

The Colesville Branch and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon

The Colesville Branch and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon

Larry C. Porter

With the many branch, ward and stake organizations which currently bedeck the international scene of Mormonism, it is understandable that the activities of a small branch of Saints at Colesville, Broome County, New York, could have been virtually forgotten with the passage of time. Yet, at the close of 1830, it was one of some five principal branches serving as focal points for the gathering of the faithful in the new Church. Fayette, Seneca County, New York, served as the headquarters of the Church, while other branches existed at Colesville; Kirtland and Mentor, Geauga County, Ohio; and Warrensville, Cayahoga County, Ohio.¹ The Colesville Branch was personally inaugurated by the Prophet Joseph Smith and its membership played a significant role in the initial years of the new dispensation. Drawn by Joseph's affirmation of communication with the heavens and the supportive evidences contained in the Book of Mormon, the Colesville Saints gave impetus to the missionary zeal of the Restoration and provided elements of needed leadership for the rapidly expanding faith.

A local account places Joseph Smith in the New York-Pennsylvania border region "shortly after 1818," as a participant in a lumbering enterprise.² However, Joseph's own narrative first places him in the area in October 1825, employed by one Josiah "Stoal."³ Mr. Stowell's farm bordered the Susquehanna River some two miles south of the village of South Bainbridge (now Afton), Chenango County, New York. He had professedly identified an area near the village of Harmony, in the township of Harmony (now Oakland Township), Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, about three miles below the New York Line, where

a company of Spaniards, a long time since, when the country was uninhabited by white settlers, excavated from the bowels of the earth ore, and coined a large quantity of money; after which they secured the cavity and evacuated, leaving a part still in the cave, purposing to return at some distant period.⁴

Having been previously unsuccessful discovering the whereabouts of the mine,⁵ Mr. Stowell had hired a number of workmen to assist him in seeking for the purported treasure. In 1825 he was desirous of securing Joseph's services "on account of having heard that he possessed certain means, by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye,"⁶ as he had heard while visiting a relative, Simpson Stowell, at Palmyra, New York.

He offered \$14 per month to Joseph,⁷ who initially demurred. But the insistence of Mr. Stowell and the prospect of good wages apparently prompted him and his father to go to the site on the Susquehanna. According to the terms of a purported "Articles of Agreement," Josiah Stowell, Calvin Stowell, William Hale, Charles Newton, William I. Wiley, the Widow Harper [Mrs. Oliver Harper], Joseph Smith, Sr., Joseph Smith, Jr., John F. Shephard, Elihu Stowell, and John Grant were to receive designated shares of any wealth realized from the venture.⁸

Isaac Hale states that Joseph Smith, Jr. and the other "money-diggers" arrived at Harmony in November 1825, and boarded at his place during the course of their mining operation. He further attested that after a short time they ". . . became discouraged, and soon after dispersed. This took place about the 17th of November, 1825."⁹ Joseph described these proceedings when he asserted that, "After I went to live with him [Stowell], he took me, with the rest of his hands, to dig for the silver mine, at which I continued to work for nearly a month, without success in our undertaking, and finally I prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it."¹⁰

While at the Hale home, Joseph became very much attracted to a daughter, Emma, who was similarly drawn to him. Of this attraction, Isaac Hale reported that after

. . . the conclusion of the digging, young Smith made several visits at my house, and at length asked my consent to his marrying my daughter Emma. This I refused, and gave him my reasons for so doing; some of which were, that he was a stranger, and followed a business that I could not approve; he then left the place.¹¹

The resulting "distant" courtship terminated some fourteen months later on January 18, 1827, with their elopement and marriage in South Bainbridge, New York, in a ceremony performed by one Squire Tarbill [Tarble?].¹²

Between the time of his lodging at the Hale home and his eventual marriage, Joseph worked for Josiah Stowell, who also operated saw mills on the Susquehanna River and owned holdings which numbered in the hundreds of acres.¹³ A most interesting personal sketch of Mr. Stowell portrays him as follows:

Deacon Isaiah [Josiah] Stowell, . . . a man of much force of character, of indomitable will, and well fitted as a pioneer in the unbroken wilderness that this country possessed at the close of the last century. He was one of the Vermont sufferers, who for defective titles, consequent on the forming a new State from a part of Massachusetts, in 1791, received wild lands in Bainbridge. He had been educated in the spirit of orthodox puritanism, and was officially connected with the first Presbyterian church of the town, organized by Rev. Mr. Chapin. He was a very industrious exemplary man, and by severe labor and frugality had acquired surroundings that excited the envy of many of his less fortunate neighbors. He had at this time grown up sons and daughters to share his prosperity and the honors of his name.¹⁴

Joseph Smith also worked as a laborer for Joseph Knight, Sr., whose residence was approximately three and one-half miles south of the Stowell place.¹⁵ The Knight home was situated on the south side [also referred to as the “east” side] of the Susquehanna River, opposite the village of Ninevah, near the “Colesville Bridge,” Colesville Township, New York.¹⁶ Mr. Knight operated a farm, a grist-mill, and a carding machine [the “carding-mill” was on the Susquehanna, about two miles above Centre Village, Colesville Township, Broome County].¹⁷

In his journal, Newel Knight, the second son of Joseph Knight, recounted the hiring of Joseph Smith and the subsequent telling of his experiences with the plates containing the Book of Mormon to the Knights:

The business in which my father was engaged often required him to have hired help, and among the many from time to time employed was a young man by the name of Joseph Smith, Jun., to whom I was particularly attached. His noble deportment, his faithfulness and his kind address, could not fail to win the esteem of those who had the pleasure of his acquaintance. . . This chosen instrument told us of God’s manifestations to him, of the discovery and receiving of the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, of his persecutions for the gospel’s sake, and many other items of his eventful life.¹⁸

Joseph Knight, Jr., gave an expanded picture of his father’s holdings and the family’s acquaintance with Joseph and the “gold book”:

My father moved to Chenango co., York State in December 1808. In a few years [June 24, 1811] he bought a farm on the Susquehanna river, in Broome co., 20 miles above the great bend, built a grist mill and two carding machines. I was raised to work in them. My father bought three other farms and hired many hands; in 1827 [1826] he hired Joseph Smith; Joseph and I worked and slept together. My Father said Joseph was the best hand he ever hired, we found him a boy of truth, he was about 21 years of age. I think it was in November he made known to my father and I, that he had seen a vision, that a personage had appeared to him and told him where there was a gold book of ancient date buried and if he would follow the directions of the angel he would get it. We were told it in secret; I being the youngest son, my two elder brothers [Nahum and Newell] did not believe in such things; my Father and I believed what he told us.¹⁹

Both the townships of Colesville and Bainbridge traditionally claim that Joseph Smith attended school in their respective districts at some juncture during his residency there.²⁰ If indeed this was the case, it is interesting to note the possible curriculum for Colesville as suggested by the report of the Commissioners of Schools of the town of Colesville, signed September 26, 1826, “The Books most in use in the common schools of our town are the following (Viz.) Webster’s & Crandal’s Spelling Books, Testaments, English Readers, Walker’s Dictionary, Daboll’s Arithmetic, Flint’s Surveying, and Woodbridges’ & Wilett’s Geographies.”²¹

Apparently Joseph Smith's labors with Joseph Knight, Sr., were seasonal or at least sporadic as he was again in the hire of Josiah Stowell at the time of his wedding in 1827. Joseph states that ". . . we were married, while I was yet employed in the service of Mr. Stool. . . Immediately after my marriage, I left Sr. Stool's and went to my father's [Manchester, Ontario County, New York] and farmed with him that season."²²

The extent to which Joseph's close friends and confidants had prior knowledge of the time appointed for his securing the "Golden Plates" as being September 22, 1827, is rather obscure, but it seems obvious that both Knight and Stowell journeyed to Manchester about that time with a decided purpose in mind:

So far at least was the elder Knight taken into the Prophet's confidence that he purposely so arranged his affairs as to be at the Smith residence, near Manchester, at the time the plates of the Book of Mormon were given into Joseph's possession.²³

Josiah Stowell and Joseph Knight, Sr., came to the Smith home on September 20 and "tarried" several days, becoming primary witnesses to that momentous occasion. Although Lucy Smith's account suggests that they were not appraised of Joseph's going to the Hill Cumorah and were even making preparations to leave,²⁴ she also states that it was Mr. Knight's horse and wagon which were used to transport the plates from the Hill Cumorah to their initial hiding place in the birch log, and some two days later, it was Joseph Knight, Sr., and Josiah Stowell who were among those summoned to go in search of the three ruffians who beset Joseph when he retrieved the plates from an endangered situation.²⁵

In December 1827, when local persecution necessitated Joseph's removal from Manchester to his father-in-law's home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, the Prophet maintained his associations in Colesville and vicinity. His friends there gave him material assistance in sustaining his immediate needs. Joseph Knight, Sr., recorded:

I left my Father Joseph Knight, Sr., purchased a building spot adjoining my Father's and began to work for myself, and nearly ready to build a large house. Joseph had commenced to translate the plates, he told my father he wanted fifty dollars; my father could not raise it; he then came to me, the same day I sold my house lot and sent him a one horse wagon. Father and I often went to see him and carry him something to live upon; at last Oliver Cowdery came to write for him, then he got along faster.²⁶

In addition to the foodstuffs, Joseph Knight, Sr., also furnished Joseph and Oliver with some of the paper upon which the original copy of the Book of Mormon was first written.²⁷ On one of his visits to Harmony in May 1829, Joseph Knight, Sr., became the subject of a Revelation through the Prophet, which admonished him that ". . . no one can assist in this work except he

shall be humble and full of love, having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things, whatsoever shall be entrusted to his care.”²⁸ The work of translation would have been seriously curtailed, had it not been for the assistance of these discerning friends.

In early June 1829, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery moved to the Peter Whitmer, Sr., home in Fayette, New York, at his invitation. Here the translation was completed, the Witnesses called, and by March 26, 1830, the Book of Mormon made available to the public.²⁹ On April 6, 1830, “The Church of Jesus Christ” was organized in the Whitmer’s log home at Fayette. Without a list of those who attended the proceedings, the writer has been unable to determine if any of the people from Broome or Chenango Counties participated in the events of that day. Joseph Knight, Jr., states definitely that “. . . my father [Joseph Knight, Sr.] was not there.”³⁰ However, in that same month (April 1830) Joseph Smith made a special visit to the home of Joseph Knight, Sr., at Colesville, in a missionary endeavor:

Mr. Knight and his family were Universalists, but were willing to reason with me upon my religious views, and were as usual friendly and hospitable. We held several meetings in the neighborhood; we had many friends, and some enemies. Our meetings were well attended, and many began to pray vocally to Almighty God, that He would give them wisdom to understand the truth. Amongst those who attended our meetings regularly, was Newel Knight, son of Joseph Knight.³¹

Newel Knight was the first in his family and apparently the first of the Colesville Saints to accept the new gospel. During the last week in May 1830, he visited at Fayette, where he was baptized by David Whitmer.³² Soon after the first conference of the Church, held June 9, 1830, at the Whitmer farm, Joseph Smith returned to Colesville, accompanied by his wife Emma, Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer and David Whitmer.

The Sabbath arrived [June 27, 1830], we held our meeting, Oliver Cowdery preached, others bore testimony to the Book of Mormon, the doctrine of repentance, baptism for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost etc. . . . Early on Monday morning [June 28, 1830], Oliver Cowdery proceeded to baptize Emma Smith, Hezekiah Peck and wife [Martha Long], Joseph Knight and wife [Polly Peck], William Stringham, Joseph Knight Jun., Aaron Culver and wife [Hannah Peck], Levi Hall, Polly Knight and Julia Stringham.³³

Although not named in the above account, there were others baptized on June 28, 1830. Esther Knight Stringham, daughter of Joseph Knight, Sr., was baptized with her parents and her husband, William Stringham.³⁴ Sally Coburn Knight, wife of Newel Knight was also baptized at this time. However, her baptismal date is listed as June 29, 1830 [June 28?], a Tuesday, which would have been the day following Joseph’s arrest.³⁵ Anna Knight De Mill,

daughter of Joseph Knight, Sr. and wife of Freeborn De Mill, was similarly baptized on June 29, 1830 [June 28?].³⁶ It should also be noted here that “a short time afterwards,” Emily Coburn, sister of Sally Coburn Knight, was baptized over the strenuous objections of her father, Amasa Coburn, and the Revelation Mr. Shearer of the Presbyterian faith.³⁷

Joseph Knight, Jr., relates that the baptisms of June 28 were accompanied by disruptive events:

. . . when we were going from the water, we were met by many of our neighbors, pointing at us and asking if we had been washing sheep; before Joseph could confirm us he was taken by the officers to Chenango Co. [South Bainbridge] for trial, for saying that the Book of Mormon was a Revelation from God; my father employed two lawyers [James Davidson and John Reid] to plead for him and cleared him; that night our wagons were turned over and wood piled on them, and some sunk in the water, rails were piled against our doors, and chains sunk in the stream and a great deal of mischief done. Before Joseph got to my Father’s house he was taken again to be tried in Broome Co., Father employed the same lawyers who cleared him there.³⁸

The confirmation of the new Saints, so rudely interrupted by the constable, was subsequently accomplished. Newel Knight and his wife Sally visited Joseph Smith in Harmony in early August 1830, and with Emma, were confirmed members of the Church. The remaining confirmations were completed on August 29, 1830, when Joseph, Hyrum Smith, and John and David Whitmer visited Colesville. “That evening we assembled the Church, and confirmed them, partook of the Sacrament and held a happy meeting. . . .”³⁹

One report says that on September 6, 1830, Freeborn De Mill, husband of Anna Knight De Mill, was baptized by Hyrum Smith and confirmed by Joseph Smith at Colesville.⁴⁰ However, another source lists his baptism at September 26, 1830.⁴¹ If the second date is correct, this would conceivably place him in Fayette for the first day of the second conference of the Church where “A number were baptized. . . and the word of the Lord prevailed.”⁴² The minutes of this conference, which assembled at the Whitmer farm September 26–28, 1830, lists the “whole” membership of the Church as sixty-two. They also note that Newel Knight was “ordained a priest under the hand of Brother Oliver Cowdery.”⁴³

Newel Knight reports that soon after this conference

Brother Hyrum Smith, wife [Jerusha Barden] and family [Lovina and Mary] came to Colesville, to live with me, but most of his time, as also that of my own, was spent in the villages around, preaching the gospel wherever we could find any who would listen to us, either in public or private. A few believed and were baptized. . . On the 14th of October Brother Hyrum Smith and I held a meeting at my uncle Hezekiah Peck’s. . . At this meeting, four persons came forward and manifested their desire to forsake all, serve their God in humility, and obey the requirement of the gospel.⁴⁴

A few days afterward, still in October 1830, Newel Knight and Hyrum Smith called on another of Newel's uncles, his mother's brother, Ezekial Peck. Both Ezekial and his wife, Electa Buck, embraced the gospel and were baptized.⁴⁵ Elizabeth Knight, daughter of Joseph Knight, Sr., was baptized at Colesville by Hyrum Smith on November 1, 1830. She was then thirteen years of age and said to have been the youngest member to be baptized up to that time.⁴⁶

Orson Pratt was ordained an elder at Fayette by Joseph Smith on December 1, 1830, and sent on his "first mission" to Colesville to labor with Hyrum Smith and Newel Knight. He returned that same month to Fayette, accompanied by Hyrum.⁴⁷ The brother of Martin Harris, Emer Harris, living at or near Windham, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, was contacted and apparently baptized, by Hyrum Smith and Newel Knight on February 10, 1831.⁴⁸

In January 1831, Jared Carter set out on a business trip of several weeks, and stopped at the home of John Peck, a brother of Hezekiah Peck and Polly Peck Knight, in Lisle Township, Broome County. John was opposed to the work of Joseph Smith, but allowed Jared to examine a copy of the Book of Mormon:

... after reading a while in the Book of Mormon and praying earnestly to the Lord that he would show me the truth of the Book I became immediately convinced that it was a Revelation of God & it had such an influence on my mind that I had no mind to pursue my business. . . on visiting the church of Christ at Colesville & having an interview with them I felt it my duty to separate from Babalon [sic] and be baptized. Accordingly I was baptized by Hyrum Smith about the 20th of February for the remission of sins & as I was baptized I felt the influences of the Spirit of God for as I stepped out of the water I was wrapped in the spirit both soul & body even so that the chill of the cold water was taken from me. . . .⁴⁹

There are others who affiliated with the Colesville Branch at this time, but the date and circumstances of their baptisms are still unidentified. Josiah Stowell has always intrigued the writer. He was obviously a leading figure in the affairs of that branch, yet the details of his baptism or his reasons for not accompanying the eventual move to Ohio, have eluded us. Whether his extensive holdings, family, or condition of age (he was sixty-one years old) precluded his removal, is difficult to discern. There is one account which bears additional investigation, however. In a sworn statement given March 27, 1903, by one Sally Ann Beardsley, she says "I remember of the time when the followers of Smith including Deacon Josiah Stowell went away. It was said they were going to the Promised Land."⁵⁰ If the account is accurate, perhaps it is possible that Josiah did go with the Saints for a short season. However, the land deeds of Chenango County do not reflect a move to Ohio, but rather a removal to nearby Tioga County, New York.

In a series of land sales, over an extended period of years, Josiah Stowell, Sr., sold his holdings in Chenango County and made new purchases in Tioga County. In an indenture made on August 30, 1833, he purchased sixty-five acres on the north side of the Susquehanna River in the Town [Township] of Tioga, Tioga County, New York. The deed names him as a resident of the Town of Tioga.⁵¹ His wife, Mariam Bridgeman Stowell, died in Smithboro, Tioga County, New York, September 23, 1833, at the age of sixty.⁵² On June 28, 1839, Josiah is identified as an inhabitant of the “Town of Barton and County of Tioga.”⁵³ An indenture made on February 3, 1844, refers to him as being “of Chemung in the County of Chemung and State of New York.”⁵⁴ He is reported to have died at Smithboro, but no death date is mentioned.⁵⁵

That Josiah Stowell, Sr., did not lose his ardor for the faith is attested to in a letter written by a member of the Church, Martha L. Campbell, to Joseph Smith, at the instigation of Brother Stowell. Dated Elmira, Chemung County, New York, December 19, 1843, it reads as follows:

Brother Smith by the request of Brother Stowell I now set down to write you he is quite unwell & is some times fearfull that he cannot stand it through the winter & wishes me to say to you that he wants your prayers & the prayers of all the saints for the recovery of his health to in able him to gether among the Saints & he also wishes to know if you could receive him as a brother he says he shall come out [to Nauvoo] next spring if he lives & has health to indure the journey he says if he remains as well as at present he shall venture to star[t] he says he never staggard at the foundation [of] the work for he knew to mutch concerning it if I understood him wright he was the first person that took the Plates out of your hands the morning you brough[t] them in, & he observed blessed is he that seeth & says he has seen & believed . . . he gave me strict chur [charge] to say to you his faith is good concerning the work o[f] the Lord he has ever manifested good feeling toward [you] and your fathers family & also the Church . . . we do earnestly solicit your prayers for us in regard to our health & also to besech the Lord for us that he may open the way for us to come up to Zion the next season for to meet with the saints would be a delicious morsel. . . .⁵⁶

Whether the state of Josiah Stowell’s health or word of the death of Joseph Smith (June 27, 1844) were the factors which precluded his going to Nauvoo, is presently an unknown. Perhaps even death denied him the “delicious morsel” which he sought.

Not all of the early converts of the Colesville Branch stayed faithful to their covenants or remained with the Colesville group. Reed Peck turned antagonistic towards Mormonism during the “Missouri Period” and witnessed against the Saints at a trial in Richmond, Missouri in November 1838. He was subsequently excommunicated from the Church at a conference in Quincy, Illinois, March 17, 1839.⁵⁷ Peck prepared a strong anti-Mormon treatise containing his observations of the Mormon conflict in Missouri,

which manuscript was extensively quoted by Lu B. Cake in his examination of the rudiments of Mormonism.⁵⁸ As late as August 28, 1862, he was living in Cortlandville, Cortland County, New York, when he purchased his son Presson's land in the Township of Afton.⁵⁹ There he died August 23, 1894, and his wife Clarissa⁶⁰ was later buried with him in the East Afton Cemetery.⁶¹ Although he chose to disassociate himself from the Church, Reed Peck's father, mother, brother and sister continued with the Saints to Nauvoo.⁶² Benjamin Slade was another member of the Colesville Branch who left the Church and became a witness for the State of Missouri in the prosecution of the brethren at Richmond. On January 13, 1857, he and his wife Roana (?) [Roxa?] were listed as residents of the Township of Guilford, Chenango County, New York.⁶³ Aaron Slade, Jr., ". . . went to Buffalo with the Mormons enroute for Nauvoo, but returned and settled on the Chemung."⁶⁴

Baptismal records are not available for others we associate with the Colesville Saints. Identified as a member of the Branch in Missouri in September 1833, Clark Slade is probably one of the original "Broome-Chenango" Saints.⁶⁵ Philip Slade and his wife Eliza, who may or may not have been associated with Mormonism, are "suspects." They resided in Chenango Township, and were disposing of property in the Village of Binghamton on March 2, 1831.⁶⁶ Phebe Crosby Peck affiliated with the Colesville Branch. Her husband Benjamin (brother of Hezekiah Peck), died April 30, 1829, prior to the organization of the Church. Later in Missouri in about 1833, Phebe married Joseph Knight, Sr., following the death of his first wife, Polly Peck Knight.⁶⁷

Attempts are yet being made by the writer to trace a number of other "prospective" members of the Colesville organization, among them a Mr. "Kimball," who "lived and carried on sugar making about one-half mile from my [Joseph Hervy] home. I was often in his shop. People said that when Smith passed through the adjoining valley Kimball joined them."⁶⁸

The third conference of the Church was convened at the home of Peter Whitmer, Sr., in Fayette on January 2, 1831. At that gathering, the Prophet Joseph Smith advanced a Revelation from the Lord which vitally affected the entire Colesville membership: ". . . Wherefore, for this cause I give unto you the commandment that ye should go to the Ohio; and there I will give unto you my law; and there you shall be endowed with power from on high. . . ."⁶⁹ Of this revolutionary announcement, Newel Knight simply states:

It was at this conference that we were instructed as a people, to begin the gathering of Israel, and a Revelation was given to the prophet on this subject.

Having returned home from conference, in obedience to the commandment which had been given, I, together with the Colesville Branch, began to make preparations to go to Ohio. . . .As might be expected, we were obliged

to make great sacrifices of our property. The most of my time was occupied in visiting the brethren, and helping to arrange their affairs, so that we might travel together in one company.⁷⁰

In the midst of these preparations, Hyrum Smith, Presiding Elder of the Colesville Branch, received the following communication from the Prophet, dated Kirtland, Ohio, March 3, 1831:

My dearly Beloved Brother Hyrum I have had much concern [*sic*] about you but I always remember you in my prayers calling upon God to keep you safe in spite of men or devils I think you had better come into this country immediately for the Lord has commanded us that we should call the Elders of this Church together [*sic*] unto this place as soon as possible.⁷¹

In response to this directive, Hyrum went to Kirtland, leaving Newel Knight to supervise preparations for removal within the Branch. Indicative of the vast amount of preparation required to move a body of people are a sampling of the land transactions which were necessitated.

Freeborn De Mill disposed of thirty-six acres on March 1, 1831, and some twenty-five acres on July 16, 1830 (the latter undoubtedly by proxy).⁷² Aaron Culver sold one hundred acres on March 9, 1831.⁷³ In an indenture dated March 9, 1831, Newel Knight sold the sixty acres which he had acquired from his father, Joseph Knight, Sr., in 1828.⁷⁴ Joseph Knight, Sr., apparently had some difficulty selling his land and was required to secure the services of an attorney, William M. Waterman. The May 5, 1831 *Broome Republican* bears this notice:

FOR SALE, THE farm lately occupied by Joseph Knight, situate in the town of Colesville, near the Colesville Bridge—bounded on one side by the Susquehanna River, and containing about one hundred and forty two acres. On said Farm are two Dwelling Houses, a good Barn, and a fine Orchard. The terms of the sale will be liberal—Apply to

Wm. M. Waterman⁷⁵

Newel was aided by his young brother, Joseph, Jr., who in early April of 1831, went on foot among certain of the brethren to alert them concerning the proposed move.⁷⁶ The exact date of departure for the Colesville Saints in their journey to Ohio is difficult to establish. It is probable that there was more than one group on the move at about the same time. Ithaca, Tompkins County, New York, was evidently the appointed rendezvous for the respective parties on the road. Joseph Knight, Jr., states that “In 1831, we met at Ithaca and came to Buffalo together. . . .”⁷⁷

There are some very interesting local accounts of having witnessed the Saints on the move. Harriet E. Shay recalls:

I distinctly remember seeing the followers of Joseph Smith, Jr., of Mormon fame, go by my fathers, George Clappers, house on the east side of the Susquehanna River in the Town of Afton County of Chenango, N.Y. between

Afton, formerly South Bainbridge, and Nineveh, on what is now known as the Lewis Poole farm.

To the best of my recollection there were eight (8) or ten (10) wagons. They were covered like western emigrant wagons, and were drawn by oxen.

One reason I remember so distinctly of the wagons going by is from the fact that my Uncle Cornelius Atherton was engaged to be married to Betsy Peck daughter of Hezekiah Peck, who with his wife and son, Reed Peck went with the Mormons at that time. Hezekiah Peck forbade the marriage of Betsy and Uncle Cornelius unless he would join the Mormons and go with them; this Uncle Cornelius would not do.

That day was made impression to me as I witnessed the sorrow of Uncle Cornelius who was at our house when the wagon train went by.

I also remember an incident which occurred about the same time which later became more familiar to me as I became acquainted with the parties. Stephen Pratt was engaged to be married to a Peck girl, a relative of Hezekiah Peck, I think her name was Anna. Just before the followers of Smith started they ran away and were married, therefore they did not go with the Mormons.

I knew Reed Peck, son of Hezekiah, well after he deserted the Mormons at Kirtland, Ohio, or Nauvoo. He came back to Afton and spent his days above the village on east side of the river. His place is known as Pecks Mills. He died about three years ago. He was a man highly respected.

Mrs. Harriet E. Shay being duly sworn deposes and says, that the above statement is true to the best of her knowledge and belief.

Harriet E. Shay

subscribed and sworn to
before me this 27th day
of March 1903

Delos Van Woert, Notary Public⁷⁸

Joseph Hervy similarly remembered a party of departing Saints:

. . . passing through Coventry into the town of Lisle (now Triangle), thence up the south branch of Halfway brook, a stream that had its rise in the town of Smithville and a small village of that name. . . My memory is that some twenty or thirty women, girls, men and boys, on foot and in two old-fashioned western emigrant wagons comprised the emigrating party. I well remember hearing it talked that women left their husbands and families to with Smith. . . .⁷⁹

Subpoenaed as a witness in Colesville when only a few days out, Newel Knight recorded “. . . this plan has been adopted by our enemies to add a little more to the persecutions already heaped upon us. The whole company declined traveling until I should return.”⁸⁰ Jared Carter was to recount “. . . we went to Ethica [*sic*] & took water to go to the Ohio.”⁸¹ Ithaca is situated on the south end of Cayuga Lake which opened a system of waterways all the way to Ohio. Their route would have taken them north, via

the Cayuga and Seneca Canals, which generally followed the course of the Seneca River, and thence into the Erie Canal system, conveying them west to Buffalo.

At Buffalo, the Colesville Saints were frustrated in their efforts to take a sloop for Fairport, Ohio, because “the wind blew from the lake and filled the harbor with ice, so that we were detained nearly two weeks.”⁸² Approximately a week after their initial arrival, they were joined by eighty Saints who had embarked from Waterloo, Seneca County, under the leadership of Lucy Mack Smith. While these two groups were conversing, still another boat “landed, having on board about thirty brethren, among whom was Thomas B. Marsh, who immediately joined us. . . .”⁸³

While at Buffalo, Jared Carter was appointed to lead “12 or 13” Colesville brethren [Joseph Knight, Jr., among them] over land to Dunkirk, New York, where they took a steamboat to Fairport, Ohio, and then proceeded to Kirtland. This feat was accomplished under very trying circumstances.⁸⁴ According to the itinerary of Freeborn DeMill, the Saints at Buffalo were finally able to take passage from that Lake Erie port on Wednesday, May 11, 1831. After a most disagreeable crossing, due to boisterous winds, they reached Fairport, Ohio on Saturday, May 14, 1831.⁸⁵ Upon their arrival at Kirtland, “it was advised that the Colesville branch remain together, and go to a neighboring town called Thompson [sixteen miles northeast of Kirtland], as a man by the name of Copely had a considerable tract of land there which he offered to let the Saints occupy.”⁸⁶ Here they were to be organized under the law of consecration and stewardship. However, Joseph Knight, Jr., recounts that the arrangement with Copley soon lost its attractiveness, necessitating their removal to Missouri:

. . . we went to Kirtland, Ohio [then to Thompson, Ohio], and commenced preparing houses on a brother’s land who had a thousand acres, my folks came on, they were called the Colesville church; we planted and sowed a great deal; the man was turned out of the church for bad conduct; his name was Lemon Copley, he then began to persecute us and we had to leave his farm and pay sixty dollars damage for fitting up his houses and planting his ground. We then had a Revelation to go to the western line of the States; we arrived at Independence, Jackson Co., Missouri, 25 July 1831.⁸⁷

The Revelation referred to by Joseph Knight, Jr., was given to Newel Knight in consequence of the difficulties with Lemon Copley and contains a directive that “you shall take your journey into the regions westward, unto the land of Missouri, unto the borders of the Lamanites.”⁸⁸ Again obedient to the Prophet, the Colesville Saints commenced their journey on June 28, 1831 and reached Independence (as stated above) on July 25, 1831.⁸⁹ Newel Knight, leader of the expedition, gives us some additional particulars:

On the third day of July I took passage with the Colesville company at Wellsville, Ohio, arrived at St. Louis on Sunday the 18th, on Sunday the 18th I took passage on the steamer Chieftain for Independence Mo., where we arrived the 25th. August 2nd, commenced the first house in Zion. August 3rd, the land of Zion and the lot for the Temple was consecrated, the Colesville branch began to labor diligently. On the 4th of August, the first conference was held at the house of bro. Lewis [Joshua Lewis]. On the 7th my mother [Polly Peck Knight] died. The time now passed [*sic*] in our common Labours, building houses and sowing grain untill [*sic*] winter. Jan 22 and 23 [1832]. A general conference was held at my house where much business was done. I was employed as President of the branch the most of my time.⁹⁰

Settling in Kaw Township, the Colesville Branch continued to maintain its identity throughout the stay in Jackson County, July 25, 1831 to December 1, 1833.⁹¹ Even when the Jackson mob drove them into Clay County, Missouri, during the winter of 1833, Newel Knight attested that “The Colesville Branch, as usual, kept together and formed a small settlement on the Missouri bottoms, building themselves temporary houses.”⁹² However, in 1836, when the Saints in Clay County were again required to leave their homes, the Colesville Branch became a nonentity, its membership being absorbed into other organizations of the Church.

From the very inception of “Mormonism,” the Saints comprising the Colesville Branch linked their lives inexorably with the Restored Gospel and the volume which had inspired their conversion, the Book of Mormon. They relinquished family, friends, homes and material comforts in pursuit of their testimonies. The Prophet Joseph Smith was not unmindful of these sacrifices. On August 22, 1842, while making entries in the Book of the Law of the Lord, he formulated a tribute to certain of the Colesville membership which might well serve as a prototype for all:

... I am now recording in the Book of the Law of the Lord,—of such as have stood by me in every hour of peril, for these fifteen long years past,—say, for instance, my aged and beloved brother, Joseph Knight, Sen., who was among the number of the first to administer to my necessities, while I was laboring in the commencement of the bringing forth of the work of the Lord, and of laying the foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For fifteen years he has been faithful and true, and even-handed and exemplary, and virtuous and kind, never deviating to the right hand or to the left. Behold he is a righteous man, may God Almighty lengthen out the old man’s days; and may his trembling, tortured, and broken body be renewed, and in the vigor of health turn upon him, if it be Thy will, consistently, O God; and it shall be said of him, by the sons of Zion, while there is one of them remaining, that this man was a faithful man in Israel; therefore, his name shall never be forgotten.

There are his sons, Newel Knight and Joseph Knight, Jun., whose names I record in the Book of the Law of the Lord with unspeakable delight, for they are my friends.⁹³

Mr. Porter is a doctoral candidate in history of religion at Brigham Young University. He is on leave from the Department of Seminaries and Institutes where he has served as a teacher, principal, and district coordinator, and currently lives on the Martin Harris farm in Palmyra, New York.

1. "Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," December 31, 1831. (Located in the LDS Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah).

2. Emily C. Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1873), p. 577.

3. Joseph Smith, "Journal History of the Church"—"Documentary History of the Church" (MSS located in LDS Church Historian's Office), Book A-1, p. 7. See also Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City, 1902), Vol. 1, p. 17 [commonly called *Documentary History of the Church*; hereafter cited as *DHC*]. In the original manuscript "Stoal" is also spelled "Stowel" with a single "l". Official records in the Chenango County, New York, Clerk's and Surrogate's offices spell the name with a double "l", "Stowell." The writer will adopt this latter form, "Stowell."

4. *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland), October 1835, p. 201. On August 14, 1968, the writer personally examined the excavation which is east of "Flat Brook" and northeast of the McKune Cemetery, which according to local residents was the site of this early digging. There is a depression there although it is obscured by heavy underbrush.

5. James H. Smith, *History of Chenango and Madison Counties, New York* (Syracuse, 1880), pp. 153–154. This account calls Josiah, "Isaiah," which is incorrect.

6. Lucy Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City, 1902), p. 91.

7. *Fraser's Magazine*, New series, Vol. 7 (February 1873), p. 229; *DHC*, Vol. 3, p. 29.

8. *Susquehanna (Pa.) Journal*, March 20, 1880, cit. *The Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, April 23, 1880.

9. *The Susquehanna Register* (Montrose), May 1, 1834.

10. *DHC*, Vol. 1, p. 17. The "old gentleman," Josiah Stowell, would have been fifty-five years of age at the time.

11. *The Susquehanna Register*, May 1, 1834.

12. *DHC*, Vol. 1, p. 17. The writer believes that the spelling of "Tarbill" may well prove to be "Tarbell" or "Tarble," names prominent in the area. It is also possible that the "Squire Tarbill" sought is Esq. Zachariah Tarble, who was in the locality at the right time, but the connecting link, if any, must yet be established.

13. See land deeds identified in the Grantee and Grantor Indices, Chenango County, Books 5, Series 1, S–Z 1798–1874, pp. 2224–2230. In a cursory survey of deeds, the writer found over 800 acres purchased by Josiah Stowell in Chenango County, New York.

14. *The Chenango Union* (Norwich, New York), May 2, 1877.

15. An excellent description of the physical layout of the Joseph Knight, Sr., property is furnished in the following account:

Just opposite of Nineveh, on the east side of the river, on what is now known as the Scott, or Henry P. Bush farm, in a little old, gray, frame house lived a poor man named Knight who worked hard to sustain his little family. At the outlet of Pickerel Lake, on this farm, Knight had a carding mill, the dam trenches and raceways being still visible. In this mill Knight toiled from day to day to eke out the scanty supply for his little ones. Some distance west of the carding mill on a slight rise of ground, stands an old barn, in which Smith later preached to his disciples, giving forth his doctrines and revealing the new truth.

“Jacob Morris Papers,” #1656, newspaper clipping dated Thursday, Aug. 16, 1888. (Located in the Olin Research Library, Cornell University.)

16. Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Chenango County, N.Y. for 1869–70* (Syracuse, 1869), p. 82; *Broome Republican* (Binghamton), May 5, 1831.

17. “Newel Knight Journals, 1800–1845,” #318. (Located in LDS Church Historian’s Office); “Newel Knight’s Journal,” *Scraps of Biography—Tenth Book of the Faith Promoting Series*, Juvenile Instructor Office (Salt Lake City, 1883), p. 47. H. P. Smith, *History of Broome County* (Syracuse, 1885), p. 332. The Broome County, New York, Census for 1825 designates Joseph Knight, Sr., as operating one of the two carding machines listed in Colesville Township.

18. *Scraps of Biography*, pp. 47, 48.

19. *Joseph Knight’s Incidents of History from 1827 to 1844*, compiled by T. Thomas Bullock from loose sheets in Joseph Knight’s possession, August 16, 1862. (Located in LDS Church Historian’s Office). This is Joseph Knight, Jr.’s account. Broome County Deeds, Liber 3, pp. 36–37. Newel Knight reversed his initial skepticism and became an outstanding leader in the early Church organization. However, Nahum continued his reluctance to accept the tenants of Joseph Smith.

20. Child, *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Chenango County*, p. 82. Child states that Joseph attended school in District No. 9: H. P. Smith, *History of Broome County*, p. 332.

21. School Reports, 1813–1867, Broome County Courthouse, Binghamton, New York.

22. *DHC*, Vol. 1, p. 17.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

24. Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph*, p. 100.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 100–106.

26. *Joseph Knight’s Incidents of History from 1827 to 1844*, p. 1. The road distance from the Knight farm, opposite Nineveh, New York, to Joseph Smith’s home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, was about twenty miles.

27. Preston Nibley, “Joseph Knight Was a Friend of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Church News*, September 10, 1955.

28. Doctrine and Covenants 12:8 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1954) [hereafter cited as D & C].

29. *DHC*, Vol. 1, pp. 48–76; *The Wayne Sentinel* (Palmyra), March 26, 1830.

30. *Joseph Knight’s Incidents of History from 1827 to 1844*, p. 1.

31. *DHC*, Vol. 1, pp. 81–82.

32. *Scraps of Biography*, p. 52.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–55; *Utah Genealogical Magazine*, Vol. 26 (1935), p. 108; Vol. 27 (1936), pp. 78–79; *DHC*, Vol. 1, p. 88 lists a “Levi Hale” rather than the “Levi Hall” named by Newel Knight. The writer believes that “Levi Hall” is correct.

34. *Utah Genealogical Magazine*, Vol. 26 (1935), p. 148.

35. *Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, p. 12. Oliver Cowdery, editor of the *Messenger and Advocate*, remembered the date as being June 29, 1830; however, the baptisms were performed on “Mondy Morning.” Monday would have fallen on June 28. The writer believes that there is a dating error here, and that Sally Knight was baptized on the same day as her husband: Monday, June 28, 1830.

36. Letter of Elsie McGee to Preston Nibley, October 3, 1955 (located in the Joseph Knight Letter File, LDS Church Historian’s Office.)

37. *Scraps of Biography*, p. 54. Emily Coburn later denied the faith and was author of a book on “Mormonism”: Emily M. Austin, *Mormonism or Life Among the Mormons* (Madison, 1882).

38. *Joseph Knight's Incidents of History from 1827 to 1844*, p. 2; *DHC*, Vol. 1, pp. 88–89. The writer would like to pursue the nature of the South Bainbridge and Colesville trials at a future time.

39. *Scraps of Biography*, pp. 62–64; *DHC*, Vol. 1, pp. 106–109.

40. Issa M. R. Teeple Stapley (compl.), *De Mille Family History and Genealogy*, 1953, p. 37.

41. "Early Church Information File," The Genealogical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.

42. *DHC*, Vol. 1, p. 118.

43. "Far West Record, The Conference Minutes and Record Book of Christ's Church of Latter-day Saints," p. 2 (Located in the LDS Historian's Office).

44. *Scraps of Biography*, pp. 65–66.

45. *Utah Genealogical Magazine*, Vol. 27 (1936), pp. 78–79.

46. *Ibid.*, Vol. 26 (1935), p. 150.

47. "Journal History," December 1, 1830.

48. "Early Church Information File," The Genealogical Society: *Scraps of Biography*, pp. 65–66.

49. "Jared Carter Journals, 1830–1834." (Located in LDS Historian's Office).

50. "Jacob Morris Papers," #1656.

51. Deed Book 29, p. 478, Tioga County Courthouse, Oswego, New York. The deed books of Tioga County contain many land transactions of Josiah Stowell, Sr. and his children, particularly Josiah Stowell, Jr., and Horace Stowell.

52. Stowell, *Stowell Genealogy*, pp. 220–230.

53. Deed Book 63, p. 107. Chenango County Office Building, Norwich, New York.

54. Deed Book 85, Chenango County Office Building, Norwich, New York.

55. Stowell, *Stowell Genealogy*, p. 229.

56. Letter of Martha L. Campbell to Joseph Smith, Jr., December 19, 1843, "Josiah Stowell Papers." (Located in LDS Church Historian's Office). Martha L. Campbell was a member of the LDS Church at Elmira, New York, having been baptized at that place on August 9, 1835, under the ministrations of Elders Evan M. Greene and John Young, Jr. See "Journal History," July 6, 1835.

57. *DHC* Vol. 3, pp. 209–210, 284.

58. Lu B. Cake, *Old Mormon Manuscript Found, Peepstone Joe Exposed* (New York, 1899). (The original Peck manuscript is located in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.)

59. Deed Book 113, p. 404, Chenango County Office Building, Norwich, New York.

60. Reed Peck married Clarissa M. Peck and they were the parents of four sons: Presson R, Frank F., Charles D., George W, and a daughter Kate. Reed Peck, File No. 3852, "Petition of Presson R. Peck," October 14, 1896, Surrogate's Court, Chenango County Office Building, Norwich, New York. Letter of Presson R. Peck to the Hon. Albert F. Gladding (Norwich, New York), Sept. 29, 1896. Located in File No. 3852.

61. Reed Peck, File No. 3852, "Petition of Presson R. Peck," October 14, 1896; Alice Payne Garden (Mrs. Henry), Chairman Genealogical Research Committee, New York State Conference of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (Compl.), "Unpublished Cemetery, Church and Town Records, etc.," 1930–1931, Vol. 1, p. 9 (Located in the Guernsey Memorial Library, Norwich, New York).

62. *Utah Genealogical Magazine*, Vol. 27 (1936), pp. 78–79.

63. *DHC*, Vol. 3, pp 209–210.

64. Smith, *History of Chenango and Madison Counties, New York*, p. 141.

65. "Newel Knight Journals, 1800–1845," #318.

66. Deed Book 13, p. 462, Broome County Courthouse, Binghamton, New York. The writer has not yet discovered the relationship between the respective Slades named above.

67. *Utah Genealogical Magazine*,... Vol. 26 (1935), pp. 108–109; Vol. 27 (1936), p. 79.

68. *The Oneonta Herald* (Oneonta, New York), January 18, 1900.

69. D & C 38:32

70. *Scraps of Biography*, p. 68.

71. “Joseph Smith Papers.” (Located in LDS Church Historian’s Office). See also the letter of Joseph Smith to Martin Harris, dated Kirtland, February 22, 1831, which directs Martin to “. . . send to Colesville and have either Hiram [*sic*] or Newel to come immediately or both if they can be spared.” (Photoprint of the original in the “Joseph Smith Papers”). Apparently Newel could not be spared.

72. Deed Book 13, p. 298; Deed Book 12, p. 448. The latter piece of land was jointly owned with Garrison De Mill.

73. *Ibid.*, Deed Book 14, p. 299.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

75. *Broome Republican*.. (Binghamton, New York), May 5, 1831, p. 3 (Micro-film copy located in the Binghamton Free Library, Binghamton, New York).

76. *Joseph Knight’s Incidents of History from 1827 to 1844*.

77. *Ibid.*

78. “Jacob Morris Papers,” #1656.

79. *The Oneonta Herald* (Oneonta, New York), January 18, 1900.

80. *Scraps of Biography*, p. 69.

81. “Jared Carter Journals, 1830–1834.”

82. *Scraps of Biography*, p. 69.

83. Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph*, pp. 174, 177.

84. “Jared Carter Journals, 1830–1834;” *Joseph Knight’s Incidents of History from 1827 to 1844*.

85. “Journal History,” July 25, 1831; *Scraps of Biography*, p. 69.

86. *Scraps of Biography*, p. 69.

87. *Joseph Knight’s Incidents of History from 1827 to 1844*.

88. D & C 54:8; *DHC*, Vol. 1, p. 181.

89. “Journal History,” July 25, 1831.

90. “Newel Knight Journals, 1800–1845,” #318. The writer specifically cites this reference because of a time discrepancy in the published source, *Scraps of Biography*, p. 70, listing their travel from Ohio to Missouri as occurring in the month of “June” rather than “July.” The manuscript accounts of Newel Knight, Joseph Knight, Jr., and the “time table” of the Freeborn De Mill family, confirm “July.”

91. “Journal History,” July 25, 1831. The latter date, December 1, 1833, marks the departure of Freeborn De Mill from Jackson County into Clay County, Missouri.

92. *Scraps of Biography*, p. 85. Newel Knight’s wife, Sally Coburn Knight (sometimes spelled “Colburn”) died in Clay County on September 15, 1834. He subsequently married Lydia Goldthwait at Kirtland, Ohio, November 24, 1835. *Scraps of Biography*, p. 94.

93. *DHC*, Vol. 5, pp. 124–125.