

## Chapter 7

# “ZION MUST INCREASE IN BEAUTY”

*W*illiam and Sally Phelps and their children adjusted to their new lives in Independence, Jackson County, Missouri. For the most part, life was pleasant for them as they awaited the arrival of Joseph Smith and other church leaders from Ohio.

### LIFE IN ZION

The Saints in western Missouri united in the cause of building Zion in the early spring months of 1832. Over the winter, Bishop Edward Partridge had purchased with consecrated monies nearly twelve hundred acres for the “inheritances” of the Saints who were already living in Zion or who would soon gather there. Most of the money for this land came from Martin Harris, the great early benefactor to the kingdom of God. Huge portions of Jackson County land were open for public sale at the federal land office a few miles away in the village of Lexington in Lafayette County. Partridge also purchased many lots from private individuals. The cost was generally between \$1.25 and \$2.00 per acre. All of the church’s acreage was in Jackson County and was still mostly woodland. Not all the land was prime property.

Enthusiastic as they were to prepare for the New Jerusalem, the leading brethren, including Phelps, wanted to immediately improve these new holdings. Consequently, the leaders wrote to Kirtland requesting that branches in the East send to Zion “one blacksmith, two shoemakers one carpenter and joiner one mason one waggon and plow maker one tanner and currier one millwright one hatter one chair & cabinet maker, one silver Smith and one wheel wright.”<sup>1</sup>

Most of the four hundred Saints in Zion as of March 1832 lived near the Big Blue River in Kaw Township. Approximately sixty were original members of the Colesville Branch from New York. During their first winter they had built cabins, outbuildings,

and fences. Now in the spring they were planting and further improving their properties. Most new arrivals from Ohio and other branches in the East settled on nearby church-owned properties in Kaw. Phelps participated in planning meetings pertaining to arriving Mormons moving to other church properties in various locations in Jackson County.

The chief church leaders together with their families resided in Independence near the temple site. This group consisted of the bishopric—Edward Partridge, John Corrill, and Isaac Morley; the printing team of W. W. Phelps, Oliver Cowdery, and John Whitmer; and the storekeeper Sidney Gilbert. They and their family members, along with a few other families, made up the Independence Branch. Starting in the spring of 1832, all of Zion was presided over by a council of high priests consisting of these same seven leaders in Independence as well as any other members of the high priesthood resident in Zion.

Life in Independence was vastly different for these men and their families than that which they were used to in Ohio or New York. Emily Partridge, daughter of Bishop Edward Partridge, described Independence as a rough settlement—a schoolhouse, a brick courthouse, three stores, a few log cabins with mud chimneys, dirt floors, windows without glass shielded by a slab of wood or a blanket to keep out the penetrating cold. “Everything was so different from what we were used to seeing. The people were different in their customs and manner of speaking.” These people consisted of a combination of indigenous Indians, African-Americans, and white settlers. “Everything seemed to be after the backwoods style.”<sup>2</sup>

The Saints sought to live according to the law of consecration, at least as far as they understood it at the time. They officially deeded all their property to Bishop Partridge. The bishop, in consultation with his two assistants, Corrill and Morley, in turn deeded back property and goods to each family’s head of household. In many cases, the properties that families were given to use and improve were the same properties they had given over to the church. These properties and goods became the family’s “stewardship” for which they would be held accountable. All these transactions were performed in solemnity and certified on documents printed at W. W. Phelps & Co.<sup>3</sup>

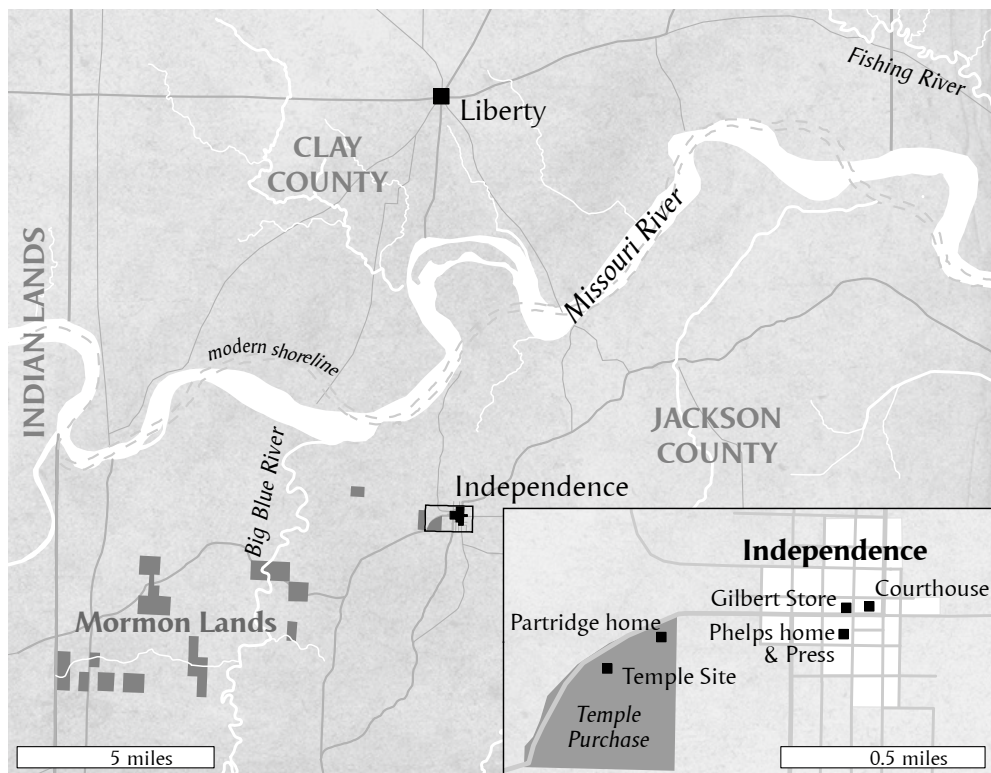
One of the first things the Independence brethren did after settling into their new accommodations, however crude, was to start school for the children. Phelps helped administer this school system. Emily Partridge reported, “The first school I remember attending was in a log cabin in Jackson Co. The school was taught by Miss Nancy Carl [Nancy Corrill, daughter of John Corrill], a young woman belonging to our Church. Our house was near the Temple lot, about half a mile from the public square in Independence.”<sup>4</sup> Some of the Phelps children were part of this school.

The council of high priests in Jackson County eagerly awaited the arrival of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, who would be bringing newsprint with them.<sup>5</sup> They would also be able to receive further inspiration and instruction from their prophet. All the Saints dearly loved “Brother Joseph.” Certainly this was the case for Phelps. It would be a time of spiritual refreshment and joy.

## JOSEPH SMITH IN JACKSON COUNTY

Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and three others left Kirtland on April 1, 1832, and stopped first on the Ohio River at Wheeling, Virginia (later West Virginia), where they purchased an entire lot of paper for the press in Zion. Joseph and his brethren arrived with their valuable cargo by stage in Independence on Tuesday, April 24. "We found the brethren generally enjoying health and faith, and extremely glad to welcome us among them," reads the Prophet's official history.<sup>6</sup> Joseph Smith and maybe other visitors stayed at the relatively commodious home of Phelps.

On the twenty-sixth, Joseph Smith convened a general council in Independence of leading high priests in Phelps's printing office. The lingering issue of who really had authority over the entire church, discussed in the previous chapter, had to be directly addressed. The Prophet had been officially acknowledged as the president of the high priesthood "according to commandment and ordination in Ohio, at the Conference held in Amherst January 25, 1832."<sup>7</sup> These brethren in Missouri now had their chance to sustain the Prophet in this new title and office even as the Ohio high priests had done. Sidney Rigdon had been called officially as Joseph Smith's counselor in the presidency of the high priesthood. (Later Rigdon would be sustained as "first counselor.") Jesse Gause, a man who would fall away from the church later in 1832, was another counselor. Gause also accompanied Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon to Zion.<sup>8</sup> The newly designated church



*Mormon settlement in Jackson County and Independence, Missouri, in the early 1830s. Map by Brandon S. Plewe. Mormon Historical Studies 16, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 18.*

bishop in Ohio, Newel K. Whitney, went with the brethren to Zion for the council meetings. Bishop Whitney had been the person who had gathered funds for the purchase of newsprint and more properties in Zion.

A major item on that day's conference agenda was Sidney Rigdon's discussion of a revelation (D&C 78) that the Prophet had received just a month earlier in Hiram, Ohio. Rigdon explained that these brethren in Zion would meet for the next few days to establish a united order and to implement more fully the principles of the law of consecration and stewardship according to the new revelation.<sup>9</sup>

The revelation stated that those who were ordained to the high priesthood (such as Phelps) should "listen to the counsel of him [Joseph Smith] who had ordained you from on high, who shall speak in your ears the words of wisdom." The revelation further pointed out that "the time has come, and is now at hand . . . that there be an organization of my people, in regulating and establishing the affairs of the storehouse for the poor of my people, both in this place [Ohio] and in the land of Zion." The Lord enjoined these, his servants, to live these principles of consecration by covenant "that you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things. For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things." The revelation warned that if any of the brethren broke their covenant, Satan would blind him and he would "lose his office and standing in the church, and . . . be delivered over to the buffetings of Satan."<sup>10</sup> Little did Phelps realize that this revealed warning of the buffetings of Satan would later (in 1838–39) be directly applied to him and his case of dissension against the Prophet and the church. At this time in 1832, however, Phelps was in total harmony with these revelations and rejoiced in them.

The most important item of business this day was the necessary reconciliation of Bishop Edward Partridge with Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. Partridge had seriously offended these two men in the summer of 1831. The concerns had to do with authority, finances, and rivalry. On March 10 the Independence Council of Elders had sent a letter of reconciliation to Joseph and Sidney in Ohio. But there is no indication that Joseph and Sidney had read the letter, because these men had left Ohio at the first of April amid much local persecution. The letter likely never reached them. On April 26 the brethren desired to close the past rift. Joseph Smith's official history recorded: "The right hand of fellowship was given to me by the Bishop, Edward Partridge, in behalf of the Church [in Zion]. The scene was solemn, impressive, and delightful. During the intermission, a difficulty or hardness which had existed between Bishop Partridge and Elder Rigdon was amicably settled, and when we came together in the afternoon all hearts seemed to rejoice."<sup>11</sup> Phelps, who helped compile these words in the history, was perhaps one of the most pleased at this reconciliation. Phelps dearly loved both Joseph Smith and Edward Partridge and had a high regard for Sidney Rigdon. Phelps would have been relieved to see harmony prevail again among his beloved brethren.<sup>12</sup>

Immediately after the men came together again in the afternoon, the council was rewarded with a new heavenly revelation (D&C 82) dictated by Joseph Smith. Verse 1 specifically applied to the reconciliation: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, my servants, that

inasmuch as you have forgiven one another your trespasses, even so I, the Lord, forgive you." The revelation was filled with both warnings and promises. It stated that those who transgressed against the laws of God would receive the judgment of God. The Lord also encouraged the brethren with the assurance that "*Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments.*"<sup>13</sup> *Zion* here referred to the Saints and their consecrated lands.

This revelation urged the brethren to call on the Lord's name for even more revelations. Phelps evidenced in his ministry as "the printer unto the church" his love for and fealty to these revelations. He yearned to print them all in one volume. According to the editors of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, "Preserving his revelations and translations was among Joseph Smith's earliest priorities."<sup>14</sup>

Another significant contribution of this revelation was further discussion regarding principles of the law of consecration. This revelation, in its original form, stated that it was "expedient" for Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Newel K. Whitney, Edward Partridge, Sidney Gilbert, John Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, William W. Phelps, and Martin Harris to "be bound together by a bond & Covennant that cannot be broken in your several Stewartships to manage the literary & Mercantile concerns & the Bishopricks both in the Land of Zion & in the Land of Kirtland."<sup>15</sup> Phelps undoubtedly went to bed that night excited that the cause of Zion would now rapidly move forward. He was pleased that he could help host Joseph Smith and his counselors in the presidency of the high priesthood in the land of Zion. Over the next several days this revelation was the basis for all council discussions.

The next morning the council convened again, and the brethren established the United Firm in Missouri. They resolved that the name of the firm in Zion would be "Gilbert, Whitney & Company" and in Kirtland "Newel K. Whitney & Company." Phelps and Sidney Gilbert were charged to draft the legal bond for the store in Zion. Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon also gave gospel discourses at this conference.<sup>16</sup>

## THREATS FROM ORIGINAL SETTLERS

In retrospect, when the official history was written, these brethren looked back on this same council meeting, on April 27, as a time when they "transacted considerable business for the salvation of the saints who were settling among a ferocious set of mobbers, like lambs among wolves." Consequently, the Saints in Missouri would organize themselves according to the Lord's plan so "that the brethren might eventually be independent of every encumbrance beneath the celestial Kingdom, by bonds and covenants of mutual friendship, and mutual love."<sup>17</sup>

The fears of these brethren regarding the original settlers in Jackson County were certainly justified. Just a few weeks earlier, in March, a group of men had met in Independence to discuss how they might harass the Saints into leaving the county. A main instigator of this confab was Indian agent William Clark (of Lewis and Clark fame), who had become quite annoyed with the Mormons' earlier attempt to preach without licenses to



the Natives in Indian Territory. Clark thought this undermined his authority. Enemies of the church began stoning some of the leading brethren's houses in Independence, including where the Phelps family lived, during that spring of 1832. All this discussion in the council of high priests on April 27 foreshadowed the tragic expulsion of the Saints from Jackson County a year and a half later. Actually, more persecution occurred even that very summer, a month or so after the conference.<sup>18</sup> Emily Partridge reported that men in Independence broke windows, shot into the homes, thrust long poles through shutters and sashes into rooms, and used abusive language. "I remember the mob set fire to a large haystack belonging to father; it was but a short distance from our house, and it made a tremendous blaze. In this manner the mob kept annoying the Saints. They were often holding meetings and forming resolutions to drive or destroy the Mormons."<sup>19</sup>

Bishop Partridge recounted the experiences of the spring of 1832: "As the church increased the hostile spirit of the people increased also.—The enemies circulated from time to time, all manner of false stories against the saints, hoping thereby to stir up the indignation of others. In the spring of 1832 they began to brick-bat or stone the houses of the saints, breaking in windows &c. not only disturbing, but endangering the lives of the inmates."<sup>20</sup>

## LITERARY FIRM

Joseph Smith and his entourage took opportunity over the next two days to visit the other Saints in Jackson County. The high priests' council reconvened again on Monday, the thirtieth, this time to further organize the Literary Firm and review its projects. The Literary Firm was now an agency within the United Firm under the overarching law of consecration designed specifically to publish church literature. The Literary Firm had been organized November 12, 1831, in Hiram, Ohio. Phelps was acknowledged as a member of the Literary Firm back in November, although he was not personally present at the Hiram Conference, having already left for Missouri. The top priority of the Literary Firm was the printing of a compilation of the revelations to the Prophet Joseph Smith. The compilation was to be known as "A Book of Commandments." Phelps's printing office was charged to print three thousand copies. This stands in contrast to the ten thousand projected copies spoken of at the November meeting. Likely the difficulty of obtaining sufficient paper and binding was a factor here. Phelps, Oliver Cowdery, and John Whitmer, who would be printing the Book of Commandments, were asked to determine which revelations would be printed in the compilation and to make all necessary grammatical corrections.<sup>21</sup>

At the same council of the Literary Firm, the brethren discussed the printing of two more books—an almanac and a hymnbook. Producing an almanac was a long-standing American tradition borrowed from the British. It was the only calendar that people had access to, and the almanac gave them much additional practical information, including items about local weather. Phelps considered himself an expert on weather patterns. For Mormons in their new Zion, an almanac was an obvious item to print, and Phelps, with his decade of experience as a journalist and printer, was the obvious man to prepare it.

As for the hymnbook, a revelation (D&C 25) had charged Emma Smith “to make a selection of sacred hymns, as it shall be given thee, which is pleasing unto me, to be had in my church.”<sup>22</sup> The council minutes read, “Ordered by the Council that the Hymns selected by Sister Emma be corrected by br. William W. Phelps.”<sup>23</sup> This relatively small decision at the time turned out to be momentous in the end. This marked the beginning of Phelps’s greatest work—the composing and compiling of sacred Restoration hymns. It also foreshadowed the frequent singing of hymns in Latter-day Saint worship services. Phelps would proceed to “correct” or revise some hymns that reflected a concept of a Zion community preparing for the second coming of the Savior.

Sometime also that day, April 30, Joseph Smith received another revelation (D&C 83) that would be published in the Book of Commandments. It stated that women in the church would have claim on their husbands for their maintenance and the children on their parents. But, the revelation added, if there were no men to care for a family, then the church itself through the storehouse would provide care and keeping, especially for widows and children.<sup>24</sup> Phelps took this revelation to heart and often would implement its principles as a church leader in Missouri. A council meeting was scheduled for the next day to discuss how to implement the decisions regarding the United Firm made on April 30.

During these council meetings, the Sidney Gilbert store in Independence became an integral part of the firm, whose members were Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, W. W. Phelps, Sidney Gilbert, Newel K. Whitney, John Whitmer, and Edward Partridge. The members of this order consecrated their respective talents and labors. They and their families were to be sustained by the firm’s profits. Surplus profits were to be used for the operation and blessing of the whole church. The operation and profits of Gilbert’s store and Phelps’s printshop would go hand in hand.<sup>25</sup>

Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Newel K. Whitney tarried for another week in Zion before departing for Ohio. (Jesse Gause stayed in Missouri even longer.) President Rigdon delivered two powerful sermons, “which, so far as outward appearance is concerned, gave great satisfaction to the people.” Sidney’s preaching style may have been well accepted by Mormons, but the reverse was true with the “Gentiles” living in Jackson County. On Sunday, May 6, Sidney gave a religious discourse in the courthouse. According to a neutral eyewitness, Sidney “said that he had been to the third heaven, and had talked face to face with God Almighty.” This would be a reference to “The Vision” received jointly by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in Hiram, Ohio, the previous February 16 and now recorded as Doctrine and Covenants 76. The witness reported that the Protestant ministers in Jackson County called on Sidney Rigdon. “He [Rigdon] repeated what he had said the day before, telling them they had not the truth, and were the blind leading the blind.”<sup>26</sup> This unfortunate confrontation played an enormous role in the breaking down of relations between the Mormons and their Jackson County neighbors.

These meetings would prove to be the last opportunity for Joseph Smith to be with church members in Jackson County, for the Saints would be driven out of the county and

lose their homes before he could make another visit. The church would never reclaim its property in Zion during the Prophet's lifetime.

After these meetings, Joseph Smith "gave the parting hand to the brethren in Independence."<sup>27</sup> Phelps had every reason to be pleased with the outcome of this visit. He was entrusted by his beloved Prophet to help select and grammatically correct the revelation manuscripts, to print the Book of Commandments, and to publish a hymnbook and an almanac. The week and a half with the Prophet and the others had been a season of spiritual renewal and joy that he would always remember.

According to Phelps's reminiscences, another significant event took place while the Prophet was in Missouri. Phelps claimed that he was "ordained and appointed to take the lead in printing, as printer to the church and also as leader of the spiritual affairs of the kingdom in Zion. With Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer as my assistants." Phelps further explained that Bishop Partridge and his counselors, Isaac Morley and John Corrill, were to preside "over the temporal affairs."<sup>28</sup> It appears from the tenor of the letters that Joseph Smith continued to write to Zion from Ohio that he considered both Phelps and Partridge to be leaders in Zion during this period. Obviously, the responsibilities of these seven leading men living in Independence were closely intertwined. Phelps and Partridge got along with each other generally very well.

Having been refreshed by this series of conferences with their esteemed brethren Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Newel K. Whitney, the leaders in Zion looked forward to fulfilling their enlarged stewardships. As evidenced by his writings that would soon appear in *The Evening and the Morning Star*, Phelps rejoiced in building Zion and being an integral instrument in God's hand in preparing for Christ's second coming. He and his associates would assist in fulfilling the Lord's word to them received just days earlier: "Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments."<sup>29</sup>

## NOTES

1. *JSP*, D2:163–79 (quotation on p. 167).
2. "Autobiography of Emily D. P. Young," *Women's Exponent* 13, no. 13 (December 1, 1884): 103.
3. Lyndon W. Cook, *Joseph Smith and the Law of Consecration* (Provo, UT: Grandin Book, 1985), 9–13; Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation among the Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 21–22; William G. Hartley, "They Are My Friends": *A History of the Joseph Knight Family, 1825–1850* (Provo, UT: Grandin Book, 1986), 84–85.
4. "Autobiography of Emily D. P. Young," 103.
5. When Joseph Smith received the letter from Oliver Cowdery asking him to obtain paper, he hardly knew where to obtain it and how to pay for it. He humbly asked the Lord for assistance and received a revelation that monies from the Gilbert-Whitney Store in Kirtland should be used for this purpose. The revelation on the matter did not get printed in the Doctrine and Covenants and is to be found today in the Newel K. Whitney Papers in the L. Tom



- Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT. For information on this revelation and the original document, see Cook, *Joseph Smith and the Law of Consecration*, 45–46, 52–53n16; *JSP*, MRB:272–73; *JSP*, D2:216–18. According to historian Ronald E. Romig, “In order to print just the Book of Commandments, W. W. Phelps needed fifteen thousand sheets of 11” x 18” paper.” See Ronald E. Romig, *Eighth Witness: The Biography of John Whitmer* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2014), 16.
6. MHC, vol. A-1, 210; *PJS*, 1:379–80; *HC*, 1:267.
  7. *JSP*, D2:229–33; MHC, vol. A-1, 210; MB2, 24; *FWR*, 44; *PJS*, 1:380; *HC*, 1:267.
  8. For a discussion of the quick rise and fall of Gause in Mormonism, see Robert J. Woodford, “Jesse Gause, Counselor to the Prophet,” *BYU Studies* 15, no. 3 (Spring 1975): 362–64; D. Michael Quinn, “Jesse Gause: Joseph Smith’s Little-Known Counselor,” *BYU Studies* 23, no. 4 (Fall 1983): 487–93; Erin B. Jennings, “The Consequential Counselor: Restoring the Root(s) of Jesse Gause,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 182–227; *JSP*, D2:457.
  9. MB2, 25; *FWR*, 44.
  10. D&C 78:2–3, 5–6, 10–11; *JSP*, MRB:266–69; *JSP*, D2:197–200.
  11. *JSP*, D2:232; MHC, vol. A-1, 210; MB2, 25; *FWR*, 41; *HC*, 1:267; Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 123; Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 113.
  12. MHC, vol. A-1, 210; *PJS*, 1:380; *HC*, 1:267. John Whitmer, who kept the minutes for this council, recorded that “all differences settled & the hearts of all run together in love.” *JSP*, D2:232.
  13. D&C 82:1–5, 14. *JSP*, MRB:228–31; *JSP*, D2:233–37; emphasis added.
  14. *JSP*, MRB:xxiii.
  15. *JSP*, D2:235–36.
  16. *JSP*, D2:232–33; MB2, 25; *FWR*, 45.
  17. MHC, vol. A-1, 212–13; *PJS*, 1:381; *HC*, 1:269.
  18. Church historian John Whitmer recorded that the enemies held the meeting in March 1832. (“The Book of John Whitmer,” in *JSP*, H2:50). F. Mark McKiernan and Roger D. Launius, editors of an earlier publication of “The Book of John Whitmer,” provided other evidence of the sinister motives of some of these Jackson County citizens, including General Clark, in their *An Early Latter Day Saint History: The Book of John Whitmer Kept by Commandment* (Independence, MO: Herald, 1980), 86n8.
  19. “Autobiography of Emily D. P. Young,” *Women’s Exponent* 13, no. 14 (December 15, 1884): 106.
  20. In 1839, at the behest of Joseph Smith, Edward Partridge began writing “A History, of the Persecution, of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, in Missouri.” The first installment appeared in the December 1839 issue of the newly established church periodical in Nauvoo, the *Times and Seasons*. The entirety of this history is located in *JSP*, H2. This quotation is found on pp. 207–8 of that volume.
  21. *JSP*, D2:237–40; MB2, 25–26; *FWR*, 46–47.
  22. D&C 25:11; *JSP*, MRB:38–41.
  23. *JSP*, D2:240; MHC, vol. A-1, 214; MB2, 26; *FWR*, 46; *PJS*, 1:381–82; *HC*, 1:270.
  24. D&C 83:1–6; *JSP*, MRB:602–3; *JSP*, D2:240–43.
  25. *JSP*, D2:244–46; MHC, vol. A-1, 214; *PJS*, 1:382; *HC*, 1:270; Max H Parkin, “Joseph Smith and the United Firm: The Growth and Decline of the Church’s First Master Plan of Business and Finance, Ohio and Missouri, 1832–1834,” *BYU Studies* 46, no. 3 (2007): 13–15; Matthew C. Godfrey, “Newel K. Whitney and the United Firm,” <https://history.lds.org/article/united-firm>.

26. Alexander Majors, *Seventy Years on the Frontier* (New York: Rand, McNally, 1893), 44–45.
27. MHC, vol. A-1, 214; *PJS*, 1:382; *HC*, 1:271.
28. “Jackson County,” MS D 6019, folder 7, CHL.
29. D&C 82:14; *JSP*, MRB:230–31; *JSP*, D2:236; emphasis added.