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Nauvoo, Illinois. Bird's-eye view from the hill across the Mississippi River to Nauvoo. Steel engraving, c. 1855, copyrighted by Herrmann J. Meyer. Library of Congress.

The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph Passes to Brother Brigham: One Hundred Twenty-nine Testimonies of a Collective Spiritual Witness

Lynne Watkins Jorgensen

On August 8, 1844, six weeks after the Prophet Joseph Smith's martyrdom, a meeting of the Saints was held in Nauvoo, Illinois. Brigham Young, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, and several other apostles had just returned from missions. The purpose of this meeting was to determine by vote who had the right and responsibility to lead the Church—Sidney Rigdon, first counselor in the First Presidency, or the Quorum of the Twelve with Brigham Young at their head.¹ In the course of the two meetings held that day, many in attendance received a divine witness that Brigham Young was to be the next leader: some Saints specifically state that Brigham Young assured the congregation that “here is President Sidney Rigdon, who was counselor to Joseph. I ask, where are Joseph and Hyrum? They

1. The most complete text of the minutes of August 8, 1844, as gathered by early Church historians, is found in Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 7:231–43 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*); for an early version of this compilation, see “History, 1838–1856, Volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844],” 296–304, Church History Library, available on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-Summary/history-1838-1856-volume-f-1-1-may-1844-8-august-1844/280>. For more on these events, see Ronald K. Esplin, “Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity,” *BYU Studies* 21, no. 3 (1981): 301–41; and Martin B. Hickman, “Succession in the Presidency,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1420–21.

are gone beyond the veil; and if Elder Rigdon wants to act as his counselor, he must go beyond the veil where he [Joseph] is. . . . I say unto you that the quorum of the Twelve have the keys of the Kingdom of God in all the world.”² During the meeting Brigham sounded and appeared remarkably like Joseph Smith; others simply say that the “mantle of Joseph” or the “mantle of the prophets” rested on Brigham Young; and others state that they were given a witness “by the spirit” that Brigham was to lead the Church.

This spiritual experience, which has come to be known as “the mantle of the Prophet falling on Brigham Young” or transfiguration, served to unite and comfort the Saints as they mourned the death of their beloved prophet and to direct them when they voted to support Brigham and the Twelve as leaders of the Church. Some Saints who were not present at the August 8 meetings reported experiencing a similar “mantle” witness on later occasions. To date we are aware of 129 people who wrote or otherwise passed on their remembrances of this witness.

Most Mormon historians acknowledge the mantle story, agreeing that something important happened in August 1844. For example, Ronald K. Esplin states, “Though there is no contemporary diary account, the number of later retellings, many in remarkable detail, argues for the reality of some such experience.”³ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton acknowledge, “Many who were present at the August 8 meeting later remembered seeing in Brigham Young that day a new appearance and hearing from him a new voice—one that was very familiar, that of Joseph Smith. For them the ‘Mantle of Joseph’ was given directly, miraculously, to Young.”⁴ Arrington notes in another book that “the diaries, letters, and later recollections of many of those present testified to an experience that persuaded them that Brigham was the new Joseph.” He acknowledges that an important event “took place” but observed that there may be psychological explanations for the phenomenon and reserves judgment

2. “History, 1838–1856, Volume F-1,” 297–98; *History of the Church*, 7:233.

3. Esplin, “Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve,” 325n84.

4. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 84–85.

regarding whether a miraculous transfiguration⁵ occurred.⁶ Others have concluded that it is unlikely that a miraculous spiritual manifestation took place. Richard S. Van Wagoner, for instance, writes, “When 8 August 1844 is stripped of emotional overlay, there is not a shred of irrefutable contemporary evidence to support the occurrence of a mystical event.” Van Wagoner concludes that “a more likely scenario was that it was the force of Young’s commanding presence, his well-timed arrival at the morning meeting, and perhaps a bit of theatrical mimicry that swayed the crowd.”⁷ Van Wagoner and others insist that transfiguration stories must appear on the day of occurrence or shortly thereafter to be acceptable.⁸ However, he has not presented documentation written on the day that refutes the fact that

5. The term “transfiguration” was used by early LDS writers in reference to the specific meeting of August 8, 1844, when the mantle of the Prophet Joseph descended upon Brigham Young. Although not everyone witnessed a change in the voice and form of Brigham Young, many reported that they did; hence the use of the term. One meaning of transfiguration is “an act, process, or instance of changing or being changed in form or appearance.” *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, 3d ed., s.v. *transfiguration*. Compare Matthew 17:1–2.

6. Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 114–15. Arrington acknowledges that it is possible to attribute the mantle experience to “the downcast spirits of the Saints, who had mourned Joseph’s passing for forty days; their yearning to be comforted by their lost leader; their disappointment with Rigdon, whose ambition had diluted his sincerity; their surprise at the presence of ‘Brother Brigham,’ who was thought by many to be still on his way back from Boston, and Brigham’s talent for mimicry.” Most Mormon historians who have written about the mantle phenomenon matter-of-factly report that many Saints later testified that they had witnessed a miraculous transfiguration of Brigham Young. See Thomas G. Alexander, *Things of Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 114; James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 216; and D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 166–67.

7. Richard S. Van Wagoner, “The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28 (Winter 1995): 21.

8. Van Wagoner, “Making of a Mormon Myth,” 22–23; see also Reid L. Harper, “The Mantle of Joseph: Creation of a Mormon Miracle,” *Journal of Mormon History* 22 (Fall 1996): 35–71.

a transfiguration occurred. In fact, Van Wagoner eventually admits that as the August 8, 1844, afternoon meeting progressed, “the sentiment which had so recently changed in favor of the twelve became palpable.”⁹

In order to enable readers to examine for themselves the evidence underlying these interpretations, numerous accounts of the mantle experience have been compiled in the document/testimony section of this article beginning on page 430. The evidence presented in these accounts demonstrates that many people testified powerfully that they had received a convincing sensory or spiritual witness of the mantle of the Prophet Joseph falling on Brigham Young. Brigham Young’s remarks as recorded by Thomas Bullock at the August 8, 1844, morning meeting are found in the appendix to this article (pages 505–7).

The Symbolic Mantle: Elijah and Elisha

The image of the mantle as a symbol of the passing of authority is at least as old as the well-known Old Testament story of the prophet Elijah and Elisha, his young follower.¹⁰ The Lord told Elijah that he was to anoint Elisha “to be prophet in thy room.” Elisha was plowing in the fields when Elijah walked past him and placed his rough mantle (cloak or cape) across the younger man’s shoulders. Elisha left the fields to follow Elijah and to have Elijah minister to him (1 Kgs. 19:16–21).

As the story continues, the time came for Elijah to leave his earthly mission:

And it came to pass, when they were gone over [the Jordan River], that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. (2 Kgs. 2:9–10)

9. Van Wagoner, “The Making of a Mormon Myth,” 11. See also Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 341.

10. Most converts learned to read from the Bible and were familiar with the term *mantle*. For more information on Elijah, Elisha, and prophetic succession, see Fred E. Woods, “Elisha and the Children: The Question of Accepting Prophetic Succession,” *BYU Studies* 32, no. 3 (1992): 47–58.

When the veil parted, there appeared a horse-drawn chariot of such brilliant glory it was called a “chariot of fire.” This vehicle swept between Elijah and Elisha, and Elijah “went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kgs. 2:11).

And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him. (2 Kgs. 2:12–15)

Like the “sons of the prophets,” many of the Saints in Nauvoo experienced a witness of the Lord’s designation of the next prophet as they met in conference in Nauvoo on August 8, 1844. The mantle experience of 1844 has become a symbol of the transfer of prophetic authority in the Church. After the death of a prophet and the identification of his successor, members of the Church frequently say that “the mantle has fallen once again.”¹¹

Oral Tradition of Mantle Testimonies

Several years ago, on a warm Sunday morning on a houseboat at Lake Powell, my father, Victor Watkins, gathered his children and

11. It is important to understand the part that the vote of this conference played in establishing the succession of authority in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The authority of the Twelve as the governing body of the Church upon the death of a President was confirmed as the congregation chose to support Brigham Young in his calling as President of the Quorum of the Twelve. Each time a new President of the Church is sustained, this plan of priesthood leadership is followed. See Esplin, “Joseph, Brigham, and the Twelve,” 301–40. See also Hickman, “Succession,” and Ronald W. Walker, “Grant’s Watershed: Succession in The Presidency, 1887–89,” in *Qualities That Count: Heber J. Grant as Businessman, Missionary, and Apostle* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2004), 195–229.

grandchildren together to share with them his testimony of the August 8, 1844, miracle.¹² He told them about his own grandfather William Lampard Watkins, who was seventeen at the time of Joseph Smith's martyrdom on June 27, 1844. When William heard the tragic news, he was in Kentucky campaigning for the Prophet, who was running for president of the United States.¹³ William hurried back to Nauvoo to join other grieving and confused mourners. At this point in the story, my father pulled a wrinkled paper from his pocket and began to read directly from William's own words:

A meeting was appointed for August 8th [1844] by which time Brigham Young and most of the other apostles had returned home. It was at this meeting Sidney Rigdon made a lengthy and tedious speech presenting his claims, telling the people what wonderful things he had planned for them.

... The darkness was soon dispelled, for Brigham Young explained before the people on that day, the order of the Priesthood. He was filled with the power of the Holy Ghost. He stood before the people as the Prophet Joseph Smith often had done and we heard the voice of the true shepherd, for he spoke with the voice of Joseph. His manner and appearance were like unto Joseph's and it was manifested to all those present upon whom the responsibility rested to carry on the work of God and lead the Saints. (document 64)¹⁴

Sharing an ancestor's testimony of seeing and/or hearing Brigham's transformation before the multitude of Saints is a tradition for many Latter-day Saint families whose forebears witnessed the event. Juanita Leavitt Brooks recalled that her grandfather Dudley Leavitt loved to retell the story as long as he lived (document 103). John and Eliza Billington Welch "were both present at the meeting held August 8, 1844

12. The story of the Lake Powell family reunion is found in Victor Watkins, *Diary*, June 19, 1977, in possession of the author.

13. *History of the Church*, 6:338.

14. This narrative of the mantle experience is one of the more well-written accounts. Though a member of a working-class London family, William was one of six scholarship boys at Brewers School and received a classical education. Watkins became the executive secretary of the highly successful Brigham City Cooperative. Lynne Watkins Jorgensen, "The First London Mormons, 1840-45: 'What Am I and My Brethren Here For?'" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1988), 69, 100.

where the mantle of the Prophet fell on Brigham Young . . . and these facts they related many, many times to their children and grandchildren, greatly strengthening and adding to the testimonies of those who listened” (document 76; see also 65).¹⁵ Some descendants of Cynthia Harrington Durphy Bowen have for generations encouraged their children to memorize Cynthia’s account of the event.¹⁶ William Ervin Stoker, who was raised from the age of six by his grandfather William Stoker, stated with pride that his grandfather “knew the Prophet Joseph Smith personally and was present when the Mantle of Joseph fell upon Brigham Young, and received a personal testimony.” He would add that he owed much to his grandfather for building up his faith by relating this story to him (document 122).

While the faith of most Church members certainly is not dependent on testimonies of the mantle experience, clearly some members of the Church were strengthened by their faith in the validity of their own or a loved one’s mantle experience. The purpose of this work is to present the written and oral narratives of the people in Nauvoo who firmly believed they had experienced a manifestation and who left their testimonies as a witness.



Detail of Brigham Young from a steel engraving of the First Presidency and Twelve Apostles published by S. W. Richards and M. Cannon, January 1, 1853. Engraving by Frederick Piercy.

15. Eliza Billington and John Welch were married in Nauvoo on May 18, 1845.

16. While I was researching this paper, Katherine Adams Peterson, a Cynthia Bowen descendant, learned of my project. She immediately took a table napkin and on it wrote from memory Cynthia’s account. See document 6.

The August 8 Conference

One session of the August 8, 1844, conference was held in the morning and another in the afternoon. Many historians of the transfiguration, including Leonard J. Arrington and Thomas G. Alexander, have concluded that the mantle event took place on the morning of August 8, 1844, after Rigdon's labored discourse offering to lead the Saints.¹⁷ Others, including D. Michael Quinn, are convinced that "the available evidence also allows the setting to have been the afternoon meeting."¹⁸ Often the actual witnesses do not record an exact date or time but merely call it "the meeting." However, a careful review of many of the available witness stories reveals that a series of at least three distinct manifestations actually occurred, in the same way spiritual experiences recur at successive temple dedications or general conference sessions.¹⁹

Records indicate that Sidney Rigdon addressed the congregation in the morning session.²⁰ After Rigdon's speech, Brigham Young suddenly stood up to call for an afternoon session and to make a few remarks. Brigham Young spoke again in the afternoon along with

17. Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 455n7, says, "There is some confusion in Latter-day Saint literature about the timing of the 'mantle of the Prophet' episode. Most published accounts have it occurring during the afternoon meeting, but my reading of Brigham Young's own diary, entry made on August 8, and the recollections of others who were there have persuaded me that it must have occurred when Brigham made his brief talk after Rigdon's speech in the morning"; Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 371n106.

18. Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 393n111.

19. At the June 14, 1993, Mormon History Association conference, Ronald Esplin noted that he initially decided that the suggestion of three primary mantle events was almost too convenient as the answer to the various mantle discrepancies. Then the idea that it might have occurred that way seemed to fall into place based on careful research in pioneer diaries.

20. LaJean Purcell Carruth and Robin Scott Jensen, "Sidney Rigdon's Plea to the Saints: Transcription of Thomas Bullock's Shorthand Notes from the August 8, 1844, Morning Meeting," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2015): 121–39; "Nauvoo, Hancock Co., Illinois," Andrew Jensen, ed., *Historical Record* 8, nos. 2–3 (March 1889): 789–91; available on *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/stream/historicalrecord08jens_0#page/n215/mode/2up.

Parley P. Pratt, Amasa Lyman, and W. W. Phelps,²¹ but apparently Sidney Rigdon did not accept the invitation to respond. The conference was of great interest to the membership of the Church, and estimates of the attendance at the meetings range from hundreds to thousands, including men, women, and children of all ages.²² Whole families attended, all expecting an answer to the succession dilemma.

In the morning session, Sidney Rigdon outlined his claim to be guardian of the Church. Many accounts describe the mantle phenomenon coming at the end of the morning session after Rigdon completed his remarks. As Brigham rose to call for an afternoon session, the witnesses saw or heard Joseph, and some, startled, rose to their feet (see documents 10, 26B, 29, 30, 38A, 38B, 48, 94A, 101, 119, 123). In the afternoon, Brigham Young actively defended the position of the Quorum of the Twelve. This was a more dignified, better organized meeting. Some attenders claim they witnessed the miracle during the second session of the conference, when Brigham delivered his message, stating that many Saints saw or heard Joseph. One of the most precise descriptions of the afternoon event was written by Judge William Hyde. Hyde described the Nauvoo events of 1844 in minute detail, specifically recording that the mantle experience took place in the afternoon. His account conforms closely to the official minute reports of the afternoon.²³

In the afternoon President Brigham Young came to the stand and addressed the vast multitude of anxious listeners as follows: . . . The Church had had the privilege of coming to Joseph and of receiving, but now he has stepped to the other side of the veil. He loved the Church even unto death, and laid down his life for it. . . .

21. William Hyde, "The Private Journal of William Hyde, 1868," holograph, 64–67, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (document 36).

22. For attendance estimates, see documents 68B, 108, 109. Brigham Young wrote, "The people assembled by thousands." Brigham Young, "Diary, 27 July 1837–1 April 1845," holograph, August 8, 1844, Brigham Young Papers, Church History Library, available on *Church History Library*, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE4093039, image 39; for testimonies that mention very young children, see documents 21, 119.

23. See "History, 1838–1856, Volume F-1," 296–304; *History of the Church*, 7:231–43.

President Young again arose and spoke concerning the endowments of the Elders. . . . On this day it was plainly manifest that the mantle of Joseph had rested upon President Young. The voice of the same spirit by which he, Joseph, spake was this day sounded in our ears, so much so that I once, unthoughtedly, raised my head to see if it was not actually Joseph addressing the assembly. (document 36)

In the course of the August 8 conference, a vote was taken, with the majority voting for Brigham Young's position that the Quorum of the Twelve should assume leadership of the Church.

Other Manifestations

The accounts of still others indicate that they witnessed a transformation not on August 8, but rather on a later date (documents 12, 41, 80).²⁴ Church historian Leonard J. Arrington verified, "It was not uncommon for people to see Joseph speaking through Brigham many years after 'the mantle had fallen on him.'"²⁵ An example is the account of the apostle Orson Hyde, who did not arrive in Nauvoo until August 12, 1844. He twice testified publicly to his "mantle" experience, which he shared with his wife, Mary Anne Price Hyde.²⁶

24. Charles Wesley Hubbard's account (document 96) mentions a date of August 4, 1844, and then goes on to describe the meeting of August 8. This August 4 date is probably an error in memory or in transcription.

25. Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 115. For instance, John D. Lee, who penned a powerful testimony concerning the mantle experience, actually did not arrive in Nauvoo until August 20, 1844, according to his diary. He obviously had his mantle experience "after the fact," as did Orson Hyde, Mary Anne Price Hyde, Anson Call, Jacob Hamblin, Albert Carrington, and others. See also note 19 for Ronald Esplin's comment concerning multiple manifestations.

26. Orson Hyde, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 13:178–83 (October 6, 1869), available on "Journal of Discourses," *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/4964>. See also Orson Hyde, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:58 (April 5, 1877). Information and time line concerning Orson Hyde and Mary Anne Price Hyde sent to me by his biographer Myrtle Stevens Hyde. See also Myrtle Stevens Hyde, *Orson Hyde: The Olive Branch of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Agreka Books, 2000), 181–82.

A number of witnesses do not specifically mention seeing or hearing a vision but testify in general terms that “the mantle” or “the spirit of Joseph” rested on Brigham (documents 2, 9, 11, 20, 24, 31, 49, 68A, 68B, 71, 76, 78, 116, 120, 121A, 121B, 122); others simply report that Brigham and/or they were touched by the Spirit (documents 23, 44, 58).²⁷

Traits of the Living Joseph

Of the witnesses to the transformation, a few provided specific details about the traits they recognized as Joseph’s. Homer Duncan not only commented on the voice of Brigham sounding like that of Joseph’s, but also referred to one of Joseph’s mannerisms: “The very gestures of his right hand when he was saying anything very positive reminded me of Joseph. My decision was then made as to who should lead the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints for surely the mantle of Joseph has fallen upon Brigham” (document 17). Mosiah Lyman Hancock commented, “I saw in him the look of Joseph, and the

27. Joseph Fielding’s journal entry regarding the conference does not mention a transfiguration but states simply that “I felt doubtful about it [Rigdon’s authority] . . . partly because the Spirit did not bear witness to it.” Fielding continues: “A Meeting was called and Rigdon again addressed us but seemed to have no Liberty or Power after which Elder Brigham Young spoke to [the] People . . . he had much Liberty and the Power of the Spirit in speaking . . . and the Saints soon began to see how things were and that the 12 must now hold the Keys of Power and Authority according to the Revelation which says the 12 are equal with the first Presidency.” Joseph Fielding, “They Might Have Known That He Was Not a Fallen Prophet—The Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding,” Andrew F. Ehat, ed., *BYU Studies* 19, no. 2 (1979): 155, original in Church History Library, typescript in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Lorenzo Hill Hatch was serving a mission in Vermont when he received word of the martyrdom; at the same time, he received a spiritual witness that Brigham should succeed Joseph: “I received the sad news of this awful affair [the martyrdom] in the town of Bristol, Addison County, Vermont. While I yet had the letter in my hand this letter was written by my uncle who claimed that Sidney Rigdon was the man to lead the Church—a voice spoke to me and said, ‘Brigham Young is the successor of Joseph Smith.’” Lorenzo Hill Hatch, *Lorenzo Hill Hatch Journal* (Provo, Utah: Mimeographed by BYU Adult Education and Extension Services, 1958), 282. This collection was originally copied by Ruth Savage Hilton from the original journals.

voice of Joseph; and it seemed to me that he was as tall as Joseph too” (document 27).²⁸ Benjamin F. Johnson also observed Joseph’s “tall, straight and portly [robust] form.” He then added his famous comments about Joseph’s speech and a missing tooth, remarking that he “heard the real and perfect voice of the Prophet, even to the whistle, as in years past caused by the loss of a tooth said to have been broken out by a mob at Hyrum [Ohio]” (documents 38A, 38B).²⁹ George Morris also described Joseph’s familiar speech patterns, noting:

In the afternoon Presedent Young arose . . . when I was startled by Earing Josephs Voice—he had a way of Clearing his Throat before he began to speak—by a peculier Effort of His own—like Ah-hem—

I raised my Head sudinly—and the first thing I saw was Joseph—as plain as I ever saw Him in my life. . . . That was Testemony anough to Convince me where the Proper athoraty rested. (document 46)

Did Brigham himself know that something miraculous had happened? His own account, dated August 8, 1844, simply states:

I arose and spocke to the people. my hart was swolen with compo-
sion toards them and by the power of the Holy Gost even the spirit of
the Prophets I was enabled to comfort the harts of the Saints. in the
afternoon a corden to my request the pe<o>ple assembl'd by thou-
sands[.] I lade before them the order of the church and the Power of
the Preasthood. after a long and laboras talk of a bout two ours in the
open air with the wind blowing, the church was of one hart and one
mind[.] they wanted the twelve to lead the church as Br Joseph had
dun in his day.³⁰

Perhaps Brigham was alluding to the miracle in his reference to “the spirit of the Prophets.” However, records do not indicate that he publicly acknowledged the manifestations at the time they occurred.

28. Joseph was well over six feet tall while Brigham was several inches shorter.

29. Although Joseph’s tooth had been repaired before his death, to Benjamin Johnson the whistle was proof that he had heard Joseph’s voice.

30. Young, “Diary,” image 39. This passage is in Brigham Young’s handwriting with his spelling and punctuation. Dean C. Jessee identifies which diary passages are actually written by Brigham Young and which are written by scribes. See Dean C. Jessee, “The Writings of Brigham Young,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 4 (July 1973): 284.

Brigham Young was careful never to claim to take Joseph's place. As early as August 15, 1844, he wrote an epistle to the Saints that stated emphatically, "Let no man presume for a moment that his [Joseph's] place will be filled by another; for, *remember, he stands in his own place* and always will."³¹ Later Brigham advised, "The spirit of Joseph which fell upon me is ready to fall upon somebody else when I am removed."³²

Testimonies of the Mantle Experience of 1844

It is impossible to verify the number of those in attendance at the conference who saw a physical transformation or heard Joseph's voice. Currently known records establish that 129 people gave written testimonies or say that a transformation or other spiritual manifestation occurred.³³ Of these, sixty-eight people created firsthand documents: personal journals, personal narratives told to a scribe, or first-person testimonies published in Church magazine articles. Testimonies from sixty-one people are secondhand: accounts gleaned from biographies written by family members or from historical compilations.

The mantle testimonies come from people who eventually settled all over the Utah Territory—from northern Utah and Idaho to southern Utah and Arizona—and even in Tahiti. There is no pocket location of people who recorded this experience.

At least the earliest writers had no opportunity to read other detailed written accounts of the mantle experience before recording their own. Some testimonies (documents 3, 16, 27, 32, 42) were written

31. "An Epistle of the Twelve," *Times and Seasons* 5 (August 15, 1844): 618, available on "Mormon Publications: 19th and 20th Centuries," *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/10011>; italics in original.

32. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 5:57 (July 19, 1857).

33. The testimonies included in this project were those I was able to document. It is possible to nearly double the number of mantle witnesses from the testimonies already included in this project. Many of the testimonies tell of spouses, parents, children, brothers, sisters, friends, and other individuals accompanying each participant. For example, see document 61. Mary Ann Stearns tells of attending the meeting with her little friend Julia Felshaw. They had to stand on benches to behold the wonderful transformation.

at least fifteen to twenty years before the publication of the most comprehensive, Church-sanctioned mantle testimony—George Q. Cannon’s 1870 essay in the *Juvenile Instructor* (document 13). Prior to the publication of Elder Cannon’s essay, printed references to the “mantle of Joseph” falling on Brigham appeared in the *Millennial Star*³⁴ and in the *Times and Seasons*.³⁵ These two Church publications do not mention any visions among members of the congregation but simply focus on the point of ecclesiastical interest—that the mantle had fallen on Brigham Young or, more generally, the Twelve.

In an address given on July 19, 1857, Brigham Young referred to Albert Carrington’s mantle experience, which occurred two months after the August 8 meeting: “He [Carrington] could not tell me from Joseph Smith, when I was speaking in the stand in Nauvoo during the October Conference of 1844. Somebody came along and passed a finger over his eyes and he could not see any one but Joseph speaking, until I got through addressing the congregation” (document 80). This talk was printed ten days later in the *Deseret News*³⁶ and may have inspired some Saints to write down their memories of the events of August 1844.

As stories about the mantle experience began to circulate in the 1850s, some writers may have responded by offering their own personalized or embellished accounts—such is human nature. However, most of the stories recorded after this point were not identical. It does not seem that the writers were relying on the same source for their versions of the event. In fact, the accounts contradict each other to some extent in their descriptions of the events of the day, suggesting

34. See document 9; Thomas Bullock, “Letter from Elder Thomas Bullock to Elder John O. Angus,” *Millennial Star* 14 (July 13, 1852): 299, available on “Mormon Publications: 19th and 20th Centuries,” *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/MStar/id/37609>.

35. “While the prophet lived, we all walked by ‘sight’; he is taken from us and we must now walk by ‘faith.’ After he [Brigham] explained matters so satisfactorily that every saint could see that Elijah’s mantle had truly fallen upon the ‘Twelve.’” “Special Meeting,” *Times and Seasons* 5 (September 2, 1844): 637.

36. Brigham Young, “Remarks,” *Deseret News*, July 29, 1857, 164, available on J. Willard Marriott Library, *Utah Digital Newspapers*, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2576175&q=1857-07-29>.

that each person wrote his or her account as remembered, not as described by Church leaders years later.

George Romney vigorously defended the veracity of the mantle stories:

I testify to you in all fervor, before God, that the mantle of Joseph Smith fell upon Brigham Young. It was Joseph's voice; absolutely Joseph's voice and manner, as Brigham Young addressed the people and told them who should be their leader. Now this is no fiction; this is true as I stand here after so many years, passing from the year 1844 up to the present time. (document 55A; see also 55B)

Testimony of the Succession of the Twelve

In 1844 the Twelve were beginning to understand their role in the Church. Joseph had carefully instructed them as to their responsibilities and had given them all the keys they would need to continue with the Lord's work,³⁷ but they did not always understand the significance of what they were taught. Brigham himself suggested that when he heard of Joseph's death he was at first overcome, fearing the keys of the priesthood were gone. Then, he said, "I felt it come like a flash of lightening to my mind, and I said 'the keys of the kingdom are here.'"³⁸ When he "came to Nauvoo," he knew "by visions of the Spirit" that from the Twelve would come a new First Presidency.³⁹ Several years passed, however, before all the Twelve agreed. Meanwhile, the support engendered by the events of the August 1844 conference gave him, as President of the Quorum of the Twelve, the authority he needed to guide the Church in the ensuing transitional period.

During the weeks following Joseph's death, the Saints had been obviously concerned about the succession of leadership. For the many who already believed that the Twelve held the keys and the authority to the leadership of the Church, the mantle experience was an additional testimony of the rightful succession of the Twelve; for others it might have been an answer to prayer. The powerful events of August

37. See Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve," 301–41.

38. Manuscript Minutes of Brigham Young Sermon, December 25, 1857, Brigham Young Papers.

39. Miscellaneous Minutes, February 12, 1849, Brigham Young Papers.

1844 finalized loyalties for many Nauvoo Saints and resolved the direction of their religious commitment. As Wilford Woodruff recalled, the mantle manifestation was the turning point. In 1872 he reminded Church members, “There was a reason for this [the mantle experience] in the mind of God: it convinced the people” (document 68B). By 1846 most of the Saints who attended the meeting were ready to leave Nauvoo and follow Brigham Young and the Twelve west.

Edward Hunter and Talitha Cheney affirmed in their mantle testimonies that they had no doubt that Brigham Young should lead the Church (documents 82 and 97). Anson Call and William Allred concluded that they were “perfectly satisfied” (documents 12 and 2). Homer Duncan pledged, “My decision was then made” (document 17). Mary Dunn, an eleven-year-old, soberly recalled her father’s remarks as the family was returning home from the meeting: “They need not hunt any farther. Brigham Young is the man to lead us” (document 18).

For others, however, the way was not so clear. A few families were split in their loyalties. In the case of Albert and Ada Winchell Clements, the mantle episode led to a divorce. Albert was a missionary called to serve shortly before Joseph’s death. On learning of the martyrdom, he started his journey back to Nauvoo. As he traveled home, he encountered his friend Sidney Rigdon. Sidney told him he was hurrying back to Nauvoo to take his place as guardian of the Church. Albert was satisfied with Rigdon’s position.

Albert did not arrive home until August 15, 1844, when he learned of the August 8 meeting, which his wife, Ada, had attended. She happily described the mantle event, testifying that Brigham Young had actually looked and sounded like Joseph Smith. Albert inquired about Rigdon. Ada answered that he had spoken, but the Spirit was not with him. Albert still took the side of his friend Sidney Rigdon. Ada vowed she would continue with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She and the children left in the exodus to the Rocky Mountains; Albert stayed behind (documents 85A and 85B).⁴⁰

40. Some years later, Albert sent a letter with an elder asking his wife for a divorce, which she granted. Both partners remarried. After the death of both mates, Albert rejoined the Church, traveled to Utah, and he and Ada went with their son to the Endowment House, where they were remarried and sealed.

Though Albert refused to accept Ada's testimony, other individuals bolstered their commitment to the Twelve through the witness of a close family member who had attended the August 1844 meeting. Sarah Studevart Leavitt accepted her husband's testimony without question:

My husband, Jeremiah, was attending a meeting where this question was being discussed. Brigham Young was speaking when suddenly he seemed to be clothed with all the authority of Joseph Smith. Jeremiah said that he had the same appearance, the same voice, as the Prophet. If he had not known that Joseph Smith was dead, he would have thought that Brigham Young was Joseph Smith. Tears dampened many cheeks. Joy and gladness filled many hearts. The Lord had not forgotten his people. . . . After that there was no one to doubt that Brigham Young was to be our new leader and Prophet. If Brigham had any doubts, my husband Jeremiah did not. (document 104)

Aurelia Spencer Rogers acknowledged that the testimony of her sister Ellen Spencer Clawson was what "strengthened my faith in the truth of Mormonism." Aurelia wrote:

[Ellen] was at a meeting of the Saints. . . . At this meeting, Brigham Young, who was President of the Quorum of Apostles, arose to speak, when "The Mantle of Joseph" fell upon him, and he was like one transformed; his countenance, voice and form were like those of the late Prophet. Many in the congregation, even children saw this miracle; it satisfied the people and decided the question who was to be the leader. (document 84)

George Armstrong Hicks struggled throughout his life with his own testimony, but he was adamant concerning the reality of his father's testimony concerning the mantle experience. He wrote in his journal:

I have heard my father [George Barton Hicks] say that he was present at the time when it is said that the mantle of Joseph fell upon Brigham Young. I believe [his testimony], I believe the spirit of Joseph took possession of the body of Brigham and spoke to the people through him. Brigham was the man to take the lead. (document 95)

"The Lonely Trail," in *Our Pioneer Heritage*, comp. Kate B. Carter, 20 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958-77), 3:111-12.

Even a twentieth-century prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints responded with gratitude for the mantle testimony of his mother, Rachel Ridgeway Ivins Grant (document 37A). In a letter to a friend, Heber J. Grant acknowledged, “I am grateful that my mother was present and had the same testimony which she often gave in public” (document 37B).

Evidence of Contemporaneous Discussion of the Experience

In Nauvoo throughout the temple building period, people seem to have talked and written about the mantle experience and about Brigham Young’s resemblance to Joseph Smith.⁴¹ These very tentative discussions are a testimony for many scholars that the mantle experience was not orchestrated either as a public relations ploy or as a psychological phenomenon. The mantle references came forth slowly, almost reluctantly, as many participants were unwilling to publicly discuss spiritual events. Historian D. Michael Quinn writes this about the immediate response:

There *were* contemporary references to Young’s “transfiguration.” The *Times and Seasons* reported that just before the sustaining vote at the afternoon session of the August meeting, “every Saint could see that Elijah’s mantle had truly fallen upon the ‘Twelve.’” Although the church newspaper did not refer to Young specifically for this “mantle” experience, on 15 November 1844 Henry and Catharine Brooke wrote from Nauvoo that Young “favours Br Joseph, both in person, manner of speaking more than any person ever you saw, looks like another.” Five days later Arza Hinckley referred to “Brigham Young on [w]hom the mantle of the prophet Joseph has fallen.”⁴²

Sometime after the August 8, 1844, meeting, Howard Egan wrote a letter to Jesse C. Little in the East that also attested to a transfiguration. On December 8, 1844, Brother Little quoted Egan’s words in a letter to Brigham Young stating, “I rec^d a Letter from Bro Egan at the time of the Conference he said ‘if a man had been blinded he would

41. See Carol Cornwall Madsen, *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 168, 185, 204, 235, 242, 255–56.

42. Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 166; first italics added.

hardly have known if it were not Joseph.” This account is one of the earliest acknowledgments of a transfiguration.⁴³

Ezra T. Benson, who was present at the August 8 meeting, later recorded in his autobiography that “many said, when they heard Brigham talk, that it was not Brigham’s voice, but the voice of Joseph.” Benson made no claim to having seen the transfiguration himself but evidently heard others discussing their experience, which he seems to have accepted without question.⁴⁴

The diary of William Burton, a missionary who returned to Nauvoo in spring 1845, may refer to residents talking about the mantle experience. In May 1845, he recorded events in his diary that had occurred during his absence from Nauvoo:

[That which] had taken place during the time that I was out on my mission;-that greivous and hard to be borne. This was the Martyrdom of the Prophet and Seer, and Patriarch, whose voices I could not hear, declaring the truths of Heaven. But their [Joseph’s and Hyrum’s] places were filled by others much better than I once was supposed they could have been. The spirit of Joseph appeared to rest upon Brigham. (document 11)

Burton’s use of the past tense—“the spirit of Joseph appeared to rest upon Brigham”—in the context of his discussion of events that had transpired in his absence is significant. If Burton was referring by these words to the mantle experience, he must have heard of the event from others who had been at the meetings. If this was the case, at that early date at least some Nauvoo residents were discussing the incident.

In a February 1845 letter, Wilford Woodruff shared the mantle news with fellow Saints in the British Isles by assuring them that

on the second day after our arrival August 8th, 1844, we met in a special conference, all the quorums, authorities, and members of the Church that could assemble in Nauvoo. [We] were addressed by elder Brigham Young, the president of the quorum of the twelve. It

43. Jesse C. Little to Brigham Young, December 8, 1844, filed December 30, 1844, Brigham Young Papers (document 19), available on *Church History Library*, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE3946022, image 9.

44. John Henry Evans and Minnie Egan Anderson, *Ezra T. Benson: Pioneer—Statesman—Saint* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1947), 88–89.

was evident to the Saints that the mantle of Joseph had fallen upon him, the road that he pointed out could be seen so plainly. (document 68A)

Recording the Experience

The spiritual witness received at the August conference was of such magnitude that believers were willing—even eager—to follow Brigham Young and the Twelve.⁴⁵ However, scholars continue to search for a witness account written on the same day as the mantle experience.⁴⁶

45. Brent L. Top and Lawrence R. Flake, “‘The Kingdom of God Will Roll On’: Succession in the Presidency,” *Ensign* 26 (August 1996): 25.

46. A few Nauvoo Saints who kept daily records, personal or official, made entries on August 8, recording the results or proceedings of the meeting without mentioning a mantle experience at that time (see document 33). Wilford Woodruff, concerned with keeping an official record, made careful notes on the comments made by the speakers during the conference but makes no mention of a specific spiritual manifestation at the meeting. See Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–84), 2:434–40. In their personal journals, William Clayton and Heber C. Kimball both briefly mention only the results of the vote taken at the meeting. See George D. Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 142; and Heber C. Kimball, *Journal*, Church History Library.

Willard Richards’s journal has a two-and-one-half page entry for August 7, a very brief entry for August 8 followed by a blank page, then another long entry for August 9. See Willard Richards, *Journal* (volume 10), 1844 March–August, *Willard Richards Journals and Papers, 1821–54*, Church History Library, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE581801, images 80–87. The entry marked August 8 is made up of a few short lines that simply state that Rigdon spoke in the morning and that the Twelve were voted by the Church to stand as the First Presidency. Then Richards writes, “See Times and Seasons.” The first reference to the August 8 meeting in the *Times and Seasons* is in the issue dated September 2, 1844 (see note 44), indicating that Richards probably made the entry after August 8. Richards, *Journal*, image 83.

Thomas Bullock’s personal journal has no entries for August 8, 1844. However, he did attend the meeting and kept minutes. His notes for the afternoon meeting make no mention of a mantle experience. His minutes of the morning meeting, taken in his particular shorthand, are notes taken during Sidney’s and Brigham’s speeches, with no additional comments of any kind. Thomas Bullock, *Minutes*, Thomas Bullock Collection, Church History Library. See the appendix to this article (pp. 505–7), Bullock’s minutes of Brigham Young’s comments in

If the experience was so “intense and life-changing”⁴⁷ for followers of the Prophet Joseph, why were none of the accounts that record the miracle written on the day of the manifestation or shortly thereafter? It is a question that unfortunately cannot be answered definitively.

A partial explanation may be that life was chaotic and dangerous for Nauvoo citizens in 1844 and 1845. The citizens were stunned by events, and some did not have the luxury of good health, time, money, or even access to writing materials.⁴⁸ After the death of Joseph and the acceptance of the leadership of Brigham and the Twelve, the Saints’ primary goals were to feed their families and to finish the Nauvoo Temple as quickly as possible⁴⁹—a charge repeatedly given by Joseph Smith and then amplified by Brigham Young.⁵⁰ In fact, Judge William Hyde recorded that Brigham Young spoke in the afternoon session of the August 8 meeting concerning the need to finish the Nauvoo Temple (document 36).

The urgency expressed by Young motivated the Nauvoo Saints to complete as much of the temple in the next eighteen months “as had been accomplished in the previous three years.”⁵¹ He organized the brethren into work crews and continued to commit the sisters to contribute a penny a week for glass and nails. Furthermore, Brigham “put the missionary work in order, studied Joseph Smith’s plan for

the morning meeting; and Carruth and Jensen, “Sidney Rigdon’s Plea to the Saints,” 133–39.

47. Carol C. Madsen comments, “Some human experiences are so intense and life-changing that memory returns not only the event in its fullness, but also the emotions that surround it.” Madsen, *In Their Own Words*, 158.

48. For a discussion concerning the lack of paper in Nauvoo in 1844, see George W. Givens, *In Old Nauvoo: Everyday Life in the City of Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 266. On November 13, 1844, the *Nauvoo Neighbor* announced a lack of paper caused by the “bad state of navigation, &c.”

49. After giving his testimony of the mantle falling on Brigham Young, Edmund Ellsworth explained that President Young told them that the temple must be built. He added, “We went to work as one in poverty.” Edmund Ellsworth, *Autobiography* [c. 1892], holograph, 4–5, available on *Church History Library*, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE6996683, image 7.

50. Esplin, “Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve,” 330. The Saints did complete enough of the temple to enable many to receive their endowments before the exodus in 1846.

51. Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 85.

an expansion of gathering places, and vigorously pushed industrial development and construction.” Numerous new frame and brick homes as well as the Seventies Hall were erected in the next year.⁵²

Additionally, the Nauvoo Saints were threatened by mobs and other lawless citizens, and the stresses that led to the murders of Joseph and Hyrum immediately reappeared, leading to the abandonment of Nauvoo in 1846. Grief and depression followed the martyrdom, and recurring diseases such as malaria and cholera were both endemic and virulent in this river town even during the best of times, which deterred record keeping.

Some diarists who had been keeping fairly regular diaries stopped writing around the time of the martyrdom and did not resume until later. For example, Thomas Bullock’s personal journal shows a gap from June 15 until October 8, 1844; Charles Coulson Rich made no entries from June 28, 1844, to January 1, 1845; and Eliza Roxcy Snow ceased writing in April 1844 and did not resume until February 1846.⁵³ Abraham O. Smoot stopped writing in his journal about the time he returned to Nauvoo (July 28, 1844) and picked up his narrative again on November 3, 1844.⁵⁴ Emmeline B. Wells, an important diarist of the Nauvoo period, did not begin her “Nauvoo Diary” until 1845.⁵⁵

Bloody flux, summer sickness, typhoid, and tuberculosis are all named in the records of the city after Joseph’s death, in addition to the normal childhood diseases of the nineteenth century that were often fatal.⁵⁶ Thirteen-year-old George Washington Bean summed up the years following the Prophet’s death as being filled with hardships such

52. Allen and Leonard, *Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 202.

53. Davis Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977), 47, 289, 331–32.

54. Abraham Owen Smoot, “Abraham Owen Smoot Journal, 1844–1845,” Abraham Owen Smoot Papers, Perry Special Collections.

55. Emmeline B. Harris Wells, “My Testimony,” in Preston Nibley, comp., *Faith Promoting Stories* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1943), 139; Madsen, *In Their Own Words*, 43–49. Madsen explains that Emmeline was sixteen, had just lost a baby, and had been deserted by her husband, James Harris, when she began to write her daily account. The early diary is typical of a heartbroken sixteen-year-old. She did not write of current events that surrounded her. She wrote of her adolescent pains and lost romance. Emmeline wrote about “the mantle” in her later years when she finally became aware of the significance of this event. See documents 94A and 94B.

56. Givens, *In Old Nauvoo*, 112–30.

as “scurvy and blackleg.” He was forced to grow up fast: “During this season I managed most of the family business as most of the folks were ill.”⁵⁷ Caroline Barnes Crosby verified that “persecution continued all around us. The brethren were obliged to be on guard all the time. The sickly season soon commenced. I was sick several weeks.”⁵⁸ One of the brethren on guard was Appleton Milo Harmon, who wrote:

They arose in mob and broke open the jail and killed Joseph and Hyrum and severely wounded Elder John Taylor, on the 27th day of June, 1844. During this time I was serving as policeman on almost constant duty night and day and in so doing exposed myself to wet and cold and soon after was taken sick with chills and fever and for three months was very sick, in fact the sickest I ever was in my life. My recovery was but slowly.⁵⁹

Emily Smith Hoyt explained that she was often sick two or three months at a time and that her life was despaired of by her friends. Her husband was in even worse health.⁶⁰ In such an atmosphere, journal keeping was simply not a priority for people who were trying to survive and still accomplish the Lord’s work. In his journal, Joseph Grafton Hovey recorded:

The people said let the Lord God of Israel choose. Then the Twelve did explain the subject and made it as clear as the noon day sun of their power and authority given them by Joseph, have not time and space to write all the particulars. For I do work hard on the Temple of the Lord cutting and sawing stone and I do get so fatigued when I leave my labors that I have not much courage to write my life.⁶¹

57. George Washington Bean, *George Washington Bean and His Family Records*, comp. Flora Diana Bean Horne (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing, 1945), 23, 31.

58. Caroline Barnes Crosby, “Memoirs Begun at Tubuai, Society Islands, 1851,” holograph, unpagged, Church History Library.

59. Appleton Milo Harmon, “Appleton Milo Harmon’s Early History and Journal for His Travels through the United States, England, and Scotland in 1850, 1851, and 1852,” available on “Trails of Hope: Overland Diaries and Letters, 1846–1869,” *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/Diaries/id/7646>.

60. Emily Smith Hoyt, *Reminiscences and Diaries, 1851–93*, microfilm of holograph, 19–20, MS 13346, Church History Library.

61. Joseph Grafton Hovey, “Biography of Joseph Grafton Hovey, Copied and Arranged from His Journal by His Grand Son, M. R. Hovey of Logan, Utah,” typescript, MSS SC 215, Perry Special Collections. Hovey’s use of the phrase “as

Additionally, most of the ordinary folk did not keep records. Diary entries, if kept at all, were generally logs or daybooks. Most members, even those few who kept journals, were very circumspect and may have been uncomfortable with writing about sacred spiritual and emotional events, as many are today.⁶² One early Saint recorded her feelings about a vision she had experienced years before:

When a true spirit makes known anything to you, in the day time, we call it a vision. If it is a true spirit it will never leave you, every particular will be as plain fifty years hence as now. I said to myself then, my snakes [vision] I saw in Kentucky, when I thought I could almost see Zion, was a true vision, though I did not know what to call it and seldom ever spoke of it, for I thought it was given to me for my own benefit.⁶³

Others may have not fully appreciated the pivotal importance of the meetings of that day and of the mantle experience until later in their lives. Because of the very personal nature of a spiritual experience, some Saints may have been reluctant to record their impressions. In a letter to Elder George S. Gibbs, Benjamin F. Johnson explains:

So deeply was I impressed with what I saw and heard in the transfiguration, that for years I dared not tell what was given me of the Lord to see. But when in later years I did publicly bear this testimony, I found that others had testified to having seen and heard the same. But to what proportion of the congregation that were present, I could

clear as the noon day sun,” sometimes associated with a visionary experience (Joseph Smith—History 1:16; D&C 110:3; Acts 9:3), may or may not have any special significance.

62. As a case in point, while teaching family history classes for the BYU Salt Lake Center, I asked my students how many of them had personally experienced a spiritual manifestation or knew of a spiritual experience of someone close to them. Nearly every hand went up. I then asked how many had written these experiences down. Nearly every hand went down. Only one or two of the students had actually kept a journal account. When I asked why they had not recorded the experience, they answered that they were uncomfortable writing about sacred events.

63. Martha Pane Jones Thomas, Autobiography, in *Daniel Stillwell Thomas Family History* (Salt Lake City: Kate Woodhouse Kirkham, 1927), 30–31, available on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *FamilySearch*, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE6694551.

never know. But I do know that this, my testimony is true. (document 38A)

By the time they recorded their experiences, the Church's progression under President Young's leadership and the accounts of others who had attended the meeting had helped to validate their experience and testifying to its reality had become an honorable activity.

Early Written Accounts—Two Women's Testimonies

It is not always possible to determine when each account was first recited or written. Two of the earliest known accounts of the mantle experience were recorded by Caroline Barnes Crosby and Emily Smith Hoyt, two formidable pioneer women who zealously recognized their mantle experience as an opportunity for them to place on record one of the few episodes where they were an equal witness to a miraculous vision. Crosby and Hoyt recorded their mantle testimonies when they finally found the essential element they needed—a solid block of time. At the end of 1850, after six hectic and life-threatening years, Caroline and Emily both found the time and solitude to begin journals of their experiences. Each woman felt that the mantle story was important enough to include at the beginning of her history.

Caroline Barnes Crosby was one of the first women to be called as a missionary for the Church, assigned to serve with her husband, Jonathan Crosby.⁶⁴ In 1846 the indefatigable Caroline left Nauvoo. In 1848 she helped lead her family from Council Bluffs, Iowa, to the Salt Lake Valley.⁶⁵ Then in spring 1850, Jonathan and Caroline, along with Addison Pratt and Louisa Barnes Pratt (Caroline's sister), accepted a mission assignment to the Society Islands, a group of islands in the west part of French Polynesia. During fall 1850, Jonathan and Addison conducted business elsewhere, leaving Caroline and Louisa alone on the island of Tubuai Manu.⁶⁶ There, Caroline could finally settle

64. Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Mormon Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Polynesia," *Journal of Mormon History* 13 (1986–87): 61.

65. Crosby, "Memoirs."

66. Crosby, "Memoirs."

down long enough to write her memoirs, including her account of the mantle experience. An educated witness, Caroline wrote:

Sidney Rigdon came to the stand and tried to show to the people that he was the rightful successor of Joseph. And his arguments were so powerful that many were almost persuaded to believe him such. But as soon as the twelve apostles with bro Brigham Young at their head took the stand it was shown conclusively where the power rested. It was the first time that I ever thought he [Brigham] resembled bro Joseph. But almost every one exclaimed that the mantle of Joseph had fallen on Brigham. For one I never had any doubts afterwards. (document 16)

Like Caroline, Emily Smith Hoyt, who arrived in the Utah Territory on October 30, 1851, wrote of her experience.⁶⁷ Emily was the Prophet's first cousin, the daughter of Joseph Smith's Uncle Asael, who had served briefly as Patriarch to the Church.⁶⁸ She found time to write her memoirs just before she left her home in Iowa to travel to the Utah Territory.⁶⁹

In 1840, Emily and her husband, Samuel Pierce Hoyt, had purchased property just over the river from Nauvoo in Nashville (now Galland, Lee County, Iowa); erected a cabin; and then built a very substantial home with ten bedrooms and five fireplaces. Emily described her home as being just "four miles from a certain point in Nauvoo. . . . Eventually we could see the [Nauvoo] temple by standing in my front door."⁷⁰

She and her family had supported Joseph Smith from the first moment they read the Book of Mormon in 1834. After learning of the murders of Emily's two cousins, the Hoyts traveled across the river to Nauvoo. Emily recalled, "We returned from that melancholy scene

67. Hoyt, *Reminiscences and Diaries*, 67.

68. Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History, 1901–36), 1:182, available on *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/stream/latterdaysaintbi01bjens#page/182/mode/2up>.

69. Hoyt, *Reminiscences and Diaries*, 19–20.

70. Hoyt, *Reminiscences and Diaries*, 19.

The last one arose. It was the then President of the Twelve Brigham Young. He spoke to the people altogether in a different style from any of those who had preceded him. A cloud of witnesses arose after B. Y. had sat down and testified to the truth of what he had said. President B. Y. arose from his seat the second time and addressed the audience. I had been well acquainted with Joseph the latter part of his life. We had been at his home many times and Joseph, Hiram and families felt at home with us. From a place of retreat before the S. P., made Joseph sent to S. P. for money to aid him in escaping for a time from the grasp of his ungodly pursuers. S. P. sent the money and they had the power in their own hands to go any place they might choose. They consulted and deliberated. Emma Joseph's wife wanted her husband and his brother Hiram to give themselves up, called them cowards etc. Joseph said if it would save the people he was willing to be sacrificed. After every thing was ready for them to get away, Joseph said he would go and give himself up to the State authorities. The Governor was pledged to protect them. Joseph said he felt that it might be, like a lamb going to the slaughter. The result of his counsel is well known. They returned and were murdered. And the Latter day Saints apparently left without a leader. But the God of Heaven who had said it was his business to provide for his saints, sent President B. Young home just in time, and clothed him not with the mantle of Elijah, but the spirit and power which had rested on Joseph. I was an eye, and ear, witness. The manner of reasoning, the expression of the countenance, the sound of the voice thrilled my whole soul. My own eyes had beheld Joseph's murdered body. My own hands had felt death's icy coldness on his once noble forehead. I knew that Joseph was dead. And yet I often startled and involuntarily looked at the stand to see if it was not Joseph. It was not, it was Brigham Young and if any one doubts the right of Brigham to manage affairs for the Saints, all that has to say to them is this. Let the spirit of God and know for yourselves. The Lord will provide for his own. Has the word of the Lord ever failed. Be young will not live forever clothed with mortality. But He who rules in heaven and on earth will control all things by the counsel of his own will. Saints will live

Page from the Emily Smith Hoyt journal (document 32). In 1851, Emily recorded her experience at the August 8, 1844, meeting. "S. P." refers to her husband. Courtesy Johnathan A. Dibble.

heart sick and sorrowful cast down but not in despair.”⁷¹ She continued, “We were summoned over the river again and went to hear what was wanted.”⁷² Thus Samuel and Emily were in Nauvoo for the meeting in the bowery on August 8, 1844, where they witnessed Brigham’s transformation. For five long years, starting in 1846, Emily’s home served as a way station for LDS refugees, a place where Saints could receive aid and nursing care before they followed the Twelve west.⁷³

By 1851, Emily was determined to let the whole world know of her unflagging testimony concerning her cousin. Knowing that the Smith family was split in their loyalties to Brigham Young, Emily began her record with her mantle testimony and justified her choices in following the Saints west. Emphasizing that she and Joseph were about the same age and that Joseph had spent much time in her home, she explained that on August 8, 1844,

President B. Y. [Brigham Young] arose from his seat . . . and addressed the audience. I had been well acquainted with Joseph the latter part of his life. We had been at his home many times and Joseph, Hiram and families felt at home with us. . . . But the God of Heaven who had said it was his business to provide for his saints, sent President B. Young home just in time, and clothed him not with “the mantle of Elijah,” but the spirit and power which had rested on Joseph. I was an eye, and ear, witness. The manner of reasoning, the expression of the countenance, the sound of the voice thrilled my whole soul. . . . I knew that Joseph was dead. And yet I often startled and involuntarily looked at the stand to see if it was not Joseph. It was not, it was Brigham Young and if any one doubts the right of Brigham to manage affairs for the Saints, all I have to say to them is this. Get the spirit of God and know for yourselves. The Lord will provide for his own. (document 32; underlining in original)

Emily Smith Hoyt was an educated woman, a graduate of a teachers’ academy. She had family ties to Joseph Smith and knew him well. She was certainly also acquainted with Brigham Young. It seems hard to imagine that she could have been duped by a “bit of theatrical mimicry.”

71. Hoyt, *Reminiscences and Diaries*, 20.

72. Hoyt, *Reminiscences and Diaries*, 20.

73. Hoyt, *Reminiscences and Diaries*, 20–21.

“The Prophet Is Not Dead!”—Children’s Testimonies

Adults were not the only witnesses of the mantle event. A number of those present at the meeting were children. William Van Orden Carbine was only nine years old in 1844, but he was well acquainted with the Prophet Joseph. He remembered sitting in the meeting with his mother, Adelia Rider Carbine, and saying, “The Prophet [is] not dead, for I [see] him on the stand.” William’s experience became a favorite story of his mother, who retold it many times (document 79A; see also 79B).

James Madison Fisher, an eleven-year-old who had often played ball with the Prophet Joseph, also remembered the unexpected vision of his friend, “Rigdon spoke first it did not have the wright ring to it when he sat down brother Brigham got up, the mantle of Joseph fell upon him, he was the picture of the Prophet [Joseph] and he had the Prophet’s voice it was a great surprise for the people, the saints was shown who was to be their leader” (document 22).

One of the children, eight-year-old Mary Field, specifically identified what she was doing at the time of the event. She recalled:

Mother [Mary Harding Field] had the baby on her knee, who was playing with a tin cup. He dropped it, attracting our attention to the floor. Mother stooped over to pick it up, when we were startled by hearing the voice of Joseph. Looking up quickly we saw the form of the Prophet Joseph standing before us. Brother Brigham looked and talked so much like Joseph that for a minute we thought it was Joseph. (document 21)

The Mantle Testimonies Are Finally Published

Emily Smith Hoyt and Caroline Barnes Crosby wrote their memoirs a few years after the event, long before the first detailed accounts of the mantle experience were published. It was not until the 1870s that a mantle account relating in detail the miraculous vision of Joseph was finally published and made generally accessible to the members of the Church.⁷⁴

74. As already noted, the only “official” mantle references that had been previously published were Brigham Young’s reference in 1857 to Albert Carrington’s

Orson Hyde's remembrance of his mantle experience was delivered publicly in Salt Lake City on October 6, 1869, and published in the *Deseret News Semi-weekly* on November 16, 1869 (document 35A).⁷⁵ But it was George Q. Cannon's testimony that the congregation "both saw and heard [Joseph] with their natural eyes and ears," published in the *Juvenile Instructor* in 1870 (document 13), that became the major source for transfiguration accounts by Mormon historians such as B. H. Roberts in *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*.⁷⁶ On April 8, 1872, Wilford Woodruff publicly bore his testimony concerning the mantle experience. This testimony was published in the *Deseret News Weekly* on May 22, 1872 (document 68B). Cannon's and Woodruff's published testimonies were followed by other testimonies that were recorded in histories written by Edward W. Tullidge and Orson F. Whitney.⁷⁷ A mantle statement from William C. Staines was published in the *Contributor* in June 1891, ten years after his death (document 60).

In 1905, the young women of the Church were also presented with the deeply personal testimonies of three redoubtable Mormon women who remembered August 8, 1844, as a day that changed their lives. Maria Wealthy Wilcox, Jane Snyder Richards, and Rachel Ridgeway

experience and the statements in the *Times and Seasons* and the *Millennial Star*.

75. In this 1869 discourse, Orson Hyde speaks as if he had been present at the August 8 conference in Nauvoo. He mentions Rigdon's speech to the congregation as well as Brigham Young's. However, Wilford Woodruff's diary places Orson's arrival in Nauvoo on August 13.

76. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Corporation of the President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965), 2:418; *History of the Church*, 7:236n. George Q. Cannon's account has become a widely quoted source for the mantle stories in major histories of the Nauvoo period. It is still accepted as a faithful version and reappears in contemporary Latter-day Saint historical and educational materials. Elder Cannon's account was quoted most recently in the *Ensign*, along with Benjamin F. Johnson to Elder George S. Gibbs, 1903. See Top and Flake, "Kingdom of God Will Roll On," 25.

77. Edward W. Tullidge, *Life of Brigham Young; or, Utah and Her Founders* (New York: n.p., 1877); Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Cannon and Sons, 1892–1904).

Grant each wrote about their memories of Joseph the Prophet for the *Young Woman's Journal* (documents 37A, 54B, 67).

Like Wilcox, Richards, and Grant, many witnesses did not write about their experience until late in their lives. Perhaps the published accounts validated their own experience; perhaps they were pressured by their children to write the story they had told over the years. As death approached, they may have felt the need to leave their written testimonies for posterity, or they may have wanted to leave a document that would silence any doubters. Several of the accounts became grand, almost poetic proclamations of belief, as though the writers felt that the formal rhetoric would lend weight to their testimonies.

Mantle Testimonies into the Twentieth Century

Mantle testimonies recorded after 1900 begin to read very much alike, probably because the participants had read the published accounts. However, significant and unique renderings were still to come. On July 2, 1902, the first known legal document concerning the mantle event made its appearance in a statement that John Welch swore before the county clerk in Logan, Cache County, Utah (document 65). Less than a year later, Robert Crookston wrote an affidavit affirming his witness of the mantle event (document 15). In 1916, Eliza Ann Haven Westover recorded her testimony in a letter to her son (document 29). The last documented and formally witnessed testimony of the mantle experience by a living participant appeared in 1925 by Jacob Jones (document 40).

Bishop George Romney twice testified publicly seventy-five years after Joseph's death. Romney was only thirteen when he witnessed the mantle event. At age eighty-eight, he delivered his testimony in the Ensign Ward in Salt Lake City on June 22, 1919. The message was so powerful that a listener immediately recorded his words for posterity:

I shall never forget in this world or in the world to come the scene as Brigham Young arose. . . . When Brigham got up the mantle of Joseph Smith fell upon him. It was Joseph's voice; it was Joseph's appearance, and I testify to you, if I never again do so on this earth,

in the presence of God and angels, that this is verily the truth. This is true—that the mantle of Joseph did fall upon Brigham Young and the people knew it. (document 55B)

With equal power, Bishop Romney also bore his testimony before the Swedish Saints in Salt Lake City on December 17, 1919. It was published for the missionaries of the Church in the *Liahona, the Elders' Journal* on April 13, 1920 (document 55A).

Conclusion

At least ninety-five people have declared, through their own or others' records, that Brigham Young took on the appearance, voice, and/or mannerisms of the Prophet Joseph Smith. When we include the records that state without further explanation that “the mantle fell on Brigham,” we can increase the number of these testimonies. These records are impressive evidence that must be weighed carefully. The introduction to the legal text *Eyewitness Testimony: Civil and Criminal* explains the value of eyewitness testimony: “Lawyers can neither afford to exclude eyewitness testimony legally nor ignore it. Sometimes it is the only evidence available, and *it is often correct.*”⁷⁸

In his book *In Search of Stones*, psychiatrist M. Scott Peck states, “One of the tests of proof, of reality, is termed ‘consensual validation,’ . . . [that is,] whenever two or more very different people make exactly the same extraordinary assessment of a phenomenon, then . . . it needs to be taken seriously.”⁷⁹

To those who accept with little question the visions and spiritual experiences of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his associates, it is also plausible that a large body of Saints could witness a miraculous manifestation. At meetings of the School of the Prophets and gatherings at the time of the Kirtland Temple dedication, numbers of Saints

78. Elizabeth F. Loftus and James M. Doyle, *Eyewitness Testimony: Civil and Criminal*, 2d ed. (Charlottesville, Va.: Michie Company Law Publishers, 1992), 8; italics added.

79. M. Scott Peck, “Holiness,” in *In Search of Stones: A Pilgrimage of Faith, Reason, and Discovery* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 75.

experienced group manifestations.⁸⁰ Nancy Alexander Tracy reported that during the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in 1836, many witnessed the appearance of heavenly beings.⁸¹ As with the mantle experience, not all the Saints present reported having seen these visions,⁸² nor did everyone who was reported by others to have seen a vision actually record the experience themselves. Those to whom visions have been opened may well report seeing different things, as was the case with the personal descriptions of a manifestation shared in Hawaii by a group of Saints that included David O. McKay.⁸³

In spite of the silence of some in regard to the events of August 8, the time lapse between the event and the written expression of others, and differences in detail or similarities in wording of the written accounts, the simple fact remains that many Saints who attended that conference in the grove behind the Nauvoo Temple testified that they saw, heard, and/or felt a manifestation that helped determine or confirm the direction for the rest of their lives and sustain a willingness to sacrifice everything.

80. Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 264–68, 284–309. See also Karl Ricks Anderson, *Joseph Smith's Kirtland: Eyewitness Accounts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 169–91.

81. Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 300; see generally Steven C. Harper, “A Pentecost and Endowment Indeed’: Six Eyewitness Accounts of the Kirtland Temple Experience,” herein.

82. Ezra T. Benson makes no claim to having had a mantle vision personally but mentions and apparently accepts the experience of others (see note 48). A number of Saints, whose reminiscent accounts have been located, were careful to record that they were at the meeting on August 8 but make no specific reference to a transfiguration. See the following accounts: (1) Lucy Diantha Morley Allen, “Joseph Smith, the Prophet,” *Young Woman's Journal* 17 (December 1906): 537, available on “Mormon Publications: 19th and 20th Centuries,” *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/YWJ/id/12922> (2) Gilbert Belnap, Autobiography, typescript, 37, Perry Special Collections; and (3) David E. Fullmer, “A Brief Sketch of the Life of David E. Fullmer and His Father Peter Fullmer,” holograph, 40, Church History Library, available on *Church History Library*, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE2388664, image 17.

83. Lavina Fielding Anderson, “Prayer under a Pepper Tree: Sixteen Accounts of a Spiritual Manifestation,” *BYU Studies* 33, no. 1 (1993): 73–74.

In the afternoon session of the August 8 conference, Sidney Rigdon chose W. W. Phelps to speak for him. Phelps was an inadvisable choice, because he spoke supporting Brigham Young.⁸⁴ Phelps was obviously affected by the spirit of that session. Long before he died in 1878, Phelps penned in verse and music his witness of the mantle experience:

Up, up! ye royal priesthood holders,—
Joseph's robe's on Brigham's shoulders,—
Clear the way; clear the way; clear the way,—
Israel reigns.⁸⁵

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84. See "History, 1838–1856, Volume F-1," 300–304; *History of the Church*, 7:237–38; Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 165; and Van Wagoner, "Making of a Mormon Myth," 12.

85. W. W. Phelps to Brigham Young, January 1, 1862, holograph, Church History Library, available on *Church History Library*, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE3976324, image 28.

accounts. Testimonies appearing in this project were those I was able to document. Many descendants suggested ancestor names for this project, but my research discovered their testimonies were part of an oral family tradition and not formally recorded. I am grateful for all suggestions. Any readers aware of documented testimonies of the mantle experience that are not included in this collection are invited to contact BYU Studies by email at byu_studies@byu.edu.

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