

Frederick Granger Williams of the First Presidency of the Church

BY FREDERICK G. WILLIAMS*

Frederick Granger Williams was second counselor in the original First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He played an important role in the establishment of the kingdom of God and for many years was Joseph Smith's physician, scribe, sermon writer, and closest friend.

Like most early leaders of the Church, Frederick was from New England, born at Suffield, Hartford County, Connecticut, on 28 October 1787, the oldest of five children born to William Wheeler Williams and Ruth Granger. Frederick was an intelligent boy, shy, and well mannered. He showed early promise as a student; but, when he was twelve, his schooling was interrupted by his family's move to Cleveland, Ohio, then a settlement of one house. His father had contracted with the Connecticut Land Company to build and operate a flour mill and a sawmill a few miles from Cleveland, for which he received the right to purchase at a reduced rate 1,306 acres of land, including his mill sites.¹

The presence of the mills attracted other settlers, and ownership of them gave Mr. Williams both a handsome income and a position of leadership in the community.² This still was

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¹Letter from the Connecticut Land Co. to William Wheeler Williams, 4 April 1798, in the Simon Perkins Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

²Beginning in 1802 when the inhabitants organized themselves into a township, the elder Williams was elected one of Cleveland's first three trustees and one of two overseers of the poor; this latter office he held again in 1805 and 1812. He was judge of the election in 1804, 1805, 1806, and again in 1810. In 1806 he was one of the patrons of the first school, where four of his children studied. See *Historical Record of Public Officeholders in Cuyahoga County* (Cleveland: W. P. A. in Ohio, 1942), pp. 2-23.

frontier country, however, and for some years formal schooling and church attendance were not possible; but Frederick continued to study at home. As the eldest child, much was expected of him. He worked on his father's farm and mills, helped construct their new home on a bluff overlooking the bay, and took over the care of the younger children and other household duties as his mother gradually lost her eyesight.

During the War of 1812, Cleveland became an important military station. Commodore Perry came in 1813 to build the ships which regained control of the Upper Lakes Region from Barclay's English fleet. Frederick, twenty-six, joined Perry as a pilot, directing him around the Lake region.³ After Perry's victory on Lake Erie and General Harrison's victory on land, the war came to an end so far as the Cleveland area was concerned. Frederick began teaching school⁴ and continued to work as a pilot on Lake Erie, transporting goods and passengers between Buffalo and Detroit.

It was on one of these crossings that he met Rebecca Swain of Youngstown, New York. After a brief courtship, Frederick and Rebecca were married in the latter part of 1815. They went to live near Warrensville, Ohio, where Frederick engaged in farming.⁵ Soon, however, he became interested in medicine.

Professionally trained doctors of the day relied heavily upon chemical medicines (especially calomel) and blood-letting. In competition, various botanical systems of medicine flourished, relying heavily upon herb teas and steam baths.⁶ After some

³Nancy Clement Williams, *After 100 Years* (Independence: Zion's Printing and Publishing Company, 1951), pp. 12, 33.

⁴C. A. Urann, *Centennial History of Cleveland* (Cleveland: Press of J. B. Savage, 1896), p. 35.

⁵Young Williams had bought 161 acres for \$402 from his father, 30 April 1810. *Land Records of Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Deeds and Mortgages*, Vol. I, 46, 47.

⁶Alex Berman, "The Impact of the Nineteenth Century Botanico-Medico Movement on American Pharmacy and Medicine," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Wisconsin, 1954), pp. 318-330.

"By 1860, the worst features of the heroic practice had disappeared. To be sure, traces of the old therapeutics persisted into late 1870s; and the abuse of calomel was still widespread at the time of the Civil War. But, by and large, physicians no longer thought it necessary to resort to the violent methods mentioned above.

"One would like to regard the improvement in therapeutics at this time as being part of the general scientific advance. The facts indicate, however, that scientific considerations played a minor role in demolishing the old heroic practice, and what was called 'rational' medication in 1860 was brought about largely by empirical and often irrational factors. Contributing also to the abandonment of the old curative measures was the constant barrage of criticism hurled at the regulars by Thomsonian and other sectarian practitioners." *Ibid.*, p. 21.

experimentation, Frederick settled upon the Eclectic System, which, as its name implied, borrowed methods from both the botanical and more traditional medical systems.⁷ Feeling that his opportunities in the medical profession would be increased, Dr. Williams and his family moved to Kirtland, Ohio, where he purchased a large farm.⁸ By 1830 he had an extensive practice and was a man of considerable influence in the community. He and one of the territory's prominent doctors had just gone into partnership⁹ when, in October 1830, four Mormon missionaries arrived in the community. On their way to preach to the Indians, they had stopped in the Kirtland area to preach to the Campbellite congregations of Reverend Sidney Rigdon; the Williamses belonged to one of these.

CONVERSION TO MORMONISM

The missionaries were Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, Ziba Peterson, and Peter Whitmer, Jr.; and their message of the restored Church of Christ, the Book of Mormon, and a living prophet interested the Williamses, who investigated further. Rebecca and the four children attended all the private meetings, and her husband went when his work would permit. In a short time she was baptized, but the doctor delayed his decision. He would read the Book of Mormon, weighing and comparing its teachings with those of the Bible; then, unwilling to accept it as true, would lay it aside to have nothing more to do with it, only to find himself turning to it later and reading again.¹⁰ At length, convinced of the truthfulness of the new

⁷Doctors first had to register with the state of Ohio in the late 1880s, but in *Auditor's Tax Duplicate*, 1836, *Geauga County, Ohio*, p. 342A, found at the Geauga County Courthouse, Chardon, Ohio, Williams is one of thirty doctors paying taxes in the county. Their incomes appear to be approximations: eight had income of \$300 and paid \$1.50 in taxes; ten (including Dr. Williams) had an income of \$200 and paid \$1.00 in taxes; three had an income of \$150 and paid \$0.75 in taxes; and nine had an income of \$100 and paid \$0.50 in taxes. No distinction was made between botanical and regular physicians.

⁸Although the *Kirtland Township Trustees' Minutes and Poll Book*, 1817-1838, found at the Lake County Historical Society, Mentor, Ohio, has Frederick G. Williams voting as a Kirtland resident in 1830 (see pp. 72, 74), the 1830 Federal Census, p. 272, has him living in Kirtland, and the Records Office, Geauga County Courthouse 1830 map of Kirtland, shows F. G. Williams's name written on lots 29 and 30. Williams did not actually record the deed to any Kirtland property until 20 April 1832. The deed shows he traded for 144 acres of property, namely, Lots 29, 30, 31. *Land Records of Geauga County, Ohio, Deeds and Mortgages*, Book 16, pp. 22,23.

⁹Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 53, 54. The author does not cite the name of the prominent doctor.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 54, 55.

book, he was baptized, confirmed a member, and immediately ordained an elder in the Church. Frederick G. Williams was then forty-four years of age.

After spending two or three weeks in the Kirtland area, where a sizeable branch was organized, the missionaries made preparations to resume their journey to the Indians in Missouri. Dr. Williams was invited to accompany the party, with the understanding that he would return to his private practice in three weeks. He accepted the call and furnished the elders with a horse, cash, and other provisions to assist in their mission.¹¹ The three-week mission turned into a ten-month ministry, so engrossed did the new convert become in preaching the gospel. The missionaries traveled south and west, preaching as they went. In Cleveland, Dr. Williams took occasion to present the gospel to his parents, who, although happy to offer the missionaries hospitality, were not interested in the Church.¹² The party stopped for several days to preach to the Wyandotte Indian nation in Sandusky, Ohio, where, some years before, Elder Williams had piloted Commodore Perry's ship in pursuit of the British and Indian forces under Tecumseh. This time he was bringing the Indians the gospel of peace.

Parley P. Pratt sums up the trip, recording:

After much fatigue and some suffering we all arrived in Independence in the county of Jackson, on the extreme western frontiers of Missouri, and of the United States.

This was about fifteen hundred miles from where we started, and we had performed most of the journey on foot, through a wilderness country, in the worst season of the year, occupying about four months, during which we had preached the gospel to tens of thousands of Gentiles and two nations of Indians; baptizing, confirming and organizing many hundreds of people into churches of Latter-day Saints.

This was the first mission performed by the Elders of the Church in any of the States west of New York, and we were

¹¹*Williams Journal*, No. 370, p. 319, Church Historian's Office. This book was originally Dr. Williams's medical journal from 1837 to 1839; and on the first 130 pages the names of his patients, the medications, and the bills appear. After page 130, the pages continue to be the accounts of his patients for a time, but the second Williams generation has used the blank portion of the page to record things of historical interest to the family.

¹²After his father's death in 1831, Frederick's brother, William Wheeler Williams, Jr., lived in the family home and, although he never joined the Church, offered its members hospitality. Joseph Smith, Junior, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (2nd ed.), commonly called Documentary History of the Church (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1948), II, 50. (Hereafter called *DHC*.)

the first members of the same which were ever on this frontier.¹³

MEETING THE PROPHET

In the meantime, Joseph Smith the Prophet had moved his family from New York to Kirtland and, for a time, lodged in the Williams home. When summer came, he and several other brethren set out for Missouri where a temple site was dedicated and instructions were received concerning the establishment of Zion in Missouri. Elder Williams participated in the proceedings and met the Prophet for the first time. This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Williams covenanted with Joseph Smith that he would be willing to consecrate his all to the service of the Lord.

Throughout the next several years, Frederick G. Williams demonstrated his willingness to abide by the covenant he had made. Upon his return to Kirtland on 11 September 1831, he received instructions through Joseph Smith that he should not sell his farm: "... for I, the Lord, will to retain a strong hold in the land of Kirtland, for the space of five years, in the which I will not overthrow the wicked, that thereby I may save some." (D&C 64:21, first published as chapter 65, verse 27 in *Book of Commandments* (Zion [Missouri]: W. W. Phelps & Co., 1833), p. 159). In the ensuing years, the farm did indeed become a stronghold for the Church. Its boundaries made up the limits of the first stake of Zion, the homes of a number of men who later became General Authorities were built on it, and the Church printing house as well as the Kirtland Temple itself was constructed on it. More than 142 acres of the 144-acre property were deeded to Joseph Smith for the Church in 1834. The deed recited consideration of \$2,200; but, in a statement written by Elder Williams sometime later, he indicated that he never received remuneration for the property, as all material goods were consecrated to the Lord and all debts among the brethren were erased, according to a revelation from the Lord.¹⁴

Elder Williams was called to be a counselor to Joseph Smith and one of the first high priests of the Church in March of

¹³*Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1961), p. 52.

¹⁴See F. G. Williams's "Statement of facts relative to Joseph Smith and myself," Church Historian's Office. The deed is found in *Land Records of Geauga County, Ohio, Deeds and Mortgages*, Vol. 18, 480, 481.

1832.¹⁵ As a member of the First Presidency, Elder Williams presided and spoke at many meetings—often serving as clerk, as well—and penned numerous letters and directives. In 1833 he formed part of the three-member committee in charge of the construction of the Kirtland Temple (in addition to working on the building and contributing funds). In 1834 he was a member of the publication committee which selected and printed the revelations which were published in 1835 under the title of *Doctrine and Covenants*. The book was printed on the press of F. G. Williams & Co., the Church's press, which also printed the first Mormon hymnal and the Mormon newspaper, *The Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*. President Williams also accepted several short-term mission calls.

In 1834, President Williams became a member of Zion's Camp, which was organized to relieve the distraught, beleaguered saints in Missouri. He was appointed paymaster and served as a scout, camp doctor, and general. The group sought to travel anonymously; and, perhaps because he was one of the older men in the group, curious people would approach him on the matter of the group's identity:

They then addressed themselves to Dr. Frederick G. Williams to see if they could find out who the leader of the camp was. The doctor replied, "We have no one in particular." They asked if we had not a general to take the lead of the company. The reply was, "No one in particular." "But," said they, "is there not some one among you whom you call your captain, or leader, or who is superior to the rest?" He answered, "Sometimes one and sometimes another takes charge of the company, so as not to throw the burden upon any one in particular."¹⁶

The next year (1835), President Williams helped organize and became a Trustee of the School of the Prophets where he also taught and was appointed editor of yet another Mormon newspaper published in Kirtland, *The Northern Times*, a weekly political newspaper dedicated to the support of the

¹⁵See D&C 81. It was not until March of 1833, however, that he was set apart as second counselor in the First Presidency of the Church. President Williams's certificate of ordination to the Church Presidency, signed by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, is found at the Church Historian's Office.

¹⁶DHC, Vol. II, 69, 70. President Williams's discharge papers from the "army," where he served as "counselor to the commander in Chief of the Army of the Lord's House, quartermaster and many other (duties) to which he was appointed," can be found on file at the Church Historian's Office.

Democratic Party.¹⁷ In 1837 his activities increased to include those of the office of justice of the peace of Kirtland¹⁸ and of an official of the Mormon-owned and operated Kirtland Safety Society Anti-Banking Company, where he eventually became president.¹⁹

FRIENDSHIP WITH JOSEPH SMITH

The covenant President Williams had made with Joseph Smith in August of 1831 on the occasion of their first meeting was as much a promise to stand by the Prophet as it was to obey

¹⁷In the *DHC*, Vol. II, 227, Joseph Smith, Jr., indicates that about the middle of May of 1835, "Frederick G. Williams was appointed to edit the *Northern Times*, a weekly newspaper, which we had commenced in February last, in in favor of Democracy."

The Painsville Telegraph (Ohio), Vol. XIII, No. 51, Friday, 12 June 1835, gives notice of this appointment in their column, "The Telegraph": "Important—We learn by the Warren News Letter that O. Cowdery has withdrawn from the editorial department of the *Northern Times*, a Mormon Van Buren paper published in this county; and that F. G. Williams will henceforth act as editor of that *invaluable* journal. It is thought that the cause of Democracy will not be endangered [sic] by this change, as the new incumbent, if he has not, like his predecessor, seen an angel, and 'hefted' the golden plates, is at least a faithful follower of the Prophet, by whose inspiration the paper will doubtless still be guided in its political course."

¹⁸Frederick G. Williams became active in local politics; the *Kirtland Township Trustees' Minutes and Poll Book*, 1817-1838, p. 139, indicates that on 6 April 1836 Williams ran for the office of overseer of the poor along with two other candidates. When the votes were counted, each of the three candidates had received 147 votes. Lots were cast, as the law provided in the event of ties, and Williams lost.

On page 143, it is recorded that on 28 June 1836, Williams ran for the office of justice of the peace of Kirtland, and won against two other candidates: 141 votes to 114 and 1 vote.

On 24 September 1836, Williams was also called to be a juror "for the ensuing year," along with five other men; see p. 143.

Esquire Williams, as he was now sometimes called, resigned his commission as justice of the peace on 25 September 1837; see p. 155. During his term, among other duties, he performed marriages for several people, including Parley P. Pratt (see *Book C of Marriages in Geauga County, Ohio*, p. 220, Geauga County Courthouse, Chardon, Ohio) and Wilford Woodruff (see *Latter-Day Saints, Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. III, No. 7 (April 1837), p. 49); certified the sale of property (see, for example, the deed on property sold by Joseph Smith to Samuel Whitney, 10 April 1837, found at Lake County Historical Society, Mentor, Ohio); and attested to the 1837 plat of Kirtland Township as the Mormons envisioned it would become (Recorder's Office, Geauga County Courthouse, Chardon, Ohio). There is a similar, though not identical, plat of Kirtland in the Church Historian's Office. A Williams Street appears on both.

¹⁹Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom, An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 3rd Bison Book printing, 1968), footnote to chapter one, pp. 427-428. First edition, 1958.

His signature appears on several of the Kirtland Bank Notes; see the \$3.00 note reproduced in Max H. Parkin, "Conflict at Kirtland," (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1966), p. 216, and the \$1.00 note reproduced at Lake County Historical Society, Mentor, Ohio. He was also a defendant in a lawsuit involving the bank. See *Book U of Geauga County Common Pleas Court Records*, p. 355, on file in the County Courthouse at Chardon, Ohio.

the Lord. This promise was renewed under special circumstances in 1834. Joseph Smith records that after he had washed the feet of each assembled elder, climaxing an evening of spirituality, "Brother Frederick G. Williams, being moved upon by the Holy Ghost, washed my feet, in token of his fixed determination to be with me in suffering or in journeying, in life or in death, and to be continually on my right hand."²⁰ Through the next years, this promised companionship manifested itself in many ways. In addition to the association their Church duties provided, Elder Williams became the Prophet's scribe and sermon writer from 1832-1836.²¹ In this capacity, President Williams penned many important documents, including architectural drawings for the City of Zion, several revelations, and the first extant account of the First Vision.²² Joseph Smith records in his journal that the two families boarded at each other's homes and worked each other's farms and that the two men studied Hebrew and other subjects together. They also traveled together on Church business and twice were missionary companions. Each had occasions to defend the other before Church and civic bodies against false brethren and mobbers. On one occasion, the Prophet, who was about the same size as Rebecca Williams, was dressed up in her clothing and, thus disguised, passed undetected through an assembled mob surrounding the Williams home.²³ As a token of his esteem for his second counselor, Joseph named his second son Frederick Granger Williams Smith.²⁴

In one of the few character sketches Joseph Smith ever made, he recorded the following in November of 1833:

Brother Frederick G. Williams is one of those men in whom I place the greatest confidence and trust, for I have found him ever full of love and brotherly kindness. He is not a man of many words, but is ever winning, because of his

²⁰DHC, Vol. I, 323.

²¹Williams writes, "I commenced writing for Joseph Smith Jr. July 20th 1832 as may be seen by S. Rigdon permission dated as above from which time up to the establishment of the Hebrew School in Kirtland I was constantly in said Smith's employ." In an itemized listing of bills owed to him by Joseph Smith, Williams says, "3 years & 4 months service writing, \$2,000, commencing the first of August 1832 and ending in January 1836." These notes are on file at the Church Historian's Office.

²²See T. Edgar Lyon, "The Sketches on the Papyri Backings," *The Improvement Era* (May 1968), pp. 19-23. See also Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," *Brigham Young University Studies*, Vol. IX, No. 3 (Spring 1969), pp. 275-294.

²³Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

²⁴F. G. W. Smith was born 29 June 1836, in Kirtland, Ohio, and died 13 April 1862 in Nauvoo, Illinois.

constant mind. He shall ever have place in my heart, and is ever entitled to my confidence. He is perfectly honest and upright, and seeks with all his heart to magnify his Presidency in the Church of Christ, but fails in many instances, in consequence of a want of confidence in himself. Blessed be Brother Frederick, for he shall never want a friend, and his generation after him shall flourish. The Lord hath appointed him an inheritance upon the land of Zion: yea, and his head shall blossom, and he shall be as an olive branch that is bowed down with fruit.²⁵

In addition to being a commentary on President Williams's character and personality, the last part of the sketch is cast in prophetic language. Even the Prophet's observations about his counselor's taciturn nature and that he "fails in many instances because of a want of confidence in himself" may help explain future developments regarding Elder Williams's place in the Presidency and cast light on his relationship to Joseph Smith, the Church, and its institutions, particularly during the Kirtland Bank episode.

PRACTICING MEDICINE AMONG THE SAINTS

President Williams continued to earn a portion of his living by medical practice. His ledger shows that at one time or another he had all the leaders of the Church under his care.²⁶ Oliver Cowdery wrote to a doctor interested in locating in Kirtland:

I made inquiry on the subject of your coming to this place to establish yourself as a Botanic Physician. We are a people who design living near the Lord, that our bodies may be healed when we are sick, for a general rule, though our faith is yet weak, being young, weak, and surrounded by a wicked enticing world. When, however, we have need of an earthly physician and in many instances we have, we call upon our highly esteemed friend and brother Dr. F. G. Williams, universally known through this country as an eminent and skillful man. I may say in short, he is also a Botanic physician—which course of practice is generally approved by us. I expect, however, that he will go to the west next spring.²⁷

²⁵DHC, Vol. I, 444.

²⁶Williams's medical ledger is Journal No. 370 on file at the Church Historian's Office.

²⁷Letter to Dr. L. Avord, from Kirtland, Ohio, 15 December 1835. Huntington Library Letters, microfilm No. 67. Cited in Stanley R. Gunn, *Oliver Cowdery, Second Elder and Scribe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1962), pp. 97, 98.

During his medical career, Dr. Williams administered to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in 1831 after they were tarred and feathered in Hiram, Ohio;²⁸ successfully treated several epidemics of cholera; treated Hyrum Smith for a hatchet wound he had accidentally inflicted upon himself;²⁹ and in 1835 saved the life of Samuel Smith's wife in childbearing, as recorded by Joseph Smith:

And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, "My servant Frederick shall come, and shall have wisdom given him to deal prudently, and my handmaid shall be delivered of a living child, and be spared." The doctor came in about one hour afterwards, and in the course of two hours she was delivered, and thus what God had manifested to me was fulfilled every whit.³⁰

One of the doctor's problems—and it seems to have been universal among early doctors—was the collection of fees for services performed. Dr. Williams, it seems, never learned the art of collecting unpaid bills, which at times caused a hardship on himself and family.³¹ When the doctor was paid, it was usually in goods or services. It was unusual enough to be paid in cash that, when in 1837 he received \$200 from Joseph Smith for past medical bills, he wrote "\$200 CASH!!!"³²

DISSENSION IN KIRTLAND

In 1837 the Church was passing through some of its most difficult trials. Resentment in Kirtland, and indeed the whole state of Ohio, had been growing for some years as a result of the Mormon influx. But it was within the ranks of the Church that the greatest friction arose. Feelings were running high, and dissatisfaction among the saints was common, even among high Church authorities, who spoke openly of replacing Joseph Smith, the "fallen prophet."³³ Parley P. Pratt's comments about

²⁸Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 65

²⁹DHC, Vol. II, 393.

³⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. II, 292, 293.

³¹At the time of his death, Dr. Williams's probate file listed several pages of names of patients together with the amounts owed him for medical services performed, which came to approximately \$800. These bills were never recovered, however, and his widow and children were unable to pay his \$15.00 coffin bill for over three years. See Frederick G. Williams's Probate file, Box No. 248, Office of Circuit Court, Adams County Courthouse, Quincy, Illinois.

³²*Journal* No. 370, p. 24, Church Historian's Office.

³³For a full account of the events in Kirtland see B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), I, pp. 396-409; hereafter referred to as CHC.

this period, though brief, reveal the intensity of the emotional charge running through the community of saints.

About this time, after I had returned from Canada, there were jarrings and discords in the Church at Kirtland, and many fell away and became enemies and apostates. There were also envyings, lyings, strifes and divisions, which caused much trouble and sorrow. By such spirits I was also accused, misrepresented and abused. And at one time, I also was overcome by the same spirit in a great measure, and it seemed as if the very powers of darkness which war against the Saints were let loose upon me.³⁴

Apparently, President Williams was also afflicted by the same spirit, for on 29 May 1837 the Kirtland Stake high council leveled charges of misconduct against him, as well as Parley P. Pratt, David Whitmer, Warren Parrish, and Lyman E. Johnson. We are not now aware what the specific grounds were except that the complaint read: "We, the undersigned . . . believing that their course for some time past has been injurious to the Church of God, in which they are high officers, we therefore desire that the High Council . . . should have an investigation of their behavior."³⁵ President Williams said that he felt that, according to the *Book of Covenants*, the high council was not the proper body to try members of the Presidency of the Church. After some discussion, "President Williams then expressed a willingness to be tried before it, but still thought it was not."³⁶ It was put to a vote and it was decided by the council that they were not the proper body to try him, whereupon

³⁴Pratt, op. cit., p. 168.

³⁵DHC, Vol. II, pp. 484, 485. Although the sequence of events is not clear, a passage from Lucy Mack Smith's book may throw some light on the nature of the misconduct charged to Williams and the others:

"At this time a certain young woman, who was living at David Whitmer's uttered a prophecy, which she said was given her, by looking through a black stone that she found. This prophecy gave some altogether a new idea of things. She said, the reason why one-third of the Church would turn away from Joseph, was because that he was in transgression himself; that he would fall from his office on account of the same; that David Whitmer or Martin Harris would fill Joseph's place; and that the one who did not succeed him, would be the Counsellor to the one that did." She goes on to explain that Dr. Williams became her scribe, and wrote her revelations for her, that those who followed this girl formed a party, held meetings, circulated a paper in order to ascertain how many would follow them, and in this spirit contaminated the minds of many of the brethren against Joseph Smith. *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and his Progenitors for many Generations* (London; Liverpool: Published by S. W. Richards for Orson Pratt, 1853), p. 211. Photomechanical reprint by Modern Microfilm Co., Salt Lake City, Utah.

³⁶DHC, Vol. II, 484, 485.

he was asked to sit in judgment against the others. What follows would make a good scene in a tragicomedy:

After one hour's adjournment, the Council sat again at one o'clock p.m. Sidney Rigdon and Oliver Cowdery presiding. . . . Councilor Martin Harris moved that President Frederick G. Williams take a seat with the presidents. After much discussion as to the propriety of his sitting, motion carried, and President Williams took his seat. Elder Parley P. Pratt then arose and objected to being tried by President Rigdon or Joseph Smith, Jun., in consequence of their having previously expressed their opinion against him, stating also that he could bring evidence to prove what he then said. . . .

After much discussion between the councilors and parties, President Rigdon said that under the present circumstances, he could not conscientiously proceed to try the case, and after a few remarks left the stand.

President Oliver Cowdery then said that although he might not be called upon to preside, yet if he should be, he should also be unfit to judge in the case, as he had previously expressed his opinion respecting the conduct of Elder Parley P. Pratt and others, and left the stand.

President Williams then arose and said, that as he had been implicated with the accused, he should be unwilling to preside in the case, and left the stand.

The Council and assembly then dispersed in confusion.³⁷

CAUSES OF CONFLICT

Along with the other causes for dissent, a major force was the collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society Anti-Banking Co. "It was reported that the 'bank' had been 'instituted by the will of God,' i.e., by revelation, 'and would never fail, let men do what they would.' This the Prophet denied in open conference saying that 'if this had been declared no one had authority from him for doing so';³⁸ many, however, became disaffected toward the Prophet.

The bank's failure has been attributed to an overextension of credit, to an alleged embezzlement of \$25,000 by Warren Parrish, and to other ills which have not yet been fully studied, but many of which were common to the nation's banking institutions as a whole during the economic panic of 1837.³⁹

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 486.

³⁸Roberts, *CHC*, Vol. I, p. 402.

³⁹Leonard Arrington in a note lists the various explanations given at the time for the failure of the bank, beginning with an editorial in the *Messenger and Advocate*, July of 1837; see Arrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 427-428.

Although the facts are disputed—and they may at this late date never be resolved—it is clear that there was a major quarrel between Frederick G. Williams and Joseph Smith arising out of the bank troubles. In an editorial in the August 1838 number of the *Elders' Journal*, Joseph Smith gives an account of the peculations of Warren Parrish as follows:

He had the handling of large sums of money, and it was soon discovered, that after the money was counted and laid away, and come to be used and counted again, that there was always a part of it missing; this being the case, repeatedly, and those who owned it, knowing that there was no other person but Parrish who had access to it, suspicion of necessity fixed itself on him. At last, the matter went to such lengths, that a search warrant was called for, to search his trunk. The warrant was demanded at the office of F. G. Williams, Esq., but he refused to grant it, some difficulty arose on account of it.⁴⁰

The Prophet's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, records one version of the incident in her book:

Prior to this, a bank was established in Kirtland. Soon after the sermon, above mentioned, Joseph discovered that a large amount of money had been taken away by fraud, from this bank. He immediately demanded a search warrant of Esquire Williams, which was flatly refused.

"I insist upon a warrant," said Joseph, "for if you will give me one, I can get the money, and if you do not, I will break you of your office."

"Well, break it is then," said Williams, "and we will strike hands upon it."

"Very well," said Joseph, "from henceforth I drop you from my quorum, in the name of the Lord."

Williams, in wrath, replied, "Amen."

Joseph entered a complaint against him, for neglect of duty, as an officer of justice; in consequence of which the magistracy was taken from him, and given to Oliver Cowdery.⁴¹

Mother Smith is at least partially in error. Oliver Cowdery and Frederick G. Williams served simultaneously as justices of the peace for a time; Oliver Cowdery resigned after a few months, and Frederick followed him not long afterward (25 September 1837). An election then was held in which Warren A. Cowdery and Thomas Burdick were elected to replace the

⁴⁰Roberts, *CHC*, Vol. I, p. 408.

⁴¹Lucy Mack Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

two men as justices.⁴² It is doubtful, too, that Joseph at that time had sufficient political influence to cause the removal of Dr. Williams from office. Once, when times were better, the Presidency of the Church had attempted to get a Kirtland justice of the peace recalled and had failed.⁴³

Another version of the argument, by Frederick's son, Ezra Granger Williams, who claims to have been an eyewitness, relates that the Prophet wished to draw out more money for speculative purposes; but Williams, acting as an officer of the bank, refused his request, suggesting he knew more about the rules of banking than did the Prophet, whereupon an ugly quarrel followed and angry words were used:

I did not think that the Prophet had any faults, but heard him as he greatly condemned my father. Then shortly thereafter he returned and on bended knees, crying like a child, humbly asked my father's forgiveness, admitting that he was wrong and that my father was right. He pleaded with him to still be friends and to continue by his side as usual. My father gladly forgave him, but answered, "No, as the people would never have the confidence in him again that they had had before."⁴⁴

Though they were reconciled, there was, in fact, public loss of confidence in President Williams. At a conference of the Church in Kirtland held 3 September 1837, Williams was sustained in the First Presidency, but the vote was not unanimous.⁴⁵

REMOVAL TO MISSOURI

By the end of 1837, most of the Mormons had left Kirtland for Missouri. It is not known precisely when President Williams arrived with his family, but it is reported that he built his home across from the Prophet's in the village of Far West.⁴⁶ At a conference of the Church held 7 November 1837, at Far West, the proposal to sustain President Williams in the

⁴²See *Kirtland Township Trustees' Minutes and Poll Book*, 1817-1838, pp. 153, 155, 157.

⁴³On 7 November 1867, seventy-one signatures were collected on a petition demanding the resignation of Esquire A. Hansen. They did not succeed, however, as Justice Hansen served out his term, which expired 18 June 1837, when Oliver Cowdery was elected in his place. The petition is found at the Lake County Historical Society, Mentor, Ohio.

⁴⁴Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 114.

⁴⁵DHC, Vol. II, 509.

⁴⁶Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 115, 118.

presidency again met with opposition, and, after a lengthy debate, Hyrum Smith was nominated to take his place:

He then nominated Frederick G. Williams to be his second counselor, but he was objected to by Elder Lyman Wight in a few remarks referring to a certain letter written to this place by the said Frederick G. Williams.

Also Elder Marsh objected to President Williams.

Elder James Emmet also objected to President Williams.

Bishop Edward Partridge said he seconded President Williams' nomination and should vote for him; and as to said letter, he had heard it and saw nothing so criminal in it.

President David Whitmer also made a few remarks in President Williams' favor.

Elder Marsh made further remarks.

Elder Thomas Grover also objected to President Williams.

President Sidney Rigdon then nominated President Hyrum Smith to take President Williams' place.

The moderator called for a vote in favor of President Williams, but he was rejected.

He then called for a vote in favor of President Hyrum Smith, which was carried unanimously.⁴⁷

Elder Williams, though no longer a member of the First Presidency, was still a member of the Church in good standing as evidenced by the fact that on 6 December 1837 he was appointed to sign elders' licenses as chairman *pro tempore* of the Missouri high council, in the absence of President Whitmer.⁴⁸

Of particular interest as indicating the Williamses' feelings in 1838 is a letter written to Rebecca Williams from her brother.

After her baptism into the Church, her father had disowned her and had refused members of the family permission to have anything further to do with her. When her father learned of the 1837-1838 exodus of the saints from Kirtland and heard it

⁴⁷*DHC*, Vol. II, 522, 523. Joseph Smith recorded a revelation indicating that transgression was the cause for Elder Williams's removal from the Presidency:

"Revelation given July 8, 1838, making known the duty of William W. Phelps and Frederick G. Williams. Verily, thus saith the Lord, in consequence of their transgressions their former standing has been taken away from them, and now, if they will be saved, let them be ordained as Elders in my Church to preach my Gospel and travel abroad from land to land and from place to place, to gather mine elect unto me, saith the Lord, and let this be their labors from henceforth Amen." *DHC*, Vol. III, 46, see footnote. B. H. Roberts indicated that he found this formerly unpublished revelation on file in Package XVI at the Church Historian's Office.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. II, 527.

rumored that his daughter and son-in-law turned from the Church and denounced Joseph Smith, he wrote Rebecca and asked her to come home if the rumor were true. Rebecca answered him from Far West, Missouri on 1 August 1838 reaffirming their faith both in the Church and the Prophet. His letter relates that their father had read her letter and, after a moment of silence, had looked up and said, "Not a word of repentance!"⁴⁹

By April of 1839, Joseph Smith had lived through his imprisonment at Liberty and had escaped his captors, and most of the membership of the Church had been run out of Missouri under the Extermination Order of Governor Boggs. The scattered saints had begun to regroup themselves on the eastern side of the Mississippi River, principally at Quincy, Illinois. When Dr. Williams arrived there, he learned that he and several others had been excommunicated from the Church on 17 March 1839. They were charged with "leaving the saints in time of peril, persecution and dangers, and acting against the interests of the Church." We do not know more precisely the substance of the charges.⁵⁰ In spite of this, Dr. Williams continued his close association with the Church. He was one of those asked by Joseph Smith a few months later to make affidavits concerning the property they had lost in Missouri so that he might use them to aid in obtaining redress from the federal government.⁵¹

At the Church conference held in April of 1840 in Nauvoo, "Frederick G. Williams presented himself on the stand, and

⁴⁹Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁵⁰DHC, Vol. III, 284. The following may indicate the nature of the charges. At the trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and others for "high treason" and other crimes against the State of Missouri, begun 12 November 1838—printed as Senate Document 189 on 15 February 1841—Burr Riggs, one of the State's witnesses (and Williams's son-in-law), testified that Sidney Rigdon suspected Dr. Williams of using his influence against the Church:

"About the latter part of July, I heard Sidney Rigdon say, [that] Wm. W. Phelps and Dr. Williams, and he strongly suspected John Corrill, were using their influence against the presidency of the church; and further said, Corrill and Phelps were men of great influence in the country, and their influence must be put down." Senate Document 189, p. 28.

⁵¹His affidavit reads: "I do certify that I was a resident of Caldwell county, in the State of Missouri, in the year of our Lord 1838, and owned land to a considerable amount, building lots, etc., in the village of Far West; and in consequence of mobocracy together with Governor Boggs' exterminating order, was compelled to leave the state under great sacrifice of real and personal property, which has reduced and left myself and family in a state of poverty, with a delicate state of health, in an advanced stage of life. Furthermore this deponent saith not. Given under my hand at Quincy, Illinois, March 17, 1840." DHC, Vol. IV, 69. The original is on file at the Church Historian's Office.

humbly asked forgiveness for his conduct, and expressed his determination to do the will of God in the future. His case was presented to the conference by President Hyrum Smith, when it was unanimously resolved, that Fredrick [sic] G. Williams be forgiven, and be received into the fellowship of the Church."⁵²

Brother Williams remained in the Church the rest of his life. His home was in Quincy, Illinois,⁵³ where he continued to practice medicine; but he made frequent trips to Nauvoo to treat and visit his longtime friend, the Prophet. On his last visit, Joseph Smith put his arm around him and said, "Brother Frederick, I hate to see you return home; you are going there to die." Frederick answered, "I am already a dead man."⁵⁴ He died a short time later at his home in Quincy of a hemorrhage of the lungs—although his son Ezra thought it was more of a broken heart⁵⁵—on 10 October 1842, two years before the Prophet's martyrdom.

In the spirit of the covenant Frederick G. Williams had made, his wife Rebecca and son Ezra heeded the Church's call⁵⁶ and went west with the Ezra T. Benson Company in 1849. Rebecca married President Heber C. Kimball and lived until 1862. Ezra G. Williams, following in his father's footsteps, became a successful doctor and established the first hospital west of the Mississippi. He was also surgeon-general of the Nauvoo Legion in Utah and participated in the Echo Canyon War. Through him, many hundreds of Frederick G. Williams's descendants are active in the Church today in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joseph Smith that "his generation after him shall flourish." This family was the only one from the original First Presidency to go west and stay in the Church.

CONCLUSION

In 1925, B. H. Roberts wrote the following letter to Frederick's grandson:

My attention has been called to what is considered a little

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵³Williams bought Lot 7, Block 30 on 10 July 1840 from his son-in-law Burr Riggs. See Book Q, p. 156, *Land Records of Adams County, Illinois*, at Adams County Courthouse, Quincy, Illinois.

⁵⁴Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 126, 127.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶Heber C. Kimball wrote a special letter to the family then living in St. Louis, urging them to come with the saints, that he would look after them. The letter is found in *Journal No. 370*, Church Historian's Office.

neglect of your father's or grandfather's historical connection with the Church and concerning the work to be done for him in the Temple. The matter was called to my attention because of the sympathy that I have for our early Church leaders and the recollection of the fact by me that in some cases perhaps fairness and justice was not always delt out to them in the dark and cloudy days thru which the Church passed, and when men thru lack of experience and adjustment to the new and developing organization got out of step and lagged behind.

I am informed by those who approached me on the subject, that arrangements were made for him to receive the ordinances of the Temple, including the very highest that can be given to man, and if such an approval for such work was given at any time, I think that it devolves upon you to earnestly carry that forth to completion, removing obstacles that may have arisen concerning it so that justice may be secured for this veteran in the work of the Lord, for I am one who believes that the little weaknesses and misfortunes that baffle men ought not to stand in the way of those who were undoubtedly chosen of the Lord to assist in bring [ing] forth this work, and Dr. Williams was one who contributed to that cause and his legal representatives should be diligent in seeing that there is secured to him every blessing which of right can be claimed in his behalf.⁵⁷

Prior to joining the Church, Frederick Granger Williams had become a successful doctor with an established practice and a bright future; he had held an elective, civil office for four years; owned land, was relatively wealthy and highly respected. He entered the Church in his mature years, forsaking all these material things, vigorously engaging in the Church's activities whatever they were. Although his testimony and love of the gospel and for Joseph Smith caused him to be persecuted and driven from his home—and in time it cost him all that he owned and broke his health—it was only within the Church that he rose to his greatest heights. He became a justice of the peace, the editor of a newspaper, the president of a bank, a trustee of a school, and a member of the Presidency of the Church. His was the privilege of being equal in holding the keys of the Kingdom with Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon (D&C 90:6). He participated in many glorious spiritual experiences culminating with the dedication of the Kirtland Tem-

⁵⁷Letter from B. H. Roberts to Ezra H. G. Williams, 10 October 1925, a copy of which can be found at the Church Historian's Office.

ple, where he saw an angel⁵⁸ and—greatest privilege of all—was permitted to see the Savior himself.⁵⁹ He lost his position of leadership and eventually even his membership in the Church. But whatever his personal weaknesses, he had the strength of character to maintain his loyalty to the Prophet and return humbly to the Church, when it would have been so easy to have disintegrated in bitterness.

⁵⁸*DHC*, Vol. II, 427. Joseph Smith records:

"President Frederick G. Williams arose and testified that while President Rigdon was making his first prayer, an angel entered the window and took his seat between Father Smith and himself, and remained there during the prayer."

⁵⁹"On the first day of the dedication, President Frederick G. Williams, one of the counselors of the Prophet, and who occupied the upper pulpit, bore testimony that the Savior, dressed in His vesture without seam, came into the stand and accepted of the dedication of the house; that he saw Him, and he gave a description of His clothing and all things pertaining to it." George A. Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. XI, p. 10.

Fire

Mildred T. Hunt*

The texture of the fabric
And its inner strength
Tell whether
Fire destroys

Or

Illuminates and blesses—
Even transfigures
With sure knowledge
Him whose avid breath
Excites its pure flame.

*Mrs. Hunt lives in Sacramento, California.