

**The Council of Fifty and Its Members,  
1844 to 1945**



# The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844 to 1945

D. Michael Quinn

Since the mid-1950s, several articles, graduate theses, and books have examined the existence and supposed role of the “Council of Fifty” in Mormon history, so that by now the Council of fifty is within the general awareness of a large proportion of Latter-day saints as well as interested non-Mormons. Unfortunately, these writers did not have access to documents presently available; and, in some cases, they did not consult important sources then available. Because casual examination can make anything appear monstrous under the academic microscope, scholarly studies of the Council of Fifty thus far have tended to distort insufficient evidence and sometimes to sensationalize their interpretations.<sup>1</sup> Current research into the documents and historical environment of the Council of Fifty requires a rewriting of these scholarly and highly popular interpretations rather than a rewriting of Mormon history in light of these previous interpretations of the Council of Fifty.

The primary role of the Council of Fifty was to symbolize the other-worldly world order that would be established during the millennial reign of Christ on earth. Aside from its symbolic value, the singular importance of the Council of Fifty is that it reveals Joseph Smith, Jr., as Mormonism’s greatest Constitutionalist. The 1844 minutes of the Council contain hundreds of pages of the Prophet’s teachings about the meaning of the U.S. Constitution and the application of that document to the Latter-day saints in the world and during the Millennium.

The secondary role of the Council of Fifty involved its literal, practical functions. The Council of Fifty was only infrequently active throughout its history, and LDS Church leadership dominated and directed it when it was active. The Council was not a challenge to the existing system of law and government but functioned in roles familiar to American political science; special interest lobby, caucus, local political machine, and private organization governed by parliamentary procedures. Because LDS leaders did not regard the Council of Fifty as subversive of American institutions, its existence was common knowledge among the Latter-day Saints as long as it functioned, and its deliberations were no more secret than were those of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. As a non-revolutionary political instrument, the Council of Fifty held its final meeting in 1884, but the organization continued to survive technically until the last of its members died in 1945.

## Establishment

Among several historical questions about the Council of Fifty is the matter of dating its establishment. A different date for its organization is provided by each of four reputable original sources—7 April 1842; 10, 11, and 13 March 1844—primarily because each source considered a different event as marking the Council’s origin. Each of these dates has significance in the establishment of the Council of Fifty.

The minutes of the Council for 10 April 1880 state that “it was organized by the Lord. April 7th 1842.” They further indicate that this was the date of the revelation to Joseph Smith which provided the name and mission of the organization.<sup>2</sup> Dating the organization of the Council of Fifty in terms of the revelation and not when Joseph Smith acted upon the revelation thus fulfills the prophecy of Daniel that the Kingdom of God was a rock cut out of the mountain without hands (Daniel 2:44–45). LDS leaders often cited the Daniel passage when they spoke of the organization of the latter-day Kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> At present, no document has surfaced that explains why Joseph Smith waited two years to give temporal fulfillment to that which “was organized by the Lord. April 7th 1842,” but the 1842 date stands as the divine establishment.

When it comes to the temporal establishment, Wilford Woodruff and Franklin D. Richards state that Joseph Smith organized the Council of Fifty on 10 March 1844.<sup>4</sup> On that date, Joseph Smith read two letters from Lyman Wight, George Miller, and their associates, who were on a mission in Wisconsin to obtain lumber to build the Nauvoo House and the Nauvoo Temple in Illinois. Lyman Wight complained that the U.S. Indian agent was using his legal powers to prevent the Latter-day Saints from dealing with the Indians who allowed the Mormons to obtain lumber from Indian lands. Elder Wight asked the First Presidency to let his group go with the Indians to the Republic of Texas where they would be free from U.S. laws and could establish a gathering place.<sup>5</sup>

Joseph Smith’s handwritten journal for 10 March 1844 indicates how a 4:30 P.M. meeting of a few associates at the Nauvoo Mansion to discuss these letters was the starting point for the organization of the Council of Fifty:

Joseph asked., can this council keep what I say. not make it Public—all held up their [*sic*] hands. [one blank line]

Copy the constitution of the U.S.

hands of a select committee [one blank line]

No law can be enacted but what every man can be protected from.

The meeting adjourned and reconvened at 7 P.M. in the assembly room above Joseph Smith’s store where he had introduced the endowment

ceremonies in May 1842, and where he now met “in council” with these men and “enjoined perfect secrecy of them.”<sup>6</sup>

Joseph Smith may not have planned to organize a special council on this occasion, but in the process of this day’s meetings the Prophet made a provisional organization, as indicated by the facts that one of those in attendance, John Phelps, was not among those formally admitted to the Council of Fifty after 10 March 1844 and that Willard Richards remained provisional chairman only three days.<sup>7</sup>

The Manuscript History of the Church, the published *History of the Church*, and the journals of William Clayton and Joseph Fielding all state that the Council of Fifty was organized on 11 March 1844.<sup>8</sup> Because this is the date when Joseph Smith first formally admitted men to membership in the organization that became the Council of Fifty, scholars have most often used 11 March 1844 as the organization date. This practice is appropriate as long as it is recognized why members of the Council of Fifty sometimes also identified the establishment of the Council with the other dates under discussion here.

Brigham Young’s handwritten journal and manuscript history state that the organization occurred on 13 March 1844.<sup>9</sup> On this occasion Joseph Smith was chosen the “standing chairman” of the Council of Fifty, replacing the provisional chairman Willard Richards.<sup>10</sup> From this date onward, the President of the Church was always the standing chairman of the Council of Fifty. In view of Brigham Young’s emphasis on the primacy of the LDS President, it is natural that he would stress 13 March 1844 as the date of establishment.

## Names

Original documents not only assign various dates of establishment but also designate this special organization by a variety of names. The specific names must be known in order to identify the Council of Fifty and to avoid assuming that every oblique reference to “council” applies to the Council of Fifty. In a revelation presented by John Taylor to the Council of Fifty on 27 June 1882, as well as in the minutes of the 10 April 1880 meeting of the Council of Fifty and in the journals of William Clayton, Franklin D. Richards, and Joseph F. Smith, the official, revealed name of the Council of Fifty is “The Kingdom of God and His Laws with the Keys and Power[s] thereof, and Judgment in the Hands of His Servants, Ahman Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

This name was too complex to be easily remembered or written, and so this organization had a wide assortment of shorter designations. Sticking closely to the revealed name, Heber C. Kimball and John Henry Smith called it “The Kingdom of God.”<sup>12</sup> In a briefer reference to the full name, Joseph Smith, Willard Richards, and Heber C. Kimball mentioned it as

“The Kingdom,”<sup>13</sup> and Heber C. Kimball sometimes called it simply “The K.”<sup>14</sup> After referring to it three times as “Special Council,” the Manuscript History of the Church and the published *History of the Church* henceforth called it “the General Council.”<sup>15</sup> George Miller and Franklin D. Richards designated it “Council of the Kingdom,” whereas William Clayton expanded that to “the council of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>16</sup> Joseph Fielding in 1844 called it the “Grand Council,” whereas Lyman Wight in 1848 described it as the “Grand Council of the Kingdom of God,” “Grand Council of God,” and “Grand Council of Heaven.”<sup>17</sup> John D. Lee exuberantly called it “councils of the Gods,” whereas Daniel Spencer and Robert T. Burton obliquely listed it as “Council of —.”<sup>18</sup> In 1849 men like Joseph Fielding, Horace S. Eldredge, and John D. Lee called it “Legislative Council” but dropped that name in 1850 when Congress created Utah Territory with a civil legislature in which the upper house was called the Legislative Council.<sup>19</sup> John D. Lee also described it as “Municipal department of the Kingdom of God,” which Brigham Young, Jr., echoed later as “Church municipal board.”<sup>20</sup>

The identity of the Council of Fifty with the church was emphasized when Wilford Woodruff, Hosea Stout, and the Manuscript History of the Church called it “Council of Elders” and when Robert T. Burton called it “Council of the Presiding Authorities of the Church.”<sup>21</sup> Orson Hyde more clearly stated this Church identity when he addressed a letter to the Council of Fifty on 25 April 1844 as “the Council of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.”<sup>22</sup> Also, the Council of Fifty sometimes carried the name of the Church President: “Joseph Smith’s Council,” “President Young’s Council,” or “President Taylor’s Council.”<sup>23</sup>

Because Joseph Smith admitted more than fifty men to his special council in the spring of 1844, most members called it Council of Fifty. Even this name had several variations: Brigham Young referred to it as “the fifty,” Shadrach Roundy called it “council of fifties,” Charles C. Rich wrote it as “council of ft,” Franklin D. Richards sometimes wrote it as “Council of 50—Kingdom,” Willard Richards and John D. Lee spelled fifty backwards and rendered it “Council of YTFIF,” Joseph F. Smith used the Roman numeral for fifty and wrote “Council of L,” George Miller called it “council of fifty princes of the kingdom,” whereas Willard Richards, Phinehas Richards, and David Fullmer designated it “The Quorum of 50.”<sup>24</sup>

One additional name for the Council of Fifty deserves separate consideration. Its members also called the Council of Fifty the “Living Constitution” or “Council of the Living Constitution.”<sup>25</sup> Some writers have confused this with the name of the fifteen trustees of the Mercantile and Mechanical association of Nauvoo who were presented in a public meeting on 31 January 1845 as the “Living Constitution” of that association.<sup>26</sup> The two “Living Constitutions” were as distinct as their separate organization

dates. Although eight members of this business “Living Constitution,” were already members of the Council of Fifty’s “Living Constitution,” two others were never members of the Council of Fifty, and five other members of this 1845 business “Living Constitution” did not join the Council of Fifty until from one month to (in one case) twenty-two years later.<sup>27</sup>

Council members Peter Haws, Erastus Snow, and George Q. Cannon explained why the Council of Fifty had the title “Living Constitution.” Joseph Smith asked the Council to write a constitution for the Kingdom of God. After a week of unsuccessful effort, Joseph Smith delivered a revelation to the Council of Fifty that stated: “Ye are my constitution.”<sup>28</sup> In this view, the latter-day Kingdom of God transcended the confines of a single, written document, and the Kingdom conducted itself according to the words and acts of inspired men. A revelation to the Council of Fifty on 27 June 1882 reaffirmed that “Ye are my Constitution, and I am your God.”<sup>29</sup> The designation of the Council as “Living Constitution” has special significance in a later discussion of the subordination of the Council of Fifty to the Church’s First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.<sup>30</sup>

## Purposes

Authors often cite the *History of the Church* to describe the purposes of the Council of Fifty.<sup>31</sup> But the revelation of 27 June 1882 gives a more comprehensive statement of the Council’s purpose:

Thus saith the Lord God who rules in the heavens above and in the earth beneath, I have introduced my Kingdom and my Government, even the Kingdom of God, that my servants have heretofore prophesied of and that I taught my disciples to pray for, saying “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” for the protection of my Church, and for the maintenance, promulgation and protection of civil and religious liberty in this nation and throughout the world; and all men of every nation, color and creed shall yet be protected and shielded thereby; and every nation and kindred, and people, and tongue shall yet bow the knee to me, and acknowledge me to be Ahman Christ, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>32</sup>

This expansive mission of the Council of Fifty was referred to by members Benjamin F. Johnson and John D. Lee, in often-quoted statements.<sup>33</sup>

After a virtual silence in traditional LDS histories about the role of the Council of Fifty in Nauvoo and Utah history, the writers of the 1950s and 1960s concluded with increasing enthusiasm that the Council of Fifty was actually the dynamic agent of Mormon history from 1844 to the 1880s. In 1958 James R. Clark stated that “the Council of Fifty or General Council was the policy-making body for the civil government of Utah from 1848 to 1870, if not later.”<sup>34</sup> Then Jan Shipps observed in 1965 that “the Council of Fifty was as important, if not more so, in building the temporal Kingdom

than the Council of the Twelve Apostles.”<sup>35</sup> And in 1967 Klaus J. Hansen concluded that “without the existence and activities of the Council of Fifty, which contributed significantly to the building of the Rocky Mountain kingdom, Mormonism might well have failed to enjoy its present stature and prestige within the framework of accepted American religious values and persuasions.”<sup>36</sup> Those conclusions can no longer be supported now that current research demonstrates that the Council of Fifty was most often not functioning and was only a symbolic formality when it was functioning.

### Activity

Two parliamentary rules governed the Council of Fifty: it could convene only when it had a quorum (fifty percent of membership) in attendance, and it existed officially only when it convened to conduct business. Thus, the Council of Fifty had only a technical, non-functioning existence when its members did not meet with or report to convened sessions of the Council.

Although the murder of Joseph Smith and other mob actions threatened the existence of both the Church and civil order at Nauvoo, William Clayton recorded that the Council of Fifty met on 4 February 1845 for the first time since the death of the Prophet the previous June.<sup>37</sup> During these critical months, the Quorum of Twelve Apostles acted virtually alone in stabilizing Nauvoo’s religious and civil society. From 1 March through May 1845, the Council of Fifty convened nearly every week to respond to current crises and to plan for the westward movement. After May 1845 the Council met sporadically until its final pre-exodus meetings in the Nauvoo Temple on 11, 13, and 18 January 1846.

For nearly three years after January 1846, the Council of Fifty had few meetings because its members were widely scattered during the pioneer exodus, making it difficult to obtain a quorum for meetings. For example, Apostle John E. Page, a member of the Council, was dropped from church office and disfellowshipped in February 1846 and was excommunicated from the Church in June 1846. Even though council of Fifty members regarded John E. Page as a traitor to both the Church and the Kingdom, it was not until 12 November 1846 that a quorum (twenty-six members) of the Council of Fifty could convene to drop him from the Council.<sup>38</sup>

The Council of Fifty did not meet regularly again until December 1848 and therefore exerted minimal direction of the Mormon pioneer exodus. An examination of the attendance at the scores of “council” meetings which supervised the pioneer exodus from February 1846 to December 1848 shows a consistent pattern: the apostles summoned these pioneer “council” meetings and invited members as well as *non-members* of the Council of



Fifty to participate at the direction of the apostles.<sup>39</sup> The inclusion of non-members of the Council of Fifty actually diminished the status of Council members who regarded the exodus as their primary mission. This situation undoubtedly was what prompted George Miller's sarcastic comment in 1855 that the Council of Fifty [in 1846–1847] "swelled to a great crowd under Brigham's reign."<sup>40</sup> Miller's disgruntled remark certainly did not describe an actual enlargement of the Council. Although Brigham Young's additions to the Council of Fifty increased its membership to a temporary high of sixty men in 1845, deaths and disaffections soon reduced the membership to the mid-fifties level established by Joseph Smith. President Brigham Young convened the Council of Fifty occasionally during the pioneer exodus of 1846–1848, but the consistent supervision of the exodus was provided by members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, to which other members of the Council of Fifty were subordinate.

After an initial flurry of activity from 1848 to 1850 in Utah, the Council of fifty became a virtual relic during the remainder of Brigham Young's leadership. It met weekly from December 1848 through the end of 1849 to provide the foundation for Utah's civil government. The Council did not convene again until 21 August 1851. One comment during the 1851 meetings demonstrates that the Council of Fifty had ceased to function while it was unconvened during this year-and-a-half period: "S. Roundy, was appointed on a mission East two years ago and never made any report, if they want it he is ready to make a report."<sup>41</sup> The Council of Fifty met periodically until 4 October 1851, when most members seemed to lose interest: "Oct. 4. 1851 10 1/2 a.m. Nine persons only having met—on motion adjourned to 1 p.m. 1 p.m. Again met—roll called—not a quorum—on motion adjourned to the call of the President."<sup>42</sup> Brigham Young showed as little interest in calling another meeting for the Council of Fifty as its members had shown for attending its last meeting in 1851. He did not bother to reconvene the Council for more than fifteen years.

When the Council of Fifty met on 23 January 1867 for the first time "since the last meeting of the Council on the 4th. October 1851," Brigham Young gave Council members no encouragement about the importance of their role. "[H]e was not aware of any particular business to be brought before the Council, further than to meet and renew our acquaintance with each other in this capacity. Had no doubt but brethren had often inquired in their own minds when the Council would again be called together."<sup>43</sup> The Council of Fifty met only eight times from this date until 9 October 1868, when it met and voted to establish Zion's Co-operative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI). The Council of Fifty apparently conducted no other substantive business during the 1867–1868 period but occupied itself primarily with the admission of new members to fill vacancies.<sup>44</sup> Interest in

these perfunctory meetings of the Council was so low that on 4 April 1868 the “Council of Fifty met this p.m., but few attended consequently it was turned into a testimony meeting for a short season.”<sup>45</sup> Brigham Young tired of the Council of Fifty and ignored it after October 1868.

His successor, John Taylor, revitalized the Council of Fifty by reconvening it on 10 April 1880 for the first time “since last met, in Oct. 68.”<sup>46</sup> Under President Taylor’s direction, the Council assembled for five consecutive years, a record of activity for the Council unequaled since 1849. Nevertheless, the Council of Fifty met only infrequently in the 1880s: five days in 1880, four days in 1881, ten days in 1882, ten days in 1883, and four days in 1884.<sup>47</sup> It was indeed functioning in “regular” meetings during the 1880s, but the Council of Fifty convened less than any other civil or religious body in Utah during the period.

Those who have regarded the Council of Fifty as the central policy-making body for Mormon theocracy from 1844 to the 1880s must reckon with the periods in which the Council never convened or conducted business. Amid the tumult at Nauvoo, the Council of Fifty did not meet from June 1844 to February 1845, even though most of its members had returned to the city by August 1844. During the pioneer exodus, it rarely met and its members simply joined with other trusted Mormons in ad hoc meetings convened and directed by the apostles. From 1850 to 1880, the Council of Fifty met on fewer than twenty days, despite the fact that Utah and the Church had a very active political and economic life during those thirty years. Finally, in the early 1880s when the U.S. government was beginning its campaign against Mormon theocracy, John Taylor resurrected the Council of Fifty to meet on only thirty-three days during a four-year period. The evidence of official meeting dates alone argues for the insignificance of the Council of Fifty in practical terms, rather than for its awesome influence as suggested by earlier writers. Instead of the Council of Fifty, it was the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that provided continuous leadership for the Mormons in religious, economic, political, and social matters.

### **Supervision**

Without question, at certain times the Council of Fifty was centrally involved in extremely important activities of Mormonism. It convened to discuss, approve, and carry out the 1844 campaign for Joseph Smith’s presidential candidacy, the 1845 preparations at Nauvoo for the westward exodus, the formation of civil government in Utah in 1849, and the selection of candidates for public office in Utah and the surrounding territories in the 1880s. Nevertheless, even when it was so actively involved, the Council of Fifty was actually under the supervision of the LDS Church leadership.

At times, the Council of Fifty was even a rubber stamp for prior decisions of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

From the beginning, the LDS Presidency and apostles directed the Council of Fifty to predetermined ends. On 29 January 1844, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles nominated Joseph Smith for the U.S. presidency and on 4 March nominated his vice-presidential running mate. After the Council of Fifty was formed in March 1844, that body simply repeated what had already been decided and continued the political campaign begun by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve.<sup>48</sup> On 21 February 1844, Joseph Smith gave to the apostles the responsibility to plan an exodus into the American West, and they initially chose eight men to act as scouts. After the turmoil of the ill-fated presidential campaign and the succession crisis, the Council of Fifty decided on 1 March 1845 to select nine men to act as scouts for a new location in the far West, and the council of fifty “selected” nearly all of the eligible men originally chosen by the Quorum of the Twelve.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, when twenty members of the Council of Fifty met for prayer with their wives in the Nauvoo Temple on 11 December 1845, Brigham Young asked only ten members of the group (seven apostles, two general bishops, and a clerk) to join him for a council about an urgent letter which warned then that the U.S. government opposed the westward exodus of the Mormons. Because the exodus from Nauvoo was the primary concern of the Council of fifty meetings in 1845, this exclusion of nine of its members from this crucial meeting is an important evidence of the subordination of the Council of Fifty to church authority at Nauvoo.<sup>50</sup>

The diminished role of the Council of Fifty from 1846 to 1848 angered Council members who did not have the powerful status of the apostles during the Mormon exodus. George Miller complained: “When we arrived at Winter Quarters the Council convened, but their deliberations amounted to nothing. But however, I was not wholly overlooked in their deliberations.”<sup>51</sup> George Miller’s apostasy from the Church in 1847 resulted from his dissatisfaction with the exclusion of the Council of Fifty from governing the pioneer exodus, and other subordinate members of the Council of Fifty soon followed that disaffection. When the high council in Iowa tried Peter Haws and Lucien Woodworth in February 1849, Haws “persisted that the Fifty should be called together. ~~He said had never been legally adjourned~~ [sic] He said that Brigham had pledged himself to carry out the measures of Joseph and intimated that it had not been done and that Twelve men had swallowed up thirty eight.” And then, “Elder G. A. Smith interrupted him by telling him that the fifty was ~~nothing but~~ [sic] a debating School.”<sup>52</sup> These crucial comments indicate how frustrated some Council of Fifty members felt toward the supremacy of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, as well as underscore the attitude of the apostles toward the subordinate role of the Council of Fifty.

Even when President John Taylor revitalized the Council of Fifty in the 1880s, he continued to maintain actual power in the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and he allowed only symbolic power to the Council. On 1 April 1880, the Quorum of the Twelve considered who should fill vacancies in the Council of Fifty. When the Council reconvened on 10 April for the first time in nearly twelve years, the non-apostles members of the Council of Fifty had only a perfunctory role in selecting new members of the Council: the day before the Council met, the apostles notified the initiates to attend the meeting.<sup>53</sup> The most striking example of this rubber-stamp quality of the Council of Fifty occurred in October 1882. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve discussed on 4 October who should be the candidate for Utah's delegate to Congress, and in the morning of 11 October 1882, the Presidency and apostles voted that John T. Caine be the delegate. Three hours later, at the direction of the LDS hierarchy, the Council of Fifty convened, discussed who should be the delegate to Congress, "nominated" John T. Caine, and appointed a committee to inform the nominating committee of the Church's political party, the People's Party.<sup>54</sup>

Members of the Council of Fifty who were not in the First Presidency or the Quorum of the Twelve were probably unaware of the extent to which those authorities manipulated meetings of the Council of Fifty so as to arrive at predetermined decisions. Therefore, the unsophisticated Council members developed unrealistic views. It is no coincidence that the most effusive descriptions of the Council of Fifty's allegedly supreme role in the latter-day Kingdom of God were written by John D. Lee, Benjamin F. Johnson, George Miller, and others who were not privy to orchestration of Council of Fifty meetings by the LDS Presidency and apostles. Even Apostles Lyman Wight exaggerated the Council of Fifty's importance because his long absences from Nauvoo during 1844 and 1845 prevented his seeing the extent to which the Presidency and apostles constituted a shadow government behind the Council of Fifty's shadow government. These overly enthusiastic Council of Fifty members simply did not understand that the Mormon hierarchy was supreme in both Church and Kingdom, and that it allowed no rival.

The Council of Fifty was prosaic rather than awesome. At the most practical level, the Council of Fifty was the "debating School" Apostle George A. Smith called it in 1849. Buttressed by oaths of secrecy, the Council of Fifty provided a forum to give the Church hierarchy different views on pressing questions of political, economic, and social significance for the Latter-day Saints. Undoubtedly, the Presidency and apostles of the Church did not prearrange all the deliberations and decisions of the Council of Fifty, but the opinions and recommendations of the Presidency and apostles carried conclusive weight in the discussions of the Council of Fifty.

The Council of Fifty also provided three dozen reliable men to carry out the political and economic programs of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who simply “honored” individual Council of Fifty members with positions of public prominence but did not allow the Council itself to rival the Mormon hierarchy’s exercise of power.

The Council of Fifty had a minimal role in the actual exercise of political power but served as an important symbol of the unattained ideal of a democratically functioning Kingdom of God. Like its economic counterpart, the United Order of Enoch and Law of Consecration, the Council of Fifty required greater perfection in the Saints than existed during the years of Mormon isolation in the Great Basin of the American West. Created according to the uncompromising millennial context of divine revelation, the Council had only a sporadic existence which was compromised by the imperfections of its members for whom power and prestige became ends in themselves. Those who most successfully fulfilled their role in the Council of Fifty recognized it as a symbol of what could and would transpire when the hearts of a sinful world and imperfect Church members turned sufficiently to Christ the King.<sup>55</sup> Those who were least successful in that trust were the men who accepted that symbol in literal terms and thereby became discouraged and bitter at the disparity. In like manner, the greatest weakness of the “Kingdom School” among recent interpreters of Mormon history lies in the confusion of symbol and substance, in the failure to separate the temporal realities of the Mormon Kingdom of God from its unachieved millennial anticipations.

## Membership

Admission to the Council of Fifty came in three stages, which could occur on one day or on three separate days—a man’s name was proposed (most often by the LDS President as standing chairman of the Council), and then voted on, and then the man was formally initiated into the Council. On the day of their admission, new members affirmed that they were in fellowship with all other Council members, and then an officer or the Council of Fifty proceeded in “giving them the ‘Charge,’ ‘The name,’ & ‘Key word,’ and the ‘Constitution,’ and ‘Penalty.”<sup>56</sup> Once admitted, men remained members of the Council of Fifty for life, unless they were dropped by the Council for disaffection. Not until 1882 did the Council add the option of release due to old age and disability.<sup>57</sup>

The specific membership of the Council of Fifty has been another area in which there has been inaccuracy. Part of the problem arose when historians identified men as members on the basis of attendance at “council” meeting that were not meetings of the Council of Fifty. Even some members of the Council made misstatements about its membership when they

sought to remember back thirty to sixty years: John D. Lee erroneously indicated that Joseph H. Jackson was admitted to the Council of Fifty, and Benjamin F. Johnson mistakenly claimed that Sidney Rigdon, William Marks, and members of the Nauvoo High Council were not members of the Council of Fifty.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the general silence about membership of the Council of Fifty in Utah has allowed rampant speculation and rumor. However, it is now possible to compare abundant diaries and other sources on the Council of Fifty in order to establish the exact dates of admission or at least the periods of service for all members of the Council throughout its history.

The first evident characteristic of the Council of Fifty's membership is the extent to which Church office was important. From 1844 to 1884 the Council of Fifty included every contemporary member of the First Presidency except the disaffected William Law, every member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, every Presiding Patriarch except John Smith (b. 1832, son of Hyrum Smith), every member of the Presiding Bishopric except Jesse C. Little, and more than forty-four percent of the First Council of the Seventy.<sup>59</sup> Of local officers during the period, forty-eight percent of the stake presidents and a much smaller percentage of the ward bishops were members of the Council of Fifty during their ecclesiastical service in these positions. This Church identity of members of the Council of Fifty was mentioned in an 1882 revelation:

Behold you are my kingdom and rulers in my Kingdom and then you are also, many of you, rulers in my Church according to your ordinations therein. For are you not of the First Presidency, and of the Twelve Apostles and some Presidents of Stakes, and some Bishops, and some High Priests and some Seventies and Elders therein? And are ye not all of my Church and belong to my holy Priesthood?<sup>60</sup>

After the exodus from Nauvoo, recently appointed General Authorities filled vacancies in the Council of Fifty.<sup>61</sup> President John Taylor also admitted Francis M. Lyman, John Henry Smith, George Teasdale, and Heber J. Grant to the Council of Fifty in apparent anticipation of his calling these men to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles within a few months. This is all consistent with the previous discussion of the subordination of the Kingdom to the Church and with Brigham Young's comment in 1855 that it was the LDS Church that produced the government of the Kingdom of God.<sup>62</sup>

The published "History of Brigham Young" stated that several members of the original 1844 Council of Fifty "were not members of the Church."<sup>63</sup> This led historian Klaus J. Hansen to suggest plausibly (but inaccurately) that Daniel H. Wells was a member of the Council while he was a non-Mormon at Nauvoo and that Thomas L. Kane later became a friendly non-Mormon member of the Council during or after the exodus to Utah.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Mormon schismatic Lorin C. Woolley circulated the wild claim

that U.S. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Calvin Coolidge were members of the Council of Fifty.<sup>65</sup> In reality, Joseph Smith admitted to the Council only three non-Mormons, all of whom were dropped from the Council on 4 February 1845, after which date the LDS leadership excluded non-Mormons from the Council of Fifty.<sup>66</sup>

The least is known about the youngest of the three non-Mormons, Marenus G. Eaton. He was thirty-two years old when he entered the Council of Fifty, an honor that the Prophet may have conferred on him when he disclosed on 27 March 1844 the conspiracy against Joseph Smith by dissenters at Nauvoo. Although Marenus G. Eaton was among the proposed defense witnesses for Joseph Smith in June 1844, after the Martyrdom he was no longer of service to the Mormons. The State of New York on 5 September 1844 filed a requisition with the State of Illinois to arrest him for counterfeiting, and it may have been for this personal disability that the Council of Fifty dropped Marenus G. Eaton on 4 February 1845.<sup>67</sup>

Edward Bonney's brother was a Mormon, but Edward at age thirty-six apparently was still a non-Mormon when Joseph Smith admitted him to the Council of Fifty. Edward Bonney is referred to several times in the *History of the Church* as a supporter of Joseph Smith during the difficulties of May–June 1844, but he broke with the Mormons over the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*. When the city of Nauvoo tried and discharged Joseph Smith on 17 June 1844 for the destruction of the press, Edward Bonney acted as prosecutor and seems to have been in earnest because he later referred to the dismissal of Joseph Smith by the Nauvoo court as a "mock administration of law." At any rate, in 1845 he moved to Montrose, Iowa, became a bounty-hunter of criminals, and in 1850 published *The Banditti of the Prairies* with its unfavorable view of the Nauvoo Mormons.<sup>68</sup> Since the Council of Fifty dropped him before he left Nauvoo, disaffection was undoubtedly the reason for the Council's action in Bonney's case.

The third non-Mormon in the Council of Fifty, Uriah Brown, had the longest association with the Mormons. He had been a friend and confidant of Joseph Smith since 1842. Soon after entering the Council of Fifty at the age of fifty-nine, Uriah Brown served as chairman of the political convention at Nauvoo that nominated Joseph Smith as candidate for the U.S. presidency. Like Eaton and Bonney, he was dropped from the Council of Fifty on 4 February 1845, but the action in Brown's case may have been taken only because he had moved away from Nauvoo and was therefore of less value to the Mormons. A letter from Uriah Brown to Brigham Young on 3 November 1845 indicates that Joseph Smith's interest in Brown centered in his invention of destructive weapons that could be used to defend Nauvoo. In this letter Uriah Brown expressed continued interest in the Mormon situation and offered to give Brigham Young the secret of the weapon



“for such just & equitable sum, as it may, perhaps, be in your power to dispose.” Whether Brigham Young answered the 1845 letter is not clear, but Uriah Brown was in Salt Lake City in 1851. The Council of Fifty on 25 August 1851 considered readmitting him to the Council and investigating the purchase of his “invention of liquid fire to destroy an army or navy,” but when Uriah Brown became too insistent and impatient, the Council tabled the matter on 13 September 1851.<sup>69</sup> There had been no non-Mormons in the Council of Fifty since 1845, and this brief reconsideration in 1851 was the only other instance in which non-Mormon participation became an issue for the infrequently meeting Council of Fifty.

Earlier investigators have emphasized the active role of Council members in political office, but these researchers have not commented on significant disparities in that public service.<sup>70</sup> First of all, more than seventeen percent of the total membership of the Council of Fifty have no discoverable record of public office. In part this can be accounted for by men who left the Church (and thereby the Council of Fifty) prior to the settlement of Utah. Yet even in Utah, where political office was abundant for Mormons, the following Council members apparently held no civil office: Abraham H. Cannon, Amos Fielding, George F. Gibbs, George D. Grant, Charles S. Kimball, David P. Kimball, and Seymour B. Young. In addition, Levi Richards held no civil office in Utah even though he had in Nauvoo, and Joseph Fielding, Philip B. Lewis, and John Young held civil office only in the legislature of the provisional State of Deseret (1849–1851) after which the three Council members spent the last decades of their lives without civil office.

The claim that the Council of Fifty was a channel to political power becomes even less convincing when one examines the lives of Council members who held public office. Nearly sixty-three percent of the politically active members of the Council of Fifty at Nauvoo and in Utah began civil service *before* they entered the Council, and some men served more than a decade in public office before entering. These men had loyally served the interests of the Church in public office for years, and the Council of Fifty gave them no added political power nor did it alter their previous pattern of political devotion to the interests of Mormonism as directed by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. Although the Council of Fifty introduced a minority of its members to political life, it seems obvious that for a much larger number of men their membership in the Council came as an honorary reward for long service on behalf of the Church and the Kingdom in public office. For these reasons, tabulating the number of Council of Fifty members in governmental office gives a misleading impression of the Council’s political impact.

Although the religious history of some members of the Council of Fifty is sketchy, it appears that twenty-two percent of the LDS members of the



Council had a serious (and usually permanent) break with the Church. The rupture manifested itself through either excommunication, disfellowshipping, being dropped from church office, or going permanently inactive. After the Church authorities disciplined a Council of Fifty member, the Council usually dropped him at its next meeting.<sup>71</sup> For most of these men the problem seemed to be centered in the Church itself—i.e., their loss of faith, violations of Church rules of conduct, religious schism, or their unwillingness to follow the religious leadership of a new Church President.

In several cases, however, the problem was centered in the Council of Fifty itself. Alpheus Cutler, James Emmett, Peter Haws, George Miller, Lyman Wight, and Lucien Woodworth all felt that Brigham Young blocked their personal missions in the Council of Fifty, missions they claimed came from Joseph Smith. They did not agree that the Council of Fifty derived its authority from the Church and was subject to Church leadership and, therefore, dissented from the Church in order to preserve what they felt were their missions in the Kingdom of God.<sup>72</sup> By contrast, a couple of members of the Council of Fifty felt devotion to the Church but found themselves in opposition to the Kingdom of God to which they had been privately admitted. William Marks as president of the Nauvoo Stake and Moses Thatcher of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles both manifested dissent against the same element of the latter-day Kingdom of God: the anointing and ordination of the LDS President as King, Priest, and Ruler on earth.<sup>73</sup> Although these two disaffected groups within the Council of Fifty were divided into dissenters *for* the Kingdom and dissenters *against* the Kingdom, both had one thing in common: they accepted the role and rites of the Kingdom of God in literal terms and did not perceive or accept the essentially symbolic nature of everything connected with the Council of Fifty. In view of what is now known about the Council of Fifty, the experiences of these men have a special pathos.

### Officers

Within the organization of the Council of Fifty, there were committees, but most were temporary in nature and did not comprise any set number of committeemen.<sup>74</sup> There was, however, an executive committee within the Council of Fifty that consisted of seven members whenever it was formed. Alpheus Cutler, who claimed to be a member of such a committee during the lifetime of Joseph Smith, called it the “Quorum of Seven.”<sup>75</sup> Although the functions of this committee are presently unclear, the published *History of the Church* referred to its meeting of 14 April 1844: “Committee of the Council met in the afternoon at my office.”<sup>76</sup> In 1882–1884, Franklin D. Richards also reported the actions of a “committee of 7.”<sup>77</sup> Although the purposes of the 1844 executive committee are still

uncertain, Franklin D. Richards clearly described the Committee of Seven when it was established on 23 June 1882:

2 Sessions in Council of the Kingdom. Committees were appointed to see after Election affairs in Idaho Territory in Nevada State—and seven John Sharp, Wm. Jennings, W. Hooper, R.T. Burton, J.R. Winder, A.M. Cannon & Moses Thatcher—for an executive committee to meet the Commissioners with lists of names from each county for Registration of officers, Judges of Elections & any & all other duties.<sup>78</sup>

Since John Taylor had reestablished the Council of Fifty more than two years prior to the date of the organization of this committee, it is obvious that the “Quorum of Seven” or “Committee of Seven” was not a permanent, self-perpetuating body in the Kingdom of God. Moreover, in 1882 the Committee of Seven was a lobbying body for the Church of a routine political nature and did not have any extraordinary religious or theocratic powers.<sup>79</sup>

Among the officers of the Council of Fifty were the recorder, historian, clerk, and reporters. Despite the name, the historian was actually the recorder of the Council of Fifty, and the terms were used interchangeably to describe the men who were responsible for the records of the Council but who did not actually take the minutes of meetings. Willard Richards was appointed historian—recorder of the Council on 13 March 1844 and served until his death in 1854.<sup>80</sup> When the Council of Fifty next met on 23 January 1867, it admitted George Q. Cannon and appointed him recorder.<sup>81</sup> The Council did not convene after 1884 and therefore did not choose a recorder as successor to George Q. Cannon after his death in 1901. William Clayton, who was appointed clerk at the provisional meeting of 10 March 1884, was officially appointed “Clerk of the Kingdom” on 13 March 1844 and served to his death in 1879.<sup>82</sup> When the Council of Fifty reconvened on 10 April 1880, it elected L. John Nuttall to be William Clayton’s successor as Clerk of the Kingdom. Nuttall also died without a successor.<sup>83</sup> Whether or not there was a formal office of assistant clerk in the Council of Fifty prior to 1880 is unclear, but on 10 April 1880, President Taylor’s son William W. Taylor was elected assistant clerk and served until his death in 1884.<sup>84</sup> Although the Clerk of the Kingdom was officially responsible for taking minutes of the Council of Fifty meetings, the Council appointed “reporters” to keep minutes: at least as early as December 1848, Thomas Bullock and Albert Carrington took minutes in addition to William Clayton who was the Clerk of the Kingdom.<sup>85</sup> Due to Thomas Bullock’s infirmities of age, John Taylor appointed George F. Gibbs a reporter on 5 April 1882, even though the Council did not admit Elder Gibbs as a member until 24 June 1882 when it released Thomas Bullock due to old age.<sup>86</sup> Although the records of the Council of Fifty had been in the personal custody of William Clayton as Clerk of the Kingdom in the 1840s, in Utah the custody passed among various officers: in 1857 President Brigham Young

had them in his personal custody and gave them to the Church Historian's Office, by 1880 the recorder George Q. Cannon had them locked in a box in Utah and took the key with him wherever he went, and in 1884 the records were in the possession of reporter George F. Gibbs.<sup>87</sup>

The senior administrative officer of the Council of Fifty was the standing chairman. Although Willard Richards served as temporary chairman at the provisional meeting on 10 March 1844, from 13 March 1844 onward the LDS President was always standing chairman of the Council of Fifty. Joseph Smith served as standing chairman in 1844, Brigham Young from 1845 to 1877 (although the Council did not meet after 1868), and John Taylor from 1880 to 1887 (although the Council did not meet after 1884).<sup>88</sup> The President of the Church as standing chairman of the Council of Fifty was not simply senior member of the Council (where seniority was determined by age) but was its chief executive. Similar to a *Curia Regis* (King's Council) in a monarchy, the Council of Fifty convened only at the request of its earthly sovereign, the President of the Church, who was the standing chairman of the Council.<sup>89</sup>

This leads to the final office in the symbolic Kingdom of God on earth as embodied in the Council of Fifty. William Clayton recorded in his journal that in the 11 April 1844 meeting of the Council of Fifty, "was prest. Joseph chosen as our prophet Priest, & King by Hosannas."<sup>90</sup> William Marks, who participated in this action, later stated that the Council of Fifty conducted this as an ordinance "in which Joseph suffered himself to be ordained a king, to reign over the house of Israel forever."<sup>91</sup> Although it has been suggested that William Mark's statements referred to conventional LDS temple rites rather than to a theocratic ceremony,<sup>92</sup> the evidence does not support this objection. Aside from the contemporary account of William Clayton and some reminiscent descriptions by William Marks, the revelation to the Council of Fifty on 27 June 1882 also stated that God called Joseph Smith, Jr., "to be a Prophet, Seer and Revelator to my Church and Kingdom; and Kingdom; and to be a King and Ruler over Israel."<sup>93</sup>

When the Council of Fifty was reestablished in 1880, one of the items brought up was filling the theocratic office to which Joseph Smith had been anointed and ordained in Nauvoo. That not all Council members favored such an appointment is evidenced in George Q. Cannon's note that the disaffection of Apostle Moses Thatcher from the Church began "when the Council of Fifty met in the old City Hall [1880–1882], and Moses opposed the proposition to anoint John Taylor as Prophet, Priest and King, and Moses's opposition prevailed at that time."<sup>94</sup> Not until 1885, just days after the federal crusade against polygamy forced President John Taylor into exile, was this ceremony performed for him. Franklin D. Richards, among others, described the event:

Wednesday Feb 4<sup>th</sup> 1885—

Prests. John Taylor & Geo. Q. Cannon having been secluded since Sunday evening word had been given to L. Snow, E. Snow F. D. Richards, A. Carington, F. M. Lyman, H. J. Grant, John W. Taylor, to meet in Council this evening—Prests. W. Woodruff—George Teasdale Moses Thatcher were oblivious to prevent arrest—B.Y. [Jr.] & J.H. Smith in N. York & Europe—

Soon after 8. p.m. Prests Taylor & Cannon met the seven of the 12 first named at End[owment] house Secretaries Geo. Reynolds and L. John Nuttall were present. After listening to some current items of news, President Taylor stated the object of the Council. directed Br Nuttall to read a Revelation which he said he received more than a year ago requiring him to be anointed & set apart as a King Priest and Ruler over Israel on the Earth—over Zion & the Kingdom of Christ our King of Kings. He also read some extracts from minutes of the Council of the Kingdom after which the President called for any remarks when several spoke their mind and F.M.L. motioned that we proceed to obey the requirement of the Revelation. when we clothed in our Priestly attire. E Snow offered prayer, when after the usual ceremony F.M. Lyman prayed in the circle. L. Snow consecrated a bottle of oil. Counselor Cannon anointed President John Taylor and we all laid hands on the Prest. & Geo. Q. sealed the anointing according to a written form which had been prepared.<sup>95</sup>

Although only the First Presidency, seven apostles, and two secretaries to the First Presidency attended the meeting, they told enough people about this ceremony that the Salt Lake Tribune soon reported that George Q. Cannon had “assisted at the coronation of JOHN TAYLOR as king” of the Mormon commonwealth.<sup>96</sup>

The anointing and ordination of John Taylor in 1885 as “King, Priest and Ruler over Israel on the Earth—over Zion & the Kingdom of Christ” is important as a verifying evidence. First, it corroborates the accuracy of earlier statements that Joseph Smith received the same ceremony at the hands of the Council of Fifty some forty years before. Second, it clarifies that Heber C. Kimball was alluding to Brigham Young’s having received the same ordinance when Heber stated:

The Church and kingdom to which we belong will become the kingdom of our God and his Christ, and brother Brigham Young will become President of the United States.

(Voices responded, “Amen.”)

And I tell you he will be something more; but we do not now want to give him the name: but he is called and ordained to a far greater station than that, and he is foreordained to take that station, and he has got it.<sup>97</sup>

Although the exact date on which Brigham Young obtained the theocratic ordination of King, Priest, and Ruler over Israel is not presently known, he undoubtedly received it in the same manner that Joseph Smith did on 11 April 1844 and John Taylor did on 4 February 1885. Also, the ceremony performed for John Taylor in 1885 further corroborates that the First

Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles did not require the presence of the rest of the Council of Fifty to conduct crucial matters of the theocratic Kingdom of God.

Although the Council of Fifty did not convene after 1884, members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve may have performed this theocratic ordinance for the Presidents of the Church who followed John Taylor. At any rate, John W. Taylor, former member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and one of the last men admitted to the Council of Fifty, addressed President Joseph F. Smith in 1911 as “Prophet, President and King” in a letter regarding the Council of Fifty.<sup>98</sup>

The 1885 ordinance for John Taylor also verifies the exclusively symbolic nature of the office of “King, Priest and Ruler over Israel on Earth” which Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and John Taylor received in succession as Presidents of the Church. When the apostles conferred this office upon John Taylor in 1885, the political Kingdom of God among the Mormons was in disarray. Polygamists (accounting for most of the prominent political leaders of Mormonism) had been disfranchised for three years and were either in prison or in hiding to avoid arrest. After a four-year renaissance of limited significance, the Council of Fifty could no longer convene because of the federal “raid,” and the Council had started its final slide into oblivion. Only days before the theocratic ordinance, President Taylor himself began a permanent exile in hiding from federal authorities.

The 1885 theocratic ordinance was really a magnificent gesture of resignation, similar to the orchestra on the *Titanic* playing “Nearer My God to Thee” as the ship plunged into the icy Atlantic. John Taylor was anointed a theocratic King, Priest, and Ruler in the absence of pomp, in a simple ceremony witnessed by a very few trusted associates, and at a time it was obvious that Mormon theocracy in Utah was in its death throes. As God’s representative on earth as prophet and President of the Church, it was sufficient to John Taylor that he had witnessed to God spiritually through a symbolic ordinance that it was the right of government under Christ to reign on the earth. Like the Council of Fifty itself, the office of Prophet—King was an ultimate symbol in Mormonism of the heavenly Kingdom of God which could only be foreshadowed on a corrupt world and in a temporal church.<sup>99</sup>

## Finale

During the years of its sporadic activity, the Council of Fifty was an open secret among the Mormons. Some of this knowledge came from unauthorized sources, such as the 1844 disclosures in the anti-Mormon press.<sup>100</sup> More often, however, knowledge of the Council of Fifty came to the Latter-day Saints through official sources. On 13 January 1846, the

Council openly identified itself in a meeting with many others who were appointed to lead the exodus from Nauvoo.<sup>101</sup> On 17 June 1857 the *Deseret News* first Published the account of Joseph Smith's organizing the "special council," and on 26 November 1857 President Brigham Young gave his concent [*sic*] for us to publish an account of it so that the Saints might understand it."<sup>102</sup> In 1858, Church publications began referring to the Council of Fifty by this name.<sup>103</sup> General Authorities of the Church gave sermons explaining that the Kingdom of God was an organization that had already been established among the Saints, and John Pack, a member of the Council of Fifty, instructed the women of the Salt Lake City Seventeenth Ward Relief Society about the organization and purposes of the Council of Fifty.<sup>104</sup> By the 1870s, *Deseret News* obituaries were referring to membership in the Council of Fifty, and in 1901 Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jenson matter-of-factly identified men as members of the Council in his published biographies.<sup>105</sup> The Council of Fifty was secretive in the same way in which the Quorum of Twelve Apostles guarded the minutes of its own meetings, but the Council of Fifty was hardly a secret among the Latter-day Saints of the nineteenth century.

Even more Latter-day Saints would have known of the organization, if the Council had functioned in a regular or lasting manner. After decades of sporadic activity, it last convened on 9 October 1884. This is evident from the diaries of men like Robert T. Burton, Abraham H. Cannon, Heber J. Grant, Franklin D. Richards, John Henry Smith, Wilford Woodruff, and Brigham Young, Jr., who regularly recorded their attendance at Council of Fifty meetings through 1884 but made no mention of attending such meetings during the decades after 1884.

The Council of Fifty's inactivity troubled Apostles John W. Taylor, who had barely entered the Council on its last meeting date in 1884. On 25 October 1887, while the Quorum of the Twelve was in the midst of seeking statehood for Utah,

John W. Taylor expressed it as his opinion that it would be much better if all of our business in relation to a State was transacted through the Council of Fifty.

Prest Woodruff said it would be all right for the Council of Fifty to meet and attend to this matter but under existing circumstances it would not be safe to have them do so.<sup>106</sup>

After 1884, members of the Council of Fifty had ad hoc meetings with the Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve concerning the quest for statehood, but that practice was simply a repetition of earlier periods in which the Council itself was nonfunctioning.

By the time the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve shepherded Utah to statehood in 1896, safety was no longer the factor for

ignoring the Council of Fifty: the Council of Fifty was obsolete even as a symbol. The voluntary theocracy of Mormon Utah had given way to factional politics which divided Church leaders and members alike along national party lines. This placed Mormonism even further from the theocratic ideals of the Kingdom of God than it was during the imperfect theocracy of territorial Utah. Therefore, when John W. Taylor desperately petitioned Joseph F. Smith to convene the Council of Fifty in 1911 to protect Elder Taylor from being disciplined by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, President Joseph F. Smith wrote on Taylor's letter: "Not granted I think the demand most absurd."<sup>107</sup>

A year before John W. Taylor's request, President Joseph F. Smith had made a statement that illuminates the spasmodic history of the Council of Fifty. On 7 April 1910, President Smith stated: "this body of men, this Council of Presidency and Apostles, compose the living constitution of the Church, with power to legislate, judge and decide."<sup>108</sup> The use of the Council of Fifty's name "Living Constitution" to designate the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles is a crucial insight into the Kingdom of God within Mormonism. In theory, theology, and reality, the LDS Presidency and apostles always governed the Council of Fifty when it was functioning, and in the absence of the Council of Fifty, they continue as the apex of both Church and Kingdom on earth until the perfect world order of the Millennium is established. On 3 January 1932, Heber J. Grant recorded that he and Franklin S. Richards were the only surviving members of the Council, and with the death of President Grant on 14 May 1945 the technical survival of the Council of Fifty ended.<sup>109</sup>

## Legacy

Although the Council of Fifty no longer exists as an organized body, there remains one of its contributions which historically outweighs any practical influences the Council may have exerted. After 1845, the Council of Fifty focused primarily on immediate issues of the Mormon community—from exterminating wolves to preparing for elections. By contrast, in 1844 and on occasion thereafter, the Council meetings departed from the immediate, often humdrum concerns of the temporal struggles of the Church. These minutes contain numerous discourses and instructions by Joseph Smith and others concerning the role of the U.S. Constitution in the present and millennial existence of the Latter-day Saints, the Nature of the all-encompassing Kingdom of God which the Council signified, and other crucial teachings that are in no other records than Council of Fifty minutes. For example, Benjamin F. Johnson reported that in the Council of Fifty meetings, Joseph Smith taught of "adopting the God Given Constatution [*sic*] of United States as a paladium of Liberty & eaqual [*sic*] Rights—



But this of itself would Require a long Chapter.<sup>110</sup> Both Benjamin F. Johnson and Orson Hyde affirmed that in a meeting of the Council of Fifty, Joseph Smith gave his famous charge to the Quorum of the Twelve to carry forth the Church and the Kingdom of God, which charge became the basis for the apostolic succession established after the death of Joseph Smith.<sup>111</sup> These teachings of Joseph Smith to the Council of Fifty, found nowhere else, fill hundreds of pages. On 16 March 1880, nearly 200 pages of the Council's minutes concerning only its "origin and Organization" were read to President John Taylor, Joseph F. Smith, and Franklin D. Richards. Elder Richards recorded that the "whole reading was exceedingly interesting & wonderful to contemplate."<sup>112</sup> Joseph F. Smith wrote that the Prophet's 1844 instructions to the Council of Fifty were "grand & god like."<sup>113</sup>

When Joseph Smith went to Carthage, Illinois, for his last imprisonment, the Church nearly lost these voluminous teachings of the Prophet to the Council of Fifty. Joseph Smith had already been charged by anti-Mormons with the ridiculous crime of treason for destroying the *Nauvoo Expositor* as a public nuisance. He knew that the frenzied anti-Mormons of June 1844 were incapable of understanding the symbolic nature of the prophet-king ordinance or the millennial context of his teachings about the Kingdom of God. Therefore, Joseph Smith told William Clayton to either burn or bury the records of the Council of Fifty. William Clayton trusted that calmer, more reasonable and more secure times would come for the Latter-day Saints and therefore preserved the records for future generations.<sup>114</sup> Though not available at this time, those teachings of Joseph Smith and of his successors in the Council of Fifty are a far greater legacy to the Latter-day Saints than the often-mundane activities of the Council itself.

#### COUNCIL OF FIFTY MEMBERS, 1844–1945<sup>115</sup>

- Adams, George J. (1810–1880). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844. Dropped 4 February 1845.
- Babbitt, Almon W. (1812–1856). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844. Remained a member until his death.
- Badlam, Alexander (1808–1894). Admitted 11 March 1844. Dropped 4 February 1845. Readmitted to Council and attended its 1851 meetings. Dropped again in 1867–1868 period.
- Benson, Ezra T. (1811–1869). Admitted 25 December 1846.
- Bent, Samuel (1778–1846). Admitted 19 March 1844.
- Bernhisel, John M. (1799–1846). Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Bonney, Edward (1807–1864). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844. Dropped 4 February 1845.
- Brown, Uriah (1784– ). Admitted 19 March 1844. Dropped 4 February 1845. Council voted on 25 August 1851 to readmit him but rescinded that vote on 13 September 1851.



- Budge, William (1828–1919). Considered 10 April 1880. Was voted in 24 June 1882. Admitted 26 June 1883.
- Bullock, Thomas (1816–1885). Admitted 25 December 1846. Reporter for the Council meetings from 1848. Released due to old age 24 June 1882.
- Burton, Robert T. (1821–1907). Admitted 25 January 1867.
- Cahoon, Reynolds (1790–1861). Attended provisional meeting of 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Caine, John T. (1829–1911). Admitted 8 April 1881.
- Cannon, Abraham H. (1834–1915). Admitted 9 October 1884.
- Cannon, Angus M. (1834–1915). Admitted 10 April 1880.
- Cannon, George Q. (1827–1901). Admitted 23 January 1867. Elected recorder 23 January 1867.
- Cannon, John Q. (1857–1931). Admitted 9 October 1884.
- Carrington, Albert (1813–1889). Admitted 18 or 22 April 1845. Reporter for Council meetings in 1848.
- Clawson, Hiram B. (1826–1912). Admitted 27 June 1882.
- Clayton, William (1814–1879). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Appointed clerk on 10 March 1844. Officially admitted on 11 March 1844. Officially reappointed Clerk of the Kingdom on 13 March 1844.
- Clinton, Jeter (1813–1892). Admitted 25 January 1867.
- Cluff, William W. (1813–1892). Admitted 10 April 1880.
- Coolidge, Joseph W. (1814– ). Admitted 18 April 1844. Dropped after 1848.
- Cutler, Alpheus (1784–1864). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844. Possibly dropped in 1848–1849 period.
- Dana, Lewis (1805–1885). Admitted 1 March 1845. Dropped after 1848.
- Daniels, Cyrus (1803–1846). Admitted 11 March 1845.
- Dunham, Jonathan (1800–1845). Admitted 1 March 1845.
- Eaton, Marenus G. (1811– ). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844. Dropped 4 February 1845.
- Eldredge, Horace S. (1816–1888). Admitted 9 December 1848.
- Emmett, James (1803–1852). Admitted 13 March 1844. Dropped 4 February 1845.
- Farnham, John W. (1794– ). Admitted 18 or 22 April 1845.
- Farr, Lorin (1820–1909). Admitted 12 October 1880.
- Fielding, Amos (1792–1875). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Fielding, Joseph (1797–1863). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844.
- Foster, Lucien R. (1806– ). Admitted 1 March 1845. Dropped 12 November 1846.
- Fullmer, David (1803–1879). Admitted 1 March 1845.
- Fullmer, John S. (1807–1883). Admitted 18 or 22 April 1845. Released due to old age 24 June 1882.
- Gibbs, George F. (1846–1924). Appointed reporter, but not member, on 5 April 1882. Admitted 24 June 1882.
- Grant, George D. (1812–1876). Admitted 9 September 1845.
- Grant, Heber J. (1856–1945). Was voted in 26 June 1882. Admitted 27 June or 10 October 1882.
- Grant, Jedediah M. (1816–1856). Admitted 6 May 1844.
- Greene, John P. (1793–1844). Admitted 26 March 1844.
- Hardy, Leonard W. (1805–1884). Admitted 27 June 1882.
- Hatch, Abram (1830–1911). Admitted 29 June 1883.
- Haws, Peter (1796– ). Admitted 11 March 1844. Dropped sometime after 13 November 1846.

- Heywood, Joseph L. (1815–1910). Admitted 6 December 1848. Released due to old age on 24 June 1882.
- Hollister, David S. (1808–1858). Admitted 18 April 1844. Possibly dropped after 25 December 1846.
- Hooper, William H. (1813–1882). Was voted in 5 October 1867. Admitted 10 October 1867.
- Hunter, Edward (1793–1883). Was voted in 23 January 1867. Admitted 25 January 1867.
- Hyde, Orson (1805–1878). Admitted 13 March 1844.
- James, Samuel (1806– ). Admitted 19 March 1844. Dropped 4 February 1845.
- Jennings, William (1823–1886). Admitted 10 April 1880.
- Johnson, Benjamin F. (1818–1905). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844.
- Kimball, Charles S. (1843–1925). Was voted in 23 January 1867. Admitted 25 January 1867.
- Kimball, David P. (1839–1883). Was voted in 23 January 1867. Admitted 25 January 1867.
- Kimball, Heber C. (1801–1868). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Kimball Heber P. (1835–1885). Was voted in 23 January 1867. Admitted 5 April 1867.
- Layton, Christopher (1821–1898). Admitted 29 June 1883.
- Lee, John D. (1812–1877). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844.
- Little, Feramorz (1820–1887). Admitted 21 April 1880.
- Lott, Cornelius P. (1798–1850). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844.
- Lyman, Amasa M. (1813–1877). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844. Possibly dropped after 25 January 1867; otherwise technically remained a member until death.
- Lyman, Francis M. (1840–1916). Admitted 10 April 1880.
- Marks, William (1792–1872). Admitted 19 March 1844. Dropped 4 February 1845.
- Miller, George (1794–1856). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844. Dropped after 26 December 1846.
- Morley, Isaac (1786–1865). Was voted in 1 March 1845.
- Murdock, John (1826–1913). Considered 10 April 1880. Admitted 28 June 1883.
- Nuttall, L. John (1834–1905). Admitted 10 April 1880. Elected clerk 10 April 1880.
- Pack, John (1809–1885). Admitted 1 March 1845. Released due to old age 24 June 1882.
- Page, John E. (1799–1867). Admitted 1 March 1845. Dropped 12 November 1846.
- Parker, John D. (1799–1891). Admitted 19 March 1844. Released due to old age 24 June 1882.
- Penrose, Charles W. (1832–1925). Admitted 26 June 1882.
- Peterson, Canute (1824–1902). Was voted in 27 June 1882. Admitted 10 October 1882.
- Phelps, John (1800– ). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844 but not admitted to Council once formal meetings began on 11 March 1844.
- Phelps, William W. (1792–1872). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Pratt, Orson (1811–1881). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Pratt, Parley P. (1807–1857). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Pratt, Parley P., Jr. (1837–1897). Admitted 25 January 1867.
- Preston, William B. (1830–1908). Admitted 10 April 1880.
- Reynolds, George (1842–1909). Admitted 8 April 1881.

- Rich, Charles C. (1809–1883). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844. Released due to old age 24 June 1882.
- Rich, Joseph C. (1841–1908). Admitted 25 January 1867.
- Richards, Franklin D. (1821–1899). Admitted 17 March 1849.
- Richards, Franklin S. (1849–1934). Admitted 10 April 1880.
- Richards, Heber J. (1840–1919). Was voted in 23 January 1867. Admitted 5 October 1867.
- Richards, Levi (1799–1876). Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Richards, Phinehas (1788–1874). Admitted 6 December 1848.
- Richards, Willard (1804–1854). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844 and appointed chairman. Admitted officially 11 March 1844. Released as provisional chairman and made recorder on 13 March 1844.
- Rigdon, Sidney (1793–1876). Admitted 19 March 1844. Dropped 4 February 1845.
- Rockwell, Orrin Porter (1815–1878). Admitted 19 March 1844.
- Rockwood, Albert P. (1805–1879). Admitted 1 March 1845.
- Roundy, Shadrach (1789–1872). Was voted in 1 March 1845.
- Sharp, John (1820–1891). Admitted 25 January 1867.
- Shumway, Charles (1806–1898). Admitted 18 or 22 April 1845. Released due to old age 24 June 1882.
- Shurtliff, Lewis W. (1835–1922). Admitted 10 April 1883.
- Smith, Elias (1804–1888). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844.
- Smith, George A. (1817–1875). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Smith, Hyrum (1800–1844). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Smith, John (1781–1854). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844.
- Smith, John Henry (1848–1911). Admitted 10 April 1880.
- Smith, Joseph, Jr. (1805–1844). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844. Appointed standing chairman 13 March 1844. Ordained and anointed Prophet, Priest, and King over Israel on Earth on 11 April 1844.
- Smith, Joseph F. (1838–1918). Was voted in 23 January 1867. Admitted 25 January or 5 April 1867.
- Smith, Silas S. (1830–1910). Admitted 10 April 1880.
- Smith, William (1811–1894). Admitted 25 April 1844. Dropped after 9 September 1845.
- Smith, William R. (1826–1894). Admitted 10 April 1880.
- Smoot, Abraham O. (1815–1895). Admitted 25 January 1867.
- Snow, Erastus (1818–1888). Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Snow, Lorenzo (1814–1901). Admitted 10 March 1849.
- Snow, Willard (1811–1853). Admitted 6 December 1848.
- Spencer, Daniel (1794–1868). Was voted in 1 March 1845. Admitted 18 March 1845.
- Spencer, Orson (1802–1855). Admitted 19 March 1844.
- Stout, Hosea (1810–1889). Admitted 25 January 1867.
- Taylor, George J. (1834–1914). Was voted in 23 January 1867. Admitted 25 January 1867.
- Taylor, John (1808–1887). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844. Elected standing chairman 10 April 1880. Anointed and ordained as King, Priest, and Ruler over Israel on Earth on 4 February 1885.
- Taylor, John W. (1858–1916). Admitted 9 October 1884.

- Taylor, William W. (1853–1884). Admitted 10 April 1880. Elected assistant clerk on 10 April 1880.
- Teasdale, George (1831–1907). Was voted in 26 June 1882. Admitted 27 June or 10 October 1882.
- Thatcher, Moses (1842–1909). Admitted 10 April 1880.
- Thayer, Ezra (1790– ). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844. Dropped sometime after 22 April 1845.
- Turley, Theodore (1801–1871). Admitted 1 March 1845.
- VanCott, John (1814–1883). Admitted 12 October 1880.
- Wasson, Lorenzo D. (1819–1857). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844. Dropped 4 February 1845.
- Wells, Daniel H. (1814–1891). Admitted 6 December 1848.
- Wells, Junius F. (1854–1930). Admitted 10 April 1880.
- Whitney, Newel K. (1795–1850). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844.
- Wight, Lyman (1796–1858). Was voted in 18 April 1844. Admitted 3 May 1844. Dropped 4 February 1845.
- Winder, John R. (1820–1910). Admitted 8 April 1881.
- Woodruff, Wilford (1807–1898). Admitted 13 March 1844.
- Woodworth, Lucien (1799– ). Admitted 11 March 1844. Dropped after 1848.
- Yearsley, David D. (1808–1849). Admitted between 14 March and 11 April 1844.
- Young, Brigham (1801–1877). Attended provisional meeting on 10 March 1844. Admitted 11 March 1844. Appointed standing chairman 4 February 1845. Anointed and ordained King, Priest, and Ruler over Israel on Earth, probably in 1848–1849 period.
- Young, Brigham, Jr. (1836–1903). Admitted 23 January 1867.
- Young, John (1791–1870). Admitted 9 February 1849.
- Young, John W. (1844–1924). Admitted 5 October 1867.
- Young, Joseph (1797–1881). Admitted 1 March 1845.
- Young, Joseph A. (1834–1875). Admitted 23 January 1867.
- Young, Phineas H. (1799–1879). Admitted 15 April 1845. His “fellowship” in the Council was challenged on 22 August 1851, but he reconciled himself with the Council on that date.
- Young, Seymour B. (1837–1924). Admitted 9 October 1884.

---

D. Michael Quinn is an associate professor of American history, Brigham Young University. This article is an expansion of the author’s interpretation of the Council of Fifty in “The Mormon Hierarchy, 1832–1932: An American Elite” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1976), pp. 193–213.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848–1876*, 2 vols. (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1955), 1:xxiii and *passim*; James R. Clark, “The Kingdom of God, the Council of Fifty, and the State of Deseret,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 26 (April 1958): 131–48; Hyrum L. Andrus, *Joseph Smith and World Government* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1958); Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 31–32 and *passim*; Jo Ann Barnett Shipps, “The Mormon in Politics: The First Hundred Years” (Ph. D. diss., University of Colorado, 1965); Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The*

*Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967). Klaus Hansen's work is most vulnerable to this criticism because his 1974 second edition stated that there was no need for revision, when in fact his interpretations were indefensible in view of diaries and other manuscripts readily available for research at the time of the second edition.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Council of Fifty, 10 April 1880, typed copy, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

<sup>3</sup> Examples in Hyrum L. Andrus, *Doctrines of the Kingdom*, vol. 3 of *Foundations of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), pp. 40–46.

<sup>4</sup> Wilford Woodruff Journal, 10 March 1844, and Franklin D. Richards Journal, 10 April 1880, both at Library-Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter cited as Church Archives.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. Brigham H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1932–1951), 6:255–60; hereafter cited as *HC*.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Smith Jr. Journal, 10 March 1844, kept by Willard Richards, Church Archives. His long entries for this date were omitted from the published *History of the Church*, 6:160, and his much briefer entry for 11 March 1844 was expanded greatly in *HC*, 6:160–61.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Smith Jr. Journal, 10 and 11 March 1844; *HC*, 6:160–61; William Clayton Journal, entries from 10 March to 18 April 1844, referred to in James B. Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo: The Mormon Experience in Illinois as Seen and Felt by William Clayton," *Journal of Mormon History* 6 (1979).

<sup>8</sup> Manuscript history of the Church, 11 March 1844, and Joseph Fielding Journal, 11 March 1849, Church Archives; William Clayton Journal, 11 March 1844, as cited in Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo," fn. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Brigham Young Journal, 13 March 1844, Church Archives; Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 13 March 1844. In later published versions of "History of Brigham Young," this was altered to conform to the traditional 11 March 1844 date. See *Latter-day Saints Millennial Star* 26 (21 May 1864): 328.

<sup>10</sup> William Clayton Journal, 13 March 1844, referred to in Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo," fn. 21; *HC*, 6:263. "History of Brigham Young," *LDS Millennial Star* 26 (21 May 1864): 328 describes these appointments but puts them on 11 March 1844, contrary to Brigham Young's handwritten journal and to William Clayton's journal.

<sup>11</sup> This is the name from the revelation of 27 June 1882 as found in a collection of John Taylor's revelations copied by his daughter Annie Taylor Hyde in her notebook, p. 67, Church Archives. The William Clayton Journal, 1 January 1845, gives the same reading of the name except that William Clayton makes "Laws" singular and makes "Power" plural (see Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo," fn. 21). The 10 April 1880 minutes agree with the 1882 revelation except in leaving out "Ahman Christ" and in making "Power" plural. The Franklin D. Richards Journal for 16 March 1880 and the Joseph F. Smith Journal memorandum, recorded following the 31 December 1880 entry, Church Archives, both agree with the 1882 revelation except for leaving out the words "Ahman Christ" and making "Power" plural. However, Joseph F. Smith in his journal for 16 March 1880 agrees with the singular form of "Power." Abbreviated versions of the full name yet closing with the words "Ahman Christ" are found in the entry for 9 October 1884 in the Abraham H. Cannon Journal, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, and the 3 March 1849 entry in the John D. Lee Journal as published in Cleland and Brooks, *A Mormon Chronicle*, 1:98. The Wilford Woodruff Journal, 29 May 1847, gives the name in an abbreviated and shorthand form: "The Kingdom of

God & his Law & Judgment in [then follows the shorthand:] th[e] h[a]nds [o]f [hi]s s[e]r[ri]nts [sic] a[h]m[a]n [then a cross for Christ].” The preceding transcription is courtesy of Andrew F. Ehat, editorial intern for *BYU Studies*.

<sup>12</sup> Heber C. Kimball Journal, 4 February 1845, Church Archives; John Henry Smith Journal, 18 May 1881, in George A. Smith Family Collection, Western Americana, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Smith Journal, 13 May 1844; Willard Richards Journal, 13 May 1844; and Heber C. Kimball Journal, 1 March 1845.

<sup>14</sup> Heber C. Kimball Journal, 11 March 1845.

<sup>15</sup> B.H. Roberts cited the original manuscript for the *History of the Church* whereas the 1857 compilers of the Manuscript History of the Church footnoted the term “General Council” in the manuscript and identified it as the Council of Fifty (see *HC*, 7:379). It should be noted that the term “General Council” was used to identify the Council of Fifty only in these sources created by the LDS church historian in Utah, and the term was never used by the members of the Council of Fifty in their contemporary diaries and journals. Moreover, whereas the term “Council of Fifty” has only one possible application, the term “General Council” has had many other applications in Mormon history: an organization of high priests as indicated in D&C 102:1, 8; a meeting of all general and local Church officers, as indicated in “Minutes of a General Council,” *LDS Millennial Star* 24 (18 January 1862):33; and meetings during the pioneer exodus involving all captains of companies and other camp leaders, many of whom were not members of the Council of Fifty. Therefore, although some present authors consistently prefer “General Council” when referring to the Council of Fifty, the term “General Council” is the last satisfactory of all possible names.

“General Council” references are in *HC*, 6:274, 286, 331, 341, 343, 351, 356, 369; *HC*, 7:379, 380, 387, 395, 399, 401, 405, 406, 407, 439, 447, 453, 567; and in Manuscript History of the Church under 26 March 1844, 4 April 1844, 11 April 1844, 18 April 1844, 25 April 1844, 6 May 1844, 13 May 1844, 31 May 1844, 1 March 1845, 4 March 1845, 11 March 1845, 18 March 1845, 22 March 1845, 11 April 1845, 15 April 1845, 22 April 1845, 29 April 1845, 6 May 1845, 10 May 1845, 9 September 1845, 30 September 1845, 4 October 1845, 11 January 1846, 12 November 1846, 13 November 1846, 25 December 1846, 26 December 1846, 27 December 1846, 9 October 1868; and in Historian’s Office Journal, 9 October 1868.

<sup>16</sup> George Miller to James J. Strang, 28 June 1855, published in *Northern Islander*, 6 September 1855; Franklin D. Richards Journal, 18 May 1881; William Clayton Journal, 1 January 1845, cited in Allen, “One Man’s Nauvoo,” fn. 21; *William Clayton’s Journal, A Daily Record of the journal of the Original Pioneer Company of “Mormon” Pioneers from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1921), pp. 202–203.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Fielding Journal, entry after 6 April 1844, in Andrew F. Ehat, “‘They Might Have Known that He Was Not a Fallen Prophet’— The Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding,” *BYU Studies* 19 (Winter 1979): 148; Lyman Wight, *An Address by Way of an Abridged Account and Journal of My Life from February 1844 up to April 1848* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 9, 11, 13, 14.

<sup>18</sup> John D. Lee Journal, 31 March 1849, in Cleland and Brooks, *A Mormon Chronicle*, 1:104; Daniel Spencer Journal, 11 April 1845, and Robert T. Burton Journal, 10 October 1883, Church Archives.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Fielding Journal, 11 March 1849; Horace S. Eldredge Journal, 4 March 1849, Church Archives; John D. Lee Journal, 3 March, 4 March, 10 March 1849, as printed in Cleland and Brooks, *A Mormon Chronicle*, 1:97–100.



<sup>20</sup> John D. Lee Journal, Fall 1848, in Cleland and Brooks, *A Mormon Chronicle*, 1:80; Brigham Young Jr. Journal, 23 January 1867, Church Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Wilford Woodruff Journal, 25 January 1867; Manuscript History of the Church, 25 January 1867; Hosea Stout Memo, 25 January 1867, in Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964), 2:716. Compare these sources with Brigham Young Jr. Journal, 25 January 1867 (where the Council is specifically identified as “the council of fifty”); or Wilford Woodruff Journal, 10 October 1867, with Elias Smith Journal, 10 October 1867 (“Council of Fifty”), Church Archives; and compare the Robert T. Burton Journal, 10 April 1883, with Franklin D. Richards Journal, 10 April 1883, Church Archives.

<sup>22</sup> *HC*, 6:369, 373; Manuscript History of the Church, 13 May 1844.

<sup>23</sup> Example in William W. Taylor Journal, 29 June 1883, Church Archives. Cf. Franklin D. Richards Journal, 29 June 1883. Sometimes, however, such designation referred to a council that was not a meeting of the Council of Fifty.

<sup>24</sup> Brigham Young Journal, 4 February 1845; Shadrach Roundy Journal, end of 1870 entry; Charles C. Rich Journal, 4 March 1845; Franklin D. Richards Journal, 4 October 1881; Willard Richards Journal, 27 March 1846; John D. Lee Journal, 18 April 1846; Joseph F. Smith Journal, 10 April 1880; Willard Richards Journal, 21 August–13 September 1851; Phinehas Richards Journal, 25 August 1851, and 23 January 1867; Fullmer Family Notebook, p. 41—all at Church Archives; and George Miller to James J. Strang, 1 July 1855, published in *Northern Islander*, 20 September 1855.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Spencer Journal, 12 April 1845, cf. Heber C. Kimball Journal, 12 April 1845 (“the Kingdom met”); Daniel Spencer Journal, 18 April 1845, cf. Charles C. Rich Journal, 18 April 1845 (“council of ft”), William W. Phelps in meeting of 27 February 1845, miscellaneous minutes at Church Archives; John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled*, ed. W. W. Bishop (St. Louis, Mo.: Bryan, Brand & Co., 1877). p. 173. An unsigned article in *Zion’s Harbinger and Baneemy’s Organ* 2 (January 1852): 3 declared that Joseph Smith “secretly organized a Council of 50 men, which he denominated ‘the Grand Council, and Living Constitution of the Kingdom of God.’” The knowledgeable source of this information was undoubtedly William Marks, who made a less specific description of the Council of fifty in his letter published in *Zion’s Harbinger* 3 (July 1853): 53.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes of Mercantile and Manufacturing Association of Nauvoo, pp. 3, 11–12, and Amasa M. Lyman Journal, 28 January, 4 February, 7 February, and 18 February 1845, Church Archives; *HC*, 7:369.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* The 1845 business Living Constitution consisted of John Taylor, George A. Smith, and Amasa M. Lyman as a presidency with the following twelve counselors: Samuel Bent, Alpheus Cutler, Phinehas Richards, Edward Hunter, Daniel Spencer, John Benbow, Theodore Turley, Orson Spencer, David Fullmer, Charles C. Rich, William Weeks, and Joseph W. Coolidge. Compare to biographical sketches at end of this article.

<sup>28</sup> Pottawattamie High Council Minutes, p. 137, 20 January 1849, and Charles L. Walker Journal, 5 June 1870, Church Archives; *Salt Lake Herald*, 16 September 1897, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Annie Taylor Hyde Notebook, p. 65. This statement also appears as a quote in the minutes of 21 April 1880, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, and probably was taken from an earlier revelation.

<sup>30</sup> See fn. 108.

<sup>31</sup> *HC*, 6:261

<sup>32</sup> Annie Taylor Hyde Notebook, pp. 58–60; see also Franklin D. Richards Journal and John Henry Smith Journal for 27 June 1882.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin F. Johnson, “A Life Review,” MS, p. 94, Church Archives; and Cleland and Brooks, *A Mormon Chronicle*, 1:80. Both statements are requested in the studies of Hansen, Andrus, and others.

<sup>34</sup> Clark, "The Kingdom of God," p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> Shippy, "The Mormons in Politics," p. 165.

<sup>36</sup> Hansen, *Quest for Empire*, p. 190.

<sup>37</sup> William Clayton Journal, 4 February 1845, cited in Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo," fn. 25.

<sup>38</sup> Willard Richards Journal, 12 November 1846.

<sup>39</sup> Examples in the Willard Richards Journal are meetings of 30 March, 2 April, 18 April, 26 April, 27 April, 20 May, 7 August 1846.

<sup>40</sup> George Miller to James J. Strang, 1 July 1855, published in *Northern Islander*, 20 September 1855.

<sup>41</sup> Meeting of 25 August 1851, miscellaneous minutes in Church Archives. Cf. journals of Willard Richards and Wilford Woodruff for this date.

<sup>42</sup> Miscellaneous minutes for the period 22 August—4 October 1851; and journals of Willard Richards, Phineas Richards, and Wilford Woodruff, beginning 21 August 1851. Another reference to the requirement of the quorum is in Albert Carrington Diary, 5 October 1880, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

<sup>43</sup> Miscellaneous minutes, 23 January 1867.

<sup>44</sup> Journals of Brigham Young Jr., Elias Smith, Wilford Woodruff, and Manuscript History of the Church, and miscellaneous minutes for 23 January, 25 January, 5 April, 5 October 10 October 1867; 4 April, 9 April, 9 October 1868.

<sup>45</sup> Manuscript History of the Church, 4 April 1868.

<sup>46</sup> Albert Carrington Diary, 10 April 1868.

<sup>47</sup> Each meeting date of the Council of Fifty often can be verified by as many as nine personal journals of Council members who openly recorded their attendance.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Smith Jr. Journal, 29 January 1844; Willard Richards Journal, 4 March 1844; *HC*, 6:187–88; Hansen, *Quest for Empire*, pp. 77–78

<sup>49</sup> Willard Richards Journal, 21 February 1844; Heber C. Kimball Journal, 1 March 1845; *HC*, 6:223

<sup>50</sup> The excluded members of the Council of Fifty were Alpheus Cutler, Isaac Morley, Orson Spencer, Joseph Young, Cornelius P. Lott, John Smith, John M. Bernhisel, William W. Phelps, and John D. Lee (see the Heber C. Kimball Journal, 11 December 1845). The published account in *HC*, 7:543–44 is quite abbreviated and does not indicate that these subordinate members of the Council of Fifty, though present, were uninvited to the council meeting of Church authorities about the letter.

<sup>51</sup> George Miller to James J. Strang, 1 July 1855, published in *Northern Islander*, 20 September 1855.

<sup>52</sup> Original draft of letter from Orson Hyde, George A. Smith, and Ezra T. Benson at Carunca, Council Bluffs, 27 March 1849, to Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards in Church Archives; Minutes of Pottawattamie High Council show the preparations for this trial of Lucien Woodworth and Peter Haws, but blank pages were left in the record books for the minutes to be copied for the actual trials.

<sup>53</sup> Franklin D. Richards Journal, 1 April, 10 April 1880; Junius F. Wells Diary, 9 April, 10 April 1880.

<sup>54</sup> Franklin D. Richards Journal, 4 October, 11 October 1882.

<sup>55</sup> The best analysis of the millennial context of the LDS Kingdom of God is Andrus, *Doctrines of the Kingdom*.

<sup>56</sup> Joseph F. Smith draft Journal entry, 12 October 1880. In his journal entry for 8 April 1881 concerning new members of the Council of Fifty, Franklin D. Richards referred to "charge obligation & password."

<sup>57</sup> Franklin D. Richards Journal, 24 June 1882.



<sup>58</sup> Lee, *Confessions*, p. 173; Benjamin F. Johnson, *I Knew the Prophets: An Analysis of the Letter of Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs, Reporting Doctrinal Views of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young*, ed. Dean R. Zimmerman (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1976), pp. 31–32. Cf. William Clayton Journal statements of 1844 membership in Allen, “One Man’s Nauvoo,” fn. 25.

<sup>59</sup> Counselors in the Presiding Bishopric were not admitted to the Council of Fifty until the 1880s, by which time Jesse C. Little had resigned his office as counselor. The absence from 1844 to 1884 of a majority of the First Council of the Seventy and of Patriarch John Smith (b. 1832) from membership in the Council of Fifty can be understood in terms of their diminished status within the LDS hierarchy. References to their status can be found in the author’s “Organizational Development and Social Origins of the Mormon Hierarchy, 1832–1932” (M.A. thesis, University of Utah, 1973), p. 277, and “The Mormon Hierarchy, 1832–1932: An American Elite,” *passim*.

<sup>60</sup> This revelation was given shortly after the 27 June meeting of the Council of Fifty adjourned (see Annie Taylor Hyde Notebook, p. 80; Franklin D. Richards Journal, 27 June 1882). This revelation was officially adopted at the next meeting of the Council of Fifty (see Franklin D. Richards Journal, 10 October 1882).

<sup>61</sup> Examples were Apostles Franklin D. Richards, Lorenzo Snow, Joseph F. Smith, Moses Thatcher, and John W. Taylor, Presiding Bishop’s Counselor John Q. Cannon, and Presidents of the Seventy William W. Taylor and Seymour B. Young.

<sup>62</sup> Brigham Young in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, England: F. D. Richards, et al, 1854–1886), 2:317.

<sup>63</sup> “History of Brigham Young,” *LDS Millennial Star* 26 (21 May 1864): 328.

<sup>64</sup> Hansen, *Quest for Empire*, pp. 61–63.

<sup>65</sup> Mark J. Baird and Rhea A. Baird, *Reminiscences of John W. Woolley and Lorin C. Woolley*, 4 vols. (Draper, Utah: n.p., n.d.), 3:9

<sup>66</sup> Biographical sketches at the end of this article, and William Clayton Journal entries for members of the Council of Fifty, cited in Allen, “One Man’s Nauvoo,” fns. 20, 21, and 25.

<sup>67</sup> *HC*, 6:279, 576; Illinois Executive Record, 1843–1847, MS, 4:208, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

<sup>68</sup> *HC*, 6:405, 412, 488–90, 500, 554, 576; introduction of Philippians D. Jordan to Bonney’s *The Banditti of the Prairies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1963), pp. vii–xxi.

<sup>69</sup> *HC*, 5:210, 246, 6:386; Uriah Brown to Brigham Young, 3 November 1845, Young Papers, Church Archives; miscellaneous minutes of 25 August and 13 September 1851.

<sup>70</sup> Hansen, *Quest for Empire*, pp. 128, 131, 135–37; Clark, “The Kingdom of God,” p. 145.

<sup>71</sup> Exceptions to this occurred when the man received Church discipline during one of the periods in which there were no Council of Fifty meetings and then died before the Council met to drop him.

<sup>72</sup> The situations of these men in relation to the Church and the Kingdom are discussed in Hansen, *Quest for Empire*, pp. 94–96; Rupert J. Fletcher and Daisy Whiting Fletcher, *Alpheus Cutler and the Church of Jesus Christ* (Independence, Mo.: The Church of Jesus Christ, 1974); Philippians C. Wightman, “The Life and Contributions of Lyman Wight” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1971); fns. 51–52 of this article.

<sup>73</sup> See discussion below, beginning fn. 90.

<sup>74</sup> See examples in *HC*, 7:439, and Cleland and Brooks, *A Mormon Chronicle*, 1:81, 82, 87, 89.

<sup>75</sup> Fletcher, *Alpheus Cutler*, p. 53; William W. Blair Diary, 13 March 1863, Research Library and Archives of The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>76</sup> *HC*, 6:333; Joseph Smith Journal, 14 April 1844.

<sup>77</sup> Franklin D. Richards Journal, 10 October 1882, 10 April 1883, 8 October 1884.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 June 1882.

<sup>79</sup> This committee of the 1880s is undoubtedly the actual source for the mythical "Council of Seven Friends" which Lorin C. Woolley invented and others have used as the self-perpetuating authority structure for continuing polygamy in defiance of LDS Church authority. For a detailed summary of polygamist/schismatic claims concerning the "Council of Seven Friends," see Lynn L. Bishop and Steven L. Bishop, *The Keys of the Priesthood Illustrated* (Draper, Utah; Review and Preview Publishers, 1971), pp. 61–75, 116–58, 279–88.

<sup>80</sup> *HC*, 6:263; Manuscript History of the Church, 13 March 1844; William Clayton Journal, 13 March 1844, referred to in Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo," fns. 21 and 25. The published "History of Brigham Young," *LDS Millennial Star* 26 (21 May 1864): 328, gives the names of the historian, clerk, and standing chairman appointed for the Council of Fifty, but it changes the date of appointment to 11 March 1844. Manuscript records indicate that this switching of date from 13 March was in error as regards the officers named.

<sup>81</sup> Manuscript History of the Church, 23 January 1867; Brigham Young Jr. Journal, 23 January 1867; miscellaneous minutes, 23 January 1867.

<sup>82</sup> William Clayton Journal, 10 March–13 March 1844, referred to in Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo," fns. 19 and 21; *HC*, 6:263; Manuscript History of the Church, 13 March 1844, "History of Brigham Young," *LDS Millennial Star* 26 (21 May 1864): 328 gives the appointment but inaccurately changes the date to 11 March 1844

<sup>83</sup> Junius F. Wells Journal, 10 April 1880; Joseph F. Smith Journal, 10 April 1880.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Bullock Journal, 6 December–23 December 1848, Church Archives. Cf. John D. Lee Journal for same period in Books and Cleland, *A Mormon Chronicle*, 1:80–83.

<sup>86</sup> Miscellaneous minutes, 5 April and 24 June 1882; and Franklin D. Richards Journal, 24 June 1882, Church Archives.

<sup>87</sup> William Clayton Journal, cited in Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo," fn. 24; Wilford Woodruff Journal, 26 November 1857; Franklin D. Richards Journal, 16 March 1880, 20 March 1884; L. John Nuttall 1879–1881 Letter Book, pp. 168, 178, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

<sup>88</sup> William Clayton Journal, 10–13 March 1844, referred to in Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo," fns. 19 and 21; "History of Brigham Young," *LDS Millennial Star* 26 (21 May 1864): 328; Manuscript History of the Church, 9 February 1849; John D. Lee Journal, 5 April 1849; as published in Cleland and Brooks, *A Mormon Chronicle* 1:104; Joseph F. Smith Journal, 10 April 1880; Junius F. Wells Journal, 10 April 1880.

<sup>89</sup> Throughout the available documents on the Council of Fifty, meetings were adjourned either to a specific meeting date or *sine die*; and in either case were subject to the call of the "President" or "Chairman."

<sup>90</sup> William Clayton Journal, 11 April 1844, 1 January 1845, quoted in Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo," fns. 21 and 22.

<sup>91</sup> William Marks to "Beloved Brethren," 15 June 1853, published in *Zion's Harbinger and Baneemy's Organ* 3 (July 1853): 53. See also the earlier reports with nearly identical wording for which William Marks was probably the source: *Upper Mississippian*

and *Rock Island Republican*, 2 November 1844; George T. M. Davis, *An Authentic Account of the Massacre of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, and Hyrum Smith, His Brother, Together with a Brief History of the Rise and Progress of Mormonism, And All the Circumstances Which Led to Their Death* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chambers & Knapp, 1844), p. 7; *Zion's Harbinger* 2 (January 1852): 3. Also, see Reuben Miller, *James J. Strang, Weighed in the Balance of Truth, and Found Wanting* (Burlington, Wisc.: n.p., 1846), p. 12.

<sup>92</sup> Gordon C. Thomasson, "Foolsmate," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6 (Autumn–Winter 1971): 148–51. The temple ceremony to which Thomasson refers was received by Joseph Smith on 28 September 1843, six months prior to the theocratic ceremony mentioned in William Clayton's journal (see Wilford Woodruff's *Historian's Private Journal*, entry for 26 February 1867, Church Archives).

<sup>93</sup> Annie Taylor Hyde Notebook, p. 64.

<sup>94</sup> Abraham H. Cannon Journal, 2 December 1895. Abraham H. Cannon was George Q. Cannon's son.

<sup>95</sup> Manuscript in Franklin D. Richards Miscellaneous Papers, Church Archives, Franklin D. Richards Journal, 4 February 1885, reads: "At 8. p.m. attended Council at Endowment House where we had prayers consecrated oil, and Prest. Jno Taylor was anointed K[ing]. P[riest]. R[uler]. of C[hurch]. Z[ion]. & K[ingdom]."

<sup>96</sup> "That Declaration," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 5 May 1885. Earlier references to this ceremony by the *Salt Lake Tribune* appeared in articles "Is Mormonism Treason?" (8 March 1885) and "They Talk It Over" (10 March 1885). Apostle John Henry Smith commented on the newspaper reports of this ceremony in a letter to his kinsman and counselor in the First Presidency, Joseph F. Smith (John Henry Smith to J. Mack [pseudonym for Joseph F. Smith], 28 August 1885, in John Henry Smith 1884–1894 Letter Book, pp. 434–35, George A. Smith Family Papers, Marriott Library, University of Utah).

<sup>97</sup> *Journal of Discourses*, 5:219 (discourse delivered 6 September 1856). Andrew Cahoon, an apostate Mormon who was a son of one of the original members of the Council of Fifty, testified in 1889 that Brigham Young had proclaimed himself as king to the 1847 pioneers in Utah (see "Testimony of Andrew Cahoon," *Deseret Evening News*, 14 November 1889). The apostate William Smith wrote: "The people of Salt Lake govern their church by a secret lodge of 50 men. It is in this lodge that Brigham Young is crowned as a King, and is there seated upon a throne prepared for him" (see *Melchizedek and Aaronic Herald*, 1 [February 1850]: 1).

<sup>98</sup> John W. Taylor to Joseph F. Smith, 17 February 1911, Church Archives.

<sup>99</sup> For other discussions of the symbolic role of the LDS Prophet-King, see Andrus, *Doctrines of the Kingdom*, pp. 556–67; Melodie Moench, "Joseph Smith: Prophet, Priest, and King," *Task Papers in LDS History*, No. 25 (Salt Lake City: Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978).

<sup>100</sup> *Upper Mississippian*, 2 November 1844; Davis, *An Authentic Account*, p. 7.

<sup>101</sup> Hosea Stout Diary, 13 January 1846, published in Brooks, *On the Mormon Frontier*, 1:105. Hosea Stout did not become a member of the Council of Fifty until 1867.

<sup>102</sup> *Deseret News*, 17 June 1857; Wilford Woodruff Journal, 26 November 1857.

<sup>103</sup> "History of Brigham Young," 11 March, 19 March 1844, in *Deseret News*, 24 March 1858 and *LDS Millennial Star* 26 (21 May 1864): 328.

<sup>104</sup> Examples are quoted in *HC*, 7:381–82; Andrus, *Joseph Smith and World Government*, pp. 4, 5, 9; Salt Lake City Seventeenth Ward Relief Society Minutes, 1868–1884 Book, pp. 345–46.

<sup>105</sup> *Deseret Evening News*, 28 November 1877; Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Co., 1901–1936), 1:290, 368.

<sup>106</sup> Heber J. Grant Letter Book Journal, 25 October 1887, Church Archives.

<sup>107</sup> John W. Taylor to Joseph F. Smith, 17 February 1911; John Henry Smith Journal, 18 February 1911.

<sup>108</sup> "Instructions given to Elder Joseph F. Smith Jr., at the Salt Lake Temple, April 7th, 1910, immediately prior to his receiving ordination as an Apostle," Smith Papers, Church Archives.

<sup>109</sup> Heber J. Grant Journal, 3 January 1932. This should disprove any rumors about other persons who allegedly were members of the Council of Fifty but who lived beyond 1931.

<sup>110</sup> Johnson, *I Knew the Prophets*, p. 31.

<sup>111</sup> Johnson, "A Life Review," MS, p. 96: Minutes of the Nauvoo High Council, 30 November 1844, p. 7, Church Archives.

<sup>112</sup> Franklin D. Richards Journal, 16 March 1880.

<sup>113</sup> Joseph F. Smith Journal, 10 April 1880.

<sup>114</sup> Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo," fn. 24.

<sup>115</sup> All names and other data have been collated from numerous personal diaries, miscellaneous manuscripts and biographies in various locations. The overlapping of these sources is sufficient to justify confidence that the list of members in this article is complete. Contrary to the list of council of Fifty members in Hansen's *Quest for Empire*, pp. 227–28, John Fielding and John Scott were not members of the Council. Hansen's list also fails to include thirty-eight verified members of the Council of Fifty.