

Chapter 19

RETURN TO MISSOURI

*W*illiam W. Phelps and other Missouri church leaders knew that two serious assignments soon awaited them in Missouri: dealing with external and internal wrangling in Clay County and reviving hope for the redemption of Zion.

INTERNAL CHALLENGES

Phelps and other Missouri leaders temporarily living in Kirtland had received troublesome intelligence from their wives and other members in Clay County. Backbiting and petty jealousies had become commonplace. Given the absence of the leading presidents, high council members, the bishop and his counselors, and even additional elders, chaos had developed in the branches. Furthermore, the remaining elders had been strictly enjoined not to conduct any disciplinary actions.¹

Time and again Phelps felt it necessary to send words of encouragement as well as counsel to the Missouri flock. In one such case, in November 1835, he wrote an extended treatise to the membership indicating that he and other members of the Missouri presidency were “sorry to hear that some are in darkness, not living by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” He exclaimed, “Brethren, remember that the religion of Christ, is not a play thing: the law of the Celestial Kingdom is perfect, and the Saints must abide in it, in order to inherit the glory.” Further, he charged the Missouri Saints to “search the scriptures daily” and to “pray unto the Lord for grace, wisdom and knowledge, to guide you into all truth.” By so doing, God would have mercy on them.² Now, as they contemplated their return to Missouri, W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer of the presidency, as well as Edward Partridge, John Corrill, and Isaac Morley of the bishopric, knew they would be required to put the church there in order.

PLANS TO REDEEM ZION

The Missouri leaders were truly filled with joy over the recent spiritual outpourings and sacred ordinances they had received in the Kirtland Temple. They had long been informed that they needed the endowment before Zion could be redeemed. Now they had the promised “endowment of power from on high.” They knew, of course, that Zion could not be redeemed unless the church membership proved worthy of the Almighty’s help. That is exactly what the leaders had strived to do in Kirtland—to become pure and holy in thought and action and to forgive each other completely.

W. W. Phelps had frequently written letters to Missouri urging the members there, including his wife and family, to become worthy as well. On June 1, 1835, he gave the membership in Clay County counsel that they should be “working diligently spiritually and temporally for the redemption of Zion, when all the pure in heart can return with songs of everlasting joy, to enjoy the good of the land of Zion. Brethren, in the name of Jesus we entreat you to live worthy of the blessings which shall be heired by the faithful after Zion is redeemed.”³

In council meetings under Joseph Smith’s direction in Kirtland, the subject of redeeming Zion came up and a few plans were contemplated. The most comprehensive council took place on September 24, 1835. The brethren determined they would begin the work of redeeming Zion the next spring. (These deliberations took place while leaders still believed the House of the Lord could be completed by early winter.) First, they would send a petition to Missouri governor Daniel Dunklin asking as they had two years before that he help the Saints return to the lands they owned in Jackson County. Second, the brethren covenanted with each other to “struggle” for the redemption of Zion “until death shall dissolve the union; and if one falls, that the remainder be not discouraged, but pursue this object until it be accomplished; which may God grant unto us in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” Joseph Smith recorded, “[We] drew up a subscription for enrolling the names of those who are willing to go up to Missouri next spring and settle; and I ask God in the name of Jesus that we may obtain eight hundred or one thousand emigrants.” John Whitmer reported that Joseph Smith even developed a “war departm[e]nt, by Revelatio[n]” to reclaim their lands with an army, if necessary. This war department consisted of Joseph Smith, David Whitmer, Frederick G. Williams, Sidney Rigdon, William W. Phelps, John Corrill, Hyrum Smith, and Oliver Cowdery (in the order of their mention).⁴ Clearly, church leaders had a militaristic mindset from this point forward. (This militancy would come into play again during the summer and fall of 1838.)

As for Governor Dunklin, in the previous November (1834) he had sent a message to the Missouri legislature referring to the “outrages” that had been perpetrated against the Mormons and insisting that they should be allowed to return to their homes. When Phelps sent that document on to Joseph Smith and the Kirtland brethren, it revived their hope that they might get back to their properties and begin to rebuild Zion. Certainly they also realized that the Saints should avoid doing anything that would excite the populous against them.⁵

Church leaders often spoke to each other about the prospects of once again establishing Zion. On October 29, 1835, many leading brethren were gathered for a splendid supper. The Ohio bishop, Newel K. Whitney, remarked to the Missouri bishop, Edward Partridge, that he hoped that one year from that time they all “might be seated together around a table on the land of Zion.” The same sentiment was expressed around the table.⁶ W. W. Phelps may have been in attendance. In any event, he likewise wished and prayed for this scenario as well.

On March 11, 1836, two weeks before the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, Joseph Smith conducted a council of the presidents to discuss how to implement a previous revelation (D&C 101): “Let honorable men be appointed, even *wise men*, and send them to purchase these lands,” which were to be “in Jackson county, and the counties round about.” The monies were to be gathered from “churches in the eastern countries.”⁷ Joseph Smith identified the “wise men” to purchase the lands—W. W. Phelps, Edward Partridge, Isaac Morley, and John Corrill (these last three from the Missouri bishopric).⁸ The designated wise men would go to Missouri with a mission to obtain new lands, and David Whitmer would linger in Ohio and the eastern states to gather more monies. David Whitmer had heretofore specialized in soliciting funds. John Whitmer, another member of the Missouri presidency, would leave Ohio that summer. Later John Whitmer would participate in dividing up and settling new lands and be part of the wise men. But David Whitmer would not appear in Missouri for over a year, not until July 1837.

Two days following the temple’s dedication, on March 29, 1836, the First Presidency gathered in the “most holy place” of the temple and “sought for a revelation from Him concerning the authorities of the Church going to Zion, and other important matters.” Soon the other presidents, which included W. W. Phelps, were brought into the circle. The next day, Joseph Smith spoke to all leading quorums and explained that the key to redeeming Zion lay in both proselytizing and gathering converts to Missouri. The First Presidency would focus on gathering funds to purchase new lands in Missouri.⁹

Church finances were essentially in a crisis at this time. Obtaining funds for purchasing new lands in Missouri would have to compete with other church financial obligations. The House of the Lord in Kirtland had cost in actual money about forty to fifty thousand dollars.¹⁰ Only about two-thirds of this amount had been obtained by the time of the dedication, thus putting the church in severe debt.¹¹ This financial crisis would continue to dog the church and Joseph Smith throughout the rest of his life.

On April 2 the council of presidents again met to discuss finances “bearing on the redemption of Zion,” which Joseph Smith’s record identified as his “favorite theme” and noted that “his whole soul was engaged in it.” The council also “decided that Oliver Cowdery and [Joseph Smith] should act as a board or committee to raise, in righteousness, all the money [they] could for a season, to send by, or to, *certain wise men appointed to purchase lands in Zion* in obedience to a revelation or commandment of the Lord, for the mutual benefit of the council.” It was also determined that W. W. Phelps would take five hundred copies of the Doctrine and Covenants and five hundred copies of the new

hymnal to Zion to sell. He was also to obtain money from subscriptions to the church's newspaper.¹²

These "wise men," including W. W. Phelps, lingered until Saturday, April 9, 1836, before embarking on their return to Missouri. They attended the April 6 jubilee celebration, and they also participated in gathering more funds for purchasing Missouri lands.¹³ Many other elders from Missouri had already departed for their homes in Zion as well as some members in Kirtland who desired to emigrate. John Corrill reported Joseph Smith's final charge to those leaving for Missouri: to "do that which the Spirit directed them to do, and he [Joseph Smith] charged them to be careful and avoid contention, and not to meddle with other orders of Christians, nor proclaim against their doctrines, but to preach the gospel in its simplicity, and let others alone."¹⁴

TRAVELING BACK TO MISSOURI

Accompanying Phelps to Missouri were Edward Partridge, Isaac Morley, and John Corrill. They took with them monies that had been specifically gathered for buying new lands.¹⁵ They walked about one hundred miles, then boarded a boat on the Ohio Canal, and continued to travel by water down the Ohio River to the junction with the Mississippi River and then upstream to St. Louis. There they tarried a week until they found a boat that would take them upstream on the Missouri River. They finally arrived on Friday, May 6. Edward Partridge noted in his journal that he "found his family well." He added, "I think I felt as thankful as I ever did in being permitted to again rejoin with my family."¹⁶ Knowing William W. Phelps's tender feelings toward his family, surely the Phelpses had a joyful reunion as well.

No extant records demonstrate how these leaders dealt with the chaotic nature of the church as they would have found it in early May. Based on their behavior in the past, it is likely that they preached repentance, obedience to the commandments, and keeping the Sabbath day holy. They also had to deal with an ongoing arrival of new immigrants and finding places for them to reside.

LOCATING A NEW RESIDENCE FOR MISSOURI SAINTS

Two of these men, W. W. Phelps and Edward Partridge, spent only a few days with their families and church affairs. Within days of their arrival in Liberty, they went out on an exploration mission to find new properties for incoming Saints. They scouted numerous locations along rivers and streams in the "far west" starting with northeastern Clay County and then into Clinton County in present-day northwestern Missouri. They soon discovered that very little timber existed in that region of country, which primarily was rolling prairie. Phelps compared this to the "land of desolation" described in the Book of Mormon. He conceded, however, that the many spring flowers and wildlife made the area beautiful in its own way. They found that where any goodly amount of timber existed on streams, settlers had already taken those favorable spots. As they continued their

exploring, Phelps and Partridge made their way in an easterly direction into a largely uninhabited region of northern Ray County along Shoal Creek. This vicinity perhaps had enough timber along the creek to support new communities. Phelps and Partridge also saw potentially good mill sites. They had located a spot not far distant from the land of Zion for new Mormon settlements.¹⁷

Phelps and Partridge returned and reported their explorations to the other two “wise men,” Isaac Morley and John Corrill. The Shoal Creek site, they explained, was thirty-five miles northeast of Liberty. All four men then went back to Shoal Creek and ended up identifying specific lots of land. Phelps and Corrill stayed in the region to purchase twenty eighty-acre plots. They went to the land office in Lexington to negotiate the purchase and laid down a small advance of money per acre. Partridge and Morley went back to Liberty to greet and take care of the many new immigrants. They informed them of their potential new settlement at Shoal Creek. In June, Phelps and other leaders put down further funds to buy a total of sixteen hundred acres.¹⁸

THREATS AGAINST MORMONS IN CLAY COUNTY

Meanwhile, beginning in early May, some local political leaders in Jackson County began to stir up the populace. They had heard rumors from newspaper reports that fifteen hundred to two thousand armed Mormons were traveling to Missouri in “another attempt to take Zion.” They appointed a “committee of vigilance” on May 7 that called for an armed response to any potential Mormon military action. In neighboring Clay County, citizens who had been hospitable to the Saints became alarmed at the rapid influx of so many of them. One letter writer indicated that if the Mormons would be allowed to continue to immigrate, they would soon outnumber the original settlers and take over Clay County politically.¹⁹

In an 1840 report, Bishop Edward Partridge recorded what was happening in June 1836: “The mob party, in Clay co. strengthened itself considerably, and became quite bold; insomuch that they in one or two instances, began to whip the saints; and one day some sixty or seventy of them assembled, rode off a few miles east, and stopped a few wagons, which were moving to Clay co., and turned them back.”²⁰

This unrest led a group of leading Clay citizens to organize a committee, and they set up a public mass meeting at the Clay County courthouse in Liberty on Wednesday, June 29, 1836. Ten leading, peace-loving citizens composed a document to the whole community laying out a case that the Mormons should soon leave the county lest there be a “civil war.” They stated that they wanted a peaceful resolution and that they were holding this meeting to avoid violent actions by a mob. The citizens’ objections were similar to those voiced in previous years in Jackson County regarding differences in religion and culture, views on slavery, worries that the Saints might ally with the Indians, and concerns that the rapidly arriving members were indigent. A major difference with Jackson County, however, was that Clay County leaders were willing to protect the Mormons until they could leave the area. They insisted, however, that the immigrants who had come in that season leave Clay as soon as possible. They set a meeting for the next day to hear a response from Mormon leaders.

Bishop Partridge indicated in that meeting that the Saints desired peace and were willing to make sacrifices to bring that about.²¹

On Friday, July 1, W. W. Phelps chaired a public meeting of Latter-day Saints. They read aloud the Clay County citizens' resolutions given out two days earlier. A public discussion ensued. A committee was created out of the presidency, the bishopric, the high council, and Elder Thomas B. Marsh of the Twelve, who was living again in Missouri. The committee drafted its own resolution that was composed for the most part by Phelps:

Resolved, that we (the "Mormons," so called), are grateful for the kindness which has been shown to us by the citizens of Clay county since we have resided with them; and being desirous for peace, and wishing the good rather than the ill-will of mankind, we will use all honorable means to allay the excitement, and so far as we can, remove any foundation for jealousies against us as a people. We are aware that many rumors prejudicial to us as a society are afloat, and time only can prove their falsity to the world at large.

We deny having claim to this, or any other county, or country, further than we shall purchase the land with money, or more than the Constitution and laws allow us as free American citizens. We have taken no part for or against slavery; but are opposed to the abolitionists, and consider that men have a right to hold slaves or not, according to law.

We believe it just to preach the Gospel to the nations of the earth, and warn the righteous to save themselves from the corruptions of the world; but we do not believe it right to interfere with bondservants, nor preach the Gospel to them, nor meddle with nor influence them in the least to cause them to be dissatisfied with their situation in this life; thereby jeopardizing the lives of men. Such interference we believe to be unlawful and unjust, and dangerous to the peace of every government allowing human beings to be held in servitude.

We deny holding any communications with the Indians; and mean to hold ourselves as ready to defend our country against their barbarous ravages, as any other people. We believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside, while protected in their inherent and inalienable rights by the laws of such governments; and that sedition and rebellion are unbecoming every citizen thus protected, and should be punished accordingly. It is needless to enter into any further detail of our faith, or mention our sufferings; therefore—

First. Resolved: For the sake of friendship, and to be in a covenant of peace with the citizens of Clay county, and they to be in a covenant of peace with us, notwithstanding the necessary loss of property, and expense we incur in moving, we comply with the requisitions of their resolutions in leaving Clay county, as explained by the preamble accompanying the same; and that we will use our exertions to have the Church do the same; and that we will also exert ourselves to stop the tide of emigration of our people to this county.

Second. Resolved: That we accept the friendly offer verbally tendered to us by the committee yesterday, to assist us in selecting a location, and removing to it.

Third. Resolved, unanimously: That this meeting accept and adopt the above preamble and resolutions, which are here presented by the committee.

Fourth. Resolved: That Thomas B. Marsh, Lyman Wight, and Samuel Bent, be a committee to carry the minutes of these proceedings to the meeting of the citizens of Clay county, to be held tomorrow at Liberty. The foregoing resolutions were unanimously adopted by the meeting.

W. W. Phelps, Chairman,
John Corrill, Secretary.²²

This resolution was brought promptly to the Clay County committee the next day, July 2, and was readily accepted. The citizens passed resolutions to help the Saints seek out a new location and appointed committees to collect means to aid the poor Saints to remove. The Clay committee indicated that they would do everything they could to protect the Mormons against any unlawful violence. They recommended that Mormons move to some location that was thus far uninhabited. They promised to urge citizens in neighboring counties to cooperate. A Clay County militia force was indeed called out in coming days to protect the Mormons.²³

W. W. Phelps promptly sent copies of the resolutions from both citizens' meetings and the Saints' public meeting to Joseph Smith and the Ohio leadership. These brethren were surprised by what had happened, but they agreed that none of these unhappy events were the fault of church members. The First Presidency in Ohio wrote the Clay County citizens' committee to explain that the church wanted nothing but peaceful relations with neighbors and that surely the Mormons in Clay would move so as to avoid conflict. They pointed out, though, that the Saints had been frequently unjustly treated based on all sorts of falsehood. In a separate letter, the Prophet and the First Presidency urged Phelps and the Missouri Saints to abide by constitutional principles in their behavior. "Give no occasion, and if the people will let you, dispose of your property, settle your affairs, and go in peace. You have thus far had an asylum, and now seek another, as God may direct." They emphasized, "Above all, show yourselves men of God, worthy citizens, and we doubt not, the community, ere long, will do you justice, and rise in indignation against those who are the instigators of your sufferings and afflictions."²⁴

In behalf of the Missouri church, W. W. Phelps wrote a letter on July 7, 1836, to Governor Daniel Dunklin urging his aid in coping with all these problems. They hoped that he at long last would exercise full executive and military authority to restore Mormons to their lawfully owned lands in Jackson County. They also indicated that they were buying new lands for settlement along Shoal Creek northeast of Clay County. Phelps concluded, "Our numbers and our necessities compel us to ask for a place where we can live in peace and procure the means of subsistence."²⁵

The governor's response, dated July 18, was thoroughly disappointing, even disgusting, to Phelps and his brethren. Dunklin admitted that he himself sympathized with the Mormons' plight and recognized the injustices they had to endure. But their circumstance, he claimed, could not be solved by executive action, but rather by judicial action. Yes, the courts had solved nothing, Dunklin acknowledged. He then referred to a recent

ruling that had occurred in St. Louis: "Public sentiment may become paramount law; and when one man or society of men become so obnoxious to that sentiment as to determine the people to be rid of him or them, it is useless to run counter to it." That was the present circumstance, he asserted. The Mormons had become so obnoxious to Jackson County citizens that their feelings were in effect the law. Whether the Mormons believed in slavery or not, or whether they were conspiring with Indians against the white original settlers or not, the feelings of the people in Jackson were the important thing. He ended his letter by stating, "If you cannot do this [convince the citizens of Jackson County of your innocence], all I can say to you is that in this Republic the *vox populi* is the *vox Dei*."²⁶ This Latin phrase means "The voice of the people is the voice of God." This decision by Governor Dunklin effectively ended all hopes for government help in returning the Saints to Jackson County. Phelps and the other Missouri Saints rested all their hopes now in the providence of God.

CREATION OF FAR WEST AND CALDWELL COUNTY

On July 23 the brethren dispatched John Corrill to Richmond, the seat of Ray County, to ask residents for an expression of their opinion about settling the northern, largely unpopulated regions of Ray County. In a public meeting, some local non-Mormons vigorously opposed the idea of allowing the Saints to locate anywhere in Ray County. They opposed on grounds that Mormon immigration would retard growth and prosperity of the county and would disturb the peace.²⁷

On Monday, July 25, 1836, a council gathered to W. W. Phelps's house in Liberty for an emergency meeting. The brethren were naturally disturbed at the response from Ray citizens. Furthermore, they had learned "that about one hundred families of emigrating Saints [were] in wagons and tents on Crooked River in the Lower part of Ray County and threate[ne]d with mobbing and pestilence some being now sick and many of them destitute of means to purchase lands or provisions." The council under the direction of Presidents W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer directed Thomas B. Marsh, a member of the Twelve Apostles but who was also an acting member of the Missouri high council, and fellow high councilor Elisha Groves to go to the distressed immigrant company. They were to inform the families that if they did not have any friends or family in the church in Clay County to care for them, they would need to temporarily spread out among the populace in Ray County and hire out for sustenance until the church could find lands for them. Elders Marsh and Groves were then authorized to "collect money among the Churches [branches] in Mo. Illinois Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee and put the same into the hands of the Zion Presidency, for the upbuilding and benefit of 'Poor Bleeding Zion.'" It was also resolved that "W. W. Phelps, John Whitmer, Edward Partridge, Isaac Morley, and John Corrill be appointed to search out land for the Church to settle upon &c."²⁸ As described earlier, the "wise men" had already located possible settlement sites north of Crooked River along Shoal Creek.

Only five days later, on July 30, the presidency sent John Corrill and John Murdock to speak with citizen leaders in Ray County to reconsider their negative decision of a week

earlier. They submitted a formal petition that suggested that a six-to-eight-mile buffer zone north of Crooked River be established and that a petition for a new county be made to the state legislature. They also said that they would not begin settling the Shoal Creek area until “the matter is decided.” Murdock recorded in his journal that this proposition was readily accepted as long as the Mormons would not come into the populated areas of Ray County.²⁹

In the first weeks of August 1836, W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer started to lay out a city on Shoal Creek, and members began quickly gathering to these new properties. Phelps was skilled at surveying, and he undoubtedly used that talent. Gradually, Phelps and Whitmer purchased more land in behalf of the church in order to expand the proposed city. They used funds gathered by Thomas Marsh and Elisha Groves for “Poor Bleeding Zion.”³⁰

On August 8, Phelps and Whitmer officially filed for possession of lands along the creek and submitted plans for a one-mile-square town. They followed closely the plan for the “City of Zion” given them three years earlier by Joseph Smith and Frederick G. Williams. This would include four main streets 132 feet wide and built on a grid. The northern half of the town was placed in the name of W. W. Phelps and the southern half in the name of John Whitmer.³¹ They held the titles in behalf of the church as Bishop Edward Partridge had at first done in 1831–1832 in Jackson County.

Also during the summer, Alexander W. Doniphan, a friend of the Mormons and also an attorney for them in Clay County, won a seat in the Missouri legislature and promised to promote the creation of a separate county for the Mormons north of the Crooked River. A local history written fifty years later stated the following:

When the Mormon leaders had determined upon the occupation of this portion of Missouri certain public men of the State thought they had discovered an easy and satisfactory solution of the Mormon problem. The Mormons had already selected Far West as their principal town and were clustering about it in considerable numbers, and at various points on lower Shoal creek. They seemed well enough pleased with the county, and were coming in by bands and companies every week. “Let us fix up a county expressly for the Mormons,” exclaimed certain of the politicians and public men.

“Let us send all the Mormons in the State to that county and induce all Gentiles therein to sell out and leave.” The proposition suited every one. The Gentiles said, “If the Mormons are willing to go into that prairie country and settle, let them have it and welcome.” The Mormons said, “If we may be allowed to remain peaceably and enjoy our religion, we will go into any country that may be set apart for us, no matter how wild and unbroken it may be, and we will make it to blossom as the rose. If we obtain political control of a county we will honestly administer it and be loyal in all things to the State government over us.”³²

Alexander Doniphan lobbied carefully and effectively until the legislature met in November 1836. Doniphan succeeded in pushing through a law (signed on December 29 by the governor) that (1) created Caldwell County, encompassing the Shoal Creek area;

and (2) established Daviess County, where a few small settlements existed still farther to the north. Doniphan wrote W. W. Phelps that he had been forced to compromise; he had wanted to have all that northern territory be a county for the Mormons.³³ It remained generally understood by Missourians that Caldwell County would be the “Mormon County.”

Caldwell was only twenty-four miles long and eighteen miles wide. This would not prove to be large enough for the rapid influx of Mormon migrants. In the end, many Saints would also settle in Daviess and Carroll Counties, where there would be considerable anti-Mormon opposition. This would help set off the Mormon Missouri War of 1838.

During negotiations between Doniphan and state officials, Presidents W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer along with Bishop Partridge and his counselors felt authorized to send settlers to Shoal Creek. Now the Saints could begin settling what would become Caldwell County. The friendly Clay County committee assisted with the move. A steady migration of Mormons gathered to their new home through the fall of 1836 and into the new year of 1837 and left no Mormons in Clay County. All future migrants from the East would have a safe place to settle. John Corrill wrote, “Friendship began to be restored between them [the Mormons] and their neighbors, the old prejudices were fast dying away and they were doing well.”³⁴

Along the way, the main Mormon community in Caldwell County came to be known as Far West, a name that no doubt was given to the city by W. W. Phelps, who helped lay it out. He had repeatedly referred to this portion of Missouri as “the Far West.” The *Times and Seasons* later reported the rapid growth of Caldwell County:

In August, 1836, the saints commenced settling upon their new location, in great numbers; and made preparations for the coming winter, by constructing comfortable dwellings for themselves, and gathering as much food for their cattle, horses &c. as their straitened circumstances would permit. Here they settled with the fond anticipation of being permitted to dwell in quietness and peace upon their possession without molestation; consequently large entries of the public lands were made by individuals of the society,³⁵ and extensive farms were soon opened; those who had not means to purchase lands, were under the necessity of loaning it of the citizens, at very high rates of percentage, frequently being compelled to pay fifty per cent.³⁶ Others who could not obtain money by loan, would procure two or three months provision for their families and go to Fort Leavenworth or elsewhere, and work until they had earned enough to enter a forty or an eighty acre tract; thus by dint of hard labor and untiring perseverance, almost every man, in a few months found himself in the possession of sufficient land to make a good farm. In a few months nearly or quite all the best land of the territory, now known as Caldwell county, was purchased by the saints, several hundred buildings erected, and great preparations made for a crop the coming season.³⁷

Presidents William W. Phelps and John Whitmer and Bishop Edward Partridge and his counselors John Corrill and Isaac Morley directed the creation and development of the city of Far West. Surely, they would have been pleased with all their efforts and sacrifice.

Just as clearly would have been the relief for Sally Phelps and the children to once again have pleasant, permanent housing and to be free of persecution.

A new House of the Lord was also contemplated for Far West. This idea was no doubt promoted by W. W. Phelps, who desired to be in harmony with the revelations concerning temples. In this he was also aided by John Whitmer. In minutes of a November 15, 1836, meeting, we learn that the Missouri presidency appointed Jacob Whitmer, Elisha H. Groves, and George M. Hinkle to be a building committee for the proposed temple.³⁸ Plans would go forward for the temple throughout most of 1837. (Ultimately, in November 1837 W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer were rebuffed by the First Presidency for developing plans for a temple without permission.)³⁹

After Caldwell became an official county in late December 1836, various officials were elected. Far West was designated as the county seat, and county officers (all Mormon) were elected. Court proceedings took place in the new schoolhouse.⁴⁰ Phelps became the chief of two county judges on February 4, 1837, and county commissioner of chancery on April 3, 1838. On May 23, 1837, he was appointed postmaster by the federal government. Moreover, he was commissioned an officer in the Caldwell County militia in the summer of 1837. Thus Phelps was both a religious and political leader.⁴¹ There was little separation between church and state.

Phelps also helped develop education in Far West. A local history recorded that “Mormons very early gave attention to educational matters,” that there were many teachers among them, and that schoolhouses were among the first structures to be built. The first schoolhouse also served as a courthouse.⁴² A nineteenth-century LDS historian noted the following about Caldwell County: “There were . . . many persons of education and accomplishments” among the Saints. “School teachers were plenty and schools were numerous.”⁴³ William and Sally Phelps’s two oldest daughters, Sabrina and Mehitabel, twenty and eighteen years of age respectively, were involved as teachers.

The twelve months between April 1836 and April 1837 were noteworthy for Phelps and his family. They were reunited after nearly a year of his absence in the East. They successfully weathered the storms of potential mob action against them from irate Jackson and Clay County residents. By the time Phelps took his family to Caldwell County in August 1836, Sally was again pregnant. On March 20, 1837, a daughter was born and named Princetta. Sadly, the little one would pass away in Far West on August 31, 1838, at a time of tremendous trial for the Phelps family.⁴⁴

During this same twelve-month period, Phelps exercised impressive leadership in seeking out an appropriate new gathering place for the Saints. He helped negotiate for a separate “Mormon County.” He led out in establishing the city of Far West. Peace was at least temporarily reestablished for the Saints in Missouri, and the Mormon people began to prosper without any foreseeable persecution. It was a time to look forward to the expected arrival of Joseph Smith and all other Ohio high priests, the Twelve Apostles, the Seventy, many other missionary elders, and family immigrants.

Because of the absence of President David Whitmer, W. W. Phelps served as the de facto church president in Missouri during these months. Everything seemed to be going

well. However, Phelps must have thought that his fond hopes for redeeming Zion in Jackson County would have to wait for several months or even years. But at least a slice of Zion was occurring before his eyes in Far West, and he had been part of it.

NOTES

1. *JSP*, D4:399–402.
2. WWPP, November 1835.
3. WWPL, June 1, 1835, 552; underlining in original.
4. *HC*, 282; “The Book of John Whitmer,” in *JSP*, H2:90; *JSP*, J1:64; *JSP*, H1:95–96; MHC, vol. B-1, 619–20.
5. *JSP*, J1:64n34.
6. *JSP*, J1:77; *JSP*, H1:106; MHC, vol. B-1, 631; *HC*, 2:294.
7. D&C 101:69–76 (December 16–17, 1833); emphasis added. Early documentation of D&C 101 is found in *JSP*, MRB:342–55. See also D&C 103:23. “Wise men” in the revelations also refers to others who contributed monies to finance church operations. See Matthew C. Godfrey, “Wise Men and Wise Women: The Role of Church Members in Financing Church Operations, 1834–1835,” *Journal of Mormon History* 43, no. 3 (July 2017): 1–21.
8. “Book of John Whitmer,” 92. Phelps identified himself as the president of this “quorum” of wise men in “Jackson County,” MS D 6019, folder 7, CHL. The duties of the wise men were reiterated on April 2 before they left for Missouri. *JSP*, D5:223–24, 223n55.
9. *JSP*, J1:60, 212–16; *JSP*, D5:222; MHC, vol. B-1, 723–25; *HC*, 2:429–32.
10. *JSP*, J1:200n414; Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 454n3; John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints* (St. Louis: printed for the author, 1839), in *JSP*, H2:151.
11. The complicated situation for church finances at this time, including the buying, trading, and selling of lands and the use of human capital in the Kirtland area, is discussed in Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People*, 401–62. See also Corrill, *Brief History*, in *JSP*, H2:159–61.
12. *JSP*, J1:217–18; *JSP*, D5:222–24; MHC, vol. B-1, 726–27; *HC*, 2:433–34; emphasis added.
13. From a letter from W. W. Phelps to Sally Phelps, April 6, 1836, in WWPP; Edward Partridge diary, 1835–1836, entry for April 6, 1836, CHL (hereafter “Partridge diary”).
14. Corrill, *Brief History*, in *JSP*, H2:158.
15. “Book of John Whitmer,” 92–93.
16. Partridge diary, April 9 to May 6, 1836.
17. Phelps sent his report in the form of a June 2, 1836, letter to Oliver Cowdery that was published in *M&A* 2 (July 1836): 340–41. This report was later inserted into the official history of the church: MHC, vol. B-1, 733–34; *HC*, 2:444–45. Partridge’s sparser record is found in Partridge diary, May 1836.
18. Partridge diary, May 1836; W. W. Phelps’s report in “2d Series—Letter No. I,” *M&A* 2 (July 1836): 340–41; “A History of the Persecution,” in *JSP*, H2:229, 229n108; Reed Peck manuscript, 1839, 15, typescript, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT; Leland H. Gentry and Todd M. Compton, *Fire and Sword: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri, 1836–39* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 29, 43n19. Documentation for the land purchases is accessible online at <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/certificate-for-land-patent-22-june-1836-a/1#full-transcript> and in print in *JSP*, D5:253–58.

19. *JSP*, H2:93n84, 158n116, 227; *JSP*, D5:258–59.
20. *JSP*, H2:228.
21. “Public Meeting,” *M&A* 2 (August 1836): 353–55; MHC, vol. B-1, 735–39; *HC*, 2:449–52; Partridge diary, June 29–30, 1836; *JSP*, D5:259–60.
22. MHC, vol. B-1, 740–41; *HC*, 2:453–54. See also Partridge diary, July 1, 1836.
23. “History of Thomas Baldwin Marsh [by himself],” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 26 (1864): 359–60, 375–76, 390–92, 406. Marsh’s autobiography is also found in *Deseret News*, March 24, 1858, 18; “Public Meeting,” *M&A* 2 (August 1836): 359–60; *JSP*, H2:228–29; MHC, vol. B-1, 742–43; *HC*, 2:454–55.
24. “Public Meeting,” *M&A* 2 (August 1836): 355–61; *JSP*, D5:258–71; MHC, vol. B-1, 743–48; *HC*, 2:455–61.
25. JH, July 7, 1836, 3; *JSP*, H2:93n285.
26. MHC, vol. B-1, 748; *HC*, 2:461–62; emphasis in original. See also Gentry and Compton, *Fire and Sword*, 31, 43n22.
27. See Gentry and Compton, *Fire and Sword*, 31–32, 43n24.
28. MB2, 69–70; *FWR*, 104–5. John Murdock was part of the immigrant party stranded on Crooked River. His account of their condition is in John Murdock journal, MS 1194, CHL.
29. John Corrill and John Murdock, “Report of the Committee,” CHL. See also *JSP*, H2:93n286; John Murdock journal.
30. “Morris Phelps,” MSd 271, CHL; Corrill, *Brief History*, in *JSP*, H2:159; Reed Peck manuscript, 1839, 11; Gentry and Compton, *Fire and Sword*, 34–36; *JSP*, D6:xx–xxi, 6, 11, 110n532, 157–60.
31. *History of Caldwell and Livingston Counties, Missouri* (St. Louis: National Historical Company, 1886), 120–21.
32. *History of Caldwell and Livingston Counties*, 103–4.
33. Andrew Jenson, “Manuscript History of Missouri,” MS 4029, CHL; *JSP*, H2:93n286, 230, 326; Reed Peck manuscript, 1839, 11.
34. Corrill, *Brief History*, in *JSP*, H2:159; *JSP*, H2:159n118; Reed Peck manuscript, 1839, 11–14; Oliver Cowdery’s reports in “The Closing Year,” *M&A* 3 (December 1836): 427, and in “To the Churches Abroad,” *M&A* 3 (January 1837): 447; report of immigrants to Missouri, Elders Ambrose Palmer and Thomas Gordon, in “Sir,” *M&A* 3 (December 1836): 429–30.
35. These men were W. W. Phelps, John Corrill, Edward Partridge, and John Whitmer.
36. W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer were chastened and ultimately drummed out of the church, in part for inappropriately selling these lands in this manner in Far West. This situation will be discussed in chapter 20.
37. “A History, of the Persecution, of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter Day Saints in Missouri,” *T&S* 1 (March 1840): 65. This installment of the history is published in *JSP*, H2:230–32.
38. MB2, 68.
39. *JSP*, D5:464–67.
40. Walter Williams, ed., *A History of Northwest Missouri* (Chicago: Lewis Publishers, 1915), 1:373.
41. JH, February 4, 1837; May 27, 1837; April 3, 1838; *JSP*, D6:684, 686; Alexander L. Baugh, “A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense of Northern Missouri” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1996), 385.
42. *History of Caldwell and Livingston Counties*, 121.
43. Andrew Jenson, “Caldwell County, Missouri,” *Historical Record* 8 (January 1889): 691.
44. Information gathered from www.ancestry.com.