

JOSEPH SMITH'S ACCURACY ON THE FIRST VISION SETTING: THE PIVOTAL 1818 PALMYRA CAMP MEETING



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Wesley P. Walters led a charge against Joseph Smith's First Vision in 1967, essentially claiming that the founding prophet described fictitious local revivals preceding the First Vision; therefore, the First Vision was fiction.¹ Joseph Smith reported a personal vision of the Father and his Son Jesus early in the spring of 1820, leaving several accounts about "an unusual excitement" (Joseph Smith—History 1:5)² that generated his extended search for the true church.³ Walters and similar scholars gathered useful data but aimed at the wrong target. This article shows that religious conditions claimed by Joseph Smith must be examined in the years before 1820, for he said his First Vision was preceded by two years of intense investigation. Also, camp meetings are better understood now as they relate to earliest Mormonism, and Michael Quinn recently stressed that the 1818 Palmyra camp meeting discussed here contradicts Walters's theory.⁴

RECORDS OF THE FIRST VISION

I've heard some criticize the Church because the Church has not publicized the First Vision records. That is an uninformed statement. The person that maintains that we have not offered the information about the First Vision is simply unaware of what's been done.

The documents and the archives are open, and they're a testimony to the honesty of the Church, which I think is a projection of the honesty of Joseph Smith, who told what he remembered and told it sincerely. People who want to claim contradictions can do so, but the testimony of a sincere, honest man is going to shine through because the statement that he knew he had seen a vision is powerful. When I first read the account of the First Vision, I was Joseph Smith's age at the time he received it, only fourteen, and I knew he was telling me the truth.

I'm willing to be led where the documents lead me. That's what a historian does. If the documents say it, you have to account for it. You have to fit your story into what you're told happened by eyewitnesses. And every time I go to the documents, I find verification for Joseph Smith's story of the First Vision. And so I can speak as a person who's been there, who's looked at the material. In that sense I may be of value to other Latter-day Saints who say, "I trust this historian because he went to the sources." And I can tell you that nothing in the sources has ever shaken my testimony of the divine origin of Mormonism. They have only confirmed it. (Richard Lloyd Anderson, interview by Samuel Alonzo Dodge, July 27, 2009, Provo, UT)

More must be said, however, on how closely this meeting fits into Joseph Smith's pre-1820 chronology. And more can be learned about the large attendance at this 1818 meeting by using other upstate meeting comparisons rather than using random examples from any North American region. At least, the successful Palmyra gathering of 1818 was a contributing cause to the religious confusion that Joseph Smith described in several First Vision accounts. At most, this is probably the "unusual excitement" that "commenced with the Methodists" in and about Palmyra, New York, in the summer of 1818, when Joseph said his serious investigations began (v. 5). This is because Joseph's description best fits a Methodist camp meeting, which took place at Palmyra in

1818 but is otherwise not documented in this location near the beginning of Joseph's investigations of the area churches. Really understanding the impact of this 1818 camp meeting requires a flood of details, which are summarized in the "Conclusions" section, near the end of this article. This is also a useful preview, and the reader who scans these conclusions first will have a road map of Joseph Smith's quest before the First Vision.

Several Brigham Young University scholars responded to the Walters theory in 1969.⁵ My 1969 article featured what two Palmyra printers' apprentices remembered about Joseph Smith's teen years.⁶ They pictured him as a virtual Methodist convert, a role which he acknowledged (see v. 8). This article adds many recollections from the circuit riders of western New York that recreate the world of the 1818 Palmyra camp meeting, which certainly meets the usage test of "revival," meaning a series of meetings bringing enhanced conviction or an unusual number of conversions. Thus Joseph Smith's basic background of the First Vision is provable, meaning that historical sources beyond Joseph verify the local Methodist activities that Joseph said took place when he was a young seeker. Furthermore, Palmyra recollections and those of Joseph connect him to a known Palmyra Methodist camp meeting that correlates with his own descriptions of beginning to investigate his neighborhood churches.

JOSEPH'S SEEKING BEFORE 1820

Joseph Smith commented on religious conflicts as they affected him. His real story line was subjective, driven by outer events that raised the inner question of God's reaction to conflicting, confusing churches. His small world was torn open by a sizable Methodist event in 1818, and every gathering afterward attended, and many personal discussions, reopened this internal conflict. Thus Walters chose an irrelevant method for testing

Joseph Smith by locating large revivals, for we know that the unresolved question of which church was right followed the boy through dozens of large and small meetings after 1818, which are well understood because evangelical church worship is so well described in ministers' manuals, diaries, and memoirs. Walters referred to small revivals in Palmyra in 1816–17 and broader conversions there in 1824–25, but he assumed that silence of sources proved a lack of religious vitality in this area in the years 1819–21.⁷ Walters arbitrarily isolated 1820, saying that Joseph Smith “claims that he was stirred by an 1820 revival to make his inquiry in the grove near his home.”⁸ However, this incorrectly interprets Joseph’s 1838 history and ignores Joseph’s 1832 account, which specifically defines the time of his juvenile experiences. In 1838, Joseph placed his First Vision in early spring 1820 (see v. 14), preceded by an investigation “at length” (v. 13).⁹ The peak of his confusion came “in [his] fifteenth year” (v. 7), which began on his fourteenth birthday, December 23, 1819. Yet Joseph placed the Methodist “unusual excitement” long before that (v. 5). Strangely, Walters was aware that in 1832 Joseph placed his seeking as very early, for Walters quoted Joseph’s words about carefully examining churches “from age twelve to fifteen.”¹⁰ Thus Joseph actively searched for true religion from late December 1817 into the early part of 1820, at the end of which he turned fifteen. The above dates blend as reasonable approximations, though Joseph Smith clearly singles out the complete years of 1818 and 1819 as his time of exploration, with divine resolution in early 1820.

DO “GREAT MULTITUDES” REFER TO A LOCAL REVIVAL?

Besides misdating Joseph’s searching, Walters insisted that conversions could qualify as a “revival” only if there were many and if they were sustained over some time. However,

Joseph Smith sometimes used “revival” or “reformation” of the pre-First Vision scene in Palmyra, though “unusual excitement” was used in his major history, and he probably intended the above terms as synonyms (v. 5). Walters claimed to prove “the absence of any revival in the Palmyra area in 1820.”¹¹ However, that is a puzzling statement in the light of two articles in the *Palmyra Register* on June 23 and July 5, 1820, reporting the sad death of James Couser, victim of “an epileptic fit” after returning drunk “from a camp-meeting which was held in this vicinity.” The second article was predictable damage control, explaining to “neighbors who belong to the Society of Methodists” that the original story did not claim that Couser bought liquor “within the enclosure of their place of worship . . . but at the grog shops that were established at, or near if you please, their camp-ground.” So the meeting in question was more than a normal Sunday gathering; it was an open-air special occasion for proclaiming Christian forgiveness to expected crowds, since shops were set up, indicating a public attraction normally lasting several days. Walters and Marquardt dismissed this event as only a Methodist camp meeting, not a revival; but in usage then and now, a successful protracted meeting is also a revival.¹²

My worn tenth edition of *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* defines *revival* as “a period of renewed religious interest,” which seems to be the Walters-Marquardt understanding; but the above dictionary also considers a revival as “an often highly emotional evangelistic meeting or series of meetings,” which defines the Methodist camp meetings of Joseph’s youth. Such meetings were among those that nearly converted him, as he said: “In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect” (v. 8). The Smiths migrated to Palmyra Village in the winter of 1816–17, but (as Mother Smith writes) in two years they had moved two miles south to

their large farm, barely over the line into Manchester Township, though their self-built log house was built (perhaps purposely) on the adjoining property, still a few yards within Palmyra Township. Joseph Smith said that this was “the place where we lived” when “an unusual excitement” began with the Methodists (vv. 3, 5).¹³ After an unstated time, Joseph began his fifteenth year (December 23, 1819) as the “great excitement” continued and Joseph was still shopping “their several meetings” with his gnawing question of “who was right and who was wrong” (v. 8). But Joseph’s canonized account includes bits of history of his feelings, of his locality, and of the broader Finger Lakes area. As stated, the major theme is Joseph’s inner agony, with accompanying religious conflict in the region. Yet interfaith conflict expanded in broader rings around Palmyra. Doctrinal quarrels “became general among all the sects in that region of country,” until the “whole district of country” was characterized by “great multitudes” choosing among the major evangelical churches (vv. 5–6). Walters and Marquardt claimed such phrases were not true of 1820 Palmyra but were justified only by the 1824–25 increases in the Palmyra area, which added a hundred Baptists, a hundred Presbyterians, and two hundred Methodists to the main Protestant groups.¹⁴ According to these authors, such statistics prove that Joseph merged memories of two eras, necessarily including the 1824–25 Christian conversions in Palmyra to reach larger convert numbers. However, four hundred converts, mostly from two townships, hardly measure up to Joseph’s language of “great multitudes” in “the whole district of country.” When early circuit ministers use such language of camp meetings, they are more often describing thousands of listeners, not just a few hundred. So the greater area of a “district” greatly increases the converts and members within it.

As before stated, the Walters theory picked 1820 (the wrong year for Joseph Smith’s investigations), claimed zero growth

then among mainline evangelicals in the Palmyra area, and then speculated that Joseph must have merged memories of 1820 and 1824–25 for Palmyra, when newspapers showed four hundred converts in the area, which loosely could be “great multitudes” joining Palmyra area churches (v. 5). Yet a close reading establishes two contexts: (1) “unusual excitement” in the “place where we lived,” expanding to (2) “great multitudes” joining churches in “the whole district of country.” Seasoned Mormon historians, including Backman, Bushman, and Hill, faulted the Walters school for essentially rearranging Joseph Smith’s words. The Walters group repositioned Joseph’s “great multitudes” into Joseph’s previous, smaller category, “the place where we lived” (Palmyra vicinity), whereas Joseph had added a new category (“whole district of country”) before using the large quantitative adjectives above. In early western New York Methodist sources, “multitudes” attending camp meetings are generally equated with the low thousands, and such numbers exceed the population of Palmyra Village in 1820. In fact, the reiterations of this theory sound less than confident.

The argument was that Joseph must have included four hundred converts made in the Palmyra area in 1824–25, or he could not have used “great multitudes.” So the conclusion was made that broad terms like “multitudes” were “scarcely overstatements” for local growth measured for the year before late 1825. Nevertheless, “multitudes” is not equivalent to four hundred converts¹⁵ but is a huge overstatement, not appropriate unless the larger “multitudes” fit into the larger “district” or “region.” Yet Joseph’s expansive statements about the pre-1820 Palmyra revival make good sense as describing spreading revivals, with fervor breaking out in a locality and broadening throughout a larger territory, a frequent pattern of expression in earlier western New York revival literature. The expansive adjectives of larger convert numbers match Joseph’s broader

“district” and “region,” where conversions were spreading before the First Vision.

METHODIST DISTRICT GROWTH IN JOSEPH’S YOUTH

As indicated throughout this article, two Palmyra apprentice printers knew Joseph and identified him as temporarily but deeply involved in Methodism. In addition, Joseph himself said that he attended the “several meetings” of the mainline groups, but “in process of time [his] mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and [he] felt some desire to be united with them” (v. 8). Of course, Joseph also credited the Methodists for igniting his soul and society until the burning questions were extinguished by deity in the forest vision (see v. 5). And afterward he confided his experience to “one of the Methodist preachers, who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement” (v. 21). The above apprentices later spoke of Joseph’s joining the Methodist “probationary class” at Palmyra (Tucker) and even functioning as “a passable exhorter in evening meetings” (Turner).¹⁶ Methodists kept statistics at most levels, and Joseph would be aware of trends. In going to meetings during 1818–19, young Joseph would normally walk two miles to Palmyra, one of ten Methodist preaching stations in the Ontario Circuit, which in turn was grouped with ten other circuits to make the Genesee District. In a rough 1818 comparison, the Methodist circuit surrounding the Smith farm would be about the size of a county, and the large Genesee District would be equivalent to several counties. Since early Methodist church records are missing at Palmyra, Walters looked at the published Genesee Conference records for 1818 and 1819, when the Genesee District still included the Ontario Circuit, where Palmyra Village and environs were located. During the year before the summer of 1819, membership in the Ontario Circuit

fell from 703 to 677, a loss of 26 individuals. Yet those flat figures are suspect.

Every other circuit in the Genesee District gained in 1819, with the total Genesee District increasing in membership more than any other district in the Genesee Conference (western New York, and adjacent sections of Canada and Pennsylvania). In 1819, the population of the Genesee District grew from 4,888 to 6,068, an increase of 1,180 Methodist members in the circuits adjoining Ontario Circuit, where Palmyra was central. This was a 24 percent increase in one year in the Methodist Ontario District, which included northwest New York, in the area from Ithaca and Cayuga Lake west to Buffalo.¹⁷ Joseph Smith was in the eye of an upstate Methodist hurricane and expressed that by expansive adjectives (“the whole district of country”) and of conversions (“great multitudes”). Non-Methodist growth was less spectacular and measured in more compact districts around Palmyra. In 1819 the Baptists added 310, and the Presbyterians added 276.¹⁸ However, Backman added Presbyterian membership figures in areas roughly the size of the Methodist Genesee Conference in western New York and found that in 1818 and 1819 there were about 1,500 new Presbyterians each year.¹⁹ As the attached chart indicates, Methodist increases in 1819 almost doubled those numbers. Judged by his large-number adjectives, Joseph’s 1838 history creates two geographical levels in explaining local as against regional religious conflict, his tighter home area as against expansion throughout a broader “district,” possibly intended as the technical Methodist term. The accompanying chart is compiled from the national report, which gave component numbers in the mid-1819 Genesee Conference (western New York and adjacent parts of Canada and Pennsylvania). It features the Genesee District within that conference, and the Genesee District contained the Ontario Circuit (including Palmyra and the Smith farm) and ten other

circuits. In his published history, Joseph introduced his pre-1820 investigations with only two peripheral sentences on district increases (see v. 5), part of an extraordinary national expansion in this period: “Between 1770 and 1820 American Methodists achieved a virtual miracle of growth, rising from fewer than 1,000 members to more than 250,000. . . . This growth stunned the older denominations.”²⁰

METHODISTS IN WESTERN NEW YORK
AND NEARBY AREAS, 1817–19²¹

	1817	1818	1819
US and adjacent Canada total (11 North American conferences)	224,853	229,627	240,924
Genesee Conference total (western NY to eastern borders somewhat west of the Hudson River)	17,935	21,046	23,913
DISTRICT TOTALS WITHIN THE GENESEE CONFERENCE			
Oneida District	3,440	4,180	4,580
Chenango District	4,091	4,594	5,161
Genesee District	4,531	4,881	6,068
Susquehanna District	2,760	2,660	2,872
Upper Canada District	1,226	1,995	2,466
Lower Canada District	1,881	2,736	2,766
CIRCUIT TOTALS WITHIN THE GENESEE DISTRICT			
Eden Circuit	158	246	321
New Amsterdam Circuit ²²	264		
Caledonia Circuit	425	594	623

Bloomfield Circuit	450	616	695
Ontario Circuit (roughly present western Wayne County)	900	703	677
Lyons Circuit	740	594	673
Seneca Circuit	640	693	1,010
Crooked Lake Circuit	333	416	656
Newtown Circuit	224	388	487
Ridgeway Circuit	133	246	331
Clarence Circuit	264	263	350
Canandaigua Circuit		122	200
Buffalo and Black Rock			45

Joseph worried about quarrels among believers, even among his family. As Methodist “unusual excitement” broke out, there was similar conflict in his home and even in travel to church. Both parents had been seekers, but Mother Smith and three siblings settled on Presbyterianism in New York, as Joseph explains (see v. 7). This denomination inherited Calvinism as held by New England Congregationalists on both sides of the family. Yet Joseph Smith took another way after Palmyra’s “unusual excitement.”²³ In his history, Joseph essentially said he was first shaken by a local Methodist revival, after which he developed some degree of affiliation with them. Joseph’s 1844 Hebrew tutor paraphrased Joseph’s memories of how an early revival opened the spiritual dilemma, which was still unresolved until the First Vision: “The first call he had a Revival meeting his mother & Br & Sist got Religion, he wanted to get Religion too wanted to feel & shout like the Rest but could feel nothing.”²⁴ The year before, journalist David Nye interviewed Joseph Smith, who then

used a synonym for a “revival” before his First Vision: “There was a reformation among the different religious denominations in the neighborhood where I lived, and I became serious, and was desirous to know what Church to join.”²⁵ Among the insights of Neibaur’s 1844 account is Joseph’s cautious preference for Methodism right up to the beginning of the divine dialogue in the forest: “Mr Smith then asked must I join the Methodist Church.” These were either the first words of Joseph’s direct query or Neibaur’s understanding that this question was in Joseph’s heart as the vision opened.²⁶

JOSEPH’S METHODIST MEETINGS: QUARTERLY CONFERENCES

Joseph’s religious experiences in 1818 and 1819 can be partially reconstructed once his Methodist participation is known. He received exhortation in local class meetings, by periodic visits of assigned circuit riders, and by his probable attendance at some quarterly meetings, then a standard institution in his area. Scholars now stress the impact of this developed organization, with the camp meeting as a recruiting resource but not necessarily the main proselyting tool. At this period the Methodist investigator was drawn into “a well-defined system of social activities, class meetings, love feasts, quarterly meetings, and camp meetings.”²⁷ Charles Giles (1783–1867) and George Peck (1797–1876) had well-known careers as circuit and district leaders in the Genesee Conference. Their detailed memoirs describe camp meetings and quarterly meetings alternately as outstanding events that brought a steady stream of converts. Quarterly meetings combined church business with worship, bringing together teachers, lay leaders, settled ministers, circuit riders, and the presiding elder of the district. This circuit conference ordinarily had a Saturday-Sunday format,

with members and seekers gathering on Saturday “from the surrounding communities and countryside to hear preaching, sing favorite hymns, and fellowship in a festive atmosphere.”²⁸ Charles Giles graduated from circuit preacher to presiding elder of the Oneida District from 1814 to 1817 and also 1822 to 1825, also presiding over the Chenango District in the interval of 1818–21. These districts were comparable to the Genesee District, which included Palmyra and present western Wayne County. As presiding elder, Giles directed quarterly conferences and described their robust pattern:

In those days our quarterly meetings were noted seasons, which excited general interest. The circuits were large, containing some hundreds of communicants, divided into distinct societies, including many class-leaders, stewards, exhorters, and local preachers. These official members, when they met at these meetings, formed a large quarterly conference, where all the important business connected with the circuit was brought up and obtained conference action. The members of the church, coming from all directions, and from various distances, bringing some of their unconverted friends and neighbours with them to gain blessings and benefits there, added much to the importance and interest of these occasions. . . . Indeed, quarterly meetings then were accounted great seasons, not only by our own church, but by many others in community: they were made the theme of conversation long beforehand, and all necessary preparations were made to attend them. Preachers and members, from neighboring circuits, frequently attended. . . . [C]onversions were common occurrences at these meetings. In the love-feasts tidings were brought in from all parts of the circuit.²⁹

In review, Joseph’s 1832 handwritten history says he actively searched for the true church “from the age of twelve years to fifteen,” that is, from late 1817 to late 1820; but in his official history, Joseph dated the First Vision “early in the spring of

eighteen hundred and twenty” (v. 14), thus subtracting most of that year from active investigation.³⁰ During that 1818–19 period in the Ontario Circuit, only one camp meeting is known that is relevant to Joseph’s religious searching. However, in that period, up to eight quarterly meetings were held in the circuit, sometimes accompanied by camp meetings. Borders of the Ontario Circuit roughly fit the western two-thirds of present Wayne County, a twenty-mile square, with Lyons Circuit on the east and Canandaigua Circuit on the south. The quarterly assemblies were often held at larger villages, so as a business center, Palmyra probably hosted a couple of these circuit gatherings during Joseph’s two years of church shopping before 1820. He recalled resisting membership but “attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit” (v. 8). This comes close to saying that Joseph attended Methodist conferences, for Lucy Mack Smith pictures her family as respectful of the Sabbath, suggesting that Joseph could easily attend worship in Palmyra or even in other locations on the Lord’s Day. Joseph’s society was inquisitive and mobile. Area gatherings attracted believers and near-believers from a dozen-mile radius, and Giles mentions riding roads with double rows of wagons on their way to camp meetings. A quarterly meeting was held periodically at Palmyra and might have been the “unusual excitement” that provoked the juvenile Joseph to seek a church, except that the Palmyra printing apprentices say the meeting of that description was a camp meeting (Turner) or its synonym, a protracted meeting (Tucker).³¹

AURORA SEAGER JOURNAL, PALMYRA, JUNE 1818

A premium source on Joseph Smith’s pre-vision life is a journal record of an 1818 Methodist camp meeting near Palmyra, which Joseph certainly knew about and very likely

attended. It is discussed here after upstate Methodist expansion because the account is understood by contemporary comparison. This 1818 entry includes raw statistics, recorded in the journal of Aurora Seager, a newly ordained circuit rider who died a year and a half after outlining this Palmyra meeting in his daily record. This remarkable resource was mentioned early by Milton V. Backman Jr. and revisited recently by other scholars.³² Aurora Seager was born in Connecticut in 1795, and his journal and correspondence furnish a nineteenth-century “pilgrim’s progress,” moving from teenage introspection to his premature death as a traveling preacher at the end of 1819.

Two principal biographies incorporated Aurora’s personal writings,³³ which tell how he started an academic program with classical languages at fifteen, then started teaching two years later at the request of his father, who in 1812 moved his large family to the ten-mile square township of Phelps in western New York, which contained “the flourishing little *Village of Vienna*,” later incorporated as the village of Phelps.³⁴ Young Aurora was industrious and reflective, continuing as a teacher until his Methodist conversion at twenty-two altered his thinking and lifestyle. Like Joseph Smith and others of the period, he later wrote about adolescent doubts and the power of prayer. More concerned with knowing the Savior than with doctrine, Aurora joined the Methodists because he felt their Christlike love. The young man was first licensed as an exhorter and later became a preacher, respected by senior ministers for his sincerity and humility. Aurora wrote that his “inability and unfitness for the work caused me to weep and pray for the promised blessing” of Christ’s companionship in his ministry (see Matthew 28:20).³⁵

Many young ministers in this environment had battled darkness and rejoiced in victory. After keenly feeling human weakness and isolation, a converted Aurora assured others that the

Savior beckoned all to enter his joyful path. After conversion in early 1817, Aurora temporarily returned to the former residence in Connecticut, comforted a dying married sister, and began his short missionary career. That spring he reported speaking at eight large meetings near Hartford, which generated great interest, though he was in the Calvinist homeland: “A considerable revival took place there, and numbers, especially of the youth, were brought to the knowledge of the truth.”³⁶ In the next year, Aurora changed location but not his preaching pattern, as he spoke at a camp meeting at Palmyra, New York, where twelve-year-old Joseph Smith likely heard Aurora and others like him declare that God had answered their prayers.

Leaving a request for transfer from his eastern New York circuit, Aurora returned to Phelps Township on May 19, 1818, and attended the quarterly conference of this New York circuit the next weekend there. The presiding elder preached on the first day, and typical Sabbath preaching was given the next day by several, including Aurora.³⁷ He had requested assignment at the 1818 annual Genesee Conference scheduled for Lansing (near Ithaca) in mid-July.³⁸ In the meantime, his presiding elder asked Aurora to work near his home, and he assisted at nearby Palmyra in the Ontario Circuit as his first assignment, which appears under journal dates of June 19–23, 1818: “On the 19th [Friday] I attended a camp-meeting at Palmyra. The arrival of Bishop Roberts, who seems to be a man of God, and is apostolic in his appearance, gave a deeper interest to the meeting until it closed. On Monday the sacrament was administered; about twenty were baptized; forty united with the Church, and the meeting closed. I accompanied the Bishop to Brother Hawks, at Phelps.”³⁹

Aurora here compressed considerable information, which yields valuable insights when rounded out. “Palmyra” no doubt indicates Palmyra Village, meaning that the meetings were held

nearby, since a camp meeting was by definition in a wooded area, and he was one of the regional ministers gathering to assist. This full town (or township) was a strip of land ten miles by twelve miles, but the campsite would normally be referenced by the nearest village, which in this case had the same name as the township. As mentioned, on June 28, 1820, the editor of the *Palmyra Register* reported an unfortunate death of a man who supposedly got drunk at “a camp-meeting which was held in this vicinity.” Some Methodists complained, to whom the editor apologized in the next issue, indicating that the man had come to the village to stay overnight.

Orsamus Turner, a young village printer discussed in the appendices of this article, knew Joseph personally before 1822 and said that Joseph caught “a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods, on the Vienna road.”⁴⁰ That road connected Palmyra Village to Vienna Village (now Phelps Village), a dozen miles southeast; Turner’s point was that Joseph was nearly converted near Palmyra in a Methodist meeting in a forested section of the road running to Vienna. In 1877, Professor W. H. McIntosh reviewed the beginnings of Methodism in Palmyra, citing their 1822 Palmyra charter and reporting that they “erected their first edifice on Vienna street, near the cemetery, in the eastern part of the village.”⁴¹ Moreover, the huge 1826 Palmyra camp meeting at the Genesee Conference took place “in a most beautiful and picturesque grove, near the village.”⁴² Some of these locations on the east of Palmyra Village may be identical; all are in general proximity, showing a Methodist continuity in this area, probably some four miles by indirect road from the Smith farm.

As mentioned, young Joseph Smith turned twelve just before 1818, the year he named as the start of serious investigation of major Palmyra churches. That alone makes his attendance expected at the known special Methodist meetings

in 1818–19. His mother and his printing acquaintances indicate that Joseph regularly came into Palmyra Village from the Smith farm, two miles south. In fact, in that period the Smiths probably continued selling homemade refreshments by cart at public occasions, as editor Pomeroy Tucker said, “on Fourth of July anniversaries, and on military training days.”⁴³ In a society seeking religion, a camp meeting drew similar crowds that attracted vendors, as discussed in the appendices under the Pomeroy Tucker heading.

The 1818 Palmyra camp meeting followed a well-used weekend pattern.⁴⁴ Seager and certainly other ministers arrived on Friday or before. Also attending was Robert Roberts, one of the three bishops of the Methodist Church, who was traveling toward the annual Genesee Conference meeting scheduled the next month at Lansing, New York, outside of Ithaca. Roberts was tall and heavy-built, unaffected, with a frontier background.⁴⁵ A fellow preacher recalled his “plain, practical sermon” at the Sunday preaching to crowds at the 1818 Genesee Conference the following month.⁴⁶ His unusual presence at the June camp meeting near Palmyra certainly drew a greater crowd. Roberts’s devout preaching was described by attorney Richard W. Thompson, who later heard Bishop Roberts open in “conversational style” and then develop his topic in “terse” language, at the same time portraying “the majesty, power and love of God.”⁴⁷

NUMBERS AT THE JUNE 1818 PALMYRA CAMP MEETING

Preachers’ writings usually evaluate camp meetings by the smaller number of those accepting Christ rather than by estimating full attendance, which included up to a score of ministers, volunteer laymen, hundreds of tent residents, and rotating visitors each day from surrounding villages and farms.

Over half of the audience would already be Christian (regularly called “professors of religion”⁴⁸), maybe a fourth would be serious seekers, and the rest the curious and the skeptical. Young people are mostly praised as pious, but guards were set up for contingencies. Seager wrote that “forty united with the Church” at the 1818 Palmyra camp meeting, which suggests an above average audience. For instance, in 1835 in southern Michigan, three circuit conferences were merged as a camp meeting, which perhaps totaled a thousand, termed by the presiding elder, “much people on the ground,” with a final result: “There were it was supposed between 40 and 50 converted.”⁴⁹ This identifies the numerical ingredients of the 1818 Palmyra camp meeting in New York’s Genesee Conference. In that summer, Charles Giles was shifted from presiding elder of the Oneida District to the same position over the more eastern Chenango District. He remembered how camp meetings drew “thousands into the tented wilderness.”⁵⁰ He described two 1818 camp meetings in the township of Manlius, around sixty miles east of Palmyra. In the first meeting, emotional cries rose from “a multitude of pious worshippers, and many curious attendants.” After preaching “from day to day,” there were “many . . . yet unconverted, besides we gathered up fifty happy converts.”⁵¹ In a few months, another camp meeting was opened on the same ground, which “was soon swarming with life. . . . Tent after tent arose in order, encircling the hallowed spot.” This second encampment brought another fifty converts, who stood beside the earlier fifty as the second set of meetings closed.⁵² Giles reminisced about his vigorous voice, which rang “in the open air in quarterly meetings, and on camp grounds, where thousands frequently assembled . . . so that five or six thousand could hear distinctly.”⁵³

At this time, George Peck was entering the ministry in the Genesee Conference, in the Broome and Cortland Circuits of

the Chenango District, and he pictured some early, successful camp meetings, including the following prototype:

Those having charge of the preparations would select a spot in the dense woods, and proceed to clear away the bushes and small trees, putting the brush around the encampment, and forming with it an impassable fence sometimes ten or twelve feet high. Within this enclosure the tents, perhaps a hundred in number, would be pitched. When the meetings began great multitudes of people would throng the place. Among these would come an occasional party of wild young men. . . . To keep such as these in awe, “guards” were appointed, whose duty it was to . . . keep the whole encampment in good order. . . . [T]he preachers and the Church-members carried on the campaign, preaching, exhorting, singing, praying, with a zeal that never cooled, and lungs that seemed never to grow weary.⁵⁴

Even in the “cold summer” of 1816, camp meetings were held in Peck’s area, one of them near Norwich, about ninety miles southeast of Palmyra. He and another circuit minister cleared the forest, after which Bishop M’Kendree was present and “spoke with great energy,” during which “the multitudes hung upon his lips as if entranced.” This camp meeting began as “feeble,” but vivid warnings of hellfire caused “hundreds” in the crowd to offer pleas for mercy, which joined with piercing prayers of the faithful to produce an “unbroken roar.” A relief squad of experienced preachers concluded this series of meetings, and many converts are implied by speaking of their “influence upon the Church and the whole community.”⁵⁵ The following year, George Peck came back to the Broome Circuit for another camp meeting, which included days-long instruction and exhortation, when “many penitents cried for mercy.”⁵⁶ The summer of 1818 Peck helped to rough out a camp space at Truxton Township, near Cortland, some sixty miles east of Palmyra. In spite of a punishing heat wave, he says, “we had

a goodly number of souls converted.”⁵⁷ The Giles and Peck memoirs in this period help to estimate numbers at the 1818 Palmyra camp sessions, as well as understand its aftermath, which includes the doctrinal competition that so offended Joseph Smith (see vv. 6–8). At Truxton, one of the rougher circuit preachers downgraded Methodist backsliders, as well as ordinary Baptists and Presbyterians, in praying and speaking, and afterward a “Baptist preacher” visited the homes of camp meeting converts, “misrepresenting the Methodists . . . turning aside a few.” Peck later overcame his indignation but felt the pain of seeing “a portion of the fruit of our labors lured from us and borne off in other directions.”⁵⁸

In post-pioneer New York, there were normally large turnouts for these “forest gatherings,” and success kept them vigorous for decades. Even before the Erie Canal was built, cumulative attendance from Friday to Monday at the 1818 Palmyra campground should have been about two thousand, since Palmyra Village was a trade center drawing on the township of that name and bordering ones. In 1820–21 census statistics, the adjoining east-west townships of Palmyra and Macedon contained 3,724, and those on the land running south to prosperous Canandaigua would double that figure. On the other hand, Palmyra Village then only had “125 houses . . . and about 1000 inhabitants,” so anyone moderately informed there would know of the Methodist crusade from Friday through Monday in late June 1818.⁵⁹ The physical preparation of the site as well as Methodist announcements in meetings and by word of mouth would herald the coming event.

Western New York sources give a context to the 1818 Palmyra journal of Aurora Seager. His figure that “forty united with the Church” is about average for camp meeting conversions in two of the six districts (Oneida and Chenango) in the Genesee Conference from about 1816 to 1818. Seager says the

Palmyra preaching closed on Monday, June 20, when “about twenty were baptized; forty united with the Church.” The latter figure was more significant, since baptism was not regularly given on Methodist conversion, but when requested. Accepting Christ was the public mark of conversion. These forty new believers came out from a much larger group of spectators. Charles Giles spoke about a “multitude” or even “thousands” in his audiences when fifty converts pledged faith. Peck spoke of “many penitents” or a “goodly number” of converts called out from assemblies of “hundreds” or “multitudes.” As stated, Palmyra Village produced an estimated camp meeting of ten thousand in 1826.⁶⁰ But even the 1818 Palmyra camp meeting was successful in gathering an average number of converts for that period. Outdoor audiences in similar western New York meetings then reached estimated highs well beyond two thousand.

Giles and Peck furnish many broad estimates of camp meeting attendance and quite regularly add specific numbers of conversions. Their overall ratios are about 1 or 2 percent of Christian converts to each camp meeting audience in western New York. This means that those forty 1818 camp meeting converts at Palmyra would be drawn from a pool of roughly two thousand spectators. So the Prophet’s phrasing is apt, calling the pre-1820 initiating Methodist meeting an “unusual excitement” (v. 5). Right afterward, the Prophet’s large historical estimates really refer to converts in the expanding circles surrounding Palmyra Village, which, as noted, had a population then of “about a thousand inhabitants.”⁶¹ A camp meeting or quarterly district conference in Palmyra would draw a great but temporary crowd. As discussed above, “great multitudes” of converts are mentioned in Joseph’s history only after he notes what was happening in “the whole district of country” (v. 5). Just before that, the Prophet’s history said that the Methodists created a heavy impact on society in “the place where we lived” (v. 5), the beginning of religious

agitation dated as 1818 by his 1832 history. After the above comparative analysis, the contemporary journal of Rev. Aurora Seager should shift historical perspective to greater respect for Joseph's 1838 history of the First Vision. A concrete source now locates a camp meeting in Palmyra in the summer of 1818, large enough to unsettle that upstate area socially and religiously. It at least doubled the population for a long weekend, added one of the three Methodist bishops to its list of distinguished visitors, and left behind changed lives and ongoing religious discussion that would materialize into a new and significant restoration church. Joseph Smith perhaps met fellow seekers at this camp meeting, and he may have questioned some of the forty new believers about their convictions and how they could be sure.

JOSEPH'S ATTENDANCE AT THE 1818 PALMYRA CAMP MEETING

Interlocking sources indicate that Joseph Smith attended at least some sessions of the June 1818 camp meeting at Palmyra. One dependable observer is Orsamus Turner, who was slightly older than Joseph and was a Palmyra printer's apprentice during part of the first six years of Smith family residence in that vicinity. Later a successful small-town editor, he also became a major western New York historian and gave several memories of Joseph as "distinct ones." Though writing of Joseph Smith with disdain, Turner admits that Joseph "occasionally" showed his "mother's intellect" when "he used to help us solve" ethical questions in the "juvenile debating club" in the village, likely before the Smiths started clearing their land before 1820. Turner concludes this section about Joseph's youth with grudging praise: "And subsequently, after catching a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods, on the Vienna road, he was a very passable exhorter in evening meetings."⁶² Very likely this is the

same experience that Joseph shared with Alexander Neibaur in Nauvoo: “The first call he had a Revival meeting his mother & Br & Sist got Religion, he wanted to get Religion too wanted to feel & shout like the Rest but could feel nothing.”⁶³ In addition to the Turner and Neibaur accounts of Joseph’s near-conversion at an outdoor Methodist revival, the Seager journal notes an important Methodist camp meeting near Palmyra in June 1818 with forty converts. This unusual event in Joseph’s village was sure to attract him, judged by his assertion of active church shopping about this time (see v. 8). Thus we have three good sources about a Methodist revival or camp meeting near Palmyra, harmonious in time but dated by the Seager journal of June 1818. The statistics show it was a major event in the community that certainly came to Joseph’s attention and almost certainly compelled his attendance. These three sources evidently report the same Methodist camp meeting and match Joseph’s 1838 history that his boyhood quest for the true church began with a local “unusual excitement” generated by “the Methodists” (v. 5). By itself, the Seager journal of June 1818 establishes the high probability of Joseph’s presence there, which is historically strengthened by Joseph’s memory of being present in a Methodist revival meeting with family members (Neibaur Journal) and by his teenage acquaintance’s report that Joseph caught “a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting away down in the woods, on the Vienna road” (Orsamus Turner).

The Smith family arrived from Vermont in late 1816 or early 1817, and in her dictated manuscript Mother Smith contrasted their migrating poverty with their later security: “In two years from the time we entered Palmyra strangers . . . we were able to settle ourselves upon our own land [in] a snug comfortable though humble habitation built and neatly furnished by our own industry.”⁶⁴ Pomeroy Tucker, a Palmyra editor who knew Joseph in this early period, states that the Smiths lived

in Palmyra Village for “some two and a half years” and “in 1818” moved two miles south to the uncleared farm, where they constructed their “original log hut”—“occupying as their dwelling-place, in the first instance, a small, one-story smoky log-house, which they had built prior to removing there.”⁶⁵ Lucy and lifelong Palmyra resident Tucker agree that the first (and only) log house of the Smiths was self-built to be ready for their move to the farm about 1819. Orsamus Turner agrees on this pre-1820 chronology, since he remembered “to have first seen the [Smith] family, in the winter of ’19, 20, in a rude log house with but a small spot underbrushed around it.”⁶⁶ The normal settler’s routine was to replace a simple log structure with a later frame home. These observers describe but one log home as the Smith’s residence before the surviving frame home was built, which was well under way by Alvin’s death in late 1823. Joseph’s own history picks up his religious narrative at the point of settling on the farm, when the Methodists initiated “an unusual excitement,” and he began to favor them (see v. 8). The above three camp-meeting accounts center in a close window of time, dated as June 1818 in the Seager journal. This is a few months after Joseph Smith’s twelfth birthday, a time when his 1832 memoir says he was beginning to investigate the area churches. This 1832 history clarifies that his seeking lasted “from the age of twelve years to fifteen,” though the vision in early spring 1820 cut off seeking for the rest of that year (see v. 14). Moreover, Joseph’s youthful church investigation could begin as early as mid-1818, according to clues in this 1838 account of the First Vision. These outdoor services were normally organized in the milder seasons, late spring through early fall, so the religious controversies as Joseph turned fourteen in late 1819 (see v. 7) definitely allow a local camp meeting during the warmer months of 1818 or 1819 as the “unusual” event that first caught young Joseph’s religious attention. The

known 1818 Palmyra camp meeting fits Joseph's chronology and also fits the Turner Methodist camp meeting context.

Walters has passed on, and he has loyal defenders. But the old claims do not stand against careful study of the 1818 camp meeting in Palmyra. As an intense seeker with Methodist inclination, Joseph would certainly be at some of the six-odd meetings over four days of this major Christian gathering only a few walkable miles from his home. Very likely there also to sell food at public events, the youth was personally seeking his own salvation and how to resolve the family division developing concerning the right church. Vogel doesn't want to mix the scriptural 1838 account and the simple 1832 history penned by Joseph Smith, since he thinks the latter leaves out "a revival and confusion over which sect to join as motivation for praying." Instead, Vogel believes that Joseph "was motivated by a need for salvation and forgiveness of sins."⁶⁷ Though some others share this view, it is a distinction without a difference. Both the 1832 and 1838 accounts merge different aspects of the same thing.⁶⁸ Early western New York literature contains autobiographies in which juveniles seek God's church and God's forgiveness at the same time.

In 1819, normal Methodist quarterly conferences were held in Palmyra's Ontario Circuit, the northern part of the original large Ontario County. In 1819 this circuit included nearly seven hundred members in an area roughly equal to the western two-thirds of Wayne County today, so the circuit conferences drew a crowd of at least three hundred that assembled several times that year—circuit preachers, visiting officials, local and visiting members, and serious investigators. Yet the big 1819 event in the area was the Annual Genesee Conference, held for a week beginning July 1. Although an annual meeting of delegates of the Methodist Episcopal Church was held on the Eastern Seaboard, preaching and administrative assignments

were mostly supervised by the bishops as they attended the eleven United States and Canadian conferences divided on sectional lines. So in 1819 the Genesee Conference hosted a visiting bishop, the presiding elders of its six circuits, and about a hundred circuit preachers from the whole conference, stretching across western New York west of Albany, and including adjoining sections of northern Pennsylvania and Canada.⁶⁹ In 1819 this event was held in Vienna Village, noted then as twelve miles southeast of Palmyra, in the town or township of Phelps, a prosperous farming area with good roads.⁷⁰ It opened on July 1 for a week of business and assignments, but preaching was expected on the Sabbath from the array of experienced and persuasive ministers there. Preacher-historian George Peck comments on the Sabbath meetings of some Genesee conferences in the years just before. Although held in the country area of Genoa (east of Cayuga Lake) in 1818, only a “neighboring grove” could accommodate “the crowds which gathered from far and near” for general services.⁷¹ In 1816 in the Paris locality (south of Utica) there were between three and four thousand spectators, which is some measure of the 1821 gatherings in the same place, where “sermons in the grove” were given “before a crowded congregation.”⁷²

Details on the 1819 sermons at Vienna Village are not available, but the above meetings are prototypes for this period. Did Joseph Smith take the twelve-mile journey to Vienna, motivated to hear men of faith who had collectively moved mountains of doubt? That possibility is likely but not yet proved. He may have joined other Methodists traveling to the Sabbath preaching by wagon, carriage, or horseback. The legendary preacher George Lane attended the Vienna conference, and young Joseph may have heard him there, possibly because the family sent Joseph to sell food at this publicized event. According to Joseph’s 1838 history, Methodist meetings first raised questions of authority and

forgiveness, after which the quest for answers steadily intensified in Joseph's thinking, in large or small meetings, in discussion or meditation (see vv. 8–10). Whether the youth was present at Vienna preaching sessions or only discussed them with Palmyrans who attended, the Genesee Conference intensified family and local church discussions concerning church and salvation.

FIRST VISION CIRCUMSTANCES IN PALMYRA MEMORIES

As the only human witness of the First Vision, Joseph Smith left behind invaluable direct accounts. Next in significance are Joseph's comments remembered by close associates. His mother's published history has a chapter on the First Vision because her editors copied it from Joseph's 1838 history, giving him credit, as it was borrowed from the first publication in the Nauvoo *Times and Seasons*. Though she adds further details about the early dynamics of Joseph's family, she does not directly incorporate the First Vision in her narrative. Joseph's 1838 story of the First Vision had a preface and fade-out in Lucy's edited manuscript and first printing; these words may seem to come from her, but on closer study, they are paraphrases of Joseph's 1838 language. So Lucy's published history generally contains Joseph's 1838 dictation of the First Vision, and there is not now evidence that her son told her of the event before the early 1830s.⁷³ Joseph later said that right after the vision he told his mother that he had learned that Presbyterianism was not true (see v. 20), but this may be sharing a conclusion without explaining its basis.⁷⁴

Joseph Smith discussed the First Vision with some acquaintances. He shared this experience with a Methodist minister but was rebuffed, which discouraged him from publicizing his story at that time (see v. 21).⁷⁵ He also reported "persecution," evidently what professionals now call "verbal abuse" of a sensitive

teenager. This led to scorn from “professors of religion,” a phrase for anyone who publicly professed belief, some of whom were evidently reacting directly to Joseph’s “telling the story” (v. 22).⁷⁶ Pomeroy Tucker was a Palmyra native, three years older than Joseph, and claimed to know what Joseph told his Methodist probationary class as he withdrew after he had found answers: “The final conclusion announced by him was, that all sectarianism was fallacious, all the churches on a false foundation, and the Bible a fable.”⁷⁷ There is a corrosive undercurrent in the Tucker-Turner reporting and in the Palmyra-Manchester affidavits on Joseph and his family, all of which confirm what Joseph claims about “bitter persecution and reviling” by many respectable members of his society (v. 23).⁷⁸

One disappointing source is William Smith, Joseph’s younger brother born in Royalton, Vermont, in March 1811. He came to Palmyra at about age five, when mother and children reunited with Joseph Smith Sr. in the winter of 1816–17. As discussed, the years 1818 and 1819 were those of Joseph’s intense seeking for a church authorized by God, when William was age seven and eight, with a next birthday about the time Joseph received the First Vision (see v. 14). As illustrated in the appendices of this article, William Smith’s memories of his brother’s visions begin with evening family gatherings, when Mother Smith tells of Joseph’s descriptions of Moroni’s coming and the assignment to obtain and translate the plates. In his *Early Mormon Documents*, Vogel published all or the main parts of seven family recollections by William Smith of varying lengths. However, William does not tell a First Vision story about Joseph Smith seeing the Father and Son, the main point of Joseph Smith’s First Vision accounts.⁷⁹ William states or implies 1822–23 for the revivals he remembers, stating that Joseph was “about seventeen” (between December 1822 and December 1823) when he saw the earliest vision, after

which Joseph shared this revelation with his assembled family.⁸⁰ At this point William's dates correlate somewhat with those given in Joseph's 1838 history for Moroni's appearances, including the delay of four years for Joseph to get the plates after the angel first appeared in 1823. Yet William seems to have little memory of Joseph's religious experiences before that, as shown in the appendices of this article. William is inconsistent in relating the coming of the angel. As William relates the story, Moroni once came in the sleeping chamber, but in several accounts William says that the angel appeared in the woods. In William's accounts, the angel might give one or more of these messages: answer which church was true, describe Joseph's future mission, instruct him about the plates and translation. Yet William's Book of Mormon story is premature by three years, compared with Joseph's accounts.

Thus William's version of Joseph's First Vision is unreliable. What he says about secular family history generally parallels what Joseph and Mother Smith say, but William's early history of Joseph's visions is skewed. William follows Joseph in his account of revivals, the prayer in the grove, and the brilliant glory, all of which is followed not by Joseph's vision of the Father and Son but by the appearance of an angel. It is as though William remembered hearing the latter story but failed to realize that there were two early visions, one in 1820 and one in 1823. In several documents William remembered Joseph's telling the family about Moroni when William was twelve (mostly 1823). But as he moved back in time, William became more dependent on others' records. In his major memoir, *William Smith on Mormonism*, he proves himself a secondhand witness on key issues by largely copying Oliver Cowdery's account of the 1820 period revivals and then borrowing from Orson Pratt to narrate the First Vision.⁸¹ So William's account of Joseph's earliest visions is not independent recollection, but he has often lifted from others the information that earlier came from the Prophet. Matthew B. Brown,

an admired researcher, died from an untimely heart attack October 5, 2011, but had published a short but important chart of a half-dozen phrases that William borrowed and remodeled from Orson Pratt’s 1840 *Remarkable Visions*.⁸² They are rearranged here in the following table.

Pratt’s <i>Remarkable Visions</i> (1840) ⁸³	<i>William Smith on Mormonism</i> (1883) ⁸⁴
He . . . retired to . . . a grove . . . and knelt down, and began to call upon the Lord. . . .	He accordingly went out into the woods and falling upon his knees called for a long time upon the Lord. . . .
He, at length, saw a very bright and glorious light in the heavens above. . . . The light appeared to be gradually descending towards him. . . . By the time that it reached the tops of the trees, the whole wilderness . . . was illuminated. . . . He expected to have seen the leaves . . . consumed. . . .	A light appeared in the heavens, and descended until it rested upon the trees where he was. It appeared like fire. But to his great astonishment, did not burn the trees. . . .
He . . . saw two glorious personages. . . . He was informed, that his sins were forgiven . . . and he received a promise that the true doctrine . . . should . . . be made known to him.	An angel then appeared to him. . . . He told him that . . . the true way should be made known to him; that his sins were forgiven, etc.

THE FIRST VISION GAP IN OLIVER’S SERIAL HISTORY

This article stresses that trustworthy history must come from firsthand observers or from those who reliably preserve what firsthand observers say. This means that the real story of the First

Vision must come from Joseph Smith's narratives, either from what he said or what a dependable person reported that he said about it. Some critics interpret later disclosures as inventions, but fuller details of important events often come out later. The Restored Church was officially organized on April 6, 1830, and on April 10, 1830, John Whitmer copied its founding constitution, which listed one major spiritual event preceding the coming of Moroni in 1823.⁸⁵ The early verses of this founding revelation stated that a mighty angel revealed the Book of Mormon "after that it truly was manifested unto this first Elder, that he had Received a remission of his sins." Some accounts of the First Vision, especially that of 1832, stressed that the First Vision assured Joseph that his sins were forgiven through Christ.⁸⁶ And the longer First Vision accounts describe an interim during which Joseph sinned again and repented and prayed for forgiveness, after which the angel Moroni appeared with a second message of acceptance while revealing the existence of an ancient buried record. Joseph's 1838 history says the angel came on the night of September 21, 1823 (see vv. 27–29), which is confirmed by Mother Smith's detailed story of the event and how it impressed oldest brother Alvin, who died prematurely on November 19, 1823.⁸⁷ Thus Joseph's early Church history stressed three religious events: the First Vision, which Joseph said granted him forgiveness,⁸⁸ followed by human sin and repentance, followed by the first coming of Moroni in late 1823 with a second assurance of forgiveness.

William Smith, however, was ill informed on the history that his brother repeatedly gave in print. Perhaps William was confused by following Oliver Cowdery's serial narrative of Joseph's first visions, published in the *Messenger and Advocate* in 1834–35. Oliver said he consulted Joseph in this series, which broadly correlates with Joseph's later history started in 1838 and canonized in the Pearl of Great Price. Joseph there described his spiritual journey with the main points he had given earlier

in the opening verses of D&C 20 and in his 1832 history: the pre-1820 Palmyra religious conflict, the First Vision (“early” spring 1820), succumbing to “temptations, offensive in the sight of God” (v. 28), sincere repentance again, then the first appearances of the angel Moroni, in 1823 (see vv. 27, 29). Informed students of Church history now know that in 1832, Joseph Smith produced a private, compact history and background of the founding visions, which confirms and supplements the above experiences. This 1832 document is in print and was recently republished in the initial history volume of *The Joseph Smith Papers*.⁸⁹ Joseph penned a preface to the 1832 history, stating that he would narrate the miraculous events that brought the Church into existence. He then described the pre-1820 Palmyra religious conflict and the First Vision, which added Christ’s words assuring Joseph of forgiveness, as well as declaring the departure of Christian churches from the original faith. Then, similar to some other religious writings of this period, Joseph acknowledged his shortcomings: “I fell into transgressions and sinned in many things which brought a wound upon my soul.” Next came the vision of Moroni “when I was seventeen years of age” (December 23, 1822, to December 23, 1823).

After the violent destruction of the Missouri press, and the Jackson County exodus, Oliver Cowdery was called to move to Ohio and in 1834 became the founding editor of the *Messenger and Advocate*, the replacement religious newspaper of the Church. Oliver began a series on Joseph Smith’s earliest visions, stating, as noted, that Joseph would help him personally and allow access to Church documents.⁹⁰ This statement shows that Oliver used the 1832 history, which contained the only known account then of the First Vision. In fact, Oliver quoted from the 1832 history in relating young Joseph Smith’s Palmyra religious conflict, as shown in the chart below. But unlike Joseph, who made his revival story a preface for the First Vision, Oliver told

of an 1820 revival and afterward postdated this religious conflict, thus deleting the First Vision and transitioning into the narrative of Moroni coming several years later. It is a minor mystery in Church history why the careful Oliver would explain Joseph's need to pray about which church was true but then avoid giving the vision that Joseph said was the answer to that prayer. Oliver, who first came to Palmyra as a schoolmaster in 1828, made some mistakes in his piece on Joseph's religious seeking in Palmyra about 1820. Since he inaccurately introduced Methodist minister George Lane into the Palmyra religious scene about 1820, this possibly caused Kirtland leaders to jump to the coming of Moroni in the next episode without taking space to mention that Lane supervised the district including the Palmyra circuit for the second half of 1824.

In summary, Joseph was the only mortal witness of the First Vision, and in his 1832 history he described the Palmyra religious conflict and the divine vision that answered his prayer in the "wilderness," after intensely seeking from ages twelve to fourteen. Oliver stated that he had access to Joseph's documents, one of which was Joseph's 1832 history, which was then the only known document with descriptions of Joseph's religious history, moving through the founding chain of events: revival confusion, the First Vision, human transgression, and the vision of Moroni.⁹¹ But Oliver, who virtually states that the 1832 history is in his possession, follows parts of Joseph's background of the First Vision but does not narrate the First Vision. By this silence he differs from the only detailed Church history model then in existence. Oliver had also edited the founding revelation of D&C 20 for publication in the first printing of the revelations, titled the Book of Commandments, with its early verse (present D&C 20:5–6) alluding to Joseph's manifestation of forgiveness, which in the 1832 history came as a direct statement of Christ in the First Vision. We know that Oliver examined Joseph's 1832

history, for he quotes phrases from it, especially several that relate to Joseph's confusion before the prayer in the grove. Literary pirates thrive because they don't tell where they found their lines, but Cowdery is a historian, explaining to readers that his material came from writings and conversations with Joseph: "With his labor and with authentic documents now in our possession, we hope to render this a pleasing and agreeable narrative."⁹²

Thus Oliver knew about the 1832 narrative of the First Vision. Yet he deleted the First Vision from his history sequences in spite of knowing about it. There are two places in the Cowdery installments where Oliver closely follows the order of events and phrases of the Prophet's 1832 document. First, the final *Messenger and Advocate* installment (October 1835) depicted an incident that had not yet appeared in any Latter-day Saint writing except the 1832 manuscript history. This was the first view of the plates by the young Joseph, who was so overwhelmed with their value that he reached to take them for selfish motives, only to be checked and rebuked in a sudden appearance of Moroni. Both accounts (Cowdery's 1835 installment and Joseph's 1832 history) refer to the angel's original warning in identical words: the Prophet was directed to obtain the plates with "an eye single to the glory of God." Both accounts record the same question of frustration: "Why can I not obtain this book?" And the answer of the angel is identical in each account: "You have not kept the commandments of the Lord."⁹³

Interrelationship is reinforced by comparing Joseph's early religious conflict in the two documents. Verbal correlations do not always prove dependence, since two similar phrases may come from an earlier written source, which does not exist in this case. Moreover, an additional tool is similar sequence of phrasing, in this case showing that Cowdery sometimes followed wording but also moved through the same succession of topics already written by Joseph Smith:

1832 Manuscript History ⁹⁴	December 1834, Cowdery Letter ⁹⁵
<p>My mind became seriously impressed with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal Soul. . . .</p> <p>I discovered that they did not . . . adorn their profession by a holy walk and Godly conversation agreeable to what I found contained in that sacred depository this was a grief to my Soul. . . .</p> <p>There was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament and I felt to mourn. . . .</p> <p>Therefore I cried unto the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go.</p>	<p>His mind was led to more seriously contemplate the importance of a move of this kind.</p> <p>To profess godliness without its benign influence upon the heart, was a thing so foreign from his feelings, that his spirit was not at rest day nor night.</p> <p>To unite with a society professing to be built upon the only sure foundation, and that profession be a vain one, was calculated . . . to arouse the mind. . . .</p> <p>In this situation where could he go?</p>

THE PALMYRA REVIVAL PERIODS SPANNING 1820

In his revival installment (December 1834), Oliver dated the “excitement raised on the subject of religion” to the “15th year” of the Prophet’s life, a time which is strictly December 23, 1819, to December 23, 1820. Oliver Cowdery included material in that issue that was never confirmed in any account of Joseph Smith, naming the leader in these revivals as “one Mr. Lane, a presiding Elder of the Methodist Church,” and identified the scene of his labors as “Palmyra, and vicinity.” The next history installment (February 1835) hit a huge bump in the road. Pleading “an error

in the type,” editor Cowdery said that the above events happened “in the 17th” year of Joseph Smith’s life. According to Oliver’s initial observation, this adjustment “would bring the date down to the year 1823,” but the correction is confused, since “the 17th” year is strictly December 23, 1821, to December 23, 1822, whereas Joseph’s specific date for Moroni’s coming is September 21, 1823, almost a year later than Cowdery’s first date (see JS—H 1:27, 29). “I do not deem it necessary,” the editor told his audience, “to write further on the subject of this excitement.” Yet this plan was not strictly followed, for Cowdery’s narrative portrays Joseph as continuing to search for “assurance that he was accepted” by God until 1823, “while this excitement continued.” Oliver then pictured Moroni appearing in the cabin loft for a message of acceptance, which corresponds to Joseph’s histories of the appearances of Moroni in 1823. As Oliver methodically closed the angel’s first instructions to Joseph, he added that he had given the essence of the story but not with perfect “arrangement,” which might mean flawed dating or an imperfect order of events or both: “I have now given you a rehearsal of what was communicated to our brother, when he was directed to go and obtain the record of the Nephites. I may have missed in arrangement in some instances, but the principle is preserved.”⁹⁶

So Oliver opened Joseph’s history with the boy’s seeking in 1820 and corrected the date to 1823, admitting in closing that he perhaps was mistaken “in some instances.” Joseph’s 1838 history timed the First Vision as “early in the spring” of 1820 (v. 14), which would require a starting revival about a year earlier for Joseph’s investigation period. And Joseph’s 1832 history is explicit that his investigation period lasted at least two years, “from the age of twelve years to fifteen” (late 1817 to late 1820), apparently an inclusive approximation.⁹⁷ So the youth’s period of seeking is 1818–19 in Joseph’s histories but is delayed from 1820 to 1823 in Oliver’s narration, when both men were in close

touch in Kirtland. Though the sudden shift of Palmyra religious excitement from pre-1820 to 1823 was made in the February *Messenger and Advocate*, that issue was published on or after February 27, since a school notice of that date appeared on the last page. Joseph Smith was a strong administrator, and likely he directed Cowdery or agreed with him on whether to explain the mistakes made in the revival period in the previous December issue. We can identify these December errors but lack Joseph's journals or presidency records to explain why dates were changed with little comment. Administrative minutes in early Kirtland are limited to the first book of high council minutes, which show a high level of meetings and presidency activity in February 1835. The presidency and Kirtland high council were the chief authorities, and during that month the Twelve and many Seventies were chosen, with appointments discussed, instruction meetings held, and many ordinations and blessings given. One explanation of the narrative leap in Cowdery's narrative from 1820 to 1823 is the lack of time to fully explain corrections. After all, Joseph had already handwritten his 1832 account of the First Vision and Joseph's search beforehand for a Biblical church and divine forgiveness, which could later be edited and published. Yet the next stage in preparing a full history for printing was not made by the Prophet until mid-1838. Perhaps the Cowdery confusion in early 1835 convinced Joseph Smith that his personal history could be accurately written only by himself.

The most obvious chronological error in Cowdery's flawed revival installment (December 1835) is dating a Palmyra "great awakening or excitement raised on the subject of religion" in "the 15th year of his [Joseph's] life," which technically began December 23, 1819. And the most obvious personal error is crediting the leadership of this local revival to Elder George Lane, whereas he was not assigned as presiding elder of the circuit including Palmyra until the summer of 1824. Methodist and

community records furnish a good survey of Lane's life, the topic of Professor Porter's reprinted article in this volume. As a young man, Lane was a circuit minister assigned to scattered congregations in huge western New York areas, but he retired from itinerancy during 1810–19, during which time he was in business and local government in the Wilkes-Barre vicinity, in Pennsylvania's upper Susquehanna Valley, roughly two hundred miles southeast of Palmyra. He returned to the traveling ministry in mid-1819, journeying from upper Pennsylvania to the 1819 Genesee conference sessions in Vienna (later Phelps), New York, a dozen miles from the Smith farm, as discussed above. Lane's name appears in the minutes, and a fellow minister remembered that "he and I set off together on horseback" for the gathering.⁹⁸ Joseph Smith's proximity to this impressive occasion and his proven connection with Methodism about this time make it possible that the religious youth heard Lane preach at the 1819 conference, though Lane's northeast route to the 1819 Vienna gathering was direct and evidently not close to Palmyra, as far as possibly attending outdoor meetings in that vicinity before the annual conference. At this 1819 Genesee Conference, Lane was appointed presiding elder of one of the six districts, the Susquehanna District, and he took a direct path back to upper Pennsylvania, again making a camp meeting near Palmyra unlikely. In fact, Lane was assigned within the Susquehanna District until 1824, when he was made presiding elder of the large Ontario District encompassing Palmyra. Early the next year, he wrote a detailed report of his ministry at Palmyra and his circuit conferences in that area and then left the traveling ministry because of his wife's serious illness, afterward residing in Pennsylvania and preaching only in that locality for a few years. In 1836 he began administrative assignments in New York City as Methodist assistant book agent and then as book agent until his retirement in 1852 and death in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, in 1859.⁹⁹

As Larry Porter notes in his careful research on Lane, Joseph may have heard George Lane preach at Vienna Village, a dozen miles from the Smith farm, at the Genesee Conference in July 1819. Otherwise, this minister had no extended contact with Joseph Smith in any official assignment until Lane visited Palmyra after appointment as presiding elder of the Ontario District, after midyear 1824.¹⁰⁰ It is most unlikely that young Joseph went to hear Lane preach in 1824, since he told his mother at that time that he could learn more spending time alone with his Bible than by hearing preaching in Palmyra meetings.¹⁰¹ However, hearing Lane preach at Sabbath sessions of the 1819 weeklong Genesee conference is possible, as well as hearing other devout circuit riders then. A younger historian-preacher was at a camp meeting held a couple of months after the Vienna Conference and gave his impression of Lane's preaching then: "The exhortations of the presiding elder, George Lane, were overwhelming. Sinners quailed under them, and many cried aloud for mercy."¹⁰² Historians have recently learned that Lane participated in a camp meeting in July 1820, near present Honeoye, some twenty-two miles southwest of the Smith farm, but it seems a little too far and definitely too late to be relevant for the First Vision early that spring.¹⁰³

Oliver accurately described Lane personally but placed him in Palmyra years before his assignment there. Oliver came into Palmyra as a teacher in the fall of 1828 and boarded with the Smiths that winter. Memories of Lane no doubt lingered from the minister's 1824 presidency of the new Ontario District, but Joseph Smith had no known contact with Lane at Palmyra before the 1820 First Vision. Moreover, Joseph never mentioned Lane in the several accounts he left of the First Vision. At the end of his life, William Smith credited Lane with preaching on James 1:4–5, thus suggesting the scripture that moved the youth to pray for God's direction on which church to join.¹⁰⁴ What basis William

had for this claim is not known, though he depended on Oliver for his Lane story and on Orson Pratt for his First Vision account, as charts above and in the appendices show. Joseph mentions James 1:4–5 in all but one First Vision account and generally states that he discovered the verse providentially in opening his Bible.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps Joseph wanted a more accurate account (without Lane) because he so strongly felt that God alone directed him to pray at this crucial moment in his life. Lane was a devout man and could easily deliver a message to ask of God, but Joseph’s hearing about James 1:4–5 from Lane before the First Vision is not historically established. The theory that Joseph heard Lane preach on this topic at the 1819 western New York conference seems to contradict the self-discovery of the 1838 history (see v. 11) and its several parallels. Since Oliver’s narrative of Joseph’s early visions placed Lane in Palmyra prior to the First Vision, Oliver confessed his chronological mistake, but simply moved the story ahead to Joseph’s next vision, without further comment on Reverend Lane.

SMITH PRESBYTERIAN CONVERSIONS BEFORE EARLY 1820

This study opened by questioning the First Vision relevance of Palmyra area revivals that brought about four hundred into the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches in the 1824–25 period. Revisionist scholars concluded that this was the revival that Joseph described in his 1838 history, claiming Joseph had dated it too early. But the forepart of this article analyzed the four-day Palmyra camp meeting of late June 1818, which harvested forty converts from one or two thousand in attendance. This fills all the conditions that Joseph recalled in his 1838 history except “great multitudes” of converts in “that district of country,” which on its face is a much larger group within a larger slice of territory than the more constricted environs of Palmyra. The 1824–25 Palmyra

area revival doesn't measure up to "multitudes" either. In looking for correlations to Joseph's 1838 history, an open-minded reader should look for a Methodist event described by "unusual excitement," which sounds more like a special event, like a camp meeting, rather than meetings programmed in a regular schedule. A four-day meeting bringing forty immediate converts fits Joseph's "excitement" as much as the 1824–25 revivals, whose four hundred converts were spread over many months. The historical record now includes both this mini-revival with spreading effects before the First Vision, and a community revival of hundreds starting about six years later. Merely quoting the more numerous conversions in the 1824–25 Palmyra area is no reason to ignore the 1818 journal entry recording the forty Methodist converts from the 1818 Palmyra camp meeting, backed up for that period by Joseph Smith's 1832 and 1838 histories and the memories of Palmyra apprentices who were Joseph's peers. Joseph's histories picture religious enthusiasm spreading in his area before 1820, and Mother Smith's history includes an 1818 anxiety dream of Father Smith with a revival setting, about being in a church building too late but seeking Christ's mercy to forgive his sins.¹⁰⁶

Smith family materials confirm the increased religious activity at Palmyra before 1820. Joseph's 1838 history relates that he was fourteen ("in my fifteenth year") when his family (his mother, his sister Sophronia, and his brothers Hyrum and Samuel) "was proselyted to the Presbyterian faith" or "joined that church" (v. 7). Palmyra Western Presbyterian Church records are missing, but family history shows that several Smiths were seeking a true church before 1820, as was Joseph. Early in her marriage, Lucy had received believer's baptism without commitment to a specific church, later commenting that she retained this status "until my oldest son attained his 22nd year."¹⁰⁷ She refers to the oldest living son, Alvin, who died of a doctor's folk remedy in late 1823 but had started his twenty-second year

on February 11, 1820.¹⁰⁸ Here she agrees with Joseph's 1838 history that she made a Presbyterian commitment by early 1820. Moreover, Joseph recalled at Nauvoo that he came from the 1820 vision in the grove and told Mother Lucy that he had learned for himself that "Presbyterianism is not true" (v. 20). Thus the older Smiths were investigating Palmyra churches on a parallel track to Joseph prior to the First Vision. The Neibaur journal, discussed above, has Joseph recalling a Methodist "Revival meeting," likely the June 1818 camp meeting in the Seager journal, where "his mother & Br & Sist got religion."¹⁰⁹ As Joseph says in the 1838 history, he was fourteen at the end of 1819, the period when his mother and three siblings chose Presbyterianism, and afterward Alvin received a Presbyterian funeral in 1823.¹¹⁰

On which level were Lucy and three children Presbyterians? This could be Presbyterian attendance, attendance on formal probation, or full membership, with right of the Lord's Supper. Yet historians following Walters have tried to merge revivals dated around 1820 with those after Alvin's death by claiming (without direct evidence) that Lucy became a Presbyterian member in her grief about 1824. Mother Smith does describe a Palmyra awakening then, when her hopes were raised by a minister who sought cooperation from local denominations, though she could not influence her husband or son Joseph to attend these meetings. However, Lucy's history does not say she joined a church in the surge of religion at Palmyra after Alvin's late 1823 death.¹¹¹ A later religious conflict throws light on the intervening years. In March 1830, Lucy and sons Hyrum and Samuel were served notice of a church hearing for nonattendance and were then visited by officials of the Palmyra Presbyterian Church.¹¹² Lucy's history gives her version of the conversation with visiting Presbyterian elders, when the Smiths defended the Book of Mormon vigorously, which was significant, since the Smith men were two of the Eight Witnesses, who had seen and handled the plates. The

hearing minutes still exist, indicating that the Smiths “did not wish to unite with us anymore.” The defendants avoided the hearing, which charged them with “neglect of public worship and the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper for the last eighteen months.” Instead of being cut off, the three were disfellowshipped, “suspended from the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.”¹¹³ These records are also significant for what charges were not filed against the Smiths. Over several years, charges appear for serious moral infractions, but the Smiths were disciplined for inactivity, an important counterbalance to community affidavits later taken against them, which were selectively obtained with negative labels such as laziness, a charge which is objectively incorrect. Moreover, the charge of church inactivity probably indicates that the Presbyterian Smiths had fairly regularly attended preaching and communion meetings during the early 1820s, or the nonattendance charge would have been filed earlier.

CONCLUSIONS: JOSEPH’S ACCURACY ON THE FIRST VISION SETTING

This paper presents the following sequences and historical judgments, listed somewhat in the order of the above discussion:

1. Understanding the historical background of the First Vision has been obstructed by poor recognition of how early young Joseph Smith started to search for true religion and the true church.
2. A correlation of Joseph’s accounts indicates that he actively investigated Protestant groups in his area during the years 1818 and 1819 (1832 account), or “in process of time” prior to receiving the First Vision in “early” spring 1820 (JS—H 1:8, 14).

3. By Joseph's accounts (e.g., v. 8) and those of two contemporary Palmyra printers' apprentices, Joseph developed a preference for Methodism in the above years and some degree of Methodist activity.
4. Joseph's 1838 history says that his intense searching began after Methodists started a "religious excitement" in "the place where we lived" (v. 5). This has drawn claims that there is no 1820 Palmyra revival evidence, and that the Palmyra area revival of about four hundred converts in 1824–25 is the only historic match.
5. This article focuses on a Palmyra camp meeting of four days in late June 1818, documented at the time by the journal of Aurora Seager, a Methodist traveling elder who died at the end of the following year. This camp meeting was attended by one of the three American Methodist bishops and about a dozen circuit preachers, resulting in forty conversions, which, in comparison with other contemporary camp meetings in western New York, would come from an estimated crowd of one to two thousand. This gathering precisely fits the local conditions before the First Vision as described by Joseph Smith's 1838 history and his other accounts. This huge assembly near a village of one thousand would certainly arrest the attention of the young seeker Joseph Smith and morally compel him to attend meetings because of documented personal zeal and additionally because of the family business of selling refreshments at public gatherings.
6. Orsamus Turner, Palmyra printing apprentice and early editor-historian, said his memories of young

Joseph Smith were “distinct ones” and that Joseph caught “a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods, on the Vienna road,” which ran through the east side of Palmyra Village and past a Methodist campground further south that was reused in later Methodist meetings.

7. In 1844 Joseph Smith’s Hebrew tutor, Alexander Neibaur, wrote details in his journal of a conversation on the First Vision, with Joseph Smith stating, “The first call he had a Revival meeting his mother & Br & Sist got Religion, he wanted to get Religion too wanted to feel & shout like the Rest but could feel nothing . . . went into the Wood to pray. . . . After a wile a other person came to the side of the first Mr Smith then asked must I join the Methodist Church = No = they are not my people, all have gone astray . . . but this is my Beloved son harken ye him.”¹¹⁴ This Neibaur journal and editor-printer Turner’s “distinct” memories (point 6 above) establish Joseph’s presence in an early Methodist camp meeting, likely the one reported by the Aurora Seager journal (point 5 above), which is dated June 1818 and located near Palmyra Village, with a crowd probably larger than that settlement.
8. Parts of Joseph Smith’s 1832 handwritten Church history were copied and paraphrased by Oliver Cowdery in his 1834–35 *Messenger and Advocate* series on Church history, which began with his version of the Palmyra religious “excitement” when Joseph was fourteen. Although the First Vision was narrated in Joseph’s 1832 history that Oliver examined, Oliver did not mention it, evidently because

he dropped further discussion of the early Palmyra revival because of mistakes. One major mistake was describing Methodist elder George Lane as a local revival leader about 1820, though Lane was not assigned there until appointed presiding elder of the district including Palmyra in mid-1824, when he became prominent in later church expansion there.

9. William Smith also reported George Lane as participating in the pre-1820 Palmyra revival, though William's First Vision accounts are unreliable, borrowing revival phrasing directly from Oliver Cowdery's serial Church history and First Vision material from Orson Pratt's 1840 pamphlet, *Remarkable Visions*.
10. The 1838 Joseph Smith history has been faulted because local history did not record "great multitudes" as converted "in the place where we lived" (v. 5) before the First Vision in early spring 1820. But this reading shrinks Joseph Smith's narration of time, for his 1832 account describes the full years of 1818–19. This narrow reading also shrinks location, for the 1838 history narrates the beginning, local event as a Methodist "unusual excitement," which progressed from "the place where we lived" to all major denominations "in that region of country" and in "the whole district of country" (v. 5). Such "great multitudes" of Christian converts come at the end of a progression of events, not at the beginning, as Joseph perceived it. His slice of Church history began with the local Methodist "unusual excitement." And Joseph quickly identified the crescendo of growth as the "whole district of country," which may be a general term for

his large area or his technical term for the whole Methodist Genesee District, which the earlier chart shows as then comprising about ten preaching stations in each of thirteen circuits stretching across upper New York from the mid-Finger Lakes to Buffalo. This multicounty Methodist “District” increased by 1,187 in the conference year ending July 1819, and Joseph included “all the sects in that district of country” (v. 5), which means that he has in mind perhaps three thousand Christian converts in his general area during the year before the First Vision.¹¹⁵

11. The most recent evaluation of Joseph Smith’s multiple accounts of the First Vision concludes, “They combine impressively to give a consistent and coherent picture.”¹¹⁶ This article broadens that conclusion to note that Joseph’s accounts coalesce not only with each other but also with family, local, and revival records, showing that his First Vision setting is historically authentic.

APPENDICES: PALMYRA MEMORIES ABOUT YOUNG JOSEPH SMITH

The following profiles are reprinted with some changes from my spring 1969 article, “Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision through Reminiscences” (*BYU Studies* 9, no. 3: 373–404). The present article builds on this information, which shows that William Smith relies on secondary information about Joseph’s First Vision, though he has some independent recollections of the pre-1820 period. The reminiscences of two young Palmyra printing apprentices who knew Joseph Smith are historically important. Thus full information appears here on Orsamus Turner

and Pomeroy Tucker, who gave sparse but important religious information about him, though slanted negatively.

APPENDIX A: WILLIAM SMITH'S MEMORIES OF EVENTS PRIOR TO 1823

As the last surviving brother of Joseph Smith, vocal William Smith gave several apparent memoirs of his brother's reports of early religious experiences. But are they memories from William's early childhood or things he only heard about later? Joseph's religious investigations probably peaked in 1819, soon after William turned eight years of age.¹¹⁷ An example of William's defective early memory is his claim that the family moved from Palmyra Village to the rural Manchester Township "in 1821."¹¹⁸ This is factually in error because an official survey of June 13, 1820, "taken by the poor old town compass" begins on the south county line and locates the starting point "three rods fourteen links southeast of Joseph Smith's dwelling house."¹¹⁹ Orsamus Turner remembered seeing this self-built log structure the previous winter, which was on the edge of Palmyra Township but adjoining the Manchester farm on the north. According to Mother Smith and Palmyra resident Pomeroy Tucker, the Smith family moved to their farm two years after moving to Palmyra Village, the year that William turned seven.¹²⁰

Up to 1823, William resisted spiritual instruction, since he was "quite young and inconsiderate";¹²¹ during the years 1823–27, he paid "no attention to religion of any kind."¹²² William left two extended narrations of his early life. In both, the earliest point regarding Joseph's religious experience is the appearance of the angel in 1823: "I remember when Joseph called his father's family together and told them that he had seen an angel, and what this angel had told him."¹²³ Lucy and William Smith report Joseph's announcement to the family similarly. Mother Smith draws the

vivid image of several family sessions, “all seated in a circle,” giving “the most profound attention” to the young Prophet.¹²⁴ William underlines the first reaction: “The whole family were melted to tears, and believed all he said.”¹²⁵ The mother and brother agree that Joseph shared the coming of Moroni with them in 1823.

There is an informative corollary to William’s lack of first-hand information prior to 1823. His published memoirs depend heavily upon the Cowdery account for background of Joseph’s vision. William’s narrations follow the same sequence as the Cowdery installments of December 1834 and February 1835 in the *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, though Oliver’s ornate style is considerably condensed by William. The Prophet’s brother copies Oliver Cowdery quite directly, with the intervening quotation of Matthew 7:13–14 used similarly by both writers:

Oliver Cowdery in 1834	William Smith in 1883
<p>If he went to one he was told they were right, and all others were wrong—If to another, the same was heard from those:</p> <p>All professed to be the true church. . . .¹²⁶</p> <p>But if others were not benefited, our brother was urged forward and strengthened in the determination to know for himself of the certainty and reality of pure and holy religion. . . .</p> <p>He continued to call upon the Lord in secret for a full manifestation of divine approbation . . . to have an assurance that he was accepted of him.¹²⁷</p>	<p>If he went to one he was told they were right, and all others were wrong. If to another, the same was heard from them.</p> <p>Each professed to be the true church. . . .</p> <p>All this however was beneficial to him, as it urged him forward, and strengthened him in the determination to know for himself of the certainty and reality of pure and holy religion.</p> <p>He continued in secret to call upon the Lord for a full manifestation of his will, the assurance that he was accepted of him.¹²⁸</p>

Significantly, William Smith relied heavily upon his own memories of what Joseph said to the family about Moroni's coming, but he relied upon Oliver's published series for the background of the vision. As explained in this article, this produced a mismatch, for Oliver described the 1820 period Palmyra religious "excitement" and then skipped over to the 1823 coming of Moroni. This suggests that William had no memory of hearing about the First Vision. By his own performance, William is not likely to remember Joseph's consecutive religious story before late 1823, although he appears to have valid personal memories before then. He admitted that his repetition of Joseph's early visions was inferior to the firsthand narration of his older brother: "A more elaborate and accurate description of his vision, however, will be found in his own history."¹²⁹

APPENDIX B: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF POMEROY TUCKER

Joseph Smith had a double reason to attend any camp meeting in his vicinity, religious investigation and the family refreshment business. The main evidence for the latter comes from a former printer's apprentice in Palmyra, Pomeroy Tucker. Tucker's career was remarkably like Orsamus Turner's, whose biography follows this account. Born in Palmyra August 10, 1802, Tucker evidently remained there until the time of his apprenticeship at the *Palmyra Register* around 1820.¹³⁰ After serving as a journeyman printer at Canandaigua, he returned to Palmyra to purchase and manage the *Wayne Sentinel* in the fall of 1823.¹³¹ His professional life as a journalist continued over thirty years, mostly with that paper, though he was also a public servant at various levels and author of a book on Mormonism in 1867, three years before his death.

From the point of view of history, Tucker's *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* is a disappointing performance. With access to the generation that remembered the establishment of the Prophet's work, the experienced editor is content to quote the Hurlburt-Howe affidavits, to repeat common gossip, and to quote extensive portions of the Book of Mormon and articles about Brigham Young for the bulk of the book. Although but weakly living up to the subtitle ("Personal Remembrances and Historical Collections Hitherto Unwritten"), Tucker does relate valuable information concerning the period of the publication of the Book of Mormon. He also claims knowledge of the Smiths "since their removal to Palmyra from Vermont in 1816, and during their continuance there and in the adjoining town of Manchester."¹³² There is no reason to question this firsthand contact, provided one is on guard not to take his western New York prejudice for fact. It is to his credit that he could at least distinguish between the two. He repeats tattered stories about Joseph Smith's dishonesty, only to admit in "common fairness" that such allegations were "not within the remembrance of the writer."¹³³ Although Tucker is content to repeat the armchair observations about the laziness of the Smiths, his specific descriptions prove the opposite. Most of Tucker's unattributed particulars of the Smiths' early Palmyra life are probably based on his observation. Much of his negative material from Palmyra is traceable to published statements, and the "hitherto unwritten" incidents are typically details of human interest. The descriptions of the Smiths in Palmyra prior to 1820 tend to belong to this category.

Tucker is particular with regard to the Smiths' arrival at Palmyra in 1816 and removal to the uncleared land in Manchester in 1818; moreover, he has a fairly accurate knowledge of their physical and financial arrangements, evidently quite independent of the earlier published details of Lucy Smith. There is no reason to question the picture of the refreshment



Orson Pratt's pamphlet Remarkable Visions tells of how Joseph Smith's "remarkable vision" came in response to his prayer "in the wilderness." (Photo from a video created by the Church Audiovisual Department, © 2001 Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved)

shop of the Smiths in Palmyra, which catered to holiday crowds. Even after the move to the farm, there was "the continued business of peddling cake and beer in the village on days of public doings." Tucker remembers Joseph in particular "as a clerk" in such selling.¹³⁴ This activity, somewhat attested in Palmyra sources, provides a practical reason for camp meeting attendance.¹³⁵ Such meetings were notable as places of socializing and festivity. De Witt Clinton left a classic description of the typical campground of that decade, featuring not merely the preaching and the crowds but the "persons with cakes, beer, and other refreshments for sale."¹³⁶ It appears to be the Smiths' business and Joseph's special charge to be present at such public events in the vicinity.

Pomeroy Tucker also verifies the circumstances of the First Vision, all the more important because the editor's positive views seem unintended. Assuming 1827 as the beginning of Joseph Smith's revelations, the editor relates the "remarkable vision" that came "about this time" in response to the youth's prayer "in the wilderness." The words of this experience are generally placed

in quotation marks, and the phrases are borrowed in sequence from Orson Pratt's pamphlet *Remarkable Visions*.¹³⁷ Tucker depends verbally on this written source, although he seems to have some memory of what young Joseph Smith said about the First Vision while still in Palmyra. But in Tucker's first chapter, where Mormon writings are not in evidence and the editor's recollections are concentrated, the following description of the early religious life of the Prophet is given:

Protracted revival meetings were customary in some of the churches, and Smith frequented those of different denominations, sometimes professing to participate in their devotional exercises. At one time he joined the probationary class of the Methodist Church in Palmyra, and made some active demonstrations of engagedness, though his assumed convictions were insufficiently grounded or abiding to carry him along to the saving point of conversion, and he soon withdrew from the class. The final conclusion announced by him was, that all sectarianism was fallacious, all the churches on a false foundation, and the Bible a fable.¹³⁸

No other Palmyra source identifies young Joseph Smith as a member of the Methodist "probationary class." Since Tucker immediately follows with a reference to "all the early avowals and other evidences remembered," he apparently claims first-hand knowledge of Joseph's temporary religious affiliation and reason for its abrupt termination: he publicly "announced . . . that all sectarianism was fallacious." A study of Turner requires a date of about 1820 for this tentative Methodist association, and Tucker emphasizes that "he soon withdrew from the class," a specific description that explains Turner's metaphor, "a spark of Methodism." This evidence indicates that about 1820 Joseph Smith was openly expressing the identical convictions that he later maintained came at that early time through the First Vision. Since such negative attitudes could have brought

only scorn upon him, it is unlikely that a fourteen-year-old boy would take this extreme position without some religious experience to solidify his personal convictions.

The historical reconstruction of Joseph's announcement about 1820 that the churches were wrong throws a different light on subsequent community opinion. The Hurlburt-Howe affidavits generally do not reach back to Joseph's early religious investigations, so they are suspect on the ground of merely reporting public reaction to Joseph's religious explanations. Mrs. Brodie stated a thesis that is found in Palmyra sources in several contradictory forms. By this theory, the earlier Joseph Smith was a seeker of buried treasure, not the sincere religious investigator that he describes himself to be in all of his vision accounts. Supposedly the metamorphosis from adventuring to outward religion took place about 1827. A standard and crucial proof in building this image is satirical editor Abner Cole's 1831 summary of the evolutionary hypothesis, speaking of the angelic revelation of the Book of Mormon: "It however appears quite certain that the prophet himself never made any serious pretensions to religion until his late pretended revelation."¹³⁹

Contemporaneous opinions may be factual or legendary. Cole was editor of the Palmyra *Reflector*, a satirical newspaper carrying his columns under the name of Dogberry. He attributes his information on the mother and father of the Prophet to others and implies secondhand information on Joseph Smith. In 1820 Abner Cole was middle-aged and a successful lawyer-entrepreneur with no reason to notice a teenager from rural Manchester. But the apprentices Tucker and Turner were near the young prophet's age level and moved in similar social and perhaps religious circles. Tucker's initial chapter of impressions about the Smiths is likely to be better informed than Cole's writing. Pomeroy Tucker portrays Joseph as a young man of unusual "taciturnity," speaking mainly to "his intimate associates" and generally ridiculed

because he could relate a “marvelous absurdity with the utmost apparent gravity.”¹⁴⁰ Is this the community response to Joseph’s limited sharing of the First Vision? Palmyra editor Tucker has his own evolutionary theory of the young Prophet advancing from reading worthless fiction to serious study of the Bible. In fact, as a student of the scriptures, he became so capable that he could discuss texts “with great assurance” and with “original and unique” interpretations. What this proved to Tucker is highly instructive. Joseph Smith came to “disgustingly blasphemous” conclusions which, coupled with his religious investigation and announcement that he would join no sect, disclosed that he and his family “were unqualified atheists,” an inevitable “hypothesis” based on “their mockeries of Christianity.”¹⁴¹

Tucker’s reasoning shows that most epithets applied to the Smiths may be grounded in the community disbelief of Joseph’s visions. If Tucker equates unorthodoxy with atheism, then his readers know that this editor represents a rigid social structure whose labels on nonconformity cannot be taken at face value. Cole’s report that the early Joseph Smith “never made any serious pretensions to religion” really means that Joseph declined to affiliate with any church. Paradoxically, Joseph’s original announcement of religious convictions created a reputation for irreligion, and the closed society that so perceived the young prophet lost the memory of his earlier religious investigations and convictions about 1820, which were recorded by his acquaintances Turner and Tucker.¹⁴²

APPENDIX C: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ORSAMUS TURNER

Most statements from Palmyra-Manchester residents are more interested in ridiculing the Smiths than factually describing their life in the early 1820s. So the value of the affidavit

format is limited because many statements are canonized gossip rather than balanced appraisals of real people. Orsamus Turner is not exempt from this criticism, but he differs from the majority who made anti-Smith affidavits in that he is capable of separating rumor from personal knowledge. Turner led a relatively short but distinguished life spanning the years 1801 to 1855. Born on the edge of civilization in western New York, he had a log cabin childhood and grew with the country to become a respected editor and author.¹⁴³ In 1852 he published a sketch of Joseph Smith and Mormonism in his *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, which he partially drew from his own experience. Because the time of Turner's residence in Palmyra is fairly pinpointed, his recollections of young Joseph Smith can be dated. He remembers their Manchester "rude log house, with but a small spot underbrushed around it," in "the winter of '19, '20." He recalls the Wayne County countryside because he had been assigned during his apprenticeship "in a newspaper office at Palmyra" to accompany a blind newspaper carrier "in the years 1818, '19."¹⁴⁴ This employment did not begin before October 1818, when the *Palmyra Register* was first issued by Timothy S. Strong, who moved away from Palmyra in 1823.¹⁴⁵ Turner says that Strong's apprentices were Luther Tucker, Pomeroy Tucker, and "the author of this work." But young Turner did not serve his whole time in Palmyra, for he also notes that he was an apprentice under James Bemis at Canandaigua.¹⁴⁶ Since he expressed a great admiration for Bemis based on intimate contact, he probably spent the years 1821 and 1822 at Canandaigua, where he "finished his apprenticeship."¹⁴⁷

Turner later recounted that he heard of the need of a printer-editor at Lockport, about a hundred miles west of Palmyra, where he had evidently returned from Canandaigua for a brief period of school. He traveled to the new locality, arrived "but

a few days after we had reached the age of 21 years” (about August 1, 1822), and purchased the new *Lockport Observatory*.¹⁴⁸ Concerning the year 1822, Turner recalled, “The author . . . became the editor and publisher of the paper, in August, of that year.”¹⁴⁹ In 1847 a fellow editor summed up his career in Lockport as continuous to that time: “Either as publisher, editor, or assistant editor, [he] has continued at his post from 1822, to the present time.”¹⁵⁰ Turner’s personal recollections of Joseph Smith of necessity refer to the period prior to the late summer of 1822 and are probably no later than 1820, the latest date of Palmyra memoirs in his writings.

Orsamus Turner declined to dignify Mormonism with serious treatment. Instead he preferred sarcasm, admitting that his sketch was made “lightly—with a seeming levity.” Although it relies heavily upon community hearsay and in irony reads like Gibbon on Christianity, certain portions of the sketch bring the early life of the Smiths into the focus of personal contact. One conclusion is based on “those who were best acquainted with the Smith family” and reports that “there is no foundation for the statement that their original manuscript was written by a Mr. Spaulding, of Ohio.”¹⁵¹ But the most notable break in derisive tone is the early introduction of Joseph Smith into his narrative. At this point Turner gives glimpses of Joseph’s early life, prefacing them with these remarks: “The author’s own recollections of him are distinct ones.”¹⁵² A series of vignettes follows, portraying the young farmer’s son bringing small loads of wood into the village, doing odd jobs, and performing errands, one of which was to get the weekly paper. On one occasion Turner and another apprentice inked Joseph’s face for his curiosity about the press. The sketch lapses back to derision after this final paragraph of personal recollection:

But Joseph had a little ambition; and some very laudable aspirations; the mother’s intellect occasionally shone out in him feebly,

especially when he used to help us solve some portentous questions of moral or political ethics, in our juvenile debating club, which we moved down to the old red school house on Durfee street, to get rid of the annoyance of critics that used to drop in upon us in the village; and subsequently, after catching a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods, on the Vienna road, he was a very passable exhorter in evening meetings.¹⁵³

From his personal contact, Turner gives the time, place, and nature of the Prophet's early Methodist attraction. The time is probably during the editor's Palmyra apprenticeship, presumably 1820 or before, and is certainly no later than the summer of 1822, when he settled at Lockport. The semi-conversion is to Methodism, precisely the belief that Joseph Smith said attracted him. Turner's "Vienna road" plainly means the road running diagonally between Palmyra Village and Vienna Village (renamed Phelps), about a dozen miles away. The road is still identified by that name, and Turner's local association is shown by his location of a mill site "a mile east of the village [of Palmyra], on the Vienna road."¹⁵⁴ "Away down in the woods" on this road is not a considerable distance from Palmyra, for this campground was reused and understood as near Palmyra.

Itinerant Methodist preachers were at the peak of their influence in Joseph Smith's youth, and their rural protracted meetings were so common that they were taken for granted. Preachers' diaries and memoirs of this period are filled with references to these "forest gatherings," which drew their audience from the countryside, up to a dozen miles' radius. This gathering is incredible to many now locked into a sedentary culture, but the pioneer's life was lonely, and he paid the price of travel for his religious and social meetings. Turner remembers an eight-mile trip by ox sled as nothing unusual for "an evening's visit," and he quotes a settler as recalling the

“itinerating Methodist ministers; we used to go through the woods, generally on foot, whenever we heard of one of their appointments.”¹⁵⁵

NOTES

Thanks to able research assistant Elizabeth Pew for locating sources for this article and to the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation for help in producing it. Thanks also to BYU professor Steven C. Harper and to BYU Religious Studies Center executive editor Devan Jensen for their encouragement and patience.

1. Wesley P. Walters, “New Light on Mormon Origins from the Palmyra Revival,” *Dialogue* 4 (Spring 1969): 67, claimed that there was no mention of Palmyra revivals in denominational magazines in these years, nor in the “Palmyra newspaper” for 1819–20.

2. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture citations are from Joseph Smith—History.

3. Joseph left a number of First Vision accounts. In 1838 he began dictating his formal history, now canonized in the Pearl of Great Price, where he asks the Lord “which of all the sects was right . . . for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong” (JS—H 1:18). Yet in his 1832 private history, Joseph had concluded before praying, “There was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament.” But a claimed contradiction here is superficial, for most devout people would see the difference between a tentative human judgment and the “certain conclusion” (v.8) from God that Joseph Smith prayed for. In fact, the 1832 account implies the same prayer question as the 1838 account, for the Lord’s answer written in 1832 answers the question of which church is true: “None doeth good. . . . They have turned aside from the gospel.” Dean C. Jessee, “The Earliest Documented Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” in John W. Welch and Erick B. Carlson, eds., *Opening the Heavens* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 7. Also, if Joseph was asking about only Christian churches in his

region, he made a negative decision on perhaps a dozen groups. His question was really whether a true church existed any place on earth. Since the Pearl of Great Price generally follows Joseph's 1838 history manuscript faithfully, the canonized version is quoted here if accurate. The text used for Joseph Smith's 1832 handwritten account is found in Jessee, "The Earliest Documented Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," in Welch and Carlson, *Opening the Heavens*, 4–7. Other First Vision accounts discussed also appear there. Both the 1832 and 1838 vision texts also appear in Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002) and will reappear in the *Joseph Smith Papers*, Histories series 1.

4. "Joseph Smith's Experience of a Methodist 'Camp-Meeting' in 1820," *Dialogue Paperless*, E-Paper 3, Expanded Version (Definitive), December 20, 2007, 23–25.

5. Several scholars have written on the integration of First Vision accounts, principally Milton V. Backman Jr. in his First Vision article in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* and in his book *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 112–13. For bibliography to 2000, see James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker, *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 933. For updated bibliography and discussion, see Matthew B. Brown, *A Pillar of Light* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2009). For recent source studies, see the two opening articles in Welch and Carlson, *Opening the Heavens*: Jessee, "The Earliest Documented Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision"; and James B. Allen and John W. Welch, "The Appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith in 1820." Internet resources are uneven, but see the websites of Brigham Young University's Maxwell Institute and of the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR).

6. This article updates my earlier contribution, "Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision through Reminiscences," *BYU Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 373–404. Some paragraphs are revised and reprinted here, especially those evaluating data

furnished by Oliver Cowdery, William Smith, and two Palmyra printers' apprentices, Pomeroy Tucker and Orsamus Turner.

7. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins," 67.

8. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins," 61.

9. Compare JS—H 1:59, where "at length" covers the four years between the coming of Moroni and the reception of the plates.

10. 1832 History, in Jessee, "Earliest Documented Accounts," 5; Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins," 70.

11. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins," 73. This conclusion is basically unchanged; witness H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1998), 15, claiming that publications and records show "no significant gains in church memberships or any other signs of revival in Palmyra in 1820." In Marquardt's *Rise of Mormonism: 1816–1844* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2005), 13, this sentence is repeated, denying "any other signs of excitement or revival in Palmyra in 1820."

12. See Marquardt and Walters, *Inventing Mormonism*, 29, after an obscure mention of the 1820 Palmyra camp meeting: "Camp meetings were often held by Methodists but did not often spark a significant revival."

13. Lucy is explicit on living in their own cabin on the edge of their farm in "2 years from" entering Palmyra. Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Lucy's Book* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1853), 321. For agreement of Palmyra resident Pomeroy Tucker, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Alvin Smith," in Kyle R. Walker, ed., *United by Faith* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications), 88–91.

14. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins," 66; Marquardt and Walters, *Inventing Mormonism*, 27.

15. "Scarcely overstatements" and "matching" are used by Marquardt and Walters, *Inventing Mormonism*, 27.

16. See the appendices to this article under the headings of Pomeroy Tucker and Orsamus Turner.

17. See the accompanying Methodist Membership Chart, 1817–19. Comparable figures are not possible in 1820, a year after the Genesee District was bisected into western and eastern

sections, with the Palmyra area remaining in the older Ontario District. Numbers taken in mid-1820 (for the twelve months before) are flat or somewhat depressed after 1819, affected by possible Methodist restructuring, possible population shifts due to canal construction, and westward migration. For instance, Charles Giles was presiding elder of the Oneida District when he complained about fluid population: “One thousand members have been added to the church this year on our district; but in consequence of numerous removals to the western country, the Minutes will show an increase of only seven hundred and forty.” Giles to *Methodist Magazine* editors, Utica, NY, August 2, 1817, in Charles Giles, *The Pioneer: A Narrative of the Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labours* (New York: G. Lane and P. P. Sanford, 1844), 264.

18. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s Testimony of the First Vision,” *Ensign*, April 1996, 16–19; see also Backman, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*, 84–88.

19. Backman, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*, 84–85.

20. John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

21. From annual *Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, figures gathered for the year prior to each annual conference of the major American Methodist sections, called annual conferences. The Genesee Conference recorded new membership at each annual session, held about each July.

22. The village of New Amsterdam was assimilated into Buffalo by final lot sales in 1822, as described in O[rsamus] Turner, *Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase* (Buffalo, NY: Jewett, Thomas & Co., 1849), 499–503.

23. For issues in this decision, see John Matzko, “The Encounter of the Young Joseph Smith with Presbyterianism,” *Dialogue* 40 (Fall 2007): 68–84.

24. Alexander Neibaur journal, May 24, 1844, in Jessee, “Earliest Documented Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” 25.

25. *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, September 15, 1843, in Jessee, “Earliest Documented Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” 25.

26. Alexander Neibaur journal, May 24, 1844, in Jessee, “Earliest Documented Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” 26.

27. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 97.

28. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 92.

29. Giles, *Pioneer*, 212–13.

30. Michael Quinn’s recent study of Palmyra camp meetings is insightful on the patterns of the Methodist outdoor gatherings that supplemented regular worship. As this article explains, however, local history matches just what Joseph describes, that is, Joseph’s sustained anxiety from the conflicting views he observed after attending Protestant gatherings, moving into serious inquiry from 1818 to his First Vision, which Joseph dated about late March 1820. I disagree with Quinn’s logic of postponing the “early” spring theophany because it was supposedly too cold then for a farm boy’s outdoor prayer. “Joseph Smith’s Experience of a Methodist ‘Camp-Meeting’ in 1820,” 23–25. Dan Vogel also questions that thinking in his letter, “What Is a Revival?,” *Dialogue* 41 (Winter 2008): viii–ix.

31. See this article’s appendices for full discussion of these Palmyrans who recalled Joseph’s First Vision years.

32. Backman referred to Seager’s 1818 camp meeting journal entry, citing correct data from P. Blakeslee’s secondhand summary in “Notes for a History of Methodism in Phelps, 1886”; see Backman’s reprinted 1969 article, “Awakenings in the Burned-Over District,” in this volume, and his *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*, 74n34. Michael Quinn quoted the printed copy of the 1818 journal, emphasizing its importance (“Joseph Smith’s Experience of a Methodist ‘Camp-Meeting’ in 1820,” 2–3), as did Mark L. Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People* (Salt Lake City: Gregg Kofford Books, 2009), 128. Stephen C. Harper also mentions Seager’s journal in his early Mormonism presentations. The present article reviews Seager’s entry in the light of regional camp meeting insights from other Methodist circuit riders.

33. See E. Latimer, a later Genesee Conference minister who knew the Seager family, *The Three Brothers: Sketches of the Lives of*

Rev. Aurora Seager, Rev. Micah Seager, Rev. Schuyler Seager, D.D. (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1880), and W. C. [William Case], "Account of the Life and Death of Rev. Aurora Seager," *Methodist Magazine*, October–December, 1821, 367–71, 406–12, 449–55.

34. Horatio Gates Spafford, *Gazetteer of the State of New-York* (Albany: B. D. Packard and author, 1824), 411; emphasis in original.

35. Latimer, *Three Brothers*, 17.

36. Aurora Seager, April 7, 1817, Windsor, CT, in W. C. [William Case], "Account of . . . Rev. Aurora Seager," *Methodist Magazine*, November 1821, 411–12.

37. Latimer, *Three Brothers*, 21.

38. At the Genesee Annual Conference, starting July 16, 1818, Aurora was assigned to the Clarence (NY) Circuit with a companion (*Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1818*, 44); at the Genesee Annual Conference, starting July 1, 1819, Aurora was assigned alone to the Montreal Circuit, under the District Presiding Elder William Case (*Minutes . . . 1819*, 52). Aurora died in Montreal of lung involvement December 21, 1819, in a scene of "triumphant death." W. C. [William Case], "Account of . . . Rev. Aurora Seager," *Methodist Magazine*, December 1821, 454–55.

39. Latimer, *Three Brothers*, 22.

40. *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase* (Rochester, NY: William Alling, 1851).

41. W. H. McIntosh, *History of Wayne County, New York* (Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign & Everts, 1877), 148. Two similar certificates of incorporation (July 3, 1821, and February 14, 1822) of the "first Methodist Episcopal Church of Palmyra" are recorded, Miscellaneous Records, Bk. C, Ontario County, NY, 385–86, 397–98, perhaps in connection with erecting a meetinghouse.

42. *Methodist Magazine*, August 1826, 313.

43. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: D. Appleton, 1867), 19. See Tucker's profile in the appendices to this article for full treatment. The Palmyra road list was made each April and can be analyzed for years that the Smith family lived together in Palmyra Village (1817–19), the time when Alvin

continued living in the village and the family (judged by the father's residence) had already moved to the farm (by April 1820 and an undetermined time before), and the years the family lived together on the farm (1821–22). Later years in the village and double residence years were evidently the time of constructing the only log home known. The road records appear in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000), 3:411–14, along with his theory of two log homes, which I consider not justified by observer evidence. Lucy Smith and Palmyra resident Pomeroy Tucker agree that the Smiths had only two houses in the countryside, a log house they began to build during 1818–19 and then a frame house nearly finished when Alvin died in 1823. See discussion under the subhead “Joseph’s Attendance at the 1818 Palmyra Camp Meeting.”

44. See the 1815 Tennessee schedule for five days, starting Friday (half-day) and ending Tuesday (half-day), with four extended meetings on Saturday, Sunday, and baptisms and the Lord’s Supper administered on Monday. The formal “invitation to the altar” came on two designated days. Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 90–91.

45. Abel Stevens wrote of the bishop’s “large person—corpulent and nearly six feet in height . . . and manners of extreme simplicity and cordiality.” *Sketches and Incidents* (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1853), 2:130. For the bishop’s life, see *American National Biography* 18 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 616–17.

46. George Peck, *Life and Times of Rev. George Peck* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1874), 93.

47. In Worth Marion Tippy, *Frontier Bishop: The Life and Times of Robert Richford Roberts* (New York: Abingdon, 1958), 151–52. Thompson was a congressman and later secretary of the Navy.

48. See the variation of “old professors” for ordinary Methodists revitalized at a camp meeting. *Methodist Magazine*, July 1826, 373. See Peter Cartwright’s more usual reference to believers as “two hundred who had professed religion, and about that number joined the Church,” in Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal*

Church in the United States of America 4 (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1864): 347–75.

49. James Gilruth journal, June 5–9, 1835, transcription in Johnson, *Frontier Camp Meeting*, 112.

50. Giles, *Pioneer*, 234.

51. Giles, *Pioneer*, 267–69.

52. Giles, *Pioneer*, 270–71.

53. Giles, *Pioneer*, 279.

54. *Life and Times of Rev. George Peck*, 48.

55. *Life and Times of Rev. George Peck*, 60–64.

56. *Life and Times of Rev. George Peck*, 82.

57. *Life and Times of Rev. George Peck*, 87.

58. *Life and Times of Rev. George Peck*, 88, 90.

59. See Horatio Gates Spafford, *Gazetteer of the State of New York* (Albany: B. D. Packard, 1824), 4 (statistics used), 376 (township populations in Ontario County, with Wayne County created in 1823 [586]), 401, left column (Palmyra Village).

60. Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 2nd ed., 73.

61. The source for the Palmyra Village population is Spafford, *Gazetteer of the State of New York* (1824), 401; “125 houses . . . and about 1000 inhabitants.”

62. *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, 213–14. For full background on Turner, see his profile in the appendices of this article.

63. Jessee, “Earliest Documented Accounts,” 25. The Neibaur account tells of a “Revival meeting,” near Palmyra (mother and two brothers present, in home area) but outdoors (large crowd shouting) in Methodist context (virtual camp-meeting description and Joseph’s question, “Must I join the Methodist church?”).

64. Lucy Smith, 1844–45 manuscript, in *Lucy's Book*, 321, left column. The Walters-school researchers developed a theory that the log house the Smiths first occupied was of unknown origin. It did stand on the property of Samuel Jennings, who owned the land in Palmyra Township adjoining the Smith farm on the north. Lucy Smith says quite a bit about her rural homes but only mentions living near Palmyra in one modest log house that her family built,

followed by their frame house, finished on the exterior by Alvin before his death in late 1823. As the text here shows, Palmyra editor Tucker also gives this sequence of two dwellings (see his section in the appendices to this paper), as does William Smith, who, though young, lived in both homes. Handwritten “Notes,” in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:486.

65. Tucker, *Origin . . . of Mormonism*, 13. The Walters-theory scholars speculate that the log house that the Smiths first occupied was not built by the Smiths, since it stood on the adjacent land of Samuel Jennings, who owned the farm in Palmyra Township adjoining the Smith farm, which was just south across the border line of Manchester Township. Lucy Smith’s history has a domestic sub-theme, making the reader conscious of the family’s move to the farm and the first log house and the long-term plan to replace it with the sided house nearly finished by Alvin before his death in late 1823. Palmyra editor Tucker also knows only these two houses, and both say that the original home was self-built. Walters and those following him have relied on the Manchester assessment rolls, which value the Smith farm (south of the log house) at \$700 in 1821 and 1822 but raise the value to \$1,000 in 1823, when the frame home was under construction within the border of Manchester Township. These revisionary scholars claim the frame home had not been started before the summer assessment of 1823, so the increased value came from building a second log home on Manchester land, no trace of which has been found. Yet the first country dwelling appears as a point of measurement in an 1820 highway survey, and archaeology has verified the site, which is some twenty-five yards north of the Palmyra-Manchester Township border on the Jennings property. Explanations have included using a log dwelling already built (seemingly the Walters theory) or the Smith’s ignorance of the property line when they began their log house. In my view, more thought should be given to the Smith’s deliberately building close to their prospective farm, with Jennings’s permission (with whom they had work and business dealings in the 1820s), against the contingency the Smiths might not be able to raise cash to purchase the Manchester farm. The argument is made that the land agent,

Zachariah Seymour, did not register his power of attorney from the Evertson estate until mid-1820, so the Smiths could not contract for their Manchester farm until then. Yet Seymour was a seasoned land agent in the area and had a trusted relationship with the New York City Evertson estate before 1820, so the Smiths may have had a tentative agreement to buy their farm before Seymour was formally authorized to sell it. So they perhaps agreed with Jennings to build on his land, with some possible provision for buying the self-built cabin if their plans succeeded. Like many settlers, the Smiths could not move forward until they saved the cash to make a binding contract, and there are variations of the above strategy, which I have probed somewhat in my longer biography of Alvin Smith, in Kyle Walker, *United by Faith: The Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith Family* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2005). Besides arguing from a supposed 1820 time contract, revisionists contend that Lucy Smith places beginning the frame home as early November 1823: “When the month of November, 1822 [1823] arrived the House was raised and all the Materials procured for completing the building” (preliminary MS, in *Lucy’s Book*, 349, left column, 1844–45). The revisionists arbitrarily take one meaning of this sentence, insisting that Lucy is saying that the Smiths began the frame house in November 1823. Yet construction materials for the existing medium-large frame house were obviously not assembled in the short three weeks when Alvin faded and died. I think Lucy means that the clapboard house had been framed and all construction materials were on site by early November 1823, when Alvin’s symptoms of abdominal pain began. After his wrenching death, Lucy continues her narrative that the finished carpenter was soon hired to complete the house, meaning Alvin had probably taken the summer and fall to manage raising the frame, roofing, and enclosing by siding before his death. This means the county appraisers could well increase the 1823 valuation because the new house was partly in place, not because of the illogical replacement of another settler’s cabin by a duplicate. The inferences made to justify the two-cabin theory are discussed in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:415–21.

66. Turner, *Pioneer History*, 212n, which describes the Smiths living in their log home in the winter of late 1819, closely surrounded by forest and underbrush. Turner apparently intended to indicate that the Smiths themselves had built this log dwelling, since it had no other purpose in a sea of trees but as a base for clearing the land. Turner knew quite a bit about the Smiths but did not mention a second log home.

67. Dan Vogel, “What Is a Revival?,” *Dialogue* 41 (Winter 2008): ix.

68. Readers of multiple news reports of the same incident must decide whether to take them as contradictory or supplementary. Two seasoned historians give the latter answer to this question in regard to Joseph’s reports of the First Vision: “No single account tells the whole story. At the same time, all the details in each of the accounts add significantly to the entire picture.” James B. Allen and John W. Welch, “The Appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith in 1820,” in Welch and Carlson, *Opening the Heavens*, 37.

69. For basic information on the 1819 conference, see F. W. Conable, *History of the Genesee Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Philips and Hunt, 1876), 158–61. The statistics of the ministers obligated to attend are found in the 1818 and 1819 *Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America*.

70. Spafford, *Gazetteer of the State of New York* (1824), 401.

71. *Life and Times of Rev. George Peck*, 93.

72. *Life and Times of Rev. George Peck*, 65, 93, 122. The rivalry for proselytes at conversion appears regularly in the memoirs of Methodist preachers. For instance, Peck comments (p. 110): “When conversions began to occur among us, the Baptists, by whom we were surrounded, began to practice their usual strategy. . . . Two preachers of that persuasion . . . were very attentive to our converts.”

73. Orson Pratt obtained a finished manuscript of Lucy’s history and (without radical editing) published it as *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: Orson Pratt, 1853). Chapter 18 (17 in some later editions) copied Joseph Smith’s 1838 record of the First Vision “from

his history” (74), and at the end credited this installment as originally appearing in the Nauvoo *Times and Seasons*, and reprinted in the *Millennial Star* (78). In my earlier article (“Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision,” *BYU Studies* 9, no. 1 [Autumn 1968]: 391–93), I misinterpreted editorial comments before and after (paraphrases of Joseph Smith’s 1838 history) as Lucy Smith’s direct comments. However, present manuscript and printed versions of her history do not show her early knowledge of Joseph’s First Vision. See the similar explanation in Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s New England Heritage*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), xvii–xviii.

74. Joseph Smith added this episode of talking with his mother in supplementary dictation to Willard Richards in 1842. See Jessee, “Earliest Documented Accounts,” in Welch and Carlson, *Opening the Heavens*, 15, 32n22.

75. In the Neibaur account of the aftermath of the First Vision, Joseph again recounted the story of the Methodist minister who told Joseph that his vision was not of God: “Told the Methodist priest, said this was not a age for God to reveal himself in Vision Revelation has ceased with the New Testament.” Jessee, “Earliest Documented Accounts,” 26.

76. Some earlier critics of the First Vision assumed that Joseph Smith recalled physical persecution, but Joseph’s explanations (see JS—H 1:21–23) pertained to public and private scorn (“reviling”), which left its legacy in many overdone affidavits later taken against the Smith family in the Palmyra region. On the meaning of “professor,” see contemporary examples in Brown, *Pillar of Light*, 70, 83n32. Also see similar usage at note 48 above.

77. Tucker, *Origin . . . of Mormonism*, 18. The idea of the Bible as a fable contradicts Joseph’s documented statements on that book. See the appendices to this article for data on Tucker.

78. The community bias is discussed in Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reappraised,” *BYU Studies* 8 (Spring 1968): 277–93. Disagreement on some issues is registered in Dan Vogel and literature he cites, *Early Mormon Documents* 2:13–21. One pseudo-issue is the sincerity of those

making affidavits on the character of Joseph Smith and his family. Statements based on hearsay or group prejudice are not more accurate if sincere.

79. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:475–513.

80. William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism*, 6–7, also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:494–95.

81. For William Smith’s borrowing from Oliver Cowdery’s 1820 period revival history, see the appendices to this article concerning William Smith.

82. Brown, *Pillar of Light*, 241.

83. Orson Pratt, *Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840), 5; also in Jessee, “Earliest Documented Accounts,” in Welch and Carlson, *Opening the Heavens*, 20–21. After building up to the need of a divine answer on the right church, Oliver simply skipped over the answer and in the continuation described Moroni’s appearance with the message about the Book of Mormon. So later in the century, William Smith did not find Joseph’s account of the First Vision in Oliver’s early Church history series. Thus he turned to an alternative account, written by Orson Pratt as the first in his 1840 pamphlet, *Remarkable Visions*.

84. *William Smith on Mormonism*, 8–9.

85. See the facsimile and transcription of the revelation copy of the above date in Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Manuscript Revelation Books*, facsimile edition, first volume of the Revelations and Translations series of the Joseph Smith Papers, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 74–77.

86. Jessee, “Earliest Documented Accounts,” in Allen and Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 5–7.

87. Background and a photo of the original gravestone is in Anderson, “Alvin Smith,” in Walker, *United by Faith*, 99. A more legible photo appears in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:450.

88. These earliest Joseph Smith events (First Vision and message of forgiveness, falling into sin and seeking forgiveness,

Moroni's coming and renewal of forgiveness) are found in all versions of D&C 20:5–6, and in Joseph Smith's 1832 history and journal narration of early visions to Joshua in 1835. See Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 11–12, 104–5; *Joseph Smith Papers, Journals* 1:87–88, 90–91.

89. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 9–14.

90. *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 13. Cowdery confessed his personal incompetence on the early life of the Prophet but stressed, "With his labor and with authentic documents now in our possession, we hope to render this a pleasing and agreeable narrative."

91. The preface of Joseph's 1832 history also makes the restoration of each priesthood a major founding event, seeming to promise detail that was not included because the document was not finished.

92. *Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 23.

93. Cowdery differs from the 1832 account in the quoted phrases only by the substitution of "this book" for "them," whose antecedent is "the plates." The phrases are found in *Messenger and Advocate*, February 1835, 80, and *Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 198.

94. Jessee, "Earliest Documented Accounts," in Welch and Carlson, *Opening the Heavens*, 4–5.

95. *Messenger and Advocate*, December 1834, 43.

96. *Messenger and Advocate*, April 1835, 112.

97. Jessee, "Earliest Documented Accounts," in Welch and Carlson, *Opening the Heavens*, 5.

98. *Life and Times of Rev. George Peck*, 104.

99. George Peck, *Early Methodism within the Bounds of the Old Genesee Conference* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1850), 492.

100. Larry C. Porter examined Lane's life in two publications, the shorter being *A Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania* (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute, Brigham Young University, 2000), 19–23. See also his "Rev. George Lane—Good 'Gifts,' Much 'Grace,' and Marked 'Usefulness,'" 199–226 of the present volume.

101. Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 358.

102. *Life and Times of Rev. George Peck*, 109.

103. Handwritten journal of Genesee circuit rider Benajah Williams, who with Lane stopped over at Richmond Township, New York, for a camp meeting on July 15–16 on the way to the 1820 Genesee Conference, that year in Canada. Mormon historians have seen transcripts and photocopies of the 1818–20 Williams journal, which was recently owned by Michael Brown of Philadelphia. Steven C. Harper’s “Seeker’s Guide to the Historical Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” n. 18 (electronic copy of BYU Religious Studies Center occasional paper). Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People*, 145n103 incorrectly dates Lane’s preaching near Rochester, New York, which was in late summer 1820, soon after the Canada conference.

104. Edmund C. Briggs and John W. Peterson interview with William Smith (1893), in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:513.

105. See the chart including using James 1:4–5 and its mention in the various accounts, in the beginning articles of Jessee, and Allen and Welch, in Welch and Carlson, *Opening the Heavens*, 56, with accounts on 3–26.

106. *Lucy’s Book*, 324, left column, indicating the preliminary MS dates the dream to “the same year that Carlos was 2 years old,” which began March 25, 1818.

107. *Lucy’s Book*, 281, both versions and n. 103.

108. *Lucy’s Book*, 264n102.

109. See Jessee, “The Earliest Documented Accounts,” in Welch and Carlson, *Opening the Heavens*, 25.

110. *Lucy’s Book*, 264n103.

111. *Lucy’s Book*, 357–58, left column (preliminary MS).

112. Sophronia had married Calvin Stoddard in late 1827, which may be one reason why she was not included in the disciplinary hearing, minutes of which are reproduced in Backman, *First Vision*, 2nd ed., Appendix K, and in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:496–501. The original manuscript is on a BYU microfilm in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

113. This time of inactivity has been used as a measure of when the mother and sons joined the Presbyterian Church, but there are other cases in these records taking action on the basis of two years' inactivity or less. These times seem to be based on taking action soon after inactivity rather than measuring the number of years of membership.

114. Jessee, "Earliest Documented Accounts," in Welch and Carlson, *Opening the Heavens*, 25–26.

115. See Anderson, "Joseph Smith's Testimony of the First Vision," *Ensign*, April 1986, 17–19.

116. Allen and Welch, "Appearance of the Father and Son," in Welch and Carlson, *Opening the Heavens*, 20, and reprinted in this volume. For similar conclusions of Joseph's consistency in his accounts and with history, see Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 2nd ed., Appendix Q.

117. He furnishes his birth date in *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, IA, 1883), 5. It is also found in Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 41, as March 13, 1811.

118. *William Smith on Mormonism*, 5; also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:493.

119. Palmyra Town Record, book 1, 221, reproduced in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:420–21, along with his case for this being an existing, not a self-built, cabin of the Smiths, which is argued at length but not proved.

120. See Tucker, *Origin . . . of Mormonism*. "Smith and his household continued their residence in Palmyra village . . . for some two and a half years. In 1818 they settled . . . about two miles south of Palmyra."

121. *William Smith on Mormonism*, 6; also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:495.

122. *William Smith on Mormonism*, 10; also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:496.

123. Sermon on June 8, 1884, Deloit, Iowa, *Saints' Herald*, October 4, 1884, 643; also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:503.

124. Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 83–84.

125. *William Smith on Mormonism*, 9; also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:496.

126. *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, December 1834, 43. See also Brown, *Pillar of Light*, 240, for this direct borrowing.

127. *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, February 1835, 78. See also Brown, *Pillar of Light*, 240, for this direct borrowing.

128. *William Smith on Mormonism*, 7–8. See also Brown, *Pillar of Light*, 240, for this direct borrowing.

129. *William Smith on Mormonism*, 9; also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:495.

130. Turner, *History of . . . Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, second supplement, 499.

131. Tucker's first issue of the *Wayne Sentinel* (October 1, 1823) still exists. Information on his apprenticeship at Canandaigua appears in the best sketch of his life, written as an obituary for the *Troy Times* by his son-in-law, John M. Francis, copied in the *Palmyra Courier*, July 8, 1870, and the *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, July 2, 1870. See also Follett, *History of the Press in Western New York*, 63, and Hamilton, *Country Printer*, 303–4.

132. Tucker, *Origin . . . of Mormonism*, 4.

133. Tucker, *Origin . . . of Mormonism*, 15.

134. Tucker, *Origin . . . of Mormonism*, 14. Tucker's summary of the Smiths' Palmyra-Manchester holiday business stresses that young Joseph was regularly vending and sometimes tricked by "the boys of those by-gone times."

135. In 1831 young James Gordon Bennett wrote his tongue-in-cheek impressions of the Smiths from interviews with some who had known them. It is probably better-than-average hearsay when he reports the father as a former "country pedlar" dealing in "the manufacture of gingerbread and such like domestic wares." His son Joseph is portrayed as being "a partner in the concern," who aimlessly hung around the "villages," perhaps an indication of selling at public gatherings that Tucker specifically mentions. See *New York Courier and Enquirer*, August 31, 1831. One of Bennett's sources was E. B. Grandin, who was closely associated with Tucker in business and social affairs, so it is perhaps no accident that the story of the

Smiths' holiday business should be similar from Bennett's contacts and the editor Tucker. His fullest description of the Smiths' goods for sale is in the setting of the Palmyra residence: "gingerbread, pies, boiled eggs, root-beer, and other like notions of traffic." *Origin . . . of Mormonism*, 12.

136. The citation of Clinton's "Private Canal Journal, 1810" is found in William W. Campbell, *The Life and Writings of De Witt Clinton* (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849), 107. Increasing population makes such activity even more likely for camp meetings in 1820.

137. Tucker, *Origin of Mormonism*, 28. Compare the descriptions of the First Vision and the angel's first revelation of the Book of Mormon in any of the editions of Orson Pratt, *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*. Proof that this source was used over other possibilities with the same phrasing is Tucker's quotation of Pratt's narration of the Moroni visitation. Compare Turner's quotation of the closing portion of *Remarkable Visions*, 139–45.

138. Tucker, *Origin of Mormonism*, 17–18. Tucker is the origin of derivative material in McIntosh, *History of Wayne County*, 150.

139. *The Reflector*, Palmyra, NY, February 1, 1831.

140. Tucker, *Origin . . . of Mormonism*, 16.

141. Tucker, *Origin . . . of Mormonism*, 17–18. The knowledge of the Bible attributed to Joseph Smith by Turner makes suspect his remark that Joseph announced the "Bible a fable." The memoirs of Lucy, Joseph, and William all agree that reverence for scripture characterized the Smith home.

142. Tucker's chapter immediately following Joseph's announcement that the churches stood on a "false foundation" is a recital of the community tradition of his money-digging activities. This repetition adds nothing, for he is merely warming over "affidavits" in print thirty years before his book. But the Palmyra editor repeatedly insists that Joseph's deceptions began late in 1819 and continued "from 1820 to 1827" (p. 22). If these stories originated in community prejudice after the Smiths began telling of Joseph's revelations (as William Smith spiritedly insists), then the existence of the rumors dates the early religious claims of the Smiths around 1820.

Tucker accepted this same chronology a decade before his book, as shown in his newspaper recollections of June 11, 1858, in the *Palmyra Courier*. Talking then about “the origin of Mormonism,” he dates Joseph’s “gift of supernatural endowments” as beginning “as early as 1820.” His odd identification of Joseph Smith as then “at the age of about 19 years” may be accounted for by the young prophet’s large physical stature.

143. The two most extensive biographies of Turner are Morley B. Turpin and W. De Witt Manning, “Orsamus Turner,” *Rochester Historical Society Publications* 17 (1939): 273–90; Harry S. Douglass, *Historical Wyoming* 12, no. 2 (January 1959): 33–46.

144. Turner, *History of the . . . Phelps and Gorham’s Purchase*, 213, 400.

145. Strong suspended publication of his Palmyra newspaper in the spring of 1823, judged by existing issues. Turner recalls the date of his move away from Palmyra as 1823 (499), which appears in two other works: Arad Thomas, *Pioneer History of Orleans County, New York* (Albion, NY: H. A. Bruner, 1871), 111–12; Milton W. Hamilton, *The Country Printer, New York State, 1785–1830*, 2nd ed. (Port Washington, NY: Ira J. Friedman, 1964), 302.

146. Turner, *History of the . . . Phelps and Gorham’s Purchase*, second supplement, 459, 499.

147. This phrase is from John Kelsey, who wrote his sketch while Turner was still alive, *The Lives and Reminiscences of the Pioneers of Rochester* (Rochester, NY: J. Kelsey, 1854), 71.

148. Orsamus Turner, “Then and Now—1822, 1854,” *Niagara Democrat*, ca. May 4, 1854, cited in *Lockport Daily Courier*, May 5, 1854, copy furnished by Chester O. Lewis, former Niagara County Historian. Turner was born July 23, 1801. Turner’s complete words pertaining to his pre-Lockport life show that he did not stay long in Palmyra after completing his Canandaigua apprenticeship: “Resuming . . . a position . . . which had a commencement, but a few days after we had reached the age of 21 years.—(32 years ago) . . . Then, just out of our apprenticeship, and at school, we heard that a place called ‘Lockport’ . . . had been made the county seat . . . and

hearing further that a printer was wanted there, we journeyed from Palmyra passing through Rochester.”

149. Turner, *Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase of Western New York* (Buffalo, NY: Jewett, Thomas & Co., 1849), 655.

150. Frederick Follett, *History of the Press of Western New York* (Rochester, NY: Jerome & Brothers, 1847), 65. Cf. Hamilton, *The Country Printer*, 304.

151. Turner, *History of the . . . Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, 214.

152. Turner, *History of the . . . Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, 213.

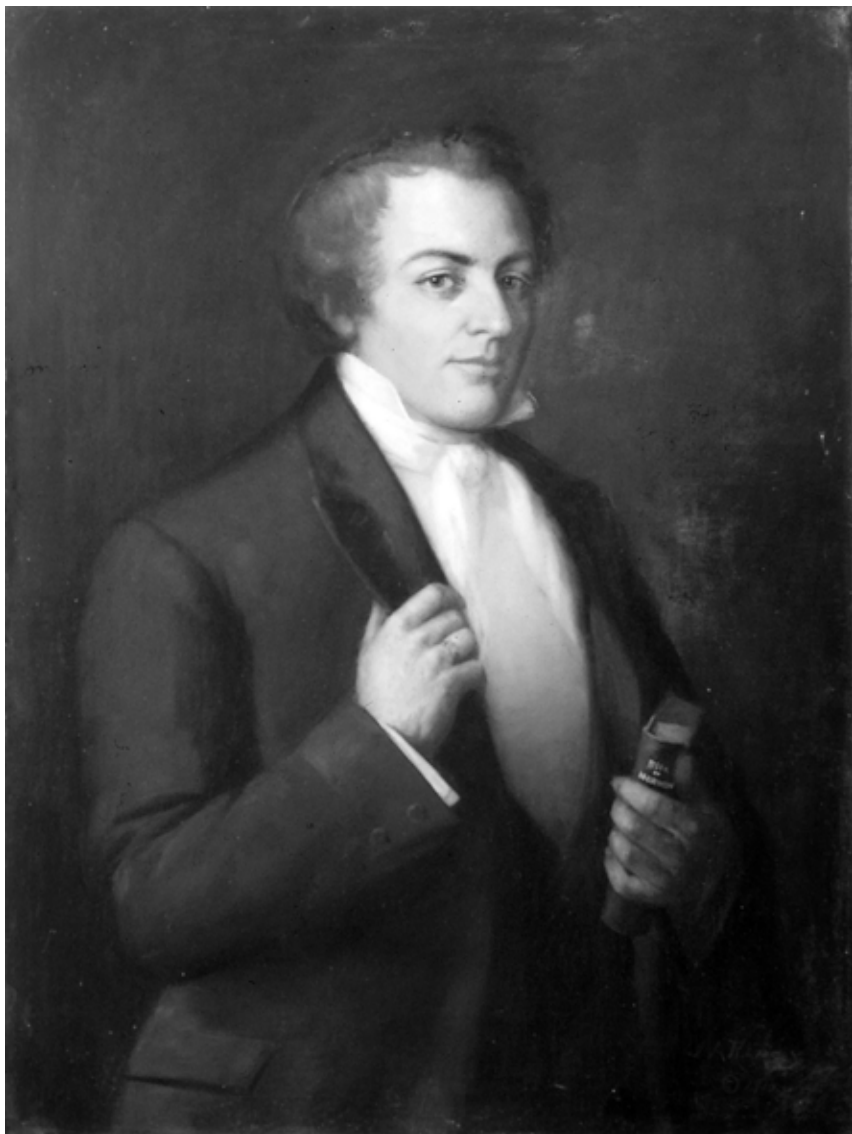
153. Turner, *History of the . . . Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, 214.

Although the Methodist records of the period in Palmyra are not now available, Turner's early history of that denomination shows that he personally knew more about its history in Palmyra than about any other church there: “The Methodist Church was organized in 1811. At first, few in number, and feeble in resources, its places of worship alternated from school house to school house; sometimes in an apartment at a private dwelling; at others in a vacant log dwelling;—until having largely recruited its numbers, it emerged from its feeble condition, and in 1821 erected its present church edifice.”

Early existence of the “juvenile debating club” at the “old red school house on Durfee Street” is confirmed by periodic newspaper notices to “the young people of the village of Palmyra and its vicinity” inviting attendance at a “debating school at the school house near Mr. Billings” (*Western Farmer*, January 23, 1822). The similarity of later notices shows that this notice does not mark the beginning of the society.

154. *History of the . . . Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, 389. Compare a traveler's sarcastic reaction to an obstruction blocking this well-traveled highway “as I was entering your village, on what I understood to be the Vienna road.” *Wayne Sentinel*, April 7, 1826. Also compare the complaint of the later deterioration of “the road between this village and Vienna.” *The Reflector* (Palmyra, NY), September 23, 1829.

155. Turner, *Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase*, 542, 555.



Joseph Smith was one who was spiritually quickened while living in the Burned-Over District. He became keenly interested in organized religion during one of the higher waves of revivalism which swept across western New York. (Lewis A. Ramsey, Joseph Smith Jr., Courtesy of Church History Museum)