most prolific practitioners. On the other hand, Mormons of the Reorganized Church violently disagree that Joseph Smith, Jr. ever taught or practiced such a doctrine. This stand became a hallmark of the Reorganization during the presidency of young Joseph Smith. Whichever argument one chooses to believe, two facts remain important for this study. The first is that some sort of experimentation regarding the Mormon marriage covenant took place in

46 Some commendable work has recently been done on the subject of plural marriage, but still much remains to be explained. See Daniel W. Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith" (M. A. Thesis, Purdue University, 1975); Lawrence Foster, Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Davis Bitton, "Mormon Polygamy: A Review Article," Journal of Mormon History, 4 (1977), 101-18. Although at times brilliant, each of these works are often uncritical of sources, giving almost equal validity to accounts written fifty years after the fact, those that are second and third-hand reminescences, family traditions or legends, and obtuse material from the period. All of this tends to distort the already unclear historical image.
Nauvoo. There were too many charges of marital irregularity in the
city to claim otherwise. Just who was involved, and at what time
they entered the practice are still mysteries. The other important
fact is that the Smith family, particularly young Joseph Smith III,
reacted against the linking of his father with the practice of polygamy.

A number of explanations have been advanced to explain why the
Mormons under Joseph Smith adopted polygamy as a religious tenet. The
official explanation of the church was simple: God had given Smith a
revelation commanding the practice. Others have argued that Smith's
lascivious nature accounted for the practice. It was simply, for these
people, a means whereby Smith could hide his promiscuity under his
religion. Most others have claimed that plural marriage arose out of

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49 See the following contemporary items to demonstrate the far-
ranging charges leveled against the Mormons about their marriage practices.
John C. Bennett, The History of the Saints: or an Expose of Joe Smith
and Mormonism (Boston: Leland and Whiting, 1842), 217-57; Nauvoo (Illinois)
Expositor, June 6, 1844. The denials of plural marriage are almost as
telling as the charges. See Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the
Latter Day Saints (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams and Company, 1835),
Section 101:4; Times and Seasons, 4 (December 1, 1842), 32, 3 (October 1,
1842), 869, 5 (February 1, 1844), 523, 5 (March 15, 1844), 474; Latter
Day Saints' Elders' Journal (Far West, Missouri), July 1838; Smith,
History of the Church, 6:411. This, of course does not include the
tremendous body of information assembled after Smith's death. See Jenson,

50 The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1908),
Section 132; William E. Berrett, The Restored Church (Salt Lake City,
Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1874), 181-83.

51 Brodie, No Man Knows My History, 181-87, 287-309. Brodie's
central thesis concerning polygamy is satirically stated in her chapter
heading, "If a Man Entice a Maid." See also J. H. Beadle, Life in Utah;
or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism (Philadelphia: National
Publishing Company, 1870), 345-80; H. Michael Marquardt, The Strange
Marriages of Sarah Ann Whitney to Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet, Joseph
C. Kingsbury, and Heber C. Kimball (Salt Lake City, Utah: Modern Micro-
film Company, n.d.).

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a complex series of social relationships peculiar to the early nineteenth century. These observers note that the nation was in ferment. Virtually every institution was being seriously questioned during the 1840s and the marriage relationship was no exception. A number of alternatives arose in which groups sought better forms of marriage. The Shakers practised celibacy, the Oneida Perfectionists under John Humphrey Noyes instituted a group marriage system, and some preached free love. The Mormons, therefore, offered simply one more solution to a hotly debated question. A few have even suggested that plural marriage arose in response to the practical problem of providing husbands for female converts to the church, and that as the ratio of men to women in the church equalized the doctrine lost impetus and was well on its way toward extinction in 1890.

While all of these concepts possibly have some validity, however slight, it may have been that speculation about the nature of the hereafter prompted the development of plural marriage. Certainly Nauvoans, including Joseph Smith, Jr., were speculating about things eternal. The Mormon temple ceremonies that arose during this same period and the kindred concept of baptism for the dead suggest that the Saints were

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52 Foster, Religion and Sexuality, 123-80.

anxious to achieve a more thorough understanding of life beyond the grave. It could have been that polygamy arose from speculation about the nature of the family or marriage after death. In April 1844 Hyrum Smith reportedly addressed an audience at the General Conference on the subject of the 10,000 reports “daily coming in about a spiritual wife doctrine.” Smith explained to his audience the concept of celestial marriage, marriage not just “till death do you part,” but forever. Smith told the congregation:

*I married me a wife, and I am the only one who had any right to her. We had five children, the covenant was made four our lives. She fell into the grave before God shewed us his order. God has shewn me that the covenant is dead, and had no force, neither could I have her in the resurrection, but we should be as the angels—it troubled me. Prd. Joseph said you can have her sealed to you upon the same principles as you can be baptized for the dead. I enquired what can I do for any second wife? You can also make a covenant with her for eternity and have her sealed to you by the authority of the priesthood. I named the subject to my present wife, and she said I will act as proxy for your wife that is dead, and I will be sealed to you for eternity myself for I never had any other husband.*

Nothing was said of multiple living wives in this sermon, but the patriarch would certainly have two with him after death. With two in the heareafter, it would have been a very short step to argue that two should


55 Hyrum Smith, Sermon, April 8, 1844, Minutes Collection (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).
be allowed in the present as well. It may have been that this idea led to the doctrine of plural marriage.\(^{56}\)

The differences over the succession and the doctrine of plural marriage between the Smith family and Brigham Young led to strain and eventually open conflict in 1844 and 1845. Little Joseph Smith, in writing of this period in his memoirs, subitled it "Oppression." These differences, he observed, led Emma Smith to become quite "obnoxious to some of the leading men of the church." Young, he noted, "Had assumed control of church affairs, and seemed inclined to dominate and make everything and everybody bend to his will. This did not suit my mother; and besides, she could not fellowship some other things that were occurring." There developed a contest between Emma Smith and Brigham Young, each seeking to gain the advantage over the other. The two josted over seemingly little things, each doling out to the other what Joseph called a "good many petty annoyances and also some things that were much more serious."\(^{57}\) Brigham Young, dealing from his position of authority, however, gave much worse to the Smith family during this period than he received.

The first concrete difficulties between the Smith family and Young came over the settlement of Joseph Smith, Jr.'s estate. Smith had died intestate, presenting the Hancock County, Illinois Probate Court with a complex legal problem. Smith's personal property was inextricably tied up with the property of the church, and Young thought that church

\(^{56}\)Flanders, Nauvoo, 267.

officials should, therefore, handle the estate. Emma, on the other hand, was concerned about providing for her five children—Julia, age thirteen, Joseph, age eleven, Frederick G. W., age eight, Alexander H., age six, and David H., Born on November 18, 1844 after Joseph’s death—and did not want to lose control of the property for an instant. She, therefore, treated all of it as her husband’s personal property. Three weeks after the prophet’s murder, Emma went to Carthage and obtained appointment as administrator of Joseph’s estate and legal guardian of their children. All of this took place before the return of the Twelve from the East. It infuriated Young that Emma had gone ahead without his approval, and especially that she intended to handle the estate herself. He did all in his power to have the order rescinded, but failed to do so during the summer.

He finally succeeded on September 19, 1844 when the presiding judge appointed a prominent Mormon, Joseph W. Coolidge, as administrator of the prophet’s estate. Emma protested, but there was little she could do, for she had failed to raise a bond demanded by the court, and Young persuaded the judge to appoint Coolidge in her place. Coolidge served as administrator for four years, obtaining few assets for the family while selling off approximately $1,000 worth of Smith property to

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58 Probate Records, Book A (1840-1846), 341-42 (Recorder’s Office, Hancock County Courthouse, Carthage, Illinois); State of Illinois, Hancock County to Emma Smith, July 17, 1844, Lewis Crum Bidamon Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saint Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).


pay for funeral expenses and administrative costs. Young Smith bitterly remembered that Coolidge’s administration had been particularly cruel for the Smith family. He allowed them, for instance, to retain only their household goods, two horses, two cows, Emma’s spinning wheels, and $124 per year in income from rental property. Young Joseph believed that Young had forced Coolidge to impose this exceptionally harsh settlement in order to make Emma accept his authority. He soon “formed the impression that while Joseph Coolidge was, under ordinary circumstances, an honest man, in this matter he was under the domination of others.”

He concluded:

Our family was subjected gradually to a series of injustices at his hands and disagreeable experiences which became almost unbearable. Whether or not Coolidge lent himself willingly to the efforts made by others to distress and annoy mother and her family, I do not know, but conditions, as they developed, seem to warrant that conclusion.

To make the whole unseemly affair worse, Coolidge was a very poor administrator who left the state without completing the duties assigned him by the court, taking with him some of the estate’s money. Had Joseph and Emma Smith not deeded various pieces of property to their minor children during bankruptcy proceedings in 1842, the Smiths would have ended up with very little indeed.

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61 Chancery Records, Book A, 490 (Hancock County Courthouse, Carthage, Illinois).
As part of the controversy over his estate, Emma Smith angered Young over the matter of the control of her husband's papers. Smith had a large collection of papers at the time of his death, but they were scattered about Nauvoo, stored in his office at the Red Brick Store, in the Masonic Lodge, in his home, and elsewhere. Emma Smith had gathered up some of them before Young returned to Nauvoo. When he got there and learned of her actions he wanted them back, claiming they were church property. When Young's men came to her house to ask for them she told them she would never give them up. Young was not too concerned about most of the papers which Emma had, since the items of greatest importance for the church--the bulk of his correspondence, his autobiography, the official revelation books, the ledgers of quorum business--were still in the hands of churchmembers loyal to Young. The document that Young particularly wanted to obtain, however, was a manuscript of the Bible, known to the Saints as the "New Translation," which was a revision of the King James version that had been prepared by Joseph Smith and his scribes, guided supposedly by revelation. Emma refused to let the church take this manuscript because, as she later explained to her son, "she felt the grave responsibility of safely keeping it until such time as the Lord would permit or direct its publication."


To assure the "New Translation's" safety Emma hid it in a trunk for which she had a false bottom built. Only one person outside the Smith family was allowed to see and copy part of this revised Bible between 1844 and 1846, for fear of Young's taking it. Emma permitted John M. Bernhisel, her friend since he had helped cure young Joseph of Malaria in 1839, to borrow the manuscript and make a copy. He told an associate in 1879 that as a friend of the family in the spring of 1845, he often visited the Nauvoo Mansion. "I had great desires to see the New Translation," he told his friend, but I did not like to ask for it; but one evening, being at Bro. Joseph's house about a year after his death, Sister Emma to my surprise asked me if I would like to see it." Bernhisel said, "yes," and she gave it to him the next day. He kept the manuscript for about three months, and returned it in June 1845. Emma Smith wrote to her oldest son in 1867 when he, as president of the Reorganized Church, was preparing the manuscript for publication, telling him why she had acted as she did in Nauvoo. "It is true that every L. D. S. cannot be trusted to copy them [the papers of the manuscript], and I did not trust many of them with the reading of them and I am of the opinion that if I had trusted all that wished for that privilege you would not have them in your possession

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68 L. John Nuttall, Diary, 335, (Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah).

69 Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," 121.
now." It was a harsh indictment of Brigham Young and his associates.\(^{70}\)

Although these incidents really amounted to very little, they point up the mistrust and dislike Emma Smith held for Brigham Young. This dislike turned to hatred in 1845 when Young, not satisfied with ascending to the leadership of the kingdom, wanted to take as his queen his predecessor's wife. With the more open practice of polygamy in Nauvoo after the prophet's death, it was an open secret that Young intended to marry many of the more desirable women of the community. Between the martyrdom and early 1846 Young married over twenty different women, including several of those who had supposedly been plural wives of Joseph Smith.\(^{71}\) He very much wanted to add Emma Smith to the list, but she shunned him entirely.\(^{72}\) This was a real blow to his ego. He never forgave her, and took every opportunity in later years to attack her. On one occasion Young remarked, "Joseph used to say that he would have her in the hereafter, if he had to go to hell for her, and he will have to go to hell for her as sure as he ever got her."\(^{73}\)

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\(^{70}\) Emma Bidamon to Joseph Smith, January 20, 1867, Emma Smith Bidamon Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archi­ves, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).


\(^{72}\) New York World, October 2, 1870.

\(^{73}\) Journal of Discourses, 17:159. See also his comments about Emma Smith in Springfield (Illinois) Weekly Republican, December 1, 1866.
After Emma Smith spurned him, Young increased his harassment of her and her family. He appointed sentries to "guard" the Smith family in the Nauvoo Mansion. Young explained that because of the instability of the county and the prominence of the family such a precaution was necessary to protect the Smiths. Young Joseph later recalled "in 1845 and 1846 no person was allowed to come to the house without passing a cordon of police." The guards reported to Young all comings and goings in the neighborhood and observed the Smiths' visitors' subsequent movements.

That Young did not intend the sentry organization as purely protective was demonstrated in an incident involving young Joseph Smith and Porter Rockwell. Rockwell, although a vocal advocate of Brigham Young since the prophet's death, was not exempt from surveillance by the guards. Joseph reported seeing this old friend walking down the street one summer day. He ran out of the house, jumped the picket fence, and bounded down the road to embrace Rockwell. They talked a couple of minutes, but all too quickly Rockwell pushed Joseph away. As he did so he tenderly told him, "You had best go back. I am glad you came to meet me, but it is best that you are not seen with me. It can do me no good and it may bring harm to you." The cruelty of that fleeting moment always remained with Smith. It influenced him the rest of his life, leading him to reject what he called the "Mormon Tyranny." I climbed back over the fence, to wonder," he lamented, "in my boyish way, how it

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was possible for men to be so wicked and cruel to good men."

When all of Young's efforts to induce Emma to support his leadership and move West failed, church authorities began to sanction more direct action. Young Smith remembered that several of the family's friends began to be attacked by ruffians when they attempted to visit the Nauvoo Mansion at night and placed the blame on Young. One such visitor, Charles Smith, was assaulted near the house by a thug armed with a bowie knife. He fought him off with a huge ebony cane, but others were not so fortunate. Austin Cowles, a former member of the Nauvoo High Council, visited the city in 1845 only to be roughly treated by Young's men stationed near the Smith home. According to Smith, youths, known as the Nauvoo "Whistling and Whittling Brigade," had been organized to intimidate strangers into making a hasty departure from town. These youths now followed Cowles about "urging him with wicked knives, saying nothing to him, except to tell him to move on when stopped to speak to anyone. Despairing of honorable treatment from his before time brethren, broken down in infamy, and stricken with grief . . . he was going to the ferry to cross the river. I spoke to him," Smith wrote, "when the escort struck up their din of whistling and and whittling, hustling the poor man with the ends of broken boards and the sticks they were whittling."
When none of these harassing incidents forced Emma Smith to capitulate and endorse the rule of Young she received a threat in the summer of 1845 that unless she fell into line or packed up her children and left town within three days, her house "would be burned over her head." Strong-willed Emma refused to back down and remained in the city. Young Joseph later recalled that on the third day after the threat his mother prepared pallets on the floor near the door so the children could easily escape should fire break out, but she herself slept in her second story bedroom in a forthright defiance of the threat. The children, aware of the threat, were a bit fearful, but said their prayers, and lay down as if nothing was wrong. Joseph described what happened the rest of the night:

We lay down in the quietness and finally went to sleep. In the morning the house was found to be still over our heads and intact, but on the north side were discovered the remains of some fire material piled against the wall. A fire had been started and a portion of the siding was scorched, but it had not caught sufficiently to set the house on fire; hence we escaped.  

Joseph thought at the time that the family had been very lucky. Emma, however, had been convinced from the outset that the house could not have burned no matter what had happened. Years later she explained to her doubtful son that she believed they had been safe because she had kept the "New Translation" hidden in the house. "I have often thought," she wrote to Joseph in late 1867, "the reason why our house did not burn down when it was so often on fire was because of them [the manuscript

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papers] and I still feel there is a sacredness attached to them." 79

All the conflict between the Smith family and church leaders, as well as the general turmoil about Nauvoo, affected young Joseph Smith deeply. The secretiveness of the church leadership, the whisperings about his father's origination of plural marriage, the "guards" watching his home, the violence in the streets all worked on the lad's psyche. This became especially true as Joseph began to realize that much of the difficulty between his mother and Brigham Young arose over the succession and young Joseph's future role in the church. Examples of how the stress of his family's life in Nauvoo affected the boy are shown in two documents which he wrote in January and February 1845. The first, entitled "Rules of Behavior for Youth," contained not only the standard rules of conduct taught in school but also others which reflected the influence of his recent unhappy experiences, as, for example:

Speak not when you should hold your piece. Many questions, remarks and sarcasms may be better answered by silence than by words--by silent contempt. Turn not your back to others . . . Show not yourself glad at the misfortune of another, though it be your enemy, . . . Be not knowing . . . Be not hasty to believe flying reports to the disparagement of any one. --Associate with men of good character and remember it is better to be alone than in bad company. . . . Never discover a secret.

The most important rule that impressed itself on young Joseph at this time, and which he tried to observe throughout the rest of his life was: "Never attempt anything but what you can do openly; free from

79 Emma Bidamon to Joseph Smith, December 2, 1867, Joseph Smith III Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
fear of consequences.\textsuperscript{80}

The second document was an account of "A Thrilling Dream." In this dream the adolescent Smith armed with pistols and a sabre, was engaged in admiring a magnificent garden. While captivated by the garden's size and beauty, he heard a scream and rushed toward the sound, finding a "savage monster" assaulting a beautiful lady. Smith wrote, "I drew my sabre and laid him dead at a single blow." Other enemies soon appeared, and Smith was fighting valiantly when he awoke suddenly in a terrified state. The violence of the dream is its most striking aspect. Although one can only surmise, Smith's subconscious may have been reacting to the harsh realities of life in Nauvoo.\textsuperscript{81}

In the midst of these internal dissensions among the Mormons, external anti-Mormon activity increased during the fall of 1845. On September 16 Porter Rockwell, riding with the sheriff of Hancock County, shot and killed Frank Worrell, one of the ringleaders in the mob that had lynched Joseph and Hyrum Smith. The county arose in protest, and the result was violence. Rioting, looting, and burning became more common among the Mormon settlements surrounding Nauvoo. Young, never one to allow events to get out of control, immediately made a compromise settlement with the non-Mormons, promising to leave the state. "During the winter of 1845-46," wrote Thomas Ford, "The Mormons made the most prodigious preparations for removal. All the houses in Nauvoo, and even the Temple, were converted into workshops; and before spring more

\textsuperscript{80}Joseph Smith, "Rules of Behavior for Youth," January 1845 (Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah).

\textsuperscript{81}Joseph Smith, "A Thrilling Dream," February 14, 1845; ibid.
than twelve thousand wagons were in readiness." Young organized the removal diligently and efficiently. During the winter he located a new gathering spot in the West; acquired food, equipment, and money; and dictated the organizational procedure for the exodus. By the end of January 1846 about two thousand Mormons were ready to leave the city. The Twelve gave the order to depart, and most of those within the city of the Saints left during February. Most of those left in Nauvoo had departed by May 1846, the city becoming a virtual ghost town.

The decision not to go west with Brigham Young’s faction of the church had been made by Emma Smith by the middle of 1845. After all that had happened, she could never submit to Young’s authority. More important, however, Emma understood that going west would mean that she would have to give up her property, her home, and her means of livelihood. She would have to rely upon the church for everything, and since Brigham Young controlled the church it meant she would have to rely directly upon him. By extension, Emma would have to consent to

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83 Times and Seasons, 6 (January 15, 1846), 1096-97; Lewis Clark Christian, "A Study of Mormon Knowledge of the American Far West Prior to the Exodus (1830-1846)" (M. A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972); Roberts, Comprehensive History, 3:70-91; Hirshson, Lion of the Lord, 68-69, 72.
84 Smith, History of the Church, 7:578-79.
becoming one of Young's wives. When the main body of Saints left Nauvoo during the first months of 1846 she remained behind to raise her children in a city past its heyday.  

As the Mormons withdrew from Nauvoo, a power vacuum developed in which lawlessness reigned as never before. Friends, among them Dr. Bernhisel, persuaded Emma Smith to take her children away from the town until order could be restored. She rented the Mansion to a recent settler, a Mr. Van Tuyl, who promised to run it as a hotel until the spring of 1847, and booked passage upriver on a steamer. The Smiths boarded the Uncle Tobey, a small steamboat with a shallow draft for use above the Des Moines Rapids, on September 12, 1846, and proceeded to Fulton City, Illinois, 140 miles north. There they settled with a growing band of Mormon dissenters, among whom were William Marks, Loren Walker, and Jared Carter, all prominent Mormons, to await developments farther south.  


87 Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (January 8, 1935), 48-49, 82 (January 29, 1935), 145. The fighting in Nauvoo has been described in Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Utah (San Francisco, California: The History Company, 1889), 226-33; Andrew Jenson, "The Battle of Nauvoo," Historical Record, 8 (June 1888), 845-47; Thomas L. Kane, The Mormons (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Historical Society, 1850). See also, Sarah Scott to Parents, July 22, 1844, in Partridge, ed., "Death of a Mormon Dictator," 598-99, which claims that dissidents were settling in the Fulton area as early as mid-1844.
Chapter 4

Maturity, 1846-1856

The Smith family arrived at Fulton City a few days after leaving Nauvoo. Tiny Fulton City was a very different environment from that of the Mormon stronghold. Nauvoo had been constantly in motion and always exciting, while this new town was sleepy and predictable. Emma Smith, however, loved Fulton City for just these reasons, and rented a cottage from a wealthy doctor close to the edge of town and set up housekeeping. In addition to her five children, Emma opened the house to several others who needed a place to stay after leaving Nauvoo. They all passed the winter of 1846-1847 agreeably.¹

William Marks, one of Nauvoo's leading citizens, moved into a house just down the road from the Smiths, and he was a constant visitor in their home. The Smiths and their guests also made friends with a number of families in town. Joseph later remembered that the Phelps family, who ran a local hotel, were especially friendly. Phelps invited Smith, his family, and his friends to take part in the social life of Fulton City. The Smith children, as relatives of the dead Mormon prophet, even became something of celebrities at parties.²


While in Fulton City the religious life of the Smith children took on the characteristics of those of other Protestant denominations. While Emma taught Joseph, Frederick, Alexander, little David, and the adopted Julia strict Christian morals, there is every reason to believe that she was bitter toward the organized Mormon religion and neglected to indoctrinate her children in its beliefs. As early as November 1844 the secular press had reported her distaste for the events that had occurred in Nauvoo after her husband's death. The prophet's widow, the paper said, "has lost all confidence (if she ever had any) in the Mormon Faith." The loss of confidence was understandable when cast against the backdrop of the succession struggle and doctrinal conflict. Having experienced these difficulties Emma refused to have much to do with any church organization, Mormon or otherwise, and prohibited her children's participation as well. William Smith, Emma's brother-in-law, wrote to a Mormon leader on Christmas Day in 1846 telling him that Emma was so bitter that she "would not let [young Joseph Smith] have anything to do with Mormonism at present." Emma Smith's intransigence upset many Saints who looked for young Joseph to lead the church at some future date. It prompted James J. Strang, one of the principal leaders of Mormonism following the prophet's death, to come to see Emma and her son during the winter.

3Upper Mississippian (Rock Island, Illinois), November 2, 1844.
4William Smith to James J. Strang, December 25, 1846, James J. Strang Manuscripts (Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut).
Young Smith was attending a party at a local hotel in town when Strang, whom he did not know, came in with another man. Joseph watched from the ballroom as the two men brushed the snow from their shoulders, and began pulling off their caps, overcoats, mufflers, and gloves as they asked for young Smith at the desk. When they turned toward the ballroom Smith recognized that one of the men was William Marks, whom he knew well. Marks called Joseph over and introduced him to Strang. Strang explained that he was leading a large contingent of Saints who had chosen to reject Brigham Young's authority, and would like very much to enlist the support of the young man who had been appointed by his father as eventual successor to the prophet.

Strang and young Smith talked for several minutes, but Strang soon learned that Emma Smith would not allow her children to affiliate with any Mormon faction. He invited Joseph to attend a series of meetings he was holding at the Marks home, in the hope of convincing him

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5 Smith, "What Do I Remember of Nauvoo?" 343.

6 The career of James J. Strang will be discussed further in chapter five as he played an important part in the origins of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Accounts of his life can be found in Milo M. Quaife, The Kingdom of Saint James: A Narrative of James J. Strang, the Beaver Island Mormon King (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1930); Klaus J. Hansen, "The Making of King Strang: A Reexamination," Michigan History, 46 (September 1962), 201-29; William R. Russell, "King James Strang: Joseph Smith's Successor?" in F. Mark McKlernan, Alma R. Elair, and Paul M. Edwards, eds., The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1973) 231-55; Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star (Liverpool, England), 8 (October 15, 1846), 93. Strang's commitment to young Smith was demonstrated as late as 1849 when his followers affirmed the youth's future prophetic calling. The annual conference passed "on motion, unanimously, that we give our prayers daily for Joseph, the son of Joseph, that he may be raised up for God to fill the station to which he has been called by prophecy." See Gospel Herald (Voree, Wisconsin), 4 (April 1849), 16.
to ally with the Strangites, but Smith did not go because of a "severe earache." Just before leaving Fulton City, Strang visited the Smith home and talked with Emma, but she refused to allow him to talk with Joseph. Strang undoubtedly wished to bring the Smiths into his organization, if for no other reason than to gain political advantage within Mormondom by having the allegiance of the prophet's family. Emma possibly sensed this ulterior motive, and certainly wanted her family to have no part in Strang's political manipulation. 7

In mid-February 1847 the Smiths' stay in Fulton was interrupted by disturbing news from home. When Emma had left Nauvoo she had rented the "Nauvoo Mansion" to a non-Mormon businessman named Van Tuyl. He was to maintain the house in good order during her absence and pay a modest rent. Emma received word from Dr. John Bernhisel, however, that Van Tuyl planned to build a flatboat on the Mississippi, take all the furniture and valuable goods from the mansion, and head downriver at first thaw before the Smiths returned from Fulton City. Emma quickly packed the children into a wagon and set out for Nauvoo in February, determined to reach home before Van Tuyl could carry out his plan. Her early return thoroughly shocked the would-be thief; she threw him out of the house, and reopened it under her own management. 8

The Nauvoo to which the Smiths returned was far different from the one that they had left only five months before. Most of the Mormons

had already gone, and had been replaced by "new citizens." The Smith family did not think much of these settlers, Joseph later describing them as

a mob of rough lawless "river element" [who] came into the city, ransacking, pillaging and destroying . . . The people who came in were of varying classes, but all were moved by somewhat similar impulses--to obtain cheaply the property being sold by the departing Saints, most of whom were glad to get any price others were willing to pay.

Almost overnight Nauvoo became a rowdy river town infested with young single men on the make. The stable social institutions that had flourished under the Saints--law and order, the church, educational facilities, and others--completely broke down after the Mormon exodus. A visiting Philadelphia lawyer named Thomas Kane described the city as a virtual ghost town. The industry that had characterized Mormon Nauvoo was gone, and the only people to be found were lounging in front of buildings or at the wharves. Most of them, he wrote, were dirty, despicable creatures who were as often as not drunk. They had taken over most of the important buildings in the city, sometimes by force, and had destroyed many of the other structures.

It was in this rough river town between 1847 and 1856 that young Joseph Smith became a man. His mother took in boarders at the mansion to earn a living, and Joseph, as the oldest son, served as her bill collector, hired hand, and assistant manager of the family business. It was in these roles that Smith learned to deal with the secular

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10 Thomas L. Kane, The Mormons (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Historical Society, 1830), passim.
world about him. He quickly discovered the realities of the business world, and learned how to plan for every contingency and to manipulate situations to his advantage. One incident that contributed to his maturity and experience came in 1847 when a boarder named Dr. Stark moved from the mansion leaving a bill unpaid. When Emma Smith learned that Stark planned to move from the city in the near future she sent Joseph to collect what he owed her before Stark got away. Young Smith confronted the doctor in his office and asked him politely to pay the money. Stark, busy at the moment, told Joseph to wait until he could get some free time. After he had waited patiently for an hour Stark finally turned to Smith and asked him what he wanted. He said nothing but handed Stark a written bill. Stark indignantly told Smith that he was moving soon and did not have the cash on hand, that the bill should have been collected months ago if it were going to be collected at all, and that it was unfair to send a boy to play on his sympathies.

Joseph left the doctor’s office, but then thought better of it and returned, determined not to leave without the money. When asked why he had come back, Smith told Stark he was staying until he got the money. “I cannot pay it,” Stark shouted, “Just tell your mother to go down into that old stocking of hers and get out some of the coin that is rusting away there and use that, if she needs any, and not come bothering me!” Smith refused to leave, however, and sat in the doctor’s office the rest of the afternoon. Finally, after several hours, Stark gave in. Turning to the boy he said, “Well, I suppose if I must, I must!” He gave the youth the fourteen dollars he owed, and swore he would never be in debt to Emma Smith again. Joseph happily trotted home to his
mother, who thanked him for collecting the money never knowing what he had gone through to get it.\textsuperscript{11}

While helping his mother run the boarding house, young Joseph met many interesting people. One of the most important was Lewis Crum Bidamon. Bidamon had originally met the Smiths while delivering to the mansion carriages ordered by the prophet in 1844. After Smith's death Bidamon had dealt with Emma several times and came to respect her cool business head.\textsuperscript{12} He came to Nauvoo while the Mormons were preparing to leave in 1846 with the intention of buying as much property as possible. While there he used his office as major in the Illinois Militia to aid Emma Smith in keeping her mansion safe from looters during the summer's chaos.\textsuperscript{13} In early 1847 Bidamon wrote to Emma Smith while she was in Fulton City asking if he might rent the mansion from her, and although she already had a renter Emma said that they could perhaps work something out in the future.\textsuperscript{14}

Emma Smith and Lewis Bidamon worked out something far more lasting than a business relationship during 1847. Taken with each


\textsuperscript{12} Deed of Emma Smith to Lorin Walker, December 21, 1847, Lewis Crum Bidamon Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri); Valeen Tippett Avery and Linda King Newell, "Lewis C. Bidamon: Stepchild of Mormonism," Brigham Young University Studies, 19 (Spring 1979), 377-78.

\textsuperscript{13} Avery and Newell, "Bidamon," 378; John M. Ferris to Hiram G. Ferris, September 3, 1846, Mormon Collection (H. H. Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California).

\textsuperscript{14} Lewis C. Bidamon to Emma Smith, January 11, 1847, Lewis Crum Bidamon Papers.
other, they began to court. "A fine-looking man," young Joseph wrote, Bidamon was "six feet tall, with high forehead and splendid bearing, usually dressed very well, and always wore, a 'citizens' hat,' as the high-crowned, somewhat formal ones of the period were called." The widow was immediately attracted by Bidamon's dashing and debonnaire manner, and the town buzzed with the exciting news that the Mormon prophet's widow was having a romance with the prosperous businessman who had recently moved to town.\footnote{Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (February 5, 1935), 176.}

In time the courtship led to marriage, the wedding taking place on the prophet's birthday, December 23, 1847.\footnote{The date of this marriage has been in question. This date is taken from the marriage certificate. Marriage Record Book, 1829-1849, Book 1A, 105 (Hancock County Courthouse, Carthage, Illinois).} The Methodist minister in Nauvoo, William Hana, performed the simple ceremony, with only a few persons besides the family present.\footnote{Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (February 5, 1935), 176.} Sarah M. Kimball, a Mormon still in town at the time gossiped about the marriage to a friend in Council Bluffs, Iowa. "The bride," Kimball wrote, "was dressed in plum colored satin, a lace tuck handkerchief, gold watch and chain, no cap, hair plain. We were not honored guests but were told that things passed off very genteelly."\footnote{Sarah M. Kimball to Mrs. Miranda Hyde, January 2, 1848, Orson Hyde Collection (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).}
The word of Emma’s marriage to Bidamon soon reached Brigham Young, who was still resentful because of Emma’s rejection of him.

John S. Fullmer wrote Young of the event:

I suppose you know by this time that there was a certain widow in this place, who was lately given . . . "in holy matrimony" to one of his Satanic Majesty’s high priests, to wit, one Lewis Bidamon. Now these twain being one flesh concocted a grand scheme by which to enrich themselves.20

Almon Babbitt was so incensed over the marriage that he even went to Emma and told her she had no right to marry the Major, as she had forsaken her commitment to the Mormon faith.21 Their marriage, Babbitt realized, assured that the prophet’s family would never go west, and that the heirs of the prophet would probably be in opposition to the followers of Young.

Young Joseph Smith, while idealizing his dead father, held mixed emotions toward his new stepfather. He recorded his impressions in his memoirs:

He was a man of strong likes and dislikes, passionate, easily moved to anger, but withal ordinarily affable in manner, decidedly hospitable, and generous in disposition. He made friends easily, but, unfortunately for him, lost them quite as easily. His love for intoxicating liquors and his lack of religious convictions were the two most serious drawbacks to the

20 John S. Fullmer to Brigham Young, January 26, 1848, Brigham Young Papers (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah); Crawford, "Notes," n.p.; Almon W. Babbitt to Heber C. Kimball, January 31, 1848, Heber C. Kimball Papers (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).

21 Emma Bidamon to my ever dear husband, January 7, 1850, Emma Smith Bidamon Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
happiness of our home, and tended to color materially
the afterevents of our lives.\textsuperscript{22}

While young Smith may not have fully approved of his stepfather’s habits
when compared to those of his natural father, whom he considered almost
flawless, the two developed an amiable rapport if not a genuine affection
over the years.\textsuperscript{23}

Bidamon was directly responsible for Joseph Smith’s first halting
entrance into the business world as a young man. When he married Emma
Smith, Bidamon was the partner of a Mr. Hartwell in a dry-goods business
in Nauvoo. They subsequently dissolved the partnership, but Bidamon
later used his influence to get fifteen-year-old Joseph a job as clerk
in Hartwell’s store. Smith, by this time a youth of average height,
striking dark eyes, an unruly mass of dark hair, and the beginnings of
a scraggly beard, began clerking for Hartwell in 1848, and remained
there learning the trade until the summer.\textsuperscript{24} After he had mastered
the art of storekeeping sufficiently to operate without supervision,
the Major proposed that he and Emma reopen the Red Brick Store with
young Smith as manager. The parents each invested $1,000, renovated
the store, bought a fresh supply of stock, and set Joseph up in business.
Bidamon thought at the time that it would be his contribution to seeing
that the youth had a fair start in the world, but, unfortunately, the


\textsuperscript{23}Joseph Smith to Emma Bidamon, March 8, 1863, Emma Smith Bidamon
Papers; Joseph Smith to Thomas Revell, July 2, 1880, Joseph Smith III
Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-
Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri); Joseph Smith to Maj.
L. C. Bidamon, September 4, 1875, Lewis Crum Bidamon Papers; Avery and

venture failed. Crucial to its success was the ability to enter the grain trade on the Mississippi, and although Joseph diligently bought and sold grain locally, acting as an agent for St. Louis brokers, he was unable to break into the large market because of a cartel that controlled most of the trade on that part of the river. Moreover, the main business district of Nauvoo had moved away from the limestone flat, where the Red Brick Store stood, onto the bluffs overlooking the river. Hence, the store only attracted those persons who were looking for goods more cheaply than could be had elsewhere. Young Smith simply could not compete effectively.

It took Joseph and his backers several months to learn that the store would not pay its way. When Joseph finally closed its doors in 1849 he did so sadly, but with the intention of beginning another business. He was, some Nauvooans thought, overly optimistic about his prospects. Joseph took a number of menial jobs in order to accumulate some working capital. He worked as a barkeep for a time, and as a farmhand for his stepfather and others. As soon as he was finally able, however, young Smith worked out an agreement with the Warsaw and Rockford Railroad to build twenty-six miles of road for the company. Acting as contractor, foreman, and oftentimes laborer, Smith began the construction project and had actually completed several miles of railroad track when the

company went into receivership and the project was scrapped. Smith next went into the land development business, and managed to acquire several acres of prime residential property in the center of Nauvoo. He also purchased fifteen acres of farmland outside of town, for which he paid a total of $2.00. At one point in his business career Smith even bought a thirty-foot boat that had come loose from its moorings in Nauvoo and floated downstream. Rather than try to retrieve the vessel, the owner sold it to Smith very cheaply. From these endeavors Smith made a moderate income. Joseph Smith, along with the Major, developed one other venture during these years--tourism. After the exodus of the Saints from Nauvoo in 1846 thousands of visitors came to see where the Mormons had once lived. They visited the Smith mansion (where many of them took pride in renting rooms); the homes of the other leaders, especially Brigham Young's; the Nauvoo House; and, most importantly, the huge Nauvoo Temple. Bidamon and his stepsons established an

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27 Legal Transactions between Julia M. Dixon, Elisha, and Joseph Smith, July 28, 1851, October 4, 1851, Lewis Crum Bidamon Papers.

28 Legal Contract between Hugh Rhodes and Joseph Smith, May 1, 1852; ibid.

29 Legal Transaction between Adolphus Allen and Joseph Smith and Frederick G. W. Smith, July 2, 1853; ibid.
informal guide service based at the mansion, where they maintained a
team and buggy for showing tourists about the town. Joseph usually
acted as driver and guide, making a small amount of money in fares and
tips. 30

Some of the visitors Joseph showed about Nauvoo were rather
famous. He recalled, for instance, that Owen Lovejoy, abolitionist
Congressman from Illinois, visited the city in 1848. Smith drove him
throughout the town, showing him the sights, and telling him the story
of Nauvoo's Mormon past. Smith could not resist telling the Congressman
how much he admired the rigorous opposition to slavery that he and his
slain brother, Elijah Lovejoy, had demonstrated. 31 Nauvoo had long
been a hotbed of antislavery sentiment, had been a major stop on the
underground railroad, and consequently young Smith had grown to sympat-
ize with the abolitionist crusade. 32

The largest tourist attraction at Nauvoo was lost on the night
of October 8-9, 1848 when an arsonist set fire to the three-story Nauvoo
Temple. Joseph remembered that he was sleeping in the upper room of the
Red Brick Store, trying to protect the building from vandals, when he
awoke to the sounds of fire bells and confused voices on the street
below. He staggered out of bed and ran to the north window where he saw

30 Avery and Newell, "Bidamon," 382.
32 R. S. Bergen to Owen Lovejoy, November 12, 1843, Wichett-Wisenall
Collection of Lovejoy Papers (Texas Tech University Library, Lubbock, Texas);
Edward Magdol, Owen Lovejoy: Abolitionist in Congress (New Brunswick,
New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1967), 45; Smith, "Memoirs," in
Herald, 82 (February 12, 1935), 208, 82 (April 23, 1935), 529-30, 82
a huge fire on the cliffs above the Nauvoo flats. Smith opened the window and called to John Mason, whom he saw running toward the fire, asking what had happened. Mason told him that the Temple was burning, adding that the community was assembling bucket brigades to fight the fire. Smith dressed and ran to his mother’s hotel, only to find that the Major was already on the hill organizing bucket brigades. Since the Smith property would be easy prey for thieves during the fire, Joseph decided that under the circumstances it was better for him to stay at the hotel. The firefighters worked throughout the night, and although they prevented the fire from spreading to other buildings in the business section, the Temple was all but destroyed. Bidamon returned not long after dawn, his body covered with ashes and blackened with charcoal.33

The Nauvoo Temple had been the most impressive symbol of the Mormonism that Smith’s father had established, and many in the community were sorry to see it destroyed. Young Joseph, on the other hand, did not truly mourn its passing, for it most clearly represented for him, as it did for his mother, the extreme Mormon religion that had rejected young Smith as successor, had embraced plural marriage and other “despicable” doctrines, and had followed Brigham Young to the Great Basin. Young Smith almost rejected all formal religion about this time, coming relatively close to his stepfather’s sarcastic Deism. The Major was fond of saying, “I believe in one God who has neither partners nor clerks!” and Joseph loved to repeat it to his friends as his own creed.34

34Ibid., 82 (February 5, 1935), 176.
Joseph's mother apparently tried to keep him associated with some type of Christian denomination, and she began to take him and the other children to the Methodist church. Bidamon accepted this practice in order to keep peace in the family, and even attended with Emma part of the time, but he did not endorse it. Emma and the children became so active in the Methodist church in Nauvoo that Almon Babbitt, watching affairs in the city with interest, reported to Brigham Young that "Emma has joined the Methodist Church; they took her on trial. It is to be hoped that she will suit them." Obviously, the statement confirmed Young's worst suspicions about Emma Smith Bidamon, for denial of the church after having experienced its spirit is the greatest of all sins in Mormon theology and considered "unforgivable." Emma had not, however, joined the Methodist Church, she merely wanted to see that her children maintained some relationship with an organized Christian denomination.

With the relatively loose religious atmosphere of the Bidamon household to encourage him during his teen years young Smith explored several different religions including some of the more exotic beliefs.

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35 Almon W. Babbitt to Brigham Young, January 31, 1848, Brigham Young Papers; Almon W. Babbitt to Heber C. Kimball, January 31, 1848, Heber C. Kimball Papers.


37 "Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," September 10, 1849 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).
He studied phrenology and astrology, but quickly found them less than satisfying. He also scrutinized the cult of Spiritualism very seriously. He found it a bit more enticing than anything he had yet come across, and spent considerable time and energy trying to understand its beliefs.  

Spiritualism had arisen near Rochester, New York in 1848 when J. D. Fox, his wife, and their two daughters began investigating communication with departed human spirits through mysterious knockings and rappings. Eventually they developed a means of communication through knocks from the spirits that allowed "mediums," people possessing supernatural powers, to receive messages from beyond the grave. The Fox family were the first mediums of the new movement and created a cult bordering on a religion.  

The cult spread rapidly throughout the country. As early as February 1851 the relatively isolated settlements of the intermountain West were reading of the "mysterious knockings" at Rochester and of Spiritualism's spread to other places. Joseph Smith first learned of the cult in 1850 from a farmer named James Chadsey, who moved to  

38Spiritualism was particularly attractive to Mormons who did not accept any of the factions during this period, because it, like Mormonism, placed emphasis upon the supernatural communication with the "great beyond." Mormonism's accent on the continuing revelation of God to man and Spiritualism's communication with the spirit world were similar in many ways. For an illuminating and concise analysis of Mormon's bout with Spiritualism see Davis Bitton, "Mormonism's Encounter with Spiritualism," Journal of Mormon History, 1 (1974), 39-50.  


40Deseret News (Salt Lake City, Utah), February 22, 1851.
Nauvoo from the East. Chadsey claimed to be a medium and held a number of seances for the local citizenry. Smith took part in one of these seances and found that Chadsey apparently, could not only evoke eerie knockings from the spirits but could also elicit penciled messages from them.

Although Joseph Smith approached the cult with skepticism, his interest was genuine. He borrowed a number of books on the subject, studying with enthusiasm Andrew Jackson Davis' writings. Davis was a leading Spiritualist whose works--The Great Harmonia and Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind--captured Smith by their logic and power. Smith became an increasingly regular participant in the local seances, and later admitted, "we would experience a species of occult manifestations between us."

After avidly taking part in seances in Nauvoo for several months, however, Smith's interest in Spiritualism began to wane. Although he had always been skeptical of the cult, two important events largely turned him against it. The first involved an attempt on the part of a traveling lecturer on Spiritualism to use his father's name to drum up interest. The lecturer claimed that the eternal power of Joseph Smith, Jr. was everywhere present in Nauvoo, and that the prophet's spirit wished to tell the community something of great importance. The lecturer advertised that she would speak under the influence of Smith's

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dead father at a public meeting. The entrance fee to the event was twenty-five cents per person, and the speaker stood to make a substantial profit from using Smith's name. Young Smith was incensed at this petty theatrical exhibition and boycotted it. Later he asked one of the people who attended, "do you really think this woman was actuated by the spirit of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, as she advertised?" After considerable hemming and having she answered, "Oh, pshaw! Joseph Smith never said whin!"42

The second incident leading to Smith's rejection of Spiritualism took place during a seance at the home of a local medium who claimed to have received a message from a spirit stating that one of Smith's old friends, Oliver B. Huntington, had died of cholera at Watertown, New York. Smith was shocked at this information and refused to believe it until it was confirmed. He wrote to the Huntington family, who had migrated to Utah with the Mormons in 1846, explaining that he had heard that Oliver had died recently and asked for verification. A few weeks later Smith received word from the family that Huntington was alive and well and traveling as a missionary for the church.

These incidents convinced Smith that Spiritualism was a bankrupt system and not worthy of his further investigation. By 1852 he had completely abandoned the cult, stating that he was utterly disgusted with the so-called spiritual manifestations as displayed by those declared to be mediums. I had seen table-tipping and had witnessed several times the pencil-writing performances, but came to the conclusion that, so far, my experience had proved there was absolutely no good in it or any part of it . . . Thenceforward I let it alone.

regarding it as a matter of mental speculation unworthy
the attention and investigation of an honest man who was
not actually willing to be humbugged—a result which I
certainly did not wish to invite.43

In 1855 Smith passed a harsh judgment on the cult: "I feel it is not
a part of the divine plan to allow such spirits to communicate with
mortals," he wrote to a girlfriend, "and I can scarcely see how we can
have real tangible intercourse with departed spirits."44 Smith came to
believe that Spiritualism was not a hoax perpetrated by confidence men,
but was a subtle form of black magic dependent upon the powers of Satan.
Its practitioners, therefore, would be punished by God. As he reminded
his followers in later years, "indulgence in weird seances and mysterious
contacts will finally wear out the firm texture of the true and higher
nature of the individual, and leave him, a pitiful and darkened wreck,
upon the shores of the spirit world."45

While Joseph Smith was involved with Spiritualism he showed little
interest in any variety of Mormonism. Mormonism, on the other hand,
showed a lot of interest in him. Many of the scattered Saints thought
him the legitimate successor of his father. He had been called, these
people assumed, by revelation from God to lead the church, and he would
eventually accept his destiny. A few of the old Saints, notably officials
in the organization headed by Brigham Young, tried to prod Smith toward
accepting his calling by inviting him to join them. His cousin, George
A. Smith, wrote Joseph in the spring of 1849 from Council Bluffs, Iowa

43 Ibid., 82 (December 4, 1935), 1544.
44 Joseph Smith to Emma Knight, December 4, 1855, Joseph Smith III Papers; Joseph Smith to Emma Knight, May 4, 1856, Joseph Smith III Papers.
about the possibility of his migrating to Utah. He told Joseph:

It is my present calculation to move with my family,
to the Mountains this summer. I should be happy if
you could find it convenient to accompany me . . .
Consult your mother on this subject, and do as wisdom
shall direct. But if you should conclude to make the
journey, I should be much pleased to enjoy your com­
pany, as will many of your friends in this region who
are going on.  

Joseph undoubtedly considered the offer, but quickly rejected it. His
mother was opposed to his going to Utah, and asked Joseph to stay in
Nauvoo to watch over the Smith property while Major Bidamon went to
seek his fortune in the California Gold Rush. He did as his mother
wished.

In 1850 Dr. Joseph Younger, representing one of the factions of
Mormonism, Jehovah’s Presbytery of Zion, under the charismatic, but erratic
leadership of Charles B. Thompson, paid a visit to Joseph Smith in Nauvoo
trying to get him to affiliate with his group. Thompson, who went by
the supposedly sacred name of Baneemy, had established a communalistic
society at the town of Preparation in western Iowa, and was in desperate
need of hardy followers who would make the town prosper. He had dis­
patched Younger to enlist the support of the Smiths in the hope that the
family’s prestige would attract other Mormons. Younger took an aggressive
approach in his meeting with Joseph and the youth lashed out at him.

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46 George A. Smith to Joseph Smith, March 13, 1849, Miscellaneous
Letters and Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

47 For a description of Bidamon’s gold rush activities, see Smith,
“Memoirs,” in Herald, 22 (February 12, 1935), 207-208; Avery and Newell,
755; Lewis Bidamon to Emma Bidamon, July 5, 1849, January 7, 1850, May 4,
1849, April 20, 1850, Lewis Crum Bidamon Papers.

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Smith later described Younger's visit with amused nonchalance:

He tried to argue me into Baneemyism, and finally, raised his hand to pronounce a curse on me; I stopped him, and reminded him that "cursings were like chickens; coming home to roost." And when he got mad and railed against me; I told him what he had been doing, and predicted (prophesized) that if he did not settle down with his family, stop wandering, dragging them about with him, he would waste his money, ... 48

Smith's "prophecy," coming as it did from the man he considered the true successor to his father, frightened Dr. Younger, and he left town almost immediately, settling at Preparation with his family. Young Smith quickly lost any interest Younger might have kindled in Thompson's movement.

Subsequent visits by members of the various Mormon factions met with a similar lack of success. Joseph Smith seemed to have little interest in any of the work being done by any of them. 49 For example, when Frederick H. Piercy visited the old Mormon stronghold in 1853, Joseph sat for a crayon sketch, but refused to discuss religion with Piercy, who was writing a guidebook for Mormon immigrants to the Great Basin. 50 Likewise, when William Walker, an official sent from Utah, visited Smith during the fall of 1853 Joseph was civil to him but let

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48 Joseph Smith to Caroline Case, March 27, 1894, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #5 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 172-75.


50 Frederick Piercy, "A Visit to Nauvoo in 1853," Journal of History, 3 (April 1910), 244; Frederick H. Piercy, Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley (Liverpool, England: F. D. Richards, 1855).

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it be known that he had no interest in Mormonism at that time. Much of the same held true when an immigrant company from England stopped at Nauvoo to see the sights and talk with Joseph Smith while in the city.

An incident in the late autumn of 1853, however, changed Smith's attitude toward the religion of his father. Smith was aware of the blessing his father had given him, and of the belief on the part of many Saints that he would eventually lead the church, but he had chosen to ignore it up to that point. While walking to a civic meeting in Nauvoo Smith was accosted by a Utah Mormon visiting the city. He told Joseph that he had a duty given him by God to unify and purify the church and that he had thus far shirked that responsibility. He told Smith he was "possibly doing a great wrong in allowing the years to go by unimproved." Smith thought a moment about this rather frank statement made by a complete stranger and quickly replied that he "was ready to do any work that might fall to my lot, or that I might be called to do." He was quick to add, however, that no man was going to force him into committing himself to religious work. When the time came for him to assume religious duties, Smith said, God would tell him, and then he would act.

Smith did, however, take one part of the stranger's counsel to heart. He began studying Mormonism. He bought or borrowed everything he could find about the sect. He studied its history and doctrine, its

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current factions and the strange attraction it held for certain types of people. He read the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants with increasing interest. He especially explored the more controversial aspects of the religious system that emerged in Nauvoo during the 1840s. This study led Smith to the conviction that the religion of his father was theologically sound. It had, however, changed in the hands of others since the prophet’s death.

Having determined that he believed in primitive Mormonism, Smith began to search for a faction of the church that most nearly adhered to that primitive theology and organization. He believed that if he found such a group God would then make known His will regarding Smith’s future. The youth did not rule out any of the various schismatic groups on his own, but he claimed that God revealed to him certain groups with which he should not associate. He later wrote:

I was plainly told that it was not my duty to unite myself with the fortunes of the Church in the Valley’s of the West; and that I was not to engage in Polygamy, but was to oppose it; although no direction was given me until some time afterwards, respecting active labor as a believer in my father’s mission.

Not long after this experience Smith claimed to have been given a vision which showed that he would have the right to choose between a life of secular prominence or one of religious service. He described this vision in 1880. While engaged in studying Mormonism, he recalled:

the room suddenly expanded and passed away. I saw stretched out before me towns, cities, busy marts, court houses, courts and assemblies of men, all busy and all marked by those char-

54 George A. and John Smith to Joseph Smith, June 24, 1854, Joseph Smith III Papers.

55 Joseph Smith to Lyman O. Littlefield, August 14, 1883, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4, 16.
acteristics that are found in the world, where men win place and renown. This stayed before my vision till I had noted clearly that the choice of preferment was offered to him who would enter in, but who did so must go into the busy whirl and be submerged by its din, bustle and confusion. In the subtle transition of a dream I was gazing over a wide expanse of country in a prairie land; no mountains were to be seen, but as far as the eye could reach, hill and dale, hamlet and village, farm and farm house, pleasant cot and home-like place, everywhere betokening thrift, industry and the pursuits of a happy peace were open to the view. I remarked to him standing by me, but whose presence I had not before noticed, "This must be the country of a happy people." To this he replied, "Which would you prefer, life, success and renown among the busy scenes that you first saw; or a place among these people, without honors or renown? Think of it well, for the choice will be offered to you sooner or later, and you must be prepared to decide. Your decision once made you cannot recall it, and must abide the result." 56

Convinced of the rightness of his remaining free from the Utah faction of Mormondom and confident that in time the choice seen in the vision would be offered in reality, young Smith stopped trying to make choices on his own. While he still studied Mormonism he did not try to find a faction with which to join, and he began to spend the bulk of his time in other pursuits. 57

Smith had long had an interest in the law, and with the decline in his emphasis on religion the youth began to study it enthusiastically. Smith believed, perhaps rightly, that when he chose a religious career at some future date, a knowledge of law would be helpful. His step-father enthusiastically encouraged Joseph to enter legal studies full


57 Joseph Smith to Cousin John, December 28, 1876, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1A, (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 11-17; Joseph Smith to John Henry Smith, January 20, 1886, George Albert Smith Collection (Marriot Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah).
time, although his mother harbored doubts. She distrusted lawyers and as late as 1866 wrote Joseph about her dislike of them: "I know very well if you Father had been acquainted with the laws of the country he might have avoided a great deal of trouble," she told her son, "and yet I have a horror of one of my children being entirely dependent upon being a lawyer for a living."

Notwithstanding Emma's misgivings, Joseph began reading law in the office of William McLennon in Nauvoo during the winter of 1853-1854.

The next year Lewis Bidamon arranged for his stepson to go to Canton, Illinois and study law under William Pitt Kellogg. Kellogg took on the would-be attorney and put him to work in a strict six-day-a-week, ten-hour-a-day schedule. Although only a young man himself, Kellogg had won acclaim as an outstanding trial lawyer in western Illinois. He was considered the best young lawyer in that part of the state, and Smith was delighted with the opportunity to work for such a man. Smith's letters to his family attest to his diligent work in Kellogg's law office. Writing from his room at the home of Bidamon's brother in Canton, where he was staying, Smith told his family in early 1855, "I am studying as hard as I can, and will try hard to acquire the mysteries of the Law."


61 Joseph Smith to Emma Bidamon, June 15, 1855, Emma Smith Bidamon Papers.
Kellogg harbored political aspirations in Canton and became intensely involved in local political affairs. Later he would become a stalwart in the Republican party—serving as delegate to the Republican National Convention of 1860; Chief Justice of Nebraska Territory during the Civil War; Collector of the Port of New Orleans; and governor, representative, and senator from Louisiana during the Gilded Age. His political ambitions in the 1850s influenced young Smith who tried to emulate him. Kellogg used his political connections in Canton to get his hard-working student appointed as clerk of the city council and deputy postmaster. Quite naturally, thereafter Smith came to view politics as a lively and important area of interest.

If Kellogg’s model as a lawyer and politician influenced young Joseph Smith, so did his social activities. Kellogg was a young bachelor during the time Smith read law in his office, and was famous for his carousing and woman chasing. Smith followed his lead and turned, almost overnight, into one of the town’s wilder young men. His cheap cigars, quick wit, and frivolity were unleashed whenever he left his work. He wrote to his brother, Alexander, in September 1855 explaining that he

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had been reprimanded for horseplay in front of a store in downtown Canton. The deputy sheriff felt compelled to stop his antics and ask him if he was "in fun or in liquor—I told him neither only just in sport ...". Smith complained not long thereafter that "Canton seems to [sic] small to hold me!" Joseph followed Kellogg’s lead in relations with the young ladies of Canton as well, but he was disappointed. He wrote a girl friend back in Nauvoo: "there are fairer at home than Canton can boast of as far as I have seen and I have been to Church very regularly since I have been here on purpose to see but never a one have I seen nor do I care about seeing any." Although excited by the law, Smith’s money ran out early in 1856 and he had to return home before completing his studies. By this time he was a full-grown man, seasoned in business and worldly in general knowledge. Physically Smith was a man as well. He described himself to a friend as "about 5 feet 8½ inches tall, weight 178 pounds and am as ugly as folks generally get to be in this country." Smith’s ugliness did not prevent him from meeting several young ladies during the mid-1850s, one of whom, Emmeline Griswold, he eventually married. Emma, as she was called, was a tall, slender, dark featured young woman, very like Smith’s mother in physical characteristics. She also possessed a keen and sometimes biting wit, a strong will, good business sense, and a certain winsome

65 Joseph Smith to Alexander Smith, September 27, 1855, Joseph Smith III Papers.

66 Joseph Smith to Emmeline Griswold, February 20, 1856, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.

67 Joseph Smith to Emma Kinght, April 14, 1855; ibid.
sensuality. But most of all, she made Smith laugh, and that is what finally convinced Smith to marry her.

Joseph Smith first met Emmeline in a Nauvoo candy store a short time before he went to Canton to study law. Nothing passed between them at this meeting, but Smith was immediately attracted to her. Several months later, as he and Frederick were driving a buggy down a muddy street in Nauvoo, they saw her picking her way on foot toward her house. At that instant Smith thought of a way to make a date with her. He told Fred, "If you will allow me to use the buggy I will pick her up and take her to her house--and some day I will marry her if I can!" Fred just shook his head and slid out of the buggy. Joseph began courting Emma thereafter, and "became her faithful attendant, escorting her to and from all our gatherings and paying continuous court to her, with no other companion or sweetheart." A fervid romance blossomed, but Smith tried to hide some of his most intense feelings about Emma until he was sure she shared them. "I felt that I could say what might be uppermost with one exception," he wrote her in 1856, "and that was that I loved you and you know what a long time I let pass before I told that and how I told it... You know Emma that I am your most faithful... and love You with all my heart."

Joseph proposed to Emma in the spring of 1856, making it clear to her, since she had never been a member of the Mormon church and her

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70 Joseph Smith to Emmeline Griswold, February 20, 1856, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
family was antagonistic toward the sect, that he must be free to respond to any future call to enter religious work. She could only marry him if she agreed to accept this as a pre-condition. 71 Emma agreed to the proposal with its odd stipulation, and the two set the marriage date for October 22, 1856. The Griswold family objected to the marriage on religious grounds and disowned Emma for the moment, but she preferred Joseph Smith to her family and the marriage took place as planned. A Presbyterian minister performed the ceremony.

Without anything approaching a real honeymoon the couple moved into the old Smith blockhouse and set up housekeeping. They were happy. As Smith wrote of these days: "The world was before us, clothed in roseate hues of youthful hope and fancy, and we faced it together happily." 72

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71 Joseph Smith to John Henry Smith, January 20, 1886, George Albert Smith Collection.

Chapter 5

ORIGINS OF THE REORGANIZATION

While Joseph Smith III grew into maturity in Nauvoo, the church that he eventually came to lead made its first halting steps toward organization out of the scattered elements of the early Mormon movement. When Smith's father was murdered in Carthage in 1844, total church membership had been at least one hundred thousand, and some contemporaries estimated it as high as two hundred thousand. The church in 1844, then, was not just a little troupe of believers who followed Joseph Smith, Jr., from state to state, and upon his death followed Brigham Young to the sanctuary of the Great Basin. There were sizable congregations throughout the nation, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest, who believed in the prophet's message and were faced with the dilemma of choosing who to follow when he died.  

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Immediately after Smith’s death Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon vied for control of the ecclesiastical machinery that would give whoever won the advantage in gaining the allegiance of the churchmembers. Young captured that machinery, assuring his success as a major factional leader within Mormonism. But he did not thereby insure his complete victory. He could not, for instance, command the allegiance of all the important members of the priesthood hierarchy, and soon found himself in stiff competition for control over the hinterland congregations not directly under the control of the Nauvoo theocratic government.3

One man in particular arose during the first two years after the prophet’s death who was crucial to the development of the Reorganized Church. That man was James Jesse Strang. He was a man of elegant charm, entrancing charisma, brilliant dreams, and haunting good looks. He claimed to be the true successor soon after the death of the prophet on the basis of several miraculous experiences similar to those of the youthful Joseph Smith, Jr. during the 1820s.4 From the time of his meteoric rise


in late 1844 until his death at the hands of conspirators within his own movement in 1856 Strang was a force to be reckoned with in Mormondom.

Because of his claims to divine revelation and his charisma, Strang gained an immediate and enthusiastic following in the areas that would later be the Reorganized Church's strongholds—that is, in northern Illinois, eastern Iowa, southern Wisconsin, and in the Great Lakes region to the east. Most of the members that he drew into his movement had been living outside of Nauvoo, and had felt a vacuum in church leadership at the death of the prophet. Strang, thus, stepped in and filled the void. He made superhuman efforts to convert all the old Saints who had been living in the hinterlands, and was successful to an astonishing degree. He even made a few converts from among the Nauvoo disciples of Brigham Young. When one of the captains of Brigham Young's wagon train, Reuben Miller, began recruiting a company to emigrate to the Great Basin from among members living in Ottawa, Illinois, Strang challenged him to a debate concerning the rightful succession to the church's presidency. Some sixty of Strang's supporters were in the audience, and the cheering section may have helped Strang's argument somewhat, but his delivery was so forceful and his reasoning so powerful that he converted Miller to his cause. Miller then returned to Nauvoo to present an ultimatum to Brigham Young and his lieutenants demanding that they appear before a Strangite court to stand trial for apostacy.

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5 Quaife, Kingdom, 19.
6 Ibid., 22.
Later in the spring Strang sent one of his prime assistants, Moses Smith to Nauvoo to seek out converts from among the followers of Young. This missionary venture was an act of audacity Young could not ignore. Moses Smith faced official censure when he reached Nauvoo, and some of the more zealous Brighamites threatened him with physical violence. Many Saints in Nauvoo, however, wanted to hear Strang’s message, if only out of curiosity, and Smith was eventually allowed to present his claims in the magnificent Nauvoo Temple. He won a few converts, mostly from among dissident members in the city. More importantly, Moses Smith opened the way for the conversion of a very important set of church leaders, and within the next few months Strang gained the support of John E. Page, a member of the Twelve Apostles; William Smith, brother of the prophet and Presiding Patriarch of the church; William Marks, Stake President of Nauvoo; George Miller, Presiding Bishop and chief financial officer of the church; George J. Adams, a member of the Seventy; Lucy Mack Smith, the prophet’s mother; and several of Joseph Smith, Jr.’s sisters.7 Throughout this time, however, many of these people looked forward to a time when Joseph Smith III would arise to his prophetic calling. Indeed, even a Strangite conference affirmed its belief in 1849 that young Joseph Smith would someday preside over the church.8

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7Ibid., 25, 29; Russell, “King James Strang,” in Restoration Movement, 239. See also the signed statement by several members of the Smith family written by William Smith. Voree Herald (Voree, Wisconsin), July 1846. The wife and children of the prophet were not included in the statement, and were conspicuous in their absence. Moreover, some of the surviving Smiths stated in 1899 that they had never signed any document supporting the claims of Strang. Saints’ Herald, 46 (April 26, 1899), 261.

8Many of these beliefs concerning the succession of young Joseph Smith have been recorded in chapter three. The Strangite conference minutes can be found in Gospel Herald (Voree, Wisconsin), 4 (April 1849), 16.
Strang’s missionary efforts were nothing short of astounding. He sent teams throughout the Midwest and East, saturating areas that had previously yielded numerous Mormon converts, and gathering in whole Mormon congregations that had been largely independent since the death of Joseph Smith. He incorporated a sizable number of Saints at Kirtland, Ohio, birthplace of Joseph Smith III, into his movement in 1846. Strang himself visited Boston, New York, Washington, D. C., Baltimore, and Philadelphia. While he pursued an aggressive missionary policy Brigham Young was content to remain in Nauvoo organizing an exodus for some ten to twelve thousand Latter Day Saints. Both men succeeded in their chosen endeavors. Each accomplished his goals, but after 1846 only Strang and his followers remained in the Midwest, Young and his adherents having begun the migration to Utah.9

Left with a powerful organization in the Midwest, James Strang became the chief rival of Young and the Twelve. He voiced strong and effective opposition to Brigham Young’s brand of Mormonism, charging him with usurping control over the church from the rightful heir. He provided a moderate Mormon organization, at least for several years, that opposed the more radical doctrinal teachings of the Utah schism, especially plural marriage. Strang’s movement, therefore, served as a rallying point for those who could not accept Young’s teachings and administration. It also offered an alternative to Saints who did not want to journey into the deserts of the West. Finally, Strang provided a vehicle for keeping the Saints organized during a trying period. Other factions

9Quaife, Kingdom, 42.
later broke away from it, notably the organization that became the Reorganized Church, as Strang was not able to discourage the expression of differing doctrinal viewpoints and scriptural interpretations to nearly the same extent that Brigham Young was in the more isolated Intermountain West.10

The year of 1846 marked the zenith of Strang's power as a Mormon leader. By the close of the year he could claim some twenty thousand members, almost all of them coming from the eminently successful missionary work among the Saints outside of Nauvoo. But at this point Strang's supporters began to dwindle.11 Three factors led to the demise of Strang's movement.

The first was a number of administrative problems that forced Strang to remain at the church's headquarters instead of out where he could win new converts as he had done in the past. Second, he short-sightedly ordered his supporters to "gather" together on Beaver Island, Wisconsin, in the middle of Lake Michigan, thus draining the various outlying congregations of his most zealous and capable supporters. Without these individuals to lead the local churches they began to die, to drift out of Mormonism entirely, or to associate themselves with other claimants to the prophetic mantle. Third, and most importantly, there was a growing schismatic movement within the Strangite faction that arose in the late 1840s over a diversity of opinion concerning church doctrine.12


11 Quaife, Kingdom, 243.

12 Flanders, "Mormons Who Did Not Go West," 27.
This movement grew in strength and vocalness as it became known that Strang had adopted a form of plural marriage and was teaching it to his trusted aides.13

A wide assortment of exotic, bizarre, and egocentric movements emerged from Strang's organization during the late 1840s. For the most part these groups were small, loosely organized, highly unstable, and relatively short-lived. They were centered around one central prophet-leader, and their only real importance for the development of the Reorganization was that they filled a void of years. Old Mormons drifted from group to group searching for what they considered the "true faith" of the original church. Had these factions not been in existence the old churchmembers might well have left Mormonism altogether. As it was, however, many of them entered the Reorganization during the 1850s.

The most important group to arise out of the Strangite movement was led by William B. Smith, the hyperbolic, erratic, and ambitious younger brother of the prophet. Smith had been a member of the Twelve Apostles since the quorum's constitution in 1835, and had, largely through the good graces of his brother, been granted a degree of respect and power in the early church far beyond his capabilities. William rewarded the prophet for his nepotism by serving as an almost constant source of dissenion and trouble wherever he was sent.14 After the

14 Joseph Smith, Jr., The History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, B. H. Roberts, ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 2:295-96, 334, 338-44, 346-47, 352-55; Wilford Woodruff Journal, February 13, 1859 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).
death of the prophet, William saw a golden opportunity to assert power in
the church and petitioned Brigham Young in Nauvoo for the privilege
of ordination to the office of Presiding Patriarch, a fatherly, evange-
lically centered office in the Mormon priesthood, but one that carried
with it great prestige. The President of the Twelve recognized
William's claim to the Patriarchal office by right of lineage, and
after a few months, ordained him on May 24, 1845. During the summer
of 1845, however, William began to show signs of his characteristic
rebellion from authority. He asserted that the Patriarchal office was
the highest in the church, and sought to gain control of the administra-
tive machinery of the movement through the office. He apparently
believed, as his followers affirmed in one of his conferences, that
young Joseph Smith would eventually claim the presidency of the church
by right of lineage when he reached maturity. In the meantime he
argued that he should lead the church by what amounted to a regency.
These claims led to a major dispute between the Twelve and the Patriarch.

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16 The delay in ordination results from Smith's irregular behavior in
the mission field. T. Edgar Lyon, "Nauvoo and the Council of Twelve," in Restoration Movement, 203; "Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," May 24, 1845 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah); Smith, History of the Church, 7:395, 418; Brigham Young to Orson Pratt, May 28, 1843, Newel K. Whitney Family Papers (Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo Utah.

17 "Patriarchal," Times and Seasons (Nauvoo, Illinois), 6 (June 1, 1845), 920-22; John Taylor, Journal, June 27, 30, 1845, as quoted in B.H. Roberts, Succession in the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1894), 19-23; Brigham Young to Wilford Woodruff, June 27, 1845, Wilford Woodruff Papers (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah). The belief that the Presid-
ing Patriarch should succeed to the presidency of the church came from a
The Apostles finally engineered his excommunication on October 15, 1845, following which William undertook a savage attack on Brigham Young and the Twelve in the newspapers.

Smith quickly gave up the assault on Young and soon drifted out of Mormonism. He accepted a position as pastor in a Baptist church in the East, but his fundamental Mormon theology kept surfacing in his sermons, and his parishioners were about to try him for heresy when he resigned from his pastorate and returned to the Mormon fold. By the spring of 1846 Smith had joined with James Strang's faction because it was the only legitimate alternative to Young's organization, it would accept Smith as Presiding Patriarch, and it extolled the doctrine of lineal priesthood even to the extent of acknowledging the authority of young Joseph Smith to govern the church should he desire to do so. Smith did not last long as a Strangite, however. A High Council excommunicated him for rebellion against established authority.

This time William Smith struck out on his own arguing that he, 

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18 Smith, History of the Church, 7:483; "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons*, 6 (November 1, 1846), 1008.

19 The most famous and easily accessible of these is Smith's "A Proclamation," *Warsaw (Illinois) Signal*, October 29, 1845.


and he alone, should be his brother's successor. He wrote a number of detailed and provocative tracts that not only set forth his theological positions but also condemned the other Mormon splinter group leaders as apostates, usurpers, and charletons. William also undertook an effective missionary program, modelled on that of Strang, and reaped similar rewards.

William Smith's assertions that he had been called to be his brother's chosen successor were extremely attractive to many of the displaced Mormons who had been wandering in a spiritual wilderness since the death of the prophet and the decline of Strang. Most of these people had been jumping from faction to faction, and were completely confused over which splinter group held Mormonism's legitimate authority. He was able to convert a longtime churchmember from Cincinnati, Ohio, who had worked in the river city as a printer for years. His name was Isaac Sheen, and he proved most helpful to Smith's cause. Smith coaxed Sheen into editing and printing a newspaper, called the Melchisedec and Aaronic Herald, in behalf of Smith's claims. The nine numbers that appeared in 1849 and 1850 violently attacked Brigham Young and his followers.

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22 His first claim for his succession was a published broadside which read, William Smith, patriarch & prophet of the most high God. Latter Day Saints, beware of imposition (Ottawa, Illinois: n.p., 1847). This rare broadside can be seen in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah.


presented William's claims to the succession, and called for all Latter Day Saints to rally to his standard.  

Smith's organization was active during this period, and held a number of conferences. In 1849, at the height of Smith's influence as a Mormon religious leader, one of these conferences adopted a petition against the admission of the Brigham Young controlled State of Deseret into the Federal Union. The petition asked the United States House of Representatives to refuse Deseret's admission because the Mormons there were in opposition to the government of the United States, because they intended to develop an independent theocracy in the Great Basin and were usurpers of power that rightfully belonged to the Smith family.

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints arose in large part out of a schism within William Smith's sect in 1850. Two influential men, Jason W. Briggs and Zenas H. Gurley, Sr., were the prime movers in the church's reformation. After the death of the prophet these men had faced the dilemma of joining with one or another of the factions that arose. Their decision was very important because both were pastors of congregations located in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin.


27The term "Reorganized Church" was first used in an official sense at a meeting of the governing authorities of the church held May 1-5, 1856. Early Reorganization Minutes, Book A, May 1-5, 1856 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
respectively, and it would largely be accepted by their congregations. Each of them independently affiliated with various groups for a time, but they were always disappointed by what they considered apostacy, especially plural marriage. During the winter of 1845-1846 both Briggs and Gurley separately came into contact with James Strang and brought their followers into his organization, but when they learned that Strang was secretly practicing polygamy each man withdrew his own and his followers' support. Each set out independently, acknowledging no authority other than that of his congregation.

Early in 1850 Briggs and Gurley came into contact with the movement headed by William Smith and decided to investigate it. Briggs, recalling the events of this period during the 1870s, explained how he and others moved toward an acceptance of William Smith as president of the church. Briggs first took note of Smith and asked to attend a conference at Kentucky, in the spring of 1850. He attended the meetings, and became excited by the lineal succession doctrine Smith emphasized. Briggs later wrote that this concept had been "pretty clearly shown in the [scriptures of the restoration, but] . . . had been almost entirely overlooked or forgotten by the Saints." Confident of the correctness of

28Testimony of Jason W. Briggs, Complainant's Abstract of Pleading and Evidence in the Circuit Court of the United States, Western District of Missouri, Western Division, at Kansas City in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints vs. the Church of Christ et al. (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1893), 401-403; Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:195-200; Davis, Story of the Church, 392, 400-401; Richard P. Howard, "The Reorganized Church in Illinois, 1852-1882; "Search for Identity," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, 5 (Winter 1970), 64; Alma R. Blair, "The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: Moderate Mormons," in Restoration Movement, 214.

29Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:745.
Smith’s position, Briggs asked for admission into the movement, and Gurley soon followed Briggs’ example. Briggs and Gurley were instrumental in bringing “many branches and nearly all the Saints in Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin” into William Smith’s fold.  

Six months after the Covington, Kentucky conference of Autumn 1850, William Smith and an associate, Joseph Woods, traveled to Beloit to visit Briggs and other Saints in the vicinity. During the trip Briggs learned that Smith was involved in polygamy, just as had been Strang and Young. Briggs later wrote:

in the course of their visit it transpired, that they not only believed in the plurality of wives, but were really in the practice of it stealthily, and under the strongest vows of secrecy. This created in some minds a terrible conflict between faith and infidelity.  

Briggs himself was one of these upset by the revelation of Smith’s polygamy, but since he still had faith in the doctrine of lineal succession to the presidency and had no hard evidence that Smith was a polygamist, he decided to wait and see what would happen rather than create another messy schism.

Briggs agreed to attend a conference of Smith’s sect to be held at Palestine, Illinois on October 6, 1851. He went with high hopes of correcting what he considered to be errors of doctrine, but returned aghast at the services of the conference. The leaders of the sect, Briggs wrote, “threw off the mask, in what they called a priest’s lodge, and confessed to the belief and practice of polygamy in the name of the

30 Jason W. Briggs, “History of the Reorganized Church,” The Messenger, (Salt Lake City, Utah), 2 (November 1875), 1.
31 Ibid.
Lord." After this announcement, Briggs abandoned his attempts to reconcile his differences with Smith. He immediately took his branch out of fellowship with the Smith movement. Gurley and other pastors soon did the same. The feelings of many were summed up by Israel L. Rogers, who left William Smith's group immediately after the conference and eventually became the first Presiding Bishop of the Reorganized Church. He wrote that "I . . . did not continue with him long, as I soon discovered he was teaching the spiritual wife doctrine, which I knew was false. Those were dark days."  

Briggs became increasingly depressed after this meeting. One by one he had seen the organizations in which he had placed such high hopes fall by the wayside. As far as Briggs could tell, the entire church that he had loved since the days of the prophet had fallen into apostacy. All the religious choices left were unacceptable in Briggs' mind, so taking a page from the experiences of Joseph Smith, Jr., he began to implore God to show him which church to join. Briggs claimed that the answer to his pleadings came on November 18, 1851 while kneeling in prayer on the prairie near his Beloit home. He wrote that during the revelatory experience "visions of truth opened to my mind." He said a heavenly messenger visited him and counseled:

Behold, I have not cast off my people; neither have I changed in regard to Zion. Yea, verily, my people shall be redeemed, and my law shall be kept . . .

And because you have asked me in faith concerning William Smith, this is the answer of the Lord thy God concerning him: I, the Lord have permitted him to repre-

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32 Ibid.

33 Blair, "Moderate Mormons," in Restoration Movement, 228.
sent the rightful heir to the presidency of the high priesthood of my church by reason of the faith of prayers of his father, and his brothers, Joseph and Hyrum Smith, which came up before me in his behalf; and to respect the law of lineage, by which the holy priesthood is transmitted in all generations . . . And for this reason have I poured out my Spirit through his ministrations, according to the integrity of those who received them.

But as Esau despised his birthright, so has William Smith despised my law, and forfeited that which pertained to him as an apostle and high priest in my church . . . They [Smith and Joseph Woods, an associate] shall be degraded in their lives, and shall die without regard; for they have wholly forsaken my law, and given themselves to all manner of uncleanness, and prostituted my law and the keys of power entrusted to them, to the lusts of the flesh, and have run greedily in the way of adultery.

Therefore, let my elders . . . preach my gospel as revealed in the record of the Jews, and the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants; and cry repentance and remission of sins through Spirit; and in mine own due time will I call upon the seed of Joseph Smith, and will bring forth one mighty and strong, and he shall preside over the high priesthood of my church; . . . and the pure in heart shall gather, and Zion shall be re-inhabited, . . . and the Spirit said unto me, "Write, write, write the revelation and send it unto the Saints at Palestine, and at Voree, and at Waukesha, and to all places where this doctrine is taught as my law; and whosoever will humble themselves before me, and ask of me, shall receive of my Spirit a testimony that these words are of me. Even so." Amen.

This revelation was the first genuine document of the reorganization of the church. It affirmed some essential points for Briggs. It confirmed his suspicions that William Smith was a false prophet, it reinforced his belief that polygamy was a doctrine contrary to the laws

of God, and it altered his belief in lineal succession to the presidency to include only those who were direct descendants of Joseph Smith, Jr., of whom his eldest son, Joseph, was the most likely candidate to accept his father’s prophetic mantle. Briggs seemed not to have been aware at this time of the prophet’s blessings upon his oldest son, setting him apart for succession in the presidency, but had he been it would have merely reinforced his already strong convictions. Briggs, and the people that soon came to associate with him, thus, based the law of succession completely upon the concept of lineal priesthood. The Reorganization later defended its belief in this law. Writing in 1855 one of the officials told a prospective convert:

This [law] Brother Cutler (the plainly taught in the revelations of God in the order of the Priesthood) was unknown to us until revealed through the gift of the ghost to several who were tired and sick of the doctrine of men and of Devils and had by fasting and prayer sought the Lord to know from him the true and right way.

Out of this revelation came the first halting strides toward reorganization. Fundamental to this movement, however, was the belief that in time God would move upon the chosen successor and influence him to accept his rightful place at the head of the church.

Briggs read his revelation to a few men in his area a couple of days after writing it. They were undeniably wary of such a pronouncement, perhaps fearing the rise of yet another would-be prophet, and they

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36 Zenas H. Gurley, Sr. to Alpheus Cutler, November 29, 1855, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
questioned Briggs’ right even to receive such a revelation for the church. Finally, after lengthy debate, they decided to pray for a testimony of the document’s divinity. They prayed independently, but each confirmed the truthfulness of the vision, made copies to take to their Mormon friends, and asked Briggs to present it to the branch the next Sunday for approval. Briggs read the revelation to his congregation immediately.

Early in 1852 one of Briggs’ messengers, David Powell, brought Zenas Gurley a copy of the revelation. It was the first he had heard of Briggs’ experience, and he read the document carefully. In the beginning he, like Briggs’ associates in Beloit, was skeptical. He exclaimed that “I knew God would raise up a prophet, but who he was or where he would come from, I did not know.” Then he said confirmation came to him as it had to others. Gurley described the experience:

About ten or fifteen days after I had heard of this revelation, while sitting by my evening fire, my boys came running into my room, declaring with great earnestness that their little sister was up to Brother [Reuben] Newkirk’s, speaking and singing in tongues. For a moment I was overpowered with joy. I exclaimed, ‘Is it possible that God has remembered my family?’ Immediately I went up, and when I was within one or two steps of the house, I paused. I listened, and O the thrill of Joy that went through my soul! I knew that it was of God, My Child, my dear child was born of the Holy Spirit. I opened the door and went in. It appeared to me that the entire room was filled with the Holy Spirit. Shortly after I requested them to join with me in asking the Lord to tell us who the successor of Joseph Smith was. I felt anxious to know that I might bear a faithful testimony. We spent a few moments in prayer, when the Holy Spirit declared, “The

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successor of Joseph Smith is Joseph Smith, the son of Joseph Smith the Prophet. It is his right by lineage, saith the Lord your God."\textsuperscript{38}

Not long thereafter, Gurley wrote to Briggs telling him simply: "We have received evidence of your revelation."\textsuperscript{39} From that point on the destinies of Gurley and Briggs, and to some extent the destiny of young Joseph Smith III, were joined together.

During the first months of 1852 messengers carrying Briggs' revelation visited most of the branches in the Midwest. The Saints living in Waukesha, Voree, Burlington, Yellow Stone, and Beloit, Wisconsin, as well as those in Palestine and Jacksonville, Illinois accepted the document as a statement of God's divine will. Many within the congregations, accustomed as they were to a tightly organized ecclesiastical system, began to push for formal organization into a church. Most of the leaders were hesitant, however, doubting they had the authority to act. But within a few months popular pressure had increased to the extent that the various branch presidents decided to bring their congregations together in Beloit for a June 1852 conference. There the assembled believers would attempt a tentative "reorganization."

The purpose of this whole move was described later.

\begin{quote}
No new doctrines have been taught, nor have any new practices subversive of the first and primary object of the organization of the Church of Christ on earth been indulged in. A steady and unchanging purpose to restore to the church its original order, to assert the primitive faith,
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{39} Quoted in Smith and Smith, \textit{History of Reorganized Church}, 3:209; \textit{Davis Story of the Church}, 404.
to gather the fragment of a scattered people—in short,
to reorganize the Latter Day work, recognizing the
measure of progress justified by experience, sound
morality, and a Christ-like walk. It seeks to avoid
the errors of the enthusiast and the follies of the
innovator. It is decidedly conservative without being
anti-progressive. It is based upon the law of God,
and justified by the law of the land.40

The conference that met in Beloit on June 12 and 13, 1852 was
unique in the annals of Mormon history. It had no acknowledged head,
no organization for which it did business, no authority to act, and
no business to transact. It was united only in its opposition to
other Mormon factions, in its acceptance of the Briggs revelation as
divine, in its belief that Mormonism as set forth in the Scriptures was
correct, and in its affirmation that the successor in the prophetic
office was growing to maturity in Nauvoo and would one day step forth
to accept his calling. Jason Briggs remembered in later years that
"there was no action taken at that conference looking toward the
reorganization," but a number of resolutions were passed that formed
a loose creed for the believers assembled.41

The conference was managed very carefully by Zenas Gurley;
Jason Briggs, who served as chairman; and David Powell. They did not
want the conference to overstep what they considered their legal bounds
in holding this meeting. The resolutions offered by Briggs, Gurley, and
Powell passed easily and could be referred to as the Reorganization's
"Declaration of Independence." They read as follows:


41 Testimony of Jason Briggs, Complainants' Abstract, 395.
Resolved, that this conference regard the pretensions of Brigham Young, James J. Strang, James Colin Brewster, and William Smith and Joseph Wood's joint claims to the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, as an assumption of power, in violation of the laws of God, and consequently we disclaim all connection and fellowship with them.

Resolved, that the successor of Joseph Smith, Jun., as the Presiding High Priest, in the Melchisedec Priesthood, must of necessity be the seed of Joseph Smith, Jun., in fulfillment of the law and promises of God.

Resolved, that, as the office of First President of the Church grows out of the authority of the Presiding High Priest, in the high priesthood, no person can legally lay claim to the office of First President of the Church without a previous ordination to the Presidency of the High Priesthood.

Resolved, that we recognize the validity of all legal ordinations in this church, and will fellowship all such as have been ordained while acting within the purview of such authority.

Resolved, that we believe that the Church of Christ organized on the sixth day of April A. D., 1830, exists as on that day wherever six or more saints are organized according to the pattern in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants.

Resolved, that the whole law of the Church of Jesus Christ is contained in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Book of Doctrine and Covenants.

Resolved, that, in the opinion of this conference, there is no stake to which the saints on this continent are commanded to gather at the present time, but that the saints on all other lands are commanded to gather to this land preparatory to the reestablishment of the church in Zion, when the scattered saints on this land will also be commanded to gather and return to Zion, ... and it is the duty of the saints to turn their hearts and their faces toward Zion and supplicate the Lord for such deliverance.

Resolved, that we will, to the extent of our ability and means, communicate to all the scattered saints the sentiments contained in the foregoing statements.

Resolved, that this conference believes it the duty of the elders of the church, who have been legally ordained, to cry repentance and remission of sins to this generation, through obedience to the gospel as revealed in the record.
of the Jews, the Book of Mormon, and Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and not faint in the discharge of duty. 42

Because of the resolutions on preaching the gospel to the scattered flock of Mormonism, the conference asked that a missionary tract be prepared by Jason Briggs, Zenas Gurley, and John Harrington, one of Briggs' lieutenants. The tract was to state the claims of the "new organization" and point up the errors of the other factional leaders. Having done this, and having enjoyed some invigorating sermons, the conference adjourned determined to meet again on October 6, 1852. 43

Jason Briggs wrote that this first conference was successful beyond all expectation. Those assembled found "visible the tokens of divine care, which, like the clouds of the size 'of a man's hand,' to the ancient prophet, confirmed their faith, that what had been promised would surely be fulfilled, in the due time of the Lord." Briggs added, "and they were determined to wait and prepare for that 'time.'" 44 Following the conference the believers redoubled their missionary activities and brought in a number of new members. 45

During the late summer of 1852 an event of tremendous importance for the history of the Reorganization took place over a thousand miles from the stronghold of the "new organization." On August 5 Brigham Young publicly announced that his faction of the church had been teaching

42 Early Reorganization Minutes, Book A, June 13-14, 1852.
43 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:210.
44 Briggs, "History," Messenger, 2 (December 1875), 9.
45 Davis, Story of the Church, 407; Briggs, "A Condensed Account," 156.
and practicing polygamy as a tenet of the faith. The non-Mormon world, which had no understanding of the development of the practice of polygamy, was shocked, appalled, and generally disgusted with a religion that was already held in contempt by many. Public response was as immediate as it was unfavorable. Moreover, during the next several years the American public grew increasingly to dislike Mormons and hate their practice of polygamy. By 1856 the Gentile community of the North had become so outraged that the newly organized Republican Party, whose strength resided largely in the Midwest where the Reorganization arose, began to link Mormon polygamy with slavery in its political platform as "twin relics of barbarism" that must be destroyed.

The Reorganized Church, made up as it was largely of Saints who had rejected the claims of Brigham Young, James Strang, and William Smith because of their espousal of polygamy, felt it had to act to demonstrate to the world that it was completely monogamous, and, therefore, entirely different from the Ismaels in the western desert. The first tract of the infant Reorganization, although commissioned before Young's public announcement, was reworked by the authors before its publication in January 1853 to take into account the Brighamite practice of plural marriage. Gurley claimed that the men were prompted to add a three page denunciation of the doctrine because of a heavenly experience.

46 "Address on the Opening of the New Year," Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star (Liverpool, England), 15 (January 1, 1853), 1-5; Deseret News Extra (Salt Lake City, Utah), September 14, 1852; Briggs, "A Condensed Account," 157-58.

They were told

Polygamy is an abomination in the sight of the Lord God:
it is not of me; I abhor it, ... and the men or set of
men who practice it. I judge them not, I judge not those
who practice it. Their works shall judge them at the last
day. Be ye strong; ye shall contend against this doctrine;
many will be led into it honestly for the devil will seek
to establish it and roll it forth to deceive.48

In the addition Briggs, Gurley, and Harrington bitterly condemned the
doctrine, and relegated practitioners such as Brigham Young and William
Smith to purgatory.49

By March 1853 many of those associated with the reorganizing move-
ment were vociferously demanding that formal organization take place
soon. Briggs writing in the 1870s, mentioned that, "It had been no
part of the expectation of the brethren from the first to organize other
than branches, advise the branches to meet together in Conference capacity
for mutual instruction, and await the coming of the successor;" but the
members' importunings led Briggs and Gurley to reconsider the propriety
of beginning a complete reorganization of the church.50

Decidedly conservative and legalistic in their religious temper-
ament, the first leaders of the Reorganization were not sure that they
possessed the priestly authority to organize further. Not wishing to
appear to be placing power and authority in their own hands, these leaders
decided to pray about the matter, asking for not only guidance but also
for a blueprint for reorganization. On March 20, 1853, after days of

49Jason W. Briggs, Zenas H. Gurley, and John Harrington, A Word of
Consolation to the Scattered Saints (Janesville, Wisconsin: n.p., 1853),
21-23.
prayer, Henry H. Deam, an old, shy fellow who had been a member of the church for many years, visited Gurley and told him he had received a solution to the problem. Deam said he had been given a plan of organization. Gurley asked him to write it down:

Verily, thus saith the Lord, as I said unto my servant Moses, "See thou do all things according to the pattern," so I say unto you. behold, the pattern is before you. It is my will that you respect authority in my church; therefore let the greatest among you preside at your conference. Let three men be appointed by the conference to select seven men from among you, who shall compose a majority of the Twelve Apostles; for it is my will that the quorum should not be filled up at present. Let the President of the Conference, assisted by two others, ordain them. (The senior of them shall preside.) Let them select twelve men from among you, and ordain them to compose my High Council. -- Behold, ye understand the order of the Bishopric, the Seventy, the Elders, the Priests, Teachers, and Deacons. These organize according to the pattern. Behold, I will be with you unto the end; even so. Amen.51

Gurley apparently filed the document away and forgot about it until time for the April conference.

When the conference met in Wisconsin, the body asked if the acknowledged leaders of the movement had devised a plan of organization. A number of different designs were presented. The debate grew long and heated, but finally Gurley, after letting the other members of the conference have their say, brought forth the Deam statement for consideration. The conference accepted it as a divinely inspired directive52 and elected three men to appoint the Apostles. This committee chose Gurley, Briggs, Deam, Daniel B. Rasey, John Cunningham, George White, and Reuben Newkirk


as the members of the Quorum. Both Gurley and Dean were asked to serve as president of the Quorum, but each refused and its presidency fell to Briggs.

The April 1853 conference might appropriately be called the founding vehicle of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. A reinvigorated organization emerged from it enabling the church to begin missionary activities, form a loose central administration, and enforce a certain amount of orthodoxy upon the members. The Reorganization’s missionaries went forth thereafter with a threefold message: “to reassert the faith and doctrines contained in the sacred books, to reclaim the backslider, and to vindicate the character of the Latter Day Work, which had become odious through the evil deeds of its professed advocates.”

The movement’s second tract, published in 1854, clearly set forth these goals, as did its personal contact with other Mormon factions.

The Reorganized Church developed a number of valuable assets during the early 1850s that not only made it attractive to others, but also

53 Early Reorganization Minutes, Book A, April 8, 1853; Briggs, “History,” Messenger, 2 (December 1875), 21-22.

54 Briggs, “History,” Messenger, 2 (December 1875), 26-27.


56 The Voice of the Captives, Assembled at Zerahemla, In Annual Conference April 6, 1854, to their Brethren Scattered Abroad (Janesville, Wisconsin: n.p., 1854).

shaped its future form in both doctrine and policy. Its organizers were, contrary to the egocentric and autocratic operators of other factions, very conservative in their moves to bring about the "new organization." They never let it appear to anyone that they were anxious for the status and power of leadership as had been the case with Brigham Young, James Strang, William Smith, and a host of others. The organizers were, in addition, men who had been minor figures in the church while the prophet lived. As such, they knew little of the prophet, and even less of the affairs in Nauvoo. Their understanding of the gospel rested almost entirely on the written word, the scriptures of the restoration, and they used them as measuring sticks against which all teachings had to be compared. This provided for a literalism in the Reorganized Church that was more pronounced than it had been during the days of the prophet in Nauvoo. Joseph Smith III, in much the same situation as the Reorganization's prime movers, naturally evolved similar interpretations and ideas. Moreover, the "new organization's" leaders claimed that the successor should be a literal descendant of Joseph Smith the prophet, with the birthright falling to the first-born son. They denounced polygamy, political and civil disobedience to the laws of the land, and temple ordinances of the faith. They affirmed the restoration's trilogy of beliefs as the distinctive features of the movement: belief in the divinity of the Book of Mormon, expectation of the continuing revelation of God to his people, and the hope for the establishment of the earthly kingdom of God. All of these factors set the movement in good stead in gaining members from the splinter groups of the church and in gaining friends in the non-Mormon community. What developed, then, was an organization that was stable, conservative, and acceptable to the mainstream of American religion.
The years between 1851 and 1856 were fundamental and formative for the Reorganized Church. Little of the developing movement's story was known to the young man who would eventually accept its leadership in 1860. Joseph Smith III had received copies of the two missionary tracts, *A Word of Comfort to the Scattered Saints* and *The Voice of the Captives*, but he had made no response to them and no other contact had been attempted. In 1856 the church and the man converged for their first head-to-head confrontation. The outcome precipitated the events of April 6, 1860, when Joseph Smith assumed the prophetic office his father had once held.

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Chapter 6

THE SEARCH

Twenty-four year old Joseph Smith, oblivious to much of the reorganizing activities of Briggs and Gurley, moved with his young bride to a farm he owned outside of Nauvoo in the early part of November 1856. The stout, bearded Smith spent most of those first days on the farm getting the ground in shape for planting the next spring. He had never worked so hard before, and his short, two-hundred-pound body ached every evening. Emmeline rubbed him down daily with linaments, but his muscles still ached. After the day’s work the young couple settled down to a quiet evening at home. Both were avid readers and enjoyed the popular magazines and books, especially Harpers’ Monthly and the novels of Charles Dickens and James Fennimore Cooper. They also loved to play games, especially chess and often held small parties where Joseph demonstrated his superior abilities in both memory and strength. On other evenings Smith dug his law books out from the corner dresser and sat at the kitchen table to brush up on some obscure point of law.¹

Although happy in this simple life, Joseph Smith still felt a certain uneasiness which was a nagging reminder that he had a destiny yet to fulfill, and that this lifestyle could not last long. As the uneasiness continued Smith began to take an increasingly active interest in the

detailed study of Mormonism. He delved into the nuances of doctrine, history, and current development of the sect, and became one of the most knowledgeable members in the community of the Mormon religion. While concerned about his destiny Smith projected an attitude of calmness, reasoning that God would take care of everything. He did as he told a friend:

examine all [doctrines] faithfully and carefully, weighing well the merits of demerits before you commit yourself to any; and after a thorough examination just ask yourself the question if the person who liveth uprightly and honestly before the world, having a conscience void of reproach is not a true Christian whether they have joined the tenets of any church or not and you will come to the conclusion that by being truly honest with uprightness of spirit and exercising the humane faculties you or anyone else is actually fulfilling the destiny for which you were placed on earth.2

By late 1856 Smith had come to believe that the vision he had seen in 1853, which told him that at some future date he would have to choose worldly success or religious service, would be realized soon. Smith, thus, began looking for that moment of decision. His decision did not come in a "moment" as he had anticipated, however, but rather in a series of subtle choices he made between 1856 and 1860.

The first, which was tremendously important in charting Smith's course into the Reorganization, came in 1856, when Smith began to reconsider his beliefs concerning the Utah Mormons. In 1853 he had claimed to have experienced a spiritual visitation in which he was told not to unite with the Utah Mormons, but Smith began to doubt the validity of

2Joseph Smith to Emma Knight, May 24, 1855, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
this experience because of conversations with a local farmer, Christopher E. Yates, and his son, Putnam. The Yates family had lived in Hancock County since before the Brighamite exodus of 1846, and had often stood up for the rights of the Mormons during the early 1840s. Consequently, mobs in the country had labelled Yates a "Jack-Mormon," and had burned his barn, destroyed his crops, and killed his livestock. Each time Smith and the Yates men talked religion they eventually got around to discussing Mormonism. Smith always acknowledged his belief in the pure Mormonism of his father and denounced the Utah variety. Once Smith admitted that one day he hoped to carry on his father's work.

In one such discussion, Putnam suggested that Smith seriously consider going to Utah, where Putnam thought, he might do a great deal of good. As a reformer, Putnam suggested, Smith could take "the lead away from Brigham; breaking up that system of things there." Even if he did not want to reform Mormonism he could still go to Utah and adopt "the style of things there, become a leader, get rich, marry three or four wives and enjoy yourself." Yates went so far as to say that going to Utah might be a duty to the faith. None of this rested easily with Smith, and he told Putnam that he could never, under any circumstances, brook the practice of polygamy.

But Smith later began to examine his beliefs about Utah Mormonism and to question the religious experience of 1853. He considered the options open to him. "Why not go to Utah?" Smith asked himself. He

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reasoned:

There are the men who were with my father, or a great part of them. There, a large part of the family; there, also, seem to be the only ones making a profession of belief in Mormonism who appear to be doing anything. Does not duty demand that I go there and clear my name and honor of the charge of ingratitude to my father's character? Is not polygamy, against which you object, a correct tenet? Is not your objection one of prejudice only? These and a thousand others . . . were suggested, and added their weight to the difficulty of the situation.

Smith mulled these questions for days, chasing one elusive answer after another. Finally, he decided to pray for answers to his questions.

The result came in the form of a religious experience. He wrote:

I heard a slight noise like the rush of the breeze, that arrested my speech and my attention. I turned my gaze slightly upward and saw descending towards me a sort of cloud; funnel-shaped with the wide part upward. It was luminous and of such color and brightness that it was clearly seen, though the sun shone in its summer strength. It descended rapidly and settling upon and over me enveloped me completely so that I stood within its radiance.

As he stood in the light he was told to have nothing to do with Utah Mormonism because, he later reported, a voice said, "the light in which you stand is greater than that which they possess." After making this statement, the vision ended as quickly as it had come. The experience, of course, settled the question of going to Utah, but it still left him without an answer to the question of which church to join.

A second great event pushing Smith toward the Reorganization took place near the end of November 1856. Two Utah Mormon missionaries, were George A. Smith, a relative of Joseph's, and Erastus Snow, a member of the

Twelve Apostles since the 1840s. George Smith was en route to Washington, D. C., where he served as a “Delegate from Utah to ask for the admission of this Territory into the Union as a state,” and Snow was heading east to undertake a mission in the New England states. They came to the Smith farm ostensibly to bring Joseph a copy of Frederick Piercy’s book, The Route to Great Salt Lake, “which contained a detailed account of a trip from Liverpool to Salt Lake, sketches and portraits of individuals met on the way, . . .” and the like. Joseph Smith had posed for a crayon sketch while Piercy was in Nauvoo, and the artist-author wanted to thank him by presenting him a copy of the work. Far more important than delivering this gift, however, was the opportunity afforded Snow and George Smith to visit with Joseph and determine his views towards the church in the Great Basin.

After a friendly greeting, Snow began to ask leading questions of Joseph, seeking to determine his beliefs in Christianity, the Book of Mormon, his father, and the possibility of migrating to Utah. Joseph answered candidly that he believed in the “Bible and the Book of Mormon, . . . but not as you people interpret them.” He went on to say that he could never “go out there and make my home with you while you are teaching and practicing as you are.” The two missionaries quickly realized

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5 Joseph Smith to L. O. Littlefield, August 14, 1883, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, the Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 15-16.

6 George A. Smith to Joseph P. Smith, July 17, 1872, George A. Smith Collection (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).

that he was referring to the doctrine of plural marriage. Realizing
the strength of young Smith's conviction, they concluded that they could
never persuade the son of the prophet to join them. Snow asked Smith
to reconsider, adding that many people in Utah already considered him
one of them, and thought that his residence among them only natural. 8
Snow knew, however, that Joseph Smith would never be a part of them
and let the matter drop.

Smith was hospitable to his old Nauvoo friends and invited them
to stay for supper, but the conversation soon turned to other subjects
outside the realm of religion. They talked two or three hours more, and
when the men finally left late that evening all were still friends who re-
spected each other's views. The Utah representatives left the Smith
farm convinced that Joseph believed neither in the divine mission of
his father, nor in the Book of Mormon. They walked back to Emma Bidamon's
boarding house to spend the night certain in the belief that Joseph Smith
had rejected his heritage in the church. 9 Had Joseph decided to go to
Utah he probably would have been accepted, but he would have been forced
to accept Brigham Young and accept him as interim leader. Smith would
have been a prodigal son returning home, but with no guarantee as to
what future role he might play in the church. Smith, understandably,
was not willing to do this, especially since he considered it degrading,
unnecessary, and doctrinally wrong. When Erastus Snow and George Smith walked down the snow-packed road away from the Smith farm, the flirtation with Joseph Smith ended. At no future time did any Utah church authority attempt to induce Joseph Smith to enter the Brighamite movement. Thus, not only had Smith rejected the Utah faction of the church as a movement that he might join, the factional leaders there had finally rejected him as well. ¹⁰

With the possibility of joining the Utah faction ended, it would seem that when two missionaries from the Reorganized Church visited Smith on December 6, 1856 he would have eagerly greeted them and wished to hear their message. Such was not the case, however, as Smith defiantly turned a cold shoulder toward them. At the fall conference of 1856 the Reorganization had voted to send two members of the Seventy, Samuel H. Gurley and Edmund C. Briggs, to visit Joseph Smith, and to ask him to lead them. ¹¹ The Reorganization's members believed

the response to the message would be the immediate appearance of Joseph, the eldest son, to take the place of his father; for until now, it had not been fully determined in the minds of some of the brethren which of the four sons would be called forth to that dignity. ¹²

These Seventies carried with them a very special letter to Smith, supposedly written by Briggs under inspiration, which laid out the hopes and claims of the "new organization." The document read:

¹¹ William E. Berrett, The Restored Church (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1974), 212.
THE CHURCH IN ZARAHEMLA, WISCONSIN, TO JOSEPH SMITH

Our faith is not unknown to you, neither our hope in the regathering of the pure in heart enthralled in darkness, together with the means, to the accomplishment of the same viz: that the seed of him, to whom the work was first committed should stand forth and bear the responsibility (as well as wear the crown) of a wise master builder—to close up the breach, and to combine in one a host, who, though in captivity and sorely tried, still refuse to strengthen the bonds of usurpers. As that seed, to whom pertains this right, and Heaven appointed duty, you can not be unmindful nor indifferent. The God of Abram, Isaac and Jacob covenanted with them and their seed. So the God of Joseph covenanted with him and his seed, that his word should not depart out of his mouth nor out of the mouth of his seed, nor out of the mouth of his seed’s seed, till the end come. A zorubbabel in Israel art thou. As a nail fastened in a sure place, so are the promises unto thee to make thee a restorer in Zion: --to set in order the house of God. And the Holy Spirit that searcheth the deep things of God, hath signified to us that the time has come. For, through fasting and prayer hath the answer from God come; unto us saying, Communicate with my servant Joseph Smith, son of Joseph the Prophet. Arise, call upon God and be strong, for a deliverer art thou to the Latter Day Saints. And the Holy Spirit is thy prompter. The Apostles, Elders and Saints who have assembled with us, have beheld the vacant seed and the seed that is wanting. And like Ezra of old with his brethren, by the direction of the Holy Spirit have we sent faithful messengers to bear this our message to you, trusting that you will by their hands notify us of your readiness to occupy that seat, and answer to the name and duties of that seed. For this have our prayers been offered up without ceasing for the last five years. We are assured that the same Spirit that has testified to us, has signified the same things to you. Many have arisen perverting the work of the Lord. But the good and the true are throughout the land waiting the true successor of Joseph the Prophet. In our publications--sent to you--we have shown the right of succession to rest in the literal descendant of the chosen seed, to whom the promise was made, and also the manner of ordination thereto. We can not forbear reminding you that the commandments, as well as the promises given to Joseph, your father, were given to him, and to his seed. And in the name of our master, even Jesus Christ, as moved upon by the Holy Ghost we say, Arise in the strength of the Lord and realize those promises by executing those commandments. And we, by the grace of God are thy helpers in restoring the exiled sons and daughters of Zion to their inheritances in the kingdom of God and to the faith once delivered to the Saints,
Holding fast to that which is good and resisting evil we invoke the blessings of the God of Israel upon these and upon all Saints. For whom we will ever pray.13

Gurley and Briggs arrived at the Smith farm about four in the afternoon on December fifth carrying their precious document securely in a pouch. Joseph was not at home when they knocked at the weather-beaten door, but Emmeline invited the men to come in and wait. Within a short time Smith entered and his wife introduced him to the missionaries. From this point the meeting was anything but cordial. They told Smith that they represented the Reorganized Church and gave him the handwritten letter from Jason Briggs. Joseph read the message and grew extremely angry over the audacity of a church that would try to win him over with such rhetoric. He thrust the document back into their hands and told them: "Gentlemen, I will talk with you on politics or on any other subject, but on religion I will not allow one word spoken in my house." The rebuff shocked both Briggs and Gurley, but their reactions differed. Gurley broke down and wept while Briggs became angry. "Mr. Smith," Briggs retorted, "while we respect your feelings as a man, and do not wish to injure your feelings yet we will not allow you to hinder us in doing our duty, as we have been sent by the command of God to tell you what we know and most surely believe in relation to your calling as the successor of your father."14

Smith rose to his feet and told the missionaries that they were acting rudely and that they were no longer welcome in his home. He

began nudging them toward the door and as they resisted he began to push them harder. Had it not been for Emmeline, he would have thrown them out, but she managed to calm him, and the three men sat down to talk more amiably for a while longer. Joseph refused to discuss religion, however, and the missionaries left two hours later with only Smith’s commitment that he would think over the proposition and meet them the next day in Nauvoo to tell them his decision.15

Briggs and Gurley returned to Nauvoo in the evening and spent a fitful night in the Bidamon boarding house. The next morning, a Sunday, they ate a leisurely breakfast and waited for Joseph. He soon appeared in the mansion house door and asked to speak with the men in private. They went upstairs to a deserted bedroom and closed the door. As Smith turned to speak, the missionaries noticed that he looked a little haggard, the sure sign of a sleepless night. Smith did not mince words. He told them that he had received no indication that the Reorganization’s proposal was the will of God, and until such time as he was satisfied that it was divine will he would take no part in the church. He told the missionaries that he wanted to be left alone to prepare for whatever God wanted him to do, and if it included serving as president of the Reorganized Church the Lord would somehow make him aware of the call without human intervention. Until that time Smith asked to be left alone, telling them in a fit of exasperation: “If you men have been

commanded of God to do anything, why can't you do it without reference to me, for I know that no man or the angels from heaven can lead the church in the condition it is now in." Briggs and Gurley were disappointed, but accepted the decision as a hopeful "maybe." Gurley asked if he might offer a prayer before they parted. As he did so, Briggs remembered that a peaceful feeling came over the group. Smith then prayed with the missionaries for guidance. When he had finished he told them:

"I am through and will take the responsibility upon myself for my own actions." He then opened the door, walked down the creaky stairs, out the front door, and back to the farm. Briggs and Gurley stayed in the room for a few minutes discussing the outcome of this first mission to young Joseph. While not pleased, they were hopeful.

Samuel Gurley returned to Zarahemla, Wisconsin within a few days after the visit to Nauvoo and reported to the church leaders. Although Smith committed himself to nothing, he did seem willing to accept the direction of the Holy Spirit. Edmund Briggs remained in Nauvoo for nearly a year, working for Smith on his farm part of the time and preaching whenever he could. He took every opportunity to show Joseph Smith the correctness of the Reorganized Church's teachings. While Briggs made little progress, he was encouraged by the fact that Smith appeared "aware of his calling as the successor of his father, but that human agency would not influence him to take any stand in the church, and that he was unalterably and utterly opposed to polygamy." Smith noted in his

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18 Briggs, "Visit to Nauvoo," 455.
memoirs that he had "turned a deaf ear to their requests," but nothing could have been further from the truth. Briggs, in the course of the year, prodded Smith to study the church’s scriptures and history more fully, and, most importantly, to think seriously about the claims of the Reorganization. Although Briggs failed to win commitment from the young farmer, he made Smith consider the whole matter more carefully, and thus pushed him a good deal closer to the decision of 1860 to join the movement.

While the religious question occupied much of Joseph Smith’s leisure time during the next three-and-one-half years, a series of difficult circumstances outside the realm of religion goaded him toward a greater reliance upon God as a source of power, guidance, and belief. In partnership with his brother, Frederick G. W. Smith, Joseph had gone into business managing several hundred acres of prime farmland. The farming operation proved moderately successful for a time, but in 1856 began a series of wet years and recurring infestations of army worms which severely limited the farm’s production. The bad weather and pest invasions forced the brothers to borrow money in order to continue operating. By the winter of 1858 they were 2,500 dollars in debt. When Frederick died suddenly in 1862, the debts incurred by the partners-


20Joseph Smith to Israel A. Smith, February 17, 1898, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.

21Joseph Smith to Cousin Mary B., December 4, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1A, 59-61.
ship which were far from being paid off, fell to Joseph. Many years later he remembered the situation bitterly, and advised his children to "Keep out of debt." Forty years of paying interest has emphasized this lesson to me and I want my sons to profit by my errors."22

His wife's mother, none to pleased with Emmeline's marriage in the first place, used Smith's financial difficulties to try to destroy their fairly happy marriage. One day in 1857, Smith later recalled, he took Emmeline to visit the Griswold's for the day while he attended to business in another town. When he returned after a long day's work, he found Emmeline gloomy and tired. She had been crying most of the day. Upon questioning his in-laws, Smith found that he had been the day's topic of discussion and the conclusions reached had been less than favorable. He learned that his relatives "had stressed the fact that I had 'turned Mormon,' [a reference to Smith's having been visited by the various missionaries and to his systematic study of Mormonism] as they called it, and otherwise talked so disparagingly of me, of the work with which I was trying to make a living, and of its successive failures, that my wife had become quite discouraged and embittered towards me." Smith told the family he would not accept their meddling, and that if they did again he would never return or even allow Emmeline to visit them again. Seething with anger, Smith told his wife to gather her things and get into the wagon, and when she hesitated Smith completely lost his temper, as he later recalled the incident:

22 Joseph Smith to Israel A. Smith, December 26, 1898, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
I told her to just act according to her own pleasure and preference at whatever cost to me. Taking out my watch I gave her five minutes in which to make up her mind what to do—whether she would go with me or stay with her mother. This may have seemed cruel, but it is part and parcel of the story and romance of my life. I was fully determined not to be at warfare with her or her family, and so left her entirely free to make her own choice, resigned to have her leave me out of the reckoning if she felt inclined so to do. I am glad to say that her love for me triumphed, and before five minutes had expired, she came to my side.

Smith’s acceptance by the Griswold family grew because of his hard-headed stand that day. Thereafter, Smith looked back on the financial difficulties of 1857 and 1858, as well as the accompanying problems with his in-laws, as a humbling experience that prodded him toward accepting his calling as his father’s successor in the prophetic office of the church.

Joseph Smith developed an intense interest in politics during the four years between 1856 and 1860, and to some extent, this interest in politics also pointed him toward his decision to unite with the Reorganized Church. Smith had leaned for several years toward a strong denunciation of slavery. He was an antislavery man, and as such engaged in morality politics. He supported, for instance, the proposed plan of his father in 1844, calling for the federal government to purchase the slaves in the southern states and set them free. He reflected in his memoirs that such schemes were idealistic. “I had not at that time,” he exclaimed, “sufficient political acumen to recognize the impracticality if not the impossibility of this way of trying to settle the question.” He added, “Later I came to see at least two reasons why it was not


\[24^{24}\] Emma Bidamon to Joseph Smith, December 27, 1868, Emma Smith Bidamon Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
feasible--one, that the laws of the slaveholding states deemed slaves chattel property and it was not lawful for States to arbitrarily dispose of any individual property of its citizens, and the other, that there were at the time about three million slaves, the price of which, being estimated at the average of seven hundred dollars--an amount that would have staggered the financiers of any government."

Notwithstanding Smith's youthful idealism, he was well aware of the political events taking place around him. When he cast his first vote in a national election in 1856, Smith acted out of conviction and voted for the man who most nearly represented his antislavery ideals, John C. Fremont, "Pathmaker of the West," and candidate of the newly formed Republican party. Fremont and the Republicans' stand against both slavery and polygamy attracted Smith. Smith's politics did not necessarily make him a popular person in Nauvoo. Hancock County, Illinois voted overwhelmingly Democratic in the 1856 presidential election, with Buchanan defeating Fillmore and Fremont nearly two to one. The vote was even more lopsided in Nauvoo itself. Smith cast one of only six votes for Fremont in the city. Smith's pinchant for following the dictates of his heart suited him well in the moral laden atmosphere of religion and nudged him toward the church.

This is further demonstrated in Smith's other political encounters in the late 1850s. When the Supreme Court handed down its decision in the Dred Scott case in 1857, Smith recalled that, "my political blood figuratively boiled within me." When not long after a Missourian asked

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26 Ibid., 529.
27 Carthage (Illinois) Republican, November 14, 1856.
Smith if he had seen a slave pass through the town, he replied, "Well, sir, I haven't seen him, but if I had, I would not tell you, because I am no slave catcher!" Seeing that the slave catcher from Missouri had been insulted by his response, Smith mischievously decided to state his position a little stronger telling him that had he seen the slave he would have given him some money and wished him luck. When reminded that the Fugitive Slave Law required cooperation in apprehending runaway slaves, Smith replied, "don't you know that the United States courts and the courts of this State combined could not make laws fast enough or binding enough to make a slave catcher out of me! You need never ask me to help you or any one catch runaway slaves!" This was not a popular stand in the Illinois counties near the slave state of Missouri. During a minor election campaign in 1857, the Quincy Herald published about fifty miles south of Nauvoo, ran a series of proslavery editorials denouncing the antislavery politicians and asking the people during the upcoming election to "Rebuke the Nigger-thieves."

Despite his antislavery stand, Smith did not join the Republican party at this time. He was, however, politically active, and in 1857 the inhabitants of Nauvoo elected him justice of the peace. Although Smith

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29Quincy (Illinois) Herald, October 1857.

later disavowed any desire for political office, he remained active in Hancock County politics, possibly continuing an interest going back to his days as Kellogg’s law student in Canton. In addition to serving as justice of the peace from 1857 until he moved from Nauvoo in 1866, Smith also served as school director for the first ward during the same period. As late as 1860 he ran for mayor of Nauvoo. Although he received a substantial number of votes especially from the German and French minorities in the town, he lost the election.

During the hard-fought Senatorial campaign of 1858 between Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln, Smith finally decided to join the Republican party. On October 11, 1858 Douglas visited Carthage and delivered one of his many speeches about popular sovereignty. Smith had long felt a bond of friendship toward Douglas because of the help he had given his father in the 1840s when he had been a judge in Monmouth, and fully intended to vote for him. He arrived at the site of the speech early to assure himself a good spot and waited as some four thousand gathered to hear the little Senator.

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31 Saints’ Herald, 26 (June 15, 1876), 370-71

32 Ibid., 368-69; Joseph Smith to Israel A. Smith, March 12, 1909, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers; Horace S. Eldridge, Journal 1857-1858, December 12, 1857, (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).


34 Carthage Republican, September 30, 1858.

Joseph later remembered that as soon as the introductions had been made and the crowd cheered for Douglas to stand, the Senator arose and nearly keeled over from intoxication. As he began to speak Douglas showed unmistakable signs of drunkenness. He slurred his words so badly that many could not understand him. Those that could were little influenced by the feeble argument that he was able to make in his befuddled state of mind. Smith, himself a teetotaler and something of a prohibitionist, was so appalled by this display of public drunkenness, that he began to heckle the men on the stand and demand that they make Douglas stop. They ignored him, but the experience was enough to convince Smith that neither Stephen Douglas nor the Democratic party was worthy of his support. He returned completely disillusioned.

Eleven days later the relatively unknown Abraham Lincoln visited Carthage, and five thousand people turned out to see the man who was giving Douglas such a good run. Smith went to hear him speak. The speakers mounted a crude platform erected on the courthouse square. Over the platform was a rough canopy made of tree boughs, and Smith remembered that Lincoln was so tall that he could not stand erect under it. When he arose to speak he had to hunch down. "His eyes were dull," observed Smith, "his manner awkward, and his voice sharp," with the result that Smith felt pity and shame for the candidate. The situation became even more ludicrous, recalled Smith:

He had spoken only a very few minutes when he abandoned his stooping posture, stepped a little back from the front of the platform, squared his shoulders and attempted to straighten up. His head came into sudden contact with the boughs above him. A humorous expression aroused his

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face and, turning his head slightly to one side, with a sudden movement he thrust it upward, entirely through the bowery business above him! There he stood towering, like some queer creature whose head was detached from its body! The crowd erupted with laughter. Soon some men took off the boughs, and Lincoln warmed to his listeners. He grew increasingly eloquent, entrancing the audience with his words. He gave them straight antislavery doctrine, and, as the Carthage newspaper reported, succeeded in "stirring up sectional prejudice and arraying one portion of the Union against the other." The newspaper editor claimed that "if his principles are successful in our national legislation the Union could not stand six months." Lincoln's antislavery declarations were just what Joseph Smith wanted to hear. His personality and beliefs made him most attractive to Smith. He recalled that "by the time the lecture was over, I was completely and altogether a Lincoln man, with a political conscience more firmly fixed than ever in its opposition to slavery and its evils." Smith became a staunch Republican and remained loyal to the party until his death in 1914.

All this time members of the Reorganized Church had been awaiting Smith's acceptance of the presidency patiently. Although there had been no further official contact since Edmund Briggs left Nauvoo in late 1857, church members were still hopeful. W. W. Blair, a very effective young traveling minister, repeatedly wrote in his 1859 diary

37 Ibid., 82 (April 30, 1935), 559.
38 Carthage Republican, October 28, 1858.
about finding Saints "looking for young Joseph."

The Saints, although having their patience sorely taxed, were convinced that their efforts would in time pay off. Jason Briggs remembered in the 1870s that "all had been done to this end that had been required, according to the light and ability given, and nothing remained but to wait the full period of that 'due time.'"

In 1859 the religious wanderings of Joseph Smith finally came to an end. He firmly believed that God was leading him along the correct path with the various spiritual experiences to which he attested, and one final religious experience eventually gave him the answer to his searchings. He was prompted to seek out this final spiritual answer to his future because of his continuing financial insecurity. In addition, his personal life was anything but stable. Smith and his wife fought constantly. Moreover, Emmeline was often seriously ill and was near death on several occasions. If financial difficulties, marital instability, and his wife's illness were not enough, Smith's children

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42 Joseph Smith to A. V. Gibbons, June 1, 1893, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4, 396; Joseph Smith to J. M. Stubbert, May 19, 1896, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #6 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).


also suffered from bad health. Smith lost his second child, a girl named Evelyn Rebecca, born on January 25, 1859. During her first summer she became ill with convulsions. More than fifty years later Smith recalled how infuriated he was and how helpless he felt as he watched his baby daughter, "unrelieved of her pain, restlessly moving her head from side to side as she lay in her little crib, and constantly moaning with her suffering." Finally Eva died on September 30, 1859. Smith recorded his grief: "At home all day evening little Eva dying Oh! how sorrowful 9 o'clock Eva dead." This sad and heartrending event, coupled with all his other problems, moved Joseph Smith to ponder the religious convictions of his father's faith.

At this very time Smith's options within the Mormon faith were closing down. The Utah faction had already been eliminated by both Smith and those in authority in the Great Basin. Other factions were disintegrating, and, one by one, were dying. James Strang had been murdered in 1856, and his movement dwindled. Alpheus Cutler's group had started to decline because of careless stewardship of its possessions,

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49 Ibid., November 3, 1859.
and could claim only four families by 1859. Lyman Wight had died in 1858, and his movement had gone with him. Charles Thompson’s organization had fallen apart when it was found that he was cheating his members out of money and property. Much the same was happening to all the other varied factions of the church that had emerged following the prophet’s death. The Reorganized Church was virtually the only viable Mormon congregation left which Joseph could join.

Pushed to the brink of despair by his personal and financial problems, Joseph Smith felt as if he were being punished excessively by God, that he was somehow being tested as Job had been in an earlier day. The oppression that Smith felt was captured in the words of a poem he wrote during this time.

I stood upon a rugged steep, my staff
the stay of many a weary mile, had chopped
from out my nervous grasp, just and gained
the height wherein I stood. My feet
were torn and bruised by jagged stones which
here and there
Lay thick upon the path which I had passed; . . .
Below I saw but faintly, here and there
A portion of the path o’er which I came;--
A darksome, dreary, tangled, lonesome path--
So full of fearful chasms, long wastes between,
That I had toiled so weary and so sad,--
Beset, distressed, perplexed, almost o’erthrown.
My heart grew heavy with my woes, and faint
with hunger unappeased, I stood; while thought
Dark as the gathering gloom in my brain oppressed.51

Out of the depths of this depression Smith received the final answer for which he had searched so long. He recalled the incident in his 1880 autobiography. It was the fall of 1859, and he had worried greatly over his religious future. He said that while praying he received an angelic


visitation. In this experience he was told: "The Saints reorganizing at Zarahemla and other places, is the only organized portion of the Church accepted by me. I have given them my Spirit and will continue to do so while they remain humble and faithful." Following his decision to join with the Reorganization, Smith made no attempt to contact any of the sect's leaders for some three months. The reasons for the delay are unclear, but in all likelihood he wanted to wait until his family and friends could get used to the idea. Smith called his family together to tell them that he had decided to join the Reorganization. They met at his mother's home, and Smith seated them in the parlor so that they were facing the oil portrait of Joseph Smith, Jr. that hung in the room. With great solemnity Joseph recited the events of the past few years, describing his financial and personal difficulties, and how they had prodded him to explore religion and look to God for answers to his questions. He told them about his spiritual experiences, how he was convinced that God had called him to a special mission in life, and that it would require his joining the "new organization" of the church. The reactions of the members of his family were varied. His two middle brothers, Frederick and Alexander, were convinced that Joseph had lost his mind, but his youngest brother, David, applauded his courage in taking such a stand on behalf of his father's work. Joseph's wife acquiesced without complaint, remembering her pledge before their marriage not to stand in his way should he ever decide to join a Mormon church. Joseph's

mother expressed her support of his decision and her willingness to consider joining the Reorganization herself. The Major, on the other hand, thought Joseph was giving up the opportunity to really achieve something worthwhile in life by not continuing to pursue his business and political interests. Lewis Bidamon, thus, tended to discount the decision on purely pragmatic grounds, but thought enough of Joseph's good sense not to oppose it. 53

Having told his family, Smith contacted the leaders of the church. On March 5, 1860 he wrote an old friend, William Marks, who had united with the Reorganization in 1859, informing him of his determination to affiliate with the movement. He wrote:

I am soon going to take my father's place at the head of the Mormon Church, and I wish that you and some others, those you may consider the most trust-worthy, the nearest to you, to come and see me; that is, if you can and will. I am somewhat undecided as to the best course for me to pursue, and if your views are, upon a comparison, in unison with mine, and we can agree as to the best course, I would be pleased to have your cooperation. I would rather you would come previous to your conference in April at Amboy. I do not wish to attend the conference, but I would like to know if they, as a body, would endorse my opinions. You will say nothing of this to any but those who may wish to accompany you here. 54

When Marks received the letter a few days later he was ecstatic, because it looked like the long promised successor was close to uniting with the Reorganization. He immediately wrote to Israel L. Rogers and William Wallace Blair, two of his closest associates in the church, asking them to accompany him to Nauvoo to talk with young Smith. On

53 Ibid., 773-74.

March 19, 1860 Marks visited Rogers in his Sandwich, Illinois home, and they agreed that they would leave for Nauvoo the next day. Since they had received no word from Blair, Rogers decided to catch the train to Plano, Illinois, pick up the church leader and meet Marks in Burlington, Iowa the next day. Rogers travelled excitedly to Blair's home, but when he arrived he found, as he noted:

Brother Blair at home, attending to his sick nephew. He had failed to receive Brother Mark's letter and therefore was quite unprepared to accompany me. He, however, was not surprised. He had a letter from Z. H. Gurley in Blanchardville Wisconsin, dated January 29, 1860. It read: "I rejoice in God that the work goes on so finely, and I know if we are united and do what the Lord commands us, the year 1860 will not pass before the Prophet is among us." He consented to go, however, and preparations were hurriedly made, but long before we reached the station, we heard the train whistle. We continued with all speed possible, and though we reached the station fully fifteen minutes late, to our joy we found the train there still apparently waiting for us. This enabled us to meet Brother Marks at Burlington, according to appointment.55

There Marks and his compatriots booked passage on the steamer Aunt Letty the same night and enjoyed a comfortable ride down the river to Nauvoo.

The Aunt Letty docked at the Nauvoo landing about four o'clock in the afternoon of the next day. The men disembarked and quietly walked to the Bidamon boarding house where they took rooms. Emma received them kindly and sent for Joseph, who had moved across the street to the old Smith blockhouse to facilitate his work as Nauvoo justice of the peace.

Soon the stocky, brown-eyed man arrived and met the representatives of

the Reorganized Church. Blair wrote that "We expressed our views with regard to the work. On comparison there appeared to be little or no difference of sentiment."\(^56\) All seemed to be in order for Smith's uniting with the Reorganization when William Marks asked the clinching question. Marks knew of the various blessings and promises that had been made to Joseph Smith concerning his eventual succession to the church's presidency. He was also well aware of the Reorganization's belief in lineal succession. Still Marks interpreted all of these as utterly irrelevant without Smith's conviction as to his divine calling. "We have had enough of man-made prophets," he told Smith, "and we don't want any more of that sort. If God has called you, we want to know it. If he has, the Church is ready to sustain you; if not, we want nothing to do with you."\(^57\) Smith appreciated Marks' concern about his personal convictions, for it was a matter of the highest importance for him as well. He had all along been determined not to accept the presidency only because of precedent, tradition, and his father's blessing.\(^58\) Smith told the three men how he had come to accept the call to the church's leadership, and they all there happily discussed their religious convictions.

The church envoys stayed overnight in the Bidamon hotel. The next morning, just before the three men boarded the steamer for their return to Burlington, Joseph Smith went to the landing and told the men

\(^56\)W. W. Blair, Diary, March 20, 1860.

\(^57\)Smith, "Autobiography," in Tullidge, Life of Joseph, 774; Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:264-65; Davis, Story of the Church, 441.

\(^58\)True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 14 (October 1868), 105.
that he had changed his mind and wanted to attend the church conference soon to be held in Amboy, Illinois. Before they left each of the men prayed with Smith for the welfare of the future prophet and for that of the church as a whole. They welcomed him into the restoration, said their goodbyes, and got aboard the little shallow-draft vessel. Smith stood on the wharf as the boat cast off and began the tough voyage upriver. He waved to Marks and his associates, but as they pulled away he began to reconsider his decision. He wondered if he had not actually deluded himself about the whole affair. Perhaps he had made up the apparitions. He asked himself, "have I actually been called of God?" Had he, perhaps, misinterpreted the experiences he had been through? Had everything of the last four years been the product of personal troubles, rationalization, or some other earthly experience? At this point he was still not quite sure. A sinking feeling in his stomach told him that no matter how he reasoned he still had some almost subconscious doubts. Smith, however, had given his word, he would attend the conference. Once there, he would trust his intuition to tell him whether he should accept the church’s presidency or not.

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59 Joseph Smith to Charles E. Malstron, January 2, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 64.
Chapter 7
GETTING STARTED

Joseph Smith arose early after a fitful sleep on the morning of April 4, 1860 and prepared to leave for the Amboy conference. He had spent a large part of the last six months pondering his place in the religion of his father, and much of the preceding two weeks mulling his decision to unite with the Reorganized Church. April 4th was the moment of truth. He had to leave for Amboy, a little town in the north-central part of Illinois, on that day or miss the conference. If he did not go to the conference Smith would possibly forsake his call to its presidency. If he went it would mean a radically new career in an eccentric religious system. The prospects of church leadership terrified Smith, but he had given his word and would attend the conference. He walked outside his Nauvoo home and met his mother who had decided to accompany him to Amboy, and the two walked to a waiting rowboat on the Mississippi River landing where two friends stood in readiness to take them across to Montrose, Iowa where they could catch a train.

The wind blew and rocked the tiny boat as it departed for Iowa. Emma Bidamon remarked during the crossing that the sudden tempest was undoubtedly caused by some evil force seeking to deter them from carrying out their mission. She said that throughout her life whenever she had sought to do the work God intended, "the old boy [Devil] seemed to be in the elements trying to prevent [it]." So many waves splashed into the
boat that Smith had to use his shoes to bail the boat out. When the
couple finally reached the other shore, they already looked worn and
crumpled, as if they had been traveling for several days.

Joseph and Emma proceeded by wagon to a nearby railroad station
and took the train to Amboy, where they arrived the next afternoon, dusty
and weary from the trip. Amboy had been incorporated in 1855 by several
ambitious promoters who wanted to create a boom town on the Illinois
Central. It grew rapidly, and had a population of 4,000 by the summer
of 1860. Signs of industry were apparent everywhere, and Smith was
impressed. In addition to a railroad yard, there were several stores,
a printing office, a planing mill, three hotels, several small manufact­
uring concerns, and various other businesses. It also boasted two
churches and a "Mechanic's Hall," a trade union fellowship meetinghouse
that served the Reorganization as its headquarters during the conference.

Smith and his mother missed the conference's opening ceremonies,
but they did attend evening prayer services on the day they arrived at
the home of longtime church members Steven and Experience Stone. As they
entered the room, the members there recognized them immediately. Smith
described the prayer service as most impressive, and "a definite epoch in

1Joseph Smith, "Autobiography of Joseph Smith," in Edward W. Tullidge,
The Life of Joseph the Prophet, (Plano, Illinois: Herald Publishing House,
1880), 774-75; Joseph Smith, "The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith (1832-
1914)," in Saints' Herald, 82 (April 9, 1935), 452; Inez Smith Davis, The
Story of the Church (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1976),
450; Joseph Smith and Heman C. Smith, The History of the Reorganized Church
of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 4 vols. (Independence, Missouri: Herald

2Lee County Times (Amboy, Illinois), February 7, 1856, March 27,
1856; John Faire, "The Mormons in Amboy," Saints' Herald, 127 (January
1, 1980), 21-22.
my life." Zenas Gurley, who presided at the service, impulsively told
the members assembled that the future prophet and his mother had slipped
into the back of the room, coming in "fulfillment of the 'word of the
Lord to them.'" The congregation sensed that the years of waiting were
about to end and that their prayers had finally been answered. They,
Smith remembered, "sobbed aloud in their joy and gratefulness." Smith
had not been fully aware of the prophecies concerning his acceptance
as president of the church, and this meeting added greatly to his know­
ledge. He reported:

As I listened to the testimonies given in that small,
humble room, and heard the statements made by many who
had received evidence concerning myself and the work
God was calling me to do, I became fully aware of the
fact that the same Influence and Power that had been
at work with me, had determined my course of action, and
had finally led me into their midst, had also been manifest­
ing itself to many of these faithful, loyal and devoted old­
time Saints.

Smith left the prayer service that night convinced that he had indeed
been called of God for a special mission, that the revelations that
had led him to accept the Reorganization had been real, and not merely
products of his imagination. Smith never again seriously questioned
the course his life had taken. 3

The next morning the conference opened at ten o'clock at the
Mechanic's Hall. Gurley called the meeting to order and announced to
the three hundred members present that sermons would be preached by
Samuel Powers, Edmund Briggs, and himself, and that no business would

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3 Smith, "Autobiography," in Tullidge, Life of Joseph, 774-75;
Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (April 9, 1935), 463; "The Reception of
be transacted until the afternoon session. These speakers discussed the differences between the Reorganization and the other factions of Mormonism, largely directing their comments toward Joseph Smith in the hope of ridding him of any vestiges of doubt about the movement that he might still have.4 These men were not aware of Smith’s confirming experience at the prayer service the night before and worried that he might back out of his commitment. As the correspondent for the New York Times wrote: "There was a fear that they might experience now, that

'Twixt Cup and lip
ther’s many a slip.'"5

But the Saints need not have worried. During lunch Gurley and others met with Smith briefly and learned that he was totally committed to affiliation with the church.

The conference reconvened at two o’clock when Zenas Gurley called the business session to order. After some preliminary business Gurley got on with the most important event of the conference. With a big grin on his face he told the packed house, "I would present to you, my brethren, Joseph Smith."5 Smith arose and delivered an address as cautious as it was emphatic, significant as much for what it did not say as for what it did. Smith explained his position concerning Mormonism and its doctrines, announcing that he had accepted the church only after years of struggle, study, and prayer. "I have come here," he told the

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5 New York Times, April 11, 1860.
6 Davis, Story of the Church, 450.
conference," not to be dictated by any man or set of men. I have come in obedience to a power not my own, and I shall be dictated by the power that sent me."

Smith went on to denounce the practice of plural marriage, declaring that it had never been a part of early Mormonism and was an "abomination in the sight of God." He believed instead, "in the doctrine of honesty and truth." He added that the "Bible contains such truth, and so do the Book of Mormon and the Book of Covenants, which are auxiliaries to the Bible." None of those books of scripture sanctioned polygamy, he said, and the Book of Mormon positively denounced it. Smith also acknowledged his allegiance to the secular government of the United States and declared that the church should always be subservient to the nation. There should be neither antagonism between the two, nor attempts to supplant civil with religious authority, he said. Smith also commented on, for him, a very important subject, lineal succession in the presidency of the church. He said that in spite of what the Reorganization believed about his right to succeed his father solely because of parentage, had he done so without a personal testimony of the call from God he would be a hypocrite of the worst variety and unable to enjoy any self-respect.

Smith concluded his remarks by admitting that he possessed a number of shortcomings which would undoubtedly show in his mistakes, but that he would serve the church to the best of his ability. He asked the Saints' indulgence and God's watchful care. Finally, Smith concluded,
"If the same Spirit which prompts my coming, prompts also my reception, I am with you." With this Smith returned to his seat in the audience.

As soon as Smith had seated himself Isaac Sheen, the capable editor of the Reorganization's newspaper, the True Latter Day Saints' Herald, stood and moved that both Joseph Smith and Emma Bidamon be accepted as members of the church on the strength of their original baptisms by Joseph Smith, Jr. After the conference agreed, Sheen asked the body to accept and ordain Joseph Smith as Prophet-President of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, succeeding his father. Smith then sat in a special chair in the center of the stage so that all could witness his ordination. Gurley, as President of the Twelve Apostles, William Marks, a High Priest, and Samuel Powers and W. W. Blair, both members of the Twelve, ordained him immediately with Gurley serving as spokesman for the group. Upon closing, he turned to young Smith and said with obvious pleasure, "Brother Joseph, I present this

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9W. W. Blair, Diary, April 6, 1860 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri); Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:251; Early Reorganization Minutes, Book A, April 6, 1860 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
church to you in the name of Jesus Christ." Smith answered solemnly:

"May God grant in his infinite mercy that I may never do anything to forfeit the high trust confided to me. I pray that he may grant to us power to recall the scattered ones of Israel, and I ask your prayers."¹⁰

The Saints obviously felt gratified that their years of waiting had not been in vain. William Marks wrote to others in 1865 describing his feelings on that April 6. He claimed that it "was the happiest day I think that I ever experienced in my life."¹¹ Jason Briggs wrote, "These events gave the greatest satisfaction to the church, and to the scattered saints in sympathy with the church in all quarters, and new impetus was given to the work."¹² Perhaps the most moving reference to Joseph Smith’s ordination came from the pen of his talented younger brother, David Hyrum Smith, who wrote this romantic poem about the deaths of his father and uncle, the fate of the church, and his brother’s calling as successor not long after Joseph’s ordination.

I came to the spot where the two martyrs lay,  
And pensively stood by their tomb,  
When in a low whisper I heard something say,  
"How sweetly we sleep here alone!"

"The tempest may rage and the loud thunders roll,  
And gathering storms may arise,  
Yet calm are our feelings, at rest are our souls,  
The tears are all wiped from our eyes."

¹⁰ As quoted in Davis, Story of the Church, 453; Amboy Times, April 14, 1860.

¹¹ William Marks to Hiram Falk and Josiah Butterfield, October 1, 1865, Paul M. Hanson Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).

"We wandered as exiles, and pilgrims below,  
To publish salvation abroad;  
The trump of the gospel endeavored to blow,  
Preparing a people for God."

"Go tell our companions and brethren most dear,  
To weep not for Joseph, though gone,  
Nor Hyrum, for Jesus through scenes dark and drear,  
Has kindly conducted us home."

I wept for the church, for her prophet was slain,  
And I felt that deceivers were near,  
Who would lead her from precepts of virtue so plain,  
Once taught her by Joseph the Seer.

But anguish gives place to a fullness of joy,  
Revived are the hopes that were slain;  
From th' seed of the Martyr, called by the Most High,  
Comes a Prophet to lead us again.13

The Saints, of course, hailed Smith's ordination as an important event, and the non-Mormon community, surprisingly, agreed. Several secular newspapers covered the conference, and each commented upon the event favorably. A local paper, the Amboy Weekly Times, for instance, reported just before the opening of the conference:

it is a well-known fact in this and adjoining States there remain a large number of Latter Day Saints who hold in detestation the polygamous doctrines of Brigham Young, and who are putting forth great efforts for the reorganization of the Mormon Church under the head of Joseph Smith . . .

The article described Smith as "a strong man of good strong sense, opposed to polygamy, and all manner of depredations upon the gentiles." "Under his head," the paper predicted,

undoubtedly the church would be purged of the outrageously bad practices which have brought it such

disrepute with all law abiding citizens. To this end it is hoped that young Joseph will feel himself in duty-bound to take the important and powerful position tendered him.\(^\text{14}\)

The *Carthage Republican*, the only paper published close to Nauvoo in 1860, also reported on Joseph Smith’s ordination. The report mentioned that Smith was a respected citizen of both Nauvoo and Hancock County as a whole and had served this area well in various civic offices, and that he had only accepted Reorganized Church leadership because the movement had categorically denounced plural marriage “and other immoral practices which have so much disgraced the church” and had pledged to “live in strict obedience to the government and laws of the United States, or any other country in which they may be located.”

Approving of Smith’s acceptance of the church’s leadership, the *Republican* predicted that his right to succeed his father “will not be disputed and his mandate will be obeyed, except perhaps by Brigham Young and a few adherents at Salt Lake; but their authority and opposition will be of short duration, it is thought, and the authority of the new leader will soon be universally acknowledged.” The *Republican*, like the Amboy newspaper, suggested that “Mr. Smith, we believe, will soon purify the Church, and do more towards reforming its adherents from their evil practices, than all the troops which the government could send to Salt Lake.”\(^\text{15}\)

The most important newspaper to report on the Amboy conference

\(^{14}\) *Amboy Times*, April 11, 1860.

\(^{15}\) *Carthage* (Illinois) *Republican*, April 12, 1860.
was the New York Times, which ran two major articles in the April 11 issue—a report by a correspondent on the meetings of the conference, and an editorial concerning Smith’s ordination. The editorial stated that many of the factions into which Mormonism had splintered after Joseph Smith, Jr.’s death had become disgusted “with the proceedings of the Saints in Utah, and have finally taken steps to get rid of the tyranny of BRIGHAM YOUNG.” It declared that “the Mormon Church everywhere acknowledges the rightful authority of young JOE SMITH, son of the founder of the sect; --and steps have for some time been in progress to induce him to assume the Presidency. This has at last been accomplished.”

The editor praised the Reorganization’s dissent from Utah’s brand of Mormonism, and concluded that Smith should be able to reorient the factions of the church and bring them within the mainstream of Christendom. This would, the editorial predicted, end the practice of polygamy in Utah without governmental interference. “If young SMITH has anything of his father’s nerve in dealing with men,” the paper concluded, “he may carry this important revolution into effect. The attempt is, in any case, an interesting and important event.”

If the Reorganization’s membership and many in the non-Mormon community were generally pleased with the ordination of Joseph Smith, the largest faction of the church was not. It had long been expected by the leaders of the Utah Mormons that Joseph Smith’s sons would eventually return to the church of their father and probably assume a leader-

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ship role. Heber C. Kimball, friend and counselor of Brigham Young, predicted in the summer of 1856 that, while "at present the Prophet Joseph's boys lay apparently in a state of slumber, everything seems to be perfectly calm with them, but by and by God will wake them up, and they will roar like the thunder of Mount Sinai." The Rocky Mountain Saints were shocked, therefore, when they first learned that the eldest son of the prophet was planning to join a rival faction of the church.

Various members of the Utah-based church, although they had ignored him since 1856, tried to persuade Joseph Smith not to lead the Reorganization. His cousin, John Smith, learned of Joseph's plans while in Council Bluffs, Iowa on a mission. He wrote to Joseph warning him that he was being used by ambitious promoters who wanted to further their own designs for gaining prestige and money. He wrote on April 3, 1860:

While here I have learned something about that matter which we talked about while I was there [last fall] it is in the mouth of everybody almost and I have seen some of the parties and by what I can learn it is all speculation and they do not care a d---d for you only want to make a tool of you to carry out thire scheema that they may get gain and I hope you will not take a step in the matter without fully considering the importance of such a step as for my part I cannot sanction any such thing for I fear it will leade us in a difficulty that would bring a stain upon us where in we might suffer loss cousin Joseph there are me sentiments well I wish you would come over here.

17 Journal of Discourses (Salt Lake City, Utah), 4 (June 29, 1856), 5.
18 John Smith to Joseph F. Smith, April 18, 1860, Joseph F. Smith Papers (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).
Joseph left for the Amboy conference before the letter arrived, but it is unlikely it would have swayed him in any case. John Smith's warnings were unfounded, and Smith thought them ridiculous in hindsight.\(^{20}\)

Not long after joining the Reorganization Smith received visits from several of his cousins who had gone west. They tried to persuade him to reconsider his actions. Smith was proper and polite with them, but he absolutely refused to leave the church. He told his cousin Joseph F. Smith that although he had nothing but the highest regard for the Saints of the Great Basin, "he believed they were in darkness on some things, owing to the teachings they have had, & the influences that surrounded them." Smith added that he had taken the right course, and that he was "not afraid but that he will come off right, and that he will take no counsel but from God, for the Lord, if he has a work for him to do--will make his will known to him, before he will to any body else[s]."\(^{21}\)

The Utah Saints bemoaned Joseph Smith's affiliation with the Reorganization as misguided at best and positively devilish at worst. The Utah leadership still recognized the right of Joseph to lead his father's church, but he would have to repent of this indiscretion and return to the true fold.\(^{22}\) Even Brigham Young, speaking before a congregation in Salt Lake City not long after Smith's ordination said he would


\(^{21}\)Joseph F. Smith to Levira A. Smith, June 28, 1860, Joseph F. Smith Papers (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).

\(^{22}\)Samuel H. B. Smith to George A. Smith, July 11, 1860, George A. Smith Papers (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).
accept the young man as successor, if he agreed to follow legitimate authority. Young told his congregation:

What of Joseph Smith's family? What of the boys? I have prayed from the beginning for sister Emma and for the whole family. There is not a man in this Church that has entertained better feelings towards them. Joseph said to me, "God will take care of my children when I am taken." They are in the hands of God, and when they make their appearance before this people, full of his power, there are none but what will say-- "Amen! we are ready to receive you." 23

Edward Tullidge, the unorthodox nineteenth century historian of the Saints, summed up Brigham Young's view: "There was in Brigham Young's mind," he wrote "attached an absolute and irrevocable condition, which was that Joseph's seed should come to himself [i.e. Young] as the Chief Apostle holding the keys of the kingdom." Young Smith was to receive, he wrote, his ordination from Young's hands. This meant that the "prophet in his son must acknowledge on earth what the chief apostle Brigham had done." Joseph, of course, could have never accepted this condition. 24

Joseph Smith and his mother returned to Nauvoo after the conference, where they pursued the same occupations. They held the same beliefs. Smith himself had not changed except in regard to religion. He still carried on his business affairs much as he had done in the past and still served the community as justice of the peace. These various secular activities provided Smith with an income, for he received no support from

23 Journal of Discourses, 8 (June 3, 1860), 69.
the church at this time, and gave him, he said, a "fair living as a liv-
ing was counted then and there."25

Only on Sunday was Smith really able to enter into religious practice. He always reserved the Sabbath for church work, criss-crossing Hancock County visiting with the old Saints who had remained and speaking wherever he could find an audience. He always preached about the divine origin of the Mormonism his father had established, about the Reorganization of the church, and gave his personal testimony concerning his call to lead the church. Often during April and May of 1860 Smith was depressed about his inability to do more in religious affairs, but he believed that events would soon turn in his favor and his little band of followers would rise to a level of some prominence in American Christianity. He was, as he told his cousin, "sanguine of success & perfectly resigned." He also said "he would do all he could and leave the result with God, and farther he felt sure that he would accomplish the work he had begun, ..."26

In some ways, perhaps, Smith's depression stemmed from his own difficulties in fitting into the mold of a frontier preacher. He found it difficult, for example, to adapt to the peculiar life-style and demeanor


26Joseph F. Smith to George A. Smith, August 22, 1860, George A. Smith Papers.
expected of a religious leader. He was so uncomfortable with this new role that when the census taker came through Nauvoo in the summer of 1860 Smith told him that his profession was justice of the peace rather than minister. In later years, however, he would grow to accept the title.

His first efforts as a minister did not exactly foster Smith’s confidence, particularly as others seemed disappointed with his character, actions, and appearance. When he first met the new prophet, Charles Derry (who was to become one of his most important associates) thought he looked “more like . . . a farmer than a church president.” He disappointed one potential convert when, not long after returning to Nauvoo in 1860, Smith went out early one morning and began fishing in the Mississippi. He was busily trying to hook a king catfish when a dusty, tired-looking man appeared, asking if he knew where a traveler could find young Joseph the Mormon prophet. Smith identified himself, pulled in his line, rowed ashore, and asked the gentleman what he might do for him. John Shippy then introduced himself and told his story:

Mr. Smith, I became a member of the church in 1842, and have preached a good deal in northern Illinois, Michigan, and Canada. When the Saints were scattered at the death of the leader, I became confused. Now I am anxious to be set right . . . My search for it has led me here, to you, but here I find you, the son of the Prophet, and the leader of the new Reorganization, fishing! What am I to think?

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Smith explained that he could think whatever he wished, but that if he was interested in the Reorganization he should study and pray about its truthfulness rather than pass judgment on it on the basis of something that one member did for sport. Shippy was a little irritated by the way Smith talked to him, but agreed to do as he suggested, and he soon joined the Reorganization. Incidents of this kind were repeated several times during Smith's first months in office by Saints who were disappointed upon first meeting the young prophet.  

Joseph Smith fared little better in living up to the preconceptions of prophethood harbored by most outsiders. At the fall 1860 business conference Smith was called from a meeting to greet a local Baptist preacher who wanted to see a "live prophet of God." Smith met him outside the auditorium and offered his hand, but the minister ignored it, instead surveying him up and down. He walked around Smith, carefully taking in his appearance. Finally the Baptist minister furrowed his brow, frowned slightly, and passed judgment. "Well," he said to no one in particular, "I confess I am greatly disappointed!" Smith asked him why, and the preacher replied, "I have always wanted to see a prophet. I have had particular ideas about them, and have often wished I might have lived in the days they existed and been permitted to talk with them; but now--I must confess I am disappointed!" Smith told the clergyman, "I must say I am sorry, sir, that you are disappointed in me, but I cannot see that I am responsible for that. I am as God made me. It may be a

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pity that I am not a handsomer man for your especial gratification, sir!" 30

Many of Smith's early sermons were also less than fully satisfying. He was unaccustomed to speaking before large crowds of people and in the early days around Nauvoo some of the crowds were hostile. He never really felt comfortable in his role as frontier preacher. On the other hand, Smith never shirked what he considered his duty, and he held meeting after meeting in Hancock County and nearby areas during his first year in the presidency. The most difficult problem he had to bring under control in order to become an effective preacher was his sense of humor. Smith was anything but solemn. He was jovial and fun-loving and liked nothing better than a good joke, even if it was on himself, and his temperament did not change after he affiliated with the Reorganization. At times, though, his disposition got in the way of his preaching, and so he worked to change it.

This was not easy. One incident, occurring in the summer of 1860, demonstrates this quality. Smith had arranged to speak at a farm outside Nauvoo and hoped to give a rather unreligious group something that would make them think of Mormonism. It was a hot, humid day. Steam was rising off the Mississippi, and everything seemed to swelter in the sun. The little room, packed with people, was uncomfortably hot. Just before the service began Smith left his associates for a few minutes of prayer. While kneeling behind the building a fly buzzed around Smith's head and landed on his large nose. This reminded Smith of a story he had

30 Ibid., 82 (April 23, 1935), 527.
read recently about an eastern minister who had been pestered by a fly
during his sermon. While reading a passage of scripture to his congre-
gation the reverend had felt a fly land on his nose. He shooed it
away and began again, but before he could complete the reading it land-
ed a second time. He brushed it away again, but the fly returned still
a third time. Finally, after the minister had gone through this routine
four or five times, he reached up, tried to grab the pest, and exclaimed,
"Damn that fly!" Smith broke out in laughter when he thought of the
punch line, and imagined such a thing happening to him. The more he
thought about it the more he laughed. By the time he had walked back
to his friends he had completely lost whatever reverence and dignity he
had come with, and told them that he could not preach the sermon. He
asked another to take his place. Someone else did, but it disappointed
the audience who had come to hear this self-styled prophet.

On another occasion not long thereafter Smith preached in a
schoolhouse across the river at Montrose. The house was packed, and
almost everyone was listening intently to Smith's oratory. The only
people in the house who were seemingly unconcerned were a couple of
boys in the back row who had intentionally seated themselves several
places from their parents. Shortly after Smith began speaking two young,
and quite lovely women walked in and sat in the only seats remaining,
those immediately in front of the boys. One of the ladies had fiery
red hair which she wore in ringlets that fell down her back. Smith
described what happened thereafter:

Just as I was reaching the climax of an argument, one of
these boys reached out with a finger and pushed it lightly
into the outer circle of this fiery-hued hair. His eyes
were intently fixed upon his action and his whole face and
attitude expressing absorption in what he was doing. I could not keep my eyes away from him, and I saw that after holding his finger in the hair for a moment, he laid it on the back of the seat in front of him and proceeded to pound it with his fist, in a very good imitation of a blacksmith pounding a red-hot iron upon his anvil!

Watching this performance made Smith smile, but he knew it had to stop before it distracted the rest of the congregation. He tried to get the boy's attention without letting the girl know, but he failed. By this time he was beginning to snicker and decided to end his sermon before he lost control.³¹

For all of the personal difficulties Smith had to overcome during his first year as president of the Reorganized Church, much of what he did was uniquely satisfying. His diligence in working with the old-time Saints around Nauvoo proved fruitful since many of them united with the church. By gathering together these elements from the past and winning several new converts Smith was able to establish a congregation in Nauvoo. He served this branch of the church as pastor from the outset, at first they met in the homes of various Saints, but the congregation quickly grew large enough to need a meetinghouse. The branch fitted out the upper room of the old Red Brick Store as a church. By 1864 Smith's "Olive Branch," as the members affectionately called the Nauvoo church, had a

³¹Ibid., 82 (June 4, 1935), 721-22.
When Smith first told his family that he planned to join the Reorganized Church they had reacted in various ways. After his return from Amboy, the Smith family had to deal with the fact of Joseph’s leadership of a Mormon faction, and it caused problems for some of them. Eventually, however, each came to terms with Joseph and the church. Besides his mother, the first close relative to demonstrate an active interest in Joseph’s church was his youngest brother, David Hyrum. David had been born five months after the death of his father in 1844, and had, thus, never experienced firsthand any of the religious life of Mormon Nauvoo. His first memories had been of the bitter conflict between his mother and Brigham Young, and he had, consequently, developed a certain amount of animosity toward the religion that had precipitated such conflict. It struck Joseph as somewhat odd, then, when David began to ask him serious questions about the Reorganization. He began to attend services at the Olive Branch with his mother and brother during the summer of 1860 and borrowed books and tracts soon thereafter. Finally, after more than a year of study and contemplation, David quietly went to John

32Smith, “Autobiography,” in Tullidge, Life of Joseph, 782-83; Early Reorganization Minutes, Book A, April 6, 1865; Smith, “Memoirs,” in Herald, 82 (April 16, 1935), 496-97. That much of the membership arose out of the attraction of having the church’s president in its midst is seen from the statement of Emma Bidamon in 1866, after he had moved to Plano, Illinois. She said, the branch’s “meetings are rather poorly attended. We have some members that are not much account. The outsiders have left off attending. . . They miss my boys.” Emma Bidamon to Joseph Smith, October 22, 1866, Emma Smith Bidamon Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri). By 1880 the Nauvoo branch had virtually ceased to exist. Thomas Gregg, History of Hancock County, Illinois: Together with an Outline History of the State, and a Digest of State Laws (Chicago: Charles C. Chapman, 1880), 939.
Shippy, who had moved to a farm near Nauvoo, and asked for baptism. Shippy promptly took the young man to the Mississippi River and baptized him, convinced that he would become, as he later wrote, "one of our church pillars, for the Spirit says so." Within two years David had proven Shippy correct, for he had risen to important positions in the church and his brother was using him as a close associate and adviser in the leadership.

Joseph Smith's immediately younger brother registered little or no interest in the Reorganization, and never joined the movement, much to Joseph's chagrin. Named for an early church leader, Frederick Granger Williams Smith had always been Joseph's closest playmate. When they had reached maturity their close relationship had continued as they operated a farm outside of town together. While Frederick acknowledged his brother's right to act as he did concerning the church, he had neither the opportunity nor the desire to explore the sect. In late 1861 he suddenly became severely ill, and his family worried that he might not survive the winter. It was during this illness that he began to show some interest in religion, perhaps because of impending death, and he started discussing Mormonism with his older brother. These discussions sparked Frederick to study the Mormon scriptures, and Joseph was delighted, thinking that in time he would become a convert. He failed, however, to ask for baptism. David, who had by this time joined the


34 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:496, 4:670.
Reorganization, was especially exasperated because Frederick had yet
to join the church.\textsuperscript{35} To encourage him to do so, David wrote him a
poem called "An Apeal [sic] to my Brother Frederick When on his Sick bed:"

\begin{verbatim}
Remember Brother Dost thou not
What Mother used to say
Or are her consuls all forgot
Her teachings thrown away.
Remember 0 how innocent
Our early years were passed
Shall we when Mother's life is spent
Neglect our god at last.

Remember how she taught us five
In faithfulness to pray
That God would guard us through the night
And watch us through the day.
Oh did we think when ere we read
The bible! holy book
In after years that in to it
We'd be ashamed to look.

O! Shall we stand above her grave
And in our conscience say
That on life's road we have not walked
As Mother showed the way.
You know how righteous she has been
Through all her weary years
Let's turn to her example then
Lest we repent with tears.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{verbatim}

Even this sentimental plea failed, and soon after its writing Frederick
suffered a relapse. Bedridden as he was, baptism would have been impos-
sible even if he had wanted it, and he eventually died on April 13, 1862
without joining the church.\textsuperscript{37}

The remaining brother, Alexander, opposed Joseph's affiliation

\textsuperscript{35}Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (May 7, 1935), 590; Davis, Story of the Church, 458.

\textsuperscript{36}David H. Smith, Diary 1853-1864, February 17, 1862 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).

\textsuperscript{37}Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (May 7, 1936), 590.
with the Reorganization from the outset. Personally, he had never been interested in religion, and had spent his time in other, more pleasurable pursuits such as carousing.\textsuperscript{38} When Joseph united with the sect Alexander feared that the Smiths would be ostracized by their friends because of what Joseph had done. Alexander came to resent Joseph and tried to ignore him as much as possible. But when members of the local community wanted Joseph to stop practicing his religion Alexander had to decide whether he would support his friends and hurt his brother or defend his brother and probably lose his friends. He stood up for Joseph and defended his right to freedom of religion. This opened the door for Joseph to talk with Alexander about the Reorganization, and in mid-1862 he baptized him.\textsuperscript{39}

Joseph’s wife, Emmeline, also had trouble coping with her husband’s new life. She had never had any connection with Mormonism, and refused to take part in it now, although she allowed him to do as he pleased. His religious activities, and the accompanying travel and work outside the home, forced Smith to spend less time with his family than he would have otherwise, and it led to serious marital problems. Emmeline resented the church because it took her husband away so much of the time, and when he was home he seemed preoccupied with other distant

\textsuperscript{38} F. Mark McKiernan, “David H. Smith: A Son of the Prophet,” Brigham Young University Studies, 18 (Winter 1978), 234.

\textsuperscript{39} Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:672-73. Two other members of the Smith family never joined the church. His adopted sister, Julia, had married and moved to Texas during the 1850s and had no part in this story, and his stepfather, Lewis Bidamon, while initially unhappy with Smith’s move grew to accept it and later to favor Joseph’s commitment to something besides wealth and power. Smith, “Memoirs,” in Herald, 82 (February 12, 1935), 207-208, 83 (September 5, 1936), 1103.
problems. As a result, the couple drifted apart.  

With their marriage none too sound already, Emmeline somehow got the impression that Joseph was involved with another woman while away on a mission in 1863. Very little information about this controversy survives, but one letter from Joseph contains his promise never again to cause such a problem in their marriage. He wrote: "I made a fair resolve never to do aught that would ever bring a blush to the cheek of her I called wife or cause a pang of regret to the girls our mutual love had brought to hearths & hearts." Indicating that he was not strong enough to keep the promise alone, Smith added, "May God help me to keep that resolve." Thereafter, Smith took every opportunity when away from home on church business to write Emmeline, pledging his undying devotion and fidelity. She apparently accepted Smith's pledge, and their relationship improved greatly thereafter. Nothing more was ever said of the matter, and Emmeline raised her estimation of her husband and his religion to the extent that she asked for baptism in 1866, following the tragic death of their young son. From all later appearances, they looked to be a happy couple united in a common religion.

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41 Ibid., 273-74.
42 Joseph Smith to Emmeline Griswold Smith, January 20, 1863, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
43 Ibid., October 14, 1863; Joseph Smith, Poem written to Emma, February 14, 1865, Joseph Smith III Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
44 Emmeline to Joseph Smith, May 16, 1865, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers; Joseph Smith to Heman C. Smith, January 20, 1908, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
Although Smith’s family largely embraced the Reorganization, the non-Mormon community about Nauvoo came to view it less favorably during the summer and fall of 1860. Although everyone in the community who had ever dealt with Joseph Smith recognized him as an honest man, the longtime citizens could still remember well the difficulties that had arisen because of the Saints’ settlement in Nauvoo during the 1840s. They had seen Smith’s father take a frontier area and turn it topsyturvy in less than five years, and they had no desire to see a second generation prophet do the same. Most of these people simply waited to see what might happen following the Amboy conference, but a few tried to stir up trouble. These rabble rousers had nothing solid as a basis upon which to excite animosity in the community until they happened upon a private letter that Smith had written to an old friend, George Edmunds, Jr., during the summer in which he said that he planned to live in Nauvoo for five years, perhaps longer, and that it would, thus, serve as an informal church headquarters. Non-Mormon spokesmen interpreted this to mean that Smith planned to revive his father’s dream of a Utopian commonwealth at Nauvoo that would assert Mormon control of the county. This, in light of past events, was unacceptable to many in Hancock County, and a movement arose to stop any gathering of Saints in the area. 45

The misunderstanding reached large proportions within a few weeks. Throughout mid-summer rumors circulated, and by August dissident elements

in Hancock County began to act against Smith and his followers. On August 21 more than a hundred Carthage residents met at the courthouse to pass resolutions prohibiting Smith from practicing his religion anywhere in the county. Other towns in Hancock County soon passed similar resolutions. All of these were forwarded to Smith, but he ignored them in the hope that the problem would blow over.

The most forceful opposition to Smith came from Nauvoo itself, and was led by Mayor Robert W. McKinney, not because he feared a repetition of past Mormon troubles but because he and Smith were engaged in a tough race for the office of mayor. The election would not be held until November, but McKinney used the religious issue as a means of discrediting Smith so that he would be more likely to defeat him. McKinney offended Smith in the Carthage Republican in a series of unsigned articles, attacking him on the basis of his Mormonism, his youth, and his various business ventures. Under McKinney’s leadership the city went so far as to hold a meeting to pass a series of resolutions against Smith’s religious activities. The next afternoon, a young lawyer J. Bernard Risse, delivered the resolutions to Smith at his justice of the peace office. Risse, who knew Smith professionally, gave him the envelope and stood awaiting a reply. Smith opened the envelope, read the resolutions, and placed them on his desk without comment. He had immediately seen that the document bore no signature or legal markings of any kind and was, therefore, nothing more than an anonymous

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46 Carthage Republican, August 23, August 24, 1860.
threat. He called this to Rissé’s attention, telling him to get the leaders in charge of the meeting to sign the document. Rissé refused.

Then Smith asked if Rissé would sign it himself. Rissé told him he would rather not. Smith caustically asked the young lawyer:

Who is responsible for this move, and for this document? Who authorized it, or who has sought in this manner to suppress me in the free exercise of any religion? Is this public opinion expressed in this manner? If so, to whom may I look for the enforcement of the interdictio contained therein?

Rissé decided not to press the matter further for the time being and quickly excused himself and left Smith’s office. Smith never heard any more about these resolutions, although he made it clear to anyone who would listen that should they be presented to him over anyone’s signature he would bring suit on grounds of restriction of freedom of religion. 48

Throughout the summer and fall of 1860 Smith continued to receive some verbal abuse in Hancock County, but nothing more. The anti-Mormons could never get fully organized, in part because Smith posed no immediate threat. In addition, some members of the county came to him in support. George Edmunds, who was a well-known lawyer and politician in the county, stood up on his behalf, claiming that he had committed no wrong, that he was entitled to basic civil liberties, and that his Mormonism was not very far different from common Protestantism. Thomas C. Sharp, one of the foremost anti-Mormons of the 1840s, also spoke on

Smith’s behalf, telling the people of the county that he believed young
Smith to be an entirely different type of man from his father, and
besides, he had lived through one Mormon War, and had no wish to become
involved in another. Writers from the Chicago Journal and New York
Times also commented that the opposition to Smith in Hancock County was
misguided, and that should anyone take direct action against the new
Mormon leader he would find that Smith had many supporters both in the
county and nationwide.

The anti-Mormon issue that some persons in Hancock County tried
to arouse during the fall of 1860 got sidetracked during the turbulent
political problems of the winter of 1860-1861. The Republican party,
with a strong presidential candidate in Abraham Lincoln, defeated a
splintering Democratic party headed by Stephen A. Douglas in the North
and John C. Breckinridge in the South. Lincoln and the Republicans were
anti-slavery, and their assumption of power at the federal level precip-
itated the secession of eleven southern states. The crisis of the Union
sapped the interest of most citizens of Hancock County in Smith’s comp-
paratively insignificant religious issue. As a consequence, the Mormon
problem that had seemed so important in August had almost completely

Smith to D. C. Murcock, January 6, 1894, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #5
(Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Arches,
The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 110-12; Joseph Smith to D. A.
 Alvord, July 15, 1896, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #7 (Reorganized Church
of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Arches, The Auditorium,
Independence, Missouri).

50 New York Times, August 29, 1860; Chicago (Illinois) Journal,
August 24, 1860.
disappeared by December 1860.51

Like everyone else in the United States during 1860-1861, Joseph Smith had to deal with the matter of secession and the likelihood of a war for the Union. But he had to act not only for himself, but also as a religious leader who spoke for the Reorganized Church. Smith tried to do so with circumspection. After the outbreak of fighting in April 1861, he was especially troubled by what stand he should take on the war. Personally, he was an ardent antislavery man convinced that the institution was both immoral and harmful to everything that was good in the nation. As a result Smith had harnessed his political hope for a better society based on free labor to the fortunes of the Republican party. Viewing the war in a positive light, he saw it as a struggle to end slavery not only in the territories but also in the states where it already existed, and he felt a strong urge to join the Union army and fight in the emancipation effort. On the other hand, he was the head of a Christian church that condemned the use of violence—"Thou shalt not kill" was a fundamental commandment of his faith. He, therefore, had to decide whether to follow his personal inclinations or to act in conformity with the basic teachings of the church. Complicating the situation and tending to push Smith toward strong support of the hostilities was a prophecy which his father had given in 1832. It told about

51 The problem of secession has been analyzed in several important works. See David M. Potter, Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis, 1860-1861 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1942); David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Kenneth M. Stampp, And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis, 1860-1861 (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1950).
a coming war between good and evil

beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina, which will eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls . . . for behold, the Southern states shall be divided against the Northern states, and the Southern states will call upon other nations, even the nation of Great Britain, . . . And it shall come to pass, after many days, slaves shall rise up against their masters, who shall be marshalled and disciplined for war. 52

Thus, the war was a fulfillment of prophecy, and the vindication of his father’s prophetic power. 53

During April and part of May 1861 Smith pondered the situation. He found no easy answers. The church expected his leadership in the matter, and would presumably accept whatever he had to say about the war. Other religious leaders in the North felt no compunction about supporting the war both morally and materially, and Smith could easily have taken this approach. But still he thought war morally wrong, perhaps as morally wrong as slavery itself. Locked in the throes of this inner conflict, Smith decided to appeal to a higher authority. He began to pray about the issue, asking that God lead him along a proper course. He specifically asked about the propriety of his serving in the military, and after weeks he claimed to have received an answer that was, at least for him, clear, definite, and unmistakable. Smith wrote the message down. It said:

52 Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1952), Section 87. This document was first published in The Pearl of Great Price (Liverpool, England: F. D. Richards and Company, 1851), a missionary tract compiled by members of the Council of Twelve. The entire tract was later canonized by the Utah based faction of the church.

Do not enlist. Enlisting makes your military services an individual and voluntary action, whereby you might shed blood while in the service. Wait; if drafted, the responsibility is lifted. In such case do not hesitate to take your places in the ranks and to do your full duty as good soldiers and citizens, supporting the government to the best of your powers. Smith accepted this as the binding policy of the church and cautioned Latter Day Saints to support the war effort as loyal Americans but not to volunteer for military service.

Joseph took an active and positive pro-war stand as a civilian thereafter. He was never drafted and he never volunteered for military service, but he helped with anything short of actual military service. He supported the war rallies and as justice of the peace sped up the processing of legal documents for various government officials and soldiers under his jurisdiction. On one occasion he even made a pro-Union speech in Nauvoo which brought enthusiastic applause from the audience, and contributed to the enlistment of seventeen local young men. This pro-war stand had the added advantage of endearing Smith to the community, and slowly the anti-Mormons who had tried to rally opposition against his religious practices forgot about his peculiarities and came to appreciate him as a normal patriotic American. Joseph Smith became, once again, another of the respected local men.

During the period immediately following his ordination as president of the Reorganization Joseph Smith tackled some very difficult personal problems and made significant advances toward a good relation.

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55 Ibid., 82 (April 30, 1935), 562, 82 (May 7, 1935), 590.
ship with the non-Mormon world. He learned something of the lonely life of a religious leader, cultivated his ministerial abilities at the local level, and built up a following in the Nauvoo area. Moreover, Smith confronted and largely converted his immediate family. In addition, he won the respect and admiration of the people of Hancock County because of his patriotic actions during 1860 and 1861. It still remained for young Smith—in spite of some tentative steps already made—to assume full leadership in the Reorganization and make it his own. He wanted to unify the church so that it could more effectively carry out its mission of preaching to the world and establishing a zionic-utopian community. In order to do so Smith had to forge a solid, effective organization under his leadership. Over the course of the next several years he spent much of his time building a central administration for his movement.
Chapter 8

FORGING AN ORGANIZATION

When Joseph Smith accepted the leadership of the Reorganized Church his single most pressing concern was the construction of a central administration that would be able to accomplish the goals he envisioned for the church. During the 1850s the Reorganization had functioned under a very loose organizational structure, almost a confederacy of virtually independent congregations that could choose to accept the policies of the General Conference and the Apostles' Quorum or completely disregard them without any fear of punishment. As a result the church had been unable to sustain any extended missionary work or forceful policy because of the shifting nature of support from the members. The members through their congregations had also enjoyed a fair degree of freedom within the church—freedom to believe what they wished concerning doctrine and history, to support or disregard the conference resolutions, and in general, to act as they pleased regarding the church.¹

This had not always been the case, for under Joseph Smith, Jr.,

¹Few have explored administrative history in the early Reorganization. Much of the background of this chapter, however, is surveyed in a highly illuminating study; Alma R. Blair, "The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: Moderate Mormons," in F. Mark McKerman, Alma R. Blair, and Paul M. Edwards, eds., The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1973), 207-30.
during the 1830s and 1840s, the church had developed a highly structured hierarchy of officers, a reasonably well defined theology, and a workable administrative policy. All of this changed during the years following his death, since there was now no accepted head of the church and much of the administrative machinery had disintegrated. When young Joseph assumed the presidency in 1860 he was an inexperienced young man who did not understand the intricacies of either the centralized operation of the church under his father or the rather loosely organized confederacy in the Reorganization. He quickly realized, however, that the Reorganized Church had to reinstitute some form of central administration, come to some understanding of doctrine, and work toward the enforcement of orthodoxy. As was his nature, he moved cautiously but deliberately to build a central administration that would accomplish these goals, and thereby make it possible for the church to carry on missionary activity, reconvert the Mormons who had drifted into other factions, and become a force in the reformation of the world into the perfect society.\(^2\)

Centralization of the church's administration took several years

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of various small steps before Smith was happy with it. First, he gradually brought the appointment of officers under his control. Then he slowly brought pressure to bear upon them to act in accordance with his administrative decisions. At the same time, Smith took steps to gain a large measure of direction over the General Conference, the chief policy-making body of the church, so that he could use it in the formulation of a coherent policy. All the while he was carrying out these plans, Smith also worked to define and enforce a rational, logical theology upon the church officers and membership through the use of the central administration. The building of this administration was never a smooth development, but was marked by trial and error, a bit like walking through a minefield blindfolded. At times both leadership and general membership, guarding the freedom to make policy they had enjoyed in the 1850s, protested Smith's procedures and derided him as a dictator, but gradually, ever so gradually, Smith succeeded in tailoring the church's government to suit his ideals and goals for the church. By the end of the 1860s he had largely remade the church into the type of organization that he wanted.

Smith began to change the makeup of the church's administrative machinery when he took the initiative in appointing its officers. Throughout the church's history members of the leading quorums had been considered called of God to function in His ministry, and, therefore, the "appointment" came through revelation. The method of calling these quorum members, however, had varied in the past. In Joseph Smith, Jr.'s time the appointments could be made by a committee called for the purpose of choosing quorum members, by the prophet in a formal revelation to the
church, or by a counselor in the First Presidency. The "new organization," having neither prophet nor First Presidency in the 1850s, early began choosing officers by committee established under the sovereignty of the General Conference. This, of course, made the conference the absolute final authority in appointing general officers.

When Smith accepted the presidency he acquiesced in this manner of selecting his lieutenants, but he soon became aware that in order to stabilize the church and assert his authority another method had to be substituted. He came to this conclusion after the General Conference challenged his wishes and thwarted his goals. Smith wanted to fill the Quorum of Twelve, for instance, and when the conference of October 1860 met he suggested that the conference appoint a committee to nominate enough men to fill it. This would have called for the ordination of four more men. The conference appointed three stalwarts—W. W. Blair, William Marks, and O. P. Dunham—to serve on the committee. These three, however, did not believe enough capable men were available in the church and they called only three new members. Smith was not

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4 Early Reorganization Minutes, Book A, April 8, 1853, April 6, 1855, (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).

5 "Conference Minutes," True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 1 (October 1860), 238.

6 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:276.
pleased, but the conference had spoken, and he accepted its decision. What really upset Smith was the April 1861 conference’s changing of the minutes of the previous meeting so that Smith’s recommendation on ordination and the decision of the committee coincided. To Smith’s initial statement, “The Quorum of the Twelve should be filled,” the 1861 conference added, “as far as practicable.”

Although Smith enjoyed popular support from the church membership, in this instance he had been outmaneuvered in the conference where all had an equal voice and vote. He had learned a valuable lesson about the nature of internal administrative machinery, but he refused to override the conference’s will even upon those occasions when he thought that it was necessary. One such time was in 1863 when Smith felt it important to appoint a counselor in the First Presidency. Following precedent taken from his father’s presidency, Smith presented a written, formal revelation to the General Conference commanding the ordination of William Marks to the presidency. Speaking for the Lord, Smith wrote: “I declare unto you, it is my will that you ordain and set apart my servant William Marks to be a counselor to my servant Joseph, even the president of the church, that the first presidency of my church may be more perfectly filled.” By elevating the appointment to the level of a formal revelation Smith virtually assured that his wishes

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7 This has been changed in the handwritten Early Reorganization Minutes, October 6, 1860. The amendment is recorded in “Conference Minutes,” True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 2 (May 1861), 67.

8 Joseph Smith, Jr. had appointed each of his counselors in the First Presidency in this manner. Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Sections 80, 99, 107.

9 Ibid., Section 115:1b.
would be carried out. While the church usually accepted Joseph's ideas, Latter Day Saints were independent and might well have challenged the nomination and overturned it had it come in any other form. The conference might have appointed another to the office or delayed appointing anyone. A formal, written revelation, however, presented the conference with an unambiguous choice--either acceptance or rejection--and while the membership might question the wisdom of the president at times, they could not refuse to accept what they considered a message from God through the prophet. The distinctions they saw between the president who was a man and open to error, and the true prophet of the "Living God" were crucial to Smith's triumph in this matter. What Smith effectively did in this instance was to take the appointive power into his hands as president, thus centralizing authority in his office.

Sometimes Smith chose not to use this great power. In 1865 and 1866, for example, the General Conferences returned to the committee method of naming general officers. Of course, Smith had a vested interest in the appointments made by the General Conference committees, and he made his wishes known. But the conference had the right to reject or accept his choices.  

In 1873 Joseph Smith decided that the leading quorums of the church had to be reorganized. Death, resignation, defection, and infirmity had decimated the ranks of the church's general officers. Smith

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operated alone in the presidency, Israel L. Rogers acted alone in the
Presiding Bishopric, and less than half of the Apostles were still
functioning. The Quorums of Seventy had been similarly reduced. After
several attempts to appoint new members to these quorums through the
old committee method had failed, Smith decided to assert his power as in
1863. He had hinted at the conferences of 1870 that unless something
changed such a revelatory reorganization might soon be on the agenda,
and that God through his prophet would handle the problem quickly,
efficiently, and without political conflict.

Smith completely centralized the appointive power in his office
with the declaration of a revelation dated March 1, 1873. He presented
it to the conference for consideration at its meeting of April 10, and

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11 Apostle James A. Blakeslee had died in 1866; Apostle John Shippy
had resigned in 1868; Counselor Philo Howard in the Presiding Bishopric
had died in 1869; venerable Apostle Charles Derry had resigned in 1870
because he did not believe he had been called of God; Apostle Zenas H.
Gurley, Sr. had died in August 1871; Smith's counselor in the presidency,
William Marks had died in May 1872; and Apostle Samuel Powers had passed
away in February 1873. In addition, Apostles Reuben Newkirk and David
Rasey, and one of the Bishopric's counselors, William Aldrich, had be-
come largely inactive.

12 Smith had told the conference as early as 1870 that he felt
"assured the time is not far distant when those who are to fill the
positions will be made known by God." True Latter Day Saints' Herald,
17 (April 15, 1870), 243-44. See also similar statements by Smith in
1872 in True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 19 (June 1, 1872), 346. Richard
P. Howard has described this development in, "On the Background of
Section 117," Saints' Herald, 124 (February 1977), 47.

13 Minutes of the General Annual Conferences of the Reorganized
Church, April 9, 1873 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day
Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 12;
Joseph Smith to G. A. Mears, April 22, 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook
#1 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-
Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 355; Joseph Smith to
Z. H. Gurley, Jr., August 10, 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 422.

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the delegates passed it without much debate, accepting it as the work of God through His prophet. It commanded the most comprehensive administrative reorganization in the church up to that date. Smith’s revelation called W. W. Blair, an Apostle, and the prophet’s brother, David H. Smith, into the First Presidency, thus filling the quorum for the first time in the Reorganization’s history. In addition, seven men were called into the ranks of the Twelve, bringing the total number to ten; the Standing High Council was filled; a number of men were called into the Seventy; and provision was made for the ordination of counselors in the Presiding Bishopric. This document established Joseph Smith as the supreme authority in the process of appointing key personnel, and it set the precedent for all subsequent appointments to the general ecclesiastical quorums.

Smith relied upon a number of methods to enforce a certain amount of orthodoxy among the men appointed to high office within the church. First, he appointed men who were largely loyal to him, and who usually were also his friends. They were often promoted over officers whom Smith had found less compatable. In addition, during the first year of his presidency Smith asked the conference to appoint all men who served on official missions for the church to work exclusively in specific jurisdictions, and to have their expenses paid by the church.

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14Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 117; Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:5; Rules and Resolutions of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1964), 38; Kendall County Record (Yorkville, Illinois), April 10, 1873.

15Early Reorganization Minutes, October 6, 1860. This was reiterated in “Minutes of the Annual Conference,” True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 2 (May 1861), 68.
All of the administrative officers of the organization were paid by the church as well. In order to receive this stipend all of these men had to report periodically on their church activities, and the reports had to be approved by the president. This meant that the church's most important ministers felt it necessary to satisfy Smith's expectations, giving the office of the president tremendous power over the men under church appointment and the policy and doctrine they taught.  

To insure doubly a general orthodoxy within the church Smith employed a couple of men every year who worked directly under his supervision and answered only to his orders. He used them largely as troubleshooters during the 1860s, investigating problems in local congregations, resolving gross doctrinal differences, and generally enforcing the policies that Smith and the church administration had formulated. Joseph's brothers, Alexander and David Smith, were two of his most trusted aides in this position. They worked throughout the Midwest, and made two trips to Utah between 1860 and 1870—all under Joseph's direction.

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16 A survey of the conference minutes from the 1860s demonstrates the importance of the appointee reports. See Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:passim. For instance, in the semiannual conference of 1863 John Shippy reported his activities to the body, and Joseph Smith stood in his behalf acknowledging the acceptability of Shippy's work as a missionary. See "Semi-Annual Conference," True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 3 (November 1863), 116-19. If one failed to report properly it could serve as grounds for expulsion from the church. See "Conference Minutes," True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 5 (April 1864), 125.

In addition to his brothers, Smith employed two other young men as alter egos in the field. They were Charles Derry and Mark H. Forscutt, both Englishmen and both converts from Utah Mormonism. Derry had been baptized into the Utah faction in 1847 and had emigrated to the Great Basin in 1854. When he reached the intermountain West, however, he found the authorities in charge there oppressive, and he returned eastward to settle in Dodge City, Nebraska. In early 1861 a copy of the True Latter Day Saints’ Herald accidently fell into his hands. In it he read about the reorganizing movement and decided to join the church. He was a huge, muscular and handsome man whose forcefulness immediately impressed Joseph Smith. The two quickly became friends, each with a healthy respect for the other’s desires and abilities. Derry became Smith’s representative in the field during the mid-1860s, carrying out his wishes with workmanlike efficiency and competency.

Mark Forscutt, likewise, had joined the Utah church in England and migrated to the American West about 1860. Like Derry, Forscutt rebelled

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19 Joseph Smith to Charles Derry, September 19, 1865, June 6, 1865, November 1, 1865, August 20, 1866, November 22, 1866, June 25, 1867, Joseph Smith III Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri); Joseph Smith, Diary, February 11, 1865-April 4, 1865 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
against the oppression that he saw in the Great Basin and left the movement. After drifting for several years Forscutt joined the Reorganization in 1866. A robust, rotund figure who sported an elegant handlebar mustache, Forscutt immediately formed a close relationship with the young Reorganization prophet. He, again like Derry, travelled for Joseph Smith in the field, and capably carried out several complicated missions during the late 1860s.

At the same time that Smith was bringing the officials under his control the president found it necessary to curb the democratic excesses that he found in the General Conference. He considered some actions of the conferences less than wise and timely. The Reorganization was a largely congregationally oriented church wherein the members exercised their prerogatives without much restraint, and they guarded them closely. The members, thus, monitored the administrative policies of the sect carefully by means of the General Conferences. The concept known to the church as "common consent" emerged as a fundamental goal of the conference members. It was based on the assumption that the people had freely and openly to endorse the acts of the admin-


istrative hierarchy. Simply put, "common consent" meant more that mere majority rule, it meant achieving a consensus through free and open debate.  

Debate, however, sometimes became a little too free and too open for the proper conduct of business. On one occasion the conference degenerated to the level of a shouting match and on another to a fist fight over seemingly trivial procedural matters. To preserve order and dignity within the conference Smith sought to institute strict rules of operations under his unquestioned authority as chairman of the business meeting. He tried to set a good example for the membership by always acting in an orderly manner while in the chair. He never took part in debate, which although common in other policy-making gatherings, had not always been the case in the church's history. Smith also tried to lead the conferences along the paths that he believed most productive without causing the membership to question his motives or charge him with authoritarianism. He checked the more boisterous members and brought about a standard of order and decorum in the business meetings by instituting the use of correct parliamentary rules governing debate. Joseph even went so far as to compile A Manual of Practice and Rules of Order and Debate for Deliberative Assemblies of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. He stated his reason for doing so in the manual's preface:

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23 "Common consent" originally stood as a policy of the church established by revelation. See Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 25: 1b. It emerged in the early Reorganization as a concept important beyond anything witnessed in an earlier day. See the discussion of how important Reorganized Church members considered this topic in Church Member's Manual (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1957), 85-86. For excesses, see "Annual Conference, True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 9 (April 15, 1866), 122.

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The want of understanding of how to conduct and preside in various meetings held by the Church; ... together with the lack of understanding and order in preparing, presenting, and supporting, before the respective assemblies, the several motions and resolutions for which consideration is asked and action demanded, make such a work a necessity ... Order promotes peace; hence a uniform understanding of how to conduct meetings held for the contemplation, consideration, and decision of matters of importance will greatly aid in preserving the harmony, dignity, and peace of coworkers in Christ; and will in no wise prevent the prevailing of the Spirit of God, which must ever be a spirit of harmony and order. Smith’s measures -- adopting rules of parliamentary law, demonstrating through personal example proper decorum during debate, and giving subtle direction along the course he believed the church should follow -- went far toward achieving a certain amount of order in the General Conference, but went even further in centralizing power in the hands of Joseph Smith.

This did not mean that Smith directed the conference down paths so narrow that there was no room for debate. He thought healthy debate essential to the proper functioning of the theocratic democracy that he envisioned establishing, but he did want to curb the excesses of democracy that he saw in the Reorganization, to strike a middle ground between the cut-and-dried conferences of the Utah Mormon faction and the rollicking donnybrooks common among some Protestant synods of the time. It is clear, however, that Smith gave a great deal of thought, time, and energy to the smooth operation of the General Conferences, always looking upon them as a challenge. Sometimes, he tried too hard to anticipate every

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25 Joseph Smith to Charles Derry, October 23, 1866, Joseph Smith III Papers.
development, everything that might go wrong. As a result of such overexertion Smith grew ill-tempered and short of patience. On one such occasion, recognizing that his brother had been wearing himself out in preparation for the upcoming conference, David H. Smith wrote to the prophet in March 1871 from his mission in the Great Lakes region to counsel him about how best to prepare for the meetings. He told Joseph:

Before coming to conference I would counsel you to rest your mind as much as possible, if you are weary then and worn, the influences will widen if you are fresh and cheerful the same spirit will pervade. The welfare of the church demands that you shift lesser cares and be strong for the greater. . . . Take Tatty [Smith's horse] and go for a rest and don't preach preach preach until your brain is utterly drained.25

Whether Smith did as his brother suggested cannot be determined, but he did enjoy the conference more than he had others in the past.27 Generally, during the 1860s Smith made steady progress toward greater control of the General Conferences.

In Smith's quest for centralization of authority, he also sought to gain direction over the publications of the church. When Smith took office the movement's only regular publication was the True Latter Day Saints' Herald, a monthly tabloid under the care of an old antislavery publisher from Cincinnati, Isaac Sheen. The church had no printing plant in the early 1860s. Sheen solicited manuscripts from the membership,

25 David H. Smith to Joseph Smith, March 4, 1871, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
27 True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 18 (April 15, 1871), 273.
wrote much of the material himself, and jobbed the actual printing
out to a commercial house. Smith and others in the church recognized
that the central organization needed control over this most effective
of communications tools. They came to consider it the president’s prerogative to direct the church’s publishing activities, and as early as
1861 began to allow Smith to censor the Herald and any other church
publications in the interest of consistency and orthodoxy. Those who
favored such censorship argued that no one in the church was more
competent for the job than a prophet of God.

Acting on this assumption, the October 1861 conference passed
a resolution, which had the full support of the church hierarchy,
granting Joseph Smith as Prophet-President of the church, “the examination and supervision of the matter going into the Herald.”  The move
greatly increased the power of the presidency, for the Herald shaped
theology, stated policy, and presented a vehicle for the unified direc-
tion of the church. Recognizing its importance, Smith sought to expand
the power of the publishing arm of the church. He lobbied with the
membership for donations to purchase a printing plant, to expand pub-
lication to include tracts, scriptures, and religious books of all
types, and to increase the size of the Herald, and the variety of its
contents.

28Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:298.
29True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 3 (February 1862), 192; Joseph
Smith, “An Appeal to the Saints,” True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 3
(November 1862), 108-09.
30Joseph Smith, Salutatory; ibid., 7 (May 1, 1865), 129, 14 (Nov-
ember 1868), 141.
In 1865 the church conference voted to appoint Smith as managing editor of the Herald and general business manager of the printing office. It was evident from the outset that Smith was a fine writer and a good editor. He demonstrated some selectiveness in the articles he published, but nearly always steered a middle course in theological debate. Most importantly for the young Reorganization, he guided members away from heated debates concerning matters of church doctrine, policy, or procedure whenever possible.  

When Smith assumed responsibility for church publications, he found that living in Nauvoo cut him off from the mainstream of church operations. The new printing office that had been established under his direction was in Plano, Illinois, so Smith moved there in January 1866 to be closer to his work, settling in a home donated for his use by some of the Plano Saints. When many of the leading officials of the movement followed Smith to Plano, the Reorganization could begin to describe the small village as the "church headquarters."  

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31 Leonard Lea, "Editorial;" ibid., 81 (November 6, 1934), 1407.
32 In the 1860s Plano was a boom town because of the completion of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad line through the community. With the railroad came a large number of businesses and a rapid influx of people. A number of prominent churchmembers lived in the town—Israel Rogers, David Dancer, and Elijah Banta were the most important—and these men were the prime movers in establishing the village as a central congregation point for many of the church membership. Rev. E. W. Hicks, History of Kendall County, Illinois From the Earliest Discoveries to the Present Time (Aurora, Illinois: Knickerbocker and Hodder, 1877) 298-99; Biographical Directory of the Voters and Tax-Payers of Kendall County, Illinois; Containing, also, a Map of the County; and Historical Sketch; a Business Directory; an Abstract of Every-Day Laws; Officers of Society, Lodges, etc., etc. (Chicago, Illinois: G. Fisher and Company, 1876), 9, 17, 19, 58, 59; Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (June 25, 1935), 817, 82 (July 30, 1935), 975-78, 82 (August 6, 1935), 1007.
Once settled in Plano Smith worked to expand the role of the printing office, hoping to make it a more effective missionary tool. As a by-product, however, he was able to extend his control over the central church administration. He moved the Herald offices twice during this period, each time substantially increasing the size and complexity of the operation. Soon Smith presided over a printing establishment composed of many volunteer and a few paid assistants, an efficient steam printing press, small rooms overflowing with proof and standing presses, compositors' areas, a sophisticated bindery, numerous storerooms, and a well-stocked bookstore. 33

As the printing office's facilities grew so did the variety of its publications. Smith began to publish hymnals, devotional and doctrinal books, pamphlets, tracts, stationery, Sunday School curriculum materials such as certificates, report forms, and classroom supplies, and the scriptures. 34 In mid-1871, for instance, Smith was able to advertise twenty English language tracts, two German tracts, and one tract written in Danish. In addition, his bookstore stocked fifteen different titles, including the scriptures of the church, several concordances, study materials, Biblical history texts, travel accounts of


34The best means of determining the quantity and type of publications issued by the printing office under Smith in the 1860s is to survey the entries in Chad J. Flake, ed., A Mormon Bibliography, 1830-1930 (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1978), 547-58.
explorers in Central America, and even the Koran. In July 1869, Smith began issuing the Zion's Hope, a children's newspaper. In an advertisement for the Hope, Smith wrote: "Every child in Israel should be supplied with the Hope. It is designed specifically to qualify them for the great future, in which we anticipate their performing so important a part."

Smith's greatest publishing accomplishment during this period was a long awaited revision of the Bible that his father had undertaken. Joseph Smith, Jr. began the work in December 1830, and worked on it relatively consistently for the next three years. He then put it aside until the 1840s and was in the process of preparing it for publication at the time of his death. As was noted earlier Smith's widow successfully staved off Brigham Young's efforts to secure it, along with other papers belonging to her husband, in late 1844. When she and her son united with the Reorganization in 1860, Emma still had

35 Books, Tracts, & etc. For Sale at Herald Office, Plano, Ill., "True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 18 (July 1, 1871), 416.
36 "Advertisement;" ibid., 16 (November 1, 1869), 288.
37 Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 34.
the manuscript in her possession. 39

In 1866 the General Conference resolved that the time had come to obtain the Bible manuscript from the prophet’s mother, and publish it. The conference appointed a committee to procure the manuscript from Emma Bidamon, and another, headed by Smith, to carry out its actual publication. 40 The committee obtained the documents with no difficulty and took them to Plano where Smith’s committee began its work in mid-1866. 41 Smith employed Marietta Hodges Faulconer—a young and vivacious widow who later became famous in the church under the married name of Marietta Walker—and Mark Forscutt as editors to take the several parts of the manuscript that Joseph Smith had made and assemble a copy ready for the printer. They worked diligently on this manuscript for the rest of the year. 42

In January 1867 Smith’s committee began proofreading the Faulconer-Forscutt manuscript and negotiating with a number of outside printers, for this job was too large for even the expanded Herald plant. 43 To

39 Joseph Smith remembered in his memoirs that his mother even refused to show her children the manuscripts of the revision of the Bible. Smith, “Memoirs,” in Herald, 82 (June 25, 1935), 125.

40 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:433-34, 4:430; True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 9 (April 15, 1866), 125.

41 Complainants’ Abstract of Pleading and Evidence, in the Circuit Court of the United States, Western District of Missouri, Western Division, at Kansas City, Missouri (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1893), 156-157.

42 Matthews, “A Plainer Translation,” 142-44.

43 Emma Bidamon to Joseph Smith, January 20, 1867, February 10, 1867, Emma Smith Bidamon Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
facilitate rapid publication, Smith concocted a subscription system in which the church members reserved copies for $2.50 each. Smith dispatched trusted aides throughout the country collecting the subscriptions, and by the end of the summer of 1867, he had obtained over $5,000 toward publication costs. Smith next sent one of the committee members with publishing experience, Ebenezer Robinson, the former editor of Nauvoo's *Times and Seasons* in the days of his father, to hire a printer. The printing was accomplished promptly and the Bibles were delivered in late 1867. Joseph Smith had achieved, according to the Saints, "a major act of goodness," and had significantly aided the propagation of the gospel. In so doing he substantially increased his centralization of the church's authority, for he had controlled the whole process.

The young prophet's program for the delineation of the doctrine of the church was at least as important as his restructuring of the church's organization. At the time of his ordination there was very little church doctrine. Reorganized Mormons agreed on opposition to polygamy and on lineal succession in the presidency, but not on much else where doctrine was concerned. Smith worked to correct this deficiency throughout the first years of his presidency. On assuming his

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44 Joseph Smith to Spencer Smith, June 24, 1868, Joseph Smith III Papers; Joseph Smith, "The Publication Committee," *True Latter Day Saints' Herald*, 11 (February 1, 1867), 42.

post, however, he merely pledged to uphold Christian virtues and ideals, and at first he made no doctrinal statements other than to denounce the Utah Mormon practices.

Early in his presidency, Smith began to steer the Reorganization toward the theology of the Mormon church as it had been during his boyhood days in Kirtland, Ohio. He wanted the church to jettison the doctrinal baggage that it had acquired during the Nauvoo experience. Joseph rejected, then, not only the concept of plural marriage, but secret temple rituals, plurality of gods, blood atonement, eternal progression, and the notion of a theocratically managed, independent nation-state as well. Over the years he led the church to adopt beliefs more protestant than uniquely Mormon. In combating the doctrines that he loathed, and in attempting to define more clearly the Reorganization’s beliefs, the young prophet insisted that the scriptures of the church—the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants—must be the standard against which all doctrine must be measured. If a doctrine ran counter to scripture as interpreted by the final authority in the church, that is, the prophet in council with the General Conference, it should be im-

46 Alma R. Blair has observed that some Mormon schismatic groups took their theology and organization from the earliest period of the church, while those who went to Utah carried to a logical extent the doctrines arising out of the Nauvoo experience. The Reorganization, however, was "oriented toward those ideas that had been prevalent in the middle period [at Kirtland], about 1833 to 1838." Blair, "Moderate Mormons," in Restoration Movement, 209-210.
mediately and forever rejected. This meant, in effect, that Smith became the final authority on matters of doctrine, since the conference generally asked the prophet to pray about any controversial matter and render an inspired decision. He might take years before he rendered a final decision, as he did on the question of the "gathering" of the Saints in order to establish a zionic community, but whenever he did speak, he did so diplomatically and in a way that disgruntled as few people as possible.

Indicative of Smith's administration of doctrinal affairs was his delicate handling of the debate over the nature of God and the Godhead. The Book of Abraham, supposedly translated from ancient Egyptian papri by Joseph Smith, Jr. was accepted by several influential leaders in the early Reorganization as theologically sound, although


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it had no official status in the canon of scripture. The book very clearly taught the concept of a plurality of gods. These gods, according to the record, formed a council which was presided over by a supreme Lord. The council "organized" the universe, placed man upon the earth, and offered him a plan of salvation that allowed humans to become gods as well, provided they adhered strictly to the system.

Smith refused to accept such doctrine as correct, but knew it had strong support from several of the church's leading men. He was present at a Quorum of Twelve meeting in 1865 when the members of the quorum debated the issue and voted that they considered the doctrine scriptural. Smith, insisted, however, that belief in the doctrine


51 Council of Twelve Minutes, 1865-1928, May 2-5, 1865 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
could not be considered a test of fellowship within the organization, and he demanded that it not be taught except upon rare occasions.  

As time passed the occasions upon which Smith allowed his lieutenants to teach the multiple god theory grew rarer. At the same time, many of the staunchest supporters of the concept grew old and began to die. By simply waiting out his elderly opponents, Smith had avoided a long and heated doctrinal debate. Gradually the church came to accept Smith's view of the matter, which was the prevailing Christian view of God and the Godhead. In the early 1870s, a formidable proponent of the multiple god doctrine, Zenas H. Gurley, Sr., died, and the theory failed to find another truly capable champion thereafter. Afterwards Smith began reprimanding the priesthood more often and more severely for preaching the doctrine publicly. 

Joseph Smith's method of destroying belief in secret temple rites differed radically from his approach to the multiple god controversy. The secret rites had never received the support of the membership that had been mustered on behalf of the plurality of gods, and

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52 Two instances in which Smith allowed the opposition to air its interpretations were "A Plurality of Gods," True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 1 (October 1860), 280-83, a very early statement in Smith's career; W. W. Blair, "The Harmony of the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants," True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 10 (September 1866), 69.

Smith, therefore, believed he could quickly and efficiently overcome any bastions of support. He mounted a frontal attack on the belief by pointing to the prime practitioners of it, the Utah Mormons, and calling it one of the finest examples of "priestcraft" he had ever witnessed. The concept was so inextricably linked with the Saints of the Great Basin that few Reorganized Mormons chose to challenge Smith's teachings on the matter.

While the Reorganization cherished certain "sacred" events that had taken place in the Kirtland and Nauvoo Temples, it perceived temples in general as public houses of worship rather than as settings in which mystical ceremonies could be performed. As for Smith, the young prophet had little firsthand knowledge of what the Utah Mormon faction had embraced regarding temple rites, but he always asserted that they were largely doctrinal baggage added to the church without serving a useful purpose. Smith stood at the forefront of those in opposition to the Mormon temple ceremonies of sealings, marriages for eternity, and sacred washings and anointings. On one occasion he wrote a friend confiding that he thought few temple rituals worthwhile, and


"would not value going through the temple a dollar's worth," he declared, "I cannot see anything sacred or divine in it."  

Somewhat paradoxically, then, Joseph Smith and the Reorganization did not reject one Mormon temple rite, baptism for the death.  

Predicated on the double assumption that God loves all mankind and grants each an opportunity for salvation, and that salvation cannot be granted without baptism, the doctrine provided for the baptism of all men by proxy.  

If a person died without accepting Mormonism, the doctrine held, he might still be taught after death, and another could be baptized on earth in his stead. It was an extremely attractive concept for many Latter Day Saints, because it allowed for the salvation of all and demonstrated the justice of God. Young Joseph Smith recognized the doctrine as possibly legitimate, at least in principle, throughout his life.  

Smith discussed the idea of baptism for the dead with the Quorum of Twelve in 1865, and produced the first official stand of the church on the subject during the meeting. William Marks, one man in the Reorganization who was "in the know" concerning doctrinal ideas of the Nauvoo period, told this meeting that the doctrine had been considered a permissive rite, to be practiced only under the most restricted conditions in a temple built especially for the purpose. Marks asserted that Joseph Smith, Jr., "stopped the Baptism for the dead" in Nauvoo, and "did not  

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56 Joseph Smith to L. L. Barth, May 26, 1893, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4, 382-83.  
57 This ritual had been established by Joseph Smith, Jr. in Nauvoo, Illinois in 1841. See Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Sections 107, 109, 110.
believe it would be practiced any more until there was a fountain built in Zion or Jerusalem." Under the younger Smith's direction, the Council resolved "that it is proper to teach the doctrine of baptism for the dead when it is necessary to do so in order to show the completeness of the plan of salvation, but wisdom dictates that the way should be prepared by the preaching of the first principles." This stand did not change during Smith's presidency, but with the stipulation that baptisms for the dead had to be carried out in a temple and with no prospect for the building of such an edifice in the immediate future, the doctrine was shunted into a nether land between belief and practice. Gradually the church stopped teaching the doctrine. To ignore, as one has remarked, was to reject.

Joseph Smith also de-emphasized the "Word of Wisdom," a series of dietary regulations which his father had given in 1833. The document recommended that Saints abstain from alcoholic beverages, tobacco, hot drinks, stimulants and depressants, and excessive amounts of meat. The

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58 Council of Twelve Minutes, 1865-1928, May 2-5, 1865.
59 Council of Twelve Resolutions, 1865-1914, 3.
60 Joseph Smith to Alfred Ward, May 9, 1880, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #3, 99-102; Joseph Smith to Job Brown, January 5, 1886, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4, 189-90; Joseph Smith to L. L. Barth, May 26, 1893, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4, 382-83; Joseph Smith to Mrs. N. S. Peterson, May 3, 1894, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #5, 229-30; Joseph Smith to John R. Haldeman, May 5, 1896, Joseph Smith Letterbook #6, 413. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, The Reorganized Church Versus Salvation for the Dead (Salt Lake City, Utah, n.p., n.d.), passim.
61 Blair, "Moderate Mormons," in Restoration Movement, 222.
revelation admonished Saints to eat grains, vegetables, fruits, and to drink water. Saints who followed the revelation were promised a long, natural life and better all-around health. The younger Smith, somewhat like his father, did not take the Word of Wisdom as a law which all churchmembers had to obey. In fact, as far as the substances prohibited in the revelation were concerned, young Joseph preached moderation rather than prohibition.

As Smith managed to gain control of the church’s administrative machinery, and to redefine and focus the movement doctrinally, he faced some minor opposition. A few members worried that Smith might become highly authoritarian and try to impose his will upon the church. They looked upon themselves as the keepers of the church’s democratic nature, who were to guard the power of the church members at large to oppose any possible infringement of their rights through the General Conferences. These dissidents, Smith reasoned, served a good purpose by sending a warning sign whenever he moved too quickly or radically toward a new objective. Whenever they arose in protest during the 1860s and early 1870s Smith adjusted his ideas and actions to fall within bounds which they found acceptable. As a result the sect remained relatively democratic

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62 Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 86.

63 Joseph Smith to Joseph Lampert, February 22, 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 99-102; Joseph Smith to Maria A. Falk, July 16, 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 399; Joseph Smith to M. B. Williams, May 10, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2, 190; Joseph Smith to William Hart, May 16, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1A (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 48; Kendall County Record, April 4, 1878, May 27, 1880, July 14, 1881.
while Smith carried out his centralization process. As one Apostle, Charles Derry, described the church's policy, "no man is questioned or snubbed for thinking and voting contrary to the majority."

However, once an issue was decided by the church Smith insisted that everyone publicly support the decision. Smith confided to Derry in 1865: "With a man's private belief we have nothing to do, but when that belief is propagated as a doctrine of the church, we can and will put a foot upon it to its extinction." Smith followed this philosophy throughout his presidency. He would accept what he considered "just criticism" of any idea, but he would not allow such criticism to do harm to all the changes that he had so laboriously carried out.

The program of centralization undertaken by Joseph Smith in the 1860s and 1870s was a revolution to many within the church. Those who could remember the centralized hierarchy of the church under Joseph Smith, Jr. were growing older by this time, and everyone had been tinged by the years of relative chaos of the so-called "dark and cloudy day" when the church broke up into factions. Smith worked to correct the lack of direction of that period, and largely did so without upsetting too many people within the movement who cherished absolute freedom. Smith believed that there were many routes to the same goal, but that a concerted effort in the same direction by the whole of the Reorganization would accomplish

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65 Joseph Smith to Charles Derry, September 19, 1855, Joseph Smith III Papers.

66 Joseph Smith to James Caffall, June 12, 1880, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #3, 152.
the desired end most effectively. To a remarkable degree, by the middle 1870s, he succeeded in setting up a centralized church that could carry out an extensive missionary program, settle doctrinal disputes with minimum of conflict, and enter into other areas of activity without virulent debate. It was fortunate that Smith had built such an organization, for the late 1870s and much of the 1880s would be wracked with turmoil arising from several quarters within the church as certain leaders resisted Smith's leadership.
AND THERE CAME PROPHETS IN THE LAND AGAIN: THE LIFE OF JOSEPH SMITH III, 1832-1914, MORMON REFORMER

VOLUME II

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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in
The Department of History

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Chapter 9

"AND THE LORD CALLED HIS PEOPLE, ZION"

While Joseph Smith managed to build an impressive administrative machine and made significant strides toward defining theology in the Reorganized Church during the 1860s he consistently avoided one of the most pressing concerns of the church’s membership. This was the Mormon concept of Zion. The early Latter Day Saints had been millennialian, and took as a primary mission of the movement the task of building a utopian society on the American frontier. Mormon communities were early founded in the hope of serving as ensigns to the nations, as places that would foster a new, righteous social order that could serve as a catalyst of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the advent of the Millennial Reign. Under Joseph Smith, Jr., the church had established settlements at Kirtland, Ohio; Independence, and Far West, Missouri; and Nauvoo, Illinois with this dream in mind, but in each case the dream had ended in failure and disillusionsment. The reasons for failure had been complex, but certainly the unwillingness of the Saints to live under the strict laws of the community established by the prophet and the non-Mormon
persecution of the Saints were important factors.\(^1\)

By the time the Reorganization had coalesced under Jason Briggs and Zenas Gurley during the 1850s many early Latter Day Saints had become somewhat disenchanted with the visions of Zion and the gathering of the righteous that had been offered by Joseph Smith, Jr. during the 1830s and 1840s. The failure of those visions to materialize had made them reevaluate the zionic concept and modify it somewhat. None of them, however, rejected the concept outright. All looked with great longing toward the day when the prophet would call them to gather at a selected place and establish Zion on earth. The caution that the early Reorganization leaders had exercised in the organizing process of 1852 was repeated in the way that they dealt with this hope for an earthly kingdom. Under Briggs and Gurley the church conference of 1852 adopted a very mild policy statement proposing “that in the opinion of this conference there is no [place] to which the Saints on this

continent are commanded to gather at the present time." The conference did not reject the goal of Zion, and asked the Saints "to turn their hearts and their gazes towards Zion, and supplicate the Lord God for such deliverance." This instruction pointed up the uncertainty of the new organization on this subject during the 1850s, but it also accented the longing of the church to return to the quest for a physical utopian community. This longing would surface after the ordination of Joseph Smith in 1860 as the Saints made clear that they expected the prophet to act as a community builder.

When young Smith assumed the leadership of the Reorganized Church he already held a few ideas about the approach the Saints should take toward the zionic mission of the church. While he stood convinced that his father's approach to the building of utopian communities was basically correct, Smith realized that the early church had tried to go too far too quickly. Neither the church members nor the non-Mormons were sufficiently prepared to accept such a utopian experiment.

The Saints had never exhibited the unselfishness and respect for each other necessary to make the project work. And they had never, Smith thought, shown the personal piety and perfection crucial to the successful establishment of such a Christian utopian society. Non-Mormons, on the other hand, did not understand the significance to the

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Mormons of such a society and worked to destroy it whenever the church made attempts to create one.  

Smith thought the Reorganization's Zion building effort should take on a more liberal and all encompassing tone than it had during his father's lifetime. For Joseph Smith Zion or the millennial kingdom of God could only be built through personal righteousness and moral perfection. This could be accomplished only through personal piety and the elimination of evil. This elimination of evil extended not just to oneself but to society in general. Hence Zion could only achieve full fruition through the reform of American society. The Saints, Smith hoped, would become moral crusaders within the United States and not just people who withdrew from the world for religious reasons. Smith, thus, accented the spiritual nature of Zion over the more traditional emphasis upon Zion as a physical community.

As a result of Joseph's personal emphasis upon the inner purity of the Saints and the necessity of their working to change the world for the better the young prophet early became an active and ruthless reformer. He wrote in an editorial in the True Latter Day Saints' [1]

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Herald during the mid-1860s that "the church should begin to take high moral ground in regard to very many abuses in society, which can only be reached, to correction, by a strong setting in upon them of the current of public opinion." This, Smith believed, would serve the mission of the church to establish Zion very well. Smith, thus, agitated for prohibition and against fornication, adultery, and other kindred sins. Smith believed that the church must act as a force for good in the world. It would crusade to eliminate sin (the primary barrier to the establishment of Zion) and thereby be a catalyst in the founding of a utopian society. The effort might take decades, even centuries, but the church would ultimately triumph if it moved in a unified, cautious, and steady manner.

Joseph Smith's concern with the spiritual aspect of an earthly kingdom of God did not mean that he totally neglected the quest for a physical Zion. The church did not want him to but he did insist that it take a less important role than it had in the past. Prodded by the church membership as well as a Quincy, Illinois lawyer named Godfrey, Smith in mid-1860 explored the possibility of pressing claims for damages suffered by the church when the early Saints had been expelled from their land in Missouri in 1838. Considering the prospect of designating

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5 True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 29 (February 18, 1880), 49.

6 Ibid., 27 (September 18, 1880), 284; Joseph Smith to Rev. F. Wilson, September 23, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 27; Joseph Smith to David R. Ramsey, August 6, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2, 376; The Weekly Argus (Sandwich, Illinois), July 16, 1881; Kendall County Record (Yorkville, Illinois), December 8, 1875, April 4, 1878; True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 8 (September 1, 1865), 67.
a place of gathering for the church in Missouri if they could receive
the land they had owned there, Smith sent Godfrey to Independence to
research the land records at the courthouse and bring back a list of
property held by the early Saints. Smith and Godfrey then compiled
a list of claims that they believed could be made good in a court of
law.\(^7\)

Anticipating victory, Smith sent his stepfather, Lewis Bidamon,
to Independence to look over the proposed lands and determine which
ones would best suit the church as a gathering place. Bidamon had been
there for only a few days, however, when he realized that the Saints
had absolutely no chance of obtaining a favorable settlement in the
courts. Many of the Missourians who had expelled the Saints twenty-
two years earlier were still in the vicinity and were still as strongly
opposed to the church as they had been previously. Their hostility
was sure to be reflected by the Missouri courts which would have to
decide the suit.

Even if the Saints should win the case, (which was unlikely),
the Mormon settlers might well face the same forceful expulsion as had
their predecessors. Finally, from a purely legal standpoint the church
had abandoned its land in Missouri, and neglected to pay taxes on it.
After a number of years the state had sold the properties for back taxes
and by 1860 it was owned by people who had purchased it legally from
the state. Even a fair court would hesitate to take away their property

\(^7\)Joseph Smith, "Autobiography of Joseph Smith," in Edward W.
Tullidge, The Life of Joseph the Prophet (Plano, Illinois: Herald
Publishing House, 1880), 775-76; Amboy (Illinois) Times, March 17, 1864.
after such a long time. 8

Instead of returning to Nauvoo after concluding that a
lawsuit to recover these former holdings in western Missouri would prove
unsuccessful, Bidamon decided to find a location for a settlement for the
people of the Reorganized Church, one for the purchase of which he might
serve as broker and thereby make himself a significant profit. He,
therefore, pushed northward to Weston, Missouri, Council Bluffs, Iowa,
and Florence, Nebraska telling anyone who would listen that he was the
agent of a large organization in Illinois that wanted to found a city
on the frontier. Bidamon refrained unless pressed from telling those
with whom he talked that the organization was the Reorganized Church
of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and that its goal was to conduct
a utopian experiment. Those land speculators to whom he did give
details immediately recognized that while settlers in the vicinity
might not want Mormons living among them a sale could mean tremendous
profits, and they wrote to Joseph Smith asking him to consider seriously
purchasing and settling their land.

By the time that Bidamon returned to Nauvoo, Joseph had built up
weeks of rage and vented it all on the Major. He told Bidamon that he

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8Complainants' Abstract of Pleading and Evidence in the Circuit
Court of the United States, Western District of Missouri, Western Division,
at Kansas City, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter Day Saints
vs. the Church of Christ at Independence, et al. (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald
Publishing House, 1893), 275-78; Joseph Smith, "Editorial," Saints' Herald,
24 (January 15, 1877), 25; Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church
(Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1976), 558-59; Lawrence
M. Friedman, A History of American Law (New York: Simon and Schuster,
1973), 212-13, 376-79; Tom Bennett, "The Church in Court (The Temple Lot
Case)," Saints' Herald, 120 (November 1973), 25, 39.
had exceeded his authority, that the church had no concrete plans to form a utopian settlement, and that Bidamon would have to write each of the land promoters explaining that the church had little interest in his offer. Bidamon knew he had used poor judgment in the matter, and wrote the land promoters as Joseph directed, but he also tried to make amends by giving Smith a detailed report of the prospects of the Saints being able to recover their lands around Independence, Missouri. As a result of this report Smith dropped the idea of suing for indemnities of any kind, and the Reorganized Church forgot about returning to Missouri for the forseeable future.

Apparently Bidamon's excursion into western Iowa and eastern Nebraska reached many more people than just the land promoters to whom he talked on the trip. As a result of the tour Smith began receiving letters from ambitious promoters all over the United States offering to sell their land at a "very reasonable price." Most of the offers, like the one made by the former territorial Chief Justice of Utah, John F. Kinney, were quickly dismissed by Smith, with the reply that the Reorganization had no plans for the settlement of the church anywhere in the immediate future.

Other offers were not so easily disposed of. Some were made by old members of the church or friends of Smith's father. Not long after his ordination, for instance, Smith received a letter postmarked New

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York City. It was from James Arlington Bennet, the debonnaire proprietor of the Arlington House educational institution located on Long Island. He had been a friend of Joseph's father during the 1840s, and may have joined the church just before the prophet's death. In his letter Bennet reminisced about his friendship with the prophet and applauded young Joseph's acceptance of leadership in the Reorganization. Bennet went on to observe that the church after his father's death unfortunately had succumbed to the evils of the world, principally plural marriage, and that he hoped the young leader would be able to reform it. Bennet noted that as a small token of the esteem in which he held the church and the Smith family he was willing to help Joseph establish a utopian community for the Saints that would be as powerful as anything his father had achieved. Smith read with particular interest:

I am not aware of what property you have in Nauvoo, nor indeed do I know whether you live in Nauvoo, but if it were necessary & meet to form a nucleus around which the Saints might congregate I have 150 acres of land in Livingston County, Illinois most admirably located between the Grant R. Roads that I would give for the purpose. Here immense numbers of the Saints would repair from all parts of the U. S. including Utah. Where under your plan their respectibility and power would soon be felt.11

Smith considered the offer for a time but ultimately turned it down. Smith's mother may have influenced him to disregard Bennet's offer, for she greatly disliked and distrusted him, on one occasion even calling

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him an "old arch hypocrite."\textsuperscript{12}

Smith also received a letter from another Bennett, John Cook Bennett, a man whom the Saints had expelled from the church in 1842 on charges ranging from seduction of a young church woman to attempted murder of the prophet.\textsuperscript{13} In June 1860 Bennett wrote the young Reorganization leader from Polk City, Iowa, a small town north of Des Moines, where he was raising chickens for the commercial market. He told Smith that he had many acres of land that he would gladly make available for the church's use as a gathering location. He ended by asking that Smith keep their correspondence secret for the present, and that he send him a fictitious name and address so that they could communicate in strictest confidence. Smith later recalled, "I immediately wrote him that any communication addressed to Joseph Smith, Box 60, Hancock County Illinois, would reach me and be given proper and due consideration." Smith went on to tell Bennett that he "had but one name and one address for the communications of either friend or foe," and did not want to do business with anyone who could not deal openly. Smith never heard from Bennett again.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12}Emma Bidamon to Joseph Smith, January 21, 1870, Mormon Collection (Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois).


The rather strange and even questionable offers Smith received from those who supposedly wanted to help the church coupled with the problems of pressing claims in Missouri and his natural interest in Zion as a spiritual rather than simply a physical community made Smith decide against working toward the establishment of a church settlement anywhere for the foreseeable future. Moreover, problems with persecution in Nauvoo during the summer of 1860 rekindled young Smith's childhood memories of mob violence, death, and destruction suffered by the early church in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Joseph recognized that much of the animosity between Mormons and Gentiles arose from the settlement of large numbers of Saints in utopian communities which occupied relatively small areas. By the fall of 1860 Smith had decided to steer clear of what he considered unnecessary difficulty and delivered a general epistle to the church outlining his official policy on Zion and the gathering of the Saints. He told the church, "there is no command to gather... at any given locality." Before any such gathering could take place, he told his followers, "there are many obstacles to be met with by us, which are to be overcome, not the least of which is the prejudice of those, who, must unfortunately for us, judge of us from specimen of men, who either were, or are, or claim to be of the so-called Mormon faith." He counseled the Saints to remain in their present homes, and to seek to demonstrate the Christian faith to a world filled with

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15 Smith's difficulties with non-Mormons in Nauvoo in mid-1860 were recounted in Chapter 7. The story of the church's previous persecutions have been analyzed in Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1979), 44-64.
evil. "Our land is wide, and full of pleasant places wanting good men for citizens," Smith declared. He asked only that the Saints move "from places where crime, wickedness, and abominations are sanctioned, or justified; and . . . quietly settle themselves in some region of the country where truth is acknowledged, where they can serve God, be good to their fellow-men, live uprightly and honestly before God, and in the sight of men, . . . holding in honor the laws of the land, a living in obedience and amenable to them." While most church members accepted this policy as the most logical course for the present, everyone considered it only temporary and looked forward to the time when they could begin gathering in the church's first zionic community.

While Smith tried to ignore the hope for a kingdom on earth, pressure from the church membership to undertake some communal experiment mounted throughout the 1860s. An 1863 article in the official church organ summed up the general belief of the Saints when the author wrote that the Saints live "daily as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, who look for 'a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.'" Smith's attempts to curtail reckless gathering, it seemed could not contain the zionic impulse. While the church could not persuade Smith to designate a formal place to assemble, Plano, Illinois,

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18"The Location of Zion, No. 4," True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 3 (April 1863), 138.
where most of the leading officials lived after 1866, became something of an unofficial settlement location for the Saints during the latter 1860s. Many of the going institutions of the church—the printing office, a large congregation of members, and religious educational activities—were located in Plano. Smith, Bishop Israel Rogers, several of the Apostles, and a number of important members who were businessmen, such as David Dancer and the flamboyant Elijah Banta, were residents of Plano. Churchmembers, therefore, naturally gravitated toward this center of government to be closer to both the man they considered a prophet of God, and the rapidly expanding administration of the Reorganization.

Smith was forced to respond to increasing pressure that the church designate a formal location for communal experimentation during the late 1860s, for Plano did not satisfy the sect’s desires in this regard. He wrote in the Saints’ Herald in 1868 that he heard from every quarter the constant cry for community building as his father had done, but told the church that it had not yet accomplished the self-purification necessary before it could succeed in establishing a kingdom of God on earth. “Strife and contention, with disobedience,”


he chided the Saints, "are sure fruit that the gospel, the great witness, has not wrought in us the work of peace, and without peace in our hearts we predict that no perfectness will come in Zion." He claimed that when "the faith which worketh by love commands them to perfect themselves by the gospel; repenting, ceasing to do evil of any and every kind, become the earnest champions of truth, and there will be no want of definite action or policy" by the central administration regarding the establishment of a signal community. 21 When the plea for the spiritual uplifting of the people seemed to fail, as it did very quickly, Smith took a different tack. 22 A little over a year later he responded to a new demand for a zionic community by suggesting that those who wished to engage in a gathering should informally settle with others of like mind and develop their local settlement. 23

Smith wrestled with this difficult theological problem periodically throughout the latter part of the 1860s. He believed in the zionic ideal perhaps as strongly as anyone in the church, but he remained cautious. He also continued to hold that any gathering attempt would fail until the Saints cleansed their lives sufficiently to live under the strict laws of such a community. In spite of this attitude of restraint, Smith could not abandon the zionic ideal. Indicative of his continued allegiance to the goal was a poem, which he wrote in the mid-1860s.

21 Joseph Smith, "Pleasant Chat," True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 13 (June 1, 1868), 168-69.
22 Ibid., 16 (August 1, 1869), 81.
23 Ibid., 16 (September 1, 1869), 146.
Gathered in one, in Christ the Lord,
Blessed in peace, his children all;
Promised defense by the Spirit’s sword,
Wait we in patience to hear his call.

Out of the rude world’s toil and care,
Haste at the Spirit’s prompting call;
Gather ye in, ’tis the hour of prayer,
Blessings of peace are waiting all.

Dreams are but given to cheer the host,
Visions are shown to be guides to all;
Benefits wait for the worn and tossed,
Gather ye here at the Spirit’s call.

Gather ye in; Hope cheers the way,
Opening for all who heed the call;
Walk they in peace by the quick’ning ray,
Which from the Father doth shine for all. 24

In late 1869 Smith began to look for a way to reconcile both
the old-style community building approach and his more spiritual approach
to the quest for Zion. Smith, as well as other equally realistic
church officials, called for the Reorganization to establish not a full-
blown communal experiment but a less ambitious joint-stock company that
would make land available to Latter Day Saints on terms equitable to
both the company and the buyers. This would mean that the settlement
would consist largely of churchmembers but that it would not carry many
of the millenarian overtones found earlier in Missouri or at Nauvoo.

Under Smith’s leadership at the October 1869 General Conference
the Saints voted to begin a program under which the early church’s

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hymn 111.
The law of Consecration and Stewardship was instituted in the Mormon movement in 1831. It was continued for only a short time, but during its operation those joining the elite membership of the law contributed all that they possessed to the church. In return, they received a stewardship of land, goods, etc. that was considered necessary for their sustenance, nothing extra in the way of luxury items and nothing less, so they were not poverty-stricken. The members then made periodic contributions of all they had accumulated during the period worked, and would, again, receive that which was necessary to their lifestyles. See Arrington, Fox, and May, Building the City of God, 15-40.

25 The law of Consecration and Stewardship was instituted in the Mormon movement in 1831. It was continued for only a short time, but during its operation those joining the elite membership of the law contributed all that they possessed to the church. In return, they received a stewardship of land, goods, etc. that was considered necessary for their sustenance, nothing extra in the way of luxury items and nothing less, so they were not poverty-stricken. The members then made periodic contributions of all they had accumulated during the period worked, and would, again, receive that which was necessary to their lifestyles. See Arrington, Fox, and May, Building the City of God, 15-40.

26 Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Sections 106,114.


28 Joseph Smith, "What Shall it be Called?" True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 17 (March 1, 1870), 144-46.
on earth, it was a necessary first step. It was designed to further the objectives of the gospel, and, Rogers wrote, “we sincerely trust that the First Order of Enoch [the name chosen for the new corporation] is but the beginning of the prosperity of Zion.”

Rogers reported that by May 1870 the Order of Enoch office had received pledges of $28,000, and that because of this remarkable response the church planned to begin formal organization of the Order in the fall of 1870. He asked that as many Saints as possible become stockholders in the company, and that all attend the church conference in September at Council Bluffs, Iowa so that a special corporate meeting could be held and the directors of the Order elected.

Smith’s United Order of Enoch was a legally constituted corporation empowered to buy and sell land or securities, construct buildings, manufacture machinery, lease assets, and make contracts. The Articles of Association called for the Order to exist for a period of twenty years with the stipulation that its charter could be renewed in 1890 if considered expedient by the stockholders. Although named after the early church’s socialistic institutional that had operated in

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Missouri in the 1830s, this company bore little resemblance to its more communal predecessor. The law of Consecration and Stewardship had provided for the establishment of a community where the members had owned all things in common. This corporation, on the other hand, worked for less idealistic goals. As its proposed constitution stated:

The general business and object of this corporation shall be the associating together of men and capital and those skilled in labor and mechanics, belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, ... for the purpose of settling, developing and improving new tracts of land ... to take cognizance of the wants of worthy and industrious poor men, who shall apply therefore, and provide them with labor and the means for securing homes and a livelihood; and to develop the energies and resources of the people who may seek those respective localities for settlement.

The purpose of the company, therefore, was benevolent but also capitalistic.

On September 19, 1870, as planned, the stockholders of the Order of Enoch held their first meeting in Council Bluffs. They established a maximum amount of capital at $40,000 and elected a board of directors consisting of seven men, four of whom lived in Iowa. Although delighted with the capital already subscribed, the directors asked and received permission from church authorities to solicit more contributions during

32 See the description of the Order in Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 42.

33 "Proposed Constitution," 126.

the next few months. In fact, as late as November 1872, the Order was still trying to increase its capitalization through added investments from church members. Most importantly for the majority of the Saints, however, at the 1870 meeting the board appointed a committee, consisting of four well-known church leaders, who were charged with "seek[ing] a suitable location for the purchase of land and the operation of said Company."^3^7

The Committee on Location went to work immediately after the fall conference. Elijah Banta, an amiable, stuttering, giant of a man, was their prime field operative, and he began traveling throughout Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri in search of a good settlement. After discovering several prospective tracts in western Iowa and northwestern Missouri, he stumbled across a huge section of relatively undeveloped land in Decatur County, Iowa. The property had many virtues. It was fertile, temperate, and well watered, and it was remote enough from the non-Mormons living in the region so that they were not excited by the establishment of a Mormon community there. It was also close to one of the Reorganization's areas of strength, the nearby farming community of Pleasanton, Iowa, where the church had some seventy-five members.^3^8

^35^"Order of Enoch," True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 17 (October 1, 1870), 605.

^36^Ibid., 19 (November 15, 1872), 659-60.


Between October 3 and November 24, 1870, Banta made several visits to Decatur County to look over the land. One of its most attractive features, he found was that a large part of the township could be purchased for as little as five dollars an acre on liberal credit terms. In addition, the prospects of a railroad being built through the proposed town site were good. After reviewing all of its attractions the Committee on Location decided to purchase the property as soon as the board approved.\(^39\) By April 5, 1871 the Board of Directors had met with Joseph Smith and everyone sanctioned the purchase. Shortly thereafter Banta contracted for the Order to buy 2,500 acres of land, 1,200 of which lay in a single tract.

In the fall of 1871 the first settlers began moving onto the Order of Enoch’s property. Religious affairs proved the single most important concern to the Saints moving there, for they wanted to make the community much more utopian than the leadership had originally planned. They soon organized a branch of the church with a charter membership of fifteen people.\(^40\) Within a few months the community had become so large and had spread so far over the Order’s acreage that congregations were established in schoolhouses on opposite ends of the land.

\(^{39}\)Elijah Banta, Journal, Book B, Mormon History Manuscripts Collection (Frederick Madison Smith Library, Graceland College, Lamoni, Iowa), 157-78.

so that the Saints would not have too far to travel to worship.\textsuperscript{41}

The rapid growth of the Latter Day Saint community astounded Joseph, who had underestimated the popularity such an experiment would enjoy. By 1875, through no vigorous promotion on the part of either the corporation or the church, the Order of Enoch's little colony contained several comfortable houses, and smaller farm dwellings, a blacksmith shop, a general store, and other business and civic buildings. The population numbered almost two hundred people, most of whom were baptized Latter Day Saints, and more were moving in almost constantly.\textsuperscript{42}

The directors of the corporation did not exercise real authority over the settlers, and the community began a relatively autonomous development under what might be called a policy of "benign neglect." The parent corporation, for instance, neglected to establish a plan for its proposed town, did not carefully supervise the use of its land, and did not ask the railroad or the state government for any special concessions like freight rate reductions or tax exemptions. The little Reorganized Church colony, thus, grew without form or direction during the mid-1870s. In 1875, however, the settlers on the Order's property decided to take charge of community planning. They assumed control of the land immediately surrounding the United States Post Office at Sedgewick, on the Order's land, renamed the place Lamoni, after a benevolent

\textsuperscript{41}Lecture of Charles F. Church, September 23, 1976 (Graceland College, Lamoni, Iowa).

\textsuperscript{42}Smith and Smith, \textit{History of Reorganized Church}, 4:120.
king in the *Book of Mormon*, and established a village on their own. 43

Thereafter, the Saints settled at Lamoni began forcefully to ask for such direction from the Order's officers and forced them to take a greater interest in the affairs of the community.

Joseph Smith regarded all of the Order of Enoch's activities with a hopeful skepticism. Although his support of the movement never waned, he believed that the Order, unless its policy changed radically soon, could never fulfill its goals. He had hoped that it would serve as a crucible out of which would arise a large number of people with the spiritual unity needed to aid in the establishment of the zionic ideal. 44 He had been disappointed that the Order's leadership had allowed affairs in Decatur County to drift, and while quietly prodding them to act more responsibly had publicly taken a moderate stand on the whole enterprise. He called it a commendable project, but refused to endorse it strongly until he was assured that it was likely to succeed. 45

As an alternative to the Order of Enoch, Smith, in his typically politick manner, persuaded the General Conference of 1875 to designate a

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special committee of removal separate from the Order to "arrange for and effect the purchase of lands, locate a town site, and perform such acts as are consistent with the making of such locations . . ." of gathering. Having induced the creation of a project that was independent of that of the Order, Smith found himself immediately appointed as chairman of the committee.\(^{46}\) Charged with carrying this out Smith's committee could either support whole heartedly the work of the Order in Iowa, which Smith did not want to do for the present, or seek a location for a gathering on its own.\(^{47}\) Smith supervised the investigation of gathering sites in a number of states, and received petitions from several areas asking that the Reorganization "gather" there. One such petition came from the town of Nauvoo, Illinois, and its arrival was particularly rewarding for Joseph Smith in view of the harsh manner in which its citizens had at first treated the Reorganization.\(^{48}\)

Smith considered carefully the desirability of moving the church's headquarters back to Nauvoo. On December 21, 1877 he made a business trip to St. Louis, and on the way back to Plano went by Nauvoo to discuss the matter with local officials. He wanted to make sure that

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 22 (May 15, 1875), 299-300.

\(^{47}\) Joseph Smith to Bro. Hendrick, January 4, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 59; Joseph Smith to J. W. Brackenbury, March 6, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 111; Joseph Smith to William H. Kelley, March 22, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 120; Joseph Smith to Charles Derry, June 9, 1876, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 29; Plano (Illinois) Mirror, June 22, 1876.

they were serious. He sought out the mayor, who was so delighted to
see him that he called a town meeting so that Smith could judge for
himself the sincerity of the people. The meeting impressed Smith very
favorably, and he probably would have liked to return to Nauvoo as a
welcome and respected member of the community. The best he could
tell the Nauvoans, however, was that he would lay the town’s petition
before the church’s General Conference for its decision. He promised
to give them an answer after the April 1878 conference, but he realized
that the petition had little hope of being accepted since many people
in the church were becoming increasingly interested in the success of
the settlement at Lamoni and wanted the church headquarters moved there. 49

Matters remained undecided until 1879 when the directors of the
Order of Enoch in Lamoni and the church hierarchy agreed to promote the
Iowa settlement as the official “gathering” point for the church and
the place where the headquarters would be located. 50 This decision
came only after the leaders of the company had satisfied Smith that
they were properly promoting and operating the Order of Enoch, and after
it became clear that the sect’s members looked upon the Lamoni colony
as the church’s institutional experiment and were unwilling to accept any

Joseph Smith to Joseph Nelson, May 1, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook
#1, 360.

50 Joseph Smith to Phineas Gadwell, December 8, 1877, Joseph Smith
III Letterbook #1, 249-52; Joseph Smith to Lars Peterson, January 9, 1878,
Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 271; Joseph Smith to David Dancer, July
15, 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 398; Joseph Smith to David
Dancer, February 18, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2, 105-06; Joseph
Smith to David Dancer, March 10, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2,
132; Order of Enoch Minutes, 1870-1882, 49-60.
other at that time. The directors of the Order had demonstrated their concern in 1879 by undertaking two important projects for the benefit of the colony. They persuaded the Iowa legislature to grant Lamoni a city charter.

With this done the Order’s leadership platted the town and began an impressive building campaign. The directors then persuaded the Chariton and Mt. Ayr branch of the Chicago and Burlington Railroad to build a line through the new town and locate a depot there. This, of course, assured the prosperity of the town as a commercial center on the prairie.

Joseph Smith held off an official pronouncement of Lamoni as the church’s official gathering place until 1880, but he let it be known that the sect’s future in Plano was quite uncertain and that a move of the church’s headquarters was eminent. The prophet had often received letters from members who wanted to move into areas with large concentrations of Saints. In the past he had told them that while he would prefer that they remain where they were, if they were determined to become members of a large church community they might well come to Plano since it had a good-sized congregation, adequate housing, and a burgeoning economy. By mid-1879, however, he was telling the Saints not to move to Plano under any circumstances, that economic conditions in the town were poor, and that the church’s headquarters would...

not remain there much longer. He wrote Henry Bach in November 1879, for example: "I would not like to encourage you to come, and then have you no chance to maintain yourself." Instead, Smith began advising the Saints to consider moving to Lamoni because that was the most likely place for the headquarters to locate in when it moved.

Conditions in Plano worsened during 1880, and the hard times there led Smith to make the final step toward declaring Lamoni as a gathering point. He wrote to his Counselor in the First Presidency, W. W. Blair, explaining that Plano was becoming a ghost town, and that the church had to move its seat of business soon.

The bottom is out of the Plano real estate market. Deering is removing, car by car, all he has. The lumber yard is about empty, and the men are being discharged, one by one. Many are making removes to Chicago, and some are going elsewhere; and Plano will soon be a dismally dull business place.

"I agree with you move at once," he concluded. As Plano declined, Lamoni and the Order of Enoch property began to look increasingly attractive since it presented a very prosperous business environment.

It did not take the Saints long to leave Plano after the official word came out that the headquarters was going to Lamoni. By the first part of 1881 most of them had moved away, and many of those left in the town, including the prophet and his family, were in the process of moving.

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53 Joseph Smith to W. W. Blair, October 30, 1880, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #3, 213-16.
A last General Conference of the church met in Plano in April 1881. Everyone knew that it would be the last such conference there and approached it with a mixed feeling of sorrow at leaving and hope for the experiment in Lamoni. Smith struck the general mood of the Reorganization during these months in a letter to David Dancer in early 1881. "There is now an opportunity to make a striking step forward in our work," he told the Order of Enoch's mentor. "I believe that we should take that step. I have made the matter one of constant study and prayer; and have that assurance that makes me bold to go forward." In October 1881 the prophet and his family finished packing their belongings and caught the train for a last ride away from Plano to a new home built on a rolling stretch of prairie just west of Lamoni. Smith's move, of course, signaled the official establishment of a new church headquarters in Iowa. Before leaving the Plano community, however, the Smith's received a warm send-off from the city. The local newspaper reported the farewell celebration.

The citizens of Plano presented Elder Joseph Smith with a magnificent gold headed cane on Wednesday evening. J. H. Jenks presented it in a fine speech. The ladies of Plano presented Mrs. Joseph Smith with an elegant silver cake.

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55 Plano Mirror, April 14, 1881.
56 Joseph Smith to David Dancer, March 26, 1881, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #3, 338.
basket. As these were presented by those outside the church, the speaker being a Methodist, it speaks well for the standing of Elder Smith in particular, and the Mormon people in general.  

By November 1881 nearly all of the church institutions that had been located in Plano, most notably the Herald office, had removed to the new center and Lamoni had begun to blossom with activity.

Although Joseph Smith had endorsed the gathering of the saints at Lamoni and had himself moved the church’s headquarters there, the prophet did not want to support this experiment to the exclusion of any other gathering centers. He realized the very real danger of becoming wedded to an ideal that might not succeed. As a result he encouraged his followers to initiate other, more utopian settlements. The most important of these was the Mormon settlement near Independence. He cautioned the people there that they should not do anything to upset the Gentile population, but that it was part of the Reorganization’s duty to build up Independence as the “centerplace” of Zion. He said that if they made their settlement cautiously and with forethought the day would come when the church headquarters would be moved there.

While Joseph Smith’s first allegiance was to the church’s settlement at Lamoni and his second to that at Independence, the prophet did

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58 Weekly Argus, September 17, 1881.
not ignore the possibilities of forming church settlements in other places during the 1880s as well. In 1883, for instance, he received a letter from Samuel Brannan, an ex-Mormon turned California magnate during the gold rush, asking that the Reorganization consider planting a colony on the Yaqui River in the Sonorro province of Mexico. Brannan’s terms were generous. He offered a thousand acres for a town site and one hundred acres for each family at no cost. Brannan’s reward as a land promoter would, of course, be to gain the development of some bleak country thus raising its value. Smith considered the offer carefully, and wrote the missionary in charge of the area asking him to investigate and report back. Without waiting for a reply from the missionary Smith replied to Brannan’s offer enthusiastically. “I know a number who are adventurous enough to try the new venture.” No matter what the Reorganized Church decided, he added, “May success crown your efforts for doing good.” Nothing came of this effort, however, and Smith soon lost interest in it.

With the full establishment of Lamoni as church headquarters, complete with general authorities and church institutions in residence, the Order of Enoch receded into the background and began to play a decreasing role in the community. Few wanted to see it continue, for it had largely accomplished its purposes. Smith himself shunted the

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62 Joseph Smith to Samuel Brannan, July 17, 1883, Ibid., 1.

63 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:582-84, 598, 616, 4:274.
Order into the background and directed the Saints toward other objectives, and when its charter expired in 1890 the company was dissolved almost silently.  

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Chapter 10

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

"I may never see you, and you may never hear from me again," Joseph Smith wrote to Republican presidential candidate James A. Garfield in June 1880, "But I could not forbear writing you just once. I am not a politician," he continued, "but am engaged with others in what is called the 'Josephite or Anti polygamic wing of the Mormon Church;' and am doing what I can to excise the Utah cancer from the fair features of American civilization; am opposed to the Utah system, and with my brethren fighting a good fight." Along with building a viable religious organization and the establishment of gathering locations for church communities, nothing motivated the Reorganization's head more than his quest for a complete reformation of Utah Mormonism into more moderate channels. In other words Smith hoped to bring the church back from a gross apostasy, to vindicate the name of his father, to help build the kingdom of God through the elimination of evil, and to gain the friendship of Christendom while maintaining the church's individual

1 Joseph Smith to James A. Garfield, June 18, 1880, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #3 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 180-62.
character.²

When Joseph Smith joined the Reorganization in 1860 he had told the General Conference that he held the marriage practices of the Utah Latter-day Saints, the Brighamites, as he called them, in "utter abhorrence," and that he would work to reform them. He claimed that they contravened the laws of God and ran contrary to the accepted morals of Western Civilization. He had also denied that the practice of polygamy had ever been a part of the Mormon Church his father had headed in the 1830s and 1840s, and always testified that his father had neither taught nor practiced plural marriage. "Father had no wife but my mother, Emma Hale, to the knowledge of either my mother or myself, and I was twelve years old, nearly when he was killed," Smith always insisted.³

As a result of Joseph Smith's basic conceptions about his father, the mission he perceived for the church, and the doctrines promulgated by the Utah Mormon church, he naturally fell into the leadership of a national quest to push Mormonism toward more standard Christianity.


³Joseph Smith to Caleb Parker, August 14, 1895, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #6 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 241; Samuel H. B. Smith to George A. Smith July 10, 1860, George A. Smith Papers (Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah).
Smith's peculiar brand of anti-Mormonism, however, stood apart from that of colleagues outside the church because he believed and defended most of the tenets of the faith. He asserted that while the church contained "true gospel" it had been led astray by Brigham Young and his associates. As a result Joseph Smith initiated a two-pronged policy toward Utah Mormonism that became the official Reorganized Church stand on the subject. The first was to seek a reconciliation of the two churches as inheritors of the legacy of Joseph Smith and supporters of the Book of Mormon. Believing as he did that the Saints in the West had been led astray regarding certain doctrines Smith sought to teach them the "errors of their ways" and bring back into the fold. Consequently, he early moved to send Reorganization missionaries to Utah to preach to the Mormons there. The second part of the policy was geared more toward the subjugation of the Utah Mormons. Smith worked with government officials to gain passage of legislation outlawing polygamy and to send officials to the Territory of Utah capable of stamping out polygamy.  

Smith began to initiate the reconciliation part of his Utah policy soon after his ordination. Under his direction the church began the publication of numerous tracts, pamphlets, magazine articles, and books designed to point out the error of plural marriage to the Saints of the Rocky Mountains. In addition, Smith and others in the Reorganization granted interviews to major secular periodicals in the United States

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designed to drum up interest in the Utah question and to delineate the differences between the two Mormon churches. Reorganized Church missionaries also took every opportunity to preach to Gentiles about the differences between the two Mormon factions in an effort to educate them about the religion and demonstrate that the Reorganization stood squarely within orthodox American Christianity.  

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Smith never pursued a vindictive policy toward the Utah based Mormons. His goal was only to educate both the non-Mormons and the Saints of the West about the errors of polygamy. He always looked toward the day when missionaries from the Reorganization would be able to go to Utah personally to work with the people there and bring them back into "orthodox Mormonism." Smith’s attitude toward the Utah Saints was so magnanimous that some within the Reorganization got the impression that Smith planned to unite the two churches immediately after his ordination by moving to Utah. This was, of course, completely wrong, but it became such a widespread rumor that Smith felt it necessary to respond to it in the columns of the True Latter Day Saints’ Herald. He told the Saints that he did not accept the doctrines of the Utah Mormons, but that he wished to aid in bringing them back into the church. He completely discounted the rumor that he was going to Salt Lake City to unite with Brigham Young, adding, “to those who know me, it is needless for me to say that I am not going to do any such thing while the doctrine of polygamy and disobedience to the laws are countenanced there.”

Joseph Smith implemented his conciliatory approach during the April 1863 General Conference when he persuaded the body to open a mission in Utah. The delegates voted to send E. C. Briggs, a member of the Twelve Apostles, and Alexander McCord, an ex-Utah Mormon, to Salt

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6 "News from Utah," True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 2 (June 1861), 92-93; Joseph Smith, "The First General Epistle of the President of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, to all the Scattered Saints," True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 2 (August 1861), 121-24.

Lake City with all possible speed. The two missionaries left the Mid­
west in the summer and arrived in the city of the Saints on August 11,
1863. They promptly began to preach in the streets, and just as promptly
ran afoul of the Mormon theocracy that controlled affairs in the Great
Basin. Opposition from Brigham Young and his colleagues did not dissuade
the missionaries, however, and they traveled throughout the northern
part of the territory opening missions in Provo, Ogden, and Logan, as
well as in Salt Lake City. Their success was only moderate, but by
the end of 1863 Reorganized Church membership had grown to three hundred
persons where there had been none in July.

During the next two years Smith kept missionaries operating through­
out the Great Basin. They converted hundreds of Utah Mormons to the
Reorganization by preaching a threefold message. They argued that young
Joseph Smith had taken his rightful place as his father's successor in
the presidency of the church, that Brigham Young was an usurper of power
who ruled as a tyrant, and that plural marriage, upon which the Utah
Mormon religion rested, was a false doctrine. Although Smith's mission­
aries were moderately successful, the Reorganization never succeeded in
building a strong organization in the Great Basin during the first years of
activity.

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8 For a full account of this mission see Roger D. Launius, "The
First Reorganized Church Mission to Utah," Restoration Trail Forum, 6
(November 1980), 1-8.

9 Edward W. Tullidge, The Life of Joseph the Prophet (Plano, Illi­
News (Salt Lake City, Utah), October 7, 1863; E. C. Briggs, Journal,
October 7, 1863 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
The most serious of the problems that made it difficult for the Reorganized missionaries to win converts, was the opposition of Young and his lieutenants. Whenever a Utah follower converted to the Reorganization he faced certain discrimination from his former brethren. He might be fired from his job if he worked for another Mormon, or they might refuse to buy his produce if he was a farmer or rancher. They might boycott his shop if he was a shopkeeper, or subject him to other forms of economic pressure. A convert's children would be teased by their peers and his family generally ostracized. Occasionally converts were physically threatened although instances of actual violence were rare. All of these actions served their purpose of discouraging Utah Mormons from joining the Reorganization. Those who decided to affiliate with the Josephites anyway found Utah a very unattractive place to be, and every spring, after the mountain passes had cleared sufficiently for safe travel, wagon trains of converts left for the more hospitable Midwest. During one winter in the 1860s, for example, the entire village of Coalville, Utah consisted of Reorganized Church converts who wintered there in anticipation of returning eastward in the spring. The result

of all of this harrassment was that the Reorganization could not success-
fully build standing branches of the church during the first years of
the Utah mission.

In 1866 Joseph Smith asked the General Conference to appoint
his younger brother, Alexander Hale Smith, as the head of the Pacific
Slope mission, which also included the Great Basin at the time. Smith
hoped that people would come out to hear and see the martyr's son. In
that way, he reasoned, the Reorganization would be able to build a solid
following in the intermountain West. Alexander and two companions left
Nauvoo, Illinois for the West on May 20, 1866. When they arrived in
Deseret, as the Mormons called Utah, they received much more attention
than had previous missionaries from the Reorganization. Just as Joseph
had hoped, the Mormons did want to see the martyr's son, especially since
he was preaching something they considered contrary to his father's religion.
Alexander rented public buildings for meetings and packed them every night.
He repeatedly sermonized on the threefold message of the Reorganization,
and was apparently succeeding when Brigham Young stepped in to destroy
his efforts. Young, who had previously tried to ignore the Reorganization,
told his followers not to have anything to do with the "heretics."
Attendance at Alexander's meetings dropped almost immediately, and the
missionaries decided that they should probably press on to California
before winter since they had no real prospects in Utah.11 Just before

11 Council of Twelve Minutes, 1865-1928, May 2-5, 1865 (Reorganized
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium,
Independence, Missouri); New York Times, May 30, 1865; Davis, Story
of the Church, 517.
the snows closed the passes Alexander Smith slipped over the Hastings
Cutoff to carry on missionary work in the Golden State.\\footnote{12}

The second phase of Joseph Smith's missionary program came in
1869 when the prophet sent both of his brothers to Utah on an extensive
missionary venture. Alexander had already been there, he knew both the
people and the territory, and he served as the chief administrator of
the undertaking. David Hyrum, the baby brother, accompanied him as the
principal speaker because of his outstanding ability to move audiences.
Whereas Alexander looked like a younger edition of his older brother--
medium height, portly, brown hair, deep penetrating eyes, full beard,
and a less than entrancing speaking ability--David eerily reminded most
people of his dead father. Tall, slim, and light-complexioned, David
even possessed, it was said, many of his father's mannerisms. He dis-
played acute sensitivities which he expressed beautifully in poetry, art,
and music, but most of all he was charmingly charismatic. Even though
ill-prepared he could stand before a crowd and move them to tears or laugh-
ter with his eloquent speech. Neither of his brothers had such personal
appeal as David, and Joseph hoped that this young missionary would be
able to capture the people of Salt Lake City with his wit and charm in
spite of Brigham Young's dictums.

Born in November 1844, eleven days after his brother Joseph's

\footnote{12} Smith's opening of California signaled the beginning of one of
the Reorganization's most successful missions. By 1894 Mormon missionaries
from Utah were complaining that they could not gain any converts in Cali-
ifornia because of the strength of the Reorganization there. See Larson
twelfth birthday, young David Smith never knew his father. He had been considered a child of promise by the Nauvoo Saints at his birth, "a means of performing a Mighty work to the glory of God and Prince Forever," and the Saints who had located in the Great Basin still considered him in these somewhat mystical terms when he visited there in 1869. David had joined the Reorganization in early 1862, and immediately many within the movement were overcome by his magnetism. A few even began a rumor that many members wanted to oust Joseph Smith as church president and replace him with David, although there was never any doubt but that David himself would oppose any such plan. He publicly laid the matter to rest by publishing a poem in April 1863 called "A Word of Advise to those who Look for me to be the Prophet."

Little Herald, stop a moment
Ere you journey on your way;
I have something of importance
That I wish that you would say
Unto those who, not contented
With the leader God hath sent,

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15 "The Son of the Prophet," Autumn Leaves (Lamoni, Iowa), 25:307-12; John Hawley, "The Life of John Hawley Written from Memory, January 1, 1885," Miscellaneous Letters and Papers, 44 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri); Fred Ursenbach to Joseph Smith, July 31, 1866, Joseph Smith III Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri); Joseph Baily Smith, Sr. to Joseph Baily Smith, Jr., January 5, 1923, (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah).
Still declare that I shall lead them,
Though I gave them no consent.

Go and tell them I am loyal
To the counsels of the Lord;
Tell them I have no desire
To dispute his mighty word.

**Joseph is the Chosen Prophet**
Well ordained in God's clear sight;
Should he lose it by transgression,
Alexander had the right.

Joseph, Alexander, David,
Three remaining pillars still;
Like the three remaining columns
Of the Temple on the hill!
Joseph's star is full and shining,
Alexander's more than mine;
Mine is just below the mountain,
Bide its time and it will shine.

Shame, then! Work no more with Satan;
Tempt me not to leave this band;
For as long as we're united,
We in faith and strength may stand.

Go to Strang, and go to Brigham,
No false prophet make of me;
In the name of Jesus, Satan!
Get thee gone--it shall not be.

Little Herald, go and tell them
To cast out this devil dark,
Then come follow after Joseph,
And to truth and reason heark.
Bid them quit their evil dreaming
Thus to mar my joy and peace,
And destroy me and my brother;
Bid these loud ones hold their peace.

Then, thou Herald, come and tell me
What the poor deceived ones say;
Tell me if they are not willing,
To help Zion on her way.
And not strive to dog her rudder,
Cut her ropes, or strain her mast;
But aboard and help cast anchor,  
That she may outride the blast.16

Those few who advocated David’s accession quickly lost steam after he made his feelings known. The matter had completely blown over by the 1869 mission to Utah.17

When the Smith brothers arrived in Salt Lake City they were very active, working diligently to convert the Mormons there. They were a curiosity in the area and people flocked to hear them speak. Within a few weeks after initiating the mission in Utah Alexander decided to travel on to California to check on matters there, but David remained in the Mormon commonwealth. He spoke on every possible occasion—in homes, in non-Mormon owned auditoriums since Brigham Young refused to open church facilities to him, and in the streets. Attendance at David’s meetings was even more impressive than it had been when Alexander was still with him. The Mormons in the city seemed convinced that young David Smith was the most impressive of the prophet’s sons they had yet met. For his part, David could hardly curb his delight whenever he condemned Brigham Young’s authoritarian operation of the church, denounced plural marriage as contrary to the laws of God, and proclaimed the

16 The first three versus of this poem appeared in True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 3 (April 1863), 199. The entire piece was published in Saints’ Herald, 55 (April 1, 1908), 317-18.

17 Even while on the Utah mission, David Smith felt the necessity of denying his succession, although the subject had not come up for years until raised again by the Mormons. “My free will, independence, unaltering service, faith, countenance, and influence, I give to my brother, Joseph,” he told Utah reporters in 1869. See The Utah Daily Reporter (Salt Lake City, Utah), August 15, 1869. That the matter had been settled in the Reorganized Church can be seen in Briggs, Journal, December 4, 1864.
truthfulness of the Mormon faith as taught by the Reorganization.

David’s successes in the city infuriated the Mormon hierarchy. Brigham Young sent out word that the Saints were not to support the activities of David Smith and the Reorganization, and he decided publicly to defend his organization and doctrine while decrying the work of the Smith sons and the Reorganized Church. From the Salt Lake Tabernacle’s pulpit Young lashed out at the Smith boys, calling them liars seeking to destroy all that their father had created. At another time Young called Joseph, Jr.’s sons “weak babies, unworthy of their illustrious father.” These attacks did not stop the work of David Smith and he continued to preach to hundreds.

By January 1870 David Smith appeared to be making serious inroads among the Utah Saints, and Joseph Smith delighted in receiving his encouraging reports. It had been the first really important dent the Reorganization had made in Utah Mormonism. Then a sudden illness brought this mission to an abrupt close. After dining with a Mormon dignitary in the spring of 1870 David took mysteriously sick. Neither doctors nor prayer seemed to help. His friends in Salt Lake City cabled Alexander to return from California immediately. When he arrived a few days later

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20 New York Tribune, June 2, 1871.
Alexander found that his brother suffered from chills, fever, fits, and hystericis. It was, he thought, a strange combination of symptoms. He decided to cut the mission short and with his brother returned to Illinois in March 1870 "on account of [David] being too incapacitated by illness for the field."21

The Utah Mormon leaders immediately claimed that David had gone insane because he had been convinced that his father had taught polygamy by the Saints in Salt Lake City and had even practiced it himself, but members of the Reorganization discounted this notion.22 Instead, some Reorganized Church members argued that Brigham Young, in his vindictive manner, had conspired to poison David because he had proven such a powerful foe to the Utah system. As attractive as this explanation might have seemed to many anti-Mormons, Joseph Smith and most other knowledgeable people gave him credit for having more sense than to attempt to take such action.23

When Joseph met his brothers at the train station in Plano he was worried about what might become of David. He undoubtedly blamed him-

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21 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:527, 530, 547; True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 17 (March 1, 1870), 180. F. Mark McKiernan has argued that the illness of David Smith was a result of acute hypoglycemia, a blood sugar deficiency. Nineteenth century doctors knew nothing of the disease since it was not discovered until the 1920s, consequently Smith never received proper treatment. See F. Mark McKiernan, "The Tragedy of David H. Smith," Saints’ Herald, 119 (December 1972), 20-23.


23 Joseph Smith to William Cloggin, December 19, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 267.
self for sending the talented younger brother to Utah in the first
Place, since the illness might not have occurred had he remained at
home. Joseph took David to his home and nursed him back to health.
Within a few months David had recovered sufficiently to return to
missionary work under his brother’s direction, and he even undertook
a second mission to Utah during the early 1870s. 24

In 1874, however, David suffered a relapse. Joseph again kept
David at home with him, trying to nurse the young man back to health a
second time. His efforts failed, as David’s actions grew increasingly
schizoid. At times he seemed perfectly rational, but at other times he
imagined all kinds of wild things. Once, for instance, David left the
house, went to the Plano telegraph office, and cabled the home office
of the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad to send him the Board of Directors’
official train. 25 In 1876 after David began to grow violent and threat-
ened several members of the Smith family, Joseph took steps to commit

24David H. Smith to Joseph Smith, November 19, 1871, March 14,
1872, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers; Larson and Larson, eds., Diary
of Charles Lowell Walker, 1:348-40; Smith and Smith, History of Reorgan-
ized Church, 3:702-03.

25Joseph Smith to Charles Derry, January 24, 1877, Joseph Smith
III Papers.
his brother to a hospital where he could be cared for professionally. David was admitted to the State Asylum for the Insane at Elgin, Illinois in January 1877. Upon hearing the news Utah Mormon officials accused Joseph Smith of locking David away so that he could never challenge him for the church's presidency. The charge was groundless, for no one who saw David during his last months outside the hospital doubted that he was mentally disturbed.

Throughout his younger brother's illness, Joseph Smith continued to carry on his plans for the missionizing of the Saints in Utah. Alexander had been singularly ineffective and David had taken ill during what appeared to be the most successful attempt yet made in Utah, so Joseph decided to carry on the missionary work himself. While he was still helping David in his home, Joseph made plans to attend a church reunion—a family-centered religious retreat lasting for about a week—

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scheduled for the late summer of 1876 at Santa Ana, California. Although he planned to spend most of his time in California, Smith decided to return to Plano by way of Salt Lake City and attend to missionary work there.\(^\text{28}\)

When he arrived in California in August, Smith made the rounds, preaching in homes, schools, public buildings, and the Reorganization's churches at every opportunity. He visited all of the most important secular and religious leaders of the state trying to build good will for the church. In addition, Smith went into several of the Mormon settlements, especially San Bernardino, a city that had been founded by the Mormons a quarter century earlier, to preach to the Bringhamites. As always, Smith taught the three-fold message of the Reorganization pointing out the errors of Brigham's authoritarianism, the evil of the practice of plural marriage, and the legitimacy of the Reorganization.\(^\text{29}\)

By November 1, 1876 Smith had completed his work in California and caught the train for the East. Although he stopped in Carson City, Nevada for several days to visit with the miners of the territory, he soon pushed on toward his important appointment in Salt Lake City.\(^\text{30}\)

At long last Joseph arrived at Ogden, stepping off the train on November 21. He went on to Salt Lake City by wagon the same day, and stayed in the home of a recent convert, Peter Reinsmar. Just as had


\(^{29}\)Ibid., 82 (September 3, 1935), 1137-38, 82 (September 10, 1935), 1167-70, 82 (September 17, 1935), 1199-1200.

\(^{30}\)Ibid., 82 (September 24, 1935), 1231-33; Joseph Smith to Audie Smith, November 4, 1876, Joseph Smith III Papers.
been the case with his brothers in 1369, Joseph Smith was Salt Lake City's greatest curiosity of the winter. As he traveled through the city on his way to the Reinsimar home residents, those who had already learned he was in town, pulled back the drapes and raised the shades of their windows to catch a glimpse of the martyr's son. Few, however, tried to meet Smith or show him any consideration whatsoever, probably because the Utah presidency had ordered its followers to ignore him as much as possible. Smith wrote to his teenage daughter about the "cold-shoulder" he received in Salt Lake City, commenting that "almost everybody one sees on the street is shy, and does not appear so frank and fearless as in Plano."  

Being ignored turned out to be a blessing for the Reorganized Church leader during his first weeks in Salt Lake City, for the arid, cold climate had caused him to have an attack of neuralgia. Smith had never experienced such excruciating pain, and, although he recovered after a while, the ailment flared up periodically after that. Known as the "suicide sickness" during the nineteenth century because the terrible pain presumably drove the sufferer from it to suicide, the largely hereditary disease was caused by a nerve growing directly into contact with the skull without the usual tissue shielding it from contact with the bone. It was particularly painful whenever the weather changed dramatically, and sometimes even when it did not, making it difficult

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32 Joseph Smith to Carrie Smith, December 1, 1876, Rebecca Weld Nolan Collection (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
for a sufferer to talk, eat, or move his head. In 1876 virtually nothing could be done to treat the malady, and those unfortunate enough to inherit it just had to suffer. Because of his illness Smith could do very little during his first weeks in Salt Lake City except catch up on his correspondence, official business, study, and rest.

As soon as he recovered sufficiently to go out and meet others, he scheduled a series of four preaching services at the Liberal Institute. This organization had been founded about 1870 by the Godbeite splinter group from Young's church. William Godbe had rejected Young's "tyrannic" rule, and with the support of several influential writers, newspapermen, and intellectuals had founded the Institute as a rival

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33 Interview with F. Mark McKiernan, Central Professional Building, Independence, Missouri, November 4, 1979; Smith, "Memoirs," Herald, 83 (June 16, 1936), 754. The likelihood of Joseph Smith, Jr. having the same affliction is great. Since he died a relatively young man it did not show up too much, but Lucy Mack Smith quoted a statement made by Hyrum Smith concerning the incarceration in Liberty Jail in the winter of 1838-1839 which shows that Joseph Smith, Jr. experienced the symptoms of neuralgia. "Several others made similar expressions, in the agony of their souls," Hyrum wrote, "but my brother did not say anything, he being sick at the time with the toothache, and ague, in his face, in consequence of a severe cold brought on by being exposed to the severity of the weather." Lucy Mack Smith, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1912), 304.

The views of Charles Walker, a staunch supporter of Brigham Young, concerning the Liberal Institute's adherents were those of most Utah Mormons: "Now those who pretend to worship at the Liberal Institute," he wrote in his diary,

are chiefly apostates . . . They think they are especial favorites of God, and the entire Church of God and its leaders are all wrong and have gon astray and are continually finding fault with the chosen of God, and are trying all in their power to shed the blood of the Lords annointed and despoil the saints of their peaceful homes and bring trouble and destruction upon the Saints of God.36

Smith, however, found the Liberal Institute open to the creeds of others and respectful of the position taken by Joseph Smith and the Reorganization.37 At each of Smith's meetings in the Institute he found himself preaching to a few eager Reorganized Church members, a wide variety of interested non-Mormons, and a very few brave, curious Utah Mormons.38

While Smith stayed in the city a few of his relatives disregarded Young's dictates and met with him informally. By and large none of the Utah cousins had seen Joseph since the summer of 1860, and the reunion


38 Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (October 1, 1935), 1263-64.
was heartwarming. Cousin John Smith, oldest son of Hyrum, talked with Joseph for a whole afternoon. Following John Smith’s lead, other relatives contacted Joseph and made brief visits. The most important of the Smith relatives, Joseph F. Smith, however, refused to visit Joseph, and the Reorganized Church leader believed that he would leave the territory without seeing him at all. Joseph F. Smith had been the most forceful of the cousins in trying to make a case for the practice of plural marriage by the martyr, and naturally there existed some animosity between them. 39

Smith did finally meet and talk with this cousin, however, but under rather unexpected circumstances. Smith had scheduled a meeting in a rented auditorium in the northern part of the city in December, expecting the same type of modest turnout he had previously attracted. Instead he found a packed house of Utah Mormons. Naturally Smith expected that he had been set up for some type of showdown, but he did not really know what was in store for him. Apparently everyone in the territory was aware that something unusual was about to happen except Reorganization officials, for in addition to Mormons, Smith noted in his audience an ex-

39Joseph F. Smith had taken the lead in defending plural marriage from attack by the Reorganization. He had begun in 1869 collecting evidence of Joseph Smith, Jr.’s involvement in the institution, and eventually compiled several hundred affidavits of witnesses and other documents demonstrating his complicity. See Joseph F. Smith, "Affidavit Books," 4 volumes (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah); Eliza R. Snow to Joseph F. Smith, n.d., Joseph F. Smith Collection (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah); Robert D. Hutchins, "Joseph Smith III: Moderate Mormon" (M. A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1977), 86; Joseph Fielding Smith, The Life of Joseph F. Smith (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1938).
governor of the territory, the territorial secretary, several judges, a few attorneys, and other dignitaries. Suddenly Smith saw the door open in the rear of the building and Joseph F. Smith stepped inside. The Mormon leader surveyed the scene and casually strolled up the center aisle to the front row of seats where seven middle-aged women appeared to be saving him a seat. As he saw his cousin, Joseph Smith immediately thought that the Mormons had sent in their best debater to confront him, and hoped to make the most of the situation by inviting everyone they could think of to watch the exchange. The women in the front row, Smith supposed, were probably ladies who claimed to have been married to his father in Nauvoo. In any event, Smith thought, the evening should turn out to be very interesting.

The service began promptly at seven-thirty, and the room was silent as Smith arose to speak after the introductions. Smith recited his familiar speech setting "forth plainly the views of the Reorganized Church upon marriage and the marriage relation . . ." He argued that his father, to his knowledge, had not taught plural marriage, but even if he had done so, that would not keep it from being a false doctrine and counter to accepted Christian belief. At every point in his sermon Smith expected to be interrupted by his cousin, but neither he nor anyone else heckled him or made any attempt to rebut his arguments. When he finished he asked the audience if there were any questions, fully expecting his cousin to rise in response, but nothing happened. When the meeting adjourned the seven women in the front row left quietly, and Joseph F. Smith came up
to pay his respects, neither condoning nor condemning his remarks. He also invited Smith over to his home so that they could visit as relatives. Smith was surprised that the evening had not ended in a confrontation, as he had fully expected, but he was pleased that his cousin had decided instead to meet him on a friendly basis.

Not long after this meeting Smith left Salt Lake City to return to Illinois, departing by train on December 11, 1876. He reached home a few days before Christmas after a western tour of just over five months. It had been an arduous, if not at first, productive trip. Smith had traveled thousands of miles, preached over seventy times, and baptized ten new members. More importantly, perhaps, he had visited Utah for the first time, giving clear proof that the sons of the prophet stood up for a viable alternative to Brigham Young’s brand of Mormonism. Although Smith’s ministry in Salt Lake City did not yield impressive numbers of converts immediately, it opened the doors for hundreds to flock to the Reorganization’s banner during the coming years.

When Joseph Smith went to Utah in 1876 he did not really expect to be asked to stay there as an official in the church, and possibly to

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41 Ibid., 82 (October 8, 1935), 1299-1300.
42 Saints’ Herald, 24 (January 1, 1877), 1; Joseph Smith to Z. H. Gurley, Jr., August 25, 1878, Joseph Smith III Papers.
43 Joseph Smith to Bros. Hanson and Overstreet, January 6, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 85; Joseph Smith to D. F. Miller, March 15, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 112-13.
succeed an old and ailing Brigham Young when he died, but he \(^{44}\) did hope, eventually to reform the Mormon church and bring it into the Reorganization. An opportunity to make a large step in this direction presented itself in the late summer of 1877. The question of succession in the presidency was far from settled for Utah Mormons in the 1870s, and it emerged once more with the death of Brigham Young on August 29, 1877. \(^{45}\) Immediately after his burial several would-be leaders came to the fore vying for control of the church. Young had very much wanted to appoint his own first-born son, Brigham, Jr. known to all as Briggie, to succeed him, but many in the church’s leadership had opposed the establishment of such a dynasty. \(^{46}\)

During the succession struggle following Young’s death Joseph Smith’s name came up as a candidate to assume leadership of the church. L. R. Freeman of Ogden wrote in September 1877 telling him that the Utah

\(^{44}\) Joseph Smith to Heman C. Smith, September 19, 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 456-57.

\(^{45}\) The problems with orderly succession for Brigham Young have been caustically described in Samuel W. Taylor, The Kingdom or Nothing: The Life of John Taylor, Militant Mormon (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1976), 133-38; and more sympathetically in Roberts, Comprehensive History, 3:160, 315.

\(^{46}\) That there was a struggle for control of the Mormon church in 1877 is apparent from the fact that John Taylor, president of the Council of Twelve, only gained sufficient control of the church’s bureaucracy in 1880 to force his ordination at the October conference, more than three years after the death of Young. Roberts, Comprehensive History, 5:524. Brigham Young, Jr.’s appointment as successor is evidenced in Salt Lake Tribune Conference Edition, April 6-10, 1877; John D. Lee, Mormonism Unveiled; or the Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop (St. Louis: Bryan, Brand and Company, 1877), 404-405; Leonard J. Arrington, “The Settlement of the Brigham Young Estate, 1877-1890,” Pacific Historical Review, 21 (February 1952), 1-20; Taylor, The Kingdom or Nothing, 258-61; Stanley P. Hirshson, The Lion of the Lord: A Biography of Brigham Young (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 321.
church's hierarchy was in chaos, and that with his prestige as the son of the prophet and the appointed successor of his father he might come to Utah, proclaim his presidency, and take over. Smith was cautiously interested. He knew he would have a much harder time convincing the people there to follow him than Freeman thought. "There are three sides of this question," Smith answered Freeman, "the church in Utah, the element called there the outsiders or Gentiles, and the one we occupy as a church." He went on to explain that "what may seem feasible and proper from your standing ground, may not be so from ours, all things considered." He left the matter open, however, when he added that "the times are ominous and changes are imminent." 47

Smith apparently considered going back to Utah during the next several weeks. He wrote to Judge K. B. Vancleave in Chicago on September 13 explaining that he had not yet decided what course to pursue in this matter, but that if everything fell into place he planned to seek the presidency of the Saints in the Great Basin so that he could carry out his unification and reformation. He added that whatever he might personally do, "the death of Pres. Young will prove a benefit to the cause of the truth I believe." 48 By December he had still not made definite plans concerning an effort to gain the presidency of the Utah church, but he had at least decided that he would not try to make a trip there until the next spring. 49 When spring came Smith procrastin-

47 Joseph Smith to L. R. Freeman, September 8, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 223.

48 Joseph Smith to Judge K. B. Vancleave, September 13, 1877; ibid., 224.

49 Joseph Smith to Magnus Fyrando, December 6, 1877; ibid., 248.
ated once more, because he feared that if he failed it could seriously injure the Reorganization. All the while the Utah church presidency was far from settled. Finally, the opportunity to act slipped away, because John Taylor was ordained president in late 1880. In later years Joseph regretted having been so hesitant, whimsically wishing that he had it to do over again but thankful that the Reorganization was still intact and growing.

Having missed his opportunity, Smith decided to wait until 1885 before undertaking a second mission to Utah. Smith left Lamoni, Iowa on June 12, 1885, traveling on the Union Pacific determined to proclaim the message of the Reorganization to the Saints of the Great Basin. After arriving there he met often with the Reorganization members to boost their sagging spirits, and held impressive public meetings in a rented opera house in the heart of Salt Lake City. His message was the same as before. Comparing himself to John the Baptist, Smith hoped to bring these wayward Saints into his brand of Mormonism.

Smith's 1885 visit went much more smoothly than had the previous one. He did not suffer from neuralgia this time, and John Taylor was

50 Z. H. Gurley, Jr. to Joseph Smith, July 21, 1878, Joseph Smith III Papers.


52 Joseph Smith to James Whitehead, September 8, 1884, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #13, 262-63.

53 Joseph Smith, "The Editor Abroad," Saints' Herald, 32 (July 4, 1885), 427.

much more tolerant of conflicting viewpoints than had been his predecessor, allowing his followers to attend Smith's meetings as they wished. Consequently, the whole city seemed more warm and open to Smith. He took every opportunity to meet residents of the city, and to relax by visiting some of the tourist attractions. In late July, for example, he went out to the Great Salt Lake to an exclusive resort on the beach. Of his afternoon's dip in the lake he wrote to his daughter, "It is hard to swim in it, though one can stand up, lie down in it and float. Large as I am, I could hardly sink in it. It is considered the fashionable thing here to go to the lake."

In early August Smith and his companions left Salt Lake City to visit other parts of Utah Territory. He went through Ogden and Swan Lake, pushed on to Deer Lodge and Bozeman, Reese Creek, Stuart, and Butte, Montana, and then returned to Salt Lake on October 1, where he continued an extensive round of interviews, speaking engagements, and social activities. After a stay in Mormon country of several months Smith decided to leave for his Lamoni home so that he could be with his

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55 Ibid., 83 (February 18, 1936), 209-10, 83 (February 25, 1936) 243-44, 83 (March 9, 1936), 273-74, 83 (March 10, 1936), 305-06, 83 (March 17, 1936), 335-38, 83 (March 24, 1936), 367-70; Joseph Smith to Audie Smith, June 19, 1885, Joseph Smith III Papers; Deseret News (Salt Lake City, Utah), June 19, 1885; Joseph Smith to Bro. George, June 20, 1885, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers; Joseph Smith to Audie Smith, August 3, 1885, Joseph Smith III Papers.

56 Joseph Smith to Audie Smith, August 5, 1885, Joseph Smith III Papers; Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 83 (March 24, 1936), 358-70, 83 (March 31, 1936), 399-400.

family for New Year's Day 1886. This mission did not yield much greater success than did the one in 1876, but Smith did preside at a baptismal service for thirty people.

Joseph Smith returned to Utah again in 1888, leaving home during the holiday season of 1887. This time he did not stay in Salt Lake City long—less than a month—but met with a number of old friends, associates, and gadflies in what should be considered more of a personal visit than an official missionary journey. He met, for instance, B. F. Cumming, editor of the Deseret News, the official Mormon-controlled organ in the Great Basin, on January 3, 1888 and the two exchanged friendly barbs. He later remembered concerning this trip: "I made no effort to reach many outside our own circles on this winter visit to Salt Lake City, but enjoyed my stay there very much, indeed." In the latter part of the month Smith took the train on to California where he visited with the Saints in the Golden State until time to return home for the April General Conference.

This was the last trip Smith made to the Salt Lake Valley during the nineteenth century, although Reorganized Church missionaries operated under his direction in Utah thereafter. This approach had not proven as

58 Ibid., 83 (June 2, 1936), 689.
60 Smith, Diary, January 3, 1888; Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 83 (June 16, 1936), 752.
61 Joseph Smith to E. L. Kelley, February 24, 1888, February 27, 1888, Joseph Smith III Papers; Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 83 (June 23, 1936), 784.
successful as he would have liked, but he did take pride in the conversions which were made among the Mormons. Opening the mission with high hopes in the 1860s, Smith had gradually lost confidence in the conciliatory policy of the Reorganization. He began to see irreparable breaches in the two church’s theologies where he had previously viewed them as very close on all but the plural marriage doctrine. Where once Smith had believed that most of the Saints in the Great Basin had been duped into following the authoritarian leadership of Brigham Young he came to understand that Young’s followers looked to him almost as a stern father-figure who would direct them along the best possible path. They willingly, Smith came to realize, gave their obedience to the Utah hierarchy, and were not being held in bondage as he had once naively believed. These realizations produced a gradual rethinking of policy toward the Utah Mormons.

As time progressed Smith began to submerge the conciliatory policy of the Reorganization toward the Mormons beneath an increasingly vocal and demanding policy of subjugation. This second prong of Smith’s two faceted strategy had been operating since the ordination

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of the young prophet in 1860, but it slowly arose, overtook, and supplant the reconciliation approach. This subjugation policy toward Utah Mormonism required that the Reorganization enter the political sphere where it agitated for federal laws to rein in the Utahns by working with assorted anti-Mormon groups often composed of pious cranks, moralists, politicians in search of an issue, and committed religious reformers. The first instance of this political involvement came in 1863 when Smith produced a "Declaration of Loyalty" for Congress, offering his church's unqualified support to the federal government during the Civil War. Although the message was subtle, the Reorganization said that while Utah Mormonism's allegiance could be questioned, the moderate Mormons of the Midwest were for Lincoln and the Union. With this one document Smith forever rejected the Utah concept of a theocracy as embodied in the State of Deseret, and accepted the more American ideal of separation of church and state.63

As a result of Smith's special position as son of the dead Mormon prophet, the leader of a major religious movement dedicated to reforming Mormondom, and his church's apparent successes in Utah,

63 "The Declaration of Loyalty to the Government of the United States, by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 3 (May 1863), 201-202. The Mormon goal of establishing a physical kingdom of God on earth is best explained in Klaus J. Hansen, Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), The Reorganized Church also made two other memorials to Congress, one in 1870 and another in 1882. See "Memorial to Congress from a Committee of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints on the Claims and Faith of the Church," True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 17 (June 1, 1870), 312-27; E. L. Kelley, et. al., The Utah Problem and its Solution (Washington, D. C.: n.p., 1882); E. L. Kelley, et. al., "Polygamy a Crime--Not a religion," Saints' Advocate, 5 (July 1882), 217-23.
Smith quickly won the interest, and in some cases the respect, of several Washington, D. C. officials who were concerned about the Mormon problem. As an instance of his and the church's influence, in early May 1866 Republican Congressman James M. Ashley of Ohio asked Smith to come to the capital to confer with members of the House Committee on Territories. The committee was most concerned about the Mormon church's disregard of federal authority, and was in the process of framing legislation designed to bring the territory more in line with the American mainstream. Ashley hoped to get Congress to pass a bill that would put teeth in the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act of 1862, which had proven all but unenforceable. Smith jumped at the opportunity and left for Washington on May 30, 1866 in company with Elijah Banta.

On June 6 Smith met with Ashley in his boarding house. Ashley asked the young Mormon expert what legislation he would recommend to deal with the situation in Utah. Smith was prepared to make some oral suggestions immediately, but Ashley wanted a written statement. Smith promised to mull the problem over and make a detailed report to the committee. A few days later, after several meetings with Ashley and other members of the Committee on Territories, Smith gave the Congressmen a report reviewing the history of the church from 1830 to 1846, and affirming that up to that time the church had heeded the law of the land. Smith added that since the split in the church, however, the

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64 James M. Ashley to Joseph Smith, May 10, 1866, Joseph Smith III Papers.

65 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:439; Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (July 15, 1833), 512.
Utah faction had consistently sidestepped the law and had not been forced into line, "and that such failure and neglect of duty on the part of the executive officers of the various States and the Nation had given rise to a conviction upon the part of some of the church members that there was no disposition to so enforce the laws of the land." He claimed that the time had come to teach the Mormons just who had sovereignty over the territory, but he added that new legislation was not necessary as there were laws in existence that would make more effective control both possible and practicable.\(^6^6\)

Ashley had specifically asked Joseph Smith to comment on the polygamy question, already knowing the leader's differences with the Utah Mormons on the subject, while telling him to remember that the Constitution forbade the proscription of religious freedom. Although acknowledging the right of every American to worship as he wished, Smith, in responding, asserted that plural marriage was not a religious principle. Such a doctrine had never been a tenet of the early Mormon church, he told the committee, and his father had never had any connection with the practice. As evidence of this he submitted early church publications which demonstrated that his father had publicly denied the practice. Moreover, he added, the tenet was not substantiated in either the scriptures or history of Christendom, and positively contradicted all for which Christianity stood. He claimed that polygamy had been the invention

of lascivious and lustful men, and a moral evil deserving of prompt
destruction. Even the defenders of slavery were on more solid ground
in rebutting the abolitionists with the Bible than were polygamists, he
said. Smith went on to argue that while the institution had to be
wiped out with all possible speed "no additional legislation upon the
part of congress was really needed to eliminate it, if they would only
insist upon a strict, just, and persistent enforcement of the laws
already included in their statutes." 67

When Smith left Washington on June 11 he felt reasonably certain
that he had convinced Ashley to pursue the policies he had recommended. 68
Although Smith looked upon the activities of Congress with hope, he
understood well the operation of democratic government and was slyly
skeptical. 69 This was well, for in spite of Joseph's contention that
sufficient anti-bigamy legislation existed, during the next four years
Congress debated several more bills designed to punish polygamists. 70
In typically slow governmental fashion, however, Congress did little
more than debate.

New anti-bigamy laws were not enacted. Some members of the


68 Joseph Smith, "Pleasant Chat," True Latter Day Saints' Herald, 9 (June 15, 1866), 177-78.

69 Joseph Smith to Charles Derry, June 29, 1866, Joseph Smith III Papers.

70 Roberts, Comprehensive History, 5:220; Deseret News, January 8, 1868; Edward W. Tullidge, History of Salt Lake City (Salt Lake City, Utah: Star Printing Company, 1886), Chapter 42.
legislative body, therefore, apparently decided, almost by default, that the only thing left for the government to do was to enforce the laws already on the books and to forget about further legislation, just as Smith had originally recommended.\footnote{Anderson, Desert Saints, 264-65; Congressional Globe (Washington, D. C.), January 14, 1869; Millennial Star (Liverpool, England), 22: 193, 230, 243, 259; Omaha (Nebraska) Herald, March 30, 1870; Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine, 1 (October 1880), 61-66.}

With the decision of the stalemated Congress not to attempt further anti-polygamy legislation for the present, one of the most pressing concerns of governmental policymakers was the appointment of territorial officers who would carry out the laws that already existed. When the less than able governor of Utah, J. M. Shaffer, fell ill and died suddenly in October 1870, many people in Utah, as well as elsewhere, petitioned President Ulysses S. Grant to appoint political friends as the new territorial governor.\footnote{Anderson, Desert Saints, 264-68.} David Smith wrote to his brother, Joseph, in November telling him that many members of the non-Mormon community in Utah and the anti-polygamy supporters everywhere thought that the Reorganized Church president would make a good governor. There was no question as to where he stood on the Mormon question, and he had long been a proponent of strictly enforcing the current laws of the land in the territory. To many people Smith seemed the perfect candidate. David wrote Joseph telling him, "if a movement should arise recommending you to Pres. Grant appointing you to the governorship of Utah, do not
fight the idea."  

This draft did not materialize, however, and President Grant appointed Oregon Governor George L. Woods in January 1871. This did not discourage the supporters of Joseph, and whenever the governorship opened in Deseret they vocally demanded Smith's appointment to the office. They argued that his personal morality, the respect he enjoyed in Utah as the eldest son of the Mormon prophet, and his determination to stamp out polygamy made him an exceptional candidate for the position. An Illinois newspaper summed up the matter succinctly: "If the government would make Joseph Smith governor of that territory, it would wipe out at once polygamy and fair Utah would take her place among the states, with no blot upon her face." 

While Smith may have reflected the mores of most Americans, and might have been acceptable to the President otherwise, the governorship of the Utah Territory was a political plum, and was usually given to a party stalwart as a reward for political service. Smith, although a strict Republican, was relatively apolitical, and, consequently, he

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73 David H. Smith to Joseph Smith, November 12, 1870, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.


75 Weekly Argus, June 21, 1879.

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never really had much a chance at the appointment.76

Indeed, Joseph Smith’s reaction to the various bids to make him Utah governor ranged from apathy to revulsion, certainly because he recognized the position as an impossible one for him to fill successfully. As he wrote in his memoirs:

the governorship of Utah was a position neither desirable nor practicable for me, that my work lay entirely outside the field of politics, and that I had no ambition whatever for secular honors. I pointed out that such a position for me would avail nothing of good to the people of Utah, for as a people they would regard it as but one more attempt to fasten upon them an unwelcome rule.77

Smith, however, did support for the governorship another Reorganization member, Plineas Cadwell, an Iowa legislator, who had hopes of gaining the executive office in Utah.78

Joseph Smith and the Reorganization had enjoyed relatively respectable relations with the secular world almost since the inception of the church because of their antipolygamy stand. But he was able to make a huge stride toward greater acceptability in the Gentile community


77 Smith, “Memoirs,” Herald, 83 (February 11, 1936), 177.

because of his successful prosecution in 1880 of an impressive court case over the property rights to the Kirtland Temple. The Kirtland Temple had been constructed under Joseph Smith, Jr.'s supervision between 1833 and 1836 as a house of worship. After the majority of Mormons left Kirtland, Ohio in 1838, however, the building had fallen into disrepair and was eventually sold as an abandoned building for back taxes. In 1862 a Reorganized Church member, Russell Huntley, bought the building and soon thereafter deeded it to young Joseph and several associates. Following this Smith partially paid the taxes on the property, renovated it and allowed the Saints living in Kirtland to meet in it.

Since the Temple had a rather complex and clouded legal title the Reorganization as a legal corporation brought suit against other persons claiming ownership of the building, including Joseph Smith, his colleagues, and the Utah Mormon church. The suit was uncontested, but the court's decision boosted the morale of the Reorganization con-

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80 Joseph Smith to George E. Payne, April 27, 1876, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1A, 2-3; Joseph Smith to Joseph F. McDowell, June 16, 1876, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1A, 6; Joseph Smith to George E. Payne, January 31, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2, 78-79; Joseph Smith to Frederic Y. Mather, December 23, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2, 424-28; Vida E. Smith, Young People's History of the Church (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1918), 2:129.

81 Joseph Smith to Alexander Fyfe, July 9, 1881, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #3, 380-84; Joseph Smith to Mark H. Forscutt, February 22, 1876, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1A, 55; Joseph Smith to Collector for Taxes for Kirtland, February 23, 1876, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1A, 97; Joseph Smith to Mark H. Forscutt, March 8, 1880, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1A, 199-200.

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siderably and raised Joseph Smith and the moderate Mormons in the opinion of many non-Mormons. The ruling of February 23, 1880 stated that the building belonged to the Reorganization as a corporation, not to any individuals, including Joseph Smith. The court awarded title to the church on the ground that it alone maintained the "same doctrines and tenets" as the original Mormon church that had built the Temple. The Judge went on to say that the Utah Mormon church "has materially and largely departed from the faith, doctrines, laws, ordinances, and usages of the said original church." In addition, it had "incorporated into its system of faith the doctrines of celestial marriage and plurality of wives, and the doctrine of Adam-god worship, contrary to the laws and constitutions of said original church." Smith took pride in this opinion, for a court had vindicated his work and gone on record as saying that his father had not initiated the practice of plural marriage. Delighted as he was with all this, Smith was ecstatic with the court's conclusion that the Reorganization "is the true and lawful continuation of, and successor to the said original Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, organized in 1830, and is entitled to all its rights and properties." Smith exploited the court's action as much as he dared, sending copies of the opinion to numerous newspapers and making speeches about the ruling that the church was the lawful successor to his father's

82 Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints vs. Lucius Williams, et. al., February 23, 1880, Court of Common Pleas, Book J. Doc. 60, 432 (Lake County Courthouse, Painesville, Ohio); Elbert A. Smith, comp., The Church in Court (Lamoni, Iowa, n.p., n.d.), 3-6; "Kirtland Temple Suit," Saints' Herald, 27 (March 15, 1880), 235; Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (December 3, 1933), 1553-54.
organization. His publicity campaign had the desired effect of making the American public more aware of the work being undertaken by the Reorganization. He commented a few years after the decision that it had "certainly drawn the attention of the world upon us as nothing else [had] ever done." Almost immediately after the case was decided Smith began to receive offers, as head of the church, to take a leading role in the secular anti-polygamy campaign from people who had previously had nothing to do with anyone tainted with Mormonism. Others wrote to Smith sympathizing with his stand regarding the Mormon question, and often asking if they could assist the Reorganization in its work in Utah with contributions. The large transcontinental railroads granted all Reorganized Church missionaries free passes to ride their lines solely because they had become aware of and supported the sect's work in Utah. On one occasion Smith was contacted by officials from Mexico for advice concerning the proper method of handling Utah Mormons


84 Joseph Smith to E. L. Kelley, July 10, 1883, Joseph Smith III Papers.


87 Joseph Smith to T. L. Kimball, October 20, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2, 359-60.
who had settled in that country’s northern provinces. The public acclaim and resultant acceptance of the church made Smith reflect happily in 1883. “When I think of all the huge mountain of prejudice, malice and lies, that the Reorganization has met and surmounted,” he told Bishop E. L. Kelley, “I am proud of being counted worthy of standing; and am thankful for any ability I may have to aid the work and maintain that standing.”

During the 1880s the anti-polygamy crusade heated up, and as it did Smith and the Reorganization became increasingly influential in the nation’s capital. He maintained almost constant contact with numerous representatives and senators during the decade, advising them about the enforcement of existing laws and the formulation of new ones. When President Garfield, with whom Smith had corresponded, delivered his inaugural address in 1881, he demanded that Congress act to eliminate the Mormon problem with stricter and better enforced laws. His opinion on this matter was at least partially influenced by Smith’s arguments. In addition, Smith made recommendations to Senator George F. Edmunds of Vermont on the framing of legislation that eventually passed in 1882 providing for the capture and prosecution of those engaging in plural

88 Joseph Smith to General E. A. Maxia, August 5, 1884, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4, 104-10.

89 Joseph Smith to General E. L. Kelley, May 1, 1883, Joseph Smith III Papers.

marriage or "unlawful cohabitation," as the law called polygamy. Still later Smith met and discussed the enforcement of this law with Governor Eli H. Murray of Utah, who agreed with the prophet that the more than ninety percent of Mormons who did not practice plural marriage should not suffer along with offenders.

Despite Joseph Smith's constant agitation for anti-polygamy enforcement, he and his followers tried always to act justly toward the Mormons. When George Edmunds proposed a bill stiffening anti-bigamy laws and destroying the political power of the Mormon establishment in 1886, he objected to parts of the bill he thought were too restrictive. "Unwise legislation in the present crisis can not fail to be productive of evil," he warned Representative William F. Hepburn of Michigan. "No scheming for mere political effect ought to be for the moment tolerated. Solid work for the benefit of the people governed and the maintaining of the supremacy of the institutions and laws of the Country ought to [be] sought after, . . . ." He asked Hepburn to remember that the iron-clad oath proposed by Edmunds, by which all Mormons would have to disavow any connection with their Temple beliefs as a prerequisite for suffrage,

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stood very close to a violation of freedom of religion. He also asked Hepburn to point out to his colleagues that the "Congress should be wisely discriminate between acts of disloyalty and that which is belief preparatory to the life beyond." He added in closing, "I acknowledge the right of the government to define largely what the rights may be to control my civil actions; but certainly deny the right to impose oaths upon me that ask me to renounce my allegiance to God in any sense; as this oath by Senator Edmunds may be construed to do."  

A month later Smith wrote to Edmunds explaining his position on the Utah problem with greater clarity. He told the Senator that he favored moderation in dealing with non-polygamist Mormons, allowing them suffrage, qualifying them to hold office, and according them all other rights and privileges of American citizenship. This did not mean, however, that he was going soft on plural marriage. Regarding the polygamists, he told the Senator,

the hand of Government has too long been clothed in silk; those who have attempted legislation have feared to hurt; this has made the leaders of the polygamists bold and aggressive, and they presume upon the old time plea of "persecution, oppression, religious intolerance, the rights of conscience," &c.

If Edmunds restricted his activity to anti-bigamy legislation, Smith counseled, there would be little trouble with non-polygamist opposition because of the relatively small number of polygamists compared to the total church membership. If he persisted in attacking the Mormon church as a whole, however, Congress would find itself with a war on its hands.

He explained that it would cost millions of dollars to subdue the Rocky Mountain Saints if the government continued its program in Utah. In addition, there would be great loss in property and quite probably in human life, and ill-feelings would persist for generations.⁹⁵

When the Edmunds-Tucker Act passed Congress in February 1887 and became law without presidential signature, Joseph Smith recognized that at least part of his argument had been heard in the nation’s capital and had been incorporated into the provisions of the Act. The law had been directed at the polygamists in the territory to a large degree, and generally left the non-polygamist Mormons alone. It did disincorporate the church and provide for the seizure of some church property, but the actual law that emerged never approached the harshness of the one that had been originally proposed. Smith, finding the act moderate in many respects supported it with certain reservations. Under the new, tougher law United States marshals rounded up most of the polygamists still in the West and placed them in prison. Finally, after years of tough enforcement, a new president of the Mormon Church, Wilford Woodruff, realized that if his people were to survive as a movement some solution had to be reached to stop the “cohab hunts.” On October 6, 1890, after guarantees of peace had been made by federal authorities, Woodruff issued a manifesto declaring that the church would henceforth abide by the laws of the land. In effect, the church

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⁹⁵Joseph Smith to Hon. G. F. Edmunds, March 4, 1886; ibid., 231-32.
swore it would no longer perform polygamist marriages so that within a generation the institution would die out. 96

Smith, after a thirty year struggle, took great pride in the elimination of plural marriage as a tenet of any faction of Mormonism. It was, as far as he was concerned, one step in the elimination of evil and a large step toward the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. As he wrote to Representative Moses Thatcher, a non-Mormon Congressman from the newly admitted state of Utah in 1896, "I have watched the course of the events as it has appeared to the public, and have been anxious to see the right vindicated; for, having all my life long been protesting against the undue exercise of official authority in the church over the members, the citizens of the Kingdom." 97

With the end of the plural marriage practice Smith stood convinced that justice had triumphed and right had prevailed in the justification of his father's work.


97 Joseph Smith to Hon. Moses Thatcher, December 18, 1896, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #7, 355-56.
During the mid-1870s the Reorganization began to experience certain internal difficulties that provided Smith with his most serious problem of the nineteenth century. The unity that Smith had achieved in both centralized church government and doctrine were jeopardized by the activities of two influential Apostles, Jason W. Briggs, who had been one of the prime movers in the early Reorganization, and Zenas H. Gurley, Jr., the son of another early Reorganization leader. Briggs was an especially imposing figure in the church. Large, rotund, and possessed of a huge head reminiscent of that of a carved jack-o-lantern on a makeshift body, Briggs had one of the best minds in the church. He was a man to be reckoned with because of his long-time efforts on behalf of the Reorganization, and many of the church members held a patriarchal affection for him. Gurley was a man of importance, too. He had an excellent pedigree as the son of Zenas Gurley, Sr. A suave, sophisticated and well educated young man, Gurley had entered the Twelve by virtue of a revelation through the president in 1874, and had been in important leadership positions ever since.

Both Briggs and Gurley were theologically liberal even by present standards, and in the late nineteenth century their beliefs were positively radical. Both men were knowledgeable about various trends in Christian thought and applied them to the unique nature of the Reorganization.
Probably the foremost theologians in the small and parochial sect, Briggs and Gurley were especially enamored with three fundamental tenets of doctrine that were largely the product of the higher criticism that had begun to emerge in Europe and filtered into the United States during the period. The first held that human reason coupled with experience was the best means of judging "truth," and was a better means than relying simply on faith and revelation.¹ The second was that the hard distinctions commonly perceived by members of the Reorganization between the spiritual and material worlds was really a false doctrine. One could never divorce the one world from the other. The third belief which was based upon many of the philosophical ideas of the period, was that all human existence constantly changed. Thus the theories of evolution and change heavily influenced the theology of both Briggs and Gurley.²

These two Apostles' conceptions of Christianity stood far removed from those of Joseph Smith, and certainly to the left of those held by a very conservative church membership. These differences naturally led to conflict when Briggs and Gurley began openly teaching their views within the church. Smith, as part of his effort to centralize power in the prophetic office and to enforce a certain amount of orthodoxy upon the members, worked to stop Briggs' and Gurley's


²Blair, "Tradition of Dissent," 152.
teaching of their radical concepts. As early as 1875 Briggs complained that the Reorganization had apparently left itself open to the establishment of a dynastic, royal family which would rule it dictatorially. He decried what he called "Family Worship" for the members of the Smith family, and called for the general curtailment of recognition of the prophet as the absolute authority on all matters. What this meant in effect was that Briggs wanted the church to take away some of the power that Smith had gained in the presidency during the preceding fifteen years. He grumbled that Smith exercised entirely too much power for the welfare of either the church or himself, because he had a definite tendency toward "Caesarism" already, and the church would be wise to guard it judiciously.

During the 1870s Briggs and Gurley grew increasingly bold in presenting their theological ideas, and in chastising the church for allowing Joseph Smith such wide latitude in the church's operation. Smith ignored the Apostles until they began to argue that Joseph's father had been the originator and chief practitioner of polygamy in the early church. They claimed that polygamy was an evil doctrine, and that Joseph Smith, Jr. had been a fallen prophet at the time of his death because he had taught the belief. They went on to claim that the Reorganization acted hypocritically by defending the elder Smith, and that the church


4 Jason W. Briggs to William H. Kelley, April 2, 1877; ibid.
should arise in condemnation of both Joseph Smith, Jr. and polygamy. 5

Joseph Smith had no sympathy for these ideas at all. He had long
sought to vindicate his father, and to clear him of any involvement in
the practice. But this vindication, Smith reasoned, would be incomplete
unless he could at least make the Reorganization present a united front
to the world on the subject. Consequently, he would allow no dissent
on this issue either in oral or written form. His tight control of
the Saints' Herald kept such opinions as those held by Briggs and
Gurley out of the official church publications, and his control of the
missionary appointees made it possible to enforce his wishes upon most
high officials. When Briggs and Gurley began to challenge the polygamy
stand, however, Smith acted to make them stop their teachings. They
were too powerful to be intimidated by Smith's standard procedures of
dealing with dissidents, however, and a great conflict arose that was
not finally decided until 1885. 6

Although the Apostles' charge that Joseph Smith, Jr. had intro-
duced plural marriage brought the prophet into the matter for the first

5 William Marks to Josiah Bitterfield, October 1, 1865, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter
Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri); The Return (Davis City, Iowa), November 1889; Joseph Smith to J. J.
Cornish, February 9, 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 302-303; Zenas H. Gurley to Joseph
Smith, November 23, 1874, Joseph Smith III Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri); Zenas H. Gurley to Dear Herald, December 5,
1873, Joseph Smith III Papers; Lawrence Foster, Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century (New

6 The system of centralized power was described in Chapter eight.
time, the controversy eventually came to rest on both the theology of the Reorganized church and its administrative system. Jason Briggs and Zenas Gurley each wanted to change the thrust of the church's theological thinking along their more liberal rationalistic lines. The two men could not, however, decide upon a strategy for accomplishing their objectives. Briggs advocated moral persuasion only. He sought to teach the Saints about the modern theological ideas he had adapted to the restoration, persuade them to accent this system of belief, and abandon the older conceptions. Gurley believed that this was an acceptable approach, as far as it went, but he also planned to manipulate the General Conferences into adopting resolutions that would reflect his ideas. In the 1870s Briggs was by far the more important of the two reformers, but after 1879 Gurley emerged as the one who challenged Smith in the political arena.

In October 1874 Jason Briggs founded The Messenger, a Reorganization newspaper based in Salt Lake City and intended as a missionary tool to be used in converting the Utah Mormons. While The Messenger may have been aimed at Mormons, Briggs quickly turned it on the conservative, orthodox Reorganization members, using it as a vehicle for the presentation of his ideas about church history, doctrine, and policy. His articles, rather than pointing out the greater "light" of the Reorganization for the Mormons, consistently attacked the most cherished positions of the Reorganized Saints.

Briggs especially challenged three central tenets of the Reorganization's doctrine in The Messenger. His first assault was on the concept of preexistence (spiritual existence with God before the creation),
which had been explained by Joseph Smith, Jr. and accepted as an integral part of the restoration's view of the Godhead since the 1830s. Briggs claimed that a belief in man's existence before the physical creation meant that God was less than all powerful. Moreover, the belief that man had always been with God reminded Briggs of Calvin's predestination, the Utah Mormon belief in a council of Gods each with his own peculiar jurisdiction in the universe, and Spiritualism's transmigration of souls back to their former selves at death. If man had always been with God, Briggs reasoned, then it meant that God did not create man. If this were the case, what in fact was man but a less powerful god coexistent with a supreme deity? Briggs mentioned, of course, that the Utah Latter-day Saints had carried this reasoning to its logical conclusion in declaring that man could progress to Godhood. Briggs argued that the whole elaborate construct had been patently false. And, he asked, if "Joseph the Martyr was deceived" about "preexistence how do we know that he was not" also deceived about "half the truths he claimed to reveal."

Needless to say, Briggs' arguments touched a raw nerve, perhaps several raw nerves, in the Reorganization's vulnerable membership. When he

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8The Messenger, 1 (October 1875), 45-46, 2 (November 1875), 3-4, 2 (December 1875), 6-7, 2 (January 1876), 10.

9Ibid., 2 (July 1876), 30.

10Ibid., 2 (July 1876), 30.
questioned the prophetic ministry of Joseph Smith, Jr., however, young Joseph Smith had to respond.

Briggs next questioned the "gathering" of the Saints and the nature of "Zion." In a series of Messenger essays Briggs claimed that belief in a literal gathering of God's elect was completely unscriptural, obsolete, and ridiculously naive. He claimed that even Joseph Smith, Jr., the initiator of the belief, did not fully understand the purpose, methods, and goals of the "city on a hill." Briggs attacked these Mormon conceptions by pointing out that from a purely pragmatic perspective every "attempt in gathering and locating Zion has been a failure. Shall we give rise to a tradition that in coming generations shall reproduce these attempts?" He, of course, told the Saints that they should discard the ideal, because the "failure resulted from the theory." Joseph Smith and the majority of the churchmembership were avidly supporting the Order of Enoch experiment at Lamoni at this time, and looked upon Briggs' articles as not only erroneous but also traitorous.

Finally, Briggs laid siege to the most important doctrine governing the Reorganization, that of revelation through a living prophet as well as through all recognized scriptures. Based on the twin disciplines of evolution and higher criticism then emerging, Briggs interpreted revelation, whether spoken or written, as intended for a specific time and place, and not necessarily universally applicable. Briggs discounted written scripture as the work of mere mortals who had written what they

12 The Messenger, 3 (February 1877), 3.
believed God had told them, not what He may have actually intended. By the same token, Briggs asserted that current, spoken revelation was necessarily filtered through some individual's brain and therefore had been warped by his perceptions. One could no longer, according to Briggs, trust anything written in scripture or spoken by the prophet as the pure word of God. It all had to be interpreted intelligently. This, of course, ran counter to the accepted beliefs of the vast majority of the Saints, who viewed the scriptures as sacred writings of God and the prophet as the living oracle of Heaven.\textsuperscript{14} Briggs asserted that religion had evolved through the ages, changed, and the past should never be idealized. He insisted that

1. The Jewish history contained in the Bible (Old Testament), was not, as a whole written by inspiration.
2. That it was not written by any whose names are a guarantee of its truthfulness as a whole.
3. It was not, in the main, written by the actors in the events recorded, or by any who were contemporaneous with them.\textsuperscript{15}

To support his assertions Briggs pointed out difficulties in the Old Testament. He, for example, charged that the creation story was a fraud, calling it only an illustration of a principle, and not actual history. He claimed that Moses had not written the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, describing them up as a compilation of legends of various pedigree made long after the mythical figures had died.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14}True Latter Day Saints Herald, 2 (February 1861), 25-31.

\textsuperscript{15}Jason W. Briggs, "The Past and the Present," Ibid., 22 (January 15, 1875), 47, 21 (October 1, 1874), 584; Blair "Tradition of Dissent," 155-56.

\textsuperscript{16}The Messenger, 1 (April 1875), 23-24.
members. The more conservative ones attacked Briggs' theories in sermons, and complained to Joseph Smith that he had a heretic in the Quorum of Twelve. Briggs complained about the antipathy shown him by the church in 1876. "There is but little encouragement for an Elder who thinks as well as feels," he caustically remarked to William Kelley. As Briggs became increasingly bold in the presentation of his ideas, Joseph Smith received more complaints from the membership, and he decided to write the Apostle about the problems he was creating for the church. Early in 1877 he told Briggs that his articles in The Messenger had been the chief cause of conflict in the sect, because the majority of the Saints thought that most of them bordered on the heretical. He explained that the First Presidency was swamped with demands that it discipline Briggs for apostacy, and that as a result the church's central administration had decided to stop the publication of such articles by any church periodical. Smith went on to say that he was taking this action reluctantly, but that he believed something had to be done to maintain unity in the church. He concluded:

I assume no right to dictate, but have supposed from the actions of the conferences since 1852, that if a matter was decided by the plain teaching of the books it was settled for all members of the Church. If this is not correct, nothing is gained by organization, for the word alone means nothing. However, I am a man of free speech and free inquiry, howbeit, he who mistakes belief for

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19 Joseph Smith to Charles Derry, January 21, 1877, Joseph Smith III Papers; Joseph Smith to Fidelia Calhoun, January 26, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 86; Joseph Smith to E. C. Briggs, February 7, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 96.

20 Jason W. Briggs to William H. Kelley, October 15, 1876, William H. Kelley Papers.
Nor did Briggs leave the subject with criticisms of the Bible alone. He cast aspersions on the Mormon scriptures, the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, as well. He did not object to these works in themselves, only the common belief that because the prophet had claimed divine inspiration that it was necessarily the truth. He completely discounted plenary revelation, explaining that revelation from God could only be understood as "a development, dependent upon the faculties of the mind." "Revelation," he insisted, "corresponds with the experience and does not transcend it, though it may seem to." Revelation, thus, was always a very mysterious event, Briggs argued, one that was ill-defined and hard to pin down. It could only be compared to the sudden realization of a complex answer to a specific problem after much study and concentration. It was never a totally sure vision or dream, as many in the church believed. Briggs explained his position in 1876. "Any other view," he wrote, "which makes inspiration absolute, a divine deposit, whether in the ark, of the tables, or in the canon of scripture, subjects us to the crushing force of objections, based upon those errors, contradictions, and improprieties, that 'neither we nor our fathers could (or can) bear,' and our children will not attempt it."18

None of these ideas sat well with the majority of the church-

17 Joseph Fielding Smith, Origin of the "Reorganized Church": The Question of Succession (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1951), 26-29.

18 Jason W. Briggs, "Inspiration, No. 2," The Messenger, 2 (September 1876), 41.
Briggs made no attempt to justify his actions to Smith, but immediately fired a defense of his position off to the Quorum of Twelve President, William H. Kelley. "Some thoughts expressed by me others condemn I suppose," Briggs told Kelley, but "then they ought to show my errors, for which I have waited and still wait... I ask no quarter of the intellect, or criticism, of any who choose to take exceptions. The avenues of light are open to us all, and I do not propose to shut my eyes—because everyone else shuts theirs."[22]

Since Smith’s letter brought no response from Briggs, the prophet decided to work quietly with the Apostle to resolve their disagreements. He wanted Briggs to assume a less controversial position in public, and to present a statement of his orthodoxy within the Reorganization to the April 1877 General Conference. Smith feared that unless the church membership received some assurance that Briggs still believed in the Reorganization there would be a powerful movement at the General Conference to punish him. To forestall such an embarrassing event Smith dispatched Zenas Gurley, one known to be in sympathy with Briggs’ ideas but who had showed remarkable restraint in expressing them, to the Apostle’s home to get some sort of written statement of his position about the church. Briggs, unfortunately, refused to compromise his position. He said he would never stoop to the level of

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[21] Joseph Smith to Jason W. Briggs, January 22, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 75-76.

Galileo by recanting publicly, offering only a statement that the
Reorganization he believed in would never proscribe free thought and
expression of ideas. While it was somewhat less than he had wanted, Smith
took this document with the intention of using it in the conference to
show “that the mass of the Brn. mistook him.”\(^{23}\)

During the month before the conference Smith was swamped with
more complaints about Briggs’ continued heresies. In March Smith
wrote his hood friend Mark Forscutt, telling him that Briggs was entirely
too obstinate for either his or the church’s own good, and that almost
certainly the General Conference would want to deal harshly with him.
Smith thought that the best course would be to take modest action at
the conference censuring Briggs for his continued unwillingness to
accept the church’s established position on a number of beliefs.\(^ {24}\)
He outlined a means of controlling the extent of this censure in a letter
to Apostle William H. Kelley on March 22, just a few days before the
conference convened. He said that there was no doubt but that Briggs
stood outside the accepted theology of the Reorganization, and that the
Twelve, since the Apostle was a member of the quorum, should handle
any disciplinary action. Such discipline, Smith believed, should be re-
latively mild, just enough to bring Briggs back to orthodoxy and to
 placate the angry members of the conference.\(^ {25}\)

\(^{23}\) Joseph Smith to Zenas H. Gurley, March 24, 1877, Joseph Smith
III Letterbook #1, 121.

\(^{24}\) Joseph Smith to Mark H. Forscutt, March 3, 1877, ibid., 110.

\(^{25}\) Joseph Smith to William H. Kelley, March 22, 1877, ibid., 120.
Early in April, just before the General Conference met, Briggs began to press for the right to publish his ideas in the Saints' Herald, fanning the flames of the controversy even higher at a very unpropitious moment. Smith had already informed Briggs that he would not accept his radically oriented articles in church periodicals, and the Apostle cried censorship throughout the church. Smith tried to tell Briggs that the articles were ill-timed, and would create tremendous disunity within the church. Briggs refused to accept this explanation and vented his anger to almost anyone who would listen. In one irate letter he said that Smith had refused to publish them because "certain ideas contained in articles... were not approved—not approved! Ye Gods! The shadow of the inquisition..." When it was suggested that Briggs rewrite the articles removing the most obnoxious parts, and revising the rest so that it would not strike the Saints as so heretical the Apostle refused. He replied to one who advised this approach adamently.

Your friendly suggestions to "temper the tone of some articles" is appreciated, and accepted in the Spirit in which they are made. But is it not misfortune that an association, an organization should require the stifling of an honest and earnest conviction? I have felt the embarrassment of the position you point out. But after all, is it not injurious to truth and progress to expect, or require any one to represent others? Can it be done? It feels to me like shackles upon the soul.

Joseph Smith's temper flared whenever he considered Briggs' unwillingness to compromise some of his freedom of expression in the interest

28. Ibid., April 20, 1877.
of church unity. He tried, however, to give Briggs every opportunity to regain his lost standing among the membership. Although Smith averted any attempt by the membership to punish Briggs at the April General Conference, the Apostle began to arouse the Saints again as soon as the meetings had broken up. In May 1877 Smith received a new round of complaints about Briggs. He tried to defend him in public as having been misunderstood asking his irate brethren to "be patient a little longer." He harped on the idea that no matter what the truth of Briggs' supposed heresy, it "does not affect the real truth of the gospel the church teaches." Even if Jason Briggs fell completely into apostacy and left the sect, Smith argued, "how can that prevent your salvation?" The gospel, he told the Saints, was larger than any man, and the members should pay little attention to Briggs' actions. On the other hand, Smith privately wrote to Briggs urging him to back off from his headlong pursuit of confrontation. He warned that most of the church hierarchy had set a collision course with him, and that many of the laity had closed ranks against what they considered heresy. They have, Smith told the Apostle, little "confidence . . . in you as a minister and as a man." He asked, even begged Briggs to draw back a little bit, if only for the moment, so that the church would not end up in a huge conflict.

29 Joseph Smith to E. C. Brand, May 1, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 154; Joseph Smith to Mark H. Forscutt, May 22, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 164.

30 Joseph Smith to Carl A. Gross, June 24, 1877; ibid., 172-73.

31 Joseph Smith to Jason W. Briggs, May 1, 1877; ibid., 150-53.
Briggs, however, paid Smith little heed, and continued to preach his liberal ideas. By the October conference Smith decided that the time had come for official action. He contacted the President of the Quorum of Twelve, William H. Kelley, and asked him to initiate the procedure they had discussed in March for censuring Briggs. Custom dictated that at each conference every member of the ruling quorums be sustained by the assembled members. It amounted to a vote of confidence every six months, and in most cases was a mere formality with the votes nearly always unanimous. It was, however, a democratic means by which the membership could exercise their control over the hierarchy. The October 1877 conference began these routine sustaining actions at the first business meeting, and quickly ran through affirmative votes for most of the members. When the conference reached Jason Briggs, however, it refused to sustain him as a member in good standing of the Apostles’ quorum by a one vote majority. The vote of no confidence came as no surprise to Smith, but he and his associates were distraught to find that they could not control the direction Briggs’ censure would take as they had anticipated. Instead of allowing the Twelve Apostles to impose a mild punishment on Briggs, the conference moved to have a committee formulate official charges against the Apostle and to try him for apostacy. The committee presented a formal list of five charges against Briggs, accusing him of denying the doctrine of preexistence, of criticizing the scriptures and revelation, and of questioning the legitimacy of the gathering principle and the nature of Zion. With formal charges preferred against Briggs the next step would be trial for heresy in a church court, but Smith, as presiding officer of the conference, postponed the convening
of such a court until the April 1877 conference by which time he hoped to work out some sort of compromise.32

During the winter both sides—Smith and the committee—worked hard to assemble evidence.33 Zenas Gurley, still sympathetic to Briggs but maintaining a low profile to avoid a fate similar to Briggs’, wrote Smith in December asking him to intervene to save Briggs. Smith did not tell Gurley in so many words about the delaying tactics that he was employing but he offhandedly remarked that he believed the committee would either come up short of evidence, or the church would not be able to assemble a proper jury, or some other unforeseen occurrence would prohibit the trial. Smith added that he believed, given time and Briggs’ silence the whole problem would cease to exist. That was what Smith was hoping.34

At the next conference the committee reported back, citing evidence in support of the charges against the Apostle. Briggs, as Smith had planned, submitted a written statement in his defense, responding point by point to the charges, claiming that most of the accusations were “erroneous throughout.” The conference then referred

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33 Smith, “Memoirs,” in Herald, 83 (June 9, 1936), 719; Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:136; Joseph Smith to J. Traughber, November 29, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 243-44.

34 Joseph Smith to Zenas H. Gurley, December 15, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 264.
the whole matter to the Quorum of Twelve, as Smith had planned, who met in a long session, but finally reported back to the body on April 12, 1878. They found Briggs innocent of every charge, mostly on the grounds of insufficient evidence or because the church had not established an official position on the matter, and "respectfully recommend[ed] to your honorable body that the brother be relieved from the odium attached to his name as an officer of the church, that he may labor in his exalted calling." Smith had engineered a dismissal of the charges as he had planned. The conference accepted the report of the Twelve and the recommendations of the president that the past indiscretions on the part of the Apostle be forgiven. 35

Jason Briggs did not continue to limit the expression of his ideas, however, and after the conference many of the Saints who had not been at the meetings informed Smith that the Apostle was in the field once again teaching heresies. Smith and the other church authorities felt the necessity of defending the dismissal of the Briggs case for the Saints. James Caffall, another Apostle, spoke for most high officers when he criticized his brethren for acting as they had in trying to expel Briggs. "It is time that we quit consuming time in dabbling on abstruse and useless topics," he wrote, "and devote our time, abilities and substance to preaching and living the gospel precepts." 36 Notwithstanding Caffall's declaration, many of the Saints

35Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:213-17; Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 83 (June 9, 1936), 719.

wanted Briggs punished for his unorthodoxy, and brought up the question of censure again at the fall 1878 conference. This time they appealed directly to the conference body as a whole, and received its authorization to appoint a church court to deal with the matter. Smith, acting as chief officer of the conference, did not like this new turn of events, but had no choice but to appoint the court. Again he employed the delaying techniques that he had used previously, telling the court to examine the facts of the case thoroughly, without taking any action until the convening of the next conference in six months. 37

During this fall 1878 conference, Zenas Gurley became involved in this controversy as more than a sympathetic bystander. The conference passed what Smith considered a harmless set of resolutions affirming the church's continued acceptance of the inspired revision of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants "as the standard of authority on all matters of church government and doctrine, and the final standard of reference on appeal in all controversies arising, or which may arise in this church of Christ." 38 Both Briggs and Gurley had already seriously questioned the revelatory experience, and Gurley arose in protest to this resolution at the conference of 1878 claiming that it would make every church member accept the scriptures in their entirety without the opportunity to disregard certain parts that he considered unhistorical or them as he believed necessary.

37 Saints' Herald, 25 (October 1, 1877), 296; Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:239-40.
Gurley shot off angry letter after angry letter to other church officials protesting these resolutions, at the same time throwing himself vocally into the Briggs camp. 39

Joseph Smith appreciated Gurley’s stand on a personal issue as well as his forthright manner of dealing with the problem, but he was not in sympathy with his position. 40 Smith told Gurley that he was mistaken in his belief that the resolution would constrict his freedom of belief, because it was only a routine affirmation of a common church understanding. Gurley refused to listen to Smith’s argument, and when he received no assurance about the matter decided to resign from the Quorum of Twelve, asking the conference to grant him “an honorable release from his official standing in the church.” Smith did not really want to lose Gurley from the Quorum, but he also did not want him to be able to use the power of the Apostolic office to deride the beliefs of the church. Briggs was a problem already, and Smith did not need a second one, so when Gurley, although still vocal and influential, offered to remove himself from official standing, Smith grabbed

39 Joseph Smith to Zenas H. Gurley, October 23, 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 491-93; Joseph Smith to E. C. Brand, October 23, 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 494; Zenas H. Gurley, Jr., “Biographical Sketch of Zenas H. Gurley, Jr.,” in Biographical and Historical Record of Ringold and Decatur Counties, Iowa (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1887), 542; Zenas H. Gurley to Fred Johnson, June 18, 1886, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers; Joseph Smith to E. C. Brand, November 7, 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 5.

the opportunity and granted his release from the Quorum. 41

Gurley’s influence was keenly felt during the rest of the Briggs controversy. With Gurley’s support, and possibly his blessing, Briggs demanded that he be tried before a church court. He told the members that he would welcome the trial as a means of presenting his case, and of showing that the Reorganization under Joseph Smith was rapidly becoming an authoritarian institution. Smith, on the other hand, worked to defuse the rapidly increasing prospect of political confrontation by employing delaying tactics. First he told those leveling charges against Briggs that the church would very carefully consider these charges to make sure that they were well supported. Then he cautioned the prosecution that if they insisted on a trial the Reorganization would by policy have to pay the expenses of those who had any official part in the proceedings. This would mean the outlay of a considerable sum of money, an expense the movement could ill-afford. Next Smith let it be known that he did not personally favor a trial of Briggs, because of the disunity that it would inevitably cause. It would, he argued, hurt church morale and public image. 42

When this line of reasoning did not reduce the prosecution’s desire for a prompt trial Smith took a slightly different approach. He

41 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:259-61.

42 Joseph Smith to W. W. Blair, January 20, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2, 76-77; Joseph Smith to T. W. Smith, February 24, 1881, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #3 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 311-12; Joseph Smith to R. M. Elvin, January 30, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1A (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 120.
notified the various officials that the trial would probably be held
during the upcoming conference. In writing to Briggs in February
Smith explained that from the eligible men attending the conference
twelve would be chosen as jurors, but casually mentioned that they would
be chosen very carefully, and he doubted that enough qualified men could
be found. In such a case the trial would be postponed once again. 43
Smith then proceeded to encourage key men not to attend the upcoming
conference so that there would be insufficient jurors, 44 and he began
to solicit favorable testimony from church authorities for Briggs so that
he could not be convicted even if a trial met. 45

When the Saints gathered at the General Conference on April 6,
1879 most expected Jason Briggs to be tried and convicted of heresy. 46
They were, therefore, disappointed when that did not happen. Smith had
spent the winter planning carefully to make sure that the trial did not
take place. On the first day of the session he reported on the standing
of the case and submitted a letter from Briggs for the Saints. In the
letter Briggs challenged the whole matter on legal grounds, claiming
that he had already been absolved of the charges when the conference
had heard them and reinstated him in 1878. What the prosecution proposed,
he claimed, amounted to double jeopardy and should be declared unlawful

43 Joseph Smith to Jason W. Briggs, February 17, 1879, Joseph
Smith III Letterbook #2, 99.
44 Joseph Smith to J. W. Chatburn, February 18, 1879, Joseph Smith
III Letterbook #2, 101.
45 Joseph Smith to T. A. Hudson, March 3, 1879, Joseph Smith III
Letterbook #2, 123.
46 Weekly Argus (Sandwich, Illinois), April 12, 1879.
by the conference. He went on to claim that the men bringing the
charges had overstepped their authority in gathering evidence. Moore­
over, the whole affair was a violation of freedom of thought and ex­
pression. It was also a dangerous precedent to set. "I call attention
to an obvious fact," he concluded, "if the same course is pursued toward
all others who differ from somebody else, it will result in generating
hypocrisy, as a defense against accusation, or divide every branch and
every quorum in the church." 47

Smith then spoke on Briggs' behalf, telling the Saints that
much of what the Apostle claimed was correct, and that it would be an
injustice to force a trial at this time. The conference then voted to
postpone any decision about the trial until a review board could decide
whether to proceed or not. Smith turned the responsibility for the
review of the case over to the Twelve Apostles, where he had a substantial
amount of influence, charging the quorum with the task of "carefully and
judiciously" exploring the case from every possible angle and not
reporting back to the conference until satisfied that they had thoroughly
done so. 48 After the conference had adjourned Smith wrote to Jason
Briggs to inform him of the proceedings. He told the Apostle that the
conference had averted a confrontation that could have proven disastrous,
and assured him that he would receive a fair hearing from the Twelve.
Smith characterized the conference's discussion of the case up to this

47 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:255-58; Saints' Herald, 26 (April 15, 1879), 130.
48 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:258.
point as having been “temperate, and free from improper allusions and
malice; in fact more regret was perceivable in the tone of those who
spoke, than any other sentiment.” He confidently concluded that the
Twelve were committed to safeguarding “the issue of principle without
injuring those parties to either side of the controversy,” so he should
not be concerned about the final decision.49

Just as Joseph Smith thought he was about to achieve an amicable
solution to the theological controversy Briggs had created, Zenas Gurley
reentered it on Briggs’ side. Responding to the events of the previous
conference, and not wanting Briggs’ liberal theology to be compromised
in any way by Smith’s activities, Gurley used every tool at his disposal
to present his liberal ideas to the church. Although no longer an
Apostle, and therefore not acting in an official capacity, Gurley could
still command attention. He spoke at every opportunity, at both church
services and civic gatherings, and wrote detailed theological treatises
about the disputed concepts.50

Smith tried to ignore Gurley’s attack, and succeeded in doing so
until Gurley charged Joseph Smith, Jr. with the practice of polygamy.51
Gurley used this as a means, as had Briggs earlier, of discrediting the
revelatory experiences of the martyr. He thus, indirectly, challenged
the resolution passed in 1878 stating that the sect accepted all revela-

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49 Joseph Smith to Jason W. Briggs, May 10, 1879, Joseph Smith III
Letterbook #2, 188-89; Joseph Smith to T. W. Smith, May 24, 1879, Joseph
Smith III Letterbook #2, 213-14.


51 Zenas H. Gurley to Joseph Smith, March 5, 1879, April 6, 1879,
Joseph Smith III Papers.
tions contained in the Doctrine and Covenants. In April Gurley asked Smith to allow him to present his ideas about this question in the Saints’ Herald. Joseph flatly refused because of the discussion of the origins of plural marriage that would arise. Smith told Gurley that he admitted that he did not know everything that had taken place in Nauvoo in the 1840s and could not personally vouch for his father’s conduct at all times, but he would not allow the question to be rehashed in the church’s official newspaper because of the bad publicity that it would bring to the church and the disunity that it would cause within the movement.

“Were I to choose,” he told Gurley, “I should much prefer to open [the Saints’ Herald] for Orson Pratt, John Taylor, or Joseph F. Smith [all Utah Mormons] for the obvious reason that they hold that the dogma of polygamy is true, and that while Joseph Smith was its author he was innocent in so being.” He gruffly told Gurley that their linking of his father to plural marriage “would be infinitely less harmful by such a course; than would the presentation of the same discussion by you, or others in the Reorganization who believe the doctrine to be evil, but believe him to have been its human author.”

Denied access to the Saints’ Herald, Gurley made every attempt to present his opinions in other ways. He redoubled his efforts to gain speaking engagements, and worked hard to see the spread of his ideas in other magazines and newspapers outside the reach of church censorship. These efforts, as they had in the past, brought waves of protest from the more conservative membership. Stephen F. Walker, one

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52 Joseph Smith to Zenas H. Gurley, April 2, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2, 149-56.
of the founders of the church’s colony at Lamoni, wrote to Smith in May 1879 telling him about Gurley’s “heretical” behavior in southern Iowa. Smith replied thanking Walker for the information and promising action. "I am so glad you wrote me about Zenas," he told Walker, "I have been waiting for two years for some strange act from him."\(^5^3\)

With Zenas Gurley in the controversy in such a powerful way, Smith realized that it would not be brought to a peaceful conclusion quickly, for Gurley was a consummate politician who would do almost anything to achieve victory. The delaying tactics used with Jason Briggs would have to be reconsidered with Gurley’s powerful entrance into the case. Smith decided that he would have to settle it before Gurley could get his campaign well organized. He concluded that the best way of doing this was to order a trial and decide the issue once and for all no matter who might win. If Smith won, and he had every intention of doing so, he could impose an administrative silence upon Briggs, a censure forbidding him from functioning in church office or as a representative of the organization. In so doing he could stop anything he might write, and reduce the effectiveness of his speeches to the level of private opinion. A defeat of Briggs, Smith believed, would serve to discourage Gurley’s recent attempts along the same lines.

During the fall conference of 1879 Smith implemented his newly

\(^5^3\)Joseph Smith to Stephen F. Walker, May 13, 1879; ibid., 200-201.
formulated plans for dealing with the Briggs-Gurley problem. Jason Briggs' case arose almost immediately after the convening of the first session, and Smith executed his strategy well. Smith's supporters immediately moved that it be referred to the Quorum of Twelve for action. Smith had earlier decided that the Twelve would find Briggs guilty of the charges, and had lobbied with the several members of the quorum to see that they carried out his wishes. The Apostles met in a token session and quickly returned a guilty verdict on two of the three charges. At that point Smith's men on the conference floor submitted a resolution of censure:

Whereas, Bro. J. W. Briggs had been found guilty by the Quorum of Twelve, of teaching that which is not accepted by the church, therefore, be it

Resolved, That he stand rejected from the Quorum of the Twelve, and that he be forbidden to act in any of the offices of the church.

And that he be so suspended until he makes restitution to the church. The conference approved this resolution with little debate, and Smith was delighted with the surprisingly easy victory.

Briggs was shocked by his swift defeat in the conference, but he refused to accept the church's doctrine. Smith reported to a friend


56 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:385-86.
that Briggs "remained . . . silently opposed notwithstanding the
finding of his peers." The discredited Apostle was still fuming well
into the next year. He told the Twelve’s president, William H. Kelley,
that the church had to explore the doctrinal ideas and precepts he
advocated or lose its force in the world because the sophisticated
Gentiles would not listen to obsolete concepts any longer.58

The harsh handling of the Briggs case made Zenas Gurley realize
that the same fate could befall him if he chose to be uncompromising.
If he remained outside the Quorum of Twelve, Gurley came to realize,
he could suffer even a worse fate since he held no official post, and
the next step in punishment would be expulsion from the church. He was,
therefore, ready to compromise. Smith had been courting Gurley through­
out the summer and fall, so they would compromise their differences
over the conference resolution about the scriptures. In order to
accomplish this compromise Smith and his Counselor, W. W. Blair, had
prepared an amendment to the original resolution that would make it pos­
sible for Gurley to accept the whole statement and regain his standing
in the Twelve. With Gurley back in the Quorum of Twelve, believed
Smith, he would be less likely to attack accepted doctrines of the church.
The amendment to the conference resolution on the scriptures stated:

it is not the intent and meaning of the said resolution to
make a belief in the revelation in the Book of [Doctrin and]
Covenants, or the abstract doctrines possibly contained in it,
a test of reception and fellowship in the church, but that the

57 Joseph Smith to Unknown Addressee, May 25, 1880, Joseph Smith
III Letterbook #3, 114.

58 Jason W. Briggs to William H. Kelley, February 22, 1880, William
H. Kelley Papers.
things therein contained relating to the doctrine, rules of procedure and practice in the church should govern the ministry and elders as representatives of the church.59

Gurley at first refused to agree to this amendment, but by the end of the conference, after long hours in private meeting with Joseph Smith, decided to accept it and return to his Apostolic ministry. Warned that the alternative might be trial and excommunication, Gurley decided that he could not change the church’s doctrine if he were outside of it, and acquiesced. Toward the end of the session Gurley presented a written statement affirming his acceptance of this second resolution on the scriptures, and asked for his reinstatement in the Twelve. The request passed easily after Smith’s speech supporting it.60

After the conference some members began to realize that the prophet had manipulated both the Briggs and Gurley cases so as to achieve his ends. As a result a few complained that Joseph Smith was becoming increasingly authoritarian, making it ever more difficult for church members to think for themselves in any religious issue without the presidency’s interference. They were, of course, quite right in charging Smith with orchestrating the conference’s manner of dealing with the Gurley and Briggs problem. They were also probably right when they surmised that his political control over the church would curb individual freedom within the sect. As a result of these charges, Smith was forced to defend his actions. He told the church that he was committed to church unity because it was the only means of accomplishing the mission of the

59Rules and Resolutions, Resolution 222.

60Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:285.
movement. He said that Briggs and Gurley challenged this unity with their radical ideas. They were willing to sacrifice the good of the church for their personal consciences. As Smith put it, these men were "'dim of sight,' and 'cannot see afar off.'" He continued

I acknowledge the "right of conscience," and believe in its exercise; but to allow that to dictate to, and dominate the rights of fellowship and ignore the bonds of Association, I cannot. If a man wants to retain himself and exercise all his individual rights, let him get by himself, where his elbows and knees will not hurt his neighbors.61

At the next conference in the spring of 1880 Briggs tried to regain his standing in the Apostolic quorum. The censured Apostle appealed to the body for "redress for wrong inflicted upon me by the late semiannual conference of September, 1879," Point by point he discussed the charges against him, and the steps taken by church officers in dealing with the matter. He argued that the trial, if one could call it that, had been illegal, and that the prosecution had failed to substantiate its charges. Finally, clutching at anything that might possibly help his case, Briggs argued that the position of Zenas Gurley, who had been reinstated, was "identical ground with myself upon this question, which was well known to the church."62 Briggs' eloquent pleading certainly persuaded some members of the assembly, but Smith stood solidly opposed to his return to the quorum until he made an attempt to become reconciled with the official church position on these doctrinal questions which were

61 Joseph Smith to L. D. Hickey, June 6, 1876, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, 26; Joseph Smith to William H. Kelley, January 1880, William H. Kelley Papers.

62 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:306-08.
at issue as Gurley had done. Until such time, Smith made sure his lieutenants blocked Briggs' reinstatement.

As Smith's men worked to block Briggs' reinstatement, they found that several members of the conference who had to pass judgment on the matter were questioning Smith's stand as a result of the persuasiveness of Briggs' arguments. They particularly asked why two diametrically opposed positions had been taken toward two men with the same basic beliefs. Having anticipated the question, Smith had an answer. As he later told T. W. Smith, an Apostle:

There is no parallel between Jason's offense and Zenas'. One [i.e., Briggs] was defiant, scornful of public teaching; the other was a manly statement that he could not teach [what he thought the church demanded]. One remained and does silently oppose notwithstanding the findings of his peers; the other made a frank statement through the accredited officer of the church, he stood with the church thus pledging himself, as his subsequent acts show, a consistent co-worker.\(^63\)

Convinced by his explanation, a majority of the Saints who had questioned Smith's conduct stood ready to support the prophet. At first one of Smith's lieutenants moved to table the whole matter until some future, unspecified time, but this motion failed. One of Smith's supporters then moved that before the conference could reinstate Briggs the ex-Apostle would have to affirm his belief in the accepted doctrine of the church. This motion passed easily.\(^64\) It made clear that Briggs would be given until the next conference, six months later, to decide what he wanted.

\(^63\) Joseph Smith to T. W. Smith, May 25, 1880, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #3, 114.

\(^64\) Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:308.
During the months that followed Smith left the initiative in the case with Jason Briggs. The ex-Apostle would have to decide what he wanted most, membership in the Reorganized Church and curtailment of expression or full freedom of thought and speech outside the sect. This was an extremely difficult choice for Briggs. He had cherished the message of the restoration since he had first heard it in the 1840s. He believed in the vast majority of the Reorganization’s doctrines, and accepted with only minor reservations the organizational structure of the church. He had invested some forty years in the sect, had dedicated himself totally to the furtherance of its goals, and had personally felt the pangs of its failures and the thrill of its triumphs. He could not just walk away from it. His personal and professional life had been too closely tied to the life of the church. Briggs had been persecuted because of his belief in the Mormon religion, and his family had suffered poverty so that he could travel as a missionary. For these reasons Briggs decided to remain with the church. 65

At the fall conference at Council Bluffs, Iowa on September 12, 1880, Briggs presented a detailed statement affirming his belief in most of the Reorganization’s teachings, and promised to curtail the public expression of his more liberal views. 66 When the document had been read and discussed some of Smith’s aides presented a resolution readmitting

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66 Joseph Smith to T. W. Smith, February 24, 1881, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #3, 311-12.
Briggs to full fellowship in the church and allowing him to function as an Apostle.\textsuperscript{67} After the conference had adjourned Smith wrote a glowing report to W. W. Blair, who had not been able to attend. He boasted only a little when he told Blair that Briggs "stated to his quorum that in general he was in accord with the faith of the Reorganization and stood with us, on the findings of the Pres. last fall, as did Zenas."\textsuperscript{68}

When, after the conference, Joseph Smith assigned Briggs and Gurley to missionary activity under his personal supervision, many recognized that he wanted to keep an eye on their field activities.\textsuperscript{69} Both of these Apostles, however, were unhappy with the way Smith had maneuvered them into orthodoxy, and began to believe, even more than they had in the past that the prophet had exercised far greater authority than he should have. Consequently, animosity between the two parties continued to grow. It never reached open antagonism, but neither faction approved of the other and a cold war resulted.

Zenas Gurley especially began to believe that Joseph Smith's power was a threat to the democracy of the church, and he tried to bring it under control. He argued that the balance of power between the various ruling bodies of the church was far out of line. As Smith remembered in his memoirs, "One side contended that it was essential to the peace and safety of the church that the two leading quorums should

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{67}Saints' Herald, 27 (October 1, 1880), 318.
\item \textsuperscript{68}Joseph Smith to W. W. Blair, October 20, 1880, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #3, 214-15.
\item \textsuperscript{69}Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:324.
\end{itemize}
be hedged about by such supervision as would prevent them from using the people as either temporal or spiritual merchandise.\textsuperscript{70}

Gurley, the dissident who had received a much softer settlement than had Briggs, began to lead the opposition to Smith's administration during the 1880s.

He formulated a political program for the reformation of the church along the lines that he and Briggs favored. Between 1880 and 1885 Gurley led an attack on Joseph Smith as the prophet that was as effective as any the president had to face during his lifetime. It led to a full-fledged power struggle arising out of the ashes of the Briggs case.\textsuperscript{71} Gurley made his case for reform on two main issues: the official power of the prophetic office and the authority of the three books accepted as scripture. He cast doubt upon Joseph Smith's authority within the church \textsuperscript{72} comparing him to the Roman Catholic Pope, complete with the aura of infallibility. He then translated his challenge of the prophetic office into an assault on the conservative doctrines that he and Briggs had long questioned.\textsuperscript{73}

Gurley's tactical plan for overhauling the church administration and doctrine was simple. He sought to enlist support for the opening of


\textsuperscript{71} Vlahos, "Challenge to Centralized Power," 141; Zenas H. Gurley to Council of Twelve, March 26, 1884, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.

\textsuperscript{72} Zenas H. Gurley to Fred Johnson, June 18, 1886, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers; Smith and Smith, \textit{History of Reorganized Church}, 4:259-60; Gurley, "Autobiography," in \textit{Biographical and Historical Record of Ringold and Decatur Counties}, 542; Vlahos, "Challenge to Centralized Power," 143-44.

the Saints' Herald to completely free debate for one year, during which time the church would presumably be informed of all the various opinions regarding these weighty questions. After this the General Conference could make a definitive statement concerning the nature and position of the organization on all aspects of the subjects under consideration.74 Joseph Smith had already refused to publish Gurley’s articles upon what he considered sensitive issues, and to prevent future censorship of the Herald, he proposed that the newspaper appear under the joint supervision of the First Presidency and the Twelve so that Smith’s authority could be better subdued.75

Gurley’s plan for the opening of the Herald would give the Apostle and his associates an open forum for their ideas. He firmly believed, possibly justifiably so, that if given the opportunity he could convince the Saints to accept his ideas. He would stress the prophet’s human qualities, pointing out past errors made by both the current prophet and his father, and calling for a renewed check on the prophetic office’s authority. Gurley proposed that the slack created by the prophet’s loss of authority be given to some extent to the various priesthood quorums and, to a far greater degree, to the General Conferences. This decentralization of power would create a more democratic church government and enhance the individual members’ freedom of thought and

74Zenas H. Gurley to Council of Twelve, March 26, 1884, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers; Zenas H. Gurley to Unknown Addressee, June 14, 1882, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.

75Joseph Smith to Zenas H. Gurley, April 2, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #2, 149-56; Zenas H. Gurley to Council of Twelve, March 24, 1884, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
action. After all, Gurley asserted, the Reorganization had arisen as a democratic response to what were considered abuses of power within Mormonism and had successfully operated during the pre-1860 period without the office of president at all. 76

By early 1884 Gurley had presented his ideas for reform in letters to other church officials, and somewhat circuitously, in various Herald articles to the general membership. He had won some support, such as sympathy from Jason Briggs, but he was still overwhelmingly outnumbered. 77 Joseph Smith was far from oblivious to Gurley’s intrigues, and managed to anticipate his actions enough to frustrate most of them. During these years Smith came more and more to view Gurley as a serpent in Eden working to destroy the fragile organization that Smith had so laboriously built. He had no intention of allowing the Apostle to destroy the unity that he had within the church. Smith also expected that Gurley, although surprisingly circumspect through 1884, would soon make an all-out bid to change the church and seriously weaken the First Presidency’s power. When such a time came Smith would be prepared to meet his attack with whatever might be necessary to defeat him, although he hoped the confrontation would not be too painful for the movement. 78

During the winter of 1884-1885 Gurley’s expected attack came.


77 Vlahos, “Challenge to Centralized Power, 146.

Smith had allowed Gurley the privilege of publishing a few theological articles in the Saints’ Herald because they appeared quite harmless, however, other more conservative members wrote rebuttals challenging them. Gurley then demanded space for rebuttals, and the Herald quickly became the battleground for the liberal and conservative theologians within the movement. At one point or another Gurley published articles challenging the supremacy of scripture as the absolute word of God, the authority of the prophet as the only oracle of heaven, the nature and purpose of the gathering, the meaning of Zion, the law of tithing, and doctrines stemming from the Nauvoo experience. The debate became so hot that at one point, W. W. Blair, writing for the conservatives, even condemned Gurley as a heretic who would have to pay for his sinfulness.

Since Smith had to approve these articles before their publication, some within the church believed that he wanted the Herald to serve as a public forum. Such was not the case, Smith had merely misjudged the excitement Gurley’s initial statements would arouse, possibly because he was not as conservative as many of his members, and once the demand for rebuttals had started coming his sense of fair play had forced him to


continue printing the essays no matter how objectionable they might become. Smith explained to complainers that he believed in freedom of expression for all, and would allow Gurley and Briggs to debate in the Herald as long as he controlled the periodical as editor.

While the Herald debate raged during the winter, Smith was planning for whatever Gurley might try at the General Conference in April, for he firmly believed that the Apostle would attempt to reform the church at that meeting. He wrote to William H. Kelley in February about the upcoming conference. Concerning Gurley, he noted, "there are rumors that there will be something out of the ordinary line attempted, or done at the April conference. What is in the Herald seems to be only a prelude." Smith went on to declare that he had every intention of meeting Gurley’s challenge head-on. Smith declared:

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81 In 1883 Joseph Smith had entered a written debate with Lyman O. Littlefield of Utah, about the nature of the early Mormon church and the origins of plural marriage. They had published a number of essays attacking each other, appearing in the Reorganization's Saints’ Herald, and the Mormon controlled Utah Journal (Logan, Utah). After three responses from Smith Littlefield suddenly wrote an essay restating his position and declared the debate over. Smith was upset that Littlefield had not allowed him to rebut this essay. See Smith’s rebuttals, Saints' Herald, 30 (September 8, 1883), 576-81, 30 (September 29, 1883), 628-30, 30 (November 3, 1883), 705-08. Privately, Smith wrote to Littlefield berating him for being so "unmanly" as to stop the debate in the middle, and in not allowing him the accepted courtesy of rebutting his article. He considered the whole affair as less than honorable. Joseph Smith to Lyman O. Littlefield, October 30, 1883, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 32-33. Smith could not, it seems with his sense of fair-play and justice, prohibit the antagonists from finishing their debate in the same way that Littlefield had stopped their 1883 debate.

No man depreciates the issues joined in the Herald more than I. But it has been under the surface for some-time, and like corruption in the blood, is better out than in. There has been this uneasy feeling for several years. Everything which procedure suggested (and some that fear seemed to dictate) has been done to avoid the hurt that might ensue if it came to the surface. But it seems that prudence has been construed to be fear, and, like Banguer's ghost, the thing "will not Down."

What shape it will take in Conference, I do not know. What others may do, I don't know. I think, however, that my own course is determined upon.83

While the debate was taking place in the Herald and Smith was trying to plan for the Gurley confrontation at the General Conference, the church's membership was becoming increasingly unhappy with the controversy. Acting in response to overpowering public demand, the church's Board of Publication met on March 30 and took the Herald out of any future debate by making Joseph Smith as the editor and church president the official censor of the paper. The resolution stated:

that the editor of the Herald be instructed to refuse to print anything in the Herald that is in conflict with the commonly received doctrines of the church; . . . and that he shall exercise such supervision in the matter and spirit of the subject matter of the Herald as to make it the teacher and defender of the church, as set forth in its accepted and authorized standards.84

When the conference convened on April 6 it reinforced this pronouncement by passing a resolution proscribing any doctrinal debate from taking place in the Herald. The resolution asserted that articles challenging


84 "Board of Publication Notes," Saints' Herald, 32 (April 25, 1885), 257.
the fundamental beliefs of the Reorganization were outside the field of
normal toleration and deserved censorship, that differences of opinion
should be discussed in private rather than in the official church news-
paper, and that articles should not impugn the integrity of the church’s
position or of church officials. This resolution passed easily. 85

Although Smith had not initiated this resolution, he did not
necessarily disagree with it. He preferred, however, to deal directly
with the immediate problem, Zenas Gurley, rather than restrict the church’s
future policy on the matter. When the time to sustain Gurley came, the
deleagtes to the conference overwhelmingly voted against the Apostle.
They also voted, somewhat angrily, not to sustain Jason Briggs as well
because of his support of Gurley. The members then passed a resolution
that was obviously directed at the two dissident Apostles. It read:

Resolved, That it is the sense of this body, that any man
who accepts appointment and ordination as a representative
of the church is under obligation to teach, sustain, and
seek to establish the faith of the church; and no one, be
he whosoever he may be, has any right to attack the divinity
of the faith in part, or as a whole, as said faith is set
forth in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Cove-
nants. 86

The prospects for the two Apostles were made bleaker when they made
no appearance at the conference and did not even submit a report by
letter. As a result, Briggs and Gurley, along with a minor dissenter,
E. C. Briggs, were censured for their non-attendance at the meetings
and other “past abuses.”

85Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:477-78.
86Ibid., 4:478.
At this point Smith took advantage of the conservative flavor of the conference to deliver what he considered an inspired message to the body that would seal the fate of the liberals. "The voice of the Spirit is that E. C. Briggs be sustained for the present," he told the Saints. "J. W. Briggs and Z. H. Gurley are in your hands, to approve or disapprove as wisdom may direct." He added, "Be merciful, for to him that is merciful shall mercy be shown." The conference took this advice—at least most thought they were merciful when they only refused to sustain the Apostles rather than trying them for apostacy as many wanted. Smith then interpreted for the Saints what he would consider proper punishment for the dissidents. Smith told the conference: "We answer that they are still members of their quorum, and hold priesthood; but by reason of the vote not to sustain, are not authorized to act as ministers for the church, until such time as the disability imposed by the vote of conference is removed." Smith had, everyone agreed acted magnanimously, but he could afford to do so for he had won decisively.

With the 1885 General Conference the threat from the liberal ideas of Briggs and Gurley had been turned back. Smith hoped, and during the next few months, came to believe that the wounds opened by

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88 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:481.
89 Ibid., 4:483.
90 Saints' Herald, 32 (May 16, 1885), 305.
91 Joseph Smith to A. J. Hinkle, May 1, 1885, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4, 159.
the confrontation would quickly disappear. Such did not turn out to be the case, however, for both Briggs and Gurley never returned to good standing. When the next conference met in April 1886 Gurley and Briggs, and fifteen or twenty other supporters, presented formal requests for withdrawal, asking that their names be stricken from the membership roles. The church, it seemed to Smith, was too small to accommodate the radical views of Briggs and Gurley to those of the majority of the members. In their withdrawal papers the Apostles claimed that their request for withdrawal should be granted because of irreconcilable differences regarding doctrine, church policy, and distribution of power within the ruling bodies of the movement. Smith said he respected Briggs and Gurley for their adherence to principle, and while regretting that such an end should have to come, quietly told the men that they would be "allowed to secede for heterodoxy" with honor.

As a result of the defeat of Briggs and Gurley Joseph Smith finally stabilized the church under his presidential leadership, galvanized the various strains that had begun to coalesce during the 1860s and 1870s, and set up an effective, centralized leadership that would not be seriously challenged again during Joseph's lifetime. Then the conference

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93 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:561-62, 524-25; Gurley, "Autobiography," in Biographical and Historical Record of Ringold and Decatur Counties, 542; Zenas H. Gurley to Mr. Dillon, April 1, 1893, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.

94 New York Times, April 12, 1886.
refused to accept any of the dissidents' contentions, it defined the policies the church would follow in matters of faith and practice—in effect granting the prophet virtually unlimited power in these matters, powers in the exercising of which he became increasingly more confident.
Chapter 12

THE GOLDEN YEARS

On November 6, 1892 Joseph Smith turned sixty years old. His full beard had long since turned grey, and his features had matured into those of an upper middle aged man. He looked every bit the patriarch who had ruled the Reorganized Church for more than thirty years. Much admired by the majority of the membership, Joseph was also respected as a superior administrator who had brought unity and honor to the Reorganization. He had found during the previous seven years since the defeat of Briggs and Gurley, a certain public vindication of the policies he had pursued since his ordination so many years earlier. The support he had received from the church in dealing with the liberal theological and procedural ideas of Jason Briggs and Zenas Gurley and the capitulation of Utah Mormons in their promise to stop practicing plural marriage were deeply satisfying to Joseph Smith. These developments bolstered Smith's confidence immeasurably. This confidence manifested itself during the 1890s and the first part of the twentieth century in a new set of tactics adopted by Smith regarding both the church's external relations and its internal administration. He was more tolerant and conciliatory toward other churches and the secular world, and he got a firmer grip on the internal operations of the church.

After the Utah Mormons issued the Woodruff Manifesto, declaring they would no longer sanction the practice of plural marriage, the Reorganization began subtly to shift its policy toward the larger faction
of Mormonism in the Great Basin. Joseph Smith had previously dealt with Utah Mormonism hostilley, but in 1890 he became more conciliatory. The Reorganization still talked somewhat about the practice of polygamy, claiming that neither the sect nor Joseph Smith, Jr. had ever taken part in this practice, but the movement stopped condemning the Utah Mormons for having practiced it. After all, the Utah Saints had been forced to cease its practice by the power of the federal government. After this time, the Reorganization could only condemn the practice of polygamy as a belief of the Mormons, not as actual fact.¹

The Reorganized Church had been able to build a moderate-sized membership on the basis of its antithesis to the ideals of the Utah Mormons. Almost from the outset of the reorganizing process begun in 1852 the church had pursued a missionary program that was aimed at the reconversion of people who were already believers in Mormonism. The Reorganized Church’s missionaries assumed that these proselytes, had a basic understanding of and commitment to mainstream Christianity, that they believed that Joseph Smith, Jr. had been commissioned by God to bring about a restoration of New Testament Christianity, and that Smith had acted as a prophet for the church leading the believers out of a spiritual wilderness as Moses had led the Children of Israel out

of the wilderness into the promised land. After 1860, when Joseph Smith III assumed leadership of the church the main thrust of the missionary effort remained unchanged, for young Joseph wanted, more than anything else, to bring the whole of Mormonism under his control as it had been under his father.\(^2\)

Whenever missionaries found believers in Mormonism, either Saints who had followed other factional leaders or who had drifted out of organized movements entirely, they gave them a threefold message designed to convince them to unite with the Reorganization. They first announced that Joseph Smith III was the head of the sect. He held that position, they claimed, by right of lineal succession and because his father had declared, "my son Joseph will take up the work and carry it on."\(^3\) The missionaries then dissociated their sect from any connection with polygamy. Brigham Young, not Joseph Smith, Jr. was the author of polygamy, they argued. It was not true Mormon doctrine, and the Reorganization disavowed it. Reorganized Church missionaries argued further that all other Mormon leaders had apostatized from the original church and had formed churches without authority from God to do so. They had transgressed God's will and had lost their


authority. "The Priesthood rightly considered signifies a body of men right­fully holding power to administer in the name of Jesus Christ for the conferring of spiritual blessings upon men," Joseph Smith contended, but it should never "be conceded to mean a class of men holding power from God to contravene the laws which have been given him for the government of all, or to do that which placed in jeopardy or destroys the people and their liberties." This, the Reorganization asserted, was exactly what the other groups had done. 4

Under Joseph Smith's direction the Reorganized Church had carried its message among the various Mormon factions. During the 1850s and first part of the 1860s almost all of its missionary work took place in the Midwest. Many converts were won in western Iowa from among those who had dropped off from Young's emigration trains en route to the Great Basin or had returned eastward after becoming disgruntled over the authoritarian nature of life under Young. Besides those Mormons, the Reorganization attracted many of the followers of other factional

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4 Early Reorganization Minutes, 1852-1873, May 1, 1865 (Reorganization Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Ar­chives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri); Joseph Smith to O. F. Attwood October 12, 1883, Joseph Smith III Letterbook 4 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Ar­chives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 27; Joseph Smith to Caleb Parker, August 14, 1895, Joseph Smith III Letterbook 6 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Ar­chives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 241-42; Joseph Smith, "Priesthood," Saints' Herald, 24 (June 1, 1877), 168; Charles Derry, "Why I Did As I Did: Reasons for Unit­ing with the Reorganization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," Saints' Herald, 24 (February 15, 1877), 68-69.
leaders such as Charles B. Thompson, Alpheus Cutler, James J. Strang, Lyman Wight, and James Colin Brewster. Additionally, the sect made contact with people outside of Mormonism who were attracted to the movement by its claims of being a restoration of the ancient New Testament gospel, its emphasis on the Book of Mormon, its comforting doctrine of being a chosen people called to build and inhabit God’s earthly kingdom, or its claims of having continuing revelation from God through its prophet. These converts, however, were small in comparison to those gained within Mormondom.

Even though the movement was seeking largely to reclaim old Mormons its growth was astounding. In 1860 the total church membership was probably not more than one thousand, by the next year it was perhaps 1,868, and by the time of the opening of the Utah mission in mid-1863, it stood at about 2,500. Almost all of these members were living in the Midwest and constituted a fairly solid base of support.

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6 The approach taken by Reorganized missionaries in dealing with non-Mormon prospects was similar to that taken by the early Mormons. They preached a revivalistic message, told about the Book of Mormon, and spoke of the special relationship members of the church had with God that was not enjoyed by members of other faiths. The result was a feeling of being better than one’s fellow man in the case of many converts.
from which to carry on more far reaching missionary efforts. 7

In 1863 the church sent its first missionary team to work among the Utah Mormons. Within six months they had converted over three hundred Utah Saints to the Reorganization. 8 At the same time, the Reorganized Church moved into California and enjoyed remarkable success among the followers of Brigham Young who had rebelled against his rule and had left Utah and moved to California. Within ten years after opening the California mission the Reorganization boasted over 1,000 members in the Golden State.

In 1863 the Reorganized Church also made its first real entry into the foreign mission field. Before that time a few missionaries had gone just over the border into western Ontario, Canada. In February 1863, however, Charles Derry, an Englishman who had been converted to the Utah Mormon faction and had migrated to Utah only to become disheartened by the practice of plural marriage, arrived in England to represent the Reorganization. He went immediately to work among the Utah Mormons with whom he had worshipped before immigrating to America. The Utah leaders in England warned their followers not to listen to anything Derry said. As a result, he was unsuccessful for several months, but soon reinforcements from the United States arrived

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7 Saints’ Herald, 57 (January 29, 1910), 100; Salt Lake Branch, “Which Branches of the Church United With the Reorganization?” 1-2, unpublished paper in possession of author; Blair, “Moderate Mormons,” in Restoration Movement, 229; H. H. Bancroft, History of Utah (San Francisco: The History Company, 1889), 645.

8 Union Vendette (Salt Lake City, Utah), December 18, 1863; Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:339; Davis, Story of the Church, 483.
and together they got to know many Mormons who were unhappy with the leadership of Brigham Young. Within a year they had converted some four hundred Englishmen, the vast majority of them dissident Mormons.  

The Reorganization maintained an ongoing mission in Great Britain throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. The number of Saints who stayed there was never large, the greater part of them migrating to the United States. The importance of these missions was nevertheless great, because to Joseph Smith they represented the universality of the effort he was making to reunite the fragments of the early church.

As a result of its proselytizing efforts at home and abroad, by 1870 the church's membership had reached about 6,900. Slightly more than fifty percent of these members lived in the three states of Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri, and something more than seventy-five percent were in the Midwest. The rapid growth of the church of the 1860s was continued in the 1870s. By 1872 Mark H. Forscutt, the church secretary, could report that there were an estimated 250 branches or congregations and 8,000 members worldwide.

Still directing its efforts principally to Mormon splinter groups and especially Utah Mormons, Joseph Smith decided to move into new missionary fields during the 1870s. In mid-1872 John Avondet, an ex-Utah Mormon, opened a mission in Switzerland. Although a native of

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10 Ibid., 480; *New York Times*, August 5, 1912.

11 Howard, "Reorganized Church in Illinois, 1852-1882," 73.

12 Saints' Herald, 57 (January 29, 1910), 100.
Pinerolo, Italy who had converted to the Utah faction when a young man. Avondet spoke good German and could, therefore, function well in Switzerland. From Switzerland he moved on to Italy and opened a mission there in 1873. In the same year Joseph Smith sent two ex-Utah Mormons from California to the Society Islands and Australia to "reconvert" the Mormons out there. In 1874 Smith sent John L. Bear, another ex-Utah Mormon, to his native Germany to work with the Mormons there, and the next year the prophet sent other Utah converts back to their native lands of Denmark and Sweden to begin missionary activities there. In every case the Reorganization confined the majority of its efforts to working among the Utah Latter-day Saints converting those who were dissatisfied with their church, or who were genuinely convinced by the message of the Reorganization. Overall, the Reorganization's missionaries reaped a rich harvest. The growth of the church during the 1880s paralleled that of the 1870s, as it grew from 11,951 members in 1880 to 23,951 in 1890.

Throughout the first thirty years of Joseph Smith's presidency to 1890 the church's appeal was mainly limited to those who had been or were still affiliated with one or the other of the Mormon splinter groups. Little effort was made toward reaching other Christian denominations.

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14 Howard, "Reorganized Church in Illinois, 1852-1882," 73.
ations, although some converts came from outside Mormondom. Perhaps the main reason for the Reorganization's limited missionary effort was that Smith's first goal was to recover and reunify what had been one under his father. Besides, the Reorganization had neither the financial resources nor the manpower necessary to conduct more extensive missionary work. It could not maintain more than about fifty missionaries in the field at one time. Although they were supplemented by laymen who served on a part time basis, working to recover lost elements of Mormonism was about all they could do.

The Reorganization's proselytizing effort was also hampered by the general revulsions with which Mormons were viewed by the general public. Its missionaries found themselves constantly harassed by pious Protestants who confused them with the Mormons who adhered to all of the obnoxious doctrines of the Utah faction. Whenever the church's missionaries did seek converts outside of Mormonism, therefore, they found that they were so busy defending the church that they had little opportunity to offer a positive statement of what they believed. So unprofitable was this broader missionary endeavor that Joseph Smith decided to abandon it in most cases. He was forced to this decision,

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16 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 3:694-95.

17 Whenever Smith's missionaries ventured outside of Mormonism, they were challenged to debates about the nature of their religion by well-meaning ministers seeking to destroy the "Mormon Menace." See ibid., 4:15, 68, 105, 111, 139, 149, 178, 199-200, 331, 435, 437, 467, 509, 518, 610, 630, 669.
oddly enough, in spite of the fact that the Reorganized Church enjoyed relatively good relations with those who were aware of the differences among the various Mormon factions and the Reorganization’s stand against polygamy. 18

Because of the peculiar nature of its missionary program, the Reorganized Church’s converts were largely of one type. They were members of small Mormon splinter groups and the less well assimilated of the Utah Mormons. Most of them were poor. In the United States they were mainly small farmers, who either owned a modest tract of land or had filed for a quarter section under the Homestead Act of 1862. In Great Britain and the other more industrialized nations of Europe some were farmers, but most were poor factory workers. In England many lived in the industrialized cities of Liverpool and Birmingham. Most converts were not well educated, but they could usually read and write, for most had initially been converted to Mormonism by reading the Book of Mormon. These Saints were generally devout, believing wholeheartedly in the restoration of the gospel that Mormonism taught, and embracing the concept that they were somehow a special people entrusted with the mission of establishing the kingdom of God on earth. 19


19 As yet there is no study of the membership of the early Reorganized Church. Except for isolated instances the data is not available. The observations are at best rough, but are based on general knowledge of specific people known to have entered the ranks of the church during the period under consideration.

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Geographically, the primary base of the Reorganized Church was the American Midwest. It contained some forty-three percent of the church's total membership as late as 1890. It was here that the early Mormon church had grown so large, and it was the traditional stronghold of Mormonism. Here also was Independence, Missouri, the Mormon center-place of Zion and the location where the Saints most wanted to live. It was the section of the country where young Joseph Smith lived, and attracted those Saints who wanted to be close to the prophet. The Midwest was also the cradle of the Reorganization, the place where the church had sprung anew in the 1850s. The second most important area of concentration was the Pacific Slope. Missionaries were constantly in the Great Basin and California because there were so many Mormons there, and they won many converts from among them. By 1890 there were smaller clusters of Saints in England, Australia, the Society Islands, and Canada, but there were also a few scattered elsewhere. In 1891 the church had a total membership of 25,368. Of these, 22,851 were in the United States and Canada, 1,176 in the Society Islands, 969 in the British Mission, 329 in Australia, and 43 scattered on the continent of Europe. The Saints were found in only thirty of the 44 states and in Ontario, with a few scattered in Nova Scotia and Manitoba. The only states or provinces with more than a thousand members were Iowa (5,283), Missouri (3,080), Illinois (1,909), Ontario (1,519), California (1,387), Michigan (1,352), Kansas (1,060), and Nebraska (1,058).


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After the Woodruff Manifesto in 1890 Joseph Smith began to recognize that the admittedly successful missionary program he had directed for thirty years was becoming obsolete. He made the effort during the 1890s, therefore, to substitute another missionary approach. Instead of creating antagonism and ill-will toward the Utah Mormons he would take a conciliatory approach. Along with this, Smith decided to emphasize the common directions of the Reorganized Church and the rest of Christianity to a greater extent than in the past, and begin working more consistently with people outside the Mormon fold. In an 1893 sermon he hinted that the Reorganized Church would no longer deride Utah Mormonism and other faiths as it had once done. As he told his Lamoni audience:

We are not necessarily antagonistic to the truth that they of different faiths may have. We have a right to examine all of them, one by one; we have a right to select that from them that is true. We have a right to accept or use it; and if it be true and antagonistic to that which we personally hold, we are under obligations to drop our opposition to it and conform to that which is true that we may find elsewhere. We have the right to maintain our own faith; but differing faiths should be friendly, our attitude to the men that hold them should be friendly, but not for a compromising character. We should not strike hands with error, with wickedness, or corruption; but we may easily strike hands with men so far as their truths are concerned, and walk side by side with them in friendliness. 22

In 1895 Apostle William H. Kelley wrote to Joseph Smith about the relations of the two Mormon sects. He echoed many of the ideas Smith had begun to implement in his attempts at rapprochement. In speaking about the democratic tendencies of the Reorganized Church government, Kelley told the prophet that it was "a kind of freedom and education

that the old [Utah] oligarchy is a stranger to." But even they, he
admitted, "will get there someday, if they do have to travel a long
route to get there." It was the duty of the Reorganization, Kelley
added, to help its Utah cousins travel the route.

Joseph Smith carried his detente with Utah Mormonism so far as
to send his oldest son, Frederick Madison Smith, to attend a huge
family reunion in Utah in 1904 telling the young man to present the
Utah Smiths with his apologies for not attending the gathering himself.
Had it not been for ill-health, he had Frederick tell his relatives,
his would have participated, even though the reunion would be held in
an obnoxious place--Brigham Young’s old "Lion House," where Young had
lived during the heyday of Mormon polygamy with some of his favorite
wives. When Smith made his last visit to Utah in September 1905
he continued his conciliatory policy. Unlike on his visits of 1876,
1885, and 1889 Smith did not meet with controversy. He spoke in
meetings of the need of his church to accept all in kindness and to
teach the "truths" of the gospel. He applauded the Mormon hierarchy’s
abandonment of plural marriage, but continued to insist that his father
had taken no part in its origination.

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23 William H. Kelley to Joseph Smith, May 8, 1895, William H.
Kelley Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

24 Joseph Smith, Journal, February 4, 1904 (Reorganized Church of
Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Inde­
pendence, Missouri).

25 Joseph Smith, "The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith (1832-1914),"
in Saints' Herald, 84 (May 8, 1937), 590-95, 84 (May 15, 1937), 625-26,
84 (May 22, 1937), 655-56; Joseph Smith to Audentia Anderson, October 17,
1904, Joseph Smith III Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter
Between the fall of 1903 and 1906 Joseph Smith had an opportunity to demonstrate his feelings toward the Utah Mormons in a popular attempt to prohibit Mormon Apostle Reed Smoot from taking the seat to which he had been elected in the United States Senate. Anti-Mormon demonstrators protested that Smoot, as a member of the Mormon hierarchy, was unfit for service in the Senate and petitioned that he be denied his seat. These interests made enough of an outcry that the Senate had a special investigation to determine if Smoot had a conflict of interest in serving as a Mormon Apostle and as one of Utah's senators. Joseph Smith and the Reorganization entered the controversy, but Smith, who had thus far spent his adult life trying to destroy the power of Utah Mormonism, supported the seating of Smoot. He claimed that religion should have no bearing on politics, and found a dangerous precedent in "the making of any man's religion a cause of war against him when no overt act of outrage against the laws . . . alleged or proved" had taken place.

The investigating committee subpoenaed Smith soon after it opened hearings, and the prophet and several associates went to Washington in early 1906 to testify. Smith made the trip to the capital fully

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expecting to support Smoot's seating by the Senate. He planned to
tell the committee that the investigation was setting a dangerous prece-
dent, and he wanted to remind the senators of the sanctity of religious
freedom guaranteed all Americans by the Constitution. Soon after his
arrival Smith met with Senator J. C. Burrows of Michigan, who was
chairing the committee, in his private office and told him about his
opinions on the case. When Burrows learned that Smith approved of
Smoot's sitting in the Senate he told the old prophet that unless it
became necessary to the committee's inquiry that some historical facts
be illuminated he would not be asked to testify, for Burrows wanted to
prevent Smoot's seating.

Although Smith thought it unlikely that he would be asked to
testify, he rarely missed attending the meetings during the next
several days, taking every opportunity to lobby with members of the
committee and the Senate in general to persuade them to allow Smoot
his seat. On February 9, 1906 the investigating committee decided to
release Smith without putting him on the stand, and he returned to
Lamoni. Smith counted his time in Washington well spent. He believed
he had aided the cause of justice by speaking out as a private
citizen and as head of a reformed Mormon movement on behalf of the
Mormon Apostle, and took it as a personal triumph when the Senate
committee decided to allow Smoot his seat in 1907.29

Joseph Smith began to take a much more conciliatory attitude

29Joseph Smith to Israel A. Smith, February 10, 1906; ibid.,
Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (July 23, 1935), 944-46, 84 (May 22,
1937), 857-58.
toward other Christian denominations during the 1890s as well. Un-
certain of his personal authority within the clannish Reorganized
Church and unhappy with the refusal of many denominations to accept
him and his movement into full fellowship within the Christian frat-
ernity, Smith had pursued something of a defensive policy toward
other sects, always seeking to prove that his church was as legitimate
as theirs. For example, in 1888 Joseph Smith had been asked to send
official representatives of the church to an ecumenical meeting of
churches in Cincinnati, Ohio. He had always hesitated to take part in
such affairs because of the possibility, even probability of being
insulted by more traditionally oriented churches, and it was only
after a long and agonizing study of the matter that he allowed one of
his communicants to attend on behalf of the church. 30

With the reorientation program Smith undertook after 1890, how-
ever, the prophet began to be increasingly concerned with fitting into
and being readily accepted by other denominations. He tried harder
than ever before to have his church identified as one of the regular
Protestant sects of America. In 1893 he jumped at the opportunity
to participate in the World’s Parliament of Religions held in conjunction
with Chicago’s Columbian Exhibition. These meetings officially opened
on September 11, 1893 and closed seventeen days later. Some one hundred
and fifty different faiths were represented, with spokesmen for each

30 Joseph Smith to W. W. Blair, May 6, 1888, Joseph Smith III
Papers; Joseph Smith to E. L. Kelley, May 28, 1888; ibid.
having an opportunity to present something about his sect’s theology.  

Joseph Smith not only happily sent a delegate to this Parliament, he attended himself. By all accounts he enjoyed himself immensely. Smith daily sat listening to the addresses made by important members of the various faiths, and even considered their papers so important that he reprinted many in the Saints’ Herald so that his followers could be exposed to the thinking of other religions. He wrote when the meetings were finished: “What a wonderful thing it was. Would the time come when all the world were akin in faith...” Thereafter Smith was even more committed than before to a reconciliation of Mormonism with the rest of Christianity.

The Parliament of Religions was not entirely a good experience for Joseph Smith and the Reorganized Church, however, although the negative aspects did not hurt Joseph’s positive outlook on the meetings. Some religious bigotry toward the Reorganized church still remained, and it was evidenced during the meetings. When he went to the Parliament

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34 Joseph Smith to Mrs. D. C. Chase, October 25, 1894, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
he was under the impression that he would be allowed to present his sect's unique theology to the audience. After the meeting had been underway for several days, however, the leaders of the Parliament called him in and told him that because of extreme pressure from influential participants, whom they refused to name, the Reorganization would not be granted time to speak in the main session but could make its presentation at an adjunct session for those who wished to attend. Smith took the matter in stride, without much response other than to file a formal protest. He reasoned, as a result of this experience, that the Reorganization still had a way to go before full acceptance could be anticipated, and besides, the true Church of Christ had always been persecuted in some form or another throughout its history. But he came to believe that the real reason that he had been denied an opportunity to speak was that had he done so the Utah Mormons would have demanded similar time for rebuttal, thus turning the Parliament into a less than good-spirited debate between rival factions. The complainants, therefore, had the best interests of the meetings at heart.

Joseph Smith's new-found conciliatory attitude toward other churches and the secular world was also demonstrated in the realization of a dream he had long worked toward. Smith valued education and wanted


every young person in the church to have an opportunity to gain one under conditions that would foster good morals as well as free inquiry.37 Under Smith’s leadership the church established a liberal arts college at Lamoni. Smith rallied support for the institution, gaining donations of land, money, and time from the membership for the college, and by 1895 it was ready to open its doors.38

Smith probably would not have supported the institution—Grace-
land College—had the church not agreed that it should be completely free from any taint of religious sectarianism. As he wrote in the Saints’ Herald: "The Saints need an institution of the kind where their children and the children of others can be educated without constant with sectarian bigotry, [or] denominational dogma ..." The Reorganization would demonstrate to the world, he argued, "that a college can be success-
fully operated purely as an educational institution, free from denomina-
tional bias or sectarian taint or intermingling."39 Joseph was very proud of Graceland’s non-sectarian nature, and boasted in his memoirs that when the cornerstone of the first building "was laid, speeches deli-
vered, and prayers offered for the success of the enterprise, on that stone stood, plainly chiseled, the word, 'Non-Sectarian,' which stands today to indicate the character the institution has borne from the


first.  

The college was not built without opposition, some of it from highly placed leaders in the church. Resources were hard to acquire during the depressed 1890s, and opponents railed at the prophet for pushing for such an institution at that time. Smith was not dissuaded, however, and cajoled, begged, and borrowed until he had sixty-four acres of land in Lamoni and ten thousand dollars in working capital.  

Smith carefully orchestrated the General Conferences as he had done so effectively during the Briggs-Gurley difficulties, to gain approval for this project in spite of legitimate and well-organized opposition.  

In an unprecedented move, largely because few businessmen were interested in the project, Joseph assumed leadership of the committee charged with the school’s creation himself, oversaw the solicitation of contributions, managed office affairs, and approved disbursements. In some respects many within the sect thought Smith was running a one-man committee in order to see that he got exactly what he had envisioned for so many years.

When the time came to build the college’s first building Joseph commissioned a Saint, Charles Dunham, as the architect. When the design was submitted the prophet quickly approved the plans for a monstrous three-

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40 Smith, “Memoirs,” in Herald, 83 (October 17, 1936), 1296.  
42 Edwards, History of Reorganized Church, 5:140, 220, 271, 372.  
43 Edwards, Hilltop Where . . . , 17-18; Joseph Smith to G. J. Waller, March 27, 1896, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #6, 263-64.
story brick building of Gothic Revival and Victorian architecture. It was a terrible choice not only because of its inherent ugliness but also because it was poorly designed, entirely too ornate, and in many places structurally unsound. The contractor had to rethink and rework the entire structure as it went up so that it would be usable at all, and in one case had to reinforce part of the flooring with metal rods before it was considered safe to walk on. All of this increased building costs to more than doubled the preconstruction estimates. This was considered gross mismanagement by many of the men who had initially opposed the venture, and Smith had to take the blame. At one point Smith responded to charges of incompetency in business affairs by declaring, "I was not a businessman." He even felt the necessity of defending his actions in his memoirs some twenty years later, telling the church, "I did not err purposely in these matters, nor through egotism or an unwillingness to listen to the opinions of others." He simply had tried to force a less than popular goal upon influential men in the church, and they took great delight in seeing him fail.

The errors were corrected and the bills paid, however, and most of the ill-feelings were forgotten in a relatively short time. Smith continued as chairman of Graceland's Board of Trustees through 1898,

44Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 83 (October 17, 1936), 1295-97; Graceland College Board of Trustees Minutes, 1895-98, 4-34 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).

45Joseph Smith to W. W. Blair, December 20, 1893, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #5, 49.

and each year the college gained in enrollments, quality of education, and donations. Smith showed his support not only as an organizer and soliciter, but also as a parent of students. He sent his two oldest sons, Frederick and Israel, to Graceland College in 1895, and took great pride in the fact that Frederick was the college's first graduate in 1898.  

Joseph's tendency toward exercising his authority within the church did not mean that he tried to monopolize control of the institution. He asserted his power only when the occasion seemed to require it, as it did in 1901 when Smith was concerned that an inspired document he wanted to be included in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants would not be approved by the various priesthood quorums if it were submitted to some because it contained statements that would limit the actions of those quorums. Instead Smith, for the first time, went beyond the authority of the quorums and presented it directly to the General Conference at large, telling the church that he had been "bidden" to do so by God.  

During this time, also, Smith distinguished between administrative decisions and legislative decisions. The former, he insisted, were specifically within his jurisdiction as president of the church. When

47 Graceland College Board of Trustees Minutes, 1895-1898, 34.
this distinction was challenged he asserted that all the members of
the church could not be guaranteed equal access to all the information
needed to make sound decisions, and that only the First Presidency was
sufficiently well informed on matters to do so. In pursuance of
this policy, Smith redirected the emphasis of most of the important
priesthood quorums toward missionary planning and extension and away
from the details of administration. These details he handled himself
by centralizing them under his direction in the First Presidency. The
presidency, thus, had authority to act in all cases, but it could
delegate its power to individuals or quorums with the understanding
that they were to exercise it only at the pleasure and by assignment
of the First Presidency.

Many of the Quorum of Twelve and other leading quorums disliked
Joseph’s tight grip on the sect’s central administration, but they were
largely powerless to oppose what they thought of as “creeping authorit­
arianism.” The lesson of the Briggs-Gurley case was still hauntingly
vivid. When Stake Presidents and other local officials were asked to
report directly to the First Presidency rather than through long established
channels of command, the Apostles and a few other Latter Day Saints
protested that this was an unwarranted violation of the prerogatives of
other ruling quorums, but they did no more than make a formal protest.
In large measure the administrative operations of Smith were simply
tolerated by other officials and not endorsed. In later years, after

50 Ibid., Sections 120:4-6, 122:7, 123:14.
51 Ibid., Sections 120, 122.
Joseph brought his headstrong son into the church's administration, these measures were increasingly resented until during the 1920s there was a disastrous revolt in the church. 52

Another area where Smith exhibited his strong hold on the church's government was regarding the material that appeared in the Saints' Herald. As the publication's editor Joseph also served as official censor. Much of the controversy between him and Briggs and Gurley had involved this matter. When Smith triumphed, he no longer had to exercise censorship powers so carefully. While still acknowledging the right of freedom of expression, 53 Smith unhesitatingly returned manuscripts that questioned what he considered official church policy. In 1886 he told Joseph Flory who had complained about having an article rejected: "You may have rights as a member of the church, and a correspondent of the Herald, of which I have not a just knowledge, or conception, or know nothing of," he told Flory, "but I have some knowledge of what devolves on me as Editor of Herald and shall act in accordance with such knowledge." Although Flory appealed to Smith's sense of justice in allowing all sides of an issue to be presented, the prophet told him that everything necessary had been already presented.


53 Joseph Smith to Jason W. Briggs, June 8, 1885, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Arches, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 82; Saints' Herald, 57 (January 26, 1910), 80.
and the time for essays such as his had ended. Others met with
similar treatment from Smith.

When Saints began to complain about the "dictatorial" conduct
Smith was demonstrating, the prophet no longer remained silent as he
had done in the past. He wrote in complaint to Bishop E. L. Kelley in
1891. "I declare, sometimes I am disgusted with the too frequent
'Something is wrong, the church is way off. I am all right; but the
way the church is going, it beats my time.'" He added, "It seems as
if every time a man gets himself into trouble, the church is in danger
of going straight to the devil. Who is the church anyway?"

Joseph Smith began to feel so secure in his role as head of
the Reorganized Church during the 1890s that he even commented on
subjects, such as politics, which he had previously considered outside
the realm of ecclesiastical concern. Smith had long been a Republican
and something of a local Republican organizer, but he had always told
the Saints that the church and politics did not mix. Now he reversed
himself and began to tell his followers which candidates they should

54 Joseph Smith to Joseph Flory, June 22, 1886, Joseph Smith III
Letterbook #4, 259-80. See also Joseph Smith to Brethren of Conference
Assembled (Lamoni, Iowa: n.p., 1901), circular.

55 Joseph Smith to Heman C. Smith, April 23, 1895, Joseph Smith
III Letterbook #6, 69-70.

56 Joseph Smith to E. L. Kelley, January 23, 1891, Joseph Smith
III Papers.

support. The candidates Smith favored invariably were Republicans. Smith also mixed secular with religious concerns during the 1890s, as when he spoke about the expansion of America's borders. In general the Republicans favored territorial expansion while the Democrats opposed it. Smith, in keeping with his political allegiance, publicly supported the orthodox Republican position. When imperialists proposed helping Cuba gain its independence from Spain so that the little island could have the "blessings of liberty," Joseph supported them, and used his high office to mobilize support for the idea. He told one person that it was the duty of the United States to help Cuba in her rebellion. "The oppression of Spain will be broken sooner or later," he told some Saints, "and Cuba will become free. It is the destiny of

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60 Joseph Smith to G. J. Waller, March 27, 1896, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #6, 362-64.
America and all contiguous to her shores." When war broke out with Spain in 1898 over Cuba Smith's longstanding belief in expansion helped shape church policy. With Smith to direct the course, the church passed a series of resolutions at the April General Conference endorsing the morality of the war.

Accustomed to getting virtually everything of consequence he wanted within the church, Smith was rather surprised when he failed in his efforts to secure for the Reorganization title to a piece of property that was very special to the sect. The Church of Christ, under the leadership of Granville Hedrick, had been one of the first schismatic groups to leave the original Mormon Church. In 1867 they had moved into the Independence, Missouri area and reclaimed some land that the church had abandoned when it was expelled from the region in 1833. The most important part of the land reclaimed was a portion of 63.27 acres in the heart of the city that Joseph Smith, Jr. had designated in 1831 as the lot upon which the Mormon Temple would be built.

Joseph Smith had long wanted to own this Temple Lot in Independence because it held tremendous religious significance for the entire

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61 Joseph Smith to David King, February 2, 1897, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #7 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Arches, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 386-87.

62 Edwards, History of Reorganized Church, 5:435; Saints' Herald, 45 (April 18, 1898), 237.

Mormon faith. The church had been commanded, the Saints believed, to build a sacred temple of God on the site. This was to be the place from which Christ would reign during the Christian millennium. As the self-styled inheritors of the early Mormon legacy the Reorganized Church naturally believed it should have possession of the Temple Lot, particularly the tract that the Church of Christ controlled, a one-and-one-half acre plot where Joseph Smith, Jr. had laid the cornerstones for the temple.

The Reorganized Church prophet moved cautiously at first. He made almost no overtures to the Church of Christ regarding the property until the late 1870s. When the Reorganized Church began moving back into Independence in force during the 1880s, however, Smith decided to move decisively to acquire the Temple Lot. The church made a number of purchases within the sixty-three acre tract, but was unable to buy the small plot where the cornerstones had been laid from the Hedrickites. Smith then asked the General Conference to appoint a committee to confer with the Church of Christ about the possibility of working out the few doctrinal differences between the two sects and merging them. Its first meeting took place in 1885, and the two churches met intermittently thereafter.

By 1887 it had become clear to Joseph that the merger negotiations

64 Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Sections 57, 58, 98.
67 Smith and Smith, History of Reorganized Church, 4:480-81.
were failing. Believing that the Church of Christ leaders were deliberately insulting the Reorganized Church in the negotiations. Smith decided not only to gain possession of the property but also punish the recalcitrant Hedrickites at the same time. A means of doing both arose during the summer of 1887 when a deed to the Temple Lot surfaced among the descendents of Oliver Cowdery, one of the early church’s more important men. On March 25, 1839, Edward Partridge, as trustee for the church, supposedly deeded the Lot to Cowdery and three named children for one thousand dollars. The Reorganization purchased two quit-claim deeds to this property from Elizabeth Ann Cowdery, widow, and Maria Louise Johnson, daughter of Oliver Cowdery, on June 9, 1887 for one hundred dollars each. Smith believed he had bought the legitimate deed to the Temple site, and decided to press for acquisition of the property on the basis of these documents.

Two days after obtaining these deeds the Reorganized Church filed an injunction against the Church of Christ to force them from the property. The Hedrickites refused to do so and there the matter stood for more than four years. On August 6, 1891, however, Smith’s men filed a "bill of equity" against the Church of Christ, in the Circuit Court of western Missouri in order "to establish a trust in and recover

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68 W. W. Blair to E. L. Kelley, May 12, 1887, Edmund L. Kelley Papers.

69 Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints vs. Church of Christ, et al., 69 Federal Reporter, 937 (1894); Historical Facts Concerning the Temple Lot, 28.

70 Edwards, History of Reorganized Church, 5:104.
certain trust property at Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, publicly known as the Temple Lot." The Reorganization challenged the Hedrickite's claim to the property on two counts. It first contended that the Reorganized Church was the "owner in fee simple, by title absolute" through the deeds obtained in 1887 from the Cowdery heirs. This title, it claimed, overrode a long provenance legally recorded and accepted since 1848 that was then held by the Church of Christ. The Reorganized Church argued, in the second place that at the death of Joseph Smith, Jr. the Mormon hierarchy had splintered and only the Reorganized faction was the legitimate successor of the early movement, because it taught "the same teachings, tenets, and beliefs as to all spiritual affairs as did the said church association by the name of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints while at Nauvoo, in the State of Illinois, and is the same church in fact, and the same association in fact, . . ." All the other Mormon groups, it asserted, were in apostacy.

Smith took a great interest in the case, doing whatever he could to help secure the return of the property to its "rightful" owner. He also took great delight in attacking the defense of the Hedrickites,

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71 Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints vs. Church of Christ, et al., 60 Federal Reporter, 935 (1894).
72 Complainant's Abstract of Pleading and Evidence in the Circuit Court of the United States, Western District of Missouri, Western Division, at Kansas, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints vs. Church of Christ, et al. (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1893), 5-8.
73 Historical Facts Concerning the Temple Lot, 2-3.
74 Complainant's Abstract, 9-10.
75 Joseph Smith to E. L. Kelley, January 17, 1890, Joseph Smith III Papers.
because he believed them to be needlessly obnoxious toward the
Reorganized Church. They were spoiling, he thought, God’s plan for
the development of the Temple Lot. “I have wondered if their atti-
tude does not come within the scope of the old, old adage of the ‘dog
in the manger’ who could not eat the hay upon which he was lying nor
permit those for whom it was provided to have it,” he bitterly wrote
in his memoirs. “They will not, cannot, themselves build the Temple,”
he continued, “and they will not permit others to do so.”76

During the trial the Reorganization’s claim that the deeds
it had purchased from the Cowdery family were legitimate was dealt a
staggering blow by the defense. The Church of Christ’s attorneys
presented evidence that the deed of Edward Partridge to Oliver Cowdery
and three of his children was not an original instrument, that it
contained no valid signature, no legal date, and was not registered in
Jackson County until 1870. Moreover, they showed that on the deed’s
supposed date of execution, March 25, 1839, neither Oliver Cowdery nor
Edward Partridge were in Missouri. Cowdery, who had left the church in
ey early 1838, was in Tiffin, Ohio, and Partridge was in Quincy, Illinois.77
The defense also demonstrated that the three children named in the deed
--John Cowdery, seven, Jane Cowdery, three, and Joseph Smith Cowdery, one
--had never existed. In light of this evidence the defense asked the

76 Smith, “Memoirs,” in Herald, 83 (September 16, 1936), 1169.
77 Historical Facts Concerning the Temple Lot, 29-31; Joseph
Smith, Jr., The History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day
Saints, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret
court to rule that the deed was counterfeit and throw the case out.\footnote{Historical Facts Concerning the Temple Lot, 32-33; Stanley R. Gunn, Oliver Cowdery: Second Elder and Scribe (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1962), 221-22; Paul E. Reimann, The Reorganized Church and the Civil Courts (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Printing Company, 1961), 216-27.}

The judge decided, however, to continue the trial in spite of the complete discrediting of the Reorganization’s deed to the property. Smith told his lawyers to forget the deeds, and to claim the property solely on the ground that the Reorganization was the legal continuation of the original Mormon church and had been forcibly driven from the land it held in 1833.\footnote{Saints’ Herald, 39 (September 3, 1892), 566-67; Smith, “Memoirs,” in Herald, 83 (September 12, 1936), 11-38, 83 (September 19, 1936), 1167.}

In seeking to prove that it was sole legitimate successor of the original Mormons, the Reorganization argued that the early church neither practiced nor taught the doctrine of plural marriage, and that Joseph Smith, Jr. had set apart his son to lead the church.\footnote{Fully three-fourths of all the testimony in the Temple Lot’s abstract of evidence deals in some way or another with proving the church’s line of authority from the time of Joseph Smith, Jr.’s death in 1844. See Complainant’s Abstract, passim; Edwards, History of Reorganized Church, 5:236-37; “President Smith in Detroit,” Saints’ Herald, 47 (July 25, 1900), 478.}

On March 3, 1894 Judge John F. Phillips awarded the Reorganization the Temple Lot property on the basis of its claims to be the successor to the original Mormon church. In his opinion he stated that the Reorganized Church was “similar” to the original church in doctrines and beliefs, and it was, therefore, entitled to a decree as “successor” to early Mormonism.\footnote{Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints vs. Church of Christ, et al., 60 Federal Reporter, 956 (1894).} The membership of the Reorganized
Church considered the decision a great victory since they had gained possession of the Temple Lot and had been legally declared the successor of the early church.  

The church's victory was shortlived. As Smith well knew, Judge Phillips' decision disregarded the very important fact that the Reorganization's deed had been proven bogus, thus providing an excellent point for the Church of Christ to appeal. At the April 1894 General Conference the prophet tried to prepare the Saints for such a development. "The decision awarding the lot to the Reorganized Church may be reversed in that [Appeals] Court," he told the body, "in which case it will be for us to either appeal to the Supreme Court or accept the situation and acquiesce in such reversal."  

The Church of Christ did file an appeal in the Eighth Circuit Court, and in May 1895 the court reversed Judge Phillips' decision, as Smith had expected. In his opinion, Judge Thayer found the Reorganized Church's quit claim deeds decidedly inferior to that held by the Church of Christ. Thayer declared that while the court would concur with Phillips' decision that "the Re-organized Church is at this day the legitimate successor of the original beneficiary, . . ." of the property, it had waited too long to assert its rights to the land on this basis. Thus, because of the Reorganization's laches and its

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83 Edwards, History of Reorganized Church, 5:240.
84 Church of Christ vs. Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, et al., 70 Federal Reporter, 179-89 (1895).
inferior title the decision of the lower court was overturned.85

Smith had the church’s attorneys file for a rehearing of the case, but it was denied on December 9, 1895.86 Smith then instructed the church’s lawyers to petition the United States Supreme Court to hear the case, but it refused to do so, and in effect left standing the Appellate Court’s decision in favor of the Church of Christ.87

Joseph Smith was understandably disappointed. Instead of having the Temple Lot and vengeance upon the Church of Christ, all he had was court costs and embarrassment. Nonetheless, he tried to cast the defeat in its most favorable terms for both the church members and the general public. He claimed that while the church lost possession of the property through a “legal technicality,” laches, it won a great moral victory by having the church’s claim to be the legitimate successor of the early church legally affirmed.88 In his memoirs Smith wrote:

we as a church body and members have been obliged to conduct ourselves with the verdict rendered by the Court of Appeals, even while we had indubitably established the fact that we were the church lawfully in succession to the one organized in 1830, and by the terms of the trust created as I have described were legally entitled to possession of the Lot for the purpose designated. The decision gave our defeat in large measure the color and texture of victory, since its adverse nature was determined simply upon a technicality which, from the conditions surrounding it, prevented us from

85 Ibid., 187-189.

86 Church of Christ at Independence, Missouri et al. vs. Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 71 Federal Reporter, 250 (1895).

87 Church of Christ at Independence, Missouri et al. vs. Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 163 U.S., 314 (1896).

88 Edwards, History of Reorganized Church, 5:287.
carrying the case further in litigation. Hence, we could but feel gratified over certain phrases of the result in spite of our disappointment.\footnote{Smith, “Memoirs,” in \textit{Herald}, 83 (September 19, 1936), 1168-69.}

Smith subsequently tried to initiate more conferences between the Reorganization and the Church of Christ in the hope of bringing about a merger, but his efforts eventually failed.\footnote{Ibid.; Joseph Smith to Elder J. W. Peterson, June 10, 1902, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).}

The twenty years between 1885 and 1905 were some of the most rewarding of Joseph Smith’s presidency in the Reorganization because he had a largely unified church organization that granted him virtually complete power to define and pursue the sect’s goals. When on one occasion he took a particularly delicate issue between him and the Twelve Apostles to the floor of the General Conference, the body voted in favor of the prophet. Afterward he almost gloatingly wrote to his son: "I was very fully vindicated at the Conference by over 2/3 vote in my favor. It would have been a good reason for you had you been there to have heard the speeches and seen the interest at the taking of the vote."\footnote{Joseph Smith to Israel A. Smith, May 9, 1901, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.} But this was far from the extent of Smith’s far-reaching power. During the same period Smith saw Utah Mormons retreat from their peculiar religious practices, a retreat brought about in part at least by his work in both Utah and the nation’s capital. As he surveyed the events of the preceding forty-five years, Smith took pride and satisfaction in the knowledge that he had achieved many of the goals he had
set for himself during his early years as president of the Reorganiza-
tion. This general feeling of accomplishment, coupled with the fact
that by 1905 he was seventy-three years old and was becoming increasingly
less able of strenuous activity, caused him to enter into semi-retirement.
During the rest of his life Joseph Smith sought to put the record of
his life in order for posterity and to train his son to succeed him.
Chapter 13

JOSEPH AT HOME

Over the years Joseph Smith's duties as president of the Reorganized Church took a tremendous amount of time away from his family, and he regretted not being able to have a more normal home life, and relationship with his wife, or to enjoy watching his children grow up. His long missionary trips to Utah and the Pacific Coast, numerous missions to the East, and innumerable jaunts throughout the Midwest took him away from Liberty Hall more than he would have liked. Even while he was at home, either in Plano or Lamoni, church affairs consumed most of his time. He confided in his diary on one occasion during his most active years that he was very tired of his "ceaseless activity which only a strong virile man could endure." Understanding that his time was not his own because of his religious duties, Joseph's mother wrote him in 1869 to console him by pointing out that his father had had the same experience. "I do not expect you can do much more in the garden than your father could," Emma told her oldest son, "and I never wanted him to go into the garden to work for if he did it would not be fifteen


minutes before there would be three or four, or sometimes half a dozen men around him and they would tramp the ground down faster than he could hoe it up.  

Notwithstanding his broad religious responsibilities, after he had marital difficulties in 1863, largely because of the church, Joseph made every effort to build a stable, caring family relationship. To a considerable extent he succeeded. Over the years he became something of a patriarch in his family, ruling as a benevolent dictator who demanded good order, obedience, proper manners, high morals and a proper religious nature from the other members. His wife’s conversion to the church in 1866 helped considerably to improve his family relations.

By 1866 Smith had three daughters—Emma, named after her grandmother, nine years old and tomboyish, Carrie, five, plump, talkative, and energetic, and Zaidé, aged three, the baby spoiled by her father. One daughter, Eva, had died as an infant in 1859, and a son, Joseph Arthur, had died in 1866. During the early part of the year Smith and his family packed their few belongings into a wagon and moved to Plano, where a number of important Saints had located. They moved into a comfortable two-story frame house that Bishop Israel Rogers had donated to the church for Smith’s use as an inducement to Smith to move.

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3 Emma Bidamon to Joseph Smith, August 1, 1869, Emma Smith Bidamon Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archipves, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).

In Plano the Smith home became something it had never been in Nauvoo—a way station for almost every traveler who wanted to meet the prophet. Nauvoo by 1866 was so far off the beaten track, it had no railroad near it, and few came there to do business. Joseph had largely been isolated from the rest of the church and even the world at Nauvoo. Plano, on the other hand, had a large church population, a growing ecclesiastical bureaucracy, and access to the rest of the nation by means of the Illinois Central Railroad. Visitors, both Mormon and Gentile, constantly came calling on the Smiths. The visits were so frequent that Smith’s wife made it a point always to set at least one extra place at the table for anyone that might be visiting at the moment, "for seldom," Smith remembered, "were we without some guests at mealtime." As often as not missionaries in town on business stayed at the Smith home for indefinite periods of time, and there were also usually a few full-time guests at the Smith house.

In 1869 tragedy struck the Smith family hard. Emmeline, Joseph’s wife of thirteen years, had never been a sturdy woman. During their marriage she had often been sick, and each illness seemed more debilitating than the last. She suffered a miscarriage in early 1869 that forced her into bed once more, and after a prolonged confinement Emmeline finally

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5Ibid., 82 (July 2, 1935), 850.

died on March 25, 1869. For the first time in many years Joseph cried as he took his wife's body back to Nauvoo for burial. In writing to a Saint more than thirty years later trying to explain why God allowed death to come to those who were such good Christians while the "wicked" seemed to live forever, Smith admitted he did not know the answer. He himself had, he declared, asked, "My Lord, Why, Oh Why?" many times, but especially when Emmeline had died.

The church members in Plano tried their best to comfort Joseph Smith, but he rejected their overtures of sympathy and wallowed in a deep depression for some months. His old friend Mark Forscutt and his wife moved into the Smith home to keep the prophet company and help care for the household. Although the Forscutts provided Smith with much companionship, his greatest comfort came from a twenty-six year old church woman, Bertha Madison, who had joined his household during Emmeline's illness to help with the housekeeping. After her death Bertha stayed on, although the presence of an unmarried woman in a widower's home quickly excited a good deal of gossip in the community. It was soon widely rumored that Smith and Bertha were having an affair. Both of them were aware of the talk, but they tried to ignore it. They apparently did not even talk about the rumors themselves. One day Joseph came home from work unexpectedly to find Bertha quietly crying as she was sewing for

the children. Joseph did not understand what was wrong, and although she hesitated to talk about it at first, Bertha eventually told the prophet that she was deeply hurt by the gossip. She offered to give up her housekeeping job in order to end the talk, but Joseph absolutely refused because nothing illicit had taken place, and he did not want to give the impression that they were ending a relationship as a result of outside pressure.  

Joseph was, nonetheless, concerned about the gossip, and especially about its effect on his housekeeper. He considered simply continuing to ignore the rumors, and he even considered remarrying so that he would not have to employ a housekeeper. In due time Smith became convinced, (by means of a revelation from God, he later claimed) that he should court and marry Bertha Madison. This would solve his housekeeping problem and his increasing desire for female companionship, while also providing a mother for his daughters. Accordingly, Joseph married Bertha in his home on November 12, 1869. The gossip continued for a while thereafter, though, since some saw the marriage as a belated attempt to cover a scandal with a thin cloak of respectability. Even those not given to gossip thought it in poor taste for Joseph to remarry before the customary year after his wife's death. Nevertheless, the couple rode out the problem, and within a few weeks after the wedding most of the gossip ceased.  

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10 Ibid., 58.

In many ways Bertha was the exact opposite of Emmeline. Emmeline had not been raised in Mormonism and had refused to be associated with it most of her life, but Bertha had been a member of the church since childhood. Emmeline had always been a frail, often ill woman while Bertha was strong and robust. Emmeline was delicately beautiful with a dainty body and striking dark features. Bertha, on the other hand, was a large, somewhat heavy-set woman who had more of a manly handsomeness than a feminine beauty. Moreover, whereas Emmeline had been reserved and quiet, Bertha was outgoing and loved to meet people. She was always ready to open her home to complete strangers, to take charge in social matters, and live in the limelight that her husband enjoyed as leader of the Reorganized Church. More importantly perhaps, Bertha never resented Joseph’s long absences from home or his frequent nights off preaching for the church as Emmeline had.\(^\text{12}\)

Within a short time after their marriage Joseph and Bertha Smith had developed a sound relationship. The intense love Smith had felt for his first wife was largely missing in this second marriage, but the arrangement was decidedly congenial. If Smith found Emmeline exciting, he found Bertha comfortable. Bertha had complete charge of the house and the family, and built a stable home environment in which Joseph could seek solace from the hectic affairs of the church. The routine of the family soon became regularized after Bertha took over the household,

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\(^{11}\) Smith, “Memoirs,” in *Herald*, 82 (February 26, 1935), 274, 82 (March 5, 1935), 303.

she carefully molding it to suit Joseph's rather fixed notions of what a home should be like. In this regard she was much superior to Emmeline, who either did not think it important to cater to Joseph's ideals or refused to compromise in order to assert her own authority.

Joseph liked to be the first person to rise in the mornings, and Bertha made sure that this small matter became the family practice. Joseph always stoked the furnace about five in the morning to warm the house, put on the tea kettle, and drew fresh drinking water from the well in an old brass-bound cedar bucket. He loved to cook when at home, and usually got breakfast started before anyone else got up, frequently preparing his favorite food, pancakes, with a healthy side order of steak. When breakfast was ready Joseph would ring a huge dinner bell that rested on the table in a central hallway, and the other members of the family knew that they had to reach the dining room within five minutes or be lectured on the sin of tardiness. After a blessing, everyone settled down to a huge breakfast. Meals were not simply opportunities to eat, but were happy occasions where family members told stories, chatted about their activities, and even sang songs.

Smith always left the house before nine o'clock and went to work in the Herald office, seldom returning home before six in the evening unless there was an emergency. The supper routine was much like breakfast, but with a few more guests to talk with about the day's events. After supper the men and small children would do whatever chores were necessary on the quasi-farm that Smith liked to operate, while Bertha and the older girls cleaned up in the kitchen. When those things were done, all the household gathered in the parlor.
Sometimes they met around the heavy piano and the girls took turns playing and singing. At other times the children put on little plays or shows. More often, however, the family played games, read magazines or books, or worked on handicrafts of one sort or another. Lucy Smith remembered that as a girl she often sat by the fire on fall evenings polishing apples while someone read a story to the family.  

Audentia Smith mentioned that her father often sat in the corner of the parlor "patiently shaping and sandpapering new bows and arrows for the boys," during the evenings. At nine o'clock every night Smith called the household together for the reading of a chapter from the big family Bible that rested on a table in the parlor, following which they all knelt in prayer.

It did not take Joseph long to begin to appreciate his new wife and the kind of life she gave him. "I found my second wife to be a most capable woman," he wrote matter of factly, one in whom I could place the most implicit confidence, and in whose care I always felt it safe to leave my home affairs without question, when I entered into the ministry of my work which required me to go upon near or distant trips. I felt an assurance that she would not only do the best she could but that she possessed the natural ability to discharge the duties of her position honorably and acceptably.

His letters to Bertha were not filled with the syrupy confession of undying

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love that were present in his correspondence with Emmeline. Bertha did not need constant reassurance, nor did he desire to write to her in such a vein. Instead Joseph’s letters home were filled with news of the trip, reporting on his safe arrival, estimating when he would return, detailing the success of his work, and perhaps reciting a humorous incident. 17

The full expression of Joseph and Bertha’s solid relationship was well expressed in two poems to celebrate their wedding anniversary. On their sixth anniversary he wrote:

Six years along life’s rugged road
We’ve passed in quiet pace together;
And held for each the same regard
Through frosty, rough, and pleasant weather.

Six times the sun his annual course
Has gone, for earth, in joy or sadness;
And days successive, good or worse,
Have filled the years with grief or gladness.

Three times in joy, our married tie
For us has budded, bloomed and fruited;
Nor have the years, in passing by,
Proved yet for other each unsuited.

Then may the years that are before,
as have the past, in peace be tarried,
That looking back to “days of yore.”
We’ll ne’er regret that we were married.

Ten years later he redeclared to Bertha:

’Tis sixteen years today, Good Wife,
This bright, though chill, November
Since we in bonds began our life,
And I as husband, you as wife,
Pledged each the other in time’s strife;

17 Joseph Smith to Bertha Smith, April 4, 1872, Joseph Smith III Papers; Phillips, 33 Women, 61.
Oh! that I still remember.

And hand in hand we've held our way
Through fair and stormy weather;
'Mid skies of blue, or skies of gray,
In stint of toil, or need of play,
We've been to each a staff and stay
In joy and grief--together.


And as the years have waxed and waned,
Our lives being blended,
We have life's treasures earned and gained,
By joys been pleased, by sorrows pained,
And thankful been for grace obtained
When each sad grief-time ended.

Thus, Bertha dear, I call to mind
That day in chill November,
We made the vows whose ties still bind,
The bonds made sweet by love entwined,
As at the first, by God designed.--
And trust you still remember.

Joseph Smith tried to develop a close rapport with his children,
and attempted to make up for his frequent absences by spending time
with each child when he was at home and by writing them when away. He
tried to teach them the difference between right and wrong, and encouraged
them to develop their talents. Although he could not give them much
money, he was occasionally able to provide them a few luxuries, and he
tried to make it possible for each child to hone his or her special
talents so that each would be prepared to lead a productive life. He
particularly encouraged his girls to develop their musical talents, even
sending them to several music camps at considerable expense. Likewise,


\[^{19}\] *Kendall County Record* (Yorkville, Illinois), January 14, 1875;
Joseph Smith to Zaide Smith, July 11, 1879, July 15, 1879, July 19, 1879,
Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
he prodded his sons to learn every technical skill they could. Frederick Madison Smith, Joseph's oldest boy, showed considerable interest in the new field of electronics, as well as physics, photography, and mechanical engineering. Smith helped him set up a machine shop and photographic darkroom in their home.  

Whenever he was away from home Smith wrote his children, always urging them to be good and work hard. While on a western tour in 1876 Smith wrote to Audentia, his four year old, known to all as Audie, a simple block printed note. It read:

Your letter was a good one.
Pa was glad to get it.
Be a good girl and learn fast, so that you can always write long letters to pa when he is away.

When away in 1879 Smith wrote each of his children short letters, always reminding what they must do, and ending with the admonition: "be good children, help mama all you can: be good natured with each other and keep happy."

In his letters he made a point of describing elaborately the place he was visiting, especially when he was in the arid West where the land was so different from anything his children had seen. His letters

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21 Joseph Smith to Audentia Smith, November 4, 1976, Joseph Smith III Papers.
23 Joseph Smith to Audentia Smith, September 5, 1885, October 29, 1885, Joseph Smith III Papers; Joseph Smith to Audentia Smith, May 17, 1889, July 3-4, 1889, ibid.
contained lessons on botany and natural history, as well as geography.

In one letter, he wrote "get out your map, find the head of the Missouri River and almost forty miles north of that is Bozeman [Montana] and twenty-five miles north of that, I am now."24 In 1876 he wrote to Carrie describing his first impressions of Salt Lake City: "the streets are very wide, the blocks very large. Street cars run nearly all over the city; but the fare is ten cents, so that it pays to walk."25

Smith always managed to send home some little gift to each of the children whenever he was away for a long time. He frequently pressed flowers, grass, leaves, and other items into his letters.26 As Lucy remembered, "he often sent a tiny trinket we might keep, rocks, soil or shells, a sheet of music or a flower pressed to enjoy." On special occasions the gifts might be a little more valuable, perhaps "a bolt of fabric for the new dresses that pleased us so much."27 He wrote to Audie in 1885, "I have a nice lot of specimens to send you and will send them by express as I fear to carry them with me all the time. They may wear my satchel out. The small pair of moccasins are for Miss Audentia Smith. Do you know the girl?"28

24 Joseph Smith to Audentia Smith, September 5, 1885, ibid.
25 Joseph Smith to Carrie Smith, December 1, 1876, Rebecca Weld Nolan Collection (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
26 Phillips, 33 Women, 61.
28 Joseph Smith to Audentia Smith, September 5, 1885, Joseph Smith III Papers.
In 1880 Joseph and Bertha Smith decided to move from Plano to the new church settlement at Lamoni, Iowa. They planned together the home they built in the new community, and were very proud of it when it was finished. It was a large, Victorian farmhouse with twenty rooms built on a patch of rolling prairie about a mile west of the town. It was constructed of the finest Michigan lumber by a master builder, Thomas Jacobs. Started during the summer of 1881, it was ready for the Smiths to occupy by late fall. Just before they left Plano, the city held a public ceremony to wish them the best for the future.

The Smiths shipped their furniture by train during the first part of October 1881, and Bertha and the children--Carrie, Zaide, David Carlos, Mary Audentia, Frederick, Israel, Azube, and Hale--followed shortly thereafter. Smith remained in Plano for a few days to finish their business there. When Bertha arrived in Lamoni with her brood, she found that Jacobs had not yet completely finished the interior, and she would have to find other accommodations for a few days. Moreover, the men hired to move the furniture from the railroad station to the new

30 Weekly Argus (Sandwich, Illinois), September 17, 1881; Israel L. Rogers to Joseph Smith, September 30, 1881, October 8, 1881, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers; Plano Branch Minutes, June 2, 1873-June 1, 1885, 265-67 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
31 Kendall County Record, October 13, 1881; Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald, 82 (December 17, 1935), 1615.
house could not do so because "the elements . . . organized for a ten
day rain." Within two weeks, however, the Smiths had moved into
their new house and began to turn it into a home. The family quickly
learned to love Liberty Hall.

The new house soon took on the character of the inhabitants. Bertha furnished the rooms for maximum utility as well as proper
Victorian elegance. The house had a formal parlor for special occasions,
a less formal living room filled with plants and a large piano, a study
for Joseph complete with bookshelves from floor to ceiling on three walls,
a long hall with rows of pegs for the family's coats and hats, a lavish
dining room, modern kitchen, and upstairs wings with suites of rooms
for the boys, girls, parents, and guests. The Smiths planned an
extensive orchard that rivaled anything else in the town, and fenced
their forty acres around the house, farmed some of it, had cattle in
a small pasture, and built a much used fishing lake on another parcel.

As Smith's children matured they went through many of the normal
problems of adolescence. Joseph and Bertha tried to guide them through
these trying times as carefully as possible. In many cases Joseph
offered fatherly counsel even when none was wanted. His children con-

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33 Joseph Smith, "Editorial," Saints' Herald, 28 (November 1, 1881), 332.
35 This information is taken from the restoration project at Liberty Hall under the supervision of Alma R. Blair of Graceland College, Lamoni, Iowa.
Smith, 1832-1914, 41.
stantly heard several pet sermons on themes important to Smith. One of those was the necessity of living within one’s means and assuming full responsibility for one’s obligations. Smith had been heavily in debt since 1862 when he was left with an insolvent partnership upon the death of his brother. 37 After spending some time trying to get out of it Joseph shouldered the obligation and eventually paid it off, but he never forgot the experience and repeatedly warned his children to avoid it. 38 For the most part, Joseph’s children followed his advice, but not during the mid-1890s. Israel, Smith’s second son, in company with some other young men engaged in a bit of carousing. In the course of several months of debauchery he ran up quite a bill at the local grog shop and other stores in Lamoni, much to the chagrin of Smith. To make matters worse, Israel decided to skip town, leaving it to his father to pay his bills. His actions infuriated Joseph Smith, and it was many years before the two were on intimate terms again, although in time Israel abandoned his wild lifestyle and made amends for it. 39

37 Joseph Smith to Cousin Mary B., December 4, 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1A (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 59-61.

38 Joseph Smith to Israel A. Smith, February 2, 1897, March 6, 1899, December 12, 1899, December 8, 1899, February 17, 1898, December 20, 1899, May 3, 1903, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers; Joseph Smith to Audencia Smith, January 27, 1897, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers; Joseph Smith to E. L. Kelley, August 23, 1897, Joseph Smith III Papers; Joseph Smith to J. W. DeNoon, June 4, 1896, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #7 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri), 71; Saints’ Herald, 34 (November 12, 1887), 729.

39 Joseph Smith to Israel A. Smith, February 2, 1897, February 17, 1898, March 31, 1899, December 8, 1899, December 12, 1899, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
Smith also emphasized to his children the importance of responsible and dependable conduct. Joseph told them that natural gifts were not nearly as important to one’s welfare as the ability to plan a course and see it through to the end. When Israel took a new job as a salesman in the eastern states about the turn of the century Joseph repeatedly wrote him about the necessity of working hard and acting responsibly. He also cautioned him never to act disloyally toward his employer, and to “make yourself necessary to your employer, if possible.” He later wrote, "don’t hesitate to do what they ask you, if it is not dishonest. But don’t consent to anything dishonorable, come home first. Just tell them you will not do it, and they will never ask you a second time.”

While counseling his children, Smith betrayed a certain restrained Victorian humor that told much about the basic good relationship he enjoyed with them. In his correspondence with his offspring he tended to poke a lot of fun at what he called the “absurdities of life.” When writing to Audie from Utah in 1885, Smith tried to explain the complicated family ties between his immediate family and some of their Utah relatives. With much intermarrying and the practice of polygamy in the West his explanation became hopelessly confused. Finally, almost with a sigh, Joseph wrote, “let that pass,” and went on to another subject. On

40 Joseph Smith to Israel Smith, January 16, 1899; ibid.
41 Joseph Smith to Israel Smith, March 6, 1899; ibid.
42 Joseph Smith to Audentia Smith, August 3, 1885, Joseph Smith III Papers.
a trip to the East in 1897 Smith told the children that he planned to attend an organ concert. "I expect to be bored," he complained, "as usual in one of these high toned concerts."\(^{43}\) A few days later he wrote from Washington, D. C. about a recent trip with one of the local church ladies to the Library of Congress. They toured the building, and entered the rotunda where Hiram Powers' famous "Greek Slave" sculpture was on exhibition. Joseph described the scene for his family:

> Just fancy your Papa looking at a statue of the Greek slave; the statue of a beautiful woman in cold marble, as naked as woman can be, with not a thing on her but a chain to hold her to a ring in the floor, by the side of a good looking, well dressed, warm flesh and blood woman palpitating with life will you. But I give Sr. Bloom credit for not once looking at the nude statue, and pictures, that I could see.\(^{44}\)

Although Joseph was sometimes disappointed with his children and may have tried too hard to mold them along lines that he wanted, the prophet had their best interests in mind. Whenever they made a reasonable request Smith tried to comply. When his sons decided they wanted to go to college Joseph provided the money although he had to borrow heavily to get it. When he sent Frederick off to school at the state university in 1894 he told him, "I am proud, and I know, my son, that you will not let them make of you a learned incapable."\(^{45}\) Smith sent Frederick a bank draft each month to pay expenses and even managed to

\(^{43}\) Joseph Smith to Audentia Smith, November 26, 1897, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.

\(^{44}\) Joseph Smith to Audentia Smith, December 7, 1897; ibid.

include a little "splurge money" once in a while. Frederick’s education used up much of the family’s funds so when the second son, Israel, decided that he wanted to attend college in 1897 Joseph tried to arrange an appointment to West Point for him. A minor political figure in Iowa, Joseph wrote to a Congressman with whom he was acquainted, hoping for his help in getting an appointment for Israel. Although the Representative would have liked to have helped, Israel, at age twenty-one, was too old to enter the Academy. Joseph managed, however, to send him to his new Graceland College in Lamoni.

As time passed Joseph became increasingly satisfied with, and even proud of his children. He did not believe in containing his ire when they had disappointed him, but neither was he stingy with his praise. In March 1899, for instance, he wrote to Israel, who had by this time become closer to his father than he had ever been while living at home. "I am getting to be rather proud of my Sons, Frederick and Israel, and hope that you will stick to business." A few months later Smith wrote to Audie: "Life has had none too many bright episodes for me, but I am thankful that the sweets of friendship and filial [love] are mine. My children have stood by me under conditions that have driven


47 Joseph Smith to William P. Hepburn, March 17, 1897, March 31, 1897, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #7, 458-59, 475.

48 Joseph Smith to Israel Smith, March 6, 1899, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
other men's from them--God bless them everyone."  

As their children were growing up and leaving home, and the Smiths began to ease into a graceful old age tragedy struck the family. In September 1896 Bertha had driven her team and buggy on an errand. During the trip one of the horses had been frightened and run off, throwing her from the buggy. She was stunned and bruised but not seriously injured, and within a few minutes went on with her business. A few weeks later Bertha went on another errand using the same skittish team. Just as she returned home, the horses became frightened again, reared, and took off at a gallop. The buggy tipped over and Bertha tumbled out onto a pile of firewood stacked by the kitchen door. Joseph helped her to her feet. She did not appear to be hurt, but when she sat down to supper a few minutes later she fainted and had to be carried to bed. Bertha was quite ill for some time, but seemed to be recovering nicely. Early in October Joseph was called away on church business, and he was gone for ten days. When he returned home he found that Bertha had suffered a relapse and was again completely bedridden. She gradually grew worse, and died quietly on October 19, 1896.

Bertha's death was a tremendous shock to Joseph and the children. He had always believed that she would outlive him. Now he and the rest of the family had to adjust to life without the woman on whom they all depended so heavily. Joseph especially had to readjust his whole life. He wrote to his friend two weeks after the funeral, "I have been passing

49 Joseph Smith to Audentia Anderson, August 26, 1899; ibid.
under the rod, by losing my companion in wedlock, October 19th, which, with a multiplicity of cares; had kept me from writing. And even now, I hardly know what to write; so varied are the emotions pressing on the mind in consideration of the field of gospel requirements. In December he wrote to some old friends who were having marital difficulties about his marriage to Bertha. "My wife & I lived together over 27 years with not a quarrel, or mischievous misunderstanding in all the long time... Our life was a scene of mutual trust, each of the other. I realized this when my wife and I were wed, and I believe she did; so under this sense of its sacredness our lives passed, until she left me."

Smith reflected that the months after Bertha's death "passed on leaden feet." His daughter, Audie, by this time married and with a family moved back into Liberty Hall to take charge of the domestic routine, reestablishing much the same pattern as her mother had followed. Smith immersed himself in his work hoping to forget some of his grief and loneliness. He did not plan to marry again. He was sixty-four years old, his children were almost all grown, and he had a well established household functioning under his daughter's direction. None of the reasons he had given for his marriage to Bertha still applied. Besides, Smith thought, no one could begin to replace Bertha and their compatible relationship.

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51 Joseph Smith to Sr. E. F. Adamson, December 17, 1896, Joseph Smith III Papers.
The prophet began to change his mind in the fall of 1897. He accepted an invitation to attend a local church conference in Toronto, Canada, the kind of affair he usually did not attend, and rode the train into the north country in mid-October a few days in advance of the date for the session’s opening. While there the Apostle in charge of the area, a young, diminutive Canadian, R. C. Evans, arranged for him to stay in the home of Alexander Clark, one of the local church members. There he renewed a brief acquaintance he had earlier made with Clark’s twenty-nine year old daughter, Ada Rachel. Smith wrote to Audie in late October about his relationship with Ada.

While at supper, yesterday evening, Ada Clark, a still older maid, sister to Mabel came in. She is employed as a helper in Bellevue Avenue Hospital for woman; and having the evening out, came to the house to go to prayer meeting to be held in Sr. Anderson’s Hall, a good fifteen minutes walk away. A Sr. Minnie Faulds, married woman was also there. When we started for the meeting Sister Faulds Mable Clark and Mary Jackson, closed up in rank and left Ada, to my care. So, accepting the challenge, I walked with her to Sr. Anderson’s. She is tall; I have to look straight out of my eyes, level headed to look her in the eyes. She is not very broad, but weighs 190 lbs. Her eyes are grey, if I have seen them right. She has a plentiful head of hair something the color of your own, is not very handsome as beauty goes, but is good looking, having a bright intelligent countenance.

Over the course of the next few weeks Smith courted Ada, and in due time asked her father to sanction their marriage, which he gladly

52 Smith, “Memoirs,” in Herald, 82 (March 5, 1935), 305, 82 (March 12, 1935), 335; Joseph Smith to Lucy Smith, October 25, 1897, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.


54 Joseph Smith to Audentia Anderson, October 28, 1897, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
did. Worried about his children’s reaction to his bringing home a strange new wife, Smith wrote the older ones to explain that he had fallen in love in Toronto and had decided to remarry. He masked some of his uneasiness in subtle humor. He told Audie and her husband, for instance:

I write to inform you that I have arranged to bring over from Queen Victoria’s dominion a bundle of goods, wares, and Canadian products, properly labelled and directed to pass inspection at the Customs House on the border, provided too many questions are not asked.

The principal piece will be labeled Mrs. Ada Smith, before being started over the border; and I hope to arrive with it in my possession or in my companionship, Jan. 14 or 15th unless blockades enroute.55

He seemed almost to beg his children to accept Ada when he wrote, “I will be much pleased if my chosen companion pleased my children when you see and know her.”56

On January 12, 1898 R. C. Evans performed a simple wedding ceremony for Joseph and Ada in the home of her father. The couple then went to Toronto for an overnight honeymoon and to catch the next day’s train for Chicago. From Chicago it was on to Lamoni, where they arrived on the afternoon of January 15. They hired a driver and wagon to take them out to Liberty Hall, but did not anticipate anything more than a quiet evening with the children who might be at the house. Smith was understandably anxious as the wagon pulled to the front of the stately home. Joseph’s brother, Alexander, and several others met the couple at

55 Joseph Smith to Benjamin Anderson, December 10, 1897; ibid.

56 Joseph Smith to Carrie Weld, December 10, 1897, Rebecca Weld Nolan Collection.
the front door, and ushered them into the main room where they became the guests of honor at a huge welcome home party. Smith described the events of the evening in his memoirs:

As the broad door swung open, there they were revealed, old and young, kith and kin, the whole family clan, extending smiling greetings, loving hand-clasps, and affectionate caresses! It was indeed a royal and characteristic welcome, and did much to reassure the young woman who had consented to become so intimate a member of a family hitherto unknown and strange to her.57

Not everyone was as thrilled with Joseph Smith’s marriage as his family appeared to be, for it aroused, once again, a fair degree of gossip and censure from both the non-Mormons who looked upon it as a scandal, and the Saints, many of whom thought it terrible that such an old man should marry such a young woman, but that three wives in one lifetime were too many for any man. Their comments about Joseph’s lustful, if not lascivious nature, were all the more biting because he was a religious leader, the Mormon prophet, a public figure whose movements were recorded in the newspapers. For non-Mormons, Smith’s marriage demonstrated again the scandalous nature of the Mormon faith. For Latter Day Saints, it meant that Joseph was setting a bad example for the young people.58 Some, however, thought the whole situation more comical than shocking. Apostle Francis M. Sheehy wrote to William H. Kelley about the marriage:

58 Ibid.
Say—much comment is being made upon that recent act of the Revelator. You known who the bride is dont you she is that monstrous big girl that played the organ at Kirtland Conf . . . I presume now another generation of Smiths will appear. It does seem as if Joseph might have got a wife that would more nearly correspond with his age she will draw all the sap out of him.\(^9\)

Joseph did not let the gossip bother him, and Ada held up very well, also. Again the talk was short-lived, and the couple soon settled down to a regular routine at Liberty Hall. Smith was gone most of the time on church business, but when he was at home he established many of the same patterns that had existed when Bertha was alive, except as Joseph grew older and more infirm Ada, who was still young and healthy, served as a nurse and friend, as well as a wife.

CHAPTER 14

TWILIGHT

For a few years after Joseph Smith returned home with his new bride he continued all of his presidential duties in the church. He made numerous missionary trips, presided at the General Conferences, and performed a variety of administrative duties with his characteristic efficiency. Although Joseph still felt quite well most of the time and worked as he had for more than thirty-five years, he recognized that he was getting to be an old man and would not live much longer. About the turn of the century, therefore, Joseph started to prepare for the transfer of leadership that would take place within the church when he died.

Joseph remembered vividly the turmoil the Mormon church had endured at the death of his father in 1844. Unified until that time, Mormonism had fragmented into a myriad of different factions, because, as Joseph had gradually come to realize, his father had not publicly and clearly stated that he wanted his son to succeed him at his death. In addition, the church’s body of law, as recorded in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, had been ambiguous and open to widely differing interpretations.¹ Joseph Smith did not want the same problem to arise upon

¹D. Michael Quinn, “The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844,” Brigham Young University Studies, 16 (Winter 1976), 187-233, points out that as a result of either church law or tradition there were eight legitimate means of succession to the presidency in 1844, each causing confusion in the church.
his death, and began planning during the 1890s for an orderly succession in the Reorganized Church.

A number of convictions underlay his plans for the succession in the presidency. He firmly believed that any future president of the church had to be called by revelation from God through the current prophet, as he believed had happened in his case during the blessing in the Red Brick Store in January 1844. As a result Joseph worked to have this rule of succession squarely implanted in the church's policy so that there could be no question as to its validity. As early as 1894 he laid the groundwork for this idea when the General Conference approved a resolution proposed by the First Presidency which asserted that "the President is primarily appointed by revelation."²

Although convinced that his successor would be chosen by revelation, Joseph was also committed to a lineal succession to the presidency. This concept had been most enthusiastically urged by William Smith in the late 1840s and 1850s, and had been endorsed by Zenas Gurley and Jason Briggs in the early Reorganization. It held that a member of the Smith family, a direct descendant of Joseph Smith, Jr., should, by birthright, be the president of the church. Ideally the two requirements that must be met pointed to the same person for the succession, again as Joseph believed had happened in his case. Joseph assumed that his oldest living son, Frederick Madison Smith, would succeed him by virtue of both heredity and revelation. Frederick, of course already

met one requirement, lineage, and during the period between 1895 and 1902 Joseph waited for him to be called through revelation.

Freddy, as Joseph always called his son until he became a member of the official church quorums, was a rambunctious lad. Handsome, intelligent, athletic, college educated and indicating a desire to earn a graduate degree, young Frederick was his father's greatest pride. He wanted to pass the presidency on to him, but he was deeply disturbed by his son's apparent lack of interest in church affairs, and also by his failure to receive a divine announcement that his son should succeed him. Frederick seemed hell-bent on frustrating Joseph's wishes. If he was not out late with the local boys, he was cut on the athletic field trying to hurt himself, as Joseph thought. He told his son in 1895, "be careful in accepting chances for violent exertion. If there is much risk of injuring yourself, don't take chances."  

In the belief that Frederick would fall into the proper course he wished him to take with only a little prodding, Joseph was absolutely delighted to present a divinely inspired document to the General Conference of 1897. It stated that the leading officials of the church had functioned in the administration for many years and were rapidly growing old, and it was time for younger men to be brought into the hierarchy in their places. Since the logical pool from which these younger men could be drawn consisted of sons of the older officials, the younger men should begin to prepare for the day when they would take their fathers' positions.

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3Joseph Smith to Frederick M. Smith, May 7, 1895, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #6 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri).
place by being ordained to offices of the priesthood. Presumably Joseph had his own son in mind when in the document he wrote: "These sons of my servants are called, and if faithful shall in time be chosen to places whence their fathers shall fall, or fail, or be removed by honorable release before the Lord and the Church."  

In keeping with this commandment, the Lamoni congregation called Frederick and the son of W. W. Blair to serve as Elders in the church a month later. The position of Elder was not to be taken lightly. Men who held that office were the standing ministry of the church, functioning in the local branches, and a call to the office signified not only that Frederick had been called by God to serve but also that he was willing to accept the responsibility and carry it out to the best of his ability. Some objected that Frederick and the younger Blair should not have been ordained because, as Apostle J. R. Lambert wrote in protest, the "two young men (whom it will be conceded, have not been active church workers in the past)," had given no indication that they would be active in the future.

Lambert's apprehensions were born out when after his ordination Frederick made only a token effort to function in his office. He was much more concerned about his education, athletics, and social life than religion. All of this greatly disappointed his father who envisioned his son being passed over in the succession because of the frailty of his commitment. After agonizing over this prospect for three years,

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4 "Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 124:7.

5 "Conference Minutes, Decatur District," Saints' Herald, 44 (June 22, 1897), 401-402.
Joseph categorically put the question of the succession to his son in 1900. "My boy," he told him, "if you do not think you wish to stand the trials and disappointments that you have had to see me endure [as president of the church], now is the time for you to withdraw." Frederick, although hesitant, finally answered his father by declaring that he knew of no better way to sever mankind than as president of the church and would serve in that capacity when the time came.6

The most important step toward making way for Frederick to succeed his father came in 1902 when Joseph called his son and the iconclastic, capable Apostle, R. C. Evans, to serve as his assistants in the First Presidency with the official title of Counselor. Joseph's previous Counselors had long since vacated the office,7 and the prophet had been functioning almost entirely alone since 1896.8 At the April 1902 General Conference Joseph told the assembly that he had seen a vision in which he "saw in the Presidency two known to the Church, but who have not hitherto been connected with the Presidency." The men he


7 David H. Smith and W. W. Blair had been called as Counselors in the First Presidency in 1873. David, the prophet's brother, had only served a short time before being committed to the Elgin Hospital for the Insane in 1877. Blair had died in office as an old man in 1896. Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 117:3.

8 In 1897 Joseph had appointed his other brother, Alexander H. Smith, and Bishop E. L. Kelley to be informal advisors, but it was understood that their principal duties would lie in other areas. Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 124:7; Edwards, History of Reorganized Church, 6:557-58.
saw were Frederick and Evans, but their lack of administrative experience somewhat troubled the old prophet. He said that he did not understand at first why such young men had been called, and "was informed that it was for the purpose that before the Presidency should be invaded by death these younger men should be prepared by association to be of assistance to whosoever should be chosen as the President upon the emergency which should occur." \(^9\)

Both R. C. Evans and Frederick M. Smith were ordained members of the First Presidency on April 20, 1902, just before the conference closed. But these events did not mean that Joseph had publicly designated his successor or that the church was aware of his wish that Frederick succeed him. He did not clarify this much when he told the Saints:

> I have been importuned to settle the question as to who should be my successor. We have advanced upon the hypothesis of lineal priesthood in this regard, and while I believe in it, I believe it is connected with fitness and propriety, and no son of mine will be entitled to follow me as my successor, unless at the time he is chosen he is found to be worthy in character, . . . for he should be called to serve in the church who has proved himself to be worthy of confidence and trust.\(^{10}\)

Obviously Smith had stated that should Frederick be considered "worthy" upon his father’s death, he should be chosen. This did not mean that he had to follow his father into the office, only that it was possible. The old prophet did not limit the succession to Frederick nor even to members of the Smith family. Moreover, it seemed quite likely to many that Frederick would be found "unworthy" to serve in the office unless

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\(^9\) Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 126.

\(^{10}\) Edwards, History of Reorganized Church, 6:558.
he changed his outlook toward the church drastically. The result of
the revelation and Smith's "explanatory" statement was to confuse the
succession question further than it had been at the outset.

Smith's choice of assistants not only brought his son into the
First Presidency, it also excited the considerable ambition of R. C.
Evans. Short, dark complexioned, starkly handsome, and startling charismatic, Evans was a forty-one year old Canadian who had demonstrated re-
markable abilities as an orator. His abilities had been put to good
use as a member of the Seventy's missionary quorum and as a member of
the Council of Twelve.¹¹ Joseph had long held a deep affection for
Evans partially because of his superior talents and partially because he
had introduced him to Ada Clark Smith in 1897. Everyone in a position
of power in the church predicted trouble would come into the Presidency
when Evans was ordained to the quorum, for it seemed to follow him
everywhere. Most often controversy arose about Evans whenever he allowed
his massive ego to get out of hand, for Evans' self-esteem was at
least as highly developed and polished as his oratorical skills.¹²

When Joseph called him into the First Presidency, and failed to
make clear his wishes on the succession, Evans took it to mean that he
might well be the next prophet. He, like Joseph, recognized that lineal
succession could take place, but he also understood that nothing in church
law excluded others from becoming president. Evans reasoned that a

¹¹R. C. Evans, Autobiography of R. C. Evans, one of the First
Presidency of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

¹²Joseph Smith to R. C. Evans, May 22, 1896, Joseph Smith III
Letterbook #6, 486-87.
hereditary restriction would be an attempt by man to limit God’s choice of president and consequently, Evans saw no reason to refuse the office if called upon to serve after the death of the seventy-year-old Joseph Smith. Evans had, after all, served the Reorganization many years in various leadership offices, and asked himself, what other relatively young man in the church had contributed so much to the cause of the Reorganization? By mere process of elimination the self-confident Evans concluded that he had little competition for the position.

Evans’ ambitions were further excited by Joseph Smith’s request that the little orator accompany him on a missionary journey to Great Britain in 1903. He readily agreed, taking great satisfaction in the fact that he, rather than Frederick, had been asked to go. They left New York City on June 7, 1903 bound for Southhampton. On the trip the two men worked very well together and developed an especially close relationship. For his part, Joseph Smith, who because of his age tired from travel or preaching, visited the British Saints who longed to meet the prophet, went sight-seeing, and generally enjoyed himself. He passed most of the real work on to the younger and more dynamic Evans. In most formal meetings both Smith and Evans occupied the platform, but Joseph usually stood and made a few brief remarks and then turned the meeting...
over to Evans. Evans would then preach a long, evangelistic sermon.  

When he and Smith returned from Great Britain in September 1903, Evans believed that he was the prophet's protegé. He had cemented an already close friendship with the old man during the trip, and was convinced that Joseph loved him more than a son. He believed that he, rather than Frederick, would be the prophet's first choice as his successor. Evans' expectations were also fostered by the fact that after his ordination Frederick had returned to school to work on a graduate degree leaving most of the First Presidency's work in the hands of his father and Evans. Evans complained that Frederick was obviously not taking his religious responsibilities seriously, and that his father had to recognize his lack of religious conviction sooner or later. When he did, Evans reasoned, Joseph would have the good sense not to entrust the church to Frederick. Evans could not have been more wrong, for Joseph was convinced that his son should succeed him, and nothing short of a thunderbolt from heaven would have changed his views.


Joseph Smith was undoubtedly aware of Evans' expectations and probably tried to deal with them without arousing the young man's animosities or crushing his spirit. Apparently his attempts failed, because by 1905 Evans still hoped for the succession. At this point Joseph realized he had to act forthrightly to clarify the matter. During the preceding two years the prophet had become increasingly ill—his obesity, failing eyesight, recurring neuralgia, and weakened constitution—kept him bedridden a good deal of the time, with Ada serving much more as a nurse than a wife. In November 1905 Joseph returned from a long mission to the American Northwest completely tired out and ailing from all sorts of maladies. He was forced to his bed for weeks, and although he eventually recovered, the time in bed had driven home the point that he was getting very old and could not possibly live much longer.

Smith, as soon as he was well enough, decided to move from Liberty Hall into Lamoni in order to be closer to other church officials and his office in the Herald building. He realized that if he tried to come and go between Liberty Hall and Lamoni every day, as he was accustomed to doing, the winter could, in his weakened condition, kill him. As soon as he told the Bishop, E. L. Kelley, that he wanted to move into town, Kelley found the Smiths a house and saw that they were

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moved in before Christmas. In mid-January 1906 Joseph arranged to sell Liberty Hall to the church for three thousand dollars so that Kelley could turn it into a home for the aged. It grieved Smith to sell his elegant home. It had been the only house he had ever built; he had lived there for twenty-five years, and he had fully expected to die there.

During the winter Joseph kept his duties to a minimum so as not to exhaust himself. He turned much of the editorial work on the Saints' Herald over to assistants, and he tried to force Frederick to assume more presidential duties. By this time his son had returned from school, and was becoming more involved in the direction of the church's affairs. By now Joseph was convinced that he would soon die. He hoped to hang on a little while longer in order to see the succession question settled. He prayed fervently about what course the church should take, and he even wrote a will.

When the April 1906 General Conference convened in Independence,

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18 Deed between Joseph and Ada Smith and Reorganized Church, January 15, 1906, Deed Book S (Recorder's Office, Decatur County Courthouse, Leon, Iowa).


Missouri Joseph was present. He believed that his survival even this long had been the result of divine intervention, and he had a pressing matter to bring before it. Since the 1902 revelation had not firmly provided for Frederick’s succession, and since R. C. Evans still harbored ambitions to have the post Joseph thought a clarifying revelation was needed. The Prophet, claiming inspiration from God, said, "in the case of the removal of my servant now presiding over the church by death or transgression, my servant Frederick M. Smith, if he remain faithful and steadfast, should be chosen, in accordance with revelations which have been hitherto given to the church concerning the priesthood."22 This statement laid to rest any questions church members might have had about who would succeed Joseph.

R. C. Evans was visibly upset over this revelation. It injured his ego to be sure, but it also made him look bad to his friends to whom he had confided that he would be the next president of the church. He did not take any part in the conference debate over the document, and he left in a huff as soon as the meetings had concluded. When shortly thereafter Evans offered to resign his position in the First Presidency, and, according to Evans, Joseph “wept over me and begged me not to insist, to wait until the Lord would speak.”23 Evans heeded Smith’s request and did not resign, but he also stopped functioning altogether in his office. Instead, he occupied himself almost entirely in local church work in the Toronto area, where he held huge revival services in the largest theaters

22 Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 127:8b.

23 R. C. Evans, Why I Left the Latter Day Saint Church: Reasons by Bishop R. C. Evans (Toronto, Ontario: n.p., 1918), 42.
in the city.

While at the 1906 General Conference Joseph Smith had stayed with John D. White in his comfortable home not far from the old Mormon Temple Lot. He had talked to White a great deal during the conference, and learning of the overwhelming desire of the Saints in Independence to have the prophet live among them in his last years, he decided to discuss with the Presiding Bishop the possibility of moving his family there. Independence was considered by most of the Saints to be the "centerplace" of the promised kingdom of God that would be built in the last days and the seat from which Christ would rule the world during the Millennium. It had always been presupposed, as a result, that the church's headquarters would eventually be located in the city, and the movement of the prophet there would be the necessary first step toward accomplishing this end.

When White learned that Joseph was serious about settling in Independence, he offered the prophet his home. In May Joseph wrote to his son Israel about the probability of his moving to Independence. "I might as well be there as here for all the good I am," he stated. "I have been pretty well out of the running for the last 6 or 7 months." Smith went on to say that there was not much left for him in Lamoni. "It will be 25 years next October since I moved here and made a home. Sixteen of those years your mother was with us. The home is gone into

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25 Joseph Smith to Carrie Weld, July 11, 1906, Rebecca Weld Nolan Collection.
other hands, and I may as well move on and at least lay my hooves in Zion.”26

In mid-July Smith, Bishop Kelley, and John White completed plans for the church to purchase White’s Independence home for the prophet. Within the month Joseph and Ada had made arrangements for their belongings to be shipped by train to the city, and by August 8 the family had moved into their new home.27 Smith liked Independence from the first. He already had many friends, mostly church members, there, and he was delighted to live so close to a place he considered the holy spot upon which God’s temple would one day stand. He also liked the modern conveniences which the city afforded, joking about the “tokens of civilized life about us.”28

With Joseph Smith settling down to virtual retirement in Independence, and R. C. Evans confining his activities to Toronto, the only person left to handle administrative matters at the official church headquarters in Lamoni was Frederick Smith, who found himself called upon to carry increasing responsibility for the church. Frederick’s decision to take an active part in church affairs had come only after several years of resistance and a long period of searching. He believed

26 Joseph Smith to Israel Smith, May 6, 1906, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.


in the divine nature of the gospel the church taught (it had been
instilled in him since his birth) but he had resented his father's
expectation that he must someday lead the church. He would have much
preferred a secular career. When his father called upon him to aid
in the church's administration after his serious bout with illness in
1905, Frederick had taken over and done an admirable job. By early 1909
Frederick had taken over most of Joseph's duties--presiding at General
Conferences and Quorum meetings, attending to routine administrative
matters, and handling most of the publishing duties--Joseph only being
called in for advice whenever a particularly delicate situation arose.

By the time of the General Conference of 1909 Frederick had
mastered most of the duties of his office and had the First Presidency
running smoothly without R. C. Evans and usually without his father.

Evans' continuation in the quorum, therefore, was not only unnecessary
but also a liability because he hindered the proper functioning of
the Presidency by his inactivity. Furthermore, the Twelve Apostles began

29 Frederick M. Smith to V. A. L. Hodges, February 27, 1907,
Frederick Madison Smith Papers (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter Day Saints Library-Arches, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri);
Smith, Concerning the Prophet, 140; Smith, "Memoirs," in Herald,
84 (January 30, 1937), 143-44; Frederick M. Smith to Israel Smith,
December 11, 1911, Frederick Madison Smith Papers.

30 Larry E. Hunt, "Frederick Madison Smith: The Formative Years
of an RLDS President," Journal of Mormon History, 4 (1977), 85; Edwards,
History of Reorganized Church, 6:167; Paul M. Edwards, "Theocratic-Demo-
cracy: Philosopher-King in the Reorganization," in F. Mark McKiernan,
Alma R. Blaire, and Paul M. Edwards, eds., The Restoration Movement:
Essays in Mormon History (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1973),
344-45; Joint Council Minutes 1906-1928, 97-98 (Reorganized Church of
Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Arches, The Auditorium, Inde-
pendence, Missouri); Joseph Smith to Herald Editors, August 1909,
Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.
to clamor for his removal because of his inactivity. In late March the Twelve formally petitioned the president, claiming that they could no longer support Evans in the First Presidency.

Joseph initially discussed this problem with his son, and Frederick agreed with the Twelve that the time had come to remove Evans. Joseph hesitated, but during the conference finally presented a document that he believed contained divine counsel. The message in the Evans case was simple. "The voice of the Spirit to me," reported Joseph, "is under conditions which have occurred it is no longer wise that my servant R. C. Evans be continued as counselor in the Presidency; therefore it is expedient that he be released from this responsibility and another be chosen to the office." As Evans' replacement Smith chose his nephew, Elbert A. Smith, and ordained him on April 18, 1909. It would have been better to push Evans out of the church hierarchy entirely, for he was a disgruntled but capable man who could take his case to the Saints from the pulpit and possibly sway many to his point of view. However, Joseph did not want to deal harshly with him and made it appear that he was being promoted by ordaining him the Bishop of all Canada, thereby charging him with responsibility for the financial affairs of the church north of the border.

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31 Heman C. Smith to Joseph Smith, January 28, 1909, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.


33 Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 129:1.

Although Evans could never challenge Frederick effectively for the presidency after 1909, and most of the church probably accepted Joseph's oldest as heir apparent, the old prophet still had his doubts about the eventuality of a smooth succession. He offered to abdicate his office in favor of Frederick so that Joseph would be able to direct the succession himself, but Frederick refused to take over the presidency officially until his father died. Since Frederick refused to take part in this plan for his abdication, Joseph Smith prepared one more document before his death which contained a policy statement concerning the presidential succession. In January 1912 he circulated a questionnaire among a number of church leaders concerning the subject. It asked for their opinion about the nature of the prophetic office, the role of the Quorum of Twelve and First Presidency in the event of a prophet's death, and other procedural and legal considerations in making a succession decision. Many officials answered, and Smith compiled the responses and issued what has been termed the "Letter of Instruction" on March 4, 1912.35

The "Letter of Instruction" was, without a doubt, the most authoritative document on Mormon presidential succession published up to that time. Joseph Smith commented on his deathbed that it was "one of the most important documents that has ever been presented to the

35 Notes on Joseph Smith by Frederick M. Smith, n.d., 9, Joseph Smith III Papers.

church."

But, it was not a revelation, and the Quorum of Twelve responded to it by resolving that "we do not commit ourselves to the terminology nor all the conclusions contained in the 'Letter of Instruction.'" The Presidents of Seventy acknowledged the statement only as "opportune counsel," though they willingly endorsed Frederick as the individual called to succeed Joseph Smith. This same position was adopted by the General Conference which, when it considered the "Letter of Instruction" in April 1912 decided not to endorse it as the official policy of the Reorganization.

Satisfied that the current affairs of the church were finally in his son's capable hands, convinced that the church would set Frederick apart as its next prophet, and aware that, he as a man of eighty years, had little time left, Joseph turned his attention to a project he had long wanted to carry out, writing the history of his life. He believed that if he were able to leave the Saints a good record of their movement it would build their faith and foster the well-being of the sect. During the 1830s Joseph, with Apostle Heman C. Smith, had formally begun this undertaking by writing a four-volume official history of early Mormonism and the Reorganization. The work was largely documentary, and was a

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37 Joseph Smith III's comments made during his last illness, November 29, 1914, Joseph Smith III Papers.

38 Council of Twelve Minutes 1865-1928, April 12, 1912.

39 Edwards, History of Reorganized Church, 6:576.


blatant apology for the sect, at times brilliantly arguing the case for the Reorganization’s existence. The old prophet and his coauthor completely reshaped the history of the early movement to make it look decidedly rosy. The early Saints, especially Joseph’s father, were always respectable, and the people who opposed the church were always bad. Joseph never dehumanized his father by elevating him above human frailties, but he did apply heavy coats of whitewash, describing his father as he viewed him, an honest man who struggled to live out his life under strong and just religious convictions.\textsuperscript{42}

Joseph’s interest in history carried into the twentieth century. When the Herald office in Lamoni burned on a bleak January morning in 1907 the prophet was heartbroken not only because of the loss of the structure and the printing plant, but also because the Reorganization’s archives, were housed in the building, and thousands of important papers and official documents, books, and pamphlets were lost.\textsuperscript{43} Largely as a result of these losses Joseph was able to persuade other church leaders to begin the publication of a quarterly Journal of History that would give the church a means of publishing documents and other items so that they could never be lost entirely.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{42}Alma R. Blair, “The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: Moderate Mormons,” in Restoration Movement, 223-35.

\textsuperscript{43}Joseph Smith to Israel Smith, January 5, 1907, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers; Joseph Smith to Audentia Anderson, January 16, 1907; ibid.

\textsuperscript{44}Joint Council Minutes, 1905-1926, October 9, 1907 (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri). The journal began publication in January 1908 and appeared quarterly thereafter until 1926.
The crowning achievement of this recounting of the church's past would be, Joseph thought, his personal memoirs. Although he had started to collect his thoughts for the project earlier; Joseph had made no significant progress in writing his memoirs, and decided that in order to facilitate the writing he would ask his son Israel to come to Independence and serve as his secretary. In early 1913 Israel moved near his father's home so that he could assume that role.

During the last two years of Joseph's life, 1913 and 1914, Israel went to his father's home about nine o'clock almost every morning, "and remained with him until he tired, usually at noon or middle afternoon," working on the memoirs. Israel helped Joseph as more than simply a scribe. He and his father worked out a procedure whereby Israel would survey all the material his father had on a given period or event, read the most pertinent items to the old man, and wait for Joseph to think about the material. After Joseph had considered the material for a couple of days he would announce that he was ready to dictate what he had to say on the subject, and sitting in his huge, overstuffed armchair would rattle off stories and analyses with remarkable speed.

In spite of Joseph's apparent speed when the actual writing began, the overall production of the memoirs was ploddingly slow because of Joseph's frequent episodes of illness. Sometimes the work would be interrupted for weeks at a time because Joseph was bed-ridden. Moreover,

45 Joseph Smith to Israel Smith, December 31, 1912, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers.

46 Israel A. Smith, "My Father's Last Years, Saints' Herald, 81 (November 6, 1934), 1409-10, 1426.
when Joseph dictated his memoirs, he often digressed from the subject under examination and talked at some length about persons and events that had no bearing on the matter at hand. Israel tried to edit some of these digressions out as they progressed, but he found that many, although having nothing to do with a subject, were illuminating. The result was a disjointed narrative. Designed to make the church and Joseph Smith look relatively good, the memoirs were really quite bad as far as historical writing was concerned. To a large degree, they were the ramblings of an old and feeble man. When these memoirs were completed in mid-1914, Joseph proudly turned them over to his sons to be edited and published. Apparently Frederick and Israel filed the recollections away and forgot about them, for it was only through the work of their sister, Audentia, that the memoirs were eventually published some twenty years after Joseph's death, running serially in the Saints' Herald between 1934 and 1937.  

With the completion of his memoirs Joseph had accomplished, as he believed, his final church duty. Although he had been prepared for death for several years, after mid-1914 he was ready to "pass beyond the veil" without any regrets. Perhaps it was happenstance, or possibly it was Joseph's mind controlling his body, but just as Joseph completed the memoirs his health began to decline drastically. During the late summer and fall of 1914, just as the world was plunging into a war that


would change it forever, Joseph began his last bout with infirmity and old age. By this time the old prophet was completely blind and quite deaf. He often had a difficult time sleeping, and many times his family could hear him sitting in his overstuffed leather chair talking to himself about the old days when the affairs of the church had rested on him alone. Many times he sang a hymn or Scottish folksong. At other times he could be heard reciting a piece of poetry he had memorized many years before.

On days when he felt a little better Joseph would rise early in the morning, dress quietly, eat breakfast, and go visiting his old friends. He usually wore a great coat, complaining to his wife that his old body always seemed cold. With Israel as a constant companion Joseph would make the rounds among those whom he had known for years. Most of the time he visited old Bishop E. L. Kelley who lived a block down the street. They sat by the fire if it was cool, or in the sun if it was not, and talked about the old days. They told and retold the same stories about traveling as missionaries together and the work in the church’s administration. Sometimes Joseph became sentimental and cried about some incident that had happened years ago. Israel had a difficult time coping with his father’s reversion to childhood here, and always took him straight home. A man who prided himself on acting honorably and “manly” suffered a rapidly advancing senility, and it was more than Israel could stand. He tried to keep his father at home most of the time after about October 1914.  

49Israel Smith, “My Father’s Last Years,” 1410, 1426.
On November 26, 1914, Joseph Smith, president of the Reorganized Church for more than fifty years, suffered a heart seizure in his Independence home. He was put to bed and doctors were called, but they were unable to help him. His children were asked to come home before he died, and what followed was a dramatic two-week long deathbed scene.

Over the course of this period Joseph's bedroom became the focus of the Saints' attention. When he was awake the old prophet held interviews with important church members. His every word was taken down by secretaries who were charged with preserving this history-making event. Newspapermen waited around Joseph's house, their stories giving the church a good bit of publicity.

The day after his seizure Joseph, anticipating death, dictated his last message to the church. He was surprisingly coherent in this message. He said that his faith was firm. It had been solid since the 1850s when he first found God and Christ, and had had several religious experiences which led him to accept the Reorganized Mormon faith. He was now happy that he was finally about to meet the Lord whom he had tried to serve for so many years. He admitted that he had not been a perfect man and had certainly made grievous mistakes as the Reorganization's president, but declared that he had always tried to do whatever seemed right. He told his followers, "I have not consciously wronged any man or woman. I have no fear to go beyond the vale ... I have no fear. If a man can be happy in dying and leaving a home like mine

and friends like mine, such a host of them for the Master’s cause, I can die happy. O blessed rest! blessed rest!"51

On November 29 Frederick arrived in Independence from the East and was quietly ushered into his father’s bedroom. When Joseph was told that his successor was in the room the prophet grabbed his hand, pulled Frederick to him, and hugged him. Joseph said he had some very important things to tell Frederick, holding onto his hand as he began. He mentioned that Frederick had a strong grip, and that he was thankful that God had provided for the church “one whose hands will not slip in the rein, nor tremble in the emergency.” Joseph continued, “Fred, a great opportunity lies before you. Better in some respects than lay before me, for, as I look back over history and the revelations that have been given to the church and are on record since I have been presiding they show me very clearly that a great many things which have been left open to misunderstanding have been cleared up in the revelations and in the letter of instruction.” At the same time Joseph urged his son to exercise patience in his relationship with the membership once he assumed the presidency. “Be steadfast and if the people are heady, if the church is heady, the eldership are heady and take the reins in their hands as they have done a little especially on the rules and regulations, rules of representation,” he told Frederick, “don’t worry, let it pass, let the church take the consequences and they will after a while grow out of it . . . Its better that way than to under-

51“President Smith’s Last Message to the Church,” ibid., 61 (December 23, 1914), 1211. This statement was also published separately as a pamphlet.
take to force them and coerce. That would be bad trouble. 52

By the first week of December Joseph had improved little, although he seemed to be free of pain. Hope for his recovery was kindled by the way he seemed to linger on, but the doctors said that his chances were slim. 53 In the early afternoon of December 10, 1914 Joseph took a turn for the worse, and died within a few minutes after experiencing a seizure. The Saints were struck with sadness at his passing even though his death had been expected for weeks. "Brother Joseph," as he was fondly remembered, had been the only president they had ever known. His personality had been indelibly stamped upon the Reorganization, and the sense of loss was everywhere apparent. Immediately following his demise the two remaining members of the First Presidency, Frederick and his cousin, Elbert A. Smith, officially informed the church that the president had died. The leading quorums then met together to draft formal epistles to the Saints about Joseph’s death and the plans for the future. 54

Before his death Joseph had left explicit instructions concerning his funeral, and they told a great deal about the faith, commitment, and character of the prophet. He asked that no one send flowers to the

52 Joseph Smith III’s Last Remarks to his Family, November 29, 1914, Joseph Smith III Papers; “Statement of President Joseph Smith to his Son Frederick M. Smith, Sunday, November 29, 1914,” Zion’s Ensign, 26 (February 11, 1915), 1.

53 New York Times, November 28, 1914; Elbert A. Smith, “President Smith’s Illness,” Saints’ Herald, 61 (December 9, 1914), 1161.


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funeral. He considered this a waste of money, and as stewards of God's possessions while on earth, to do so was a sin. Instead, Joseph asked that those who might have wished to send flowers give the money to the poor. He also requested that his casket be painted black and be relatively plain, without metal trimmings or an ornate lining. He asked that it be similar to the type used to bury Saints who had died in poverty at the church's home for the aged in Lamoni. He further asked that no more money than absolutely necessary be spent on the funeral itself. He did not want the services of a high-priced choir, in fact, he did not want a choir at all, and saw no reason to hire an expensive undertaker, or use an impressive hearse. He said he wanted to keep the affair simple, for he had come into life simply and wished to go out the same way. He also told those in charge of the funeral to dress him in ordinary clothes, quickly adding however, "I do not want my black suit used for that purpose, as it has been no favorite of mine."

The funeral was held on the afternoon of December 13. The weather was sunny, crisp, and delightful. The whole city seemed to turn out for the services, the people passing the casket containing the prophet's remains as it laid outside in the sun in state, as he had requested. Apostle Joseph Luff gave the funeral sermon, striking a positive note for the large number of people in attendance. He told the Saints who had followed Joseph for so many years:

55 Elbert A. Smith, "Instructions Regarding President Smith's Funeral," Saints' Herald, 61 (December 16, 1914), 1188.
Let us now, brethren, go on with the great work left for us to accomplish,—undivided, with mutual trust and good fellowship and with greater faith and consecration. There is no occasion for doubt or fear, no cause for division or confusion. There is every reason to have confidence and courage. Good men and well-loved men pass, but God remains. His work must prevail. The living must redouble their efforts in his service. May his favor and blessing abide with us.\textsuperscript{56}

Immediately after the funeral the ruling quorums met to discuss the future of the church, and quickly approved the succession of Frederick M. Smith to the prophetic office.\textsuperscript{57} They decided that he should not be ordained immediately, but rather should wait until the 1915 General Conference.\textsuperscript{58} In the meantime, the administration of the church would be handled without a president, but otherwise as it had been in the past. Frederick, although officially president-designate, exercised full control of the church’s administration, easily assuming the few duties his father had performed during his last years. The ordination, thus, was a pro forma ceremony symbolizing the transfer of power, for Frederick had, in fact, held most of the power in the church since 1909 anyway.\textsuperscript{59}

The death of Joseph Smith brought condolences from many persons. Those within the church, naturally, offered their sympathy to the family over the loss. But the non-Mormon community stated the general opinion that Joseph Smith had been a good, God-fearing man who had lived morally

\textsuperscript{56}Elbert A. Smith, “Death of President Joseph Smith;” ibid., 61 (December 16, 1914), 1185-86.

\textsuperscript{57}New York Times, December 14, 1914.

\textsuperscript{58}Joint Council Minutes, 1905-1926, December 14, 1914.

\textsuperscript{59}Edwards, History of Reorganized Church, 6:584-87.
while also exemplifying his peculiar brand of Mormonism. The Kansas City Journal wrote in its obituary of Smith that he had been "the Prophet, but first of all he was the Christian gentleman and the good citizen. As such he lived; as such he died; as such he will be remembered by all outside the household of his faith." The Chariton, Iowa newspaper, located not far from Lamoni, remarked that Joseph had been the best example of the type of people Christians were called to be. He was the kind, tolerant leader of a church that contained a majority of that type of people. He would be remembered, the editor concluded, as a man who lived his religious convictions and had been motivated by the morals of Christian conduct. The most impressive tribute paid Joseph Smith did not come from obituaries or notes of condolence. It came in 1916 when Smith's remains were exhumed and placed in a large Vermont Granite sarcophagus in the Mound Grove Cemetery in Independence, Missouri. On that occasion the Kansas City Star editorialized that Joseph Smith had been a most important religious leader who had lived a testimony of his unique religion for all of Christendom. He deserved such a monument, the Star commented. "The history of him is written in the hearts of thousands of people. No need of it being inscribed on the monument," the editor added, "it will go down from generation to generation, he being one of the greatest men of the century."

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60 Kansas City (Missouri) Journal, December 12, 1914.
61 Chariton (Iowa) Leader, December 17, 1914.
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Glossary of Reorganized Church Terms

Apostle: one of the twelve men set apart in the Reorganization to serve as a special missionary for the movement. Considered one of the highest priesthood offices in the sect, its occupants enjoyed great power.

Bishop: a big priesthood office in the church. Its holder is charged largely with administrative and financial affairs for a particular jurisdiction.

Branch: the name usually assigned to an individual congregation or church. It is the primary jurisdiction of church government.

Counselor: advisor to a ruling official. The president of the church, for instance, had two Counselors to help make up the First Presidency, as does the Bishop in making up the Presiding Bishopric. These individuals serve at the pleasure of the ruling official and carry out administrative functions under his direction.

First Presidency: an administrative unit made up of the president and two Counselors, charged with the over operation of the church. They direct all aspects of the movement, and are considered the most important body in the Reorganization.

General Conference: annual meeting (semi-annual to 1883) of delegates representing the members of the Reorganization who make church policy, adopt a budget, and sustain the officers of the church.

Patriarch: member of the priesthood—a fatherly figure who serves the membership as an advisor. He also gives special blessings, some of them prophetic in nature to members who ask for them.

Presiding Bishopric: three-man body consisting of the Presiding Bishop and two Counselors, who are charged with the administration of the church’s temporal affairs. They collect and disperse monies, make investments, and oversee the construction and operation of church facilities.

Priesthood: the clergy of the church. Each member of the priesthood is considered called of God to function in a specific office and ordained to serve for life. Most receive no remuneration for their services.

Prophet: the man called by his predecessor through divine revelation who serves as president of the church and, as oracle to heaven, delivers divinely inspired messages to the Saints.

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Quorum: a ruling body of the Reorganization. The twelve members of the Apostolic body are, for example, known as the Quorum of Twelve Apostles.

Seventy: priesthood office whose primary duty is to perform missionary work throughout the non-Mormon world. They are named after the New Testament Seventy who were sent out by the Apostles.

Stake: an administrative unit of the church, like a diocese, formed wherever there are ten or more branches located in close geographical proximity. It is presided over by a Stake Presidency consisting of a president and two counselors.

Zion: a utopian society envisioned by the church that will be built upon earth before the second coming of Jesus Christ. The seat of government for this utopian state will be, in church belief, Independence, Missouri.
Roger Dale Launius was born in Galesburg, Illinois, on May 15, 1954. He attended public schools in Vandalia, Illinois, and Mauldin, South Carolina, and was graduated from Hillcrest High School in June 1972. After four years at Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa, he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in May 1976. The following September he enrolled for graduate study at Louisiana State University, where he earned the degree of Master of Arts in history in May 1978. He is currently enrolled in the Ph.D. program at Louisiana State University.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Roger D. Launius

Major Field: History

Title of Thesis: "And There Came Prophets in the Land Again:" The Life of Joseph Smith III, 1832-1914, Mormon Reformer"

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

March 25, 1982