

## Relocation to Palmyra and Manchester, New York

In 1816 forty-five-year-old Joseph Smith Sr. left his wife, Lucy, and eight children in Norwich, Vermont, and traveled to the village of Palmyra in western New York state. A history of the Smith family was written twenty-eight years later by Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph's wife.<sup>1</sup> Her history of the Smith family in New York covers about ninety pages in her rough manuscript. Undoubtedly Lucy Smith's narrative contains some errors, but it remains a valuable record of her family's life.

From contemporary records and accounts we learn many interesting details of the family's move to Palmyra and later to Manchester, the next township south of Palmyra. The chronology of the Smith family's move can be established with reasonable certainty. The records described in this chapter help determine when the family was living in the village of Palmyra, their move to the log cabin on Stafford Road, and finally their residence on the farm in Manchester.

Lucy describes her husband departing for Palmyra, New York. Leaving Vermont, Joseph Sr. was followed for a short distance by his eldest sons, Alvin and Hyrum, who watched as their father left alone for Palmyra. He would send for his family when he was ready for them.

Lucy was joyful at the reunion with her husband early in 1817. Lucy was forty-one years old though she considered herself one year younger (she had been born in 1775 but gave her birth year as 1776). She described the family's long-range plans after locating in the village of Palmyra:

We <all> now Sat down and maturely councilled [counseled] together as to what course it was best to take how we sho[u]ld proceed to buisness [business] in our then destitute circumstances It was agreed by each one of us that it was <most> advisable to ap[p]ly all our energies together and endeavor to obtain a Piece of land as this was then a new country and land was bow [low] being in its rude state but it was almost a time of famine wheat was \$2.50 per bushel and other things in proportion. how shall we, said My Husband, be able to sustain ourselves and have anything left to buy land[?] As I had done considerable at painting oil cloth coverings for tables stands &c. I concluded to set up the buisness [business] and if prospered I would try to supply the wants of the family. In this I succeeded so

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<sup>1</sup> Notes were taken from the dictation of Lucy Mack Smith and made into a manuscript draft in 1844-45 by Martha Jane Knowlton Coray and her husband, Howard. The original manuscript draft is in the LDS Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter CHL). The history was revised in 1845 and first published as *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: Published for Orson Pratt by S. W. Richards, 1853). See Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), cited hereafter as *Lucy's Book*. This work includes a textual history, a parallel comparison of the rough draft, and the 1853 printing, and notations of important manuscript and printed variants.

well that it was not long till we not only had an abundance of good and wholesome provision but I soon began to replenish my household furniture a fine stock of which I had sacraficed [sacrificed] entirely in moving<sup>2</sup>

This recollection compresses a number of years prior to 1820. Lucy represents her important role as wife and helpful caregiver in reestablishing the family in Palmyra. Lucy's craft enterprise prospered, and later the family contracted for one hundred acres in the township of Farmington (the area that became Manchester in 1822), immediately south of Palmyra Township.

Joseph Sr. is first mentioned in Palmyra on the road tax list for April 1817 as a resident on Main Street.<sup>3</sup> At this time their family consisted of six sons and two daughters: Alvin (nineteen), Hyrum (seventeen), Sophronia (thirteen), Joseph Jr. (eleven), Samuel Harrison (nine), William (six), Catherine (four), and Don Carlos (one).

New York law established a system for maintaining roads which required that each township be divided into road districts and that all men in each district were required to work on the roads. Each district was under the supervision of a path master or overseer elected at an annual town meeting held on the first Tuesday of April. At the same meeting, three commissioners of highways were elected. The overseer had sixteen days from the date of this election to list every male living in his district who was twenty-one years or older (a free man) or property owner (a freeholder). Each man devoted at least one day a year to keeping the roads in repair in the district in which he lived. This included clearing brush, stones, and fallen trees; repairing bridges; filling holes; and in the winter clearing paths through the snow. One could hire someone to serve in his place, but failure to fulfill the obligation in person or by proxy resulted in a fine enforceable by law.<sup>4</sup> The office of Overseer of Highways was not to be taken lightly. The overseer was liable to a fine of ten dollars for each failure to notify those who were required to work on the roads and for each delinquency in performing any other task assigned him. Two weeks prior to the town meeting the following year, he was required to certify what work had been done and, by whom, and to report anyone who had not fulfilled his obligation.

The name of Joseph Sr. first appears in Road District 26 for April 1817, consistent with his having arrived in the latter part of 1816. The town's "Record of Roads" shows that District 26 began on Main Street in the center of the village of Palmyra (the so-called "Four Corners" where four churches now stand) near where the road from Canandaigua intersected, running west until it crossed into what is now Macedon Township. The district included a small portion of the present Walworth road on the north side of Mud Creek and also a road running south toward the adjoining township of Farmington (now Manchester).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, Manuscript Draft, CHL. See Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 318.

<sup>3</sup> Palmyra Highway Tax Record, Palmyra, New York, Copies of Old Village Records, 1793-1867, LDS Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, microfilm 812,869. A typescript copy by Doris Nesbit (n.d.) is also in the King's Daughters Library, Palmyra, New York. The record is headed, "A Copy of the Several Lists of the Mens Names Liable to Work on the Highways in the Town of Palmyra in the Year 1804." The original record itself cannot be located at present.

<sup>4</sup> New York Legislature, *Laws of the State of New York*, 2 vols. (Albany: H.C. Southwick, 1813), 2:125, 128-29, 271-75, 309.

<sup>5</sup> Palmyra, New York, "Record of Roads of the Town of Palmyra, 1793-1901," 94-95, 104; microfilm copy in the State Library, Albany, New York.

This 1817 list basically follows the order in which individual properties were situated as one moves west on Main Street, with Joseph Smith Sr., listed as living at the west end of Main Street. Joseph Sr.'s name occurs again at the same location in District 26 in 1818 and 1819. Horace Eaton wrote concerning the residence of the Smith family on Main Street:

Where Asa Chase now resides there once stood a house built by Saml. Jennings. This house was occupied by the father of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, who cam[e] from Sharon [sic] Vt. 1817. Afterwards Levi Daggett resided there & here occurred the wedding of Henry Wells & Sarah Daggett.<sup>6</sup>

The Woman's Society of the Western Presbyterian Church corroborates, "Henry Wells married his first wife—Sally Daggett—in the little weather beaten house that stands opposite Stafford street on the north side of Main street."<sup>7</sup>

In April 1820, the name of Alvin Smith appears for the first time on the road tax list among the merchants on Main Street. Alvin turned twenty-one in February 1819 and his absence from the 1819 road list may indicate he had been hired out or was not considered twenty-one years old that year. The Main Street address may represent the cake and beer shop the Smiths reportedly operated in town.<sup>8</sup> However, Joseph Sr.'s name appears at the end of the list, showing he is now living outside the business district and near the Palmyra-Farmington town line, where the road district ended.

The Smith family now lived in a cabin on property south of the village owned by Samuel Jennings, who had built the house which they occupied on Main Street. It appears that in early 1820 Alvin Smith was still using the house in Palmyra while his father and family members had removed to the new location near the southern border of Palmyra Township. This residence would be mentioned two months later in the "Palmyra Town Book" as "Joseph Smiths dwelling house," located about fifty feet north of the line dividing Palmyra from Farmington. It stood about two miles south of Main Street on property owned by Jennings, a merchant with whom the Smiths did business and who extended credit to Joseph Sr.<sup>9</sup> When the road survey crew on June 13, 1820, laid out the extension of Stafford Road to join Main Street to the north, they used the cabin as a reference point. The survey read: "Minutes of the survey of a public Highway beginning on the south line . . . in the town of Palmyra three rods fourteen links southeas[t] of Joseph Smiths dwelling house."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> H[orace]. Eaton, "Continuation of the History of Palmyra, A Sermon preached on the Annual day of Thanksgiving, Nov. 26, 1863," Palmyra King's Daughters Library, Palmyra. Eaton was pastor of the Western Presbyterian Church from 1849 to 1879.

<sup>7</sup> The Woman's Society of the Western Presbyterian Church, comp., *Palmyra, Wayne County, New York* (Rochester, NY: The Herald Press, 1907), 27. The marriage between Henry Wells and Sarah Daggett (daughter of Levi Daggett Sr.) took place on September 5, 1827.

<sup>8</sup> Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1867), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Jennings, Estate Papers, June 5, 1822, Ontario County Records Center and Archives, Canandaigua, New York, 10, line 23, and 12, line 10, for Joseph Smith Sr.'s debts of \$11.50 and \$1.00 respectively at the time of Jennings's death on September 1, 1821.

<sup>10</sup> "Palmyra Town Book" (Old Town Record [1793-1870]), 221. Also in "Record of Roads," (1793-1901), 120, Town Clerk's Office, Palmyra, New York. The "Record of Roads" book reads

The Smith cabin location is further supported by Orsamus Turner, who in 1818 began as a young apprentice printer at the office of the *Palmyra Register*. He recalled that he first saw the Smith family in the winter of 1819-20 living "in a rude log house, with but a small spot underbrushed around it" near the town line.<sup>11</sup> This cabin on the outskirts of the village of Palmyra should not be confused with a cabin the family eventually built on land in nearby Manchester that is mentioned by Lucy Mack Smith.

Lucy subsequently reported that the family contracted for 100 acres of "Everson" (Evertson) land held by the estate of Nicholas Evertson, an attorney in New York City, who had acquired considerable land holdings in western New York before his death in 1807. It was June 1820 before his executors conveyed to Caspar W. Eddy, a New York City physician, power of attorney to sell his holdings. Eddy traveled to Canandaigua, New York, the seat of Ontario County, and on July 14, 1820, transferred his power of attorney to his friend Zachariah Seymour.<sup>12</sup> Seymour had long been a land agent in the area and was a close associate of Oliver Phelps, who with his partner Nathaniel Gorham had opened a land office in Canandaigua and had instituted the practice of "articling" for real estate.

Articling was a way for hard-working but cash-poor pioneers to obtain possession of land by buying on the installment plan. Under this arrangement a schedule of payments was outlined in an "Articles of Agreement" which stipulated the following conditions: the deed was held by the seller until the final payment was made and if the buyer defaulted he lost all right to the land as well as to any improvements, and the seller could then resell it.<sup>13</sup>

It was by this method that the Smiths worked to become property owners. The land deed of Squire Stoddard, who in November 1825 acquired the lot adjoining the Smith Manchester farm, noted that the north line of his property was "the south line of lands heretofore articulated to Joseph and Alvin Smith."<sup>14</sup>

The usual pattern of payment involved breaking the price down into three or more installments, each due a year apart on the original date of the contract. Often the first payment was further broken into easily met segments, such as \$10 down, \$18 within 90 days, and the balance within the year. When the anniversary date of the contract arrived, the entire second payment was then due. Although title was retained by the seller, the property tax was ordinarily paid by the buyer and is expressly stipulated in some contracts. Sometimes specific requirements

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"dwelling home," while the "Town Book" reads "dwelling house." Both are recopied from a now missing original road record book, but the latter reading was transcribed earlier. A 1982 excavation confirmed a dwelling site at this location.

<sup>11</sup> O[rsamus]. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase* (Rochester, NY: William Alling, 1851), 212-13, 400. A full analysis is contained in Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996-2003), 3:415-21.

<sup>12</sup> For the probate of Nicholas Evertson's estate, see County of New York, Manhattan Borough, Surrogate's Court, Wills, 47:7-11. On the power of attorney, see Miscellaneous Records, C:342-44, 347-48, Ontario County Records Center and Archives, Canandaigua.

<sup>13</sup> On Oliver Phelps's "articling" innovation, see John W. Barber and Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the State of New York* (New York: S. Tuttle, 1842), 406-7, reprinting an extract from the *Rochester Directory* of 1827. A number of Seymour's papers are in the Phelps's papers both at the State Library in Albany and the Ontario County Historical Society in Canandaigua.

<sup>14</sup> Deed recorded in Deed Liber 44:220, Ontario County Records Center and Archives, Canandaigua.

were added, such as building a cabin at least eighteen feet by eighteen feet within a year or clearing a specified acreage of land within that period. Often the record of payments was kept on the back of these Articles of Agreement.<sup>15</sup>

Joseph Sr. and Alvin would have had to "article" for their land shortly after July 1820. Joseph Smith Sr. is listed in the Farmington (Manchester) 1820 census (which was enrolled between August 7, 1820 and February 5, 1821), suggesting that the articling was completed no later than February 1821. The ages of the male family members were: two under 10, (William and Don Carlos); two between 16-26, (Alvin and Hyrum); one over 45, (Joseph Sr.). Female members were: one under 10, (Catherine, also spelled Katharine); one between 16-26, (Sophronia), and one between 26-45, (Lucy Mack Smith). Both Joseph Jr. (age fourteen) and his younger brother Samuel Harrison (age twelve) are missing from the census.<sup>16</sup>

The new Smith farm encompassed approximately one hundred acres, one third of the original Lot No. 1 in Farmington Township. According to the assessment roll for June 22, 1820, the entire three hundred acres of Lot 1 were taxed to the heirs of Nicholas Evertson at that time. In the following year's assessment (July 7, 1821) only two hundred acres were taxed to the Evertson heirs, while the balance was assessed to Joseph Smith.<sup>17</sup>

After contracting for the farm, Lucy reports, "In one year's time we made nearly all of the first payment. The Agent advised [advised] us to build a log house on the land and commence clearing it, we did so. It was not long till we had 30 acers [acres] ready for cultivation. But the second payment was now coming due and no means as yet of meeting it."<sup>18</sup> In the draft memoir Lucy stated, "So that in 2 years from the time we entered Palmyra, strangers destitute of friends, home or employment, We were able to settle ourselves upon our own land [in] a snug comfortable though humble habitation built and neatly furnished by our industry."<sup>19</sup> The two-year time period after arriving in Palmyra mentioned by Lucy appears to be an inaccuracy on her part.

As a result, Alvin left Palmyra in an effort to raise "the second payment and the remmainder [remainder] of the first," and he returned with "the necessary amount of money for all except the last payment." If they contracted for the land soon after Seymour received his power of attorney to sell it, around August 1, 1820, then the rest of the first payment and all of the second payment would have been paid to Seymour by August 1, 1821. Mother Smith adds that they were unable to make the third and last payment (which would have been August 1, 1822) because the land agent died. Seymour did indeed die on July 2, 1822, corroborating this

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<sup>15</sup> Examples of printed forms requiring the payment of the assessment tax, building a cabin, clearing acreage and the reversion clause can be found in the State Library, Albany, New York, among the Phelps papers.

<sup>16</sup> See *Ontario Repository*, August 8, 1820, 3; "Census of 1820," *History and Growth of the United States Census* (Washington, D.C., 1900), 134, 137); U.S. 1820 Census Records, Farmington, Ontario County, New York, LDS Family History Library, microfilm 193717, p. 318, Family 524, Salt Lake City. The *Palmyra Register* of August 16, 1820, asked residents to help prepare the census information themselves.

<sup>17</sup> Farmington, New York, Assessment Roll, July 7, 1821, 25, 32, Ontario County Records Center and Archives, Canandaigua.

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 319-20.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

part of her story and establishing the fact that the Smiths contracted for the land sometime after mid-July 1820.<sup>20</sup>

Lucy mentioned that "in one year's time" after they contracted for the property, the land agent told them they should build a cabin on their land, which "we did." However, it cannot be precisely determined from her account when this log structure was built. That this refers to their Farmington farm and not the Palmyra property is clear from several key facts. First, the Smiths were living in the Palmyra cabin when the road supervisors mentioned it in June 1820 before the Smiths could have contracted for the Farmington land. In addition, William Smith wrote concerning the Farmington-Manchester property, "The improvements made on this farm was first commenced by building a log house at no small expense, and at a later date a frame house at a cost of several hundred dollars."<sup>21</sup> William would hardly call a cabin built on Samuel Jennings's land in Palmyra an improvement on their farm across the line in Manchester.

From the Palmyra road tax list it is clear that at least Joseph Sr. and Alvin were still living in Palmyra as late as April 1822. It is probable that the Smiths did not move to the Manchester farm until after the summer of 1822. It could not be earlier than July 1821 because the Smith family genealogy mentions the birth of Lucy, the youngest child of the family. The genealogy specifically states that Lucy was "born in Palmyra."<sup>22</sup>

That some members of the Smith family did not move until after April 1822 is witnessed by the Palmyra road tax list. In 1821, the name of Hyrum Smith, who had become twenty-one in February, appeared with Alvin and Joseph Sr. on the Palmyra road tax list. In the April 1822 road tax list, the elder Smith and Alvin again appear, so that, as of April, the father and oldest son had not yet moved to their Manchester farm, since they were taxed as Palmyra residents. Hyrum's name is missing from the 1822 list. This could indicate that other members of the family had been working on their one hundred acres and had built a cabin sometime in 1821. It is also possible that Hyrum and perhaps some other Smith children had moved there to relieve the crowded conditions in their Palmyra cabin. But it could also indicate that Hyrum had hired out to work.

When the one hundred acres first went on the assessment roll in July 1821, taxed to Joseph Sr., the parcel was valued at \$700, \$7 an acre. This was approximately what uncleared land in the area was selling for at that time. The remaining two hundred acres of Lot No. 1 were taxed to the Evertson heirs at a value of \$1,400.<sup>23</sup> The same value appeared in the June 29, 1822

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 321-23. On Zachariah Seymour's death, see the Walter Hubbell Papers, Princeton Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey: letter from Henry Panquis to James Kent, August 8, 1826, 1; and his eulogy in the *Ontario Repository*, July 16, 1822, a reprint of the previous week's *Ontario Messenger*.

<sup>21</sup> "Notes Written on 'Chamber's Life of Joseph Smith.' by William Smith," about 1875, typescript, 17, CHL.

<sup>22</sup> "Genealogy," Manuscript History, A-1:10 [separate section], CHL, reads, "Lucy Smith, born in Palmyra, Ontario Co. N.Y. July 18, 1821." See Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Autobiographical and Historical Writings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:19. *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, IA: Herald Steam Book & Job Office, 1883), 5, gives 1821 as the date for the move to Manchester.

<sup>23</sup> For examples of land prices, ranging from \$3 to \$10 an acre, see the Phelps papers in Albany, New York.

assessment.<sup>24</sup> However, by July 24, 1823, the value of the Smith property had jumped to \$1,000. This is an increase of over 40 percent, yet the average property value for the whole township rose only 4 percent that year. This indicates that, for the first time, a cabin had been built and sufficient land had been cleared so that under New York law the assessed value had to be raised.<sup>25</sup>

Lucy's narrative corroborates the assessment roll evidence for an 1822 move to the Manchester property. She introduces events leading up to her son Alvin's death by saying: "In the spring after we moved onto the farm we commenced making Mapel [Maple] sugar of which we averaged 1000 lbs per year. We then began to make preparations for building a house, as the Land Agent of whom we purchased our farm was dead and we could not make the last payment."<sup>26</sup> William Smith wrote that the family moved into the township of Manchester and "Here my father purchased one hundred acres of new land heavily [heavily] timber[e]d and in the clearing up of this land which was mostly done in the form of fire."<sup>27</sup>

Next Lucy remarks that the third harvest had "arrived since we opened our new farm and all our sons were actively employed in assisting their Father to cut down the grain and storing it away." Wheat harvest in New York State fell during the latter part of July. Contracting for the property sometime after mid-July 1820 meant that the harvest for that year was over. The first harvest for the Smiths would have fallen in the summer of 1821. Accordingly the third harvest would bring us to the summer of 1823. At this point, Lucy relates the story of an angel's visit informing her son of gold plates. She reported that he attempted in September to obtain the plates but was denied permission. Then in November, they finally succeeded in raising their frame house and had the necessary materials on hand for its completion. However, Alvin's sudden sickness on November 15 and his death four days later on November 19, 1823, left the house incomplete. Lucy remembered that, on his death-bed, Alvin told Hyrum, "I now want you to go on and finish the House."<sup>28</sup>

To summarize, the first location where the Joseph Smith Sr. family lived outside of the village of Palmyra was a log house on Samuel Jennings's property. That they resided there is mentioned in a June 1820 survey. There is no indication that they built this log house. While they were living there, the land agent told them to build a log house on their newly acquired hundred

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<sup>24</sup> Manchester, New York, Assessment Roll, June 29, 1822, 16, Ontario County Records Center and Archives, Canandaigua.

<sup>25</sup> Manchester, New York, Assessment Roll, July 24, 1823, 17. The 4 percent increase was arrived at by comparing the dollar value per acre of property from 1820 to 1823 and averaging the increase shown in 1823. On increase in evaluation, see *Laws of the State of New York* 2:510.

<sup>26</sup> Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 322-23.

<sup>27</sup> "Notes Written on 'Chamber's Life of Joseph Smith.'" 20.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 335-36, 349-52. Lucy says that the frame house was still being built when Alvin died but has the year as 1822, which is incorrect. She gives Alvin's death variously as 1822 and 1824. Early sources for the year of Alvin's death include the gravestone in the General John Swift Memorial Cemetery, Palmyra, inscribed: "In memory of / Alvin. Son of Joseph / & Lucy Smith. who / died Nov. 19. 1823. / in the 25. year of / his age." See photograph in Alma P. Burton, *Mormon Trail from Vermont to Utah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 35. The Palmyra *Wayne Sentinel* 2 (September 29, 1824):3, contained an advertisement placed in the newspaper by Joseph Sr., dated "Sept. 25th, 1824," stating he had exhumed Alvin's body to refute rumors that it had been removed for dissection.

acre farm. This is according to Lucy Mack Smith. Improvements such as a log structure and the clearing of land are reflected in the July 1823 assessment of the property.

Lucy mentioned that Alvin commenced building a frame house just before his death which occurred in November 1823. The home may not have been actually finished but the Smiths moved into it. There was only one frame house in Manchester. As will be explained in Chapter 4 Lemuel Durfee purchased the farm and its improvements in December 1825. The Smith family then became renters and lived in the home until about April 1829 when they moved in with Hyrum's family in the log home built on the hundred acres. There is no contemporary record showing the family living in Palmyra Township after their move to what became Manchester.

Once it is clear that the frame house was not raised until November 1823 then the increase of \$300 in the assessed valuation, four months earlier in July 1823, must refer to some other improvements, including the completion of the log cabin on their farm. This conclusion receives further confirmation when Lucy introduces the events of 1823 with the words, "In the spring after we moved onto the farm." This clearly fixes the date of their move to the farm as occurring in 1822.

Some indirect evidence supporting an 1822 date for the Smiths' move onto their Manchester property comes from the dating of the Palmyra revival. The account that young Joseph Jr. gave in 1838-39 places the excitement on the subject of religion as occurring in the second year after they moved to the farm, although he mistakenly dates it to 1820.<sup>29</sup> Lucy's account specifically places the revival as occurring after Alvin's death. Contemporary evidence shows that the revival occurred during the last months of 1824 and early months of 1825. Thus, if the revival, which broke out in 1824, occurred two years after the Smiths moved to their Manchester farm, then their move to the farm would have indeed occurred in 1822.

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<sup>29</sup> Manuscript History, Book A-1:1, CHL; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:269.