

Lyman E. Johnson: Forgotten Apostle

(co-authored with William Shepard)

Published in the *Journal of Mormon History* 36 (Winter 2010):93-144.

On December 20, 1859, Lyman E. Johnson, landlord of the Prairie Hotel at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and an unidentified passenger drove their horse sleigh onto the frozen Mississippi River and started for Dubuque, Iowa. The Prairie du Chein *Courier* ran a bleak notice two days later: “Drowned.—L. E. Johnson, the landlord of the Prairie Hotel, was accidentally drowned night before last. He was in a sleigh with others, when it went through an air-hole in the ice, of the Mississippi.”¹ A lawyer named Woods added: “He and another gentleman were going in a sleigh to Dubuque. They were crossing the Mississippi River on the ice; being heavily wrapped with robes and mufflers. They drove into an air-hole, were unable to extricate themselves, and were drowned.”² Woods described the forty-eight-year-old ex-Mormon in glowing terms: “He was generous in his nature, convivial and bounteous in his hospitality; had many parties and social gatherings. In person he was tall and large, of fine physique; remarkably fine looking, and of polite and elegant address.”³

This winter accident ended the life of one of early Mormonism’s brightest stars, who is little known today. During his Mormon career, he was a brilliant missionary, bringing scores of converts into the young Church and claiming that an angel showed him the Book of Mormon plates. He attended the School of the Prophets, was among the first to learn new revelatory doctrines, recruited soldiers for the 1834 Zion’s Camp, in which he participated, and energetically defending Joseph Smith against criticism during the camp’s trek to Missouri. The capstone of his Mormon experience was his calling and ordination to the Quorum of Twelve Apostles on February 14, 1835, and a blessing that promised he would live until Christ’s second coming.

His estrangement from the Church may have begun in mid-1836 when he and fellow apostle John F. Boynton borrowed a large sum to become merchants in Kirtland, Ohio. Following the failure of the Kirtland Bank and the financial crisis of 1837, their business and other investments failed. Like many other prominent Mormons, they joined the opposition party at Kirtland, and Lyman was not sustained as an apostle at a Church conference held on September 3, 1837. Restored to his apostleship a week later, he moved his family to Far West, Missouri.

¹ “Drowned,” Prairie du Chein *Courier* 8 (December 22, 1859):3. The *Courier* 8 (March 8, 1860):3 announced: “Found—The body of E. L. [L. E.] Johnson the late proprietor of the Prairie Hotel, who was drowned by breaking through the ice last winter, has been recovered.” “Air holes” were areas in the river where a spring or other abnormality were located and consequently weakened the ice.

² Edward H. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers and Public Men of Early Iowa* (Des Moines, Iowa: The Homestead Publishing Co., 1916), 337-38.

³ *Ibid.*, 338.

His membership in the Church ended when he was excommunicated in April 1838 for opposing the institutional Church and was driven from Far West with other dissenters. He demonstrated his apparent contempt for the Mormons when he accompanied the victorious Gentile forces into Far West following the surrender on November 1, 1838. After attempting to recover personal possessions lost during his earlier rapid departure from Far West, he and his family briefly settled at Richmond, Ray County, Missouri, and then relocated near Davenport, Iowa. By 1840 the family settled permanently at Keokuk in Iowa Territory, where Lyman was a successful attorney, businessman, and community leader. In spite of his adversarial relation with the Mormons in Missouri, he visited Joseph Smith, former missionary companions, and family members at Nauvoo and became a Mason in the Nauvoo Lodge. Three months after the murder of Colonel George Davenport at Rock Island, Illinois, on July 4, 1845, Lyman was deputized to help apprehending a Mormon identified as an accessory in Davenport's murder and was severely beaten by Mormons during the attempted arrest at Nauvoo. Less than a year later, he was reportedly among the anti-Mormon forces who attacked the remaining Mormons and the new citizens of Nauvoo. There is no indication that he had additional contact with the Mormons or joined any church following the Battle of Nauvoo. He spent the rest of his life pursuing business opportunities and engaging in Masonic activities with the same fervor he exhibited when he was a Latter Day Saint missionary.

Becoming a Mormon

John and Elsa (or Alice) Johnson moved from Vermont to Hiram, Portage County, Ohio, in 1818 with several children and labored to establish a successful farm.⁴ By 1831, when the family became acquainted with Mormonism, they owned over 300 acres and lived in a large, comfortable house. It is widely assumed the family became Mormons after Elsa's arthritic arm was miraculously healed by Joseph Smith.⁵ Daughter Marinda Nancy Johnson, who was then fifteen, tells this story of her parents' conversion and that of neighbors Ezra and Dorcus Booth: "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."⁶

⁴ Milton V. Backman, Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio 1830-1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 403 note 1, explained: "Although the wife of John Johnson is referred to in some contemporary records as Elsa or Elsey, she was also called Alice in a family Bible." Mark L. Staker, "Remembering Hiram Ohio," *Ensign*, October 2002, 32, wrote: "The Johnsons had 15 children; 9 lived to adulthood: Alice, Fanny, John Jr., Luke, Olmstead, Lyman, Emily, Marinda, and Justin."

⁵ Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:363.

⁶ Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormonism* (New York: Tullidge & Crandell, 1877), 403-4.

Lyman Johnson was baptized at Kirtland, some thirty miles from Hiram, about February 1831, and was soon ordained to the office of priest.⁷ His sister Marinda was baptized in April. Luke S. Johnson and the rest of the children, except Olmstead, may have been baptized by the end of the following month.

Lyman entered the Prophet's inner circle when Joseph and Emma moved into his parents' home on September 12, 1831. This close association resulted in Lyman's ordination as an elder at a general conference on October 25, 1831, by Oliver Cowdery.⁸ Eight days later, he was ordained a high priest by Sidney Rigdon at a conference at Hiram, Ohio,⁹ and joined with those assembled in testifying that Joseph Smith's revelations were true. Lyman, his brother Luke, William McLellin, and Orson Hyde—all future apostles—sought to know God's will for them in early November; the revelatory response was to “preach the gospel to every creature.”¹⁰

First Mission, 1832

Lyman immediately began preaching with Orson Pratt in Lorain County, Ohio, returning to Amherst, Ohio, for a conference on January 25, 1832. Here another revelation directed him and Pratt to “take their journey into the eastern countries” (LDS D&C 75:14; RLDS D&C 75:3).

⁷ Lyman was born in Pomfret, Windsor County, Vermont. His gravestone in Evergreen Cemetery in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, gives a birthdate of October 15, 1813, and says he was “46 years old” when he died on December 20, 1859. The gravestone was broken in half as early as 1992 when Johnson family genealogists, Virginia Tims and Elaine M. E. Speakman arranged for it to be repaired. Currently, portions of the tombstone are impossible to decipher. Elaine Speakman confirmed Lyman's birth date on the gravestone from a 1964 photo. According to the family Bible, found [in] the attic of Fanny Johnson Ryder in Hiram, Ohio, Lyman was born on October 24, 1811. We consider the gravestone date to be incorrect and that October 24, 1811, is the correct date of Lyman's birth. According to Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 19, Lyman is listed as a priest at the conference held in Orange Township on October 25, 1831.

⁸ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 25. See also Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compendium of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901–30), 1:91-92.

⁹ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 28.

¹⁰ *The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 68:8 (hereafter LDS D&C) and *Doctrine and Covenants, The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (now Community of Christ) (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 1990), 68:11 (hereafter RLDS D&C).

The two companions left on February 3, following the New Testament example of traveling without purse or scrip; their possessions consisted of “our change of clothing.”¹¹ They traveled to Mercer County, Pennsylvania, on February 8 and stopped at the home of Benjamin Stokely in Cool Spring Township. At “early candle light” they preached to those assembled, describing the name given them by “the world” as “Mormonites.” They explained how Joseph Smith obtained the plates from which he translated the Book of Mormon and retold its dramatic story: that Lehi “came across the water into South America” and “the last battle that was fought among these parties was on the *very ground* where the plates were found, but it had been a running battle, for they commenced at the Isthmus of Darien [Panama] and ended at Manchester,” New York. Lyman testified that an angel had shown him the Book of Mormon plates. According to Benjamin Stokely, one of the attendees,

[Johnson] has left Father, Mother, Brothers and Sisters, the farm and neighborhood of [fr]iends, to declare the will of God, and the rev[el]ation of John who saw the angel flying through Heaven—An angel brought the Morm[o]nite Bi[b]le and laid it before him (the speaker;) he therefore *knows* these things to be true. Being sent to call on all to repent—he has come to fulfil[l] the commands of Heaven: he has cleared his skirts of our blood. . . .

One of the young men called himself Lyman Johnston [sic], from Portage County, Ohio. The other was called Arson [sic] Pratt; no fixed place of abode. They were going North East, intending to preach the gospel to every kindred, tongue and nation:—They appeared to have little learning, to be sincere in all they said. They had good manners—had been well raised—were decent and unassuming in every thing I saw, or heard them say.¹²

At this point, Pratt and Johnson were both twenty years old. The two missionaries also preached at the courthouse in Franklin, Venango County, northeast of Mercer County, on Saturday, February 11, repeating their message about Joseph Smith, the gold plates, Lehi, and the last battle. The pair explained that their founder, Joseph Smith, “having repented of his sins, but not attached himself to any party of Christians, owing to the numerous divisions among them, and being in doubt what his duty was, he had recourse [to] prayer. After retiring to bed one night, he was visited by an Angel and directed to proceed to a hill in the neighborhood where he would find a stone box containing a quantity of Gold plates.” The doctrinal thrust of their Book of Mormon message was

¹¹ Elden J. Watson, ed., *The Orson Pratt Journals* (Salt Lake City: Elden J. Watson, 1975), 12.

¹² This report was submitted to the *Western Press* of nearby Mercer, Pennsylvania by Benjamin Stokely, who wrote, “As the press is a medium through which to communicate information for public use, I have sent the following for that purpose.” “The Orators of Mormon,” *Catholic Telegraph* (Cincinnati) 1 (April 14, 1832):204–5; emphasis retained; reprinted from *Western Press*, Mercer.

on repentance, and quotations from our prophets to prove their doctrine, and the return of the Jews to Palestine, which was to be done by the gentile nations, accompanied with power from above, far superior to that which brought their fathers out of Egypt. They insisted that our Savior would shortly appear, and that there were some present who would see him on the earth—that they knew it—that they were not deceiving their hearers; that it was all true. They had one of their bibles with them, which was seen by some of our citizens who visited them.¹³

Lyman and Orson traveled through Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York City, then concentrated their missionary activities in Vermont and New Hampshire. Their successful missionary techniques included introducing the gospel in a given community and remaining long enough to baptize all who would accept their message. They would return later to ordain officers and set the branches in order.

By May the missionaries were in Charleston, Vermont. Among those they baptized were Amasa M. Lyman, Winslow Farr, and William Snow. Snow recorded in his journal that he, “was baptized <on the 19th of may> under the han<d>s of Lyman E Johnson at which time Brother Winslow Farr & his wife Olive (who had been healed of a Disease tha[t] had been upon her for ma[ny] years)” were also baptized.¹⁴ One of Winslow and Olive’s sons was eleven-year-old Lorin, who later told Edward W. Tullidge about his family’s first encounter with Mormonism: “Orson Pratt commenced to preach to a crowded house, and told them the nature of his mission. . . . Afterward Lyman arose and delivered one of the most powerful testimonies pertaining to the mission of Joseph Smith, and the great work of the last days, that Lorin ever heard. He also said he knew the Book of Mormon was true, for he had seen an angel and he had made this known unto him.”¹⁵

Lyman returned to Kirtland before Orson, since he ordained William Smith, the Prophet’s younger brother, an elder at a December 19, 1832, conference.¹⁶ Lyman also participated with Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, ten other elders, and an undisclosed number of male and female members at a conference on January 22–23, 1833, in which spiritual gifts were manifested and the School of the Prophets was organized. After Joseph spoke in tongues on the first day of the conference, “the gift was poured out in a miraculous manner, until all the Elders obtained the gift.” The following day was even more spiritually gratifying. While fasting, and after much speaking, singing, and prayer, Joseph washed the feet of the elders and then “through the power of the Holy Ghost

¹³ “Mormonism,” *Fredonia [New York] Censor* 11 (March 7, 1832):4; reprinted from the *Venango Democrat*, Franklin, Pennsylvania.

¹⁴ William Snow, Journal, May 1832, L. Tom Perry Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Words in angled brackets appear above the line.

¹⁵ Edward W. Tullidge, *Tullidge's Histories. Volume 2: Containing the History of all the Northern, Eastern and Western Counties of Utah; also the Counties of Southern Idaho* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor, 1889), 174–75.

¹⁶ Fred C. Collier and William S. Harwell, eds., *Kirtland Council Minute Book* (Salt Lake City: Collier’s Publishing Company, 1996), 3. William Smith’s license is in Community of Christ Library-Archives.

[proclaimed] that the Elders were all clean from the blood of this generation.” The elders were then sealed up unto eternal life. Lyman and the others understood that this blessing was provisional; if they willfully sinned after being cleansed, they “should be given over unto the buffetings of Satan until the day of redemption.” The elders then washed each other’s feet.¹⁷

The 1833 phase of the School of the Prophets lasted from January 23 to about April 1. They met in a 10x14-foot room “in the upper story of the Newel K. Whitney store.”¹⁸ As Joseph and Emma Smith lived in the rooms over the Whitney store, Emma apparently had to clean pipe dottle, tobacco ash, and spittle from chewing tobacco after the elders finished each session. After she complained to Joseph, he received the revelation on the Word of Wisdom on February 27 banned the use of tobacco, alcohol and “hot drinks.”¹⁹

Second Mission, March-September 1833

The brief interlude at Kirtland ended on March 26 when Lyman and Orson left on their second mission to the Vermont area. Their assignment was to go eastward and preach by the way, going to the churches they had previously raised up. If Lyman kept a journal, it has not survived; therefore, the best guide of his ministerial labors comes from the journals of his sometime companions Orson Pratt and John Murdock, who were both high priests. Both diaries note Lyman’s personal activities when they were together only peripherally; even less is known about the periods when they worked separately. They preached in schoolhouses and homes, baptized, administered to the sick, held conferences, and defended their flocks from Protestant ministers.

After leaving Kirtland, Lyman and Orson visited the churches in Springfield, Pennsylvania, and in Jamestown and Silver Creek, New York. Significantly, in Geneseo, Livingston County, New York, they encountered a hotbed of dissent engendered by the vision on the “Three Glories” received by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon on February 16, 1832, at the home of Lyman’s father. Murdock recorded in early May: “Bro. L. Johnson Came to me Said he & O Pratt had visited Ezra Landing [Landen] in Geneseo who denied the vision & other Revelations & other members Joined him & they wanted

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

¹⁸ Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith: A Historical and Biographical Commentary of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 186.

¹⁹ Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 47; LDS D&C 89; RLDS D&C 86. On October 3, 1883, at a meeting of the Salt Lake School of the Prophets, Zebedee Coltrin recalled that he was the only survivor of the meeting in which Joseph received the revelation on the Word of Wisdom. He said Lyman was one of the twenty-one elders present, twenty of whom used tobacco. “They all immediately threw their tobacco and pipes into the fire.” *Salt Lake School of the Prophets: Minute Book 1883* (Palm Desert, Calif.: ULC Press, 1981), 53.

to get help.”²⁰ Ezra Landen, a high priest and president of the Geneseo Branch,²¹ had expressed skepticism in this and other revelations. Murdock and his companion, Leonard Rich, joined Pratt and Johnson as “4 High Priests forming the council.” On May 1, they met with Landen at 6:00 P.M. with Murdock presiding. Pratt offered the opening prayer, then “laid the case before the conference by stating that Br Landing said the vision was of the Devil & he believed it no more than he believed the devil was crucified & many like things.” Landen in fact denounced it as “of the Devil” and said “would not have the vision taught in the church” for a thousand dollars.²² He defended himself, not by arguing doctrine, but by citing the sacrifices and hardships he had endured as markers of his sincerity. Murdock responded that he and others had also made great sacrifices; “but if we do not hold out to the end we do not obtain the crown.” The next morning “the church met according to appointment Br Orson led in explanation [sic] of the vision & other revelation[s] followed by my Self & Br Lyman.” Landen asked forgiveness, which was granted, and the conference allowed him to continue in his office.²³

Lyman and Orson arrived at Bath, New Hampshire, in early June and worked together until June 14. Although they held a number of joint meetings, for the most part, they worked separately, preaching in different towns. When the congregation in Charleston, New Hampshire, united in prayer, Pratt wrote in his journal: “Heard their prayers & moved upon his servant Lyman by the power of the Holy Ghost to seal them

²⁰ John Murdock, *An Abridged Record of the life of John Murdock, Taken from His Journals by Himself*, typescript, 27, May 1, 1833, LDS Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. The vision of the Three Glories is now LDS and RLDS D&C 76. The vision would have been circulated as “A Vision,” *Evening and the Morning Star* 1 (July 1832):2 and by written and verbal communications. John Murdock in 1832 went to Warrensville and Orange, Ohio and mentioned that the brethren “had Just received the Revilation called the vision & were stumbling at it I called them togather confirmed them in the truth.” John Murdock, *Journal*, 18. Cook, *Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 311, explained: “Members of the Church during this period did not confuse ‘The Vision’ (section 76) with the ‘First Vision’ because the 1820 event was not generally known until after 1842.”

²¹ Landen’s brief career as a Mormon was significant. When John Young (Brigham Young’s father), and sons Phineas and Joseph (Brigham’s brothers) visited the branch at Columbia, Pennsylvania, in April 1832, they encountered Elders Ezra Landen and Daniel Bowen. John was baptized by either Ezra or Daniel, Phineas was baptized by Ezra, and Joseph was baptized by Daniel. Ezra also baptized eighteen or twenty persons in and near Avon and Genessee, New York, in the fall of 1832. Lyman D. Platt, “Early Branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-Day Saints 1830-1850,” *Nauvoo Journal* 3 (1991):12 and 4 respectively; *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (chronological scrapbook of typed entries and newspaper clippings, 1830–present), April 14, 1832, October 12, 1839, LDS Church History Library; Orson F. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1945), 24.

²² John Murdock, *Journal*, 27, May 1, 1833. It may have been because of concerns among Church members that Joseph Smith modified some of the wording of the Vision in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants.

²³ Murdock, *Journal*, 27–28.

up unto eternal life & after this the Brethren arose one by one & said that they knew that their names were sealed in the Lamb's Book of life & they all did bear this glorious testimony save two or three."²⁴

Unhappily, Lyman Johnson was still on this mission when his fifteen-year-old sister, Mary, died on May 30, 1833, at the home of Joseph Smith in Kirtland. Joseph Holbrook recorded that her death "caused much gloominess at the prophet's house." She was buried in the cemetery near the Kirtland Temple.²⁵ John Sr. and Elsa Johnson moved from Hiram to Kirtland about this time. John was ordained a high priest on June 4 and became a member of the United Firm, a partnership organized in March 1832 to help support certain Church leaders who held the office of high priest. A year later, the firm was disbanded.²⁶

Mission with Orson Pratt, 1833-34

Lyman and Orson returned to Kirtland on September 28. After briefly working on the Kirtland Temple and participating in various Church councils and activities, a council of high priests commissioned them to return and visit their brethren at Geneseo, New York.²⁷ Accordingly, they left Kirtland on November 27. This was not a spiritually satisfying mission, as they spent considerable time attempting to counter the negative impact made by Methodist ministers, to mediate disputes between members, and to deal with schismatic elements in the branches.

One of the most disheartening episodes was Ezra Landen's backsliding in Geneseo. He had once again decided that the "Vision of the Three Glories" was heretical because it seemed to contradict the traditional Christian view of heaven and hell as taught in the Bible and Book of Mormon.²⁸ On December 31, 1833, Lyman was chosen as "moderator" by high priests Orson Pratt, John Murdock, and Amasa Lyman, four elders, one priest, and one teacher. Orson Pratt recorded: "After his [Landen's] case was duly

²⁴ Orson Pratt, Journal, August 26, 1833, LDS Church History Library; also in Watson, *The Orson Pratt Journals*, 24; terminal punctuation added.

²⁵ Janet Lisonbee, *In Memory of the Early Saints who lived and died in the Kirtland, Ohio area*, (N. p., Author, 2003), 8.

²⁶ Lyndon W. Cook, *Joseph Smith and the Law of Consecration* (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book, 1985), 57–70. See LDS D&C 96:6-9; RLDS D&C 93:2 for John Johnson Sr.'s appointment to the firm. On June 25, 1833, Joseph Smith wrote to William Phelps and other Saints in Jackson County, Missouri: "Zombre [John Johnson Sr.] has been received as a member of the firm by commandment, and has just come to Kirtland to live." Joseph Smith, et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 7 vols., 2d rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978 printing), 1:363, June 25, 1833. See also Max H Parkin, "Joseph Smith and the United Firm: The Growth and Decline of the Church's First Master Plan of Business and Finance, Ohio and Missouri, 1832-1834," *BYU Studies* 46, no. 3 (2007):5–66.

²⁷ An Epistle from a Council of High Priests, November 23, 1833, LDS Church History Library.

²⁸ For a non-Mormon view, see "Changes of Mormonism," *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* (Utica, N.Y.), March 17, 1832.

examined by the conference & some points of the Revelations read & explained touching his situation the conference were requested to give their decision & they unanimously [unanimously] gave their voices against him & he was cut off from the church.”²⁹

Lyman returned to Kirtland in mid-February 1834 and, only a week later on February 20, attended a high council meeting at which he and Milton Holmes were directed to go to Upper Canada on a mission. The high council addressed an area of disagreement that Lyman and Orson Pratt had encountered recently in Erie County, Pennsylvania, about the Word of Wisdom. Some members were reluctant--or refused--to take the sacrament from an elder who did not keep the Word of Wisdom. Lyman sided with those who felt that a backsliding elder disqualified himself, while Orson maintained that an elder who was still in fellowship could administer the sacrament, unless official action were taken on complaints. Three high councilors argued for exclusion, while three supported Orson’s position. The decision was “No official member in this Church is worthy to hold an office after having the Words [sic] of Wisdom properly taught to him.”³⁰

Apparently, Lyman’s mission to Canada was superseded by the emergency in Missouri and the need to recruit soldiers and raise funds to restore the Mormons who had been driven out of Jackson County. Joseph Smith noted on May 9 that Lyman, Willard Snow, and others from “the north part of Vermont” joined Zion’s Camp at Mansfield, Ohio.³¹ Lyman, his brother Luke, and some two hundred other Mormon men set out, conforming to the camp’s military regimen, walking seemingly endless miles from Kirtland to Clay County, Missouri,³² and even preaching to curious crowds. Like their comrades, the Johnson brothers witnessed the suffering and deaths caused by cholera and were similarly disappointed when they were prevented from entering Jackson County by armed Missourians. However, when Zion’s Camp ground to a halt on the banks of the Missouri River across from Jackson County, the Johnson brothers disobeyed orders. Luke later explained that he had made a personal vow to enter Jackson County. He, Lyman, and other unidentified men obtained a boat, rowed across the river, disembarked, “discharged three rounds of our small arms, and immediately got into the boat and with all our energies rowed back.” Missourians from the opposite shore shot at them on the return trip, so Luke “returned fire.”³³

When Zion’s Camp was disbanded on June 30, Luke returned to Kirtland in Heber C. Kimball’s company, arriving on July 26. Luke and Lyman participated in the August trial for Zion’s Camp participant Sylvester Smith who charged Joseph Smith with conducting himself improperly during the trek to Missouri. The brothers joined Brigham

²⁹ Orson Pratt, Journal, December 31, 1833, LDS Church History Library; see also Watson, *The Orson Pratt Journals*, 29.

³⁰ Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 33.

³¹ *History of the Church*, 2:65, May 8, 1834.

³² James L. Bradley, author of *The Eternal Perspective of Zion’s Camp* (Bountiful, Utah: Alpha Graphics, 2004) told William Shepard in a telephone interview on June 2, 2009, that the distance traveled by Zion’s Camp from Kirtland to the borders of Clay and Jackson Counties in Missouri was approximately 900 miles.

³³ “History of Luke Johnson. (by himself.)” *Deseret News*, May 26, 1858, 57.

Young and other Zion's Camp veterans in upholding the Prophet's character and rejecting Sylvester Smith's charges.³⁴

Lyman married Sarah Salter Lang at Kirtland on September 4, the same day that Lyman's sister Marinda married Orson Hyde. Sidney Rigdon performed both ceremonies.³⁵ The five months between Lyman's marriage and his ordination to the apostleship in February 1835 is not well documented. Probably he served short missions in Ohio³⁶ and attended the school for the elders which taught a variety of topics including English grammar and writing. William McLellin recorded in his journal on November 24: "This morning I commenced boarding with bro. Lyman Johnson and here I calculate to continue this winter."³⁷

Chosen an Apostle

Months before the Church was organized, Book of Mormon witnesses Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer were directed by revelation to search out twelve men to be latter-day apostles. Those selected were to take Christ's name "with full purpose of heart" and preach the gospel in "all the world" (LDS D&C 18:27-38; RLDS D&C 16:5-6). This directive was finally complied with when Joseph Smith told brothers Brigham and Joseph Young on February 8, 1835, to "notify all the brethren living in branches, within a reasonable distance from this place, to meet at a General Conference on Saturday next. I shall then and there appoint twelve special witnesses, to open the door of the gospel to foreign nations, and you," said he (speaking to Brother Brigham), 'will be one of them.'³⁸

³⁴ Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 44-58. Although Lyman is not mentioned in Kimball's incomplete list of his company of ten, it is assumed he was in this group. For Sylvester Smith's statement that his accusations against Joseph Smith were without foundation see "Dear Brother," October 28, 1834, *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834):10-11.

³⁵ Sarah was born May 6, 1815, at Lyman, Grafton County, New Hampshire. Howard Parker Moore, comp., *A Genealogy of the First Five Generations in America of the Lang Family, Descendants of Robert Lang, Fisherman, of the Isles of Shoals* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle Company, 1935), 80; Marriage Record C:55, 64, Probate Court, Geauga County, Ohio, microfilm 873,461, LDS Family History Library, Salt Lake City.

³⁶ On November 11, 1834, Sidney Rigdon told McLellin and John Boynton, "It was decided that it was not wisdom for us to go so far [to preach]—But that we must Labour in the regions round about." On November 16, Lyman left Kirtland and joined McLellin at Fair Port for a preaching appointment. Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831-1836* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press/Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1994), 148.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

³⁸ Joseph Young Sr., *History of the Organization of the Seventies* (1878; rpt., Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 1992), 3.

Accordingly, on February 14 a large number of Saints convened.³⁹ It was apparent that the Zion's Camp veterans would receive special attention as they sat "in one part of the house by themselves." Joseph Smith announced that inspiration from the Holy Spirit and a vision from God made it clear that he should choose and ordain to the ministry men who "went to Zion." Smith explained that those ordained would "go forth to prune the vineyard for the last time, for the coming of the Lord, which was nigh, even fifty six years, should wind up the scene."⁴⁰

After a one-hour intermission, the meeting resumed with individual prayers by the Three Witnesses: Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris. They then chose twelve veteran missionaries to be apostles. Lyman, the youngest, was the first ordained. A synopsis of his ordination blessing commands:

that he should bear the tidings of salvation to nations, tongues and people, until the utmost corners of the earth shall hear the tidings, and that he shall be a witness of the things of God to nations & tongues, and that Holy Angels shall administer to him occasionally, and that no power of the enemy shall prevent him from going forth and doing the work of the Lord. And that he shall live until the gathering was accomplished according to the Holy Prophets. And that he should be like unto Enoch. And your faith shall be like unto his, and he shall be called great among all the living and Satan shall tremble before thee, and that he shall see the Saviour come and stand on the Earth with power and great glory.⁴¹

Mission with the Twelve, 1835

The first mission of the apostles—Lyman's fourth, not counting short-term local missions—began on May 4. With his former missionary companion Orson Pratt, who had also been called as an apostle, Lyman walked from conference to conference, preaching wherever they had an audience: in homes, schoolhouses, and public buildings. All members of the Twelve did not attend every conference. There were four conferences in New York, one each in Upper Canada, Vermont, Massachusetts, and two in Maine in a four-month period.⁴²

Lyman and Orson preached about the vision that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon had received on February 16, 1832, describing multiple glories in the afterlife. For example, Orson Pratt noted on May 17, 1835, "Elder Johnson preached in the forenoon &

³⁹ Roger D. Launius, *Zion's Camp: Expedition to Missouri, 1834* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 1984), 163, indicated that the meeting was held in "the unfinished temple," while according to Backman, *The Heavens Resound*, 198, "members of the priesthood crowded into the new schoolhouse next to the rising temple." Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 70, minutes stated that "brethren & sisters" attended this meeting.

⁴⁰ Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 70.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴² "A Record of the Transactions of the Twelve Apostles," in Patriarchal Blessing Book 2:8-20, May 9-August 28, 1835, LDS Church History Library.

I in the afternoon upon the vision of Joseph & Sidney.”⁴³ Also following a conference in Pillar (or Pillow) Point, New York, Lyman again preached on the 1832 vision.⁴⁴ When joining their fellow apostles at conferences, they mediated disputes, enforced discipline, preached, testified about the truth of Mormonism, and performed Church ordinances. By July Lyman had traveled to Dalton, Coos County, New Hampshire, and preached Mormonism. Ethan Barrows wrote years later:

I had the privilege of hearing a lecture from Elder Lyman E. Johnson, a Mormon elder, who preached in my father’s house. From that time I was convinced that Mormonism was true. He reasoned from the Scriptures in a most powerful manner and showed the constituent parts of the church of Christ, and the errors of the world and its condition at the present time, together with the beauty of Christ’s kingdom and of the gospel. In conclusion he testified to the truth of the Book of Mormon. He said that an holy angel had ministered with him and had shown him the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and commanded him to testify to all the world that it was true.⁴⁵

Shortly afterwards, William McLellin baptized eighteen-year-old Ethan and his mother, Amelia (or Emily) Barrows.⁴⁶

At a conference at St. Johnsbury, Vermont, on July 17–18, the Council of the Twelve conducted a trial for Gladden Bishop, a schismatic and disruptive elder. Although the charges against him were not proven, the council took his license because of his argumentative attitude and his refusal to acknowledge any personal faults.⁴⁷ Orson Pratt added: “The 12 set in council & transacted such business as came before us. Publick meetings were held in the same <place> on the 2 days following. 9 came forward & were baptized.”⁴⁸

McLellin, who was also present at this conference, recorded on July 18–19: “Elder O. Hyde & Ly[man] Johnson preached to quite a large congregation. Sunday I preached in the forenoon to about 1500 persons on the rise and government of the church of christ & P[arley P]. Pratt preached in the afternoon on the Kingdom of christ, 9 were

⁴³ Orson Pratt, Journal, May 17, 1835; Watson, *The Orson Pratt Journals*, 62.

⁴⁴ Shippo and Welch, *The Journals of William E. McLellin*, 185, June 20, 1835.

⁴⁵ “Journal of Ethan Barrows,” *Journal of History* 15 (January 1922):36; written ca. 1892.

⁴⁶ Shippo and Welch, *Journals of William E. McLellin*, 191, July 27, 1835.

⁴⁷ “The Twelve Write,” *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (August 1835):167. The best accounts of this mission are “Dear Brother.” *ibid.*, 2 (October 1835):204–7; Watson, *Orson Pratt Journals*, 60–72; Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 79–84; Shippo and Welch, *Journals of William E. McLellin*, 171–210; Richard L. Saunders, “The Fruit of the Branch: Francis Gladden Bishop and His Culture of Dissent,” in *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History*, edited by Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 102–19.

⁴⁸ Pratt, Journal, July 17, 1835; also in Watson, *The Orson Pratt Journals*, 67; initial capitals and terminal punctuation added.

baptized during the meeting.”⁴⁹ Brigham Young described the same conference: “Sunday the barn and yard was crow[d]ed it was thought their ware betwene 2 and 3 thousand People. Their was 144 cariges that was counted by the Brotherin.”⁵⁰

One attendee, in a letter to a newspaper immediately after the conference, emphasized the rustic locale: “An Old barn, standing by the road-side, has been fitted up as a temporary place for assemblage, and on entering it, we found quite a numerous audience collected, the majority of which were females. On the scaffold of the barn were seated the twelve Mormon Apostles, so called by believers, from Ohio. They looked fresh from the back-woods. A brother of Joe Smith, the chief prophet, [William Smith] composed one of the number.” The observer took notes on addresses by Parley P. Pratt and by McLellin, whom he accused of “Murdering the King’s English, in an address of the abuse of gifts.”⁵¹

Although this mission was comparatively short (four months), it required great effort and dedication. While the apostles were gone, the Council of the Presidency of the Church [Kirtland and Missouri] convened at Kirtland on August 4 to investigate charges that Jared Carter, also serving a mission, had made to Oliver’s brother, Warren A. Cowdery, at Freedom, New York. Upon examination, the Council opined: “We further inform the Twelve, that as far as we can learn from the churches through which we have traveled, you have set yourselves up as an independent council, subject to no authority of the Church, a kind of outlaws!”⁵² The council also examined an excerpt from a letter William McLellin had written to his wife, stating that he was glad she would not be attending Rigdon’s school at Kirtland this summer, as Orson Hyde mentioned the manner in which the school was conducted.⁵³ The council, affronted by McLellin’s letter, voted to withdraw fellowship from McLellin and Hyde for criticizing Rigdon’s school. The other ten apostles remained in fellowship and were directed to finish their conferences.⁵⁴

It is unclear if the apostles received this directive from the council while on their mission. However, after they returned to Kirtland on September 26, the apostles met with the Council of the Presidency of the Church to investigate “certain letters and reports coming to the ears of the council” relative to their recent mission. After an ensuing investigation, “it was proven before the council that said complaints originated in the minds of persons whose minds were darkened in consequence of covetousness or some

⁴⁹ Shippo and Welch, *Journals of William E. McLellin*, 190, July 18–19, 1835.

⁵⁰ Brigham Young, Journal, typescript, July 19, 1835; terminal punctuation added; holograph in LDS Church History Library. McLellin thought there were about 1,500 persons in attendance while the minutes mentioned over 1,000. Orson Hyde estimated attendance from 1,000 to 1,500. “From the Letters of Elders Abroad,” *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (August 1835):167.

⁵¹ “Mormonism in New England,” *Maine Farmer and Journal of the Useful Arts* (Winthrop) 3 (October 9, 1835):288. Local residents remembered the “Snow barn” being used as a meeting house. Edward T. Fairbanks, *The Town of St. Johnsbury, VT* (St. Johnsbury, Vt.: Cowles Press, 1914), 218–19.

⁵² *History of the Church*, 2:240. For Warren Cowdery’s responsibilities in the Freedom, New York, area, see LDS D&C 106, RLDS D&C 103.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2:239–40.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:240.

other cause other than the Spirit of Truth.”⁵⁵ The council also examined a letter from McLellin to his wife which “expressed dissatisfaction with President Rigdon’s school.” As Hyde was blamed with McLellin in the matter, they were “found to be at fault.” They “frankly confessed” and were forgiven.⁵⁶

Fifth Mission: 1836

Lyman returned to Kirtland in September 1835. Daughter Sarah M. was born at Kirtland in March 1836. He returned to the mission field on April 6, with companions Milton Holmes and John Herrit. This mission, which lasted until September 1836, passed through Whitestown, Oneida County, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; and New Brunswick, Upper Canada. In June, he sent a letter to the LDS newspaper *Messenger and Advocate* summarizing his work in Maine and Sackville, New Brunswick. The editor paraphrased that Johnson “gives us to understand that he has met with little opposition, except from those whose craft was in danger; but that God had in every instance thus far given him wisdom that his adversaries had not been able to gainsay nor resist. He farther [sic] adds, although this mission has not been as successful as some others in bringing souls into the kingdom, yet through the assistance of God he had been instrumental in establishing a small branch of a church of eighteen members in the town of Sackville.”⁵⁷

A conference was held at Newry, Oxford County, Maine on August 12–14 with Apostles Brigham Young and Lyman in attendance.⁵⁸ Young recorded: “Sunday I Preached in forenoon Elder L. E. Johnson in afternoon.”⁵⁹ Afterward they traveled to Boston. Before Lyman returned to Kirtland in September, he baptized five additional converts “making 27 in all since he left home in April last.”⁶⁰

As Dissenter

Given this record of unblemished commitment and zeal, Lyman’s disaffection is perhaps the greatest mystery of his life. No documents shed light on when or why Lyman decided to withdraw from his covenant to dedicate his life to preaching the gospel. Possibly he developed misgivings in Joseph Smith’s divine calling when Zion’s Camp fizzled, when revelations in the Lord’s voice were edited, or when a strident minority insisted on the Prophet’s infallibility. Other reasons may have included hurt over the

⁵⁵ Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 140.

⁵⁶ Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:43, September 26, 1835.

⁵⁷ “From the Elders Abroad,” summary of Lyman E. Johnson letter, June 26, 1836, *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (July 1836):352; terminal punctuation added. See Richard E. Bennett, “Plucking Not Planting,” in *The Mormon Presence in Canada*, edited by Brigham Y. Card, Herbert C. Northcott, John E. Foster, Howard Palmer, and George K. Jarvis (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1990), 23.

⁵⁸ Brigham Young, Letter to “Brother O. Cowdery,” September 15, 1836, *Messenger and Advocate* 3 (November 1836):408.

⁵⁹ Brigham Young, Journal, typescript, August 14, 1836.

⁶⁰ “From the Elders Abroad,” summary of Lyman Johnson’s mission, *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (September 1836):381.

mistrust and bad treatment inflicted on the apostles by jealous Church members during the 1835 mission.⁶¹ Although it is impossible to know for certain, it seems reasonable to us that one of the factors was that he followed the lead of other Mormons and borrowed excessive amounts of money at a time of rampant financial speculation.⁶²

Most Latter-day Saints, including Joseph Smith, believed that a bank would stimulate and maintain the Kirtland economy. Several neighboring communities with banks appeared to have a brighter economic future.⁶³ For a variety of reasons, Mormon leaders drafted an "Articles of Agreement" on November 2, 1836, to establish the Kirtland Safety Society Bank. After the Ohio legislature denied its application in December, these same leaders formed the Kirtland Safety Society Anti-Banking Company. Lyman attended the organizational meeting on January 2, 1837;⁶⁴ but for unknown reasons, neither he nor John F. Boynton, a fellow apostle and future business partner, invested. Lyman's father invested \$600.20 and Luke invested \$46.66.⁶⁵

By the spring of 1837, many Latter-day Saints were financially stressed; but the failure of the society, which closed its doors in the summer, resulted in financial ruin for many.⁶⁶ On April 9 in the Kirtland Temple, Joseph Smith had "proclaimed that Severe Judgment awaited those Characters that professed to be his friends & friends to humanity & the Kirtland Safety Society But had turned tr[a]jitors & opposed the Currency & its friends which has given power in to the hands of the enemy & oppressed the poor

⁶¹ For factors causing dissent at Kirtland generally, see Marvin S. Hill, "Cultural Crisis in the Mormon Kingdom: A Reconsideration of the Causes of Kirtland Dissent," *Church History* 49 (September 1980):286–97.

⁶² Returning from a mission in October 1836, Heber C. Kimball recorded his evaluation of the effects that spiraling inflation was having on the Kirtland Saints and added: "Lyman E. Johnson and John F. Boynton went to New York and purchased to the amount of twenty thousand dollars worth of goods and entered into the Mercantile business [at Kirtland], borrowing considerable money from Polly Voce and other Saints in Boston and the regions round about, and which they have never repaid." "History of Heber Chase Kimball by his own dictation," 47-48, handwriting of Thomas Bullock, Heber C. Kimball Papers, LDS Church History Library.

⁶³ Roger D. Launius, *The Kirtland Temple: A Historical Narrative* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 1986), 78–79, explained: "The optimism expressed by the Kirtland Saints for the development of the local economy prompted Joseph Smith and other church leaders to sponsor a bank, an effort designed to capitalize on an already favorable business climate."

⁶⁴ "Minutes of a Meeting of the Members of the 'Kirtland Safety Society,'" *Messenger and Advocate* 3 (March 1837):475–77.

⁶⁵ Marvin S. Hill, C. Keith Rooker, and Larry T. Wimmer, "The Kirtland Economy Revisited," *BYU Studies* 17 (Summer 1977):466–68.

⁶⁶ Backman, *The Heavens Resound*, 320, indicated that two hundred Mormons invested in the society and lost "nearly everything." He summarized: "It has been estimated that the financial loss approached \$40,000, almost the total cost of building the Kirtland Temple. The loss was sustained by persons whose income averaged about \$400 annually." For Joseph Smith's activities with the society, see Hill, Rooker, and Wimmer, "Kirtland Economy Revisited."

Saints.”⁶⁷ Although the local consequences were heavy, the banking problems in Kirtland were part of the national banking panic of 1837 that swept the nation. Ira Ames described how Lyman Johnson and John Boynton had purchased a valuable farm inside the Kirtland city limits from a Gentile named Ariel Hanson with a down payment and the balance on credit. Taking advantage of the rising land prices, they subdivided and sold portions at inflated prices. Ames, a fellow Mormon, bought eighteen acres at \$100 per acre from them and, after paying the apostles \$1,500, signed a mortgage for the balance. In the ensuing crisis, Lyman and John were unable or unwilling to make their payments on the farm, and it reverted back to Hanson. Ames lost his eighteen acres, his \$1,500, and improvements. He bitterly lamented, “Boyington [sic] and Johnson [even] tried to get my horses from me on the \$300.”⁶⁸

Shortly after Joseph Smith returned to Kirtland from visiting branches in Canada in late August, a conference was called on September 3 in the Kirtland Temple to sustain Church authorities and to deal with some of the dissenters. Brigham Young even packed the gallery with loyalists because of “the disaffection existing in the hearts of many.” He said he “went to the brethren whose votes could be relied on, early in the morning, and had them occupy the stand and prominent seats.”⁶⁹ When the apostles were presented to determine if “they should hold their office of Apostleship,” Luke and Lyman Johnson and John F. Boynton were “rejected from serving in that office.” Luke and Lyman were not in attendance at that time but Boynton would not make a full confession and justified his conduct by “reason of the failure of the bank.” Senior apostles Brigham Young and Thomas Marsh insisted that he needed to manifest “a hearty repentance” before he could be fellowshipped. Sidney Rigdon addressed the meeting linking the fall of John F. Boynton and Lyman Johnson with “leaving their calling to pursue any occupation derogatory to that calling.” Undaunted, Boynton “still attributed his difficulties & conduct to the failure of the bank, stating that the bank he understood was instituted by the will & revelations of God, & he had been told that it never would fail, let men do what they pleased.” Joseph countered that he “always said that unless the institution [Kirtland Safety Society] was conducted upon righteous principles it could not stand.” Boynton’s confession was adjudged insincere, and he was again not sustained in his calling.⁷⁰

Between the Sunday meetings on September 3 and 10, a meeting was held in Joseph Smith’s house with Lyman, Boynton, and possibly others. Thomas Marsh, the moderator, said a “reconciliation was effected between all parties.”⁷¹ On September 12,

⁶⁷ Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898*, typescript, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–85), 1:138.

⁶⁸ Ira Ames, Journal, first entry in 1837, LDS Church History Library.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 61.

⁷⁰ Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 184–86. Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 1:120, January 5, 1837, reports Joseph Smith’s statement on the Kirtland Safety Society.

⁷¹ “History of Thos. Baldwin Marsh,” *Deseret News*, March 24, 1858, 18. LDS D&C 112:12–13 commands Thomas Marsh to admonish the Twelve, but if “they harden not their hearts, and stiffen not their necks against me, they shall be converted.”

Vilate Kimball wrote to her husband, Heber, reporting that Marsh met with Lyman and John, and they agreed to “make their confession” to the Church. “Luke has not got home, he went to see Elder Mclelin [sic], [but] Br Marsh said he thought there would be no difficulty with him when he comes to find the rest all united.”⁷² On September 10 in an “assembly of the Saints,” “Luke Johnson, Lyman Johnson, and John F. Boynton . . . made confession to the Church.” After an affirmative vote by the congregation, they were restored to “their office of Apostleship.” They then administered the Sacrament to their recent accusers.⁷³

Lyman took his family to Far West, Missouri, shortly after the September 10 meeting. Many factors make it impossible to determine his financial status at that time. However, on April 15, 1838, dissenter Mormon Stephen Burnett wrote Lyman at heated letter suggesting that Lyman may have left Kirtland with a considerable amount of money:

You state in your letter that you have lost six thousand dollars Kirtland paper--now I will tell you what Joseph Smith Jr told me when he was here on his [trip] West last Sept, I asked him about you, he said you has bagg [sic] of money & could pay all of your debts if you would, I asked him if you did not loose [sic] by the bank & he said no--not a cent, He said you never took it [Safety Society script] for goods any longer tha[n] it would pay your debts. And after that you refused to take it, besides you loaned two thousand out of the bank which you never paid but exchanged a large amount with a broker in St Louis at 5 per cent for specie when you and Luke went west last fall and you bought land, hired a house built &c, this however I believe to be a lie amongst the rest.⁷⁴

Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon also went to Far West after the September 10 meeting to regulate the affairs of the Church there and settle differences with the Far West presidency. Thomas Marsh presumably left Kirtland about October. At Joseph

⁷² Vilate Kimball, Letter to Heber C. Kimball, September 12, 1837, LDS Church History Library. For an unsympathetic view of Thomas Marsh, see Ronald K. Esplin, “Thomas B. Marsh as President of the First Quorum of the Twelve 1835-1838,” in (no editor identified), *Hearken O Ye People: Discourses on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Sandy, Utah: Randall Book, 1984), 167–90.

⁷³ Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 188–89.

⁷⁴ Stephen Burnett, Letter to Lyman E. Johnson, April 15, 1838. On May 24, 1838, a copy of the original letter was made. This copy was then recopied in 1839 into Joseph Smith Letterbook 2:64-66, Joseph Smith Collection, LDS Church History Library. Vilate Kimball, in her September 12, 1837, letter to Heber confirmed Lyman’s purchase of land at Far West: “I saw Br. Limon Johson [Lyman Johnson] to day. He said I must tell you he had bought for himself and Br[.] Boynton one hundred acres of land apiece lying within three miles of Far West City. He has also bought each of them a lot in the city. He has a corner lot lying between Br. Pattens and the one resurved for you. He wished you to tell Br Hyde if he could not find a lot to send him that he would divide with him. He has got a house now building upon it 18 X 28.”

Smith's summons, a diverse group met on November 6–7 at Far West. Present were Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, and Thomas Marsh with dissenters Lyman Johnson, Oliver Cowdery, David and John Whitmer, William Phelps and William McLellin. Lyman was sustained as an apostle at this meeting.⁷⁵

Joseph and Sidney were able to patch together an uneasy peace but returned to Kirtland in December to face a chaotic, unsalvageable situation. Brigham Young was driven from Kirtland on December 22 “in consequence of the fury of the mob”; and Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith fled Kirtland on January 12, 1838, for similar reasons.⁷⁶

As Joseph and Sidney were laboriously making their way to Far West during this emergency flight, Thomas Marsh and David Patten were making plans to discipline the Missouri presidency (David Whitmer, John Whitmer, and W. W. Phelps, also Oliver Cowdery). Angered by the dissenters' presence and by the real and perceived threats they posed to the institutional Church, Marsh and Patten discussed their proceedings at Far West and appointed a committee on January 20 to inquire “into their feelings and determinations.”⁷⁷

Ten days later, Lyman, Oliver Cowdery, and other Far West dissenters, presumably reacting angrily to the tone of the committee's demands, countered with a committee of their own:

Tuesday Jan. 30th, 1838, Far West At a meeting the following members of the Church of Latter Day Saints, viz: F. G. Williams, D. Whitmer, W. W. Phelps, John Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Lyman E. Johnson and O. Cowdery convened at the house of Oliver Cowdery in Far West, Caldwell Co., Mo. . . . After consultation, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, [and] Frederick G. Williams were appointed a committee to draft a declaration and resolutions, to present to the next meeting; and W. W. Phelps, John Whitmer and Lyman E. Johnson, were appointed a committee to look for a place for the above named individuals in which to settle, where they may live in peace, and also report to the said meeting.⁷⁸

After the high council committee reported meeting with the dissenters, Marsh, with the backing of Apostle David Patten, called a high council meeting and then held meetings on four separate days, February 5, 7-9 at different locations where the saints rejected the presidency. David and John Whitmer, and William Phelps were stripped of

⁷⁵ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 121–23.

⁷⁶ Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 61; *History of the Church*, 3:2, January 12, 1838.

⁷⁷ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 135.

⁷⁸ Oliver Cowdery, Letterbook, 85, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. The dissenters did look for an alternate place to settle. Thomas Marsh, “History of Thos. Baldwin Marsh,” 18, May 18, 1838: “In company with Joseph, Sidney and others, I went north in Daviess county. We met with Oliver Cowdery, Lyman E. Johnson and others encamped, who were also exploring northward on Grand River.”

their offices but retained their membership.⁷⁹ John Whitmer and William Phelps were excommunicated on March 10.⁸⁰

Joseph Smith designated Marsh as president *pro tempore* of Far West Stake on first day of the conference held April 6–8, 1838, at Far West, with Patten and Brigham Young as assistant presidents. On the second day of conference, Patten said Lyman Johnson was among the “men whom he could not recommend to the conference.”⁸¹ Seymour Brunson, ordained a high priest in December 1831, composed nine charges against Oliver Cowdery and filed them with Bishop Edward Partridge on April 11; Oliver was excommunicated the following day.⁸² On April 13, the Far West High Council, headed by Marsh, Patten, and Young met to consider seven charges against Lyman Johnson filed by Alanson Ripley, a high priest:

1st. For persecuting brethren by stirring up people to prosecute them, and urging on vexatious lawsuits against them and thereby bringing distress upon the innocent.

2nd For virtually denying the faith of the Church of Christ of Latter Day saints, by vindicating the cause of the enemies of this Church, who are dissenters from us, now in Kirtland, and speaking reproachfully of the Church and High Council, by saying their proceedings were illegal and that he never would acknowledge them to be legal, these assertions were without foundation and truth, also, treating the Church with contempt by absenting himself from meetings on the Sabbath, by not observing his prayers in the season thereof, and by not observing the word of wisdom.

3rd. For seeking to injure the character of Joseph Smith jr by reporting that he had a demand [note] against him of one thousand dollars, when it was without foundation in truth.

4th For laying violent hands on our Brother Phineas Young, and by kicking and beating him, thereby throwing contempt on the church of Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Missouri.⁸³

5th. And by saying that he would appeal the suit between him & Brother Phineas Young and take it out of the County, saying that he could

⁷⁹ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 137–41.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 145–50.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 158–60.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 166–69.

⁸³ D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1994), 556, said Johnson was “fined for assault and battery on BY’s brother in 1838.” Mormon George Walter testified before Judge Austin A. King in November 1838: “I was [in] Far West and went bail for Lyman E. Johnson. . . . I was taken to task & warned that I would suffer for it. and on leaving town that evening, in company with Johnson, there was a number of guns fired at us. . . . I returned to town and saw Rigdon who took me to task for going Johnson’s bail.” Mormon Inquest Testimony before Judge Austin A. King, 35, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, University of Missouri.

not get justice done him, thereby speaking reproachfully of the authority of Caldwell County.

6th For telling a fals[e]hood.

7th For taking whiskey and making Weldon drunk & then cheating him out of his property.⁸⁴

Lyman did not attend his trial. He sent a letter of protest and resignation on April 12 which characterized Ripley's charges as a "novel document" designed "to compel me under pain of religious sensure [sic] and excommunication not to appeal a lawsuit [for beating Phineas Young] or change the venue of the same in which I am deeply interested." Lyman added that he would "not condescend to put my constitutional rights at issue upon so disrespectful a point, as to answer any other of those charges until that is withdrawn & until then shall withdraw my self from your society and fellowship."⁸⁵

During the ensuing trial, fifteen individuals testified against Lyman. Thomas Marsh charged that Lyman bragged about contriving a system of traveling on steam boats "without paying his fare," while Joseph Smith said Lyman "vindicated the cause of the dissenters" and lied when he said he had a \$1,000 note against him. Brigham Young testified that his brother Phineas "came to Br. [John P.] Green's a few mornings since with his head cut the blood running out of his ears, also his stomach was injured, & Phineas said Lyman E. Johnson had fought him; which was proved in court afterwards." Dimick B. Huntington added that Lyman "told him he had given Phines [sic] Young a pounding, because he had given him the lie, and if any other man should give him the lie, he would not promise that he not get the same sauce."

George M. Hinkle testified that Lyman told him "when he purchased his farm of Weldon" he was aware Weldon "was fond of liquor." According to Hinkle, Lyman got him "tolerably well shaved" (drunk) before he purchased Weldon's "large farm with great improvements together with five hundred head of hogs, a good stock of horses and cattle, also, a flock of sheep, the plows belonging to the farm for twenty-two hundred and fifty dollars." Unsurprisingly, the high council determined that Lyman was guilty. He was excommunicated and "given over to the buffetings of Satan until he learns to blaspheme no more against the authorities of God."⁸⁶ Also on April 13, the high council determined that David Whitmer was "no longer considered a member of the Church of Christ of Latter day Saints" after examining charges against him.⁸⁷

These excommunications did not end dissent at Far West. John Corrill,⁸⁸ a witness to the interactions between the hierarchy and the dissidents, recorded that, even after the

⁸⁴ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 172-73.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 174-76.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 176-78.

⁸⁸ John Corrill was baptized in January 1831, was ordained a high priest in June 1831, was a diligent missionary, and was ordained as the third bishop in Zion. In 1837, he was released as a counselor to Bishop Partridge and was elected state representative from Caldwell County in 1838. Following the clashes between the Mormons and Gentiles in October 1838, he left the Mormons and published a history about them in 1839. See

dissenters had left the Church, “the old strife kept up” and the loyalists “complained much of the ill treatment they had received from the dissenters.” According to Corrill, the Church members “were determined to bear it no longer, for they had rather die than suffer such things.”⁸⁹ During this period of escalating tensions, William McLellin was apparently excommunicated in May.⁹⁰ Lyman may have been planning to go into law practice with Oliver Cowdery, since Cowdery mentioned in a letter that he and Lyman were expecting the delivery of fifty-five law books.⁹¹

By mid-June, plans were being made to drive Lyman Johnson and his cohorts from Far West based on the belief, according to John Corrill, that the Church “would never become pure” as long as dissenters were in their midst. He claimed that “secret meetings were held, and plans [were] contrived” to determine how to rid the community of the dissenters.⁹² Reed Peck, a former Mormon who wrote about events in northern Missouri in 1839, said the “enmity of the two parties from Kirtland” smoldered until plans were laid to “free the community of the Cowderies, Whitmers, Lyman Johnson and some others.”⁹³

It is against this background of anger and indecision that Sidney Rigdon gave his “Salt Sermon” on Sunday, June 17, to a large gathering of Mormons in which he reportedly stated: “When men embrace the gospel and afterwards lose their faith it is the duty of the Saints to trample them under their feet.” Rigdon also claimed that “a set of men among them” was “doing all in their power to destroy the presidency” and urged his audience to “trample them into the earth.” Peck dismissed this heated language as “undoubtedly a farce acted to frighten these men from the country that they could not be spies upon their conduct or that they might deprive them of their property.”⁹⁴

Kenneth H. Winn, “‘Such Republicanism as This’: John Corrill’s Rejection of Prophetic Rule,” in Launius and Thatcher, *Differing Visions*, 45–75.

⁸⁹ John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, (Commonly Called Mormons) Including an Account of Their Doctrine and Discipline, with the Reasons of the Author for Leaving the Church* (1839); rpt., Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, n.d.), 29.

⁹⁰ Shippo and Welch, *Journals of William E. McLellin*, 323–24. See also Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith 2:240–41*.

⁹¹ Internal evidence indicates a date of composition of May 10, 1838, Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, 92.

⁹² Corrill, *A Brief History*, 30, explained that the plans were in abeyance until “President Rigdon delivered from the pulpit what I call the salt sermon.”

⁹³ Reed Peck, Letter to “Dear Friends,” September 18, 1839, quoted in *Reed Peck Manuscript*, typescript (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, n.d.), 6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6–7. The July 4 entry of Joseph Smith’s Scriptorium Book, kept by George W. Robinson, justified the salt sermon: “I would mention or notice something about O[liver]. Cowdery David Whitmer Lyman E. Johnson and John Whitmer who being guilty of base iniquities and that to manifest in the eyes of all men, and being often entreated would continue in their course seeking the lives of the First Presidency and to overthrow the Kingdom of God which they once testified off [of]. Prest Rigdon preached one Sabbath upon the salt that had lost its savour, that it is henceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and trod[den] under foot of men.” Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith 2:249*.

Farce or not, Corrill warned John Whitmer that his life might be in danger. This warning, coupled with the growing belief that religious convictions justified breaking the civil law, resulted in Whitmer's meeting with Joseph Smith. As Whitmer later testified, Smith said the "excitement is very high," but indicated it would be allayed if Whitmer put his "property into the hands of the bishop and high council, to be disposed of according to the laws of the church."⁹⁵

When the dissenters did not leave Far West immediately, a long threatening letter, dated June 1838, presumably written by Sidney Rigdon, was signed by eighty-three individuals and was presented to the dissenters the day following the "Salt Sermon."⁹⁶ This letter accused Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, John Whitmer, William W. Phelps, and Lyman Johnson of joining "a band of counterfeiters, thieves, liars, and blacklegs of the deepest dye, to deceive, cheat, and defraud the saints out of their property by every art and stratagem which wickedness could invent." It criticized Oliver and Lyman for misusing the law to defend themselves and to persecute the Church: "You set up a nasty, dirty, pettifogger's office, pretending to be judges of the law, when it was a notorious fact that you are profoundly ignorant of it." The warning closed with the threat, "We will put you from the county of Caldwell, so help us God."⁹⁷

According to John Whitmer, the threat was not only of expulsion. Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and George W. Robinson unlawfully attached the property of the extended Whitmer family, Oliver Cowdery, and Lyman Johnson, warning that "they had threatened us to kill us" if the suits to attach their property were contested. Not bowing to threats, Whitmer explained that he, his brother David, Oliver Cowdery, and Lyman Johnson went to Clay County "to obtain legal counsel to prepare to overthrow these attachments which they had caused to [be] sued against us which we were abundantly able to do by good and substantial witness."⁹⁸ En route back to Far West, they were astonished to encounter Oliver and Lyman's families, who had been driven from Far West with only their clothing and bedding. John Whitmer charged that, during their absence, Joseph, Sidney and "the band of gadeantons [Gadiantons] kept up a guard, and watched our houses and abused our families, and threatened them, [that] if they were not gone by morning, they would be drove out & threatened our lives if they ever saw us in Far West."⁹⁹ William Phelps, spared a similar fate, was restored to the Church prior to July 8 by rebaptism.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ *Senate Document 189: The Testimony Given before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit in the State of Missouri, at the Court-House in Richmond, in a Criminal Court of Inquiry Begun November 12, 1838* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1841), reprinted as *Senate Document 189* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, n.d.), 33.

⁹⁶ Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 94.

⁹⁷ Letter to Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, John Whitmer, William W. Phelps, and Lyman E. Johnson, June 1838, *Senate Document 189*, 6–9.

⁹⁸ Bruce N. Westergren, ed., *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 184.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* William McLellin gave a less factual account about the expulsion of the dissenters and their subsequent loss of property in "Saturday Evening, Feb. 6th, 1847. In Conference assembled. W. E. McLellin, for the committee read the following, as the

Writing in Joseph Smith's Scriptorium Book under the date of July 4, George W. Robinson described his personal perception of the dissenters' flight: "These men took warning, and soon they were seen bounding over the prairie like the scape Goat to carry off[f] their own sins [Lev. 16:21–22] we have not seen them since, their influence is gone, and they are in a miserable condition, so also it [is] with all who turn from the truth to lying cheating defrauding & Swindeling."¹⁰¹ The dissenters briefly found shelter at William McLellan's home, "twenty-five miles from Far West in Clay County,"¹⁰² then found lodging in Richmond, Missouri.

During this period, the Orson Hyde and Heber Kimball families, accompanied by Erastus Snow and perhaps thirty other Saints, arrived at Richmond, where they encountered Lyman Johnson. Heber Kimball recorded: "He ordered a dinner at the hotel for all of his old friends, and treated us with every kindness." However, when the Mormons were forced to surrender on November 1 at Far West and give up their arms, Kimball bitterly condemned Lyman Johnson and other ex-Mormons for piloting the militia into Far West.¹⁰³

Life as a Gentile

One of the first things Lyman did as a nonmember was to file charges in the Ray County Circuit Court on August 30, 1838, against Daniel Kern for trespass. to recover damages to his property. According to the suit, Daniel was charged with unlawfully possessing one overcoat, two vests, three silk handkerchiefs, six shirt bosoms, twelve collars, three pair of pantaloons, one rifle, and many other items.¹⁰⁴ The case was dismissed. According to an anonymously authored country history, the Lyman Johnson and John Boynton families lived in Scott County, Iowa, for an undetermined period in 1839. Lyman and John built the first distillery in that county.¹⁰⁵

By February 1839, Lyman, Sarah, and their three-year-old daughter, Sarah, had settled opposite Nauvoo at Keokuk in Iowa Territory, where he practiced law and dealt in

result of their investigation and labors," *Ensign of Liberty* (Kirtland, Ohio) 1 (March 1847):9. Corrill, *A Brief History*, 30, wrote: "This sermon [Rigdon's Salt Sermon] had the desired effect. Excitement was produced, in the church, and, suffice it to say that, in three or four days, several of the dissenters became much alarmed, and fled from the place in great flight, and their families soon followed, but their property was attached for debt."

¹⁰⁰ See Alexander L. Baugh, "A Community Abandoned: W. W. Phelps' 1839 Letter to Sally Waterman Phelps from Far West, Missouri," *Nauvoo Journal* 10 (Fall 1998):23; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 2:257.

¹⁰¹ Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:249.

¹⁰² Shipps and Welch, *Journals of William E. McLellan*, 324.

¹⁰³ Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 217–18.

¹⁰⁴ "Legal Instruments re: Mormons in Utah," Vault MSS 707, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Daniel Kern, whose last name is spelled in various ways, was a Mormon.

¹⁰⁵ *History of Scott County, Iowa* (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing, 1882), 1189. Our thanks to Elaine M. E. Speakman for calling our attention to this reference.

real estate. They may have chosen Keokuk because some members of the Johnson family settled at Nauvoo. Lyman is listed as among Keokuk's early settlers—a “real pioneer.” Their first Keokuk home was a substantial house of hewn logs built in 1839 or 1840 with a fine location on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. A local historian describes it as “a most comfortable little place, with a lean-to at the back and a small yard at the side.” It had a “clear cold spring” which gave it a special character.¹⁰⁶ This site is now under the new Mississippi River Bridge.

It is impossible to determine what Lyman actually thought about Mormonism after 1839, but he and John Boynton may have entertained plans to return to the Church in late 1840. Vilate Kimball wrote to Heber in England in December 1840, commenting that Joseph Smith had taken a boat trip on the Mississippi River and “who should accompany him but John F[.] Boynton and his wife, and Lymon [sic] Johnson. They made it there [their] home to Joseph Smiths all the time they were here. I never saw Joseph appear more happy; said he, I am a going to have all my old friends around me again.”¹⁰⁷

Lyman's forty-one-year-old sister, Alice, died at Nauvoo in July 1841, and Lyman appears in four records of the time. On July 19, 1841, an interlinear assertion in the Manuscript History Book C-1 reads: “Council of the Twelve, viz B. Young H. C. Kimball, J Taylor, O Pratt & G A Smith met at El[der] Young's house, conversing with Lyman E. Johnson, who formerly belonged to the Quorum; Prest. Rigdon and myself [Joseph Smith] were with them part of the time.”¹⁰⁸ Perhaps Lyman addressed the members of his former quorum, for in 1877, Brigham Young recalled:

Lyman E. Johnson said, at one of our Quorum meetings, after he had apostatized and tried to put Joseph out of the way. Lyman told the truth, He said, “Brethren--I will call you brethren--I will tell you the truth. If I could believe 'Mormonism'--it is no matter whether it is true or not--but if I could believe 'Mormonism' as I did when I traveled with you and preached, if I possessed the world I would give it. I would give anything, I would suffer my right hand to be cut off, if I could believe it again. Then I was full of joy and gladness. My dreams were pleasant. When I awoke in the morning my spirit was cheerful. I was happy by day and by night, full

¹⁰⁶ Virginia Wilcox Ivins, *Yesterdays: Reminiscences [sic] of Long Ago* (N.p., Author, 1914), 43.

¹⁰⁷ Vilate Kimball, Letter to Heber C. Kimball, December 8, 1840, LDS Church History Library. Later that month, Vilate wrote Heber: “Brother Lyman Johnson, called the day that the [English] sisters were here, and had quite a chat with them. They all sang so beautifully that it was quite a paradise.” Quoted in Jeni Broberg Holzapfel and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, eds., *A Woman's View: Helen Mar Whitney's Reminiscences of Early Church History* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1997), 183.

¹⁰⁸ Manuscript History Book, C-1, pp. 1,219, LDS Church History Library. See also George A. Smith, Journal, July 19, 1841, LDS Church History Library; “History of Brigham Young,” *Deseret News* March 10, 1858, 2; *History of the Church* 4:389.

of peace and joy and thanksgiving. But now it is darkness, pain, sorrow, misery in the extreme. I have never since seen a happy moment.”¹⁰⁹

In June 1842, Lyman Johnson visited the *Times and Seasons* office, and Wilford Woodruff, in a letter to Parley P. Pratt, commented that Lyman was “well in health.”¹¹⁰ The next month Brigham Young, also writing to Parley, mentioned that Lyman was “unwell” and staying in Nauvoo at the home of his sister, Marinda Johnson Hyde. “John Boyington [sic],” he added, “is in this cou[n]try as a dentest [dentist].”¹¹¹

Lyman E. Johnson and the Nauvoo Criminals

Still, other threads—perhaps intentional, perhaps coincidental—connected Lyman Johnson with developments in Nauvoo. One of the most colorful was Johnson’s connection to the far from saintly Hodges family. The Curtis Hodges Sr. family was converted in Erie County, Pennsylvania; baptism followed at Kirtland, Ohio, in late 1832.¹¹² They moved to Missouri with the Saints, were forced out of Clay County in 1836, and were driven from Caldwell County during the 1838 Mormon War.¹¹³ Curtis Sr., Curtis Jr., and an unidentified brother were participants in the Battle of Crooked River, and Curtis Sr. survived being shot in the side.¹¹⁴ They moved with the body of the Church to Illinois in 1839–40. William and Stephen Hodges, and their brothers-in-law Darius Campbell and Truman Wait were accused of stealing a horse in Des Moines

¹⁰⁹ Brigham Young, June 17, 1877, *Journal of Discourses* (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854–86), 19:41.

¹¹⁰ Wilford Woodruff, Letter to Parley P. Pratt, June 12, 1842, LDS Church History Library.

¹¹¹ Brigham Young, Letter to Parley P. Pratt, July 17, 1842, LDS Church History Library.

¹¹² Curtis Hodges Sr., born August 9, 1787, at Cambridge, Washington County, New York, married Lucy Clark, born September 19, 1790, at Sanford, Bennington County, Vermont. Marriage information unavailable. Their children in birth order are: Sarah L., Lucy Ann, Curtis Jr., Amos, Ervine, William, Stephen, Eliza Jane, Emeline, Marietta, James, and Hyrum. See Bill Shepard, “The Notorious Hodges Brothers: Solving the Mystery of Their Destruction at Nauvoo,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 26 (2006):282–84. For the best information about the Hodges, see Marietta Hodges Walker, *With the Saints in an Early Day* (1912; rpt., Independence: Price Publishing Co., 2000). Marietta referred to her family as “the Clarks,” her mother’s maiden name, to prevent the readers from realizing she was a member of the Hodges family..

¹¹³ Losses experienced by the Hodges family are listed in Clark V. Johnson, ed., *Mormon Redress Petitions: Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict* (Provo: Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1992), 464.

¹¹⁴ Walker, *With the Saints in an Early Day*, 229–31.

County, Iowa, in 1842.¹¹⁵ Curtis Jr. was cut off from the Church in 1843 for bigamy and Curtis Sr. was accused of stealing from the Saints in Tennessee in 1843.¹¹⁶

In May 1845, William and Stephen, then ages twenty-five and twenty-three respectively, were living with Amos Hodges, another brother, and his wife, Lydia, in a poor section of Nauvoo near the Mississippi River. Although Amos was president of the Thirteenth Quorum of Seventy he could not enter Iowa “because he had been indicted for robbery.”¹¹⁷ Ervine and his wife, Luzette, lived at Mechanicksville, some thirty miles from Nauvoo in Hancock County. Apostle John Taylor noted in his diary that Ervine had “a poor character for unrighteousness”¹¹⁸

A Mennonite family, the John Millers (Johannes Muellers) family, living near the small town of West Point in Des Moines County, Iowa Territory, was targeted for robbery after rumors reached the criminal element of a thousand dollars in cash. William Hodges, Stephen Hodges, and their accomplices thirty-six-year-old Artemus Johnson¹¹⁹ and twenty-one-year-old Thomas Brown¹²⁰ believed that the Mennonites would be easy marks and attacked the house about midnight on May 10, 1845. The stoutly built Miller and his son-in-law, Henry Leisi, fiercely resisted; however, they were outnumbered. Miller was killed, and Leisi was mortally wounded. Artemus Johnson and Thomas Brown went into hiding, but the Hodges brothers returned to Nauvoo. They initially encountered Patriarch and Apostle William Smith, the only surviving brother of Joseph Smith, who advised them to leave Nauvoo “and never return.”¹²¹ Ignoring Smith’s advice they next sought out Brigham Young who said the brothers “came to me asking what they should do” and he “told them to fulfil [sic] the law” [and surrender to the police]. The brothers then “threatened” to take his life.¹²² William and Stephen were at Amos’s house where a mixed party of Nauvoo police and Iowa officials apprehended them on the morning of

¹¹⁵ Incomplete trial documents, Des Moines County Court House, District Court, Box A, 176, Burlington, Iowa. Stephen was found guilty, but his sentence is unknown.

¹¹⁶ *History of the Church*, 5:350; “To the Editor of the Times and Seasons,” *Times and Seasons* 5 (March 1, 1844):461.

¹¹⁷ Seventies Record, 13th Quorum, B:43, LDS Church History Library. This record also lists William Hodges as an elder. See statement of Judge Charles Mason in *Life and Letters of Charles Mason: Chief Justice of Iowa 1804–1882*, edited by Charles Mason Remy (Washington, D.C.: Charles Mason Remy, 1939). The page is strangely numbered 91–3.

¹¹⁸ Dean C. Jessee, ed., “The John Taylor Nauvoo Journal January 1845–September 1845,” *BYU Studies* 23 (Summer 1983):58. George Q. Cannon was Taylor’s clerk.

¹¹⁹ Artemus Johnson, a Mormon elder, had previously been disciplined by the Mormons for stealing. Bill Shepard, “Stealing at Mormon Nauvoo,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 23 (2003):92, 99.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 92–93, 98–99. Brown’s father had been excommunicated for stealing, and Thomas had been jailed in Brown County for stealing.

¹²¹ For account of William Smith’s meeting with Brigham Young, other members of hierarchy, and the Nauvoo police, see Jessee, “The John Taylor Nauvoo Journal,” 60, entry of June 25, 1845.

¹²² For Young’s statement, see *ibid.*, 62.

May 13. After being briefly held by the Nauvoo police, they were turned over to Iowa officials and held in custody, first at Fort Madison and then at Burlington.¹²³

Hawkins Taylor, a former representative to the Iowa Territorial Legislature and a resident of the small settlement of West Point, who participated in arresting the Hodges brothers wrote: “The court [Des Moines County, Iowa] appointed me to go to Nauvoo to take the testimony of their witnesses to be used in court, subject to the same rules of evidence that would govern if given in court. I spent three days in Nauvoo taking testimony. L. E. Johnson, one of the Hodges’ lawyers, was with me.”¹²⁴

On June 12, lawyers for the brothers filed a motion with the District Court of Des Moines County to delay trial pending the appearance of additional witnesses who could testify that the brothers were in Nauvoo on the night of the attack. The court denied the motion. Among those who wanted to testify that William and Stephen Hodges were at Nauvoo on the critical night were Gentile criminal associates Aaron Long, John Long, and Judge Fox.¹²⁵ Ironically, the Long brothers and Fox would be among a group of Gentile criminals with ties to the Hodges brothers who murdered George Davenport, a

¹²³ Edward Bonney, *The Banditti of the Prairies or, the Murderers's [sic] Doom!! A Tale of the Mississippi Valley* (1850; rpt., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 27–35; Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1962), 1:38–39; and Jesse, “John Taylor Nauvoo Journal,” 48–49. Bonney’s account of criminal activities of the Hodges brothers and other 1845 events mentioned in this article are the most expansive information on the subject. Bonney was born to Jethro M. Bonney and Laurana Webster Bonney August 26, 1807, in Essex County, New York, and married Maria L. Van Frank in Homer, New York, on January 17, 1832. He arrived at Nauvoo in 1840 with his wife and several children. His biographer, Philip D. Jordan, noted that he witnessed the revolt of William and Wilson Law, the political ambitions of Joseph Smith, the destruction of the *Expositor* press, and the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith at Carthage, Illinois, on June 27, 1844. He moved from Nauvoo to an unsettled area near Fort Madison in Lee County, Iowa, in April 1845. Jordan acknowledged that Bonney was suspected of passing counterfeit money but said that his description of his role in bringing William and Stephen Hodges to justice was factual and said he had helped apprehend three of Davenport’s slayers. Jordan characterized Bonney as a “bounty- hunter type, seeking reward either in money or in notoriety or both.” Philip D. Jordan, “Introduction,” to *Banditti of the Prairies*, vii–xxi. Quinn, *Origins of Power*, 127, noted that Bonney was a Mason at Nauvoo, was one of three Gentiles Joseph Smith named to the Council of Fifty, and thus he was Joseph’s aide-de-camp in June 1844. Quinn, “The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844 to 1945,” *BYU Studies* 20 (Winter 1980):193, dates Bonney’s membership in the Fifty between March 14 and April 11, 1844. Brigham Young dropped him from it on February 4, 1845.

¹²⁴ Hawkins Taylor, “Autobiography of Hawkins Taylor,” 56, typescript, Archives and Special Collections, Western Illinois University Library, Macomb.

¹²⁵ Period histories and newspaper accounts unanimously described the attempt to have the Longs and Fox alibi the brothers as proof that they were in the same criminal gang. See, for example, “The Murder of Miller and Leiza by the Hodges,” [*Keokuk*] *Gate City*, May 24, 1876, 2.

well-respected pioneer, fur trader, and founder of Davenport, Iowa, the following month on July 4 at Rock Island, Illinois.¹²⁶

On June 17, 1845, a document witnessed by Lyman Johnson and Hawkins Taylor¹²⁷ was recorded at Carthage, Illinois, in which criminal associates of William and Stephen transferred lots at Nauvoo valued at \$1,000 to pay lawyers Frederick D. Miles and Jonathan C. Hall of Burlington, Iowa, to conduct the legal defense of the brothers. Amos and Ervine Hodges joined with fellow Mormons William A. Hickman, Return Jackson Redden, and W. Jenkins Salisbury,¹²⁸ to transfer city lots in Nauvoo to pay the brothers' new lawyers. Significantly, two criminal associates of the Hodges brothers, William F. Louther and R. Blecher,¹²⁹ were listed on the same document as transferring lots to Miles and Hall. After this arrangement, Lyman Johnson is not referred to as a lawyer for the brothers.

¹²⁶ Hawkin Taylor, "Autobiography," 56, disgustedly observed after Davenport's murder that some of "the very witnesses who testified for the Hodges [in pre-trial depositions] concocted and made all the arrangements" for Davenport's murder.

¹²⁷ Bonds and Mortgages, 1844–48, 2:66-67, recorded June 17, 1845, Hancock County Court House, Carthage, Illinois; microfilm 954,776, LDS Family History Library. Bonney, *Banditti of the Prairies*, 47, stated: "Messers. Hall & Miles of Burlington, Iowa were employed to defend them, and their fee of one thousand dollars secured to them." He added (55), "This robbery was planned by Amos Hodges and R. H. Bleeker, who as security for the Hodges signed the note to Hall & Mills and Judge Fox, one of their witnesses."

¹²⁸ Hickman was apparently a member of the same criminal gang as the Hodges which operated in Hancock County, Illinois, and neighboring counties in Iowa. Hope A. Hilton, "Wild Bill" Hickman and the Mormon Frontier (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 10–11, minimally covers the Iowa thefts. Bonney, *Banditti of the Prairies*, 230, referred to Hickman as "one of the most notorious rascals" for crimes committed in Iowa Territory in 1845. Redden was born September 26, 1817, at Hiram, Ohio, to George Grant Redden and Adelia Higley Redden, was baptized in 1841, and moved to the Nauvoo area. Bonney, *Banditti of the Prairies*, 214-15, identified him as one of the planners of the Davenport robbery. Salisbury's participation in this transfer of property is puzzling as he is not otherwise identified as a member of the criminal gang. He was a brother-in-law of Joseph Smith. Lavina Fielding Anderson examined his stormy passage through Mormonism in *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 861–62.

¹²⁹ According to Bonney, *Banditti of the Prairies*, 85, 214, William W. Louther went on a stealing expedition with Return Jackson Redden and joined with Amos Hodges, Return Jackson, Aaron and John Long, Judge Fox, Orrin Porter Rockwell, and others to plan the robbery of Colonel George Davenport. Robert H. Birch (who used "Beecher" and "Bleeker" as aliases) was a former member of the William W. Brown gang of Bellevue, Iowa, which was shattered by vigilantes in 1840. He was arrested for the murder of Colonel Davenport. Susan K. Lucke, *The Bellevue War: Mandate of Justice or Murder by Mob?* (Ames, Iowa: McMillan Publishing, 2002). Birch was also involved with Amos Hodges in a Nauvoo robbery in June 1845. Bonney, *Banditti of the Prairies*, 12, 72.

William and Stephen's trial began on June 19 and concluded with their conviction three days later. They were sentenced to be hanged at Burlington on July 15.¹³⁰ Immediately after the sentencing, Ervine Hodges unwisely proclaimed at Burlington he would tell the Gentiles all he knew about Mormon stealing unless Brigham Young helped secure the release of his brothers. Ervine presumably reasoned that Young would help his brothers as a trade-off for Ervine's silence. He was wrong. On June 23 he confronted the Mormon leader with his demands, but Young summarily dismissed him. Like William and Stephen, Ervine angrily threatened to kill Young. Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs, one of Brigham's plural wives, recorded: "The said Hodge was direct from Burlington. He has a Brother there, sentenced to be hung on the [blank] of Sept next for Murder. *Said Hodge has threatened Brigham Youngs life* which He was a man of unbounded temper."¹³¹

If Young believed the Mormons had nothing to fear from the charges of a fringe Mormon with a criminal reputation, Ervine's criminal associates had a great deal to lose if he revealed gang secrets. Ervine was cutting through a corn field near Young's house about 10 P.M. that evening when an assailant, later identified as Return Jackson Redden, stabbed him fatally with a bowie knife to keep him from revealing information. When asked who stabbed him, the dying Ervine managed to say, "They were men whom he took to be friends, from the river."¹³² The following day the Burlington newspaper said: "The supposition of many is that he was murdered by a gang of scoundrels to which he and his brothers are supposed to have belonged, to prevent disclosures which it was feared the execution of Stephen and William might provoke."¹³³

Ironically, at the time when William and Stephen were being charged with murder and Ervine was threatening to divulge gang secrets, Amos Hodges joined Robert H. Birch and Judge Fox to plan the robbery of a Nauvoo merchant named Rufus Beach. According to Edward Bonney, Amos advised Brigham Young of the robbery who passed the warning on to Beach. Beach took the precaution of stationing armed guards who interrupted the robbery, shooting at Birch and Fox.¹³⁴ Both escaped, but Amos was arrested. John Taylor recorded on June 21, "A man of the name of Amos Hodges was taken up on a charge of theft. I am afraid he is connected with a gang of villains that are lurking about, stealing on our credit."¹³⁵ Amos was bailed out of jail on June 28 by

¹³⁰ "Trial for Murder," *Burlington Hawk-Eye* 7 (June 26, 1845):2-3.

¹³¹ Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, ed., "All Things Move in Order in the City": The Nauvoo Diary of Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs," *BYU Studies* 19 (Spring 1979):314, June 23, 1845. The editor omitted the italicized portion which Jacobs had crossed out.

¹³² Jessee, "The John Taylor Nauvoo Journal," 58.

¹³³ "A Brother of the Murderers Murdered," [*Burlington*] *Territorial Gazette and Advertiser* 8 (June 28, 1845):2.

¹³⁴ Bonney, *Banditti of the Prairies*, 55-56.

¹³⁵ Jessee, "The John Taylor Nauvoo Journal," 53. Following his arrest for Davenport's murder, Birch, in an effort to get his sentence reduced, testified against other gang members. His "confessions" included the statement: "Fox and myself attempted to rob Beach in Nauvoo, and would have succeeded, had not Brigham Young told Beach about the plan. We came near being caught, but escaped, and crossed the [Mississippi] river to Old [Grant] Redden's." Bonney, *Banditti of the Prairies*, 215.

Apostle William Smith,¹³⁶ promptly disappeared, and is presumed to have been murdered.¹³⁷ William Smith charged five months later that Amos had been smuggled out of Nauvoo by members of the Nauvoo Police who murdered him in Iowa.¹³⁸ It is more likely he was murdered by Robert A. Birch or Judge Fox for betraying them when they attempted to rob Beach.

At an unknown date before July 4, Robert A. Birch, John and Aaron Long, and a criminal named John Baxter met at the isolated Iowa cabin of Grant Redden¹³⁹ and his son William some ten miles from Nauvoo in Des Moines County to plan the Davenport robbery. The Longs, Birch, and Baxter left the Reddens and went to Rock Island where they were joined by another thief named Granville Young and, presumably, by Fox. During the botched robbery, a gun accidentally discharged, shooting Davenport in the leg. After his assailants fled, he bled to death.¹⁴⁰ Bonney reported that the gang took “between six and seven hundred dollars in money, a gold watch and chain, a double-barreled shotgun and pistol” before fleeing “precipitately.” The Davenport family promptly offered a reward of fifteen hundred dollars.¹⁴¹

Eight days after William and Stephen were hanged at Burlington on July 15, D. F. Miller, an attorney in Fort Madison and an associate of one of the Hodges’ lawyers, Jonathan C. Hall, wrote Judge Charles Mason who had presided over the Hodges’ trial and assured him that Thomas Brown and Artemus Johnson had participated in the Miller murder with the Mormon brothers. He added that Ervine “was killed unquestionably by one of the Band which numbers I have every reason to believe numbered 50 to 100 within 20 miles of this place. He was murdered because he threatened exposure.”¹⁴²

As the excitement over the hanging of the Hodges brothers was diminishing, Edward Bonney and other bounty hunters and lawmen were pursuing Davenport’s murderers. Bonney began by checking the list of witnesses who had volunteered to testify in favor of William and Stephen, singling out John and Aaron Long and Judge Fox. He soon learned that Robert H. Birch had joined them at Grant Redden’s cabin and trailed them from that site. Posing as an outlaw on the run, he infiltrated the criminal society and

¹³⁶ George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 169. William Smith’s puzzling relationship with the Hodges family is examined in Shepard, “The Notorious Hodges Brothers.”

¹³⁷ “Irvine Hodges,” *Warsaw Signal* 21 (July 23, 1845):2, commented that Amos had not been seen since Ervine’s murder.

¹³⁸ “Letter from Wm. Smith, Brother of the Late Prophet,” *Sangamo [Illinois] Journal* 16 (November 5, 1845):2.

¹³⁹ George Grant Redden, son of Christopher Redden and Margaret Grant Redden, was born November 8, 1790, at Bernardstown, New Jersey and married Adelia Higley in 1816 in Portage County, Ohio. They had eight children, including Return Jackson Redden and William Harrison Redden.

¹⁴⁰ The organizational meeting at Redden’s, the boat trip to Rock Island, and Davenport’s murder are reported in “The Davenport Murderer,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye* 7 (November 13, 1845):2.

¹⁴¹ Bonney, *Banditti of the Prairies*, 61–63.

¹⁴² D. F. Miller, Letter to Charles Mason, July 23, 1845, typescript, Charles Mason Papers, Iowa State Historical Society, Des Moines.

arrested Fox, Birch, and John Long. Baxter, Granville Young, and Aaron Long were arrested by others and taken to Rock Island where the Rock Island Circuit Court indicted them for murder during its October term. Meanwhile, because of incriminating evidence found near Grant Redden's home, he and William were also arrested and taken to Rock Island where they were likewise indicted in the October term "as accessory to the murder of Davenport before the fact."¹⁴³ During Birch's trial he testified against the others and implicated Return Jackson Redden in the original planning of the Davenport robbery at Nauvoo.¹⁴⁴

Justice was quickly dispensed. Baxter was sentenced to life in prison, John and Aaron Long and Granville Young were hanged on October 19, 1845, William Redden received a one-year sentence, and Grant Redden escaped prison when one juror refused to find him guilty. Birch and Fox avoided punishment as they escaped from or bribed their guards.

The next phase was arresting Return Jackson Redden, then in Nauvoo, "as accessory to the murder of Col. Davenport. L. E. Johnson was deputized to make the arrest, under authority of a warrant issued by Miles W. Conway, Esq., justice of the peace."¹⁴⁵ It was an explosive period. Mormon homes were being burned in the countryside, and Mormons serving under Jacob Backenstos, sheriff of Hancock County, were using deadly force against Gentile house burners. Given the touchy trigger fingers, the Burlington justice of the peace concluded that Redden had to be taken by subterfuge and turned to Lyman E. Johnson as a logical candidate. He had done legal work for Redden and others, they had both grown up in Hiram, Ohio, and they were related.¹⁴⁶

According to a newspaper report, Johnson arranged to meet Redden at Nauvoo's upper wharf in the stone house to "consider arrangements for bailing his father and brother out of jail."¹⁴⁷ On October 25, 1845, the steamboat *Sarah Ann* docked at the upper wharf with Sheriff James L. Bradley of Rock Island, Illinois, on board. Johnson held Jackson in conversation until Bradley, armed with a warrant "for one Jackson Redden," charged him "with the murder of Col. Davenport in July last."¹⁴⁸ When Redden resisted arrest, the crew and passengers rushed from the *Sarah Ann* to Bradley's assistance. In turn, Mormons came running to help Jackson; and in the resulting melee, both Johnson and Bradley were injured.

To make the situation more bizarre, Dr. Robert D. Foster, an ex-Mormon who was a prominent dissenter at the time of the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, happened to be on board the *Sarah Ann*. He wildly fired his pistol, injuring no one but causing more confusion. The Mormons prevailed, and the *Sarah Ann* departed without Jackson.¹⁴⁹ The account in the *Warsaw Signal* gives this version:

¹⁴³ For information on the pursuit and arrest of the accused murderers, see Bonney, *Banditti of the Prairies*, 77–204. For the arrest of the Reddens, see pp. 204–13.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁴⁶ Redden was the nephew of Lyman's maternal aunt, Nancy Jacob Redden.

¹⁴⁷ "Affray at Nauvoo--Rescue of a Prisoner," *Bloomington Herald*, November 1, 1845. See also Bonney, *Banditti of the Prairies*, 217.

¹⁴⁸ "The Nauvoo Fracas," *Territorial Gazette and Advertiser* 8 (November 1, 1845): 2.

¹⁴⁹ *History of the Church*, 7:486-87, October 25, 1845.

When the boat, on which they were, landed, Mr. Johnson, went up into the City, and decoyed Reding [sic] to the landing and endeavored to get him on board the boat; but he would not go. The Sheriff then arrested him on shore; he however resisted him and he would not go on the boat. He was then seized by the Officer and his aids, and while they were in the act of forcing him on the boat, they were attacked, by a mob, who assailed them with brick bats and other missiles, which soon disabled them so that they were compelled to let their prisoner go. Mr. Bradley was severely wounded on the head and also on the knee. Mr. Johnson was struck with great violence with a brick-bat on the side of the face.¹⁵⁰

Three days after this failed attempt, Major William B. Warren, the Illinois militia leader assigned to keep the peace between the Mormons and Gentiles, and Captains James D. Morgan and M. Turner met with Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Amasa M. Lyman, George A. Smith, and John Taylor at Nauvoo. Minutes of this meeting on Tuesday, October 28, 1845, report:

Captn. Morgan: Our man who was wounded is gone home, getting better slowly.

B Y [Brigham Young]: I'd rather a great sight they would come and buy our property.

[Major] Warren: I'd rather so too, but I think when a writ for murder.

B. Y.: There was nothing said about a Writ--a man came up, grabbed him by the arms & said I have got the man--hundreds will swear it.

Warren: The Sheriff in Town, Mr. Kimble & others all say "in the name of the State I arrest you &c."

B. Y.: Foster fired his pistol twice & it is said he was so scared he fired rather in the air--What is the writ for?

W[arren]: Murder? Lyman Johnson is not dangerously hurt.¹⁵¹

There is no record of Lyman Johnson interacting socially, professionally, or as an agent of the Rock Island Court in Nauvoo after being beaten by the Mormons. Similarly, the Rock Island officials apparently gave up on arresting Redden in the Mormon stronghold as he was only a minor player in the July 4 murder at Rock Island, they did not have the means to force the Mormons to release Redden to them, and it was clear the Mormons were preparing to vacate Nauvoo. Redden, for his part, presumably remained at

¹⁵⁰ "Outrages in Nauvoo," *Warsaw Signal* 2 (October 29, 1845):2.

¹⁵¹ Minutes of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, October 28, 1845, typescript, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Series 9: Mormon History Topics, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University Libraries, Logan; punctuation added. "Last Visit of Major Warren to Nauvoo," *Warsaw Signal* 2 (November 5, 1845):2, reports this meeting, stating that Young told Warren: "Redding [sic] has gone to Michigan."

Nauvoo as William Smith, exiled from Nauvoo by October to Perkins Grove, Illinois, wrote in the Springfield *Sangamo Journal* in early November: “Jack Redding [sic] the supposed murderer of Arvine [sic]Hodge . . . Has been running at large in Nauvoo.”¹⁵²

Almost certainly in those days that sharply divided families and individual hearts into “us versus them,” Lyman Johnson’s willingness to defend alleged (and convicted) criminals, even those, like Return Jackson Redden, around whom the Mormons rallied, alienated him further from the Saints. Final evidence that he no longer considered himself Mormon was a second-hand report suggesting that he had joined the Gentile militia who overwhelmed the Mormons and “new citizens” in the Battle of Nauvoo, in September 1845. On September 25, 1846, William Clayton, who was then at Winter Quarters, noted in his diary: “Lyman Johnson, one of the old Twelve, headed a party of the mob from Keokuk, Iowa territory.”¹⁵³ Clayton probably heard about the fighting at Nauvoo from Daniel H. Wells and William Cutler who arrived from Nauvoo the previous day. Hawkins Taylor, never a Mormon but Johnson’s associate in Keokuk, later lamented in his autobiography: “I most foolishly and wickedly, with a few others, had gone over from Keokuk and joined the anti-Mormon army.”¹⁵⁴ Although there is no way to know for sure, Johnson may have been one of the “few.”

Lyman Johnson and the Masons

As we have found no references that Lyman attended Church functions at Nauvoo, we hypothesize that, when he joined the Masons at Nauvoo, he encountered a system which became a substitute for his former religion. When “An Entered Apprentice Lodge” was opened at Nauvoo in February 1842, forty-one men, most of them Mormons, presented petitions for initiation. Lyman was among them, along with former missionary associates Brigham Young, William Smith, and Amasa Lyman as applicants.¹⁵⁵

Two months later on April 7, Lyman attended a meeting at the Nauvoo Masonic Lodge with Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, John Taylor, Robert D. Foster, Wilford Woodruff, William Law, John E. Page, John C. Bennett, and other Mormon luminaries. Lyman’s former missionary companion John Murdock is mentioned in the minutes along with Alanson Ripley, who had filed charges against Lyman at Far West in

¹⁵² “Letter from Wm. Smith, Brother of the Late Prophet,” *Sangamo Journal* 15 (November 5, 1845):2.

¹⁵³ George Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 291.

¹⁵⁴ Hawkins Taylor, “Autobiography,” 57.

¹⁵⁵ Mervin B. Hogan, *The Founding Minutes of the Nauvoo Lodge* (Des Moines, Iowa: Research Lodge No. 2, A.F. & A.M., 1971), 10–22. In an email on June 6, 2005, Nick Literski, a lawyer and Mason who then lived in Nauvoo responded to Bill Shepard’s request for information about Lyman being a Mason: “My transcript of the Nauvoo Lodge record shows that Lyman’s petition was presented on March 17, 1842, with the ballot found clear. He was initiated as an entered apprentice on April 20, 1842, and passed to the degree of fellowcraft on April 31, 1842. Oddly, the June 16 1842, minutes identify him as an entered apprentice, and records him as being passed to the degree of fellowcraft on that day.”

April 1838.¹⁵⁶ On April 20, 1842, Lyman and William Marks were duly initiated as “E. A. [Entered Apprentice] Masons.”¹⁵⁷ According to an anonymously authored country history, Lyman became a charter member of Eagle Lodge, No. 12, in Keokuk in 1845 or 1846; serving as Senior Warden (second position in the lodge) in 1847 and 1848 and as Worshipful Master (head of the lodge) in 1849.¹⁵⁸ A Masonic symbol prominently adorns his tombstone.

Resident of Keokuk

When Lyman built the first brick house in Keokuk in 1842 on the corner of Main and Second streets, he had probably put aside any thoughts about rejoining the Mormons. The construction of this home was an arduous undertaking, with bricks being transported across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo to Keokuk on a flatboat.¹⁵⁹ This house was a landmark in Keokuk for many years, had several owners, and was even remodeled and later used as a bank. The fact that Lyman built a log home described as “impressive” and later such an imposing brick house suggests that he was financially secure. If he did not have a monetary reserve when he settled at Keokuk, he must have dramatically supplemented his income as a lawyer by buying and selling land and property. Family genealogist Elaine M. E. Speakman documented that “he executed more than sixty deeds and mortgages” after arriving at Keokuk.¹⁶⁰

John Elbridge, Lyman and Sarah’s second child, was born at Keokuk on April 19, 1844.¹⁶¹ Ellaine Goodall, Lang family genealogist, documents the death of their “name unknown” infant three and a half years later in late December 1847.¹⁶² Sarah Melissa Granger Kimball, writing from Nauvoo on January 2, 1848, to Marinda Hyde at Kanesville, sadly noted that Lyman and Sarah had buried their youngest child.¹⁶³

In an extensive history about the lawyers in early Iowa, Edward H. Stiles describes “a little ride of 250 miles through an almost unbroken wilderness” made by four lawyers from the Burlington-Keokuk area to the Mormon settlement at Kanesville in 1847. Lyman E. Johnson was one of the four, accompanied by John F. Kinney, J. C. Hall, and William Thompson. Their purpose was to document the Mormon vote in the recent

¹⁵⁶ Hogan, *Founding Minutes of the Nauvoo Lodge*, 25–26.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵⁸ *History of Lee County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1879), 656; Elaine M. E. Speakman, comp., “Lyman E. Johnson,” 7, photocopy in our possession used with permission. Speakman is a genealogist and historian living in Mount Pleasant, Utah.

¹⁵⁹ “Keokuk History, 1820 to 1906,” *Constitution-Democrat*, September 29, 1906, 62; microfilm 960,049, item 1, LDS Family History Library. The home was torn down before 1987.

¹⁶⁰ Speakman, “Lyman E. Johnson,” 7.

¹⁶¹ Ellaine Goodall, Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, Family Group Record for Lyman Johnson and Sarah Lang; photocopy in our possession.

¹⁶² Ellaine Goodall, Family Group Record for Lyman Johnson and Sarah Lang. We have been unable to document this birth.

¹⁶³ Sarah Melissa Granger Kimball, Letter to Marinda Hyde, January 2, 1848, LDS Church History Library.

election between Daniel F. Miller and William Thompson for the Southern District of Iowa.¹⁶⁴ Stiles said nothing about the Mormons and provided little information of historical value; instead, he concentrated on describing the four lawyers' preoccupation with finding enough liquor throughout their trip. At the start of the journey, Lyman was driving the two-horse wagon when Kinney "pulled out a bottle of brandy which I [Kinney] had taken the precaution to provide myself with, and as I held it up in my hand, I cried out 'I have got the advantage of you fellows.' 'Not by a great sight,' says Hall, and as he spoke he raised from the bottom of the wagon a one-gallon jug. Thus equipped we started."¹⁶⁵ Stiles added an additional story of en route high-jinks:

While they were at the river, they fell in, at the tavern, with a French trader by the name of Percha, who induced Hall and Johnson into a game of cards, at the end of which through his trickery, they found their exchequer in a very famished condition. They came to where Judge Kinney and Miller were and related their misfortune, stating that the Frenchman had through his cheating and manipulation of the cards reduced them to the condition they were in. Up spake Kinney, "See here, boys, I can beat that fellow and if you'll say nothing about it, I will." Of course, they promised. Kinney and the Frenchman played, and strange to say, he won back all the money Johnson and Hall had lost and some forty dollars besides.¹⁶⁶

Also in 1847, Lyman sold his brick home (the future bank) to John A. Graham and built a mansion even more elaborate at 204 North Second Street. Like its predecessor, this house was a landmark home in Keokuk for many years.¹⁶⁷

The 1850 Census listed Lyman E. Johnson (age thirty-eight), Sarah L. Johnson (age thirty-four), Sarah Johnson (age fourteen), and John E. (age six) living in Keokuk Township, Lee County, Iowa. Lyman's wife died on February 3, 1851, of unknown causes.¹⁶⁸ Daughter Sarah M., age fifteen and a half, married Joel Matthews, a twenty-nine-year-old lawyer, at Keokuk eight months later on October 14. Joel was confirmed into the Episcopal Church in 1851 and Sarah in 1854. Son John E. was nine when Lyman

¹⁶⁴ See "The Miller-Thompson Contested Election," *The History of Des Moines County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1879), 432–37. According to Edward H. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers*, 256, the Mormons at Kaneshville had voted almost unanimously for Miller because, "during the time that Miller was practicing law in Fort Madison, he performed many kind acts for the Mormons at Nauvoo . . . and they reciprocated his kindness by giving their votes for his election to Congress." However, the poll books from Kaneshville disappeared and Thompson was elected. Miller contested the results so a canvass of secondary evidence was taken.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 256–58.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁶⁷ Ivins, *Yesterdays*, 44. The 1850 census lists the value of Lyman's real estate at \$8,000.

¹⁶⁸ Sarah Johnson, Obituary, *Valley Whig and Keokuk Register*, February 6, 1851, 2. The Caleb F. Davis Papers, Keokuk, Iowa Public Library, 1:59, indicates she "died of consumption."

married a woman named Mary A. (surname not identified) in 1853. She frequently signed business documents and, after Lyman's death, ran the Prairie Hotel at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin.¹⁶⁹ In November 1852, possibly in anticipation of his remarriage, Lyman sold his stately home and about thirty-seven acres, to his daughter Sarah and son-in-law for \$4,000.¹⁷⁰

Lyman Johnson as a Business Man

Despite Lyman's success as a lawyer in Keokuk, his real passion seems to have been speculating in land and property. He and his second wife, Mary, did not stay in Keokuk, but moved to St. Louis, Chicago, Vermont, and probably other locations during the 1850s, pursuing varied business opportunities. For example, in St. Louis, they owned a half interest in the steamboat *Patrick Henry*, sold it in February 1853 for \$4,000 to his son-in-law Joel Matthews,¹⁷¹ then bought a tract of land in St. Louis called "Prairie Place." Two months later, they sold land at Keokuk, although it is not clear whether Lyman or Mary was the original owner. The first of their two children, Kate, was born in Missouri in 1854. By October 25, 1855, the Johnsons had apparently moved to Chicago but again sold land at Keokuk for \$7,000.¹⁷² It is still not clear whether this property predated the marriage, but more likely they had acquired it on speculation, then turned it over to make a profit.

In 1857, the Johnsons were living in Cook County, Illinois, and somehow went into debt almost \$4,000; they sold real estate and other property to settle it. On August 6, 1857, Lyman bought a small hotel named Union Hall in Clarendon, Rutland County, Vermont, for \$1,800. He agreed to make three equal payment of \$600 each on March 1 in three successive years.¹⁷³ On July 22, 1858, the Johnsons suffered another financial loss when they sold the Union Hall for \$1,634.28.¹⁷⁴ Daughter Nettie was born at Clarendon

¹⁶⁹ Speakman, "Lyman E. Johnson," 7.

¹⁷⁰ Lyman E. Johnson, to [son-in-law] Joel Matthews, November 30, 1852, Deeds, Lee County, Iowa, microfilm 959,244, 13:242, LDS Family History Library. Joel Matthews and his wife sold the property to J. E. Burke, June 7, 1853, *ibid.*, 13:672. A photograph of this house's front elevation taken in 1985 is located in the Office of Historic Preservation, Photo Roll 5256, Iowa State Historical Department, Des Moines, Iowa. It is captioned: "This house is a standard version of the Gable-front & Wing National style, with decorative pedimented window heads." The house was demolished after 1985.

¹⁷¹ Lyman E. Johnson to Joel Matthews, February 10, 1853, St. Louis (Independent City), Missouri, Deeds, 6:261, microfilm 531,610, LDS Family History Library. We are indebted to Elaine M. E. Speakman for her research in land transactions involving Lyman E. Johnson.

¹⁷² Lyman and Mary A. Johnson to Hugh T. Reid, Deeds, January 13, 1854, 14:611, Keokuk, Lee County, Iowa; microfilm 959,245, LDS Family History Library.

¹⁷³ Reuben R. Throll and Enoch Smith to Lyman E. Johnson, August 6, 1857, Deeds, 15:331, Clarendon, Rutland, Vermont; microfilm 982,549, LDS Family History Library.

¹⁷⁴ Lyman E. Johnson and Mary A. Johnson to Andrew J. Lang, July 22, 1858, Deeds, 15:338, Clarendon, Rutland County, Vermont; microfilm no. 982,549, LDS Family History Library.

on July 27, 1858. In an election in that city, in September 1858, Lyman was a candidate for justice of peace. It is not clear whether he sought the nomination, but this outsider was not a popular candidate, garnering only three of the 1,432 total votes.¹⁷⁵

Lyman's Death at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin

In late 1858, the Johnsons moved to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, on the east side of the Mississippi River. They may have been operating with limited funds, for there is no record of their purchasing the Prairie Hotel, which had been built in 1835. Presumably, they rented and renovated the one-and-a-half-story building. It was probably a second-tier hotel as it was not advertised in the town *Courier*, while the city's three newer hotels routinely advertised. A notice of the Prairie Hotel's opening under the Johnsons' management appeared in the November 10, 1858, *Courier*:

This well known Hotel has recently been taken, fitted up, and refurbished by Mr. L. E. Johnson who has successfully prosecuted this line of business for many years [and] has succeeded in the proprietorship of the hotel and being a liberal gentlemanly Landlord, he will soon make acquaintance of a host of people, who will make the house their stopping place. Previous to the recent change of proprietors, this fine hotel was favorable [sic? or is this a typo?] known to the traveling public as a public house of good accommodating capacity and with a gentleman of [illegible] kind and obliging manners we have no doubt but it will command an exclusive patronage. The house is to be formally "opened" this evening by an Oyster Supper Party, to which our citizens have been cordially invited by the Proprietor.¹⁷⁶

The next month, five days before Christmas, Lyman drowned in the Mississippi River.¹⁷⁷

Summary

From 1832 to early or mid-1836, Lyman Johnson was one of the great men of Mormon history. He testified to scores of the curious, the skeptical, and future converts that Joseph Smith was a prophet and that the Book of Mormon was a true record of God's other Israelites in the Americas. Armed with immense faith, which was fueled by his

¹⁷⁵ Speakman, "Lyman E. Johnson," 7.

¹⁷⁶ "The Prairie Hotel," *Courier* 7 (November 10, 1858):3.

¹⁷⁷ Apostle Matthias F. Cowley, prior to his forced resignation from his apostleship, spoke at October 1901 general conference, recalling that he remembered "hearing President Lorenzo Snow say on more than one occasion how determined Lyman E. Johnson was to see an angel from the Lord. He plead [sic] with and teased the Lord to send an angel to him, until he saw an angel; but President Snow said that the trouble with him was that he saw an angel one day and saw the devil the next day, and finally the devil got away with him." *Conference Report*, October 1901, 18.

personal testimony of being visited by an angel, he covenanted with God and man to dedicate his life to spreading and defending the restored gospel. He rendered unquestioning allegiance to Joseph Smith, whom he believed was God's personal representative. After being called and ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood, Lyman was one of the most productive missionaries of early Mormonism. Moreover, during his relatively short tenure as an active Mormon he witnessed and participated in many of the landmark events at Kirtland and in the eastern branches.

Yet despite his testimony and accomplishments, Lyman chose to diminish his missionary activities in favor of becoming a merchant. This compromise apparently opened the way for doubt and bitterness to replace faith and compliance, and his slide out of Mormonism seems to date from that decision. Kirtland's collapsing economy in 1837, the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society, Joseph Smith's involvement in selling land, and other factors increased his disillusionment; and he transitioned from questioning aspects of Mormonism to opposing the institutional Church as a dissenter.

It is apparent that Lyman was too independent to live indefinitely under the constraints placed upon him by his religion. Once his shield of faith and obedience was pierced, it seems inevitable that he would seek a society which would allow him to use his energy to pursue wealth, enter the social elite, and enjoy the benefits of both. It is unlikely that he would have followed the example of his brother Luke and, after a season away from the Church, joined the Mormons in Utah. There is no evidence that Lyman's testimony had become dormant but strong evidence that it had died.

It is interesting, however, that even his traumatic separation from the Mormons in Missouri in 1838 did not break the bonds with his brethren that were forged in the mission fields. They were united by shared hardships, rejection, successes, preaching, testifying, and sharing in the events that shaped early Mormonism. Perhaps this love for his missionary colleagues survived the loss of his faith in the institutional Church.

In Lyman we find the best and worst of the early Mormons. On one hand he possessed attributes Latter-day Saints venerate: faith, works, sacrifice, love for the Prophet, and selfless devotion to God's cause. On the other, he also embodied trait that orthodox Latter-day Saints could never consider, much less condone: rebellion, violence, rejection of the gospel, and finally, apostasy.