

John Whitmer and the Revelations of Joseph Smith

Published in *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 21 (2001):39-49.

Born in Pennsylvania on 27 August 1802, John Whitmer was the third son of four brothers and three sisters born to Peter Whitmer and Mary Whitmer. His family moved to Fayette Township, Seneca County, New York. John attended Zion's Church at the age of nineteen as did his brothers, Christian, Jacob, and Peter. John Whitmer's life would change in a few years with a newfound friend, a religious prophet named Joseph Smith Jr. Smith was twenty-three years old when he arrived in early June 1829 at the Peter Whitmer Sr. home. Joseph Smith had been dictating a religious work for nearly two months and came to Fayette with Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, John's brother, to complete the Book of Mormon manuscript. John, at the age of twenty-six, became a scribe to Joseph Smith writing about sixty pages of the original manuscript.¹ It was reported that Whitmer said that he helped "as the words fell from Joseph's lips, by supernatural or almighty power."² It is probable that John was baptized in Seneca Lake when his brothers David and Peter received that ordinance. These three brothers received revelations for themselves through Joseph Smith. In the latter part of June John gave his name, along with his brothers, Christian, Jacob, and Peter, to a religious testimony as having "seen and hefted [lifted]" the plates of the Book of Mormon, becoming one of the Eight Witnesses.

John was one of the six elders who met at the first church conference at Fayette on 9 June 1830. He received his elder's license that originally designated him as "an Apostle of Jesus Christ an Elder of this Church of Christ."³ The next month Joseph Smith and John Whitmer "began to arrange & copy the revelations and commandments which we had received from time to time."⁴

An associate of John was his brother-in-law Hiram Page. Page found a stone through which he claimed to obtain revelatory messages. Page received revelations "concerning the

¹ Zenas H. Gurley, "Synopsis of a Discourse," *Saints' Herald* 26 (15 December 1879):370. John Whitmer died on 11 July 1878.

² Myron H. Bond to Henry A. Stebbins, 2 August 1878, *Saints' Herald* 25 (15 August 1878):253.

³ John Whitmer elder's license, 9 June 1830, William Robertson Coe Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. The words "Apostle of Jesus Christ" were crossed through at an unknown time.

⁴ See Manuscript History, Book A-1:50, written in 1839, Archives, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereafter LDS Archives; Dean C. Jessee, editor, *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Autobiographical and Historical Writings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1989), 1:259, 319 and Dan Vogel, editor, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 1:127. The revelations would include what became Book of Commandments chapters 2-27.

upbuilding of Zion[,] the order of the Church and so forth.”⁵ These revelations were perceived as being at variance with the scriptures and Joseph Smith’s revelations. The three elders who at first accepted Page’s revelations were Book of Mormon witnesses, Oliver Cowdery, David, Peter, and John Whitmer. Joseph Smith was able to convince them of their error. In four revelations, the longest one for second elder Oliver Cowdery, it was revealed, “those things which he [Page] hath written from that stone are not of me, and satan deceiveth him.”⁶ In another message for David Whitmer it stated that he had “been persuaded by those whom I have not commanded.”⁷ To John Whitmer a revelation said, “thou should commence from this time forth to proclaim my gospel . . . until I command you to go from hence.”⁸

With Cowdery on the Lamanite mission John Whitmer served as Joseph Smith’s scribe and confidant. On 21 October 1830 at the Whitmer home Joseph Smith recommenced his revision and additions to the Old Testament book of Genesis.⁹ John was the original scribe for the revelation given for Orson Pratt through Joseph Smith’s small stone:

at Peter Whitmer Sr.’s residence he [Orson Pratt] asked Joseph whether he could ascertain what his mission was, and Joseph answered him that he would see, & asked Pratt and John Whitmer to go upstairs with him, and on arriving there Joseph produced a small stone called a seer stone, and putting it into a Hat soon commenced speaking and asked Elder P[ratt]. to write as he would speak, but being too young and timid and feeling his unworthiness he asked whether Bro. John W[hitmer]. could not write it, and the Prophet said that he could: Then came the revelation to the Three named given Nov. 4th 1830.¹⁰

After the January 1831 conference John was commanded to go to Kirtland, Ohio, to preside over church members in the area. He copied more of Joseph Smith’s revelations

⁵ Jesse, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:263, 323.

⁶ A Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ (Zion [Independence, Missouri]: Published by W. W. Phelps & Co., 1833), chapter 30, verse 11, cited hereafter as Book of Commandments; also in *The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1981), Section 28, verse 11, cited hereafter as LDS D&C; and *Book of Doctrine and Covenants* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1990), Community of Christ Section 27:4 (cited hereafter as RLDS D&C). Subparagraph letters of RLDS Doctrine and Covenants not included. Newel Knight recalled “Even Oliver Cowdery and [members of] the Whitmer family had given heed to them” (“Newel Knight’s Journal,” in *Scraps of Biography* [Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883], 64).

⁷ Book of Commandments 31:2; LDS D&C 30:2; RLDS D&C 29:1.

⁸ Book of Commandments 33:1, 3; LDS D&C 30:9-10; RLDS D&C 29:3.

⁹ Whitmer took dictation from Joseph Smith for Genesis 4:18-26; 5:1-11 (KJV); LDS Moses 5:43-59; 6:1-18, 52-67 (in Pearl of Great Price). See *The Holy Scriptures* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1991) Genesis 5:29-45; 6:1-16, 53-70, dictated on 21 October and 30 November 1830. Manuscripts of revision of Old and New Testament in Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.

¹⁰ James R. B. Vancleave to Joseph Smith III, 29 September 1878, “Miscellaneous Letters and Papers,” Community of Christ Archives. See H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 188.

including all of the revision of Genesis completed in New York.¹¹ Sidney Rigdon, an Ohio convert, wrote a letter of introduction for Whitmer: “I send you this letter by John Whitmer. Receive him, for he is a brother greatly beloved, and an Apostle of this church. With him we send all the revelations which we have received.” Rigdon further explained,

You are living on the land of promise, and that there is the place of gathering, and from that place to the Pacific Ocean, God has dedicated to himself, not only in time, but through eternity, and he has given it to us and our children, not only while time lasts, but we shall have it again in eternity, as you will see by one of the commandments, received day before yesterday.¹²

The Painesville, Ohio, *Telegraph* mentioned Whitmer’s arrival stating:

A young gentleman by the name of *Whitmer*, arrived here last week . . . with a new batch of revelations from God, as he pretended, which have just been communicated to Joseph Smith. As far as we have been able to learn their contents, they are a more particular description of the creation of the world, and a history of Adam and his family, and othey [other] sketches of the anti-deluvian world, which Moses neglected to record. But the more important part of the mission, was to inform the brethren that the boundaries of the promised land, or the New Jerusalem, had just been made known to Smith from God—the township of Kirtland, a few miles west of this [Painesville], is the eastern line and the Pacific Ocean the western line.¹³

On 8 March 1831 a month after Joseph Smith arrived in Kirtland, Smith, through a revelatory message, called John Whitmer as the first church historian, though Oliver Cowdery had written a brief history. The revelation asked John to “write and keep a regular history” and assist Joseph Smith in transcribing what was revealed to the prophet. Whitmer copied the Bible revision of Genesis and most of the Gospel according to Matthew.¹⁴ John Whitmer was to “keep the Church record & History” as Oliver Cowdery was on a church mission to Native American Indians.¹⁵ Whitmer wrote that Cowdery’s church history commenced “at the time of the finding

¹¹ The text worked on in New York that Whitmer copied included introductory revelation of June 1830, RLDS D&C 22; LDS Moses 1 and Genesis 1:1-5:32 (KJV); LDS Moses 2:1-8:12; RLDS Holy Scriptures, Genesis 1:1-7:85.

¹² E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville [Ohio]: Printed and Published by the Author, 1834), 110-111; Book of Commandments 40:15-16; LDS D&C 38:18-20; RLDS D&C 38:4 (2 January 1831). See also H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 99.

¹³ *The Telegraph* 2 (18 January 1831), Painesville, Ohio. Whitmer arrived during the week of 9-15 January.

¹⁴ In Ohio John Whitmer copied the June 1830 introductory revelation, Genesis 1:1-24:41 (KJV); RLDS Holy Scriptures, Genesis 1:1-24:42; and Matthew 1:1-26:71. Whitmer wrote another revision of Matthew 26:1-71. Whitmer was a scribe for Joseph Smith’s dictation of Matthew 26:71-75 (KJV); Matthew 27-28 and Mark 1-8 before leaving for Independence, Missouri, in November 1831.

¹⁵ “The Conference Minutes and Record Book of Christ’s Church of Latter Day Saints,” (known

of the plates, up to June 12, 1831.”¹⁶ Cowdery’s record probably included some church events in New York, the missionary work in Kirtland, his reception on the border of the Lamanites and work among the white population.

John Whitmer’s extant history in the Community of Christ Archives appears not to be his original 1831 manuscript but a copy and continuation of Cowdery’s church history. Chapter one of “The Book of John Whitmer Kept by Commandment” starts with the following wording:

I shall proceed to continue this record, being commanded of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to write the things that transpire in this church, (inasmuch as they come to my knowledge,) in these last days. It is now June the twelfth one thousand eight hundred and thirty one years since the coming of our Lord and Savior, in the flesh.¹⁷

Whitmer tells of his brethren taking their journey to preach the gospel to the Lamanites and organizing a branch of about one hundred thirty members in Geauga County, Ohio. The next event mentioned in the church history was the conversion of Sidney Rigdon. Rigdon was ordained an elder by Oliver Cowdery. John wrote that Rigdon and Edward Partridge desired to see Joseph Smith Jr. in New York. Thereafter three of Joseph Smith’s revelations were written out in the manuscript.

In chapters two and three are recorded four revelations received at Kirtland in February 1831. At the end of chapter three, on page twenty-two of the manuscript, is recorded the words, “The word of the Lord came to the Seer as follows: ‘published in the edition of book of doctrine and covenants published at Kirtland[,] Ohio, 1835. Page 128. Insert the Revelation.’” Also another five places give instructions (as though for publication) to include the printed text of certain revelations for the proposed history. In Whitmer’s history there are written ten revelations of Joseph Smith. Before examining the text recorded by John Whitmer some background is needed.

In the early church many of Joseph Smith’s revelations were given as private instruction for those involved with the work. This was the case with individual inquiries both before and after church organization. Instructions for the young church were considered sacred and to be kept within the confines of church membership.

The importance of heeding Joseph Smith’s words as they were given to him by God is

as the “Far West Record”), 3, manuscript in possession of LDS Church. See Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, editors, *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1983), 5.

¹⁶ “The Book of John Whitmer Kept by Commandment,” chapter 6, 25, Community of Christ Archives. See Bruce N. Westergren, editor, *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 56. Whitmer’s history in its present form contains twenty-two chapters. Manuscript material that had been in the possession of Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, and David Whitmer was obtained by the RLDS Church in 1903. Ebenezer Robinson wrote in 1889 that he and Levi Richards made a copy of Whitmer’s church history at Far West, Missouri. See “Items of Personal History of the Editor,” *The Return* 1 (September 1889):133, Davis City, Iowa. It is not known if this copy presently exists. The eight pages of the Book of Commandments manuscript were reported to have been found inside the cover of Whitmer’s history.

¹⁷ “The Book of John Whitmer,” chapter 1, 1; Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 3.

stated in a document given on 6 April 1830 at Manchester, New York, in a revelation regarding Joseph Smith Jr. and the Church of Christ: “Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his [Joseph Smith’s] words, and commandments, which he shall give unto you, as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me.”¹⁸

In April 1831 the Painesville *Telegraph* published three 1830 church documents that were reportedly obtained from Martin Harris. They were the Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ, the commandment regarding rebaptism and the commandment concerning the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.¹⁹ The February 1831 Law of the Church was published four-and-one-half months later in the September issue.²⁰

During the first half of November 1831 in Hiram, Ohio, a series of church conferences were held. Three of these dealt with printing Joseph Smith’s revelations. On 1 November it was voted that 10,000 copies of the revelations should be published in a book known as the Book of Commandments. As stated in the minutes: “[B]r[other] Oliver Cowdery made a request desiring the mind of the Lord through this conference of Elders to know how many copies of the Book of commandments it was the will of the Lord should be published in the first edition of that work. Voted that there be ten thousand copies struck.”²¹ The preface to the manuscript was then received that began: “Behold, this is mine authority, and the authority of my servants, and my Preface unto the Book of my Commandments, which I have given them to publish unto you, O inhabitants of the earth.”²²

During the 8 November conference Sidney Rigdon mentioned “the errors or mistakes which are in commandments and revelations, made either by the ~~scribe~~ translation²³ in consequence of the slow way of the scribe at the time of receiving or by the scribes themselves.” It was “Resolved by this conference that Br Joseph Smith jr correct those errors or mistakes which he may discover by the holy Spirit while ~~receiving the revelations~~ reviewing the revelations & commandments & also the fulness of the scriptures.”²⁴ Resolved by this conference that br Oliver Cowdery shall [²⁵] all the writings which go forth to the world ~~which go~~ through the Printing press²⁶ except the revelations and commandments, by the Spirit of the Lord

¹⁸ Book of Commandments 22:4; LDS D&C 21:4; RLDS D&C 19:2.

¹⁹ *Telegraph* 2 (19 April 1831). See Book of Commandments 24, 23, and 28; LDS D&C 20, 22, and 27; RLDS D&C 17, 20, and 26.

²⁰ *Telegraph* 3 (13 September 1831). See Book of Commandments 44:1-53 with revised text in 1835 D&C 13:1-18, Kirtland, Ohio; LDS D&C 42:1-69; RLDS D&C 42:1-18.

²¹ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 27.

²² Book of Commandments 1:2; LDS D&C 1:6; RLDS D&C 1:2.

²³ Probably should be transcription.

²⁴ The phrase “fulness of the scriptures” meant Joseph Smith’s revision of the King James Version of the Bible.

²⁵ Possible wording in the text is evidently reflected in the revelation of 20 July 1831 that said that Cowdery is to assist William W. Phelps “to copy and to correct and select” material for the *Evening and the Morning Star*. See Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 143; LDS D&C 57:13; RLDS D&C 57:5. This revelation was not included in Book of Commandments. Andrew Jenson added the words “copy correct and select” in the space (Cannon and Cook, eds., *Far West Record*, 29 note 2). The *Journal History of the Church* in LDS Archives has “shall revise all the writings.”

²⁶ Meaning published in the forthcoming church paper: *Evening and the Morning Star*.

and this according to the commandment given in Missouri July 20, 1831.”²⁷

A revelation to Joseph Smith gave instructions for John Whitmer to accompany Oliver Cowdery to the land of Zion. Whitmer was told to “continue in writing and making a history of all the important things which he shall observe and know, concerning my church.”²⁸

At the last conference held on 12 November, it was “Voted that Joseph Smith jr. be appointed to dedicate & consecrate these brethren [Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer] & the sacred writings & all they have entrusted to their care, to the Lord; done accordingly.”²⁹ Eight days later Cowdery and Whitmer left Hiram for Independence, Missouri. The manuscript that they carried contained about one hundred twenty-one pages. The extant pages of the November 1831 manuscript appear in the handwriting of John Whitmer.

At a council of the Literary Firm held on 30 April 1832, it was “Ordered by the Council that three thousand copies of the book of Commandments be printed the first edition.” Phelps, Cowdery, and Whitmer were “appointed to review the Book of Commandments & select for printing such as shall be deemed by them proper, as dictated by the Spirit & make all necessary verbal corrections.”³⁰ Copies of revelations received since November 1831 were brought to Independence by the presidency of the high priesthood. These included the vision of the three degrees of glory and a revelation to Jesse Gause as Smith’s counselor that were copied by Whitmer as additional material to the original manuscript of the Book of Commandments.

William W. Phelps commenced printing the first church periodical at Independence. The paper called the *Evening and the Morning Star* appeared in print for the first time in June 1832.³¹ On the first page, under the title “Revelations,” appeared “The Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ.” In the July issue Smith and Rigdon’s vision of the three degrees of glory was published. Each issue from June 1832 to July 1833 contained either a complete revelation or a portion of a revelation, most of which were subsequently published in the Book of Commandments. In Kirtland, Ohio, Frederick G. Williams and Joseph Smith were recording various revelations into what is known as the Kirtland Revelations Book. All but the last thirteen manuscript pages were recorded by 18 August 1834 in that book.

On 10 February 1833 John Whitmer, now thirty years old, married Sarah Jackson, age twenty-three, the ceremony being performed by William W. Phelps.³² The printing of “A Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ” commenced, but was a slow project.³³ On 20 July 1833 citizens of Jackson County met at the courthouse in Independence and

²⁷ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 29.

²⁸ 1835 D&C 28:1; LDS D&C 69:3; RLDS D&C 69:1.

²⁹ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 32.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

³¹ Peter Crawley, “A Bibliography of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New York, Ohio, and Missouri,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 12 (Summer 1972):477-478; also Affidavit of W. W. Phelps, 28 September 1832 and Ronald E. Romig and John H. Siebert, “First Impressions: The Independence, Missouri, Printing Operation, 1832-33,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1990):51-66. On this same press the *Upper Missouri Advertiser*, a weekly newspaper, was published. It is possible that John Whitmer was preparing for the press an early draft of his church history as he recorded “Paid for paper for history” (John Whitmer Account Book, LDS Archives).

³² Annette W. Curtis, “Whitmer Family,” *Missouri Mormon Frontier Foundation Newsletter*, 21/22 (August 1999):11.

³³ *Evening and the Morning Star* 1 (December 1832):8 [56] and 1 (May 1833):1 [89]. On 1

formed a committee to ask the Mormons to shut down the printing office and leave the county.³⁴ When the latter proved unwilling to do so, the non-Mormon community voted to demolish the printing office. About four hundred people went to the residence and printing house of W. W. Phelps and Company, threw the press from the upper story, scattered the type, and destroyed most of the building.³⁵

Sheets of the unfinished book were salvaged from the wreckage of the office and collected as they blew about the streets of Independence. From these sheets a small number of copies of the book were assembled, though the five printed sheets (160 pages) represented only a part of the anticipated final work.³⁶ The few copies thus assembled were used by church members in reading and studying Smith's revelations.³⁷ Though the books had different title pages and bindings, they constituted "the first book printed in the immense territory between St. Louis and the Pacific coast."³⁸ Almost two years later in May 1835, John Whitmer arrived at church headquarters at Kirtland, Ohio. This was during the typesetting of the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Although only a few Book of Commandments manuscript pages survived, the five printed sheets were an invaluable primary source used in preparing the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. The "Kirtland Revelations" book was also a source. Textual revisions were made to some of the revelations as early as January 1835. These alterations first appeared in the *Evening and Morning Star* Kirtland reprint and later in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants.

On 17 August 1835, a General Assembly was called in Kirtland. In this period of church history, the term "General Assembly" meant a gathering "of the several [priesthood] quorums which constitute the spiritual authorities of the church."³⁹ One of the purposes was to determine if the Doctrine and Covenants then in press would be approved by church authorities. John Whitmer testified "that he was well acquainted with the work & knew it to be true and from

December 1832 Joseph Smith recorded in his diary: "wrote and corrected revelations &c." (Joseph Smith 1832-34 Diary, 3, LDS Archives; Dean C. Jessee, editor, *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Journal, 1832-1842* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 2:4.

³⁴ Warren A. Jennings, "Factors in the Destruction of the Mormon Press in Missouri, 1833," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 35 (Winter 1967):57-76.

³⁵ Petition dated 28 September 1833 in the *Evening and the Morning Star* 2 (December 1833):114, Kirtland, Ohio; in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, B. H. Roberts, editor (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1959), 1:412; and *Times and Seasons* 1 (December 1839):18, Commerce, Illinois in *History of the Church* 1:390, footnote.

³⁶ Peter Crawley and Chad J. Flake, *Notable Mormon Books 1830-1857* (Provo, Utah: Friends of the Brigham Young University Library, 1974), 6. See also Peter Crawley, "Joseph Smith and a Book of Commandments," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 42 (Autumn 1980):18-32 and Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church: Volume One 1830-1847* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1997 [1998]), 37-42.

³⁷ Elden J. Watson, compiler, *The Orson Pratt Journals* (Salt Lake City: 1975), 38, entry for 2 April 1834; *Evening and the Morning Star* 2 (August 1834):184, Kirtland, Ohio, an Appeal dated July 1834; also Lectures on Theology, "Lecture Third," 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, pages 36 and 42. See also John Whitmer Account Book, LDS Archives.

³⁸ "Missouri History Not Found in Textbooks," *Missouri Historical Review* 44 (October 1949):94; extract from the *Kansas City Star*, 1 July 1949, by John Edward Hicks.

³⁹ 1835 Doctrine and Covenants 3:11; LDS D&C 107:32; RLDS D&C 104:11 ([28-30] April 1835).

God.”⁴⁰ The assembly voted on the book as a whole, thereby canonizing the Doctrine and Covenants.

There is no indication that anyone realized that the text of some of the revelations had been revised, deleted, or enlarged. The revelations were accepted in their altered form without comment, apparently in the belief that they were identical to those originally given to the Saints. There was no explanation made by the committee, either in the preface or within the text of the revelations, as to why alterations had been made.

An examination of the text of the handwritten revelations recorded in John Whitmer’s history shows us the following. The manuscript account written by John Whitmer is a retrospective history. It is not a contemporary record. It incorporates notes, revelations, and letters. Chapters one through three were written in a neat hand by Whitmer. The first twenty-two pages may have been a copy of an earlier draft. But it is clear from the revelatory documents copied into chapters one through three that the earliest the text could have been recorded in this manuscript would have been after the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants came from the bindery in September 1835. The John Whitmer history appears to have been recorded in the manuscript book closer to 1836-1838 with additions commencing about 1846-1847.⁴¹

Chapter 1 contains the text of LDS D&C 35, 37, 38 and RLDS D&C 34, 37, 38. Two of these revelations of Joseph Smith were received in December 1830 and the other at the third church conference in January 1831. The text of the three revelations follow the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants.

Chapter 2 contains LDS and RLDS D&C 41, the first recorded revelation received at Kirtland, Ohio. The Whitmer wording includes some revisions that first appear in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants such as the added words “inasmuch as he keepeth my commandments.”⁴² Included in the copying in this chapter is the revision of LDS D&C 42:1-72 and RLDS D&C 42:1-19.⁴³ Whitmer’s record contains copying errors such as words skipped when being transcribed. For Section 42 the copy includes some additional 1835 wording. For example, the John Whitmer text includes LDS D&C 42:29-32 and RLDS D&C 42:8 containing the 1835 revision to that portion of the document.⁴⁴ LDS D&C 42:73 and the ending of RLDS D&C 42:19 did not appear in the Book of Commandments. This small addition was printed in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants and included in the history prepared by Whitmer.⁴⁵

Chapter 3 contains what is now LDS and RLDS D&C 43 and 44. Seven revelations that

⁴⁰ Kirtland Council Minute Book [3 December 1832—27 November 1837], LDS Archives, typescript, 103.

⁴¹ See Charles A. Davies, *Question Time* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1967), 2:169 and Richard P. Howard, “John Whitmer: Scribe, Preacher, Leader, Historian . . . and Historical Association,” *Saints Herald* 129 (1 March 1982):28.

⁴² “The Book of John Whitmer,” chapter 2, 12, RLDS; Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 28. See 1835 D&C 61:3; LDS D&C 41:8; RLDS D&C 41:3. Compare with Book of Commandments 43:10.

⁴³ “The Book of John Whitmer,” chapter 2, 12-17; Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 28-34.

⁴⁴ “The Book of John Whitmer,” chapter 2, 14; Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 31. See 1835 D&C 13:8. For early text see Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 108 and Book of Commandments 44:26-27.

⁴⁵ “The Book of John Whitmer,” chapter 2, 17; Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 34. See 1835 D&C 13:19.

Joseph Smith received before John Whitmer was appointed to keep the church history are recorded in the manuscript. On page twenty-two is the first notation to insert from the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants a March 1831 revelation, what is now Section 45, into the history. This is the first of six places where instructions were given to insert revelations received in March, May, and June 1831.

In chapters five, six, and eight, one revelatory message was copied into each chapter. One of the revelations (LDS and RLDS D&C 48) is evidently a copy of a March 1831 revelation that Whitmer had in his possession.⁴⁶

Of the total number of documents written or noted in John Whitmer's history all except one were received by Joseph Smith prior to 12 June 1831 when Whitmer said that Cowdery stopped his history.⁴⁷ Oliver Cowdery's history was probably fragmented since John Whitmer covers the time period when Cowdery and associates left New York on their mission to the Native American Indians. Whitmer included a copy of Oliver Cowdery's description of the consecration of the land of Zion, Sidney Rigdon's dedication of "the ground where the city [of New Jerusalem] is to stand" and the spot of ground for the contemplated Temple.⁴⁸ Whitmer's history covers in chapters two through eight events at Kirtland, Ohio, from February to June 1831.

Joseph Smith's revelations are best understood by having the earliest possible texts. It is essential to uncover the original intentions and meanings of the revelations and of the historical circumstances surrounding them. John Whitmer as a scribe, clerk, and historian preserved copies of Smith's pronouncements during the formative period of the church. While Whitmer's history does not help in recovering the early text, it does give us an appreciation of how one early Latter-day Saint preserved a record for future generations. This is one step further in our appreciation of the early Restoration movement.

⁴⁶ "The Book of John Whitmer," chapter 5, 24; Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 51-52. The words "by the Bishop and elders of the church" in John Whitmer's history are a close reading at this point to Book of Commandments 51:6 rather than 1835 D&C 64:2 that reads "by the presidency and the bishop of the church"; LDS D&C 48:6; RLDS D&C 48:2.

⁴⁷ "The Book of John Whitmer," chapter 1, 25; Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 3, 56.

⁴⁸ "The Book of John Whitmer," chapter 9, 31-32; Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 85-87.