

Note: Footnotes 1-3, 16-18 were omitted during printing:

# The Temple Lot in Jackson County, Missouri, and How Early Church Members Worshipped

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## Background

The Puritans who settled in America believed they were God's chosen people who had found a land of promise. The idea of a western New Jerusalem had been mentioned in the seventeenth century by Samuel Sewall when he asked, "why the Heart of America may not be the seat of the New Jerusalem." Cotton Mather considered the New Jerusalem would be west beyond the confines of New England.<sup>1</sup>

While some looked for a New Jerusalem in the state of New York, others spiritualized the idea and saw the cause of Zion in the revivals of the 1820s. Such expressions as "growing zeal for the prosperity of Zion," "enquiring the way to Zion," and "wishes well to the cause of Zion" were expressions of the revival movement and referred to the building up of the church.<sup>2</sup>

Out of this background came the Book of Mormon. According to this record, Jesus Christ had given instructions to the forefathers of the Native Americans concerning the New Jerusalem to be built in the Americas. The Gentiles who believe "shall assist my people, the rem[n]ant of Jacob; and also, as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem."<sup>3</sup> This article explores events relating to the Temple Lot in Jackson County, Missouri. It includes the 1831 visit of William E. McLellin who, years later, would demonstrate to visitors the location of the Temple Lot. From correspondence, it has

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<sup>1</sup>Alan Heimert, "Puritanism, the Wilderness, and the Frontier," *New England Quarterly* 26 (September 1953):380-81. See also Gustav H. Blanke with Karen Lynn, "God's Base of Operations: Mormon Variations on the American Sense of Mission," *Brigham Young University Studies* 20 (Fall 1979):83-92. James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard wrote: "The Puritans saw themselves as a chosen people, commissioned by God to build a New Jerusalem, or a City of Zion, in America—an exemplary community that all could observe and emulate." *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 9.

<sup>2</sup>Rev. George Lane, "Revival of Religion on Ontario District," *The Methodist Magazine* (New York) 8 (April 1825):161, letter dated January 25, 1825; *The Christian Herald* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire) 8 (March 1825):7 and *Wayne Sentinel* (Palmyra, New York) 2 (March 2, 1825):4. The minutes of the Geneva Presbytery states: "[i]n the congregation of Palmyra, the Lord has appeared in his glory to build up Zion." Geneva Presbytery Minutes, D:27, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Smith, *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the hand of Mormon, Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi*. By Joseph Smith, Junior, author and proprietor (Palmyra [NY]: Printed by E. B. Grandin for the author), 1830, p. 501; LDS 3 Nephi 21:23; CofC 3 Nephi 10:1.

become clear that Latter Day Saints prayed, worshipped, confessed their sins, and spoke in tongues during their early meetings. Some members who originally believed would in time reassess their relationship with the movement. Their various stories were written in letters and published in newspapers that are now available to historians.

### **Upbuilding of Zion and Mission to the Lamanites**

In September 1830, five months after Joseph Smith Jr. organized the restoration-themed Church of Christ, one of the eight witnesses to the Book of Mormon, a man named Hiram Page, claimed to have received revelations through the medium of a seer stone, "concerning the upbuilding of Zion" and other matters.<sup>4</sup> "Finding however that many (especially the Whitmer family and Oliver Cowdery) were believing much in the things set forth by this stone," Joseph Smith soon proclaimed that divine guidance had determined Page's revelations to be invalid.<sup>5</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Oliver Cowdery, the second elder to Smith, was directed to "go unto the Lamanites [Native Americans] & Preach my Gospel unto them & cause my Church to be established among them."<sup>6</sup> Concerning the city called New Jerusalem, Oliver was told that "it is not Revealed & no man knoweth where the City shall be built But it shall be given hereafter Behold I say unto you that it shall be among the Lamanites."

Later, three others—Ziba Peterson, Parley P. Pratt, and Peter Whitmer Jr.—were instructed to accompany Cowdery on the mission. Cowdery himself stated that he was going "to rear up a pillar as a witness where the Temple of God shall be built, in the glorious New-Jerusalem."<sup>7</sup> Following a church conference at Kirtland, Ohio, in June 1831, certain men were instructed to convene the next conference in Missouri where those missionaries to the Indians had gone. Missouri was:

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<sup>4</sup>Manuscript History of the Church, Book A-1 [written in 1839], Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, (hereafter cited as CHL), A-1:54; Brigham H. Roberts, ed., 7 vols., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1959), 1:109-110; Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 436, 438.

<sup>5</sup>"A Book of Commandments & Revelations," cited hereafter as BCR, MS 22505, Church History Library in Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books, Facsimile Edition* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009), 41. See also Book of Commandments (Zion [Independence, MO]: Published by W. W. Phelps and Co., 1833) [in press], chapter 30, verse 11; in LDS Doctrine and Covenants, section 28:11 and CofC Doctrine and Covenants, section 27:4.

<sup>6</sup>BCR, 41, September 1830; Book of Commandments 30:7; LDS D&C 28:8; CofC D&C 27:3.

<sup>7</sup>Statement signed by Oliver Cowdery and dated October 17, 1830, cited in a letter of Ezra Booth to Rev. Ira Eddy, November 24, 1831 and published in *Ohio Star* 2 (December 8, 1831):3, Ravenna, OH. Also cited in Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828-June 1831* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013), 204.

the land which I will consecrate unto my people, which are a remnant of Jacob, and them who are heirs according to the covenant...if ye are faithfull [sic] ye shall assemble yourselves together to rejoice upon the land of Missorie [sic] which is the Land of your inheritance, which is now the land of your enemies but behold I the Lord will hasten the City in its time.<sup>8</sup>

By the time Smith arrived at Independence, arrangements probably would have been made with Jones H. Flournoy to survey the land where the New Jerusalem temple could be built. As Jean Addams explained, Flournoy had squatters' rights to a large acreage such that discussing the option of purchasing land from him would be something that most likely had been done.<sup>9</sup>

On July 20, 1831, at a meeting of church leaders in Independence, Joseph Smith proclaimed a revelation concerning the location for the city of Zion. The document declared:

the land of Missorie [sic] which is the Land which I, have appointed & consecrated for the gathering of the Saints. Wherefore, this is the land of promise & the place for the City of Zion. yea and thus saith the Lord your God, if ye will receive wisdom here is wisdom. Behold the place which is now called Independence is the centre [sic] place.

The American New Jerusalem would be located south of the Santa Fe Trail just outside the Independence city boundary: "the spot for the Temple is lying westward upon a lot which is not far from the court-house."<sup>10</sup>

Lands were to be purchased for what Smith would term an "everlasting inheritance." Bishop Partridge would divide the land on behalf of the church members. Sidney Gilbert, a merchant from Ohio, was given three responsibilities: first, to be an agent to purchase property; second, to establish a store to obtain money for buying land; and third, to take the gospel to the Lamanites. This last instruction was, "let my servant [sic] Sidney obtain license (behold here is wisdom & whoso readeth let him understand) that he may send goods also unto the lamanites even by whom he will as clerks employed in his service & thus the gospel may be preached unto them." The same revelation established William W. Phelps to be a printer for the church and for Oliver Cowdery to assist him.

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<sup>8</sup>BCR, 89, June 6, 1831; Book of Commandments 54:1, 43-44; LDS D&C 52:2, 42-43; CofC D&C 52:1, 9.

<sup>9</sup>R. Jean Addams, "The History and Acquisition of the Original Temple Lot Property in Independence, Jackson County, Missouri," *Mormon Historical Studies* 20 (Spring 2019): 1-76. See also Addams, *Upon the Temple Lot: The Church of Christ's Quest to Build the House of the Lord* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2010).

<sup>10</sup>BCR, 93, July 20, 1831; LDS D&C 57:1-5; CofC D&C 57:1. The revelation was not published in the Book of Commandments. On the courthouse see Max H Parkin, "The Courthouse mentioned in the Revelation on Zion," *Brigham Young University Studies* 14 (Summer 1974):451-57. On additional background see Pearl Wilcox, *The Latter Day Saints on the Missouri Frontier* (Independence: author, 1972), 15-42.

## Dedication of the Spot for the Temple

The land and site for the temple was outside the Independence city boundary. Sidney Rigdon had been instructed on August 1 to "consecrate & dedicate this land & the spot of the temple."<sup>11</sup> On Wednesday, August 3, 1831, two weeks after Smith's July 20 revelation, church leaders met "where the temple is to be erected." According to Oliver Cowdery:

Sidney Rigdon dedicated the ground where the city is to Stand: and Joseph Smith Jr. laid a stone at the North east corner of the contemplated Temple in the name of the Lord Jesus of Nazareth. After all present had rendered thanks to the great ruler of the universe. Sidney Rigdon pronounced this Spot of ground whol[ly] dedicated unto the Lord forever: Amen.<sup>12</sup>

Ezra Booth, a former Church of Christ member, explained in a November 1831 letter to his friend Rev. Ira Eddy why he withdrew from the church. He explained that the temple site was "one half of a mile out of Town, to a rise of ground, a short distance south of the road." In the wooded area, he described a sapling, debarked on the north and west sides:

On the south side of the sappling [sapling] will be found the letter, T. which stands for Temple; and on the east side ZOM for Zomar; which Smith says is the original word for Zion.<sup>13</sup> Near the foot of the sappling [sic], they will find a small stone, covered over with bushes, which were cut for that purpose. This is the cornerstone for the Temple.<sup>14</sup>

Two days after the dedication of the temple site, bishop Edward Partridge wrote to his wife Lydia in Kirtland, Ohio, that he needed to stay through December because either he or Sidney Gilbert "must be here to attend the sales in December," since it was known when the land would be available to purchase. He half-apologized, writing, "You know I stand in an important

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<sup>11</sup>BCR, 97; Book of Commandments 59:70; LDS D&C 58:57; CofC D&C 58:13.

<sup>12</sup>As copied into "The Book of John Whitmer Kept by Commandment," chapter 9, page 32, Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence; in *Journal of History* 1 (January 1908):59-60 and Bruce N. Westergren, ed., *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 86-87; also in Karen Lynn Davidson, Richard L. Jensen, and David J. Whittaker, eds., *Histories, Volume 2: Assigned Histories, 1831-1847* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 45.

<sup>13</sup>That Joseph Smith considered "Zomar" to be Zion see "Grammar & A[l]phabet of the Egyptian Language," 23, MS 1295, Folder 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; 1835 manuscript in H. Michael Marquardt, comp., *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers* (Cullman, AL: Printing Service, 1981), 49-50; also in Robin Scott Jensen and Brian M. Hauglid, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 4: Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts, Facsimile Edition* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2018), 160-61.

<sup>14</sup>Ezra Booth, letter to "Rev. & Dear Sir" [sixth letter to Rev. Ira Eddy], November 14, 1831, *Ohio Star* 2 (November 17, 1831):3, Ravenna, OH. For additional information on Booth see H. Michael Marquardt, "Ezra Booth on Early Mormonism: A Look at His 1831 Letters," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 28 (2008):65-87.

station, and as I am occasionally chastened I sometimes fear my station is above what I can perform to the acceptance of my Heavenly Father.”<sup>15</sup>

On December 19, 1831, following Joseph Smith’s return to Kirtland, Partridge delivered \$130 to Jones H. Flournoy and Clara Flournoy to obtain the 63-acre site where the New Jerusalem temple was to be erected.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly after Smith laid the cornerstone and Rigdon dedicated the temple site, non-member William McLellin arrived in Jackson County. Having heard about the new religion, McLellin acted on his interest by traveling from Paris, Illinois, to Independence, where he was shown the location where the dedication had taken place. Shortly thereafter, McLellin was baptized into the Church of Christ on August 20, 1831, by Hyrum Smith. Four days later, he was ordained an elder and, on the following day, joined Hyrum Smith on a mission.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Saints Reproved and Solemn Assemblies Held**

David Pettigrew was a recent convert who had joined the Church of Christ in 1832. In December that year, he moved to his 159-acre farm six miles west of Independence. Having purchased the farm at an earlier date, he now relocated to Jackson County. A short time later, his family was baptized. He wrote in an autobiography:

[u]pon my arrival at Jackson County we were reproved by the Lord, through revelation, for treating lightly the book of Mormon and the former revelations, and were to remain under condemnation if we did not repent, and remember the Book of Mormon and the revelations.

The September 1832 revelation that mentioned “the whole church under condemnation” was recorded in the manuscript volume Book of Commandments and Revelations kept by John Whitmer.<sup>18</sup> Pettigrew continued:

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<sup>15</sup>Edward Partridge to “My Dear wife” [Lydia Partridge], August 5-6, 1831, MS 23154, Edward Partridge letters, 1831-1835, Church History Library. Also quoted in D. Brent Collette, “In Search of Zion: A Description of Early Mormon Millennial Utopianism as Revealed through the Life of Edward Partridge” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1977), 148-49.

<sup>16</sup>Arthur M. Smith, *Temple Lot Deed*, 3rd ed., (Independence: Board of Publications, Church of Christ, 1963), 5; see also Jackson County, Deed Record, Book B:1-3; “Jackson Temple Lot Deed Found in Church Relics,” *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), Church Section, January 23, 1932, p. 1; Richard Price and Pamela Price, *The Temple of the Lord* (Independence: authors, 1982), 32-38. On May 6, 1892 Emily D. P. Young took “the original copy deed to the Temple lot in Independence” to Wilford Woodruff’s office. Emily Dow Partridge Young Diary, typed copy, 96, MS 2845; and Jones H. Flournoy and Clara Flournoy deed to Edward Partridge, MS 14294, both in Church History Library.

<sup>17</sup>Shipps and Welch, *Journals of William E. McLellin*, 33-36, entries for August 18-25, 1831; William E. McLellin papers, MS 13538, Church History Library.

<sup>18</sup>BCR, 152; in Robin Scott Jensen et al, *Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books, Facsimile Edition*, 281.

Soon after this, Bishop Partr[i]dge, appointed a Solemn asembly [sic] in all the branches, which is to be held as a day of confession, and repentance, he went from branch to branch ex[h]orting, until he had gone through them all, and in a few months, we were informed that we had repented, and the Angel's [sic] were rejoicing [sic] over us, but there yet remained a Scourge and a Judgement to be poured out upon the children of Zion, these things Sunk deep in my mind.<sup>19</sup>

In a council of high priests that met on February 26, 1833, Partridge "laid before the council the effect of the proceedings of the Solemn Assemblies as held throughout Zion."<sup>20</sup> During the same month a succeeding church member, Salmon Sherwood, wrote:

I have visited the Mormon meetings, one of which was called the solemn assembly, where the Bishop declared by vision from Joshua [sic; Joseph] Smith, that they were all under condemnation for not reading the book of Mormon, and that they must repent or they would be cut off and Zion would be removed somewhere else. He also declared that the seer, Joseph Smith, had the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and could see the multitudes of the angels.<sup>21</sup>

### **Receiving the Gift of Tongues in Zion**

John Whitmer wrote:

Zion is prospering at pres[e]nt and high priests are stationed to watch over the several branches. Decmbr [sic] 1, 1832, there are now 538 individuals in this land b[e]l[ong]ing to th[e] church. And it came to pass that in the fall of th[e] year 1832, th[e] disciples at Ohio rec[e]ived th[e] gift of tongues and in June 1833 we received th[e] gift of tongues in Zion.<sup>22</sup>

A further insight into church activities comes from letters written by a church member around December 1833 "to his aged father" that were later combined into a single letter-to-the-editor that was published in Boston, Massachusetts:

One half a mile to the west there is a beautiful cultivated spot of one hundred and fifty acres. Notwithstanding the dark cloud which appears to hang over our heads at this time,

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<sup>19</sup>"A History of David Pettigrew," MS 22278, p. 15, writing started in 1840, Church History Library.

<sup>20</sup>Conference Minutes, and Record Book, of Christ's Church of Latter Day Saints, copy of minutes, LR 7874 21, p. 34, Church History Library; also in Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 60.

<sup>21</sup>"The Mormons," Independence, Missouri, February 25, 1833, *Sangamo Journal* 2 (April 6, 1833):2, Springfield, Illinois. The letter was reprinted in the *Missouri Intelligencer and Boon's Lick Advertiser* 17 (April 20, 1833):1, Columbia, MO.

<sup>22</sup>"The Book of John Whitmer Kept by Commandments," in Karen Lynn Davidson et al, *Histories, Volume 2: Assigned Histories*, 51.

on this spot of land will shortly be built the temple, and the city of the New Jerusalem, into which our Lord and Saviour [sic] will descend in a cloud from heaven with power and great glory. We have a plan given by revelation of the city and the temple. The temple is to be like Solomon's, only far more splendid. Many of our dear brethren, who have been driven from this land by our enemies, will shortly return in the Lord's due time, and help to accomplish this great and glorious work. I have sufficient authority for saying this, for the Lord hath spoken it.

Besides living near where the temple was going to be located, the Latter Day Saints held services on the Sabbath (Sunday):

You wished to know how we spend the Sabbath. We mean to spend it as the Lord has commanded us by revelation. We are strictly forbidden to do any other work on the Lord's day but to prepare our food, and to assemble ourselves together to worship the Lord.

Next was explained the duties of church members:

We commence our service with prayer. Then it is the duty of every member, both old and young, to arise, one at a time, and speak of the goodness of God, and to confess our sins, if we have committed any the past week, to one another and before the Lord. This is frequently done in an unknown tongue, and then interpreted by one who may have the spirit for this work. Here is the wisdom of the Lord to search out all iniquity; for many of us have been moved by the Spirit and spoke in another tongue that which, when interpreted, would prove to be the secrets of the heart and sinful deeds that we should not confess in our own tongues. Many a one has risen with tears in his eyes, and confessed the truth of the interpretation.

It was further told how the sacrament was observed:

Furthermore, in obedience to the commands of the Lord, we on every Sabbath commemorate the death and sufferings of our Lord and Saviour [sic], by partaking of the bread and wine, yea, pure wine, the clear juice of the grape. Our branch made one barrel this fall.

Explaining the struggles through which members had gone, the writer wrote:

We have had many trying scenes to pass through since we arrived here one year ago. The Lord spake by revelation that he was not well pleased with his children in Zion, and that we all had great need of repentance, pointing out our greatest sins, which were, breaking the law of the celestial kingdom, and not reading the book of Mormon. Again[,] we received the word of the Lord in June by revelation through the prophet in Kirtland, that we had much iniquity amongst us, that he would not have his holy land polluted, and that there was a scourge and a judgment awaiting the inhabitants of Zion. Accordingly[,] our chastisements were very severe. Many were cut off from the church from that time. For

several weeks we received great blessings from the Lord. The most of the church that stood received the gift of tongues, to speak in the language of the Lemnites [sic] as well as in those of the isles of the sea and the nations of Ur. It was given to some in each branch of the church to interpret all that was spoken; and also it was given to many of us to prophesy of things shortly to take place.<sup>23</sup>

### **William McLellin Shows Visitors the Location of the Temple Lot**

The location of the spot where the latter-day temple would be built is based in part on what William McLellin had told visitors of his experience when he had been there in 1831. After Joseph and Hyrum's murders, and having joined various Restoration churches through the years, McLellin settled in Independence in 1869.<sup>24</sup> In 1879, when Mark Forscutt visited the temple area, McLellin indicated to him that he "knows it is within ten feet of it, w[h]ere the dedication of it was made for a Temple."<sup>25</sup>

John L. Traugher Jr., who collected material on early Latter Day Saintism, also wrote about William McLellin showing him the location for the temple:

I visited Dr. McLellan in April, 1881, and walked with him over the "Temple Lot" lying west of the court house in Independence...He said that the laying of the cornerstone of the temple, which is spoken of in Mormon works as something great, consisted of a ceremony over a rock which Martin Harris picked up in a little hollow which is on the temple lot.<sup>26</sup>

In a January 1882 letter, Reorganized Church apostle William H. Kelley told of visiting McLellin five months later in September 1881:

The doctor was able to point out the identical spot where Joseph [Smith] stood when he first visited it, and which is the place of the corner stone. He visited it soon after himself, when it was all covered with young poplars thickly standing. Joseph cut his way in through this thick growth of trees, brush and saplings, and marked the spot by blazing a tree near by [sic], cutting away the under brush [sic] for a few feet around and setting up a small stone that had been picked up in the ravine below. This was all the corner stone that was ever laid upon it, and it only to mark the place of the corner.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>“Extracts of Letters from a Mormonite,” *The Unitarian* 1 (May 1, 1834):251-53, Boston, Massachusetts. Quotation marks in the article are omitted.

<sup>24</sup>See William Shepard and H. Michael Marquardt, *Lost Apostles: Forgotten Members of Mormonism's Original Quorum of Twelve* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2014), 316-21.

<sup>25</sup>Mark Hill Forscutt journal, February 17, 1879, Mark Hill Forscutt Collection, Vault MSS 811, Box 8, Folder 9, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>26</sup>John L. Traugher, "Some Statements by Dr. W. E. McLellan," May 23, 1884, John L. Traugher Collection, MS 666, Manuscripts Division, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

<sup>27</sup>“Letter From Elder W. H. Kelley,” January 16, 1882, *Saints' Herald* 29 (March 1, 1882): 67.



## Summary

The spot for the temple was established and dedicated in August 1831. The land is considered sacred by the majority of Restoration churches and groups who envision that a temple will be erected there in the near future.

The accounts and letters cited above illuminate the lives of the early pioneers of the Restoration, confirming what was taught and practiced by the early Latter Day Saints. Testimonies, confessions of sins, and the gift of tongues prevailed among these members in Jackson County. Though the Lamanite mission was not a success, church leaders did accomplish the task of locating the spot for their temple. Ezra Booth's recollection of the area where the temple would be built is a connection to the events in the life of the early church. Much later, William E. McLellin would add his insight into the location of the latter-day temple of the New Jerusalem, based on his own visit to the site in 1831.

Located on the original 63-acre site are buildings of three Restoration churches: The site for the temple owned by the Church of Christ (the Temple Lot church); the visitor center of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and a temple constructed for worship by Community of Christ.

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Orson Pratt, who also visited the spot in 1831, remembered, "The ground, then was covered with the common trees of the forest." Orson Pratt Sr., to "My Dear Marian," September 18, 1878 as cited in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1944), 5:417.