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Quincy, Adams County, Illinois

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Abstract: A short historical essay on the town of Quincy in Adams County, Illinois, and its place in Latter-day Saint history.

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QUINCY, ADAMS COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

The city of Quincy, favorably known in the history of the Church, as the place where a large number of Saints met with a friendly reception, and were released from want, and perhaps starvation, in the cold winter of 1838-39, is situated on the east bank of the Mississippi River, 134 miles by rail northwest of St. Louis, Mo., and 262 miles southwest of Chicago, Ill. It is the centre of eight railroads, has some fine parks and public and private buildings, together with numerous manufactories, and several academies and churches. It now has a population of about 30,000, and is the third city of the State of Illinois in size. It is most picturesquely situated about 125 feet above the river of which it commands a fine view. A splendid bridge recently built across the river connects Quincy with West Quincy on the Missouri side.

Most of the Saints who fled from Missouri in the winter of 1838-39, under the cruel exterminating order of Governor Lilburn W. Boggs, made their way as best they could into the State of Illinois, and a majority of them crossed the Mississippi River at Quincy, then a small city of a few

thousand inhabitants. The distance from Far West, Caldwell County, Missouri, from where most of the exiles came, was about 150 miles in a straight line, but the way the roads ran it was nearly 200 miles. When it is remembered that the roads were bad and heavy and the weather extremely cold, it is no wonder that a number of the exiles succumbed to their hardships and sufferings and found an untimely grave, before they could travel that distance and reach the land that would give them temporary shelter. It is not known how many of the Saints lost their lives during the Missouri persecutions. Some Church writers state the number to be three hundred, including those who were killed outright, and who died on the journey fleeing from their persecutors, and those who afterwards died in consequence of their sufferings and exposure at the time of the exodus. This is probably correct.

The Saints who were stripped of nearly all their earthly possessions, were necessarily in a deplorable and wanting condition, when they, bleeding and broken-hearted, arrived at Quincy, and they soon excited the sympathy of the citizens of that town

and its vicinity. A kindly reception was given the homeless outcasts—a reception very similar to the one given to many of the same people by the inhabitants of Clay County, Missouri, when a cruel persecution had driven about twelve hundred of them from their homes in Jackson County five years before.

The Democratic Association of Quincy took the lead in extending relief to the "Mormon" exiles. On Feb. 23, 1839, a meeting was held by this association for the purpose of inquiring into the situation of the Saints. About all that was done at this meeting was to pass a resolution to the effect that the people called Latter-day Saints were in a situation requiring the aid of the people of Quincy. A committee of eight was appointed to call a general meeting of both citizens and "Mormons," and to receive a statement from the "Mormons" of their condition, with a view to relieving their necessities. The committee was instructed to get the Congregational church in which to hold the next meeting, but the directors having in charge that building would not allow it to be used for that purpose. Failing to secure the church, the second meeting was held in the court-house.

At this meeting, held Wednesday evening Feb. 27th, the special committee appointed at the first meeting reported their labors. They had received statements from Sidney Rigdon and others in relation to the expulsion of the "Mormons" from Missouri, and suggested a series of resolutions setting forth that the exiled strangers were entitled to the sympathy and aid of the people of Quincy; that a numerous committee composed of individuals from every

part of the town be appointed to allay the prejudices of the misguided citizens of Quincy, and explain that it was not the design of the "Mormons" to lower the wages of the laboring classes, but to secure something to save them from starvation; that a standing committee be appointed to relieve, so far as in their power, the wants of the destitute and houseless, and to use their utmost endeavors to procure employment for those who were able and willing to labor. The report closed by saying:

"We recommend to all the citizens of Quincy that in all their intercourse with the strangers, they use and observe a becoming decorum and delicacy, and be particularly careful not to indulge in any conversation or expression calculated to wound their feelings, or in any way to reflect upon those who, by every law of humanity, are entitled to our sympathy and commiseration."

This good work begun by the Democratic Association was continued by them, and substantial assistance was given to the suffering Saints, through their exertion, in behalf of the afflicted. At a subsequent meeting of the association, held Feb. 28th, the following resolutions were adopted:

"That we regard the right of conscience as natural and inalienable, and the most sacredly guaranteed by the Constitution of our free government.

"That we regard the acts of all mobs in violation of law, and those who compose them, individually responsible, both to the laws of God and man, for every depredation committed upon the property, rights or life of any citizen.

"That the inhabitants upon the western frontier of the State of Missouri, in their late persecution of the people denominated Mormons, have violated the sacred rights of conscience and every law of justice and humanity.

"That the governor of Missouri in refusing protection to this class of people, when pressed upon by a heartless mob, and turning upon them a band of unprincipled militia, with orders encouraging their extermination,

nation, has brought a lasting disgrace upon the State over which he presides."

Thus with expressions of sympathy and material aid did the people of Quincy assist the Saints, and bid them hope for better days. Nor was this kindly feeling confined to the people of Quincy and vicinity alone, but it extended throughout the State. And especially among the leading men thereof, including Governor Thos. Carlin, Stephen A. Douglass, Dr. Galland and others.

In the meantime the Saints continued to cross the river from Missouri. The family of Joseph the Prophet arrived at Quincy in care of Stephen Markham, Feb. 15, 1839. Shortly afterwards Brigham Young and other leading men of the Church (whose lives were sought by the Missourians) fled from their persecutors and joined those who had preceded them at Quincy, where their presence was much needed to administer council and comfort to their fellow-sufferers.

At a special conference of the Church held in Quincy, March 17, 1839, Brigham Young, who presided over the conference, explained to the assembled Saints the circumstances of the Church at the time and the situation of the scattered members. He advised the Saints to settle, if possible, in companies, or in such a way that they could be organized into branches, so that they might be "fed by the shepherds; for without, the sheep would be scattered." After transacting various other business, Elder George W. Harris spoke about those who had left the Church during the time of perils, persecutions and dangers, and were now acting against the interests of the Saints. After a full expression of the conference, it was

unanimously voted that the following persons be excommunicated from the Church: Geo. M. Hinkle, Sampson Avard, John Corrill, Reed Peck, Wm. W. Phelps, Frederick G. Williams, Thomas B. Maish, Burr Riggs and several others.

April 22, 1839, the Prophet Joseph arrived among the Saints in Quincy, having at last escaped from his enemies in Missouri, after a cruel imprisonment of over five months in that State. (See page 460.) Steps were immediately taken to secure a new location unto which the Saints might gather. (See page 464 and *Nauvoo*.)

Among the members of the Church who flocked into Quincy there were a few bad characters who were altogether unworthy of the association of Saints, and who preyed upon the hospitality of the people of Quincy to such an extent that the Church authorized Apostle John Taylor to write the following letter, which was published in the *Quincy Argus* about the 1st of May, 1839:

"In consequence of so great an influx of strangers, arriving in this place daily, owing to their late expulsion from the State of Missouri, there must of necessity be, and we wish to state to the citizens of Quincy, and the vicinity, through the medium of your columns, that there are many individuals among the numbers who have already arrived, as well as among those who are now on their way here, who never did belong to our Church, and others who once did, but who, for various reasons, have been expelled from our fellowship. Amongst these are some who have contracted habits, which are at variance with principles of moral rectitude (such as swearing, dram-drinking, etc.), which immoralities the Church of Latter-day Saints is liable to be charged with, owing to our amalgamation under our late existing circumstances. And as we as a people do not wish to lay under any such imputation, we would also state, that such individuals do not hold a name or a place amongst us; that we altogether discounte-

nance everything of the kind; that every person once belonging to our community, contracting or persisting in such immoral habits, have hitherto been expelled from our society; and that such as we may hereafter be informed of, we will hold no communication with, but will withdraw our fellowship from them.

"We wish further to state, that we feel laid under peculiar obligations to the citizens of this place for the patriotic feelings which have been manifested, and for the hand of liberality and friendship which was extended to us, in our late difficulties; and should feel sorry to see that philanthropy and benevolence abused by wicked and designing people, who, under pretense of poverty and distress, should try to work up the feelings of the charitable and humane, get into their debt without any prospect or intention of paying, and finally, perhaps, we as a people be charged with dishonesty.

"We say that we altogether disapprove of such practices, and we warn the citizens of Quincy against such individuals who may pretend to belong to our community."

This letter bears evidence of the honesty of the Church, and shows its disposition to treat the people of Illinois, who had so nobly and kindly received its members in the days of their distress, with candor.

"About this time too," writes Elder B. H. Roberts in his article "The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo" published in the *Contributor*, "the good feelings entertained towards the Saints by the people of Quincy and vicinity was not a little endangered through the unwise course of Lyman Wight. He began the publication of a series of letters in the Quincy *Whig*, in which he laid the responsibility of the outrages perpetrated against the Saints in Missouri upon the Democratic party, implicating not only the Democrats of Missouri, but indirectly the National Democratic Party. This gave much dissatisfaction to members of that party in the vicinity of Quincy, who had been very active in assisting the Saints; and a number of the leading

men approached prominent brethren, who still remained in Quincy, and desired to know if the Church sustained the assertions of Lyman Wight. Under date of May 13, 1839, Elder R. B. Thompson wrote a letter to President Joseph Smith on the subject, in which he protested against the course taken by Wight, because of the influence it was having on many of those who had so nobly befriended the Saints in the day of their distress. Besides it was altogether unjust, for no particular political party in Missouri was responsible for the black cruelty practiced towards the Saints. Those who were in the mobs which robbed them of their homes, burned their houses, ran off their stock, and who whipped, murdered and finally drove the people from the State of Missouri, were made up of individuals of every shade of political faith, and of every religion, and many of no religion whatever. It was unfair then, under these circumstances, that the responsibility should be laid at the charge of any one party or sect of religion. So that Wight's course was not only doing much mischief, but was also unjust.

"To counteract the evil effect of Lyman Wight's communications to the *Whig*, Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon and Hyrum Smith, the First Presidency of the Church, published a letter in the *Whig*, dated May 17, 1839, from which we make the following extract:

"We have not at any time thought there was any political party, as such, chargeable with the Missouri barbarities, neither any religious society, as such. They were committed by a mob, composed of all parties, regardless of difference of opinion, either political or religious.

"The determined stand in this State, and by the people of Quincy in particular, made

against the lawless outrages of the Missouri mobbers by all parties in politics and religion, have entitled them equally to our thanks and our profoundest regards, and such, gentlemen, we hope they will always receive from us. * * * We wish to say to the public, through your paper, that we disclaim any intention of making a political question of our difficulties with Missouri, believing that we are not justified in so doing'

"Lyman Wight was a bold, independent spirited man; inclined to be self-willed and refractory. No one could control him; and even counsel or advice was usually disregarded—except it was from Joseph Smith. A few years subsequent to the time of which we are now writing, Lyman Wight himself said: 'Joseph Smith is the only man who ever did control me; he is the only man who ever shall' But to Joseph's words Lyman Wight gave respectful attention, and bent his own strong will to comply with the wishes of the Prophet. He himself was a master spirit, and could apparently bring himself to acknowledge but one to whom he was willing to yield his own judgment, and his own will, and that one was Joseph Smith. And it is said by those acquainted with him, that in the Prophet's hands his spirit was as pliable as that of a child. * * *

"In reply to the letter of R. B. Thompson, the First Presidency writing under date of May 25th admitted, that the course of Wight was unfair, and said the Church was not willing to make of their troubles a political question; but they also said that they considered it to be 'the indefeasible right of every free man to hold his own opinion in politics and religion;' and therefore would have it understood that, as an individual, Lyman Wight had the

right to entertain and express whatever opinion he pleased in regard to their troubles in Missouri; only intimating that care should be taken not to set forth individual views as the views of the Church. In writing to Lyman Wight on the subject, under date of May 27, 1839, Joseph did not upbraid him, nor peremptorily order him to discontinue the publication of his letters, or retract them, but he informed him that the matter had been considered in a council of the Church, and that the result was that his course was disapproved. But Joseph took occasion to express his confidence in Wight's good intentions, and said:

"Knowing your integrity of principle, and steadfastness in the cause of Christ, I feel not to exercise even the privilege of counsel on the subject, save only to request that you will endeavor to bear in mind the importance of the subject, and how easy it might be to get a misunderstanding with the brethren concerning it; and though last, but not least, that whilst you continue to go on upon your own credit, you will steer clear of making the Church appear as either supporting or opposing you in your politics, lest such a course may have a tendency to bring about persecution on the Church, where a little wisdom and caution may avoid it.

"I do not know that there is any occasion for my thus cautioning you in this thing, but having done so, I hope it will be well taken, and that all things shall eventually be found to work together for the good of the Saints. * * *

"With every possible feeling of love and friendship for an old fellow-prisoner and brother in the Lord, I remain, Sir, your sincere friend.'

"Throughout this whole affair it will be observed that Joseph starts out with the idea that every individual is absolutely free and independent as to entertaining views and in giving expression to them, both in politics and religion, so long as he makes no one else responsible for

them. That in correcting Lyman Wight he does it by appealing to the man's reason, and by pointing out the possible result of his course, which may be avoided by a little discretion; while the whole communication breathes such a spirit of confidence in the man he is correcting, and love for him as an 'old fellow-prisoner,' that it was altogether irresistible. And this is the secret of Joseph's power to control his brethren. There was no petty tyranny in his government. He was above that. Every right he claimed for himself, he accorded to others. While his mildness in correcting errors and his unbounded love for his brethren knit them to him in bands stronger than steel. It was ever his method to teach correct principles and let men govern themselves.

"Sidney Rigdon succeeded in escaping from the prison in Missouri before Joseph and the other brethren, who were confined in Liberty jail. And on his arrival in Quincy, his position as one of the Presidents of the Church, his education and eloquence, gave him the attention of the leading citizens of Quincy, and particularly enlisted the sympathy of Governor Carlin, of Illinois. By coming in contact with him, and relating the cruelties practiced against the Saints in Missouri, he conceived the idea of impeaching the character of Missouri on an item in the Constitution, viz., 'that the general government shall give to each State a republican form of government.' And it was his point to prove that such a government did not exist in Missouri. His plan was to present the story of the Saints' wrongs to the governors of the respective States, before the assembly of the several

legislatures, and induce as many of them as possible to bring the case before the legislatures in their messages. Another part of the plan was to have a man at each State capital armed with affidavits that would give the necessary information to the legislatures. After the action of the State legislatures the case was to be presented to Congress for its consideration and action.

"To carry out his plans George W. Robinson was appointed to take affidavits and collect general information bearing on the subject. And Sidney Rigdon secured a letter of introduction to the governors of several States and to the President of the United States from Governor Thomas Carlin, of Illinois, and Governor Robert Lucas, of Iowa."

This gigantic plan arranged by Sidney Rigdon for the impeachment of Missouri was like many of his other plans—altogether impracticable. It was therefore abandoned by Joseph and the Church, and the policy adopted of appealing directly to Congress and the President.

At a conference of the Church held on the Presbyterian camp ground near Quincy, May 4th, 5th and 6th, 1839, it was unanimously resolved:

"That Almon W. Babbitt, Erastus Snow and Robert B. Thompson be appointed a traveling committee to gather up and obtain all the libelous reports and publications which have been circulated against our Church, as well as other historical matter connected with said Church, that they possibly can obtain.

"That this conference do entirely sanction the purchase lately made for the Church in the Iowa Territory, and also the agency thereof.

"That Elder Oliver Granger be appointed to go to Kirtland, Ohio, and take the charge and oversight of the House of the Lord, and preside over the general affairs of the Church in that place.

"That the advice of this conference to the brethren living in the Eastern States is, for them to move to Kirtland, and the vicinity thereof, and again settle that place as a Stake of Zion; provided they feel so inclined, in preference to their moving further west.

"That this conference are entirely satisfied with, and give their sanction to the proceedings of the conference of the Twelve and their friends, held on the Temple spot at Far West, Missouri, on Friday, the 26th of April last.

"That they also sanction the act of the council held the same date and same place, in cutting off from the communion of said Church certain persons mentioned in the minutes thereof.

"That Elders Orson Hyde and William Smith be allowed the privilege of appearing personally before the next General Conference of the Church, to give an account of their conduct; and that in the meantime they be both suspended from exercising the functions of their office.

"That the conference do sanction the mission intended for the Twelve to Europe, and that they will do all in their power to enable them to go.

"That this conference send a delegate to the city of Washington, to lay our case before the General Government; and that President Rigdon be the delegate.

"That Colonel Lyman Wight be appointed to receive the affidavits which are to be sent to the city of Washington.

"That Elder William Marks be hereby appointed to preside over the Church at Commerce, Ill.

"That the following of the Seventies have the sanction of this council to accompany the Twelve to Europe, namely, Theodore Turley, George Pitkin, Joseph Bates Noble, Charles Hubbard, John Scott, Lorenzo D. Young, Samuel Mulliner, Willard Snow, John Snider, William Burton, Lorenzo D. Barne, Iton Holmes, Abram O. Smoot, Elias Smith; also the following High Priests, namely, Henry G. Sherwood, John Murdock, Winslow Farr, William Snow, Hiram Clark.

"That Elder J. P. Greene be appointed to go to the city of New York and preside over the churches there, and in the regions round about."

May 9, 1839, Joseph left Quincy, with his family, and removed to Commerce (afterwards Nauvoo). About the same time the majority of the

Saints who had been so kindly treated by the citizens of Quincy also removed to Hancock Co., Ill., and Lee County, Iowa, which had been selected as gathering places for the Saints.

Quincy, however, continued to be the home of a number of Saints for some time afterwards. On the 25th of October, 1840, a Stake of Zion was organized there, of which Daniel Stanton was appointed President, with Stephen Jones and Ezra T. Benson as his Counselors. Also a Bishopric, consisting of George W. Crouse (Bishop), Azariah Dustin and Sylvester B. Stoddard (Counselors), was appointed at the same time. This Stake organization existed until the following spring (1840), when all Stakes outside of Hancock County, Illinois, and Lee County, Iowa, were discontinued, and all who obeyed the council of the constituted Church authorities removed to these places. Notwithstanding this we find that as late as Feb. 18, 1843, when a conference was held in Quincy, the branch of the Church there was represented to consist of 77 members, including 2 High Priests, 5 Elders, 1 Priest, 1 Teacher and 1 Deacon, mostly in good standing.

Friendly relations continued between the citizens of Quincy and the Saints as long as the latter remained in Illinois, and at the time of the exodus in 1846, Mayor John Wood and other leading men of Quincy, took an active part in trying to bring about a peaceable settlement of the difficulties existing between the contending parties; and the citizens of Quincy again rendered the Saints substantial aid while they were fleeing away from the borders of civilization.