

Burgess

THE EARLY HISTORY OF NAUVOO

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The Early History of Nauvoo

Together with a Sketch of the People
Who Built This Beautiful City and
Whose Leaders Suffered Persecution
and Martyrdom for Their
Religion's Sake



S. A. BURGESS, Historian



General Church Headquarters
Independence, Missouri
U. S. A.

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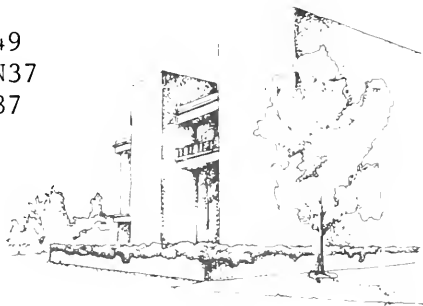
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**Southern Illinois University
at Edwardsville**

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Nauvoo

A Brief Historical Sketch

The founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Joseph Smith, was born at Sharon, Vermont, the 23d of December, 1805. Ten years later the family moved to Manchester, near Palmyra, New York.

During a revival in the early spring of 1820, held by several different denominations, Joseph Smith went into the woods to pray, under the advice of James 1:15: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." As a result, this boy of fourteen years received a vision of his Savior and was informed that his heavenly Father was about to do a great and marvelous work.

A Vision

Then, the night of September 21, 1823, while engaged in prayer, an angel appeared to him and quoted Malachi 3 and 4, Isaiah 11, Acts 3:22 and 23, Joel 2:22-32, and many other passages, and informed him of the plates of the Book of Mormon with a record of the people of this continent. On the following day he was shown the plates. Each year thereafter, on the same date, he visited the place

where the plates were deposited, until September 22, 1827, when he received the plates together with the Breast Plate and Urim and Thummim.

Book of Mormon

His wife, Martin Harris, John Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery assisted by transcribing as he translated the Book of Mormon by the power of inspiration and the use of the Urim and Thummim. On the 11th of June, 1829, the copyright was taken out and in August the book placed in the hands of the printer. Eleven other witnesses were permitted to see and handle the plates, and then the plates were taken back by the angel. These men always affirmed and reaffirmed their testimony of the authenticity of these plates and of the Book of Mormon.

At Kirtland, Ohio

The first normal organization of the church was made on the 6th of April, 1830, at Fayette, New York, at which time Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were ordained as elders. Six took part in the organization.

This remained, however, the headquarters of the church for a very short time. The first missionaries were sent to the west in October, 1830, and visited Kirtland *en route*, where eventually many were baptized. These missionaries then continued on to the western boundary of Missouri, which they reached in March, 1831. In January, 1831, President Joseph Smith removed to Kirtland, and this place became the headquarters of the church and so continued for several years.



JOSEPH SMITH

Prophet and leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints from its organization in 1830 to his martyrdom in 1844.

1844

Kirtland Temple

The Kirtland Temple, the only temple completed in this age by direct command of God, was there erected, the corner stone being laid July 23, 1833. The work was pushed, the temple being completed and dedicated on March 27, 1836. During this period the High Priests and First Presidency were called, the Presiding Bishopric, Quorum of Twelve, and Quorum of Seventy organized, and the High Council called, chosen, and ordained.

At Independence, Missouri

After the first missionaries reached Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, in March, 1831, many others followed, including Joseph Smith on a visit in July, 1831. Kirtland was made a gathering place, though Zion, or Independence, was made the central place. The Temple Lot in Independence was dedicated, a printing press secured, and the Book of Commandments and *Evening and Morning Star* published.

But Missouri, and especially western Missouri, was settled from Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and North and South Carolina. The people were decidedly favorable to slave ownership. Furthermore, Missouri had been kept out of the Union for several years on this question of slavery, and feeling had run high until the Missouri Compromise had permitted its admission. Ten years later the Latter Day Saints, many of whom were from New England, came and settled, bought land, built homes, and erected **churches**.

This difference on the slavery question doubtless had much to do with their trouble and finally their expulsion from the County of Jackson, and from Missouri, although their religion and belief in revelation was a contributing factor.

July 20, 1833, the printing office was destroyed. Leaving Jackson County, settlement was made in Clay County. But on June 29, 1836, protest was made for fear they would settle there permanently, so in August, 1836, they moved to the northeast and settled in part of Ray County. Here they purchased most of the best land, which was divided off and made into Caldwell County. This county was formed and set aside as a sort of reservation for the Saints, but they were not allowed to live there.

Settlement was later made in Daviess County in 1837. These settlements were always made by written agreement, so as to avoid difficulties so far as possible. But despite this agreement, mobs formed, and they were compelled to leave the State in 1838.

The two great reasons for their expulsion have already been stated: The difference in social culture between the New Englanders who favored abolition, and the slave-owning settlers; also the question of religion. Many of these left in the winter of 1838 and 1839, and by the latter year practically the whole body had moved into Illinois near Quincy.

At Nauvoo

On May 1, 1839, the church purchased the Hugh White farm outside of Commerce, for \$5,000. This farm consisted of one hundred thirty-five acres.

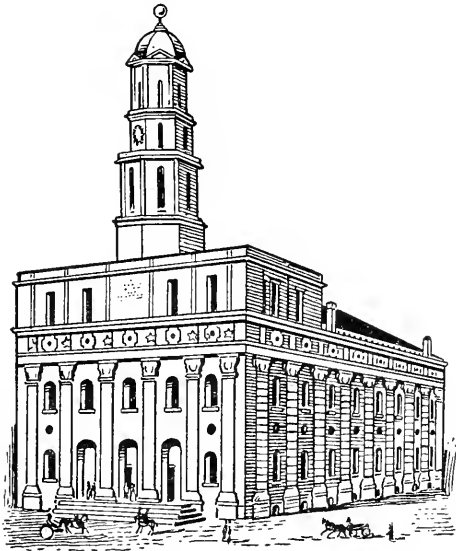
They also purchased Doctor Isaac Galland's farm west of the White property.

On May 9 Joseph Smith left Quincy with his family and arrived at Commerce, Illinois, on the 10th, where he moved into the small log house on the White farm on the bank of the Mississippi River. This log house was built in 1823 or 1824 by Captain White, and had been occupied by the government agent, for Indians were quite numerous at that time throughout Illinois, and there were some four hundred or five hundred lodges of Sac and Fox Indians in the vicinity, according to the History of Hancock County. Across the river, Iowa was practically unorganized territory. It had been recently a part of the Territory of Wisconsin, but in 1840 it was the Territory of Iowa, including the present States of Iowa, Minnesota, and part of both North and South Dakota. This log house of Captain White's was the first Indian agency established in Illinois.

Building a City

On June 11 Theodore Turney built a house of logs, in block 147 of the White purchase. Within a year one hundred and fifty houses had been erected by the Saints. On April 21, 1840, the name of the post office was changed to Nauvoo (a Hebrew term signifying a beautiful place). By the first of January, 1841, there was a population of 3,000. By 1844 the number of inhabitants has been variously estimated. Accuracy is not possible, as the settlement was made between the decennial census of 1840 and that of 1850. Usually the number is stated as 25,000, but some old settlers have urged that it was double that.

With a church membership of 200,000 to 250,000 and this the principal place and the headquarters of the church, either figure would not be surprising.



NAUVOO TEMPLE

*Built at great expense and sacrifice.
An imposing memorial to the faith of
the Saints.*

Many substantial dwellings of brick and frame and many of rock were erected.

Nauvoo Charter

The state legislature, December 16, 1840, granted a very liberal charter. The charter made provision for the Nauvoo Legion and the University of Nau-

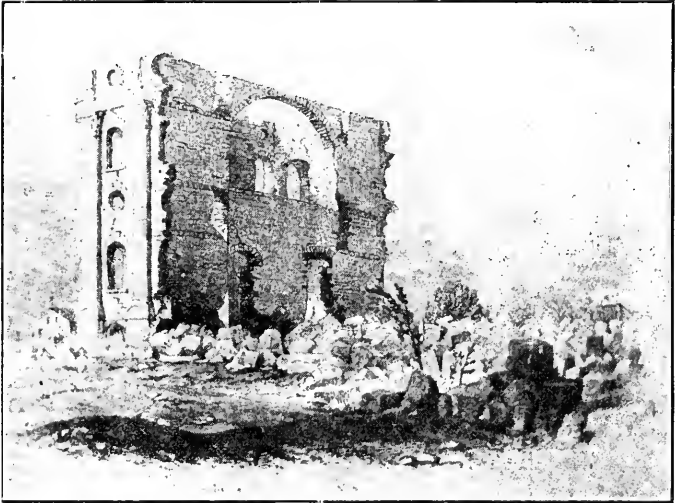
voo. Immediately steps were taken to establish the University of Nauvoo, and by February 15, 1841, James Kelley, A. M., had been elected as president. A building committee was chosen, the work of education pushed energetically, and a faculty chosen. By fall several new members had been added to the faculty, including Orson Pratt, Orson Spencer, and Sidney Rigdon. All matters of education in the city were transferred to the regents of the University of Nauvoo.

On February 4, 1841, the Nauvoo Legion was organized with Joseph Smith as Lieutenant General; J. C. Bennett, Major General; and Wilson Law and D. C. Smith, Brigadier Generals. Such local organizations were common at that time. Nauvoo was on the frontier. Indians resided within the limits of Chicago and elsewhere in Illinois.

The Nauvoo Temple

General Conferences and public meetings were held in the grove in Nauvoo these first few years, but the necessity of a meeting place was seen, and as early as 1841 the erection of a temple was undertaken. Stone was secured from a quarry on the north side of the city in a river bed. The building was completed far enough to be used in the summer of 1844, though the upper auditorium was not plastered, and the lower auditorium only temporarily arranged for meetings, and only a temporary baptismal font had been placed in the basement.

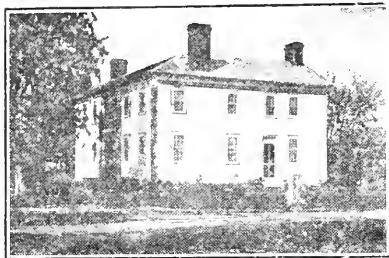
After the death of Joseph Smith some further work was done on the temple, but it was never com-



RUINS OF NAUVOO TEMPLE

This once beautiful temple finally was burned and for a time stood in this manner, a monument to the wrath of persecuting mobs.

pleted. The temple was described by Charles Lanman in 1846 as Roman in style, intermixed with Grecian and Egyptian. This building was destroyed by fire in 1848. Its ruins were used as a stone quarry, and many buildings were erected from its remains.



THE MANSION HOUSE

For many years the official residence of the Prophet and the scene of many notable events in Nauvoo.

Among other buildings, the Nauvoo House was started in 1841, and finished to the top of the windows of the second story. A Masonic Lodge was organized in Nauvoo, and on January 24, 1843, the corner stone of a Masonic Temple was laid. This building was completed April 5, 1844. The lower two stories still stand.

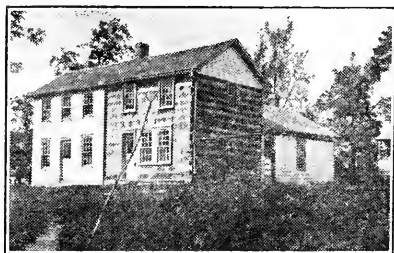
Cause of Difficulties

The rapid growth of Nauvoo caused considerable jealousy in the neighboring cities and towns. The Saints were welcomed in 1839 and 1840, but in a few years the critical situation, not only in Hancock County but in the congressional district, became apparent. At first both parties flattered the church officers and the people of the city. This was one rea-

son for the liberal charter, including provision not only for the University of Nauvoo and the legion, but also for a municipal court to which was granted the powers of habeas corpus. This last grant of power was by no means unique. About the same time the city of Alton was granted a municipal court with similar powers, and later the city of Chicago. Still in a short time this fact was made a cause for additional offense against Nauvoo.

Political Troubles

In the election of 1843, Mr. Walker, the Whig candidate, had a plurality outside of Nauvoo of some 2,200 or 2,400. Nauvoo, however, cast a vote of over 3,000 in favor of Mr. Hoge; this despite the fact that Joseph Smith had voted for Mr. Walker. From that time on the Whig press knew no limit to



THE HOMESTEAD

The first home of the Smiths in Nauvoo—a house built in 1823 and still standing well preserved.

its rage and persistently attacked the city of Nauvoo and the church. When in 1844 Joseph Smith reluctantly permitted his name to be proposed as a candidate for president of the United States, the Democrats, finding they had nothing to gain, also

turned against the people of Nauvoo. The primary basis of the trouble was undoubtedly political, according to Governor Ford's History of Illinois. Also these New Englanders of the church were abolitionists. Shortly before the Nauvoo trouble, Elijah J. Lovejoy, an abolitionist, was killed in 1837 in Alton, Illinois. He was regarded as a martyr to that cause.

As often happens in the case of a large city, thieves in the vicinity many times retreated towards the city, and Nauvoo was unjustly blamed for things with which her citizens were not connected. Governor Ford made a personal investigation and states that the reports were greatly exaggerated, and if the conditions of the community were compared to Saint Louis or many other large cities, the number found guilty would not be so great as in other large cities. It was in this connection that the use of the writ of habeas corpus had given some basis for the spread of false reports.

Masonic Lodge

The rapid growth of the city, the large number of people of one belief, is again illustrated by the fact that the Nauvoo Masonic lodges were much larger than any other in the State and appeared to menace the control of the grand lodge of Illinois. Protests were therefore made, not only from near-by towns but as far away as the lodge of Quincy. The principal basis, however, of the trouble, was political and the spread of false rumors because of prejudice against their religion and belief in revelation, and because of the growing size and power of the city.

The favorable reports of state officials, of ministers and travelers who visited Nauvoo in the 40's, cause us to believe that there was no just basis for these rumors, and the messages and history of Governor Ford definitely state that the rumors were the result of gross exaggeration.

Death of Joseph Smith

The assassination of Joseph and Hyrum Smith at Carthage on June 27, 1844, followed by the repeal of the charter of the city of Nauvoo on January 13, 1845, led to the decline of the city. For a few years every effort was made to continue to erect substantial edifices, but the continued unrest in the city led to the agreement of many to withdraw from Nauvoo. A large part of these scattered throughout the neighboring States. A few thousand, however, under the leadership of Brigham Young and other members of the Twelve, proceeded in 1846 across Iowa to Kaneshville or Council Bluffs, and thence to Utah.

Brigham Young and Utah

This faction led by Brigham Young was only a small percentage of the original church, perhaps five or ten per cent at the most. After their arrival at Salt Lake City, all who went there were rebaptized. New doctrines were introduced, such as Adam God and blood atonement, and in 1852 a purported revelation was presented to the church by Brigham Young, favoring plural marriage. These doctrines of Adam God, blood atonement, and polygamy, were never tenets of the original church during the life-

time of Joseph Smith but were a departure from the early faith and doctrine.

Shortly after the departure of the members of the church, Etienne Cabot came to Nauvoo in the spring of 1849 with his Icarian Community. They found a ready-made town with houses and tilled fields. They utilized buildings which were left and used stone from the temple to erect others, but a few years later this colony dissolved.

Reorganization of the Church

In the meantime, of the very many who followed no faction, a few gathered in Wisconsin in 1852 and started a reorganization of the church. The widow of Joseph Smith, Emma Smith, had remained in Nauvoo and left for only a short time during the winter of 1846-47. A few months after her return, Mrs. Smith was married to Major Lewis Bidamon, December 27, 1847. Major Bidamon completed the southwest corner of the Nauvoo House and erected an office in the northwest corner, removing the bricks from the other portions to complete the house, and selling the bricks from the north wing.

Joseph Smith, the eldest son of Joseph Smith, continued to reside in Nauvoo, where he secured his schooling. He was elected justice of the peace and served for seven and one half years; he also served for seven and one half years as school director. In 1860 he affiliated himself with the Reorganization, and at the Amboy Conference was chosen President of the church. He continued to reside in Nauvoo, however, until 1865 or 1866, nearly twenty-

seven years, but then removed to Plano, Illinois, which became headquarters of the church.

Lamoni, Iowa

In October, 1881, the headquarters of the church and Herald Publishing House were removed to Lamoni, Iowa. Here Joseph Smith made his home for over twenty-six years, until he removed to Independence, Missouri, in 1906, where the other principal officers of the church shortly after were removed, and where he passed away in December, 1914.

Independence, Missouri

Frederick M. Smith was chosen as President by the church in April, 1915, and under his direction Independence, Missouri, was formally made the headquarters of the church by the conference of 1920, recognizing what was already an accomplished fact. The headquarters of the church are now fully established in Independence, Missouri, where all of the principal offices of the church are located.

Lamoni, Iowa, continues as the place second in importance, with Graceland College and an Old Folks' Home.

From the first, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has denounced polygamy and the other doctrines added by the church of Utah. They have also emphasized, and still do, that the original church never accepted nor had anything to do with these doctrines. The Reorganized Church was held the lawful successor or the continuation of the original church by Judge L. S. Sherman in the Kirtland Temple Suit, in the Court of Common Pleas, Lake County, Ohio, in 1880.

A Court Decision

Then Judge John F. Philips, of the United States Circuit Court for Western Division of the Western District of Missouri, in 1894, in a thoroughly contested action, also held that the Reorganized Church was the lawful successor of the original church founded in 1830. Also that these added doctrines of polygamy and the like did not belong to the original church. This was requisite in a suit to determine the title to the Temple Lot in Independence, Missouri. (See decision of John F. Philips, Judge, pp. 33-45.)

The United States Circuit Court of Appeal modified this decision, so far as it affected possession of the lot, on the grounds of adverse possession and laches. The important questions of succession and responsibility for these objectionable doctrines were not considered or modified.

Today in Nauvoo

During the summer over two thousand visitors, many of whom are tourists, some from various parts of the United States including Maine and California, visit Nauvoo. The pastor of the local congregation is the caretaker of the church property and conducts visitors to the points of historical interest.

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints still owns several of the old landmarks, including the Old Homestead, the Mansion House, and the Nauvoo House. They have a fine brick church and a growing congregation. A reunion is held here each year which is largely attended, not only by those in the city but by those of the church who come from distant parts.

It is still a place they love, though its glory is now of the past.



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