

Ezra Booth on Early Mormonism: A Look at His 1831 Letters

Published in *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 28 (2008):65-87.

Introduction

Ezra Booth was an early convert in the Church of Christ. At the June 3, 1831, church conference he was ordained to the high priesthood. Called by revelation to go to Missouri he witnessed the laying of the foundation of the latter-day Zion including the cornerstone of the proposed New Jerusalem temple. Ezra wrote nine letters explaining his experiences with Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon.¹ He also touched on what he regarded as failures in prophetic leadership. The letters to Rev. Ira Eddy were written during the period of September 12 through December 6, 1831. As an eye witness and participant Booth explores some of the earliest teachings of church leaders. Each 1831 letter will be briefly summarized as reported by Booth.

Ezra Booth and Family

Ezra Booth was born about 1792 at Newton, Fairfield County, Connecticut. He moved to the state of Ohio and was a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church. One source says that Ezra was "six feet in height, a large head, broad shoulders and finely proportioned. In intellect he was far above the average."² At the age of twenty-five Booth was admitted on trial in the Ohio District of the Methodist Church. He was a deacon for a couple of years before becoming an elder in 1821.³ Ezra served as a Methodist circuit rider or preacher. In 1824 it was determined "not to give Ezra Booth a station this year,

¹ Booth's letters first appeared in the *Ohio Star* 2 (October 13 – December 8, 1831, except for the issue of December 1). The *Telegraph* (Painesville, Ohio), reprinted all nine letters from October 25 – December 27, except for December 13. Other newspapers that included one or more letters included the *Huron Reflector* (Norwalk, Ohio), the *New-York Observer*, and the *American Eagle* 2 (March 12, 1833):2, Westfield, New York.

² J. N. Fradenburgh, *History of the Erie Conference* (Oil City, Pa.: Derrick Publishing Co., 1907), 1:344.

³ Samuel Gregg wrote, "Rev. EZRA BOOTH, second preacher on the Mahoning Circuit, was admitted on trial in the Ohio Conference September 1817, and into full connection and ordained a deacon in 1819, and an elder in 1821." See Samuel Gregg, *The History of Methodism within the Bounds of the Erie Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Published for the Author by Carlton and Porter, 1865), 1:167.

on account of temporal business."⁴ During this time Ezra was married to Dorcas Taylor (born in 1800 at Great Barrington, Massachusetts) on November 10, 1819.⁵ They were the parents of one daughter, Almeda, born on August 15, 1823. Shortly afterwards Ezra Booth left the ministry and entered the occupation of farming.

Nelson, Portage County

The Booth family settled in Nelson, Portage County, Ohio. They were living there at the time the 1830 census was taken. The census record shows that in addition to the Booth family there were five other persons at their residence. Ezra and Dorcas joined the Church of Christ in early 1831 and he was a member for about six months before withdrawing. When Booth purchased land on April 11, 1833, the recorded deed says he was residing in Mesopotamia, Trumbull County.

Mantua, Portage County

After Ezra returned to the Methodist Church he purchased a farm located in Mantua consisting of eighty-five acres. The land on Lot 12 was bought from Jedediah Harmon.⁶ Booth became a Millerite. William Miller predicted that Christ would come between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. Since this did not come to pass, associates of Miller said Jesus would appear on October 22, 1844. William Miller accepted this calculation two weeks prior to the forthcoming advent.⁷ When Christ made no appearance some followers' confidence became shaken. This is known as the "Second Disappointment." Shortly afterwards, Ezra was associated with the Shakers during the years 1845 to 1850.⁸ Booth is reported to have abandoned Christianity and became an agnostic.⁹

⁴ For Ezra Booth's pastoral service see William Warren Sweet, ed., *Circuit-Rider Days Along the Ohio: Being The Journals of the Ohio Conference from its Organization in 1812 to 1826* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, n.d.), 142, 149, 160, 163, 170, 174, 175, 183, 187, 195, 199, 213, 225, 239, 245.

⁵ *Portage County, Ohio Marriages 1808-1850 Vol. 1* (Warsaw, Ind.: Larry & Cynthia Scheuer, 1990).

⁶ Deed Records 16:426, Portage County, Ohio. Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, microfilm no. 899,068. See also Elmer F. Pfaff, *Rediscovering Mantua (Portage County, Ohio): The first 100 years of survival...1799-1899* (Mantua, Ohio: Mage in Nation Co., Inc., 1985), 78.

⁷ Everett N. Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1994), 144-45.

⁸ This information was obtained from Dr. Robert W. Sawyer of Hiram College, Hiram, Ohio, e-mail of April 14, 2004. Dr. Sawyer is working on a collection of Almeda Booth's letters, which will include a full account of her life.

⁹ Fradenburgh, *History of the Erie Conference*, 1:346.

Almeda A. Booth

The prize of the Booth family was their daughter Almeda. On a sad note she became engaged to Martin Harmon but prior to the marriage he died. Thereafter Almeda consecrated herself to higher education. It was said of her, "She was the daughter of a Methodist preacher . . . a man of marked mental strength, and of great tact and energy. The daughter inherited her father's intellectual power and force of character." Almeda was a teacher and a student at the Western Reserve Electic Institute, a Disciples of Christ school. It was later named Hiram College. She taught English, classics, and mathematics from 1851 to 1866, except for a year she spent at Oberlin College.

Almeda had a powerful influence on James A. Garfield (1831-1881) who attended school at the Institute from 1851 to 1854, graduating in 1856 with honors. In 1858 he returned and became principle of the school and married a classmate Lucretia Rudolph (1832-1918). Garfield later became the twentieth president of the United States, and four months after his inauguration was assassinated. While is school Garfield wrote about spending time in December 1853 working with Almeda on making a joint translation of Romans. Concerning Miss Booth it is said that she, "was more or less familiar with the standard authors of English literature, both prose and poetry; and she aided James greatly in the selection of books many of which they read together, discussing their merits, and making notes."¹⁰ After Almeda's death President Garfield said of her early quest for education:

When she was twelve years of age she used to puzzle her teachers with questions, and distress them by correcting their mistakes. One of these, a male teacher, who was too proud to acknowledge the corrections of a child, called upon the most learned man in town for help and advice in regard to a point of dispute between them. He was told that he was in error, and that he must acknowledge his mistake. The teacher was manly enough to follow this wise advice, and thereafter made this little girl his friend and helper. It was like her to help him quietly, and without boasting. During her whole life none of her friends ever heard an intimation from her that she had ever achieved an intellectual triumph over anybody in the world.¹¹

In the census of Mantua in 1860 Almeda is listed as a thirty-six-year-old teacher. The family continued to live there until about 1865 when they changed their residence to Cuyahoga Falls in Summit County, west of Portage County.¹²

¹⁰ William M. Thayer, *From Log-Cabin to the White House: Life of James A. Garfield* (Boston: James H. Earle, 1880), chapter 20.

¹¹ Ibid. See also Phebe A. Hanaford, *Daughters of America; or Women of the Century* (Augusta, Maine: True and Co., 1882), 515.

¹² Ezra Booth bought one acre from L. R. and T. A. Marshall in Cuyahoga Falls, Summit County, in 1865 (Deed Records 51:213-14, Summit County, Ohio).

Cuyahoga Falls, Summit County

The 1870 census listed the Booth family as residing in Cuyahoga Falls. Ezra was at the age of seventy-eight "at Home." His wife Dorcas, sixty-nine years old, was "Keeping House," and Almeda at forty-six was still a teacher.¹³ Almeda taught at Cuyahoga High School.¹⁴ Her father, Ezra, died on January 12, 1873, at Cuyahoga Falls at the age of eighty.¹⁵

Almeda moved in November 1875 to Cleveland so that she could be closer to doctors because of poor health. She died there on December 15, 1875, at the age of fifty-two, and was buried at Cuyahoga Falls on December 17. President Garfield gave the eulogy on her behalf. Dorcas lived another thirteen years dying on September 9, 1887, at the age of eighty-seven.¹⁶ Her will stipulated donations to the American Bible Society and the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. She was buried between her husband and daughter in the city cemetery at Oakwood Cemetery, Cuyahoga Falls, Summit County, Ohio. Their headstones are in poor condition and need proper care.¹⁷ In Hiram, Ohio, it is even now rumored that at the Garfield House resides some ghosts including President Garfield, his wife Lucretia, and Almeda Booth.¹⁸

Conversion of Ezra Booth to Mormonism

As the Mormon movement spread in northern Ohio in 1831, converts were added to the fold. In the Hiram, Portage County, this included John and Elsa Johnson and members of their family. Two of their sons would later be called as members of the Council of the Twelve Apostles. Their son Luke S. Johnson, who as twenty-three years old when Smith came to Ohio, recalled:

Soon after Joseph Smith moved from the state of New York, my father, mother and Ezra Booth, a Methodist minister, went to Kirtland, to investigate Mormonism. My mother had been laboring under an attack of chronic rheumatism in the shoulder, so that she could not raise her hand to

¹³ 1870 U.S. Census, Cuyahoga Falls, Summit County, Ohio, dwelling house 95, family 105, page 201.

¹⁴ *Centennial History of Summit County, Ohio and Representative Citizens* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Co., 1908), 295. See also William Henry Perrin, ed., *History of Summit County, with an Outline Sketch of Ohio* (Chicago: Baskin and Batty, Historical Publishers, 1881), 479-80.

¹⁵ Special thanks to Dr. Robert W. Sawyer for providing this date.

¹⁶ Record of Death 1:288, Probate Court, Summit County, Akron, Ohio. The age eighty-four is listed, but this is incorrect since she was born in 1800.

¹⁷ Special thanks to Pam and John Hammond for providing photographs of the headstones of Ezra, Dorcas, and Almeda Booth.

¹⁸ "The Garfield House, Hiram, Ohio," retrieved from <http://www.prairieghosts.com/oh-gar.html> and "The Garfield House," retrieved from <http://www.hauntedhouses.com/states/oh/house3.htm>, on April 1, 2004.

her head, for about two years; the Prophet laid hands upon her, and she was healed immediately.¹⁹

Luke's sister Nancy Marinda Johnson, who was fifteen at the time, also wrote concerning the conversions of the Booths and Johnsons:

In the winter of [1830-] 1831, Ezra Booth, a Methodist minister, procured a copy of the Book of Mormon and brought it to my father's house. They sat up all night reading it, and were very much exercised over it. As soon as they heard that Joseph Smith had arrived in Kirtland, Mr. Booth and wife and my father and mother went immediately to see him. They were convinced and baptized before they returned. They invited the prophet and Elder Rigdon to accompany them home, which they did, and preached several times to crowded congregations, baptizing quite a number."²⁰

Ezra and Dorcas believed the restored gospel. The date of their baptisms is unknown but they could have occurred as early as February 1831.²¹ Ezra was ordained an elder in the latter-day Church of Christ and preached in the area. He assisted in the conversion of Symonds Ryder, a Disciple of Christ minister.²² In June Joseph Smith Jr. the prophet-leader of Mormonism, gave a revelatory message that stated:

Behold, thus saith the Lord unto the elders whom he hath called and chosen, in these last days, by the voice of his Spirit, saying, I the Lord will make known unto you what I will that ye shall do from this time until the next conference, which shall be held in Missouri, upon the land which I will consecrate unto my people, which are a remnant of Jacob, and them who are heirs according to the covenant.²³

This revelation instructed church leaders Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon to leave their homes and make a journey to the state of Missouri. They were told if they were faithful it would be made known what they should do. But if they were unfaithful

¹⁹ "History of Luke Johnson (by himself)," *Deseret News* 8 (May 19, 1858):53, Fillmore City, Utah Territory. See also Amos Sutton Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve, Ohio* (Cincinnati: Chase and Hall, 1875), 250-51.

²⁰ Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (New York: [Tullidge and Crandall], 1877), 403-404.

²¹ The possible date of February 1831 is based on the wording, "the Rev. Mr. Booth, who, as many of our readers are aware, about a year since embraced their faith" (*Ohio Star* 2 [October 6, 1831] Ravenna, Ohio).

²² Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples*, 251.

²³ H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 136, revelation dated June 6, 1831. See Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Section 52:1-2, (cited hereafter as LDS D&C) and Doctrine and Covenants of the Community of Christ, Section 52:1 (cited hereafter as RLDS D&C).

"they shall be cut off, even as I will, as seemeth me good." The message called a number of church elders to travel to Missouri. Isaac Morley and Ezra Booth were to travel together—"let my servant Isaac and my servant Ezra (B.) take their journey, also preaching by the way unto the same land."²⁴ Morley was probably the senior missionary companion being about six years older than Ezra. Isaac was also an assistant or counselor to Bishop Edward Partridge. Five days after the revelation Isaac Morley gave power of attorney to Titus Billings prior to leaving for Missouri.²⁵

Nine Letters by Ezra Booth

Soon after returning from Missouri Ezra Booth arrived at his home in Nelson. Here a church conference was held on September 6 where "it was voted that Ezra Booth be silenced from preaching as an Elder in this Church."²⁶ Five days later Joseph Smith pronounced a revelation calling Isaac Morley and Ezra Booth to repentance. Morley stayed behind in Missouri with the church bishop. The next day Booth wrote his first letter to Rev. Ira Eddy announcing his "renunciation of Mormonism." From his letters it appears that Booth was disillusioned with Joseph Smith and especially Sidney Rigdon. The nine Booth letters were written to Rev. Eddy and published in the *Ohio Star* in Ravenna, Portage County. The letters contain Booth's experience in his journey of over fifteen hundred miles.

Rev. Ira Eddy

Reverend Ira Eddy, of Edinburg, Portage County, was about four years younger than Ezra Booth, being born on March 31, 1796. Eddy was converted to Christ in 1813. He later was licensed to exhort and preach the gospel, and became a circuit rider of the Methodist Church. Like Booth, he rose through the ranks as deacon then to the office of elder. Eddy became a well-known circuit preacher in northeastern Ohio and in 1831 became the presiding elder in the Pittsburgh Conference, Ohio District.²⁷

Reasons for Writing Letters

Booth's reasons for writing letters were clearly stated: "1st. To discharge a duty which I owe to God and the public. 2d. To rescue, if possible, the honest and

²⁴ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 136-37; LDS D&C 52:3-6, 23; RLDS D&C 52:2, 5.

²⁵ Deed Book 14:583-84, Geauga County, Ohio, June 11, 1831. Edward Partridge gave [gave] his power of attorney to Billings on June 16, 1831 (14:427-28).

²⁶ Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983), 12.

²⁷ Gregg, *The History of Methodism*, 1:150-53, 166-67, 259-60. Special thanks to Carol Holliger, archivist, Archives of Ohio United Methodism, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio, for providing information on Ira Eddy and Ezra Booth.

conscientious who are involved in it. 3d. To prevent others from falling into it. 4th. To comply with the request of a number who have solicited an exposure of Mormonism."²⁸

In his letters Ezra Booth draws from his experience as a church member in June, July, and August 1831. A large portion of his nine letters included his experience and expectations in Jackson County, Missouri. The language and tone of his letters shows that he was upset with what he now perceived as a deception. Many of his recollections can be documented separately from his harsh comments. Those items not found in other sources may have occurred and others could possibly be exaggerations made as he composed his letters. The following is a short description of each letter.

Letter 1 - Prophecy and Visions Failed

In his first letter to Rev. Ira Eddy, Booth confessed his own human nature and weakness. Booth was humble and acknowledged falling victim to a delusion. He wrote, "When I embraced Mormonism, I conscientiously believed it to be of God." Then Ezra related his experience when arriving in Missouri when he "discovered that prophecy and visions had failed, or rather had proved to be false." It was so clear, that Sidney Rigdon said, "Joseph's vision was a bad thing."

Letter 2 – Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible

In Booth's second letter he affirms that the City of Zion in Missouri is to be a city of refuge, a safe asylum when destruction comes. He gives details regarding the teachings of Mormon preachers and about Joseph Smith's revelations. On the Bible alteration or translation, Booth wrote, "This work is now in operation. The Gospel by St. Matthew has already received the purifying touch, and is prepared for the use of the church. It was intended to have kept this work a profound secret, and strict commandments were given for that purpose and even the salvation of the church was said to depend upon it."²⁹

Letter 3 – Abnormal Experiences

In the next letter, the third in the series, Ezra mentioned abnormal experiences of church members including receiving commissions directly from heaven. Individuals were preaching to imaginary audiences and so forth. Visions such as opening and closing the gate of the city of New Jerusalem were entertained.³⁰ Concerning the ten tribes and the society of individuals who had died, Booth recalled:

But these visionaries have discovered their place of residence to be contiguous to the north pole; separated from the rest of the world by impassable mountains of ice and snow. In this sequestered residence, they

²⁸ "Mormonism," *Ohio Star* 2 (October 20, 1831).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ John Whitmer mentions other experiences. See Bruce N. Westergren, ed., *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 57.

enjoy the society of Elijah the Prophet, and John the Revelator, and perhaps the three immortalized Nephites. -- By and by, the mountains of ice and snow are to give way, and open a passage for the return of these tribes, to the land of Palestine.³¹

Another item that Booth mentions is examining a manuscript copy of a revelation concerning the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon. There are, Booth writes, immense treasures in the earth, especially in New York State. "These treasures were discovered several years since, by means of the dark glass, the same with which Smith says he translated most of the Book of Mormon."

Letter 4 – Conference of June 1831

The June 1831 church conference is detailed in the fourth letter. The day previous Joseph Smith said, "Not three days should pass away, before some should see their Savior, face to face." On the day of the conference Joseph Smith ordained Lyman Wight to the high priesthood. This was the first time the Melchizedek (or Melchisedec) priesthood had been conferred upon the church elders.³² After this ordination occurred, Booth says that Lyman Wight arose.

and presented a pale countenance, a fierce look, with his arms extended, and his hands cramped backward, the whole system agitated, and a very unpleasant object to gaze upon. He exhibited himself as an instance of the great power of God, and called upon those around him, "if you want to see a sign, look at me."

He then stepped [stepped] upon a bench, and declared, with a loud voice, he saw the Savior: and thereby, for the time being, rescued Smith's prophecy from merited contempt. – It, however, procured Wite [Wight] the authority to ordain the rest. So said the spirit, and so said Smith. The spirit in Smith selected those to be ordained, and the spirit in Wite [Wight] ordained them. But the spirit in Wite [Wight] proved an erring, and forgetful dictator; so much so, that some of the candidates felt the weight of his hands thrice, before the work was rightly done.

Another elder who was ordained to the high priesthood

³¹ Levi Hancock wrote that Joseph Smith said, "John was to tarry until Christ came he is now with the ten tribes a preaching" ("Levi Hancock Journal," ca. 1854, Family and Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereafter referred to as LDS Archives). Those of the tribe of Ephraim were to go to Jackson County, Missouri. See Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 174; LDS D&C 133:32; RLDS D&C 6. The ten tribes were said to be located north of the Great Lakes.

³² In letter 2 Booth wrote, "Many of them have been ordained to the High Priesthood, or the order of Melchisedec [Melchisedec]; and profess to be endowed with the same power as the ancient apostles were."

moved upon the floor, his legs inclining to a bend; one shoulder elevated above the other, upon which the head seemed disposed to recline, his arms partly extended; his hands partly half clenched; his mouth half open, and contracted in the shape of an italic O; his eyes assumed a wild and ferocious cast, and his whole appearance presented a frightful object to the view of the beholder.³³

This was Harvey Whitlock. Some in attendance thought Harvey was possessed by the devil. Joseph Smith also came to that conclusion. Booth was also ordained to the high priesthood by Lyman Wight.

While Booth's experience was negative, there were others in attendance at the conference that saw these experiences as evidence of the power of God. John Murdock, for example, wrote, "there was a great out po[u]ring of the Spirit manifested in that Conference."³⁴

Letter 5 – Expectation of a Native American Church

The trip to the promised land of Missouri is discussed in Booth's fifth letter. Booth does not name his companion, saying "in company with the one appointed to travel with me." In fact, his companion was Isaac Morley, one of two assistants to Bishop Edward Partridge. Booth said he preached seven times, twice in Ohio, three times in Indiana, once in Illinois, and once in Missouri. But he did not feel that he had the same liberty in preaching as he did in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Before leaving Ohio, Booth's expectation was that when the elders arrived at their destination they would speak to the Lamanites (Native Americans or Indians) in their own dialect and gain access to the natives. To his disappointment "the Elders appeared to be averse to preaching, either to the white or red people, and indeed, adverse circumstances prevented it." Prior to Booth's arrival, William W. Phelps preached to the Native Americans in Indian Territory on the first Sunday, on July 17. Two individuals "were baptised, who had previously believed in the fulness of the gospel."³⁵

A church conference was held on August 2. Booth's biggest objection was stated in the letter, "We expected to find a large Church, which [Joseph] Smith said, was revealed to him in a vision, Oliver had raised up there." On the contrary, Booth found no significant "church" of Native Americans. Instead, he wrote, "This large Church was found to consist of three or four females," although this may be a slight understatement since Peter Whitmer Jr. said they baptized seven individuals.³⁶ As to the expectation of many Lamanite members, Parley P. Pratt gave a report to church leaders at the end of

³³ *Ohio Star* 2 (November 3, 1831):3.

³⁴ "John Murdock Journal," LDS Archives. This is from one of the autobiographies written by Murdock.

³⁵ "Manuscript History," Book A-1:129, LDS Archives. See Dean C. Jeseee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Autobiographical and Historical Writings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989), 1:358.

³⁶ Statement of Peter Whitmer Jr., December 13, 1831, LDS Archives.

March. At least two letters were received from Oliver Cowdery concerning the Lamanites, but no mention was made about baptisms. At the end of this letter Booth wrote that he arrived in Jackson County the same day as the Colesville Branch, which was on July 25.

Letter 6 – The City of Zion and Temple of the New Jerusalem

The sixth letter contains a brief description of Independence as it appeared in the summer of 1831:

It is a new Town, containing a courthouse built of brick, two or three merchant stores, and fifteen or twenty dwelling houses, built mostly of logs hewed on both sides; and is situated on a handsome rise of ground, about three miles south of the Missouri river, and about twelve miles east of the dividing line between the U. S. and the Indian Reserve, and is the County seat of Jackson County.

At this early date there were plans for a printing press and a store. Then, concerning the Native Americans in the territory outside of Missouri, Booth wrote:

West of the line lies the territory, selected by the Government of the U. S. for the future residence of the Indians; to which place, a number of tribes have recently emigrated. The question is frequently asked, do the Indians seem disposed to receive Mormonism; or have any of them as yet embraced it? To which question, I have heard some of the leaders reply, "O yes," when the truth is, not an individual [Native American] had embraced it when I left that place, nor is there any prospect they will embrace it.

Laying the foundation of Zion commenced on August 2. Ezra Booth was present at the ceremony west of Independence where Sidney Rigdon administered the oath of allegiance. As Oliver Cowdery reported Sidney Rigdon asked those gathered:

Do you receive this land for the land of your inheritance with thankful hearts from the Lord? answer from all we do, Do you pledge yourselves to keep the laws of God on this land, which you have never have kept in your own land? We do. Do you pledge yourselves to see that others of your brethren, who shall come hither do keep the laws of God? We do.

The land was consecrated by Rigdon, and twelve men set a shrub oak on the cornerstone for the start of the City of Zion.³⁷ The next day, August 3, another gathering

³⁷ Account of "the proceedings of Laying of the first logs of the City of Zion" by Oliver Cowdery, no date, copied into "The Book of John Whitmer, Kept by Commandment," 31-32, Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri. See Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 85-87.

was held, this time at the location for the temple of the New Jerusalem. Booth mentions that the ground for the temple was consecrated but does not say by whom. Joseph Smith laid the cornerstone for the projected sanctuary. Booth described the ceremony and the cornerstone's location for the benefit of others who would come later:

The next day the ground for the Temple was consecrated, and Smith claimed the honor of laying the corner-stone himself. Should the inhabitants of Independence, feel a desire to visit this place, destined at some future time to become celebrated, they will have only to walk one half of a mile out of the Town, to a rise of ground, a short distance south of the road. They will be able to ascertain the spot, by the means of a sappling [sapling], distinguished from others by the bark being taken off on the north and on the east side. -- On the south side of the sappling will be found the letter, T, which stands for Temple; and on the east side ZOM for Zomar; which Smith says is the original word for Zion.³⁸ Near the foot of the sappling, they will find a small stone, covered over with bushes, which were cut for that purpose. This is the corner-stone for the Temple.³⁹

At the time the land where Joseph Smith wanted the temple to be erected was covered with trees. This spot is currently located in the city of Independence, Missouri.⁴⁰

Letter 7 – Edward Partridge's Doubts

In his seventh letter to Rev. Eddy, a lengthy letter written on September 20 to Bishop Edward Partridge was included almost verbatim. Booth reiterated his belief in what he termed "the falsehood of Joseph's vision" given previous to leaving Ohio, which claimed Oliver Cowdery "had raised up a great church in Missouri." Partridge was also reminded of the time he told Joseph and Oliver that the land they selected "was inferior in point of quality to other lands adjoining." Evidently Bishop Partridge did complain to Joseph Smith about no "large church." Edward told Joseph: "I wish you not to tell us any more, that you know these [things] by the spirit when you do not; you told us, that Oliver had raised up a large Church here, and there is no such thing." Smith replied "I see it, and it will be so."

Booth in this letter was recalling both his and Partridge's doubts and tried to win Edward over in his renunciation of Smith.⁴¹ Concerning Smith's revelations, Booth dryly

³⁸ That Joseph Smith considered "Zomar" to be Zion, see "Egyptian Alphabet," 23, original in LDS Archives, 1835 manuscript in H. Michael Marquardt, comp., *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers* (Cullman, Ala.: Printing Service, 1981), 49-50.

³⁹ *Ohio Star* 2 (November 17, 1831):3.

⁴⁰ Joseph Smith wrote in 1835 "Having received, by an heavenly vision a commandment, in June following [1831], to take my journey to the western boundaries of the State of Missouri, and there designate the very spot, which was to be the central spot, for the commencement of the gathering together of those who embrace the fulness of the everlasting gospel." See Joseph Smith, "To the elders of the church of Latter Day Saints," in *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1 (September 1835):179.

suspected that they were "something short of infallible." Some, Booth wrote, resort to Smith's weakness and say words to the effect: "'Were he to get another man's wife, and seek to kill her husband, it would be no reason why we should not believe revelations through him, for David did the same.' So Sidney asserted, and many others concurred with him in sentiment."

After their stay in Jackson County, a number of the elders, including Booth, left on August 9 with Joseph Smith to travel back to Ohio, initially by canoe on the Missouri River. Isaac Morley did not return with Booth but stayed to assist Bishop Partridge. Booth explained events that happened on his return trip back to Ohio. In his letter he recounts confusion and discord among the elders, especially the church leaders. After consenting to reconciliation between the parties on the morning of August 12, Joseph Smith received a revelation acknowledging the dangers of traveling upon the Missouri River.⁴² By contrast to the elders' dangerous mode of travel, the church's top leaders, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and Sidney Rigdon, were to go by stage to Cincinnati. Rigdon said, "The Lord don't care how much money it takes to get us home." Booth arrived home a few days after Smith and company on September 1.

Another complaint Booth made to Partridge was that, since their return to Ohio, Sidney Rigdon wrote a description of the land of Zion, said to be different from what Partridge had written in Missouri. This new description was to replace one that was considered false. A revelation to Joseph Smith stated:

Verily I say unto you I the Lord am not pleased with my servant Sidney he exalted [exalted] himself in his heart & received not counsel but grieved the spirit Wherefore his writing is not acceptable unto the Lord & he shall make another & if the Lord receive it not behold he standeth no longer in the office which he hath appointed him⁴³

Rigdon wrote his second description on August 31, 1831, and told about the calamities that should come upon the inhabitants of the earth. He mentioned that the land of Zion was situated in the center of the continent and had "exceeding fertile soil," and that it was truly "a goodly land & none other so well suited for all the saints." Ending his writing he refers the saints to the "commandments which the Lord has delivered by the mouth of his prophet which will be read to you by our brethren Oliver [Cowdery] & Newel [Whitney] whom the Lord has appointed to visit the churches & obtain means for purchasing this the land of our inheritance" in the holy city.⁴⁴

Letter 8 – Gospel to the Lamanites

In his eighth letter Booth discussed the Book of Mormon. He wrote, "We now know that the Natives who inhabit the forests of America, are a 'branch of the House of

⁴¹ Edward Partridge wrote, "I am occasionally chastened." See Partridge to "Dear wife" [Lydia Partridge], August 5-6, 1831, typed copy, LDS Archives.

⁴² Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 152-53; LDS D&C 61:4-20; RLDS 61:1-3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 158; LDS D&C 63:55-56; RLDS D&C 63:14.

⁴⁴ Sidney Rigdon Collection, LDS Archives.

Israel;' and by the means of this blessed book, they are soon, even in this generation, to be restored to the knowledge, and the true worship of the God of Israel."⁴⁵

Booth then reproduced two documents written before he joined the church. One was an early text of a September 1830 revelation for Oliver Cowdery to preach the gospel to the Lamanites and "cause my Church to be established among them."⁴⁶ The second item was two covenants made by the four missionaries that they would bring the gospel to the Lamanites and is dated Manchester, October 17, 1830. Also mentioned was the New York episode relating to Hiram Page having revelations that appeared and disappeared from a stone, this being termed a satanic fraud.

Letter 9 – Goods for Indian Trade and Intermarriage

In his last letter, number 9, Booth mentioned to Rev. Eddy what he had learned when in Missouri. In particular, Oliver Cowdery passing "into the Indian territory, where he continued but a short time, before he was notified by the U. S. agent, that he must either re-pass the line, or be compelled to take his residence in the garrison, forty miles up the Arkansas river."⁴⁷ Here Booth saw a problem of Cowdery not being able to complete his mission, having been "arrested by man in his course."

On July 20 Joseph Smith assessed the situation and gave a revelation regarding the place of the City of Zion and the gathering of the saints. The revelatory document mentioned a store to be regulated by Sidney Gilbert. In the letter Booth says:

Another method has been invented, in order to remove obstacles which hitherto have proved insurmountable. "The Lord's store-house," is to be furnished with goods suited to the Indian trade, and persons are to obtain license from the government to dispose of them to the Indians in their own territory; at the same time, they are to disseminate the principles of Mormonism among them. From this smug[g]ling method of preaching to the Indians, they anticipate a favorable result.

Then Ezra Booth related what he had heard about another idea to get on the reservation to do missionary work:

In addition to this, and to co-operate with it, it has been made known by revelation, that it will be pleasing to the Lord, should they form a

⁴⁵ *Ohio Star* 2 (December 8, 1831):1.

⁴⁶ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 84; LDS D&C 28:8 and RLDS D&C 28:3 (revised text).

⁴⁷ Peter Whitmer Jr. wrote "To our sor[r]ow there came a man whose name was Cumoins [Cummins] and told us ... [that] he was a man under authority he told us that he would apprehend us to the garosan [garrison] we then resorted among the Gentiles" See statement of Peter Whitmer Jr., December 13, 1831, LDS Archives. Parley P. Pratt recalled, "We were soon ordered out of the Indian country as disturbers of the peace; and even threatened with the military in case of non-compliance." See Parley P. Pratt Jr., ed., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1994), 44.

matrimonial alliance with the Natives; and by this means the Elders, who comply with the thing so pleasing to the Lord, and for which the Lord has promised to bless those who do it abundantly, gain a residence in the Indian territory, independent of the agent.

Booth closed his last letter saying that he accomplished his objective in part and hoped that individuals would dismiss Mormonism. But what impact did the letters of Ezra Booth have on the work in Ohio? Statistics are not available on members who may have left the church because of Booth's letters or on individuals who chose not listen to the missionaries.

Evaluation of the Letters

There is no claim that Booth's letters are totally accurate. But did his nine letters have an impact on early Mormonism? Most of the events recorded by Booth took place as he mentioned. But the prophetic promises of Joseph Smith were likely to be modified after being made known to outsiders. It appears that Elder Sidney Rigdon disagreed with some of Ezra Booth's observations. After the seventh letter was published, Joseph Smith received a revelation on the first day of December at Hiram, Ohio, while working on his revision of the New Testament. The instructions were for Smith and Rigdon to go on a mission for a season and proclaim the gospel. They would be able to respond to letters published in the *Ohio Star* and other newspapers:

Confound your enemies call upon them to meet you both in publick [public] and in private and inasmuch as ye are faithful their shame shall be made manifest wherefore let them bring forth their strong reasons against the Lord Verily thus saith the Lord unto you there is no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper and if any man lift his voice against you he shall be confounded in mine own due time⁴⁸

Criticism came not only from Booth but also Symonds Ryder, the "enemies" mentioned in the text. Smith and Rigdon may have objected to Booth's harsh language and problematic objections explained in the letters. So Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon stopped their work on the Bible revision and preached in adjacent towns against Booth's letters. Two weeks later Rigdon publicly issued a challenge to Booth and Ryder. Sidney Rigdon said that he was willing to review the writing of Booth in the village of Ravenna "as those letters are unfair and false representation of the subjects of which they treat." Rigdon demanded a debate with Booth. Symonds Ryder was requested to meet Rigdon in the township of Hiram and discuss the Book of Mormon.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 181; LDS D&C 71:7-10; RLDS D&C 71:2.

⁴⁹ *Ohio Star* 2 (December 15, 1831). Four years later Sidney Rigdon still maintained that the "letters were a bundle of falsehoods" and "would not bear the test of investigation." See Rigdon to Brother [John] Whitmer, *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (January 1836):242,.

Reynolds Cahoon and Hyrum Smith mentioned in their journals that they heard reviews of Booth's letters.⁵⁰ The *Ohio Star*, after publishing in their December 29 issue a letter from Symonds Ryder, declined to carry on the debate further. They explained:

MR. BOOTH has sent us for publication a vindication of his character from the attacks made upon it by Mr. Rigdon, during his late visit to this place. Mr. Booth thinks, very naturally, that if those who assert the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, are impostors, there would be no great wisdom in submitting his reputation to the same testimony; as those who are capable of the imposition, might be corrupt enough to traduce his character, right or wrong. We have already expressed an opinion that the controversy in our columns may not end without injustice to either party; and as the admission of Mr. Booth's communication would lay us under obligation to publish a reply, we must respectfully decline its publication.⁵¹

Others planned to send Booth's letters to relatives. For example, Wesley Perkins wrote, "I would Send you A paper that Contains A letter written by the Rev. E. Boothe [Booth]. I will Send you the letters & you may survie [survey] them and Satisfy your Silf [Self]. Mr. Booth went to the Promust [Promise] land."⁵²

The letters produced a positive outcome as elders continued to preach the Book of Mormon, and direct conversions came from their efforts. Ira Ames investigated the church and was baptized into the Restoration church after reading some of Booth's comments and a letter from his mother. Ames later recalled, "When reading his letters I felt an impression that there was something in Mormonism."⁵³ Other analysis could be made, but it is clear that Ezra Booth participated in the founding of the Jackson County, Missouri, Zion. His letters retain an early recollection of important church events in 1831. The appeal of Mormonism was its claim to prophetic leadership.

Though we cannot recall all of the events in our past we can appreciate the legacy that those who were connected with Mormonism for only a brief time. Ezra Booth's letters had an impact on the early Mormon Church. May we remember those moments in 1831 as we try to appreciate and understand our past history through the eyes of those who chose not to remain with the movement.

⁵⁰ Hyrum Smith wrote, "Went to ravanah [Ravenna] hearD the exposition upon Booths lett[e]rs DeliverED by Brother SiDney" See Hyrum Smith Journal, December 26, 1831, L. Tom Perry Special Colections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Reynolds Cahoon recorded, "Went to Ravana [Ravenna] there heard the Discuss[i]on of Booths letters." See Reynolds Cahoon Journal, January 2, 1832, LDS Archives.

⁵¹ *Ohio Star*, 3 (January 26, 1832).

⁵² Wesley Perkins to "Respective Brother & Sister," February 11, 1832, as cited in Dennis Rowley, "The Ezra Booth Letters," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 (Autumn 1983):136.

⁵³ Ira Ames Autobiography, LDS Archives.

Why Ezra Booth's 1831 Letters Are Important

The impact of Booth's nine letters were both negative and positive.⁵⁴ It was negative in the sense that he was the first former member who pointed out the failure of Joseph Smith's prophetic insight on the issue of a Lamanite church established from the missionary efforts of Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer, Ziba Petersen, Parley P. Pratt, and Frederick G. Williams. Smith's faulty expectation may have resulted from the report of Parley Pratt in March and from Oliver Cowdery's letters.

Positive aspects included a mission call for Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith to rebut Ezra Booth's letters. The decision to omit for publication and refine his revelations permitted Joseph to express his views in new ways. The second letter of Booth cites from a manuscript revelation that Smith's Bible revision was to be regarded as "a profound secret, and strict commandments were given for that purpose; and even the salvation of the church was said to depend upon it."⁵⁵

The February 9, 1831, revelation corroborates part of Booth's letter concerning the church's salvation and keeping the revision a secret. The revealed Laws of the Church included the following statement with regard to Smith's revision of the scriptures: "Thou shalt ask and my scriptures shall be given as I have appointed, and for thy salvation thou shalt hold thy peace concerning them till ye have rec[eive]d. them, and then I give unto you a Commandment that ye shall teach them unto all men & they also shall be taught unto all nations kindreds, tongues & people"⁵⁶

Two manuscripts have the earlier reading: "For thy salvation thou shalt hold thy peace concerning them." The Book of Commandments printed the text in a different form:

Thou shalt ask and my scriptures shall be given as I have appointed; and for thy *safety it is expedient that* thou shouldst hold thy peace concerning them, until ye have received them: Then I give unto you a commandment that ye shall teach them unto all men; *for* they also shall be taught unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people.⁵⁷

In the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants a further explanation appears in this revelation:

⁵⁴ In 1834 E. D. Howe republished Booth's nine letters. The letters are contained on forty-six pages or 15 percent of *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville [Ohio]: Printed and Published by the Author, 1834), 175-221.

⁵⁵ *Ohio Star* 2 (October 20, 1831):3.

⁵⁶ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 109, from manuscript designated "Book of Commandments, Law and Covenants; Book B," LDS Archives. Compare with LDS D&C 42:56-58; RLDS D&C 42:15.

⁵⁷ Book of Commandments 44:43-44; emphasis added for on words not in manuscript Book B. The reading "for thy safety it is expedient that" appears in two post-November 1831 manuscripts and was evidently based upon the November 1831 Book of Commandments manuscript.

Thou shalt ask, and my scriptures shall be given as I have appointed, and *they shall be preserved in safety; and it is expedient that thou shouldst hold thy peace concerning them, and not teach them until ye have received them in full. And I give unto you a commandment, that then ye shall teach them unto all men; for they shall be taught unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people.*⁵⁸

Finally, the minutes of a general conference held on October 25, 1831, at Orange, Ohio, reports that Joseph Smith said, “Except the church recieve [sic] the fulness of the Scriptures that they would yet fall.”⁵⁹

One of Ezra Booth's major complaints was not finding a church containing Native American converts. In the eighth letter, the text of a revelation given prior to the departure of the Lamanite missionaries was published for the first time. The revelatory message read: “And now behold I say unto you, that thou shalt go unto the Lamanites, and preach my Gospel unto them, and cause my Church to be established among them.”⁶⁰

The wording was close to that in the Book of Commandments. But for the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants it was felt necessary to modify the language. The text of the revelation appeared as follows: “And now, behold I say unto you, that you shall go unto the Lamanites and preach my gospel unto them; and *inasmuch as they receive thy teachings, thou shalt cause my church to be established among them.*”⁶¹

Joseph Smith and his committee decided not to include the revelation that designated Independence as the center place and site of the New Jerusalem city in the Book of Commandments manuscript. The revelatory document was not published until the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants with altered meaning. There were no Native American converts among the Shawnee or Delaware tribes as promised. The early text read:

And again verily I say unto you let my servant Sidney Gilbert plant himself in this place and establish a store that he may sell goods without fraud that he may obtain money to buy lands for the good of the saints and that he may obtain provisions and whatsoever things the di[s]ciples may need to plant them in their inheritance and also let my servant Sidney [Gilbert] obtain a licence [sic] (Behold here is wisdom and whoso readeth let him understand) that he may send goods also unto the Lamanites even by whom I will as clerks employed in his service and thus the gospel may be preached unto them.⁶²

⁵⁸ 1835 Doctrine and Covenants 3:15. Emphasis added for wording not in Book of Commandments 44:43-44. See LDS D&C 42:56-58; RLDS D&C 42:15.

⁵⁹ Minutes copied into the “Far West Record.” See Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 23. The phrase “fulness of Scriptures” refers to Joseph Smith’s Bible revision See Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 108; LDS D&C 42:15; 104:58; RLDS D&C 42:5; 101:10; and the revision of Luke 11:52.

⁶⁰ *Ohio Star* 2 (December 8, 1831):1.

⁶¹ 1835 D&C 51:3, emphasis added; LDS D&C 28:8 and RLDS D&C 28:3.

⁶² Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 143, July 20, 1831.

In 1835 the text was revised as follows:

And also let my servant Sidney Gilbert obtain a licence, (behold here is wisdom, and whoso readeth let him understand,) that he may send goods also unto the *people*, even by whom *he* will as clerks, employed in his service, and thus *provide for my saints, that my gospel may be preached unto those who sit in darkness and in the region and shadow of death.*⁶³

Independence, Missouri, the Center Place

On July 20, 1831, a revelation designated Independence as the center place was received: "This is the land of promise and the place for the city of Zion yea and thus saith the Lord your God if ye will receive wisdom here is wisdom behold the place which is now called Independence is the center place and the spot for the temple is lying westward upon a lot which is not far from the courthouse."⁶⁴ The courthouse mentioned is the brick Jackson County Courthouse located in 1831 on the public square in the village of Independence. The land and site of the temple was outside the Independence city boundary. At the time of the dedication, the property was owned by the state of Missouri.⁶⁵ The message dictated by Joseph Smith included instructions that

it is wisdom that the Land should be purchased by the saints and also every tract lying westward even unto the line run[n]ing directly between Jew [Native Americans] and Gentile and also every tract bordering by the prairies in asmuch as my disciples are enabled to buy lands behold this is wisdom that they may obtain it for an everlasting inheritance.

Sidney Gilbert was told to purchase "lands in all the regions round about" and also to "establish a store that he may sell goods without fraud that he may obtain money to buy lands for the good of the saints."⁶⁶ Gilbert was to establish the store in Independence. He was directed to have clerks employed under license in the store so that they could bring goods to the Native Americans and thereby obtain entrance and do missionary work among them "and thus the gospel may be preached unto them." Bishop Edward Partridge and his counselors were "to divide unto the saints their inheritance even as I have commanded."

An early copy of this revelation is preserved in the Kirtland Revelations Book. Another copy was recorded by Sidney Gilbert. The text retains the original wording as Joseph Smith dictated it. Not only does it designate the Independence area as the city of Zion, or New Jerusalem of the Book of Mormon, the gathering place for the saints, but it also tells of proselytizing the Native American tribes in the territory west of the Missouri.

⁶³ 1835 D&C 27:4; LDS D&C 57:9-10; RLDS D&C 57:4, emphasis added.

⁶⁴ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 142; LDS D&C 57:2-3; RLDS D&C 57:1.

⁶⁵ Bishop Edward Partridge purchased a little over sixty-three acres near Independence on December 19, 1831, including the spot where the contemplated temple was to be erected.

⁶⁶ Gilbert returned to Independence about January 1832 and purchased Lot 51 for a general store on November 19, 1832.

Dedication of Spot for the Temple Pronounced by Sidney Rigdon

On August 3, 1831, a number of elders assembled where the Temple is to be erected. Sidney Rigdon dedicated the ground where the New Jerusalem is to stand. Joseph Smith laid a stone at the Northeast corner of the planned Temple. Oliver Cowdery wrote, as recorded in John Whitmer's history, about the gathering of the elders at the location where the temple was to be erected: "Sidney Rigdon dedicated the ground where the city is to Stand: and Joseph Smith Jr. laid a stone at the North east corner of the contemplated *Temple* in the name of the Lord Jesus of Nazareth. . . . Sidney Rigdon pronounced this Spot of ground wholly [wholly] dedicated unto the Lord forever: Amen.⁶⁷ This fulfilled the instruction of a revelation give a day or two previously that Sidney Rigdon should consecrated and dedicated the spot for the temple.⁶⁸

As Ezra Booth mentioned, a short distance outside of the village of Independence, south of the road, was the land designated as the location for building the latter-day temple of the New Jerusalem. William E. McLellin, an early convert, traveled to Independence and arrived there after Joseph Smith left the area to return to Ohio. McLellin was disappointed in not meeting Joseph Smith. But William McLellin did meet Martin Harris and obtained information on the spot for the proposed temple site.⁶⁹ In September 1881 Dr. William E. McLellin showed William H. Kelley and a Brother Warnky the temple lot. Kelley wrote of his visit with McLellin:

The doctor was able to point out the identical spot where Joseph stood when he first visited it, and which is the place of the corner stone. He visited it soon after himself, when it was all covered with young poplars thickly standing. Joseph cut his way in through this thick growth of trees, brush and saplings, and marked the spot by blazing a tree near by, cutting away the under brush for a few feet around and setting up a small stone that had been picked up in the ravine below. This was all the corner stone that was ever laid upon it, and it only to mark the place of the corner.⁷⁰

John L. Traugher, Jr., who collected material on early Mormonism, recalled in 1884 when William E. McLellin showed him the location for the temple:

⁶⁷ Copied into "The Book of John Whitmer," 32, Community of Christ Archives; published in *Journal of History* 1 (January 1908):59-60; and Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 86-87, emphasis retained.

⁶⁸ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 148; LDS D&C 58:57; RLDS D&C 58:13.

⁶⁹ Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin 1831-1836* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, Brigham Young University and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 33-36, entries for August 18-25 1831. Original in LDS Archives.

⁷⁰ William H. Kelley to Editor, January 16, 1882, *Saints' Herald* 29 (March 1, 1882):67. Orson Pratt wrote, "The ground, then was covered with the common trees of the forest" (Orson Pratt Sr., to "My Dear Marian," September 18, 1878 as cited in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1944), 5:417.

I visited Dr. McLellan [sic] in April, 1881, and walked with him over the "Temple Lot" lying west of the court house in Independence. He showed me the spot of the temple and related the farce of consecrating first the whole land of Zion, then the temple lot, and lastly the spot of the temple. He said that the laying of the cornerstone of the temple, which is spoken of in Mormon works as something great, consisted of a ceremony over a rock which Martin Harris picked up in a little hollow which is on the temple lot.⁷¹

Though the Lamanites missionaries lacked proper credentials, they preached to the white population in Jackson and Lafayette counties, Missouri. Booth told of two possible ways to get on the reservation. One was through intermarriage with the Native Americans and the other was by providing food and supplies from the projected store of Sidney Gilbert. Reynolds Cahoon wrote in his journal concerning his experience on reaching Independence:

There my mor[t]al Eyes beheld grate [great] and marvilous [marvelous] things such as my eyes once never even Contemplated of seeing in this world we had a glorious me[e]ting on the sab[b]ath we with the Brethren I ar[r]ived in Independance [Independence] on thursday the fourth of august 1831 After tarr[y]ing in Independence a number of days and exploring much of of that region of c[o]untry the Lord com[m]anded us to rurn [return] holm [home] to our familys [families].⁷²

Booth's letters contain two significant proposals on preaching to the natives. First, although Booth wrote negatively of a "smug[g]ling method of preaching to the Indians," the method of providing goods to the natives was endorsed in the revelation of July 20, 1831. Second, the idea that Joseph Smith had a revelation regarding intermarriage to obtain residence with the Lamanites is supported. Booth, without naming Martin Harris, wrote in his ninth and last letter:

It has been made known to one, who has left his wife in the state of N.Y. that he is entirely free from his wife, and he is at liberty to take him a wife from among the Lamanites. It was easily perceived that this permission, was perfectly suited to his desires. I have frequently heard him state, that the Lord has made it known to him, that he is as free from his wife as from any other woman; and the only crime that I have ever heard alleged against her is, she is violently opposed to Mormonism. But before this contemplated marriage can be carried into effect, he must return to the State of N.Y. and settle his business, for fear, should he return, after that

⁷¹ John L. Traughber, "Some Statements by Dr. W. E. McLellan," May 23, 1884, John L. Traughber Collection, Manuscripts Division, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁷² Reynolds Cahoon Journal, LDS Archives.

affair had taken place, the civil authority would apprehend him as a criminal.⁷³

At a meeting held in February 1845 William W. Phelps mentioned that Joseph Smith had a revelation "that Martin [Harris] was to marry among the Lamanites."⁷⁴ Harris frequently traveled to Palmyra, New York where his wife lived. He neither divorced his wife Lucy nor chose a Native American to be his wife.

While Booth's exposé of his Missouri trip did not change the location of the latter-day New Jerusalem, it did change the plan to convert the Native Americans by preaching by humanitarian means. That there was some rebellion among those who returned from Missouri is indicated in a revelation through Smith. The elders were told on September 11 concerning Joseph Smith, "There are those who have Sought occasion [occasion] against him without a cause nevertheless he has sinned but verily I say unto you I the Lord forgiveth Sins unto those who confess their Sins before me & ask forgiveness who have not sinned unto Death."⁷⁵

To Isaac Morley and Ezra Booth they were told that the Lord was angry "with him who was my Servent [sic] Ezra" and also the Lord's servant Isaac "for they kept not the Law neither the commandment they sought evil in their hearts & I the Lord withheld my Spirit from them they condemned for evil that thing in which there was no evil nevertheless I have forgiven my servent [sic] Isaac."⁷⁶

Instead of the central place for church headquarters, the saints were told that the land of Kirtland would be retained as a strong hold "for the space of five years in [the] which I will not overthrow the wicked that thereby I may save some." Kirtland would be a resting place before traveling to Missouri. The saints were told the rebellious "are not of the blood of Ephraim wherefore they shall be plucked out."⁷⁷

Ezra Booth endured hardships in his travel to and from Missouri. While others remained committed to the church, Booth afterwards denied Joseph Smith's revelations and withdrew his fellowship with the church. His recollections of early events in the life of the church preserved in his 1831 letters are important in understanding those days.

⁷³ *Ohio Star* 2 (December 8, 1831):1.

⁷⁴ "Meeting of the Twelve & others in the Recorder's office," February 27, 1845, LDS Archives. The minutes as recorded by Thomas Bullock stated: "Phelps s^d. [said] 6 or 8. went over the boundaries of the U.S. to preach – Jos[eph]. went to prayer - he then commenced a revelation that Martin was to marry among the Lamanites - c [and] that I [Phelps] was to preach that day - &c &c it was a long revelation."

⁷⁵ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 159-60; LDS D&C 64:15-16, 21, 36; RLDS D&C 64:2-4, 7, September 11, 1831.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; LDS D&C 64:15-16; RLDS D&C 64:3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 159-60; LDS D&C 64:21, 36; RLDS D&C 64:4, 7.