

**Membership of Certain of Joseph Smith's
Family in the Western Presbyterian
Church of Palmyra**

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Milton V. Backman, Jr. and James B. Allen

When Joseph Smith wrote his personal history in 1838, he said that about the time of his first vision, in 1820, four members of his family had joined the Presbyterian faith: his mother, Lucy; his brothers, Hyrum and Samuel; and his sister Sophronia. Until recently Mormon historians have presented little corroborating evidence, but an examination of the Presbyterian Church records in Palmyra has shown that at least three of the Smiths were part of that congregation in 1828, although by that time they had become inactive.

There was only one meeting house in the village of Palmyra in 1820. This was a frame building occupied by the Western Presbyterian church and located near the cemetery where Alvin Smith was buried, a half-block north of the present Methodist church on the road leading to the Martin Harris farm house. At that time the Methodists were meeting in homes of settlers, in schools, or in the out-doors. A Methodist class had been organized in Palmyra. The Baptists had erected a meeting house about two miles west of Palmyra village and the Quakers had organized a class north of Palmyra. These four congregations were the only groups holding regular services near the village. We estimate that approximately 11 percent of the population of Palmyra "town" (an area six by twelve miles square) and Farmington "town" were active church members in 1820. This was about the same as the national average.

The three documentary items presented below are taken from the "Records of the Session of the Presbyterian Church in Palmyra, Volume 2." They show that in March, 1830, Joseph's mother, Lucy, and two of his brothers, Hyrum and Samuel, were visited by a committee from the church because they had been inactive for at least eighteen months. This means that they had not actively involved themselves in the affairs of the Presbyterian church since September, 1828, which was just a year after Joseph had received the plates from which he translated the *Book of Mormon*. It is significant to note that they were charged only with inactivity and that no accusation was made even hinting of any dishonesty, lack of integrity, or undesirable moral character. The records show the ecclesiastical proceedings

against the Smith family, and their final suspension from fellowship in the Presbyterian church.

March 10th 1830 Session met pursuant to notice—Opened with prayer

Present Revd Alfred E. Campbell Modr [Moderator]

Geo Beckwith	} Elders
Henry Jessop	
Pelataiah West	
Newton Foster	

The committee appointed to visit Hiram Smith Lucy Smith and Samuel Harrison Smith reported that they had visited them and received no satisfaction. They acknowledged that they had entirely neglected the ordinances of the church for the last eighteen months and that they did not wish to unite with us anymore.

Whereupon Resolved that they be cited to appear before the Session on the 24th day of March inst. at 2 Oclk P.M. at this Meeting House to answer the following charge to wit Neglect of public worship and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for the last eighteen months.

Witnesses	Henry Jessop	James Robinson
	Harvey Shel	Robert W. Smith
	Levi Dagget	Fri U. Sheffield

Closed with prayer—Adjourned to 29th 2 Oclk P.M.

Records from the minutes of the moderator

[Signed] Geo N. Williams clk

March 24th 1830 Session met pursuant to adjournment

Opening prayer

Present the Revd Alfred E Campbell Modr

Henry Jessop	} Elders
Geo Beckwith	
Pelataiah West	
Newton Foster	
David White	

Hiram Smith Lucy Smith and Samuel Harrison Smith not appearing pursuant to the citation served upon them by P. West Resolved that they be again cited to appear before this session on Monday the 29th inst. at this place at 2 Oclk P.M.—and that P. West serve said citation.

Closed with prayer—Adjourned to 29th 2 Oclk P.M.

Records from the minutes of the Moderator

[Signed] Geo N. Williams clk

March 29th 1830 Session met pursuant to adjournment

Opened with prayer

Present Revd Alfred E. Campbell Modr

Geo Beckwith	}	Elders
Newton Foster		
Pelatiah West		
Henry Jesson		

The persons before cited to wit. Hiram Smith Lucy Smith and Samuel Harrison Smith not appearing and the Session having satisfactory evidence that the citations were duly served Resolved that George Beckwith manage their defense. The charge in the above case being fully sustained by the testimony of Henry Jessup Harvy Shel Robert W. Smith and Frederick U. Sheffield (in minutes of testimony on file with the clerk) the Session after duly considering the matter were unanimously of opinion that Hiram Smith Lucy Smith and Samuel Harrison Smith be and they hereby are suspended from the Sacrament of the Lords Supper.

Closed with prayer—Adjourned

Records from the minutes of the Moderator

[Signed] Geo N. Williams clk