

Palmyra Revival of 1824-25

When Joseph Smith Jr. described his first vision in his 1838-39 account, he dated it to the spring of 1820 and affirmed that this vision was the result of a religious revival—"an unusual excitement on the subject of religion." Smith stated that the excitement that stirred him also led his mother (Lucy Mack Smith), two brothers (Hyrum and Samuel Harrison), and one sister (Sophronia) to join the Presbyterian Church, while he was drawn to the Methodists.¹ An examination of newspaper accounts, religious periodicals, church records, and personal narratives shows that there were no significant gains in church memberships or any other signs of excitement or revival in Palmyra in 1820. There was a stirring and momentous revival there with all the features that Joseph Smith's history mentions during the fall and winter of 1824-25.

In Lucy Mack Smith's draft of her history, she adds details which also suggest an 1824 date for the revival. She begins by linking the revival to the death of her son Alvin, who died in November 1823. After relating the family's sorrow after his death, when "we could not be comforted because he was not," she adds a short statement, subsequently crossed out: "About this time their [there] was a great revival in religion and the whole neighborhood was very much aroused to the subject, and we among the rest flocked to the meeting house to see if their was a word of comfort for us that might relieve our over charged feelings."²

Her "over-charged feelings" were the result of Alvin's dying suddenly the previous year. A year later Lucy was still seeking consolation for her wounded soul and hoped to find it at the town meetinghouse where the revival was in full progress and frequent meetings were held. Her manuscript continues:

There was <at this time> a man then laboring in that place to effect a union of all the churches, that all denominations might be agreed to worship God with one mind, and one heart. This I thought looked right, and tried to persuade my Husband to join with them as I wished to do so myself and it was the inclination of them all [her children] except Joseph. He refused from the first to attend the meeting with us. He would say, Mother, I do not wish to prevent you from going to meeting or joining any church you like or any of the Family who desire the like, only do not ask me to <do so> for I do not wish to go. But I will take my Bible and go out into the woods and learn more in two hours than you could if you were to go to meeting two years. My husband also declined attending the

¹ See Manuscript History, Book A-1:1-2, CHL; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:269-70. The fact that the names of Smith's mother and brothers appear later as members of the Palmyra Presbyterian Church who were dropped for nonattendance is further evidence that the revival Joseph Smith had in view affected the local Presbyterian Church. See "Records of the Session of the Presbyterian Church in Palmyra," 2:11-12, microfilm, film 900, reel 59, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Volume 1, which may have listed the Smiths as members, has been missing since at least 1898.

² Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 356-57. Another portion crossed out included: "The circumstance of this Death aroused the neighborhood to the subject of religion" (355).

meetings after the first but did not object to myself and such of the children as chose <going or becoming> church members.

Lucy notes that her son Joseph warned her about those involved, and her description of his warning suggests that the church she was intending to join was indeed the Presbyterian Church:

Now you look at deacon <Jessup>. . . suppose that (one of his poor neighbors) owed him the value of one cow. This man has eight small children; suppose the poor man should be taken sick & die leaving his wife with one cow but destitute of every means of support for herself and family. Now I tell you that deacon Jess<u>p</u>, <religious> as he is, would not hesitate to take the last cow from the widow and orphans rather than loose [sic] the debt.³

Henry Jessup was a long-time Presbyterian, one of the original trustees of the Western Presbyterian Church of Palmyra at its incorporation on March 18, 1817.⁴

According to Joseph, his older brother Hyrum joined the Presbyterian Church along with his mother as a result of the religious excitement. Willard Chase, a neighbor, mentioned that in 1825 Hyrum asked to borrow a stone (called a seer stone) found earlier while digging a well. Though reluctant to let the stone go, Chase said he honored Hyrum's request because Hyrum "had made a profession of religion" and Chase felt he could now be trusted to return it.⁵

In his 1838-39 account, Joseph Jr. remembered that great multitudes joined the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches during the revival. Church membership rolls are carefully kept; and in most cases, membership can still be traced.

Membership rolls of "the first Baptized [sic] Church in Palmyra," which had a frame meetinghouse west of the village of Palmyra in Macedon Township, reveals that, during the entire year of 1820, only eight people were received on profession of faith and baptized. However during the period between October 1824 and August 1825, even though the church was without a pastor at the time, ninety-four individuals were baptized and added to membership rolls.

For Baptists the awakening began on October 20, 1824, when church minutes show that "Michael Egleston, Erastus Spear, Lorenzo Spear, Abigail Spear, Belena Byxbe, Minerva Titus, Sophia Rogers, and Harriot Rogers told their Christian experience to the Church and were fellowshipped by the Church and on Thursday following were Baptized by Elder Bradley and Received into the Church." The minutes of November 20 mention eight more individuals

³ Ibid., 357-58. In the Coray revised manuscript (1845), Joseph Smith's 1838-39 account, as published in the *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois) in 1842, was inserted into Lucy's history, making it contain two accounts of the same revival but with different dates. See Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 331.

⁴ Incorporation papers of the Western Presbyterian Church of Palmyra, March 18, 1817, in Miscellaneous Records, Book C:209, Ontario County Clerk's Office, Canandaigua. Henry Jessup was referred to as Deacon Jessup; see *Western Farmer* 1 (December 12, 1821):4.

⁵ Affidavit of Willard Chase, Manchester, Ontario County, New York, December 11, 1833, in E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville [Ohio]: Printed and Published by the Author, 1834), 241. See also Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 2:66.

baptized; the November 24 minutes name an additional twelve. In December nineteen more were added by conversion. In the first four months of 1825, there were forty-five additional baptisms. For the one-year period from October 1824 to the end of September 1825, there were a total of ninety-four persons baptized, an increase of eighty-seven members. Membership increased from 132 to 219 (65 percent).⁶

The same pattern characterizes Methodist membership records, which give the total membership of the dozen or so preaching points serviced by a circuit-riding preacher. The increase of 208 reported in the summer of 1825 for the previous year demonstrates that this had proved to be a banner year for the Ontario circuit on which Palmyra was located. In contrast, the circuit had constantly lost members during the period between 1819 and 1821 — twenty-six in 1819, six in 1820, and forty-nine in 1821.⁷

Presbyterian membership rolls paint an identical picture. Although the first volume of the local church's minutes is missing, records of the Geneva Presbytery to which the church belonged and reported are still extant, and these clearly reflect the revival in the congregation at Palmyra. The minutes show that by September 21, 1825, when figures were in for a revival over the winter of 1824-25 "99 have been admitted on examination." As early as February 1825, the Presbytery was called on, in glowing terms, to

bless the Lord for the displays of sovereign grace which have been made <within our boundaries> during the past year. In the congregation of Palmyra, the Lord has appeared in his glory to build up Zion. More than a hundred have been hopefully brought into the kingdom of the Redeemer. The distinguishing doctrines of grace have proved eminently the sword of the Spirit, by which the rebellion of man's heart has been slain. The fruits of holiness in this revival even now are conspicuous. The exertions for the promotion of divine knowledge are greater than formerly. Sabbath Schools, Bible classes, Missionary & Tract Societies are receiving unusual attention, & their salutary influence is apparent.⁸

⁶ For 1820, see Minutes of the Palmyra Baptist Church under the dates of March 18; June 17; and August 19, 1820. For 1824-25, see the Minutes of the Palmyra Baptist Church, October 16; November 20, 24; December 4, 5, 18, 1824; January 1, 15, 29; February 19; March 5, 19; and April 3, 1825. See *Minutes of the Ontario Baptist Association* (Rochester: Printed by Everard Peck, 1825), 5, for published membership figures for the conference year 1824-25. The records of "The First Baptized [sic] Church in Palmyra" are now in the American Baptist Historical Society in Rochester, New York. In 1835, when part of the congregation organized the Baptist Church within the village of Palmyra itself, the original records remained with the part of the church that would eventually become the Macedon Baptist Church in the next township to the west.

⁷ *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1773-1828)*, published in 1840, report: 446 (1824), 471 (1825), 330 (1819), 345 (1820), and 366 (1821). The records of the Palmyra Methodist Church were burned in a fire at Rochester in 1933.

⁸ Geneva Presbytery "Records," September 21, 1825, Book D:40; Geneva Synod "Records," October 6, 1825, 431, both in the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In the Presbytery's Report to Synod, the Palmyra church reported for the year between September 10, 1824, and September 23, 1825, additions of 103 members and a membership jump from seventy-nine to 178 members (130 percent) with forty adult baptisms. See "Presbyterial Reports

Evidence of the increase of "Sabbath Schools, Bible Classes, Missionary & Tract Societies" also can be seen in the following excerpts printed in the local newspaper the *Wayne Sentinel*:

Messrs. Editors -- Please to allow the subscriber . . . the privilege of expressing his gratitude to God, for what He is doing for the people of Palmyra, and likewise his thanks to a number of friends in that village, for assisting him in printing Tracts, and in setting up Sabbath Schools.

The collection taken up on the Sabbath evening, amounting to \$7[.]72, by the recommendation of the Rev. Mr. STOCKTON, will afford the subscriber some assistance, and it being divided and partly appropriated to a Juvenile Library, for a Sunday School in Palmyra, it will probably be the means of commencing a Library there for the benefit of the rising generation. . . .

By a Sabbath School Society is meant an institution for collecting the children and youth, of all denominations, whenever most convenient, for the purpose of giving them instructions from the word of God without any attempt to build up any peculiar sect or party. Such parts of the Holy Scriptures ought to be committed to memory as are of the most practical nature, and such as may be considered most useful in pointing out the duty of man to his Maker, and to his fellow creatures; such, for instance, as the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, Christ's Sermon on the Mount, the xii. of Romans, iii. of Colossians, and iv. of Ephesians. ...

A MEETING will be held in the Presbyterian house of worship, in this village, on *Thursday evening, the 16th inst.* at half-past 6 o'clock, for the purpose of organizing a RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY. All who feel disposed to encourage the circulation of Scripture truth in the form of small and familiar publications, are invited to attend.⁹

A look at the presbytery records for 1820 suggest some anticipation of a revival in the church of Phelps (located at Oaks Corners some fourteen miles from Palmyra) and at Canandaigua (some thirteen miles away), but nothing for the Palmyra church. The "Presbyterial Reports to the Synod of Geneva" confirms the scarcity of converts in the conference year of 1820. The presbytery reported to synod only fourteen additions to the Western Presbyterian Church of Palmyra for the period between February 1820 and March 1821. The additions include eight infant baptisms. If four Smiths joined that year, this would have left only two others to join all year.¹⁰ But if the four members of the Smith family united with the Western Presbyterian

to the Synod of Geneva," Presbyterian Historical Society. For the quotation, see Geneva Presbytery "Records," February 2, 1825, Book D:27-28.

⁹ *Wayne Sentinel* 2 (December 15, 1824).

¹⁰ Geneva Presbytery "Records," February 2, 1820, Book C:37 and "Presbyterial Reports to the Synod of Geneva." The membership for Palmyra shows an increase over the previous year's report from sixty-one to seventy-one members. This figure includes those who transferred in by letter of recommendation from another congregation as well as those joining upon profession of faith, off-set by those transferring out and those who either died or were dropped from membership.

Church of Palmyra by April 1825 there ages would be: Lucy (49), Hyrum (25), Samuel Harrison (17), and Sophronia (22).

This pattern of growth is confirmed by Reverend James Hotchkin, who in 1845 began writing the official history of the rise of the Presbyterian denomination in western New York. The Synod of New York backed this effort and requested all the churches to open their records to him. Hotchkin was especially interested in revivals. His account for the Palmyra church shows revivals in 1817 and in 1824 but nothing in the intervening years.¹¹

The revival over the winter of 1816-17, which affected mainly the Presbyterian Church of Palmyra, received coverage in at least a dozen periodicals, including among others the *Christian Herald and Seaman's Magazine*, the *Religious Remembrancer*, the *American Baptist Magazine*, and the *Boston Recorder*.¹²

The 1824-25 revival likewise received enthusiastic write-ups in an equal number of publications.¹³ But there is total silence in these same periodicals about any revival in Palmyra between 1819 and 1821.¹⁴

The 1824-25 dates can also be confirmed by checking the names of reported participants. William Smith, Joseph's brother, was interviewed in June 1841 by James Murdock, who read back his notes for correction. William recalled: "About the year 1823, there was a revival of

¹¹ James H. Hotchkin, *A History of the Purchase and Settlement of Western New York, and the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Presbyterian Church in That Section* (New York: Published by M. W. Dodd, 1848), 378.

¹² See accounts in *The Christian Herald and Seaman's Magazine* (September 28, 1816; May 10; June 7, 1817): 2:16; 3:103f, 164; *Religious Remembrancer* (October 5; November 2, 1816; May 17, 1817), 4th Series, 24, 39, 151f; *American Baptist Magazine* (July 1817) 1:153; and *Boston Recorder* (September 17, 1816; May 13; October 21, 1817): 1:151; 2:88, 180. See also Joshua Bradley, *Accounts of the Religious Revivals . . . from 1815 to 1818* (1819), 223.

¹³ Accounts of the revival in Palmyra during 1824-25 are reported in *New-York Religious Chronicle* 2 (November 20, 1824): 154; 3 (April 9, 1825): 58; *Western New York Baptist Magazine* 4 (February 1825): 284; *Western Recorder* 1 (November 9, 1824): 90; 2 (March 29, 1825): 50; *Boston Recorder* 10 (April 29, 1825): 70; 10 (May 20, 1825): 82; *Baptist Register* (Utica), December 3, 1824; March 11, 1825, 7; *American Baptist*, February 1825; *Zion's Herald* 3 (February 9, May 11, 1825), a Methodist weekly in Boston; *American Baptist Magazine* 5 (April 1825):124-25; and the *New York Observer*, May 7, 1825.

¹⁴ The following periodicals were examined without finding a single reference to a Palmyra revival: Baptist: *American Baptist Magazine* (January 1819-November 1821); *Latter-day Luminary* (February 1818-November 1821); *Western New York Baptist Magazine* (February 1819-November 1821); Presbyterian: *Religious Remembrancer* (January 1818-August 18, 1821); *The Christian Herald and Seaman's Magazine* (January 2, 1819-January 6, 1821); *Evangelical Recorder* (June 5, 1819-September 8, 1821). Methodist: *The Methodist Magazine* (January 1818-December 1821). Other: *Boston Recorder* (January 1818-December 1821); *Palmyra Register* (January 13, 1819-December 27, 1820). The *Palmyra Register* has revivals reported in the state of New York but not in Palmyra (June 7, August 16, September 13, October 4, 1820). Even when it describes a Methodist camp meeting in the vicinity of the village, it reports only that a man got drunk at the grog shops on the edge of the campground and died the next morning. *Palmyra Register* 3 (June 28; July 5, 1820):2.

religion in that region, and Joseph was one of several hopeful converts."¹⁵ In his own book, *William Smith on Mormonism*, published in 1883, William wrote, "In 1822 and 1823 [sic], the people in our neighborhood were very much stirred up with regard to religious matters by the preaching of a Mr. Lane, an Elder of the Methodist Church, and celebrated throughout the country as a 'great revival preacher.'"¹⁶ In addition to Lane, William, who was thirteen years old at the time, recalled the involvement of Benjamin Stockton:

Rev. Stockton was the president of the meeting and suggested that it was their meeting and under their care and they had a church there and they [the Smiths] ought to join the Presbyterians, but as father did not like Rev. Stockton very well, our folks hesitated and the next evening a Rev. Mr. Lane of the Methodists preached a sermon on "what church shall I join?" And the burden of his discourse was to ask God, using as a text, "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally."¹⁷

William's description of the revival fits the pattern of the period. Once a revival had broken out, regular and frequent meetings would be scheduled at the town meetinghouse to advance the enthusiasm. Since Presbyterians were dominant in Palmyra, one could well expect Reverend Benjamin Stockton, their pastor, to preside and to expect the converts to join the church located in the village itself. The Baptist building was about a mile west of the center of the village, and Methodists were a mile east on Vienna Road, so Joseph Smith's expression of an unusual excitement in that "region of country" was a good way to describe the situation.

It is important to note that any extended series of revival meetings at which Stockton presided must fall in 1824 or later because he did not become pastor of the Palmyra Presbyterian Church until February 18, 1824.¹⁸ Reverend James Hotckin, in cataloging the revivals in the churches of Geneva Presbytery, wrote of the Palmyra church that a "copious shower of grace

¹⁵ Letter of Rev. James Murdock, dated New Haven, June 19, 1841, to the *Congregational Observer* 2 (July 3, 1841):1, Hartford and New-Haven, Connecticut. Interview of William Smith aboard an Ohio River boat on April 18, 1841. Original of *The Congregational Observer* is located in the Connecticut State Historical Society, Hartford. This interview was republished in the *Peoria Register and North-Western Gazette* 5 (September 3, 1841).

¹⁶ William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism*, 6.

¹⁷ Interview of William Smith by E. C. Briggs as reported by J. W. Petersen to *Zion's Ensign* 5 (January 13, 1894):6, Independence, Missouri; see also, with minor inaccuracies, *Deseret Evening News* 27 (January 20, 1894):11; *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 56 (February 26, 1894):133-34. William stated: "My mother, Lucy Smith, and my brothers Hyrum and Samuel and my sister Sophronia were members of the Presbyterian church situated in the town of Palmyra." *Zion's Ensign* 3 (August 27, 1892):2, which he described as the "Church, of whome the Rev. Mr. Stoc[k]ton was the Presiding Paster." William Smith, "Notes Written on 'Chamber's Life of Joseph Smith' by William Smith," typescript, 18, CHL.

¹⁸ For his installation, see *Wayne Sentinel* 1 (February 18, 1824):3; (February 25, 1824):2. Also Geneva Presbytery "Records" C:252-54, 274; and Hotckin, *History*, 377. Stockton asked for permission to resign on September 5, 1827 (Geneva Presbytery "Records" D:83) to which the local congregation agreed on September 18 (D:85).

passed over this region in 1824 under the labors of Mr. Stockton, and a large number were gathered into the church, some of whom are now pillars in Christ's house."¹⁹

Stockton was pastor of the Skaneateles church in central New York from March 4, 1818, until June 30, 1822.²⁰ He visited Palmyra to give a speech to the Youth Missionary Society in October 1822, and the newspaper described him then as "Rev. Stockton of Skaneateles."²¹ He appeared again in the Palmyra paper when he performed a wedding on November 26, 1823, just a week after Alvin's death.²² According to William Smith, Stockton was present the previous week and had preached Alvin's funeral sermon. In this sermon, Stockton implied that Alvin "had gone to hell, for Alvin was not a church member, but he was a good boy and my father did not like it."²³ William noted that when the revival meetings closed and Stockton insisted that the converts join the Presbyterian Church, "our folks hesitated" because of his insinuation about Alvin.

The "Rev. Mr. Lane," the other person mentioned by William Smith as participating in the revival, is George Lane, a talented Methodist preacher.²⁴ Lane is also mentioned by Oliver Cowdery, who worked with Joseph Smith beginning in 1829. In the Mormon periodical, *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, Cowdery commenced a "full history of the rise of the church of Latter Day Saints," published during 1834-35. For details of this account, he said he relied on information furnished by Joseph Smith. Cowdery wrote:

That our narrative may be correct, and particularly the introduction, it is proper to inform our patrons, that our brother J. SMITH jr. has offered to assist us. Indeed, there are many items connected with the fore part of this subject that render his labor indispensable. With his labor and with authentic documents now in our

¹⁹ Hotchkin, *History*, 378.

²⁰ For his installation date, see *Evangelical Recorder* 1 (March 7, 1819):111; or *Religious Intelligencer* 2 (May 2, 1818):800. On the terminal date, see Hotchkin, *History*, 341. Stockton remained a member of Cayuga Presbytery, which included Skaneateles, through 1823 (see Geneva Synod "Records," 1:211, 238, 258, 374) until he transferred to Geneva Presbytery on February 3, 1824 (see Geneva Presbytery "Records" C:252).

²¹ *Palmyra Herald* 2 (November 6, 1822):3.

²² *Wayne Sentinel* 1 (December 31, 1823; January 7, 14, 21, 28, 1824).

²³ *Zion's Ensign* 5 (January 13, 1894):6; *Deseret Evening News* 27 (January 20, 1894):11 and *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 56 (February 26, 1894):133. See also *Zion's Ensign* 3 (August 27, 1892):2.

²⁴ For sketches of Lane's life, see *Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* 8 (1860):40-41; William Sprague, *Annals of the American Methodist Pulpit* 7 (1861):810-11; Hendrick B. Wright, *Historical Sketches of Plymouth, Luzerne Co., Penna.* (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson & Brothers, 1873), 309, 346ff; Oscar Jewell Harvey, *The Harvey Book* (1899), 128-34; George Peck, *The Life and Times of Rev. George Peck, D.D.* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1874), 96-97, 104, 108-9; George Peck, *Early Methodism within the Bounds of the Old Genesee Conference from 1788 to 1828* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 492-95, and scattered references 166-67, 235-38, 309, 346, 428, 431, 441-42, 447-49, 509. Lane's portrait appears in *The Methodist Magazine* 9 (April 1826), and later in H. Wright, *Historical Sketches*, facing 346.

possession, we hope to render this a pleasing and agreeable narrative, well worth the examination and perusal of the Saints.²⁵

Then Cowdery begins with Smith as a young man of seventeen who is stirred by a revival in 1823 through the preaching of Lane:

One Mr. Lane, a presiding Elder of the Methodist church, visited Palmyra, and vicinity. Elder Lane was a tallented man possessing a good share of literary endowments, and apparent humility. There was a great awakening, or excitement raised on the subject of religion, and much enquiry for the word of life. Large additions were made to the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches.—Mr. Lane's manner of communication was peculiarly calculated to awaken the intellect of the hearer, and arouse the sinner to look about him for safety—much good instruction was always drawn from his discourses on the scriptures, and in common with others, our brother's mind became awakened. For a length of time the reformation seemed to move in a harmonious manner, but, as the *excitement* ceased . . . a general struggle was made by the leading characters of the different sects, for proselytes.

Oliver Cowdery then mentioned members of the Smith family joining one of the churches:

In this general strife for followers, his mother, one sister, and two of his natural brothers, were persuaded to unite with the Presbyterians. . . . After strong solicitations to unite with one of those different societies, and seeing the apparent proselyting disposition manifested with equal warmth for each, his mind was led to more seriously contemplate the importance of a move of this kind.²⁶

When Oliver Cowdery first published this account, he gave Smith's age as the "15th year of his life." He corrected this in his next letter, and said that in his previous letter the time of the religious excitement should have been in Smith's seventeenth year: "You will recollect that I mentioned the time of a religious excitement, in Palmyra and vicinity to have been in the 15th year of our brother J. Smith Jr.'s, age—that was an error in the type—it should have been in the 17th.—You will please remember this correction, as it will be necessary for the full understanding of what will follow in time. This would bring the date down to the year 1823."²⁷

The 1823 Palmyra excitement, as Cowdery printed it, was placed prior to the reported first appearance (September 1823) of the angel who guarded the golden plates of the Book of Mormon. Oliver Cowdery's correction of the date to the year 1823 has the incorrect year since Lane was not the presiding elder of the local Methodist circuit until he was appointed a year later

²⁵ *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834):13, Kirtland, Ohio. Cowdery's eight installments were copied in the fall of 1835 and are located in Manuscript History, Book A-1:46-103 [a separate section], CHL. See Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:26-96.

²⁶ *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (December 1834):42-43, emphasis in original.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1 (February 1835):78.

in 1824. That Cowdery has not overdrawn the effectiveness of Lane's preaching is evident from the comments of a fellow minister in the Methodist Genesee Conference, George Peck:

As a preacher he [Rev. George Lane] was thoroughly orthodox, systematic, and earnest. His sermons exhibited a thorough acquaintance with the Scriptures and with the human heart. In the palmy days of his itinerancy he was often overwhelmingly eloquent. Sometimes under his powerful appeals vast congregations were moved like the trees of the forest before a mighty wind. Many a stout-hearted sinner was broken down, and cried aloud for mercy under his all but irresistible appeals. His language was unstudied, but chaste, correct, simple, and forcible.²⁸

In 1823 Lane was living in the area of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and was not appointed presiding elder of the Ontario District in which Palmyra was located until July 1824.²⁹ He presided only until January 1825 when illness in his family forced him temporarily to leave the ministry.³⁰

As presiding elder, Lane was responsible to ride from circuit to circuit in the Ontario District and hold the quarterly business meetings for each circuit. Each preaching point or congregation on the circuit sent delegates to the quarterly meeting, and at its conclusion the presiding elder would travel on to the next circuit of the district to preside at its quarterly meeting.

According to Lane's report, published in the *Methodist Magazine* (April 1825), the Lord's work in Palmyra and vicinity "commenced in the spring, and progressed moderately until the time of the quarterly meeting, which was held on the 25th and 26th of September" 1824.³¹ A note in the local Palmyra newspaper of September 15 showed the progress of the work over the spring and summer, shortly before Lane came on the scene at the September conference:

A reformation is going on in this town to a great extent. The love of God has been shed abroad in the hearts of many, and the outpouring of the Spirit seems to have taken a strong hold. About twenty-five have recently obtained a hope in the Lord, and joined the Methodist Church, and many more are desirous of becoming members.³²

²⁸ George Peck, *Early Methodism*, 494. George Lane was born on April 13, 1784 and died on May 6, 1859.

²⁹ For official confirmation of Lane's assigned field of labor, see *Minutes of the Annual Conferences* (1773-1828), 1:337, 352, 373, 392, 418, and 446. In 1823 Lane was serving in the Susquehanna District in central Pennsylvania. In July 1819 Lane went with Reverend George Peck to the annual eight-day business meeting of the Genesee Annual Conference. This was held at Vienna (now Phelps), a village some fifteen miles from the Smith home. The "Journal" of the conference does not indicate that any preaching services were held, and there is no indication of any revival touched off at Vienna or Palmyra.

³⁰ *Minutes of the Annual Conferences* (1825), 470.

³¹ "Revival of Religion on Ontario District," letter of George Lane, January 25, 1825, in *Methodist Magazine* 8 (April 1825):158-59.

³² *Wayne Sentinel* 1 (September 15, 1824):3.

This supports Joseph Smith's description of the religious excitement or revival as having "commenced with the Methodists." By September the revival had not yet touched the Baptist church, for at the annual meeting of the Ontario Baptist Association held on September 22, the church reported only two baptisms for the entire previous year.³³ Similarly the local Presbyterian Church remained untouched, for the report of the Presbytery for September 8 stated, "there has been no remarkable revival of religion within our bounds."³⁴

George Lane's personal report dated January 25, 1825, presents a detailed account of the revival's progress. He describes events occurring in the vicinity of Palmyra, focusing on how youth were especially affected:

From Catharine [circuit] I went to Ontario circuit, where the Lord had already begun a gracious work in Palmyra. . . . About this time [September 25 and 26, 1824] it appeared to break out afresh. Monday evening, after the quarterly meeting, there were four converted, and on the following evening, at a prayer meeting at Dr. Chase's, there were seven. Among these was a young woman by the name of Lucy Stoddard.

Nineteen-year-old Lucy Stoddard was a cousin of Calvin Stoddard, who would later marry Smith's sister Sophronia and who would a few months after this also be touched by the revival.³⁵

From this point Lane's account is largely taken up with Lucy Stoddard's conversion experience. Her calm and joyful acceptance of illness and death just a few weeks after her conversion, in the last week of September 1824, helped fan the flames of revival among the young people of the village:

The great deep of her heart was broken up; she saw clearly that she was a child of wrath, and in danger of hell. With this view of her sad condition, she fell prostrate at the feet of her offended sovereign, and in the bitterest anguish cried for mercy. In this situation, however, she was not suffered long to continue before she obtained a most satisfactory evidence of her acceptance with God through the merits of Jesus Christ. Her soul was unspeakably happy, and with great emphasis she exhorted others to come and share with her the inestimable blessing.

A week after her conversion, she married Hiram Wilcox. Lane continued his report:

The same week she was married she was attacked by a bilious remittent fever, which terminated in a typhus fever. . . . [A]t length, her disorder took such a turn as to convince her and others, that her stay in this world would be but short. The patience with which she endured her afflictions, which were sometimes very

³³ *Minutes of the Ontario Baptist Association* (Convened at Gorham, Sept. 22-23, 1824), 4.

³⁴ Geneva Presbytery "Records," Sept. 8, 1824, D:16.

³⁵ Calvin W. Stoddard, twenty-three years old at the time, was baptized by Elder Malby of the Palmyra Baptist Church on Sunday, April 3, 1825, along with his sister Bathsheba. His parents (Silas and Bathsheba), who were in their sixties, had been baptized the month before (*Minutes of the Palmyra Baptist Church*, March 5 and April 3, 1825). Stoddard married Sophronia Smith, who was then a member of the Palmyra Presbyterian Church, on December 30, 1827.

severe, was remarkable; not a murmur was heard to escape her lips. . . . From Saturday night to the time of her dissolution, which took place on Monday following, she seemed wholly swallowed up in God.

Lane then described her dying moments and the dramatic impression left on her friends. He reported that

when life appeared almost extinct, she raised her trembling hands, and clapped them three times, crying, "Hallelujah! hallelujah! hallelujah! glory to God in the highest!" From this time she lay in perfect composure until twelve o'clock on Monday, November 1st, when she breathed her last without a struggle or a groan, after an illness of three weeks and two days, and just five weeks from the time of her conversion. The effect produced by this death was the happiest. While it confounded the infidel, it greatly strengthened believers, especially young converts.³⁶

Stoddard was not the only one whose death challenged friends to prepare for heaven. In Manchester Township, which joined Palmyra on the south, a deadly epidemic broke out and spread through Phelps Township to the east. This "sweeping mortality," as it was called by Benjamin Farley, a Christian-Connection preacher, was regarded by him as an act of God to prepare people's hearts to seek salvation. Writing from Phelps, he reported in a letter to the *Gospel Luminary* dated January 28, 1825:

It has been a great time of lament[a]tion and mourning; children removed from parents, and parents from children. The scene has been truly alarming. . . . I was called upon almost every day to attend on funeral solemnities, and often two in a day; until I was attacked myself with the same fatal disorder, which brought me near to the grave.

Such widespread deaths inevitably made people think of the need to prepare for eternity. Farley continued:

Since those d[ay]s of death and mourning, the Lord has graciously visited this place in mercy. Many have been brought to sing the new song, while scores are enquiring what they must do to be saved. The work is not confined to one neighborhood, but is becoming general. In Palmyra it is judged that more than one hundred have recently experienced salvation; and in the vicinity of Sulphur Springs [now Clifton Springs, Manchester Township] about the same number. The work in the above mentioned places is among the methodists and presbyterians. Congregations are uncommonly large and attentive. . . . [T]he harvest truly is great.³⁷

³⁶ *Methodist Magazine* 8 (April 1825):159-60. Lucy Stoddard Wilcox died on November 1, 1824.

³⁷ *Gospel Luminary* (West Bloomfield, N. Y.) 1 (March 1825):65-66.

The actual numbers of converts in Palmyra may have been larger than Farley's January 1825 letter estimated, for two months previously the *Western Recorder* had already reported "one hundred or more" converts for Palmyra:

A revival of religion has lately commenced in the town of Palmyra, N.Y. It is stated by one of the subjects of this glorious work, that one hundred or more persons, it is thought, have lately been brought out of darkness into marvelous light.—Persons of all ages and classes are the subjects of this work of grace.³⁸

By mid-December the number was said to have swelled to near two hundred. Reverend Reuben Winchell in a letter dated "Dec 20th, 1824" written from Avon, New York, reported that, while he was recently preaching at West Bloomfield, he heard that the number of converts was about two hundred. He wrote: "In Palmyra, a town about 30 miles North East of this, God has triumphed gloriously. About 200, as I am informed, are sharers in this great and precious work."³⁹

Even these figures may be too conservative; for Lane placed the number of Methodist converts alone at "upward of one hundred and fifty" by mid-December:

December 11th and 12th our quarterly meeting for Ontario circuit was held in Ontario. . . . Here I found that the work which had for some time been going on in Palmyra, had broken out from the village like a mighty flame, and was spreading in every direction. When I left the place, December 22[n]d, there had, in the village and its vicinity, upward of one hundred and fifty joined the [Methodist] society, besides a number that had joined other churches, and many that had joined no church.⁴⁰

By the time Lane left the area the third week in December, many people needed only an invitation in order to be baptized. On Christmas day a Baptist preacher wrote to a friend: "As I came on my journey this way, I tarried a few days, and baptized eight."⁴¹

Meanwhile revivals were spreading as well in the neighboring towns. By February revivals were reported in Williamson and Ontario to the north, in Manchester, Sulphur Springs, and Vienna to the southeast, in Lyons to the east, and in Macedon to the west. Even towns at a greater distance from Palmyra began to experience revival fires, with Mendon to the west and Geneva to the southeast sharing in the divine outpouring.

A steady stream of reports of the spreading revival continued to flow from the papers and periodicals in early 1825. On January 13, Methodist preacher J. B. Alverson wrote from Canandaigua about Methodist gains:

In Geneva the work has increased considerably. . . . On Ontario circuit . . . the prospects are very promising. Two hundred have been added since conference [i.e., July 1824]. On Lyons [circuit] the Lord continues to visit the people in great

³⁸ *Western Recorder* 1 (November 9, 1824):90.

³⁹ *American Baptist Magazine* 5 (February 1825):61-62.

⁴⁰ *Methodist Magazine* 8 (April 1825):160.

⁴¹ *The Latter Day Luminary* 6 (February 1825):61.

mercy. At Clyde the prospect is great . . . Sixty-one have experienced religion since this revival commenced, and forty-one have joined the society.⁴²

By February townships bordering on Lake Ontario were described as touched by revival fires. According to West Bloomfield's *Gospel Luminary* for February 1825, "We learn that a powerful reformation has been spreading for several months past, in the towns of *Palmyra*, *Williamson* and *Ontario*. The work we are informed still continues in those places."⁴³

West Bloomfield itself tasted the reformation blessing. "It has been a gr[ad]ual scene of reform[a]tion with us ever since April last" (1824), wrote David Millard in a communication dated February 25, 1825. Though not as powerful as the revival had been, still he found that "Our meetings are yet crowded and solemn, and some appear to be seeking the one thing nee[d]ful. On the 11th, inst. I baptized *twenty* happy converts. . . . On the 19th I baptized *five* more. Several others are expected to go forward in this ordinance soon." Millard, who had been preaching at West Bloomfield since 1817, closed his report by noting: "Such a season of extensive and powerful revivals, was probably never known in this western country, since its first settlement."⁴⁴

By March the work was subsiding in the village of Palmyra, but it continued to spread in adjacent towns. Gorham, considerably south of Vienna, was followed by the area of Clyde, farther east beyond Lyons, where during the first part of May about one hundred and fifty were reported converted. By this time "no recent cases of conviction" were reported from Palmyra itself, but the work was advancing in the Sulphur Springs area and still continuing at Geneva, twenty-five miles distant.⁴⁵ This generalized 1824-25 revival activity fits completely Joseph Smith's statement that the excitement occurred not only in the place where he lived but "became general among all the sects in that region of country, indeed the whole district of Country seemed affected by it."⁴⁶

As converts began filling churches, leaders took stock of their numbers. By January Methodists estimated that on their Ontario circuit two hundred had joined their society. A Baptist pastor in Bristol, New York, reported to a friend under the date of March 9, 1825, that in the immediate area of Palmyra, "Multitudes have abandoned their false hopes and false schemes. . . . About three hundred have united with the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches; and to each in about equal numbers."⁴⁷

The Palmyra newspaper for March 2, 1825, reprinted a report from the *Religious Advocate* of Rochester:

More than two hundred souls have become the hopeful subjects of divine grace in Palmyra, Macedon, Manchester, Phelps, Lyons, and Ontario, since the late revival commenced.—This is a powerful work; it is among old and young, but mostly among young people. Many are ready to exclaim, "what hath God wrought!" "It is

⁴² *Methodist Magazine* 8 (April 1825):161.

⁴³ *Gospel Luminary* 1 (February 1825):42; emphasis in original.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 (March 1825):65; emphasis in original.

⁴⁵ *Western Recorder* 2 (May 10, 1825):74.

⁴⁶ Manuscript History, Book A-1:1, CHL; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:270.

⁴⁷ *American Baptist Magazine* 5 (April 1825):125; Solomon Goodale writing from Bristol, New York, March 9, 1825.

the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." The cry is yet from various parts, "come over and help us." There are large and attentive congregations in every part, who hear as for their lives. Such intelligence must be pleasing to every child of God, who rightly estimate the value of immortal souls, and wishes well to the cause of Zion.

Since the *Religious Advocate* was a Presbyterian-related periodical, the figures undoubtedly reflect Presbyterian gains. A note in the same issue of the Palmyra paper adds this balancing information: "It may be added, that in Palmyra and Macedon, including Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist Churches, more than 400 have already testified that the Lord is good. The work is still progressing. In the neighboring towns, the number is great and fast increasing."⁴⁸

By September 1825 the results of the revival for Palmyra had become a matter of record. The Presbyterian Church reported ninety-nine admitted on examination; Baptists had received ninety-four by profession of faith and baptism; the Methodist circuit showed an increase of 208. Oliver Cowdery's mention of "large additions" and Joseph Smith's statement that "great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties" were scarcely overstatements. Thus, the revival matching the detailed descriptions of both Cowdery and Smith took place in 1824-25 both "in Palmyra" (Cowdery) and "the neighborhood" (Smith), as well as in the surrounding "vicinity," "region," and "whole district of Country."⁴⁹

Contemporary evidence requires an 1824-25 date for the religious revival or excitement in the area of Palmyra which Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery described in their respective histories. Certainly memory at times conflates events, and perhaps Smith in retrospect blended in his mind events from 1820 with a revival occurring four years later.

⁴⁸ *Wayne Sentinel* 2 (March 2, 1825):3, 4. Unfortunately these reports have been mistakenly misdated to 1820 and used in several Mormon publications to establish an 1820 revival. However, the *Religious Advocate* did not begin publication at Rochester until about 1825, and its account quoted above refers to the 1824-25 revival. For an example of this account being used to support an 1820 revival date, see Gordon B. Hinckley, *Truth Restored: A Short History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 1-2.

⁴⁹ For a response to a proposed 1820 revival date, see H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 28-31.