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# *The Peter Whitmer Log Home: Cradle of Mormonism*

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Orson Pratt joined the Church on his birthday, September 19, 1830. He was baptized by his brother, Parley P. Pratt, in Old Canaan, Columbia County, New York. Orson came to see the Prophet Joseph Smith at the Peter Whitmer log home in western New York the following month of October and later reflected: “It was a very interesting period of my life, when but nineteen years of age, to visit the place where this Church was organized—the room of old father Whitmer—where the Lord spoke to His servant Joseph and others, as printed in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. In that same room a revelation, through the prophet Joseph, was given to me, November 4th, 1830, which is also printed [D&C 34]. That house will, no doubt, be celebrated for ages to come, as the one chosen by the Lord in which to make known the first elements of the organization of His Kingdom in the latter days.”<sup>1</sup> Let’s review some key events surrounding the Whitmer home and the organizational meeting of the restored Church that occurred at that celebrated dwelling place.

### **The Whitmer Log Home**

The Whitmer log home was a house of refuge for Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in troubled times. While yet in Harmony, Pennsylvania, they had been the recipients of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods at the hands of heavenly ministrants during the month of May 1829.<sup>2</sup> Their engagement in the translation of the Book of Mormon was well known locally and had long stirred the ire of the religious community. The Prophet spoke of “the spirit of persecution” that had already been “manifested in the neighborhood.” He further stated, “We had been threatened with being mobbed, from time to time, and this too by professors of religion.”<sup>3</sup> One of the principal antagonists proved to be Emma Hale’s own uncle, Elder Nathaniel Lewis, a local preacher in the Methodist faith, who would later declare that “Joseph Smith Jr. is not a man of truth and veracity” and that “his general character in this part of the country, is that of an impostor, hypocrite and liar.”<sup>4</sup> Mother Lucy Smith described just how serious the situation had become for her son when she affirmed that “an evil-designing people were seeking to take away his (Joseph’s) life, in order to prevent the work of God from going forth to the world.”<sup>5</sup>

Because of this desperate situation, Joseph and Oliver temporarily suspended their work of translating the Book of Mormon, instead seeking and obtaining sanctuary at the Peter Whitmer home in Fayette, New York. David Whitmer came down to Harmony and provided transportation back to the farm in late May. He reported that the translation process was begun anew at his father’s and “occupied about one month, that is from June 1st to July 1st, 1829,” the point of completion.<sup>6</sup> The Prophet found “Mr[.] Whitmer’s family very anxious concerning the work, and very friendly towards ourselves.”<sup>7</sup> David, John, and Peter Whitmer Jr. expressed their desire to know what duties the Lord had in store for them in the unfolding state of events. Joseph made inquiry through the Urim and Thummim, and these men became the recipients of a series of revelations giving them the requested guidance.<sup>8</sup> The Whitmer log home became a temple of revelation and learning in that formative period.

### **Witnesses and Scribes**

As the work proceeded, it was determined that three special witnesses of the plates would be chosen. Those identified by revelation—Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris (D&C 17)—accompanied Joseph Smith

as they retired to a secluded location. David remembered that June day with some detail. He affirmed: “I was plowing in the field one morning and Joseph and Oliver came along with a revelation stating that I was to be one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon. I got over the fence and we went out into the woods near by, and sat down on a log and talked a while. We then kneeled down and Joseph prayed.”<sup>9</sup> Being even more specific, he said that they went to a place “cleared of underbrush, at a point equally distant between two public highways.”<sup>10</sup> This would suggest that they went out from the house in an easterly direction, placing them at a point bracketed between the intersection of the Aunkst Road to the south and the Miller Road on the east—the only “two public highways” immediately adjacent to the Whitmer farm. Here they viewed the golden plates and other artifacts as presented by the angel Moroni. David recalled “the voice of God spoke out of heaven saying that the Book was true and the translation correct.”<sup>11</sup>

Mother and Father Smith were at the Whitmer home when the witnesses returned. Lucy said that Joseph exclaimed, “Father, mother, you do not know how happy I am; the Lord has now caused the plates to be shown to three more besides myself. They have seen an angel, who has testified to them and they will have to bear witness of the truth of what I have said.” Lucy explained that she and Joseph Sr. returned to Palmyra the following day as “a cheerful, happy company” and were followed a few days later by Joseph, Oliver, and the Whitmers. There the male members retired to a wooded place “where the family was in the habit of offering up their secret devotions to God.” It had been revealed to the Prophet that eight additional witnesses were also to bear record—Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer Jr., John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith Sr., Hyrum Smith, and Samuel H. Smith. They were shown the golden plates as exhibited by Joseph (without the angel being present) and were allowed to handle them.<sup>12</sup> The Whitmer and Smith families were indelibly linked to the unfolding of the Restoration: David Whitmer had become one of the Three Witnesses, and Christian, Jacob, Peter Jr., John, and Hiram Page, a brother-in-law, represented five of the Eight Witnesses.

Of interest is also the report, given in considerable detail, that yet another Whitmer family member, Mary Musselman Whitmer, was likewise a witness of the plates. Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith conducted an interview with David Whitmer in which he told them of his return trip from Harmony to Fayette in the spring of 1829 and of his mother’s experience with the angel and the plates. David explained:

When I was returning to Fayette with Joseph and Oliver all of us riding in the wagon, Oliver and I on an old fashioned wooden spring seat and Joseph behind us, while traveling in a clear open place, a very pleasant, nice-looking old man suddenly appeared by the side of our wagon who saluted us with, "good morning, it is very warm," at the same time wiping his face or forehead with his hand. We returned the salutation, and by a sign from Joseph I invited him to ride if he was going our way. But he said very pleasantly, "No, I am going to Cumorah." This name was something new to me, I did not know what Cumorah meant. We all gazed at him and at each other, and as I looked around enquiringly of Joseph the old man instantly disappeared, so that I did not see him again. . . . [I] remember that he had on his back a sort of knapsack with something in, shaped like a book. It was the messenger who had the plates, who had taken them from Joseph just prior to our starting from Harmony. Soon after our arrival home, I saw something which led me to the belief that the plates were placed or concealed in my father's barn. I frankly asked Joseph if my supposition was right, and he told me it was. Sometime after this, my mother was going to milk the cows, when she was met out near the yard by the same old man (judging by her description of him) who said to her, "You have been very faithful and diligent in your labors, but you are tired because of the increase of your toil, it is proper therefore that you should receive a witness that your faith may be strengthened." Thereupon he showed her the plates. My father and mother had a large family of their own, the addition to it therefore of Joseph his wife Emma and Oliver very greatly increased the toil and anxiety of my mother. And although she had never complained she had sometimes felt that her labor was too much, or at least she was perhaps beginning to feel so. This circumstance, however, completely removed all such feelings, and nerved her up for her increased responsibilities.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to this particular statement, David's recorded testimony of the event was given a number of times, each consistently bearing witness of the essential elements that his mother had seen the angel and the plates.<sup>14</sup> Andrew Jenson also reported an interview which he and Edward Stevenson conducted with John C. Whitmer, a grandson of Mary Musselman Whitmer and son of Jacob Whitmer, wherein John asserted, "I have heard my grandmother (Mary M. Whitmer) say on several occasions that she was shown the plates of the Book of Mormon by an holy angel, whom she always called Brother Nephi. (She undoubtedly refers to Moroni, the angel who had the plates in charge.)"<sup>15</sup> Mary's witness of this occasion was well known in the Whitmer family. Based on David Whitmer's testimony, various historians have cited the event in context with the occurrences of that day.<sup>16</sup> The Whitmers provided critical leadership and support to the infant Church. John Whitmer would be called as Church historian and recorder; David Whitmer later served as branch president in Jackson County at the Whitmer settlement; David also presided over the high councils in Clay and Caldwell

counties, while John served as his counselor; and Christian and Jacob became high councilors in Clay County.<sup>17</sup>

It was during the continuation of the translation in June 1829 that Joseph and Oliver retired to the chamber of Father and Mother Whitmer's home and called upon the Lord for guidance relative to their exercise of the Melchizedek Priesthood keys which they had heretofore received on the Susquehanna, but which had been momentarily kept under restraint as they awaited the Lord's command to organize. Joseph said that while they were in the attitude of fervent prayer,

The word of the Lord came unto us in the Chamber, commanding us, that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ, and that he also should ordain me to the same office, and that after having been thus ordained, we should ~~th~~ proceed to ordain others to the same office, according as it should be made known unto us, from time to time, ~~We~~ also commanding us, that as soon as practicable we should call together all those who had already been baptized by us, to bless bread, and break it with them, also to take wine, bless it, and drink it with them doing all these things in the name of the Lord, but to defer our own ordination until we had called ~~the Chur~~ together our brethren and had their sanction, and been accepted by them as their teachers, after which we were commanded to proceed to ordain each other and ~~then~~ call out such men as the spirit should dictate unto us, and ordain them, and then attend to the laying on of hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost.<sup>18</sup>

Though deferred for the present, that pronouncement would become the exact prototype or pattern which they would use to exercise their existing priesthood to officially organize the Church when commanded to do so on April 6, 1830. It is the writer's belief that this revelation in the Whitmer chamber did not confer new priesthood powers by "voice command" that were necessary to organize the Church, but rather "the word of the Lord" outlined the steps which would be carried out by Joseph and Oliver and the other organizers when directed to do so some ten months later on April 6th. They already had the Melchizedek Priesthood and the keys of the apostleship which had previously been bestowed upon them by Peter, James, and John while yet on the Susquehanna. Hiram Page, son-in-law of Peter Whitmer Sr., would be present on the day of organization and later inform William E. McLellin that "Peter, James, and John" had come and bestowed the Holy Priesthood "before the 6th of April 1830."<sup>19</sup> Orson Pratt, who first met the Prophet at the Whitmer log home in October 1830, was familiar with the organizational process. He taught:

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery sought after this higher authority, and the Lord gave it to them, before the rise of the Church, sending to them Peter, James and John. What for? To bestow upon them the Apostleship. . . . Now, who would be better qualified to administer the sacred office of the Apostleship than the three men who held it while they were here on the earth? It has to be a man who holds authority in heaven that can bestow it here on the earth; and such men were Peter, James and John, who restored that authority to earth in our day, by bestowing it upon Joseph Smith. When this authority was restored, the Church was organized on the 6th day of April 1830.<sup>20</sup>

### **Printing of the Book of Mormon**

With the translation of the Book of Mormon nearly finished, the necessity of acquiring a copyright on the volume became more apparent. Here the initial decision was made to acquire the copyright. An application was subsequently submitted to Richard Ray Lansing, clerk of the Northern District Court, who had his home and office in Utica, New York.<sup>21</sup> Lansing entered the title as a matter of record on June 11, 1829, and later forwarded the document to the US Patent Office in Washington, DC.<sup>22</sup>

The decision to make application to Egbert B. Grandin to print the Book of Mormon originated at Fayette, but oversight of the printing process itself soon moved to the Joseph Smith Sr. log home at Palmyra as a matter of convenience. John H. Gilbert stated that E. B. Grandin began printing the book at Palmyra about mid-August 1829. Martin Harris stood as surety for the publication under a mortgage agreement with Grandin dated August 25, 1829.<sup>23</sup> Joseph Smith remained in Palmyra through September 1829. Assured that the details of publication had been arranged, he returned to Emma and his Harmony homestead in Pennsylvania, where he corresponded with Oliver and notified him that he had arrived home safely on October 4, 1829.<sup>24</sup>

### **Persecution**

While Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, and Martin Harris were shepherding the printing of the Book of Mormon in Palmyra, they had to face a serious boycott levied against its publication by sectarian members of that community. Lucy Smith said that the opposition had formed a committee that resolved “never to purchase one of our books, when they should be printed.”<sup>25</sup> In this same period, the Whitmer log home became a bastion against sectarian encroachment in Seneca County. Following publication of the Book of Mormon, a boycott similar to that in Palmyra was organized in Seneca County



by the Reverend Diedrich Willers (1798–1883) of the German Reformed Church. This was the church to which members of the Whitmer family belonged before their conversion to Mormonism. Reverend Willers, who first entered his pastorate with the Christ Reformed Congregation at Bearytown (the hamlet of Fayette) in April 1821 and continued without interruption until January 1, 1882, was one of several ministers with whom the Whitmers worshipped during their sojourn in New York.<sup>26</sup> His correspondence is on file at the Waterloo Historical Society.

Peter Whitmer Sr. had brought his family to Fayette from the Harrisburg–York, Pennsylvania, area in about 1809. The Whitmers had attended services at “Christ’s Church” in Bearytown, six miles distant, and also at the log house of worship, Zion’s Church, which stood just one and one-half miles south of the Whitmer home. It later burned to the ground on February 7, 1835, and was replaced with a two-story brick structure, the Jerusalem Church.<sup>27</sup> Today no building remains on the site. Only an array of headstones with German names marks the place in the old churchyard. Reverend Willers called on Peter Whitmer Sr. at his home in June 1830 and attempted “to expose the clumsy deception”—all to no avail; Peter and his family remained resolute. An estimated one hundred converts had swelled the Mormon ranks in the area. Willers alerted his contemporaries in York to the situation: “Since last year all of the neighboring congregations [German Reformed and Lutheran] have been frequently and earnestly warned to beware of this so-called Golden Book and not to buy any. . . . Already in this region more have been sold than one would have expected, and the unbelieving and godless vermin have now gone to Pennsylvania in order to scatter their books among the public.”<sup>28</sup>

Willers further emphasized his concern by calling upon his fellow ministers to publish abroad a warning cry against the heretical doctrines being taught within the Book of Mormon, stating, “And so I am, your brother, commissioned by the Zion Congregation, imploring you to warn with utmost urgency the residents of the Union, wherever our Magazine of the Reformed Church is read, against these new doctrines and against the purchase of these books.”<sup>29</sup> Reverend Willers gave unyielding service in the Reformed Church for over sixty years. During a succession of years he preached for eight German congregations—Christ Church in Bearytown (Fayette), Zion’s/Jerusalem Church in Fayette Township, Seneca in Seneca Falls, Lyons in Wayne County, Dansville in Livingston County, Scipio in Cayuga County, Lansing in Tompkins County, and Salmon Creek in Tompkins County.<sup>30</sup> It is tempting

to criticize anyone who contends against the Prophet, not always considering a legion of good works done in the ministry and perhaps not empathizing with their earnest desires to protect the flock. Reverend Willers, however, is revered locally for his steadfastness and exceptional service to mankind. He is buried in the Burgh Cemetery on the Yellow Tavern Road, three miles southeast of the Whitmer home.

### **Announcement of the Plan to Organize the Church**

The Prophet rode up to Palmyra from his Harmony home with Joseph Knight Sr. to be present for the public release of the Book of Mormon at the E. B. Grandin Book Store on March 26, 1830. Knight said, “When we was on our way he [Joseph] told me that there must be a Church formed But did not tell when.” Knight emphatically noted this circumstance a second time, saying, “I stayed a few Days [in Palmyra] wa[i]ting for some Books to be Bound. Joseph said there must Be a Church Biltup.”<sup>31</sup> The anticipated organization occurred at the Peter Whitmer farm just eleven days after the release of the Book of Mormon on Main Street in Palmyra. Joseph Smith reported receiving a revelation prescribing the specific day of organization. In a preface to this revelation, he declared:

We still continued to bear testimony and preach to such as would hear as far as we had opportunity. And <We> made known also to those [-] who had already been baptized, that we had received commandment to organize the Church [see D&C 20; see also D&C 21], and accordingly <we> met to gether, <(being about 30 <six> in number) besides a number who were believing – met with us> on Tuesday the Sixth day of Aprile in the year of our A.D. A thousand E One thousand, Eight hundred and [“&” written over by “and”] thirty, and proceeded, as follows, at the house of the above mentioned Mr. Whitmer.<sup>32</sup>

The six organizers were identified as Joseph Smith Jr., Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, Peter Whitmer Jr., Samuel H. Smith, and David Whitmer.<sup>33</sup> Numbers of other persons were present on that occasion. In an interview with Edward Stevenson, David Whitmer stated, “On the 6th of April, 1830, 6 elders were at Peter Whitmer’s, David’s father’s 2 rooms were filled with members—about 20 from Colesville, 15 from Manchester Church and 20 from Father Whitmers. About 50 members & the 6 Elders were present.”<sup>34</sup> The Whitmer households alone had fifteen people who either lived on the farm or nearby, verifying the statement that there were twenty who were “round about my father’s place.” Three of the fifteen were infants, however, and may not have

been numbered with those who crowded into the two rooms mentioned. There were certainly other children—if not from the Whitmer households, maybe from among the other attendees. Elizabeth Ann Whitmer, daughter of Peter Sr., was fourteen and undoubtedly attended. One individual, David Lewis, professed to be there, but he gave false testimony.<sup>35</sup>

### Day of Organization (April 6, 1830)

The Church was organized on the designated day. Joseph Knight Sr. remembered that those in attendance “all kneld down and prayed and Joseph gave them instructions how to Bild up the Church and exorted them to Be faithfull in all things for this is the work of God.”<sup>36</sup> The Prophet himself gave the most comprehensive statement of that day’s extended proceedings:

Having opened the meeting by solemn prayer to our Heavenly Father <and the meeting Ch brethren & Sisters having by unanimous vote, accepted us as &c> I proceeded to lay my hands upon Oliver Cowdery—and ordained him an Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [this title is obviously inserted as the result of the later name change in 1838; see D&C 115], after which he ordained me also to the office of an Elder of said Church. We then took bread, blessed it, & brake it with them, also wine, blessed it, and drank it with them. We then laid our hands on each individual member of the Church present, to confirm them members of the Church of Jesus Christ, and that they might receive the Holy Ghost, when immediately the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the whole community us all in a miraculous manner <to a greater or less degree.> [Thirteen lines of strikethrough sentences occur at this point before continuing on with the corrected text.] . . .

We afterwards called out and ordained Several <some others> of the brethren to the respective offices of the Priesthood, according as the Spirit made manifest unto us. <Revelation> As may reasonably <be> expected, such scenes as these were calculated, to inspire our hearts with Joy unspeakable, at the same time that we felt ourselves almost over whelmed, with awe and reverence for that Almighty Being, by whose grace we had been called to be instrumental in bringing about for the Children of men, the enjoyment of such glorious blessings, as were now at this time poured out upon us. . . .

The Prophet concluded his concise recitation of the events occurring at the organizational meeting by stating:

After a considerable time spent in such <a> happy manner, we dismissed, with the pleasing knowledge, that we now individually were members of—and had been acknowledged of God, The organized Church of Jesus Christ, organized in accordance with commandments and revelations given by him to ourselves, in these last days; as well as according to the order of the Church of Christ, as found recorded in the New Testament.<sup>37</sup>

David Whitmer underscored the effort to incorporate their religious society according to the order of law, explaining additional developments necessitating that they do so:

The reason why we met on that day was this; the world had been telling us that we were not a regularly organized church, and we had no right to officiate in the ordinances of marriage, hold church property, etc., and that we should organize according to the laws of the land. On that account we met at my father's house in Fayette, N.Y., on April 6, 1830, to attend to the matter of organizing according to the laws of the land.<sup>38</sup>

I believe that the particular “laws of the land” referred to by David Whitmer and prescribed organization “agreeable to the laws of our country” found in Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 have reference to an attempt on the part of the Prophet and the other organizers to meet the legal requirements enumerated by the New York State Legislature titled “An Act to provide for the Incorporation of Religious Societies,” and passed on April 5, 1813. The writer’s efforts to find the elusive document which may have been executed by the brethren on that occasion and references to the applicable sections of that law are summated herein.<sup>39</sup>

It would also be important for the reader to be aware and examine the legalities and merits of an alternative option to this 1813 act that was likewise available to the Church at that time. David Keith Stott has recently developed a thesis in which he proposes that Church leaders pursue the legalities of “an unincorporated religious society” at that time rather than later burdening themselves with certain encumbrances of an incorporated society.<sup>40</sup>

### **Site of Missionary Activity and Conferences**

The Whitmer home became the immediate nerve center of an expanded missionary thrust following the organization. From there, Oliver Cowdery preached the first sermon of the new church just five days after April 6 and with marked success. Baptisms on that occasion include Hiram Page, Katharine Page, Christian Whitmer, Anne Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, & Elizabeth Whitmer. One week later, April 18, Joseph Smith asserted that the following persons were also baptized: Peter Whitmer Sr., Mary Whitmer, William Jolly, Elizabeth Jolly, Vincent Jolly, Richard B. [Ziba] Peterson, and Elizabeth Ann Whitmer—all by Oliver Cowdery.<sup>41</sup> Numbers of the Jolly family lived just a matter of a few hundred yards southeast from the Whitmers at the crossroads of the Aunkst and Miller Roads. That corner cluster was called “Jolly

Town.” In the latter part of April 1830, Joseph, David, and Oliver journeyed to Colesville, New York, where the extended family of Joseph Knight Sr. was very successfully proselytized. Samuel Smith, brother of the Prophet, was directed to go down the Livonia turnpike with a knapsack filled with copies of the Book of Mormon. In this effort he performed a succession of three missions, which took him into Ontario, Monroe, and Livingston Counties.<sup>42</sup>

The first conference of the new organization took place at the Whitmer home on June 9, 1830. The Articles and Covenants (D&C 20) were read and received “by unanimous voice of the whole congregation.” Ordinations were performed and licenses received.

Peter Whitmer’s Fayette log home again became a place of refuge for the Prophet Joseph and Emma in August 1830. Nathaniel Lewis, “a man of the Methodist persuasion, who professed to be a minister of God,” once again created a climate of persecution. The mob at Harmony stepped up their threats and imprecations against the Smith household. Joseph reported, “Mr Whitmer having heard of the persecutions which had been got up against us at Harmony, Penn, had invited <us> to go and live with him.” Newel Knight brought his wagon from Colesville and drove them to Fayette.<sup>43</sup>

The second conference of the Church was also held at the farm on September 26, 1830. In the order of business, there was “singing and prayer



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The Whitmer log home was the site of the organization of the Church.

in behalf of Br. Oliver Cowdery & Peter Whitmer Jr., who were previously appointed to go to the Lamanites.”<sup>44</sup> Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson, in an October revelation, were also called to accompany Oliver and Peter (D&C 32).

As a direct result of the labors of those missionaries, while passing through the greater Kirtland, Ohio area, Sidney Rigdon of Mentor and Edward Partridge of Painesville determined to travel to western New York to meet the Prophet. Sidney had already been baptized, but Edward came as an investigator. They arrived at the home of Joseph Smith Sr. in Seneca Falls Township at a small unincorporated settlement known as “The Kingdom,” December 10, 1830.<sup>45</sup> The Prophet was there at his parent’s home on the Seneca River, addressing an assembly of family members and friends. After hearing Joseph’s discourse, Partridge was touched by the Spirit and asked for immediate baptism. As it was late, the Prophet suggested they wait until the next day. On December 11, they waded into the freezing waters of the Seneca River, and Joseph immersed the future bishop of the Church.<sup>46</sup>

By revelation the Lord called Sidney Rigdon as scribe for Joseph in making a translation of the Bible (see D&C 35:20–21). A revelation commanded the members of the New York church to assemble in Ohio (D&C 37). Then a revelation instructed Joseph and Sidney to preach the gospel and strengthen the Church before their departure. They preached to the Saints of Broome and Chenango Counties. Emily Coburn said that Rigdon’s sermons were “acknowledged by all to be the best ever preached in that vicinity.”<sup>47</sup> Rigdon preached in the Young Men’s Association room in Thayer and Grandin’s Exchange Row on East Main Street Palmyra. He also sermonized at the courthouse in Canandaigua and at the home of Ezra Thayer just outside of Canandaigua. Addresses were given to the public and Saints alike at Fayette, and Rigdon preached at the courthouse in Waterloo just before his departure for Ohio on January 24, 1831. They actively carried out the revelation to the letter.<sup>48</sup>

The third and last conference of the Church at the Whitmer farm took place on January 2, 1831. There the Saints collectively heard the first call to gather in this dispensation: “Go to the Ohio; and there I will give unto you my law; and there you shall be endowed with power from on high” (D&C 38:32). In keeping with the commandments received, Joseph and Emma left the Whitmer log home in the latter part of January and proceeded to Kirtland in a sleigh driven by Joseph Knight Sr., arriving at the Newel K. Whitney store about February 1 [on February 4], 1831.<sup>49</sup>

### Departure from the Home

Whitmer family members bade good-bye to their Fayette log homestead on May 3–4, 1831. They congregated with others of the Fayette Branch near the Joseph Smith Sr. home on the Cayuga-Seneca Canal (Seneca River) in Seneca Falls Township. Some eighty in number, under the direction of Lucy Mack Smith, boarded a canal boat for a series of water passages to Kirtland, Ohio. Traveling east to Cayuga Bridge on the Cayuga-Seneca Canal, they sailed north by that same canal through the Montezuma Swamp, where they connected with the Erie Canal. Journeying west to Buffalo on “Clinton’s Big Ditch,” the company was momentarily delayed by ice in Buffalo Harbor. While waiting for clearance, they boarded the steamboat *Niagara* commanded by a Captain Blake. In what is described as a miracle, they were suddenly able to clear the harbor on May 8, 1831.<sup>50</sup> Sailing on Lake Erie, the company unexpectedly encountered a severe storm and had to put in at a Canadian port. When the waters settled, they sailed across Erie to the American side and made their way west to Fairport Harbor, Ohio. It was then just ten miles to Kirtland by wagon. The waterways had served them well.

### Modern-Day Site Location and Reconstruction of House

In 1969, Elder Mark E. Petersen of the Quorum of the Twelve and Elder Marion D. Hanks, Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve, were working closely with the Church Information Service to direct an extensive examination of the buildings on the Peter Whitmer Sr. farm. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying the precise location of the Whitmer log home and the architectural dimensions of its construction as far as they could be determined. The project was assisted by persons with expertise in the fields of history, archaeology, and architecture.<sup>51</sup>

Richard Lloyd Anderson, professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, was asked by Elder Hanks to make a thorough historical survey, paying special attention to the exact placement of the Whitmer home in the critical period of the Restoration, 1829–30. This knowledge was pertinent to a reliable historical account being delivered by the missionaries to visitors at the John Deshler home, which served as the visitors’ center at that time. Likewise, it was important for the projected development of physical facilities at the site in the future. The Brethren held a perceptive view of the years ahead and the preservation for future generations of the place where all

the elements of the organization of the restored Church came together on April 6, 1830.

Dr. Anderson had amassed extensive files on the Whitmer family, and had written and lectured on their experience. His collective works were an indispensable resource for the project. Being familiar with my graduate program and forthcoming study of Mormon origins on site in New York, Richard Anderson suggested to Elder Hanks that I be added to the team as a field representative on the ground in Seneca County. Elder Hanks was most agreeable and went out of his way to secure the use of the existing cobblestone home on the Martin Harris farm in Palmyra for the use of the Porter family, 1969–70.

Before I went east, Dr. Anderson and I conducted interviews of persons who had spent significant time on the Whitmer farm, either as tenant farmers or missionaries. We interviewed Mildred Hall and her husband, Wilford A. Hall, who were missionaries at the farm in 1958 and 1959. They had taken a particular interest in its history. I also interviewed Owen T. Howard, caretaker from 1941 to 1946, and William Lee Powell, tenant farmer from 1946 to 1952. Dr. Anderson and I likewise interviewed historian Carter E. Grant, who had previously made a personal examination of the site of the Whitmer log home.<sup>52</sup>

When my family and I arrived in Palmyra, we occupied the 1849 washed lakeshore cobblestone home of William Chapman. The one-and-one-half-story white frame home built by Martin Harris had burned down in 1849, and the two-story cobblestone was raised by Chapman during 1849–50. The Chapmans stayed in an adjacent corncrib while their home was being built.<sup>53</sup> This later home had often been mistakenly cast as the actual home of Martin Harris.

The basic plan of Elder Hanks and Dr. Anderson was to secure the needed documentation on the exact site of the Whitmer home and then bring in an archaeological crew from Brigham Young University to verify the historical findings. A man by the name of John Deshler occupied the farm as shown in a May 16, 1831, indenture. Years later there were those who strongly advocated that the existing Deshler home—an L-shaped, Greek Revival structure—was merely the old Whitmer log home, sided over and expanded from the story and one-half core. In 1969, the Church decided to extend a new wing that would run east from the center of the old Deshler home. It was to contain a diorama depicting the day of organization of the Church, complete with six mannequins surrounding a table. At the farm Clyde Larsen, the Church contractor who built the extension, said that he began the expansion of the east



wing by cutting out two windows from the east wall of the central structure and making them into doors. Brother Larsen affirmed that there were no logs inside the walls. Instead, they were constructed of sawed lumber with a lath and plaster facing. The building was all frame construction.<sup>54</sup> Further investigation showed that the home was actually built between 1845 and 1850.

To assist us in our search for the exact location of the Whitmer log home, we were materially aided by onsite interviews with persons familiar with the farm. Elder Hanks and Dr. Anderson arranged for William Lee Powell of Roy, Utah, to fly into the airport at Rochester. He had been the tenant farmer on the Whitmer acreage from May 1, 1946, to November 1, 1952. On September 2, 1969, Dr. Dale L. Berge of the BYU Anthropology Department (who had just come from a dig at Nauvoo for Nauvoo Restoration, Inc.), along with Robert Stevens, president of the Cumorah Mission, and I met Brother Powell at the Whitmer farm. Brother Powell explained that as he and his sons were harvesting their hay and pushing it with bull rakes down a south lane from the north field, they would then swing east through the double doors of the barn and deposit their load. After a couple of seasons of haying, they began to uncover a rectangular trough in the earth that had once been used to hold a laid-rock foundation for a dwelling on the west side of the barn. Brother Powell got his tape measure and found the rectangle to be twenty feet by thirty feet. He realized the implications of their discovery as John D. Giles, editor of the *Improvement Era*, had visited the farm and pointed out to him the same site. Giles thought it to be the spot where the Whitmer home stood. He in turn had received his information from Elder Rulon S. Wells of the Seventy, who took Brother Giles to the Whitmer farm and explained to him that in 1907 he, Wells, had visited the site and that some of the logs from the Whitmer home were still visible at that same place. Brother Powell told visiting authorities and others of his find and even wrote Salt Lake, but nothing came of it.

Since the foundation stones were in the way of their farming operation, Powell finally gathered up those that were visible and deposited them in a pile to the north. As time went by, other farmers plowed over the remaining site and the stones were largely lost to view, as were the stones piled to the north. Fortunately, however, Brother Powell had taken a careful measurement from the barn doors to the foundation at that time. Though the large barn had since been torn down, Powell was able to reconstruct the location of the double doors from the base of the old silo, which still remained where

the northwest corner of the barn had been. Ascertaining the placement of the doors further south, he then measured out thirty-two feet to the west and said to Dale, President Stevens, and me, “This is the spot where the foundation was found.” The corners of the twenty-by-thirty-foot log home were then roughly calculated, leaving their exact location to be defined by the dig itself.

Dr. Berge had brought his digging crew with him from Nauvoo—John Call, BYU archaeology student, and William K. Johnson, a volunteer from Weber State College, Ogden, Utah. On September 3, 1969, they dug a test trench that looked promising. Then they established their base point, staked out plots, and began their excavating. The artifacts were right there. The results of their dig have been meticulously recorded by Dr. Berge. This time when the remaining stones from the foundation troughs were removed, each was placed in a pile. When the excavating was completed, a hole was dug by a backhoe operated by Clyde Larsen. The stones were then buried so they would not get away again. Ten years later someone from the church called me and asked, “Where did you bury those stones?” It was 1979 or 1980, and the Church was reconstructing the Whitmer log home in 1979–80. I told the caller, “Dig four feet ESE of the SE corner post of the archaeological dig.” Some few of the stones were then cemented into the foundation of the new



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Dale Berge and his crew, John Call (center) and William Johnson (right), dig the initial test trench at the Whitmer farm.

home. So there is a touch of the old in the construction. As a last gesture, Clyde Larsen was invited to put in four metal posts, painted red, to mark the defined corners of the log home.

The project directors had determined the importance of having an architect visit Seneca County with an eye toward producing plans for the construction of a log home from the 1820s. In the latter part of September 1969, Steven Baird, a historical architect for Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., was directed to join Dale Berge and me in New York. John Genung, historian for the Waterloo Library and Historical Society, was familiar with the existence of the oldest log house still standing in Seneca County—the 1836 Tillinghast log home in Romulus Township. Mr. Genung made arrangements with Mrs. Tillinghast to see the place, and on September 22, 1969, we all accompanied him to the site. Providentially the building was still intact (winter snows would soon cave the roof in, however). This was a beautiful, split-garret log house with all the right features intact. Steve Baird was in his element as he took innumerable measurements and photographs from top to bottom of the one-and-one-half story structure. His calculations would prove invaluable down the line as a prototype of a reconstructed log home.

Another important follow-up interview was arranged by Dr. Anderson in April 1970. He invited Samuel L. Ferguson of Shiprock, New Mexico, to meet with me at the Whitmer farm. Brother Ferguson had been the Palmyra Branch president in 1928. Our connecting at the farm now put in motion



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Samuel Ferguson identifies the original homesite.

a most valuable oral history link in identifying the precise location of the log home. Standing on site, Brother Ferguson explained to me a unique sequence of events. He said that on February 12, 1928, Andrew Jenson, assistant Church historian, had come out from Utah to visit the Whitmer farm. Brother Jenson had invited both Willard W. Bean and himself to accompany him to Fayette.

At the farm Brother Jenson explained to Brothers Ferguson and Bean that on October 2, 1888, he had previously been at that site with Edward Stevenson and Joseph S. Black of Utah. There they met Chester Reed, who had leased the farm. Chester had been born in Fayette in 1836. His father, John Reed, was a resident of Fayette for seventy-five years. Chester grew up with a tradition of “the Mormon farm.” His father had shown him the location of the Whitmer home, still marked by the vestige of the old log house. The exact location of the home was distinctly pointed out by Chester Reed to Jenson and his companions on that occasion in 1888. Brother Jenson in turn pointed out the spot to Brothers Ferguson and Bean in February 1928. Now, to complete the link, on April 20, 1970, the oral affirmation of past years was again reiterated for the writer’s benefit as Brother Ferguson repeated Andrew Jenson’s declaration of 1928 to me.

In April 1970, Dale Berge notified me that he had been directed to dig the old well that was situated between the site of the log house and the Deshler home at the Whitmer farm. He was bringing with him Dr. Ray T. Matheny of the Anthropology Department at BYU. He requested that I make inquiries concerning a rental of a pickup truck, a water pump, and the availability of a steel conduit to put down the well for safety’s sake. At the farm they pumped the groundwater out of the well and lowered the metal conduit to secure the laid-rock curbing. They then placed a ladder through the middle of the cylinder and were able to descend to the bottom. Sadly their screening did not produce the artifacts that they had hoped. The well was comparatively clean.

Ten years later, 1980, some of the preliminaries respecting the Whitmer log home were therefore already in place for the sesquicentennial celebration—the 150th anniversary of the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ on April 6. In anticipation of that day, the Brethren caused some major changes to be made at the farm during 1979–80. The Deshler home was moved over against the east property line for missionary quarters. A beautiful colonial style meeting house and visitors center was constructed where the Deshler home had stood. And to the west, on the designated site of the old



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Whitmer home replica under construction.

Whitmer house, a carefully crafted log home was reconstructed by historical architects. Materials from three old log homes, retrieved from Seneca County farms, were used as the primary base for the structure.

On April 6, 1980, President N. Eldon Tanner opened the 150th annual conference of the Church in the Mormon Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City. Then, by satellite transmission, the conference audience joined President Spencer W. Kimball as he stood at a pulpit in the reconstructed Whitmer log home in Fayette, New York. Interestingly, the pulpit's crown had been carried out to the site by Elder Eldred G. Smith, patriarch emeritus. It was Alvin Smith's lap box (later inherited by Hyrum Smith) in which the golden plates had once been placed. In President Kimball's opening remarks, he stated:

We are here, this lovely Easter morning, in the reconstructed farmhouse of Peter Whitmer, Sr. It has been faithfully restored for this occasion to bring to us anew the recollection of the all-important and significant event which occurred here a century and a half ago. In the years to come, it will be visited by good people from over the earth who will wish to stand where I stand today. . . . Standing here today we review in our minds the mighty faith and works of those who, from this humble beginning, gave so much to help move the Church to its present wondrous stature; and more importantly, we behold through the eye of faith a vision of its sure and glorious future.<sup>55</sup>



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By satellite transmission, the 1980 general conference audience joined President Spencer W. Kimball as he stood at a pulpit (Alvin Smith's lap box) in the reconstructed Whitmer log home.

President Kimball and his company then left the Whitmer log home and moved to the beautiful colonial-style Fayette Branch chapel adjoining it. There President Kimball dedicated the log home, the chapel and attached visitors' center, and the Deshler home, which had been renovated as a missionary residence.

In conclusion, may I share an interesting dichotomy of aspirations relative to the future of the restored Church as pronounced by two contemporary figures familiar with the 1830 organization. The first, Reverend Diedrich Willers, penned his wishes for the early demise of Mormonism to his "Reverend Brethren" of York, Pennsylvania, as he waxed philosophical in June 1830: "By itself this new sect may not astound the Christian Church. The past centuries have also had their religious monstrosities, but where are they now? Where are the sects of Nicolaites, Ebionites, Nasoreans, Montanites, Paulicians, and such others, which the Christian churches call fables. They have dissolved into the ocean of the past and have been given the stamp of oblivion. The Mormonites, and hopefully soon, will also share that fate."<sup>56</sup>

Conversely, the second figure, Sidney Rigdon, reflected back on his December 1830 visit to the Whitmer farm with a positive prediction of the future expansion of Mormonism during an anniversary sermon to the Saints assembled in Nauvoo, April 6, 1844: "I recollect in the year 1830, I met the

whole church of Christ in a little old log house about 20 feet square, near Waterloo, N. Y. and we began to talk about the Kingdom of God as if we had the world at our command; we talked with great confidence, and talked big things, although we were not many people, we had big feelings; we knew fourteen years ago that the church would become as large as it is today . . . we saw in vision, the church of God, a thousand times larger.”<sup>57</sup> Both Reverend Willers and President Rigdon would be astounded at how the Church of Christ has grown and will continue to grow, for “the God of heaven [has] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people . . . it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:32). **RE**

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### Notes

1. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 12:88; Orson remembered that the Prophet’s revelation to him, D&C 34, was given in the “chamber of old Father Whitmer,” and that John Whitmer was the scribe. See *Journal of Discourses* 17 (February 7, 1875): 290.
2. For a detailed examination of the dating of these priesthoods, see Larry C. Porter, “The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods,” *Ensign*, December 1996, 30–47.
3. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, vol. 1 of *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 291.
4. *Susquehanna Register*, May 1, 1834, 1.
5. Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 135.
6. *Kansas City Daily Journal*, June 5, 1881, 1.
7. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 234.
8. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 234–35; see D&C 14, 15, 16. These three revelations became the first of some twenty which were received at the Whitmer farm and later recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants.
9. *Saints’ Herald*, March 1, 1882, 68.
10. *Chicago Tribune*, December 17, 1885, 3.
11. *Saints’ Herald*, March 1, 1882, 68; *Kansas City Daily Journal* (June 5, 1881): 1; It should be noted that Martin Harris had withdrawn himself from the others previous to the initial appearance of Moroni and was later joined by the Prophet for a separate experience with the angel; see *History of the Church*, 1:54–55.
12. Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 139–41.
13. “Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith,” *Deseret Evening News*, November 16, 1878, 1.
14. Lyndon W. Cook ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991): 13, 28, 41–43, 50–51, 182, 214, 215–16, 217–18.
15. Andrew Jenson, “Still Another Witness,” *Historical Record*, October 1881, 621.
16. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 1981, 30–32; Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration*, 1983, 121; Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 1984, 103. The Prophet seems

not to have included the event in his writings. However, David Whitmer does recite in detail Joseph's reactions at the time of the encounter with the "Messenger who had the plates" while en route from Harmony to Fayette, and also recounts Joseph Smith's confirmation to him that the plates born by the messenger had been concealed in the barn. See "Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith," *Deseret Evening News*, November 16, 1878, 1.

17. Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Whitmers: A Family That Nourished the Church," *Ensign*, August 1979, 34-40.

18. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 238-39.

19. Letter of Hiram Page, Fishing River, Missouri, to William E. McLellin, Kirtland, Ohio, March 4, 1848, Community of Christ Library and Archives, Independence, Missouri.

20. Orson Pratt in *Journal of Discourse*, 16:294-95; Brigham Young also recognized the necessity of the bestowal of the higher priesthood by these ancient apostles prior to the organization when he declared, "I know that Joseph received his Apostleship from Peter, James, and John, before a revelation on the subject was printed, and he never had a right to organize a Church before he was an Apostle," in *Journal of Discourse*, 1:137. For further substantiation of the sequence followed in the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood and the Apostleship to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery before the organization of the Church, see Larry C. Porter, "The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods," *Ensign*, December 1996, 30-47.

21. M. M. Bagg, *The Pioneers of Utica* (Utica, NY: Curtis and Childs, 1877), 332-34.

22. R. R. Lansing. See Joseph Smith copyright entry in Court of the United States for the Northern District of New York, September 1826 to May 1831; 116:107. Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

23. John H. Gilbert to James T. Cobb, Palmyra, Wayne County, New York, February 1879, in New York Public Library, Special Collections, New York City; Wayne County Mortgages, Book 3:225, Lyons, New York.

24. Joseph Smith, Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Oliver Cowdery, Palmyra, New York, October 22, 1829, Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, 9, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

25. Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 150.

26. *Manual of the Churches of Seneca County* (Seneca Falls, NY: Courier Printing, 1896), 101-2, 123-24; A significant number of documents relating to the pastorate of Rev. Diedrich Willers are located in the Waterloo Library and Historical Society in Waterloo, New York, the Seneca Falls Historical Society in Seneca Falls, New York, and the Diedrich Willers Collection at the Carl A. Kroach Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

27. Larry C. Porter, "A Study of the Origins of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-1831" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1971), 224-29; *Manual of the Churches of Seneca County*, 101-2. The Christ Reformed Church still stands today in the hamlet of Fayette.

28. Diedrich Willers to Reverend Brethren [Revs. L. Mayer and D. Young, York, Pennsylvania], [Bearytown, Fayette, New York], June 18, 1830, Diedrich Willers Collection, Carl A. Kroach Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, translated from German by D. Michael Quinn in D. Michael Quinn, "The First Months of Mormonism: A Contemporary View by Rev. Diedrich Willers," *New York History* 54, no. 3 (July 1973): 327.

29. Quinn, "First Months of Mormonism," 331-32.

30. *History of Seneca County, New York* (Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign, and Everts, 1876), 131.

31. Dean C. Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 36-37.



32. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 241–42.

33. Joseph Knight [Jr.] Papers, Church History Library. These are the generally accepted names; however, there are various listings, as discussed by Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Who are the six who organized the Church on April 6, 1830?” *Ensign*, June 1980, 44–45.

34. “Journal of Edward Stevenson,” January 2, 1887, 129, microfilm copy, Church History Library; some fourteen persons who were in attendance can readily be documented by name. The writer once pieced together a pool of seventy-three names of persons who had demonstrated a developing interest in Mormonism and might have chosen to be present for the proceedings of that day; however, they need to be proved out. See Larry C. Porter, “Organizational Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ, 6 April 1830,” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: New York*, ed. Larry C. Porter, Milton V. Backman Jr., and Susan Easton Black (Provo, UT: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1992), 154–55.

35. Care needs to be exercised in identifying known or potential participants. At least one person was a spurious claimant to having been there on the day of organization. A man by the name of David Lewis reported that he was present on that day as an eleven-year-old boy from a neighboring farm. He gave a deposition to Andrew Jenson, assistant Church historian, and others on September 10, 1908, in which he described in detail that signal moment right down to the Prophet’s white shirt with a two-inch ruffle in front and his declaration to those assembled, “Come let us organize the Church.” His recollection of whole conversations and experiences which he had with Joseph over a period of time was exciting. Then I read a marginal note penned later and signed by Andrew Jenson. It read, “This statement was afterwards proven to be untrue. [Signed] Andrew Jenson.” See Testimony of David Lewis, Historian’s Office, September 10, 1908, dictated to Andrew Jenson and others, in Church History Library. The reader should be warned that the Lewis account was printed as being factual in a Church publication, “Challenge to Greatness: The Nineteenth-Century Saints in New York,” *Ensign*, September 1978, 26. I looked up the genealogy of David Lewis and found that he had not been born on May 5, 1818, as claimed, but rather on May 5, 1831.

36. Jesse, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” 37.

37. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 242–44.

38. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887), 32–33.

39. Recognizing that there had apparently been a concerted effort on the part of the Prophet and the brethren to meet the requirements of incorporation according to the laws of the state of New York as specified in the 1813 act, I decided to make a serious attempt to find the document if it could be found. Truman G. Madsen, director of the Institute of Mormon Studies, introduced me to the work of George H. Mortimer. President Mortimer was a regional representative of the Twelve for a region covering western New York and Portions of Pennsylvania and Canada. He was an attorney in New York City and among the host of researchers who have unsuccessfully attempted to locate the missing incorporation document across the years. He informed Truman of his having spent considerable time, particularly in the summer of 1959 searching for that document. President Mortimer graciously shared his data and explained the law under which the Church would have been legalized, “An Act to provide for the Incorporation of Religious Societies,” passed by the New York State Legislature on April 5, 1813. This act stipulated that certificates of incorporation be recorded within the county and entered at that level by the clerk of said county.

President Mortimer had carefully examined the legal statutes bearing on the subject from 1813 to 1830 to see if there were any intervening amendments bearing on the original law which would have affected the 1830 incorporation and had found none. He provided a copy of his survey of the “New York Laws on Religious Corporations” from the earliest general law to the time of the organization of the Church. He also digested the cardinal points of the law as they pertain specifically to section III. Of immediate interest was the required number of trustees. The law provided that there should be no less than three or more than nine trustees elected. It appears that the Prophet Joseph Smith arbitrarily selected six individuals to assist in meeting the requirements of the law though he could have varied the number. Under the law, those involved in the voting were to be male members of the church or congregation of full age, that is, twenty-one years old. After retracing the steps of his search, President Mortimer wished me well.

My friend John S. Genung, a local businessman and a trustee and historian of the Waterloo Library and Historical Society, introduced me to Thomas B. Masten Jr., Seneca County clerk at Waterloo. Mr. Masten gave me unlimited access to the materials deposited in his office—“Miscellaneous Record Books A and B”—containing church incorporation records for this early period, and also allowed me to examine the court records in his underground vault item by item. Because Seneca County is a two-shire county (this occurs when the county court is held in two towns in the same county on an alternating basis, i.e., Waterloo and Ovid), John Genung also made arrangements for me to go to Ovid, New York, and meet with undersheriff Gerald B. Brewer at the courthouse in that southern community. There Mr. Brewer allowed me to check the records in his keeping—without success. Just on an outside chance, Mr. Genung also took me to meet Thelma I. Sission, Fayette town clerk, who permitted me to carefully scrutinize every item in the Fayette town vault, but to no avail. Under the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Church remained in New York for some nine months before the exodus to Kirtland, Ohio. To date, the incorporation document, if ever filed, has not been found. There are a range of explanations and possibilities extant under the extenuating circumstances of that day. For further discussion of the day of organization and applicable sections of the 1813 act, see Larry C. Porter, “A Study of the Origins of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816–1831” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1971), 243–253, 374–86.

40. David Keith Stott, “Legal Insights into the Organization of the Church in 1830,” *BYU Studies* 49, no. 2 (2010): 121–48.

41. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 244.

42. Dean L. Jarman and Kyle R. Walker, “Samuel Harrison Smith,” in Kyle R. Walker, *United by Faith: The Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith Family* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2005), 210–11; Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 151–53, 166–67; Larry C. Porter, “The Field Is White Already to Harvest”: Earliest Missionary Labors and the Book of Mormon,” *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith*, ed. Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1988), 73–89.

43. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 322.

44. Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953), 1–4.

45. Mother Lucy Smith identifies their Seneca County home as being in “Waterloo” but in reality the home was situated in Seneca Falls Township at an unincorporated community called “The Kingdom,” about midway between Waterloo and Seneca Falls. The home was situated on the north side of the Seneca River. Lucy mentions her landlord was a “Mr. Kellog”

and neighbors, “Mr. Osgood and Mr. Hooper, a tavern keeper,” all heads of families at the Kingdom. Lucy arrived from Palmyra with her family during the period of incarceration of her husband, Joseph Smith Sr., at the Canandaigua Jail, for indebtedness. This was apparently between October 7 and November 5, 1830. See Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 167–68; Porter, “Study of the Origins,” 268–73, 285–90.

46. B. H. Roberts sets the date of the Partridge baptism as December 11, 1830. See *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902), 129n.; however, the circumstances and dating of the event may require an additional assessment. What is now the present day revelation designated as D&C 35 to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon has recently been dated as December 7, 1830, and D&C 36 to Edward Partridge now dated December 9, 1830. See Joseph Smith, *The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations, Manuscript Revelation Books*, Facsimile Edition, Ed. Robert Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 63–69. The dating of these two documents indicates the arrival of Rigdon and Partridge in Seneca County in advance of that previously supposed and the need for further investigation into the occasion of their visit to the Smith home on the Seneca River.

47. Emily M. Austin, *Mormonism; or Life Among the Mormons* (Madison, WI: M. J. Cantwell Book and Job Printer, 1882), 37.

48. Porter, “Study of the Origins,” 285–90.

49. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 346–47. The specific date of the Prophet’s arrival in Kirtland has been identified as February 4, 1831 in Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting for Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 96–97; Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” 38.

50. Porter, “Study of the Origins,” 311–21; The actual date of departure from Buffalo was May 8, 1831, see “Opening of Navigation,” *Buffalo Journal & General Advertiser*, May 11, 1831, p. 2, col. 3; the crossing of Lake Erie to Fairport, Ohio, is described by Katharine Smith, see “Fountain Green, Ill., May 16th,” in *Saints’ Herald*, Lamoni, Iowa, July 3, 1886, 404–5.

51. Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The House Where the Church Was Organized,” *Ensign*, April 1970, 16–25.

52. Carter E. Grant, “Peter Whitmer’s Log House,” *Improvement Era*, May 1959, 349, 365–66, 369.

53. Thomas L. Cook, *Palmyra and Vicinity* (Palmyra, NY: Palmyra Courier-Journal, 1930), 206–7.

54. Personal interview with Clyde Larsen, Peter Whitmer Sr. farm, Fayette, New York, November 3, 1969.

55. Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, April 1980, 74.

56. Quinn, “First Months of Mormonism,” 331.

57. *Times and Seasons*, May 1, 1844, 522.