

---

# The Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes

H. Michael Marquardt

## Background

**I**N SEPTEMBER 2016 the LDS Church Historian's Press made available in print the early minutes of the Nauvoo, Illinois, Council or Quorum of Fifty, or Kingdom of God of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Though the Council was in operation for only a short time in Nauvoo, the release of the minutes now allows scholars access to these vitally important deliberations.

Council meetings were held in Nauvoo during a three-month period in 1844: March, April, and May. They were recorded, copied, and based on memory and on the journal of William Clayton. Though there had been some discussion favoring destruction of the minutes, Clayton made sure that a historical record would contain what took place. Willard Richards was the recorder and Clayton the clerk. The organization commenced March 10–11, 1844.

Within the context of American history the Mormon movement was different from and yet the same as other religious organizations. Some thought that a New Jerusalem would be built on the American landscape.<sup>1</sup> In preparing for the second coming of Jesus, the Church of Christ had come to regard itself as the kingdom of God with a mission to spread the latter-day gospel throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> There was thus no need for a kingdom or government separate from this restored church or the US government. But that changed over time as a result of conflict within and outside the church. In 1838 an organization known as the Danites was formed.<sup>3</sup> W. W. Phelps thought it was treasonable “to set up a government within a Government.”<sup>4</sup>

---

1. For example see Gershon Greenburg, *The Holy Land in American Religious Thought, 1620–1948* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994).

2. “Revelations ... A revelation on prayer, given October 30, 1831,” *The Evening and the Morning Star* 1 (September 1832): 2, Independence, MO. See LDS and RLDS Doctrine and Covenants 65.

3. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 231, 293, 464.

4. Missouri General Assembly, *Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &c. in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons; and the Evidence Given before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the*

During the Nauvoo period of church history there developed an inclination to form secret organizations. One such group was the Council of Fifty. Some thirty-five years ago two studies of this council were published but were limited to available historical records<sup>5</sup> because these three volumes of minutes were not available at the time. Although there seems to have been a problem in keeping the topics discussed in the meetings confidential, such is no longer the case.

Several early programs were commenced at Nauvoo by Joseph Smith in 1844. They included plans for westward migration of church headquarters toward the general areas of Texas, Oregon, California and the Rocky Mountains. After writing letters in November 1843 to a few presidential candidates on their views of the Mormons, Joseph Smith decided to become a candidate himself for president of the United States. His main publication on the subject, written for him by W.W. Phelps, was titled, *General Smith's Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States*, and was first published in Nauvoo in February 1844. Sidney Rigdon became Smith's running mate for the office of vice president.

Latter Day Saints still continued to view themselves, especially in Nauvoo, in a persecution mode, envisioning their actions as a defense of their rights under the Nauvoo Charter. Their view was that the US government was as much responsible for actions against them as were the states of Missouri and Illinois. As such, survival became an existential objective in the quest to protect their church and their leader Joseph Smith.<sup>6</sup>

### Joseph Smith as Chairman of the Council

The council consisted of about fifty men who were bound by secrecy and sworn in allegiance to chairman Joseph Smith. Members of the Kingdom of God were forming a theocracy wherein the voice of God was to become the voice of the council. They envisioned their group as the kingdom that Daniel of the Old Testament saw coming out of a mountain and filling the earth. As recorded in the minutes, the name of the select organization was the result of a revelation pronounced by church president Joseph Smith on March 14.

The name of the council was discussed and the Lord was pleased to give the following Revelation; Verily thus saith the Lord, this is the name by which you shall be called, The

---

*State of Missouri, at the Court-House in Richmond, in a Criminal Court of Inquiry, begun November 12, 1838, on the trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and others, for High Treason and Other Crimes Against the State* (Fayette, Missouri: Printed at the office of the Boon's Lick Democrat, 1841), 122.

5. See D. Michael Quinn, "The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844-1945," *BYU Studies* 20 (Winter 1980): 163-97 and Andrew F. Ehat, "It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God," *BYU Studies* 20 (Spring 1980): 253-79.

6. See Bill Shepard and H. Michael Marquardt, "Mortal Enemies: Mormons and Missourians 1839-1844," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 36, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 35-80.

Kingdom of God and his Laws, with the keys and power thereof, and judgment in the hands of his servants. Ahman Christ.<sup>7</sup>

At a church conference on April 5, Sidney Rigdon of the First Presidency mentioned in his discourse: “When God sets up a system of salvation, he sets up a system of government; when I speak of a government I mean what I say; I mean government that shall rule over temporal and spiritual affairs.”<sup>8</sup> Six days later, at a meeting of the Council of Fifty, Rigdon presented a history of the council and said, “The design was to form a Theocracy according to the will of Heaven, planted without any intention to interfere with any government of the world. We wish to have nothing to do with them. . . . It is nevertheless necessary to be careful and prudent inasmuch as there is so much disposition in the minds of men to cry treason at every thing we do.” Rigdon “said further that we had chosen our beloved Prest. Joseph Smith as our standing chairman, and our mouth between us and our God.”<sup>9</sup>

### Joseph Smith Received as Prophet, Priest and King

It was also in this secret group of men where they received “from this time henceforth and forever, Joseph Smith, as our Prophet, Priest & King, and uphold him in that capacity in which God has anointed him.” The council adjourned the morning meeting “with shouts of Hossanna [*sic*] to God and the Lamb Amen and Amen.”<sup>10</sup> This occurred on April 11, 1844, at a meeting in the Nauvoo Masonic Hall, but the action did not remain a secret for long. A report published in New York from an individual who visited Nauvoo read:

In many respects, Joe [Smith] has the advantage over his illustrious predecessor [Mahomet]: he, Joe, is not only Prophet, but is also Mormon King, and in his triune function of Prophet, Priest and King, he lords it over God’s heritage with such a strict eye to the Lord’s treasury, that he will by and by be enabled to present the world with a faint imitation of the outward glories of Solomon’s temple.<sup>11</sup>

At the April 18 council meeting Elder David Yearsley (1808–49), a merchant and council member, commented on setting up the kingdom:

7. Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 14, 1844, in Matthew J. Grow, Ronald K. Esplin, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, and Jeffrey D. Mahas, eds., *Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846*, vol. 1 of the Administrative Records series of *The Joseph Smith Papers* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2016), 48–49 (hereafter as *Council of Fifty, Minutes*). The minutes are located in MS 30055, Council of Fifty record books, 1844–1846, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

8. “Conference Minutes,” *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 9 (May 1, 1844): 524.

9. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, April 11, 1844, 88–89.

10. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, April 11, 1844, 95–96.

11. “Life in Nauvoo,” April 25th, 1844, in *New-York Daily Tribune* vol. 4, no. 41, whole no. 975, May 28, 1844, p. 4, column 1.

We can try to elect our president for a scare crow, but how can a man be elected president when he is already proclaimed king. Can he give up his office for a smaller one.[?] He is perfectly willing to go and electioneer, to blind the eyes of the people, but he wants to see our king upheld in his office here.<sup>12</sup>

Joseph Smith was careful in cautioning council members, “It is not wisdom to use the term ‘king’ all the while. Let us use the term ‘proper source’ instead of ‘king’ and it will be all understood and no person can take advantage.”<sup>13</sup>

### Excommunication of William Law, Jane Law and Others

There was pressure from within the church by stalwart William Law, recently a member of the First Presidency, against what he regarded as secret practices not included in the teachings found in the Book of Mormon or the Doctrine and Covenants. The April 18 Council of Fifty meeting ended about 5:30 p.m., followed by a special “council of the authorities”<sup>14</sup> at 6:00 p.m. While six members of the Quorum of Twelve and seven of the Nauvoo High Council were present, this was neither a High Council meeting nor a council under Bishop Newel K. Whitney, who was also in attendance. Of the thirty-two men present at the meeting, twenty-three were members of the Council of Fifty.<sup>15</sup> Notably, neither Joseph Smith nor Sidney Rigdon attended. William and Jane Law and three other church members were excommunicated, and a notice to that effect was printed in the *Times and Seasons*:

Nauvoo, April, 18, 1844.

Robert D. Foster, Wilson Law, William Law, and Jane Law of Nauvoo; and Howard Smith, of Scott county, Illinois, for unchristian like conduct, were cut off from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, by the authorities of said church, and ordered to be published in the Times and Seasons.

W. RICHARDS,  
Church Recorder.<sup>16</sup>

Even after this event there was still time for negotiation and reconciliation between the church and the Law family. At the May 6, 1844 Council of Fifty meeting Sidney Rigdon “reported that he had labored with the Laws without accomplishing any thing, but judged that they had taken a course which they never would

12. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, April 18, 1844, 125.

13. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, April 18, 1844, 128.

14. Willard Richards Journal, April 18, 1844, MS 1490, Church History Library.

15. See Joseph Smith Journal, kept by Willard Richards, April 18, 1844, Church History Library; also in Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Brent M. Rogers, eds., *Journals, Volume 3: May 1843–June 1844* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2015), 231–32.

16. *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 8 (April 15, 1844): 511, printed circa April 20, 1844.

become reconciled.” The Council of Fifty turned the offenders over “to the buffetings of Satan.”<sup>17</sup> William Law afterwards helped establish the *Nauvoo Expositor*, a newspaper that would soon publish negative articles against both the church and the Nauvoo city charter.<sup>18</sup> Soon afterwards William Law would become a leader in a reformed church.

### Constitution of the Kingdom of God

A committee was appointed to write a constitution and bylaws of the Council of Fifty but had been unable to complete the assignment. Accordingly, Joseph Smith proclaimed a revelation on April 25 as follows:

Verily thus saith the Lord, ye are my constitution, and I am your God, and ye are my spokesmen. From henceforth do as I shall command you. Saith the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith’s vice presidential running mate, said on May 6 “as the Lord God lives Joseph shall be President next term and I will follow him.”<sup>20</sup> Six days later Smith proclaimed in a speech near the Nauvoo temple, “I calculate to be one of the Instruments of setting up the Kingdom of Daniel, by the word of the Lord, and I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world.”<sup>21</sup>

The last meeting of the fifty was held on May 25, 1844, with Joseph Smith in attendance. Shortly thereafter on June 7, the only issue of the accusatory *Nauvoo Expositor* was published, and twenty days later Joseph and Hyrum Smith lay dead of murder at Carthage jail.

### Brigham Young as Chairman of the Council

The first meeting of the Council of Fifty following the death of Joseph Smith was held on February 4, 1845. This initiated three clusters of meetings that would be held in Nauvoo: February 4–May 10, 1845; September 9–October 4, 1845; and January 1846. Wanting nothing to do with the US government, members instead focused on five topics: (1) Brigham Young as successor to Joseph Smith; (2) the gentiles’ rejection of the gospel; (3) confirmation of Brigham Young as prophet, priest and king; (4) plans for deputizing Indians to assist in the mission; and (5) plans for the western migration.

17. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, May 6, 1844, 152, 154.

18. [No title], *Nauvoo Expositor* 1 (June 7, 1844): 2, column 3.

19. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, April 25, 1844, 136–37.

20. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, May 6, 1844, 158.

21. Discourse reported by Thomas Bullock, May 12, 1844, Joseph Smith Collection, MS 155, box 4, folder 6, Church History Library.

In early 1845 the first copies of a *Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter-Day Saints. To all the Kings of the World; To the President of the United States of America; To the Governors of the several States; And to the Rulers and People of all Nations: Greetings* were published in New York. The proclamation was composed by Council of Fifty member Parley P. Pratt and proclaimed, “Know ye:— That the kingdom of God has come: as has been predicted by ancient prophets, and prayed for in all ages; even that kingdom which shall fill the whole earth, and shall stand for ever.”<sup>22</sup>

### Brigham Young the Successor to Joseph Smith

At the first council meeting after Joseph Smith’s death, held on February 4, 1845, it was confirmed that Brigham Young was “president of this quorum” and “president of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>23</sup> Orson Pratt said it was “self evident that the president of the church stands as the head of this council.”<sup>24</sup> Willard Richards told Council members, “Instead of saying K-i-n-g say chairman.” As indicated by William Clayton in the minutes, Young was the “legal successor of president Joseph as our head.”<sup>25</sup>

Members of the council knew there were leaks of what was discussed in their meetings. W. W. Phelps commented, “Tis not yet a year since this council was first organized, yet, some have told what has passed here although under the most solemn obligations of secrecy.”<sup>26</sup> Orrin Porter Rockwell said “those [who] leaked out shall pay the forfeit by the loss of his head; if I find them.”<sup>27</sup>

The minutes of the special conference for April 7, 1845, included the proposal by Apostle George A. Smith “that we acknowledge President Brigham Young as the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to this Church, and nation, and all nations, and also the President of the whole Church of Latter Day Saints,” which vote was carried unanimously.<sup>28</sup> The minutes were edited for publication in the *Times*

---

22. *Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter-Day Saints. To all the Kings of the World; To the President of the United States of America; To the Governors of the several States; And to the Rulers and People of all Nations: Greetings* (New York, April 6, 1845), 1.

23. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, February 4, 1845, 221.

24. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, February 4, 1845, 223.

25. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, February 4, 1845, 224–25.

26. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, February 4, 1845, 220.

27. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, February 4, 1845, 224.

28. General Church Minutes, CR 100 318, box 1, folder 32, April 7, 1845, Church History Library. Other individuals mentioned Brigham Young as church president. See Samuel James to S[idney]. Rigdon, January 28, 1845, *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 9 (March 1, 1845): 130, column 2, Pittsburgh, PA; Daniel Davis Diary, MS 1676, folder 1, 12, Church History Library; Appointment of David Candland to a mission in England, January 22, 1846, signed by Brigham Young “President of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,” copy in my possession. See also D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1994), 178, 648, 650–51.

*and Seasons*, eliminating the phrase, “nation, and all nations, and also the President of the whole Church of Latter Day Saints” and adding the word “generation” to read “that we acknowledge President Brigham Young is the president of the quorum of the Twelve apostles to this church and generation.”<sup>29</sup>

### The Gentiles Have Rejected the Gospel<sup>30</sup>

Mormon scriptures predicted a time when the fullness of the gospel would be rejected by the gentiles. From that point the gospel would go to the house of Israel, of which the American Indians were alleged to be a remnant. This would be considered in prophetic words that “the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”<sup>31</sup> The concept of the gentiles’ rejection was discussed in Council of Fifty meetings.

William Clayton did not attend the meeting of February 27, 1845, as he was ill. In separate minutes of the “Meeting of the Twelve & others,” recorded by clerk Thomas Bullock, it included the comment of W. W. Phelps that “the Kingdom is <now> rent from the Gentiles.”<sup>32</sup> Two days later council president Brigham Young explained, “The gentiles have rejected the gospel and we will carry it to the branch of the house of Israel in the west. Let the gentiles remain in ignorance unless they will come to the standard.”<sup>33</sup>

This discussion continued in the month of March through the next four meetings of the Council. George Miller said the “gentiles have rejected every thing that belongs to salvation” and “the fullness of the gentiles has come in.”<sup>34</sup>

At the March 11 meeting Brigham Young said, “He don[']t care about preaching to the gentiles any longer” but “feels as Lyman Wight said let the damned scoundrels be killed, let them be swept off from the earth, and then we can go and be baptized for them.” Young continued, “The gentiles have rejected the gospel, and where shall we go to preach. We cannot go any where but to the house of Israel ... This is the last call we will make to them and if they don[']t listen to it we will sweep them out of existance [existence].” Heber Kimball agreed.<sup>35</sup>

29. “Conference Minutes,” *Times and Seasons* 6, no. 7 (April 15, 1845): 870.

30. See William Shepard, “The Concept of a ‘Rejected Gospel’ in Mormon History, Part 1,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 130–81.

31. *Book of Mormon* (Palmyra [New York]: E. B. Grandin, 1830), 487–88; *A Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ (Independence [MO]: W. W. Phelps & Co., 1833)*, 4:5–6 (March 1829); 48:25–27 (March 1831).

32. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, in printed Appendix 1, February 27, 1845, 533, angle brackets indicate words above the line. See also Jedediah S. Rogers, ed., *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2014), 83.

33. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 1, 1845, 255.

34. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 4, 1845, 289.

35. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 11, 1845, 299–301.

On March 18 Young confirmed what he had stated the previous week. Orson Spencer expressed his feelings, "Our salvation is the destruction of the gentiles and their destruction will be our salvation."<sup>36</sup> Young stated, "The kingdom is rent from the gentiles, and has been ever since this council was organised."<sup>37</sup>

At the church conference of April 8 Heber C. Kimball "proposed to withdraw fellowship from the Gentiles' eniquity [iniquity], which was done by a unanimous vote" and it was explained: "Now they are disfellowshipt."<sup>38</sup> Brigham Young said "that, by martyring the Prophet and Patriarch, the Gentiles have rejected the gospel."<sup>39</sup> During the next conference in October, Apostle Kimball mentioned, "At the last conference, a vote was passed that the Gentiles were cut off; and now, why do you want to labor for them. Inasmuch as the Gentiles reject us, lo! we turn to the Jews."<sup>40</sup>

### Brigham Young Confirmed as Prophet, Priest and King

Some new members were inducted into the council on March 1. They voted in the affirmative to "receive Prest. B. Young as successor of Prest. Joseph Smith and prophet, priest, and king to this kingdom forever after."<sup>41</sup> On March 4 those present "all voted to sustain Prest Young in his place as standing chairman, Prophet, Priest, and King." Heber C. Kimball, filling in as chairman for this meeting, "said that this was the kingdom which Daniel saw would be set up in the last days which would overthrow and subdue all other kingdoms."<sup>42</sup>

### Beyond the Rocky Mountains

Discussions during the next three March meetings included harsh words of Brigham Young as summarized by the clerk: "in regard to going beyond the rocky mountains, he don[']t feel like it, it is so far to go there, and have to come back to kill off these cursed scoundrels."<sup>43</sup> Orson Pratt thought "to read the minutes seems to him to be a waste of time."<sup>44</sup>

It was not always clear where President Young intended the Mormons to place their new home. He said "it was Joseph[']s mind that the head of California Bay was

---

36. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 18, 1845, 335.

37. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 18, 1845, 338.

38. "Speech Delivered by Heber C. Kimball," April 8, 1845 in *Times and Seasons* 6, no. 13 (July 15, 1845): 973.

39. "The Conference," *Nauvoo Neighbor* 2, no. 50 (April 16, 1845): 2.

40. "Conference Minutes," April 8, 1845, *Times and Seasons* 6, no. 16 (November 1, 1845): 1012.

41. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 1, 1845, 256.

42. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 4, 1845, 278.

43. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 11, 1845, 303.

44. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 18, 1845, 325.

the place for us where we could have commercial advantages, but he also proposed other places for our consideration.”<sup>45</sup> John Taylor said “We ask no favors of the United States of any kind nor never mean to.”<sup>46</sup> Concerning the command to build the Nauvoo House, Young explained:

It is a commandment from God through the prophet Joseph to build that house and shall we say we can[']t build it? no. If we say we can build it, we can do it. There are sacred records deposited in the foundation of that house and it is our duty to build the house and cover up those records.<sup>47</sup>

After hearing a report from John M. Bernhisel, counselor John Taylor said he was much pleased:

Sufficient information has been given to prove that it is a good place for the saints to make a location, that they may build a City on the Coast of the Pacific and carry the gospel to the other part of the globe. This would be a good place for the time being, there is plenty of cattle and provisions of every kind. We will soon be independent of this nation, and we will be the head and not the tail.<sup>48</sup>

### Shod with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace

Apostle Heber C. Kimball said in his discourse at an April 8 church conference that he wanted the church members to finish the Nauvoo Temple and take stock in the Nauvoo House. He quoted Ephesians 6:15 (KJV), “And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” But in this case the reference was to having weapons, like knives, guns and rifles that could be used against others. Kimball asked and answered:

What is the object do you suppose of making the proclamation for all the saints to gather in, from all the United States, if we want to send them back again? We want them here, that they may help us to build the Temple, and the Nauvoo House; and want them to bring their firelocks, and learn to use them, and keep them well cleaned and loaded, and primed, so that they will go off the first shot, that every man may be in

45. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 18, 1845, 328.

46. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 18, 1845, 330.

47. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 18, 1845, 344. The list of items deposited in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House on October 2, 1841 included the original Book of Mormon manuscript. Recorded in the Book of the Law of the Lord under the date of December 29, 1841, see Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011), 19–20.

48. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, March 22, 1845, 352.

readiness, and prepared, that is, every man shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; (holding up his cane as a sample;) that is the way.<sup>49</sup>

What Kimball was referencing in this passage was clarified in the Council of Fifty minutes. At the first Council meeting after the April conference Peter Haws “said he had long contemplated the means whereby cousin Lemuel could be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” “Preparation of the gospel of peace” was explained in a footnote: “This phrase was used by Latter-day Saints at this time to describe being armed.”<sup>50</sup> Haws commented, “The Indians think nothing of going two or three thousand miles, and whenever it is made known to them, that they can have a preparation of the gospel to administer to this nation they will go into it.”<sup>51</sup> The idea was to give weapons to the American Indians.

The minutes reported that John Taylor “believes in every one of the Indian tribes being shod with the preparation of the gospel.”<sup>52</sup> Charles C. Rich said, “we should have the pulling of the strings, and that we should have the influence with the Indians and not any other nation. He would be glad to have the Indians put in possession of the arms, but let us have the influence of dictating and controlling the whole matter.”<sup>53</sup>

Theodore Turley, who had been commissioned on March 18 to make Bowie knives and fifteen-shooters (rifles), “said he had been appointed to go to work and make some tools for the preparation of the gospel” and needed a larger shop.<sup>54</sup>

In May Thomas Bullock recorded Brigham Young as saying:

I want you all to be shod with the preparat[ion]n. of the Gospel – have your firelocks clean – be ready at a moments warning – to slaughter all that come – they will find death here – c [and] hell will follow after – our enemies if they tho[ugh]t. we were not prepared, wo[ul]d. be upon us – we have influence in the world – every one be peaceable, atte[n]d. to their own bus[iness]: c [and] if an enemy comes to destroy me or my family I wo[ul]d. send them to hell across lots.<sup>55</sup>

49. “Speech Delivered by Heber C. Kimball,” April 8, 1845, *Times and Seasons* 6, no. 13 (July 15, 1845): 971. The local newspaper made an interesting reference to the Nauvoo cane, “It is becoming quite fashionable for gentlemen to possess a *Nauvoo cane*; and the good people of this city of peace, also use a *cane*,—but the point of the staff, is, to have it ‘shod with the preparation of the gospel.’” “Nauvoo Canes,” *Nauvoo Neighbor* 2, no. 52 (April 30, 1845): 2, column 5, emphasis retained. Kimball’s speech was reprinted in the *Warsaw Signal* 2 (October 22, 1845): 1.

50. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, April 11, 1845, 403, and note 665.

51. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, April 11, 1845, 408.

52. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, April 11, 1845, 406.

53. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, April 11, 1845, 408.

54. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, April 11, 1845, 416.

55. General Church Minutes, CR 100 318, Box 1, folder 33, May 4, 1845, Church History Library.

At the May 10 Council meeting Heber C. Kimball “moved that we declare ourselves an independant [sic] nation,” and Orson Pratt “said he did not think it necessary, inasmuch as the nation has already made us independant.” Brigham Young “stated that through his advise brother Turley has commenced making fifteen shooters, and has one here for a sample. He wants some of one of the brethren to buy it, that Turley can send to St Louis and get some more barrels. The Gun was sold to W. [Willard] Richards.”<sup>56</sup>

### More Plans for the Western Migration

At the first meeting in September Brigham Young indicated “that there is not much difficulty in sending people beyond the mountains. We have designed sending them somewhere near the Great Salt Lake and after we get there, in a little time we can work our way to the head of the California Bay, or the Bay of the St [San] Francisco.”<sup>57</sup> Six days later Young wrote in a letter to Samuel Brannan, “I wish you together with your press[,] paper and ten thousand of the brethren were now in California at the Bay of St. Francisco, and if you can clear yourself and go there do so and we will meet you there.”<sup>58</sup>

The Council of Fifty was still making considerations on where to locate in January 1846. In their next-to-last meeting William Clayton recorded in the minutes concerning Brigham Young, “When we leave here his mind is to go just beyond the Rocky mountains, somewhere on the Mexican claim and the United States will have no business to come there and if they do we will treat them as enemies.”<sup>59</sup>

### Summary

We have learned from the minutes that both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young were accepted in their chairmanships as prophet, priest and king in this latter-day “Kingdom of God.” Many of the ideas planned in Council meetings, thought to be important at the time, would never occur. William Shepard explained:

After the deaths of Brigham Young in 1877 and Orson Pratt in 1881, the doctrine of Gentile rejection was rarely mentioned. Reasons for its decline include the Church’s distancing itself from doctrines which antagonized non-Mormons, a transition away from teaching that the millennium was imminent, and the fact that the doctrine impeded

56. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, May 10, 1845, 454.

57. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, September 9, 1845, 472.

58. Brigham Young office files, Brigham Young to Samuel Brannan, September 15, 1845, retained copy, CR 1234 1, box 16, folder 4, Church History Library. Printed in Will Bagley, ed., *Scoundrel’s Tale: The Samuel Brannan Papers* (Spokane, WA: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1999), 91–92. The words “and we will meet you there” were omitted when the Manuscript History of Brigham Young was compiled.

59. *Council of Fifty, Minutes*, January 11, 1846, 513.

the missionary program. Another important reason was that the Church was beginning its slow transition from a posture of confrontation with the United States to an attitude that supporting the nation in times of crisis was a patriotic and religious duty.<sup>60</sup>

The minutes indicate the existence of big projects that would never take place. The death of Joseph Smith would abruptly terminate his presidential campaign. Under Brigham Young's leadership there would be no alliance with the American Indians to form a force against the US government. Missionaries would not depart to the Pacific Islands as planned. But such outcomes would hardly be problematic to council members since the "Kingdom of God" would be moving forward regardless. The plan to move west was to them the overriding concern. But conflict with the United States government would yet resume years later.<sup>61</sup>

With the publication of the Nauvoo Council of Fifty minutes by the Church Historian's Press, one might now hope that further advances in scholarship and history would follow with the publication of additional historical records, such as the remaining minutes of the Council of Fifty and the Nauvoo journals of William Clayton. A recent compilation of articles using the Nauvoo minutes has started the process.<sup>62</sup> In the final analysis, we should be grateful to those who have made this wealth of documentary records of the Latter Day Saint movement available for professional study.

H. MICHAEL MARQUARDT (research@xmission.com) is an independent historian and research consultant. He is on the editorial board of the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*. He is the compiler of *Early Patriarchal Blessings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Smith Pettit Foundation, 2007); *Later Patriarchal Blessings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Smith Pettit Foundation, 2012); author of *Joseph Smith's 1828–1843 Revelations* (Xulon Press, 2013) and co-author with William Shepard of *Lost Apostles: Forgotten Members of Mormonism's Original Quorum of Twelve* (Signature Books, 2014).

---

60. William Shepard, "The Concept of a 'Rejected Gospel' in Mormon History, Part 1," *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 153.

61. See William P. MacKinnon, ed., *At Sword's Point, Part 1: A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858* (Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark Company, an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press, 2008) and *At Sword's Point, Part 2: A Documentary History of the Utah War, 1858-1859* (Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark Company, an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press, 2016).

62. Matthew J. Grow and R. Eric Smith, eds, *The Council of Fifty: What the Records Reveal about Mormon History* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, in cooperation with Deseret Book, 2017).