

them to you.

Q. [JP] Thank you.

David W. Knowles

Nauvoo, Illinois

Birthday: February 1, 1925

Interview on September 28, 2001, in his home by Andrew Wahlstrom

Amy Redd and Margaret Ann Knowles, David's wife, also present

Q. [Andrew Wahlstrom] How long have you lived in the Nauvoo area, Dave?

A. [David Knowles] Since 1946. Fifty-six years, approximately.

Q. What brought you to this area?

A. [Points to wife, Margaret Ann]

Q. So you were born in this area?

A. [Margaret Ann Knowles] Yes.

A. [DK] She is the native.

Q. What occupations have you had in Nauvoo?

A. I have been school superintendent for twelve years here. I was executive director of the Hancock County Mental Health Center for twenty years, mayor of the city for four years, city council member for two years, and chairman of the Grape Festival Committee for three years.

Q. What are some of the challenges you think there are living in Nauvoo?

A. I think the city of Nauvoo is a bedroom community. The thing that's attractive to us is that it is quiet, kind of unassuming. You can leave your workplace, come back to Nauvoo, and relax. It's just a nice place to be a part of. But there's no future here for people like yourself. You're either going to be working in Fort Madison or working in Burlington or someplace, and then you're going to move. Basically it's a community of older folks.

Q. So many of the residents of Nauvoo don't have young families?

A. Right. We have young families. Margaret Ann and I have four children. One is in Texas, one is in Bloomington, one is in North Carolina, and one is here. So one out of four settled here. He works in Fort Madison. Basically this is his home, and he works elsewhere.

It doesn't lend itself to industry, where you can go and become involved in the community economically. There are some occupations—for example, selling insurance or selling real estate, that sort of thing—but as superintendent of the school, most of the teachers that I employed came from other areas. They would come into Nauvoo and teach.

Q. Does Nauvoo have any traditions as a city?

A. The grape festival is a tradition. It started out during the Depression as a farmers' market. The city would have it in the fall—in late August and early September. All the farmers would bring their produce to town, and they would have a sell out. It might be a weekend, and they would set up and sell all the produce they had developed on their farms.

Then it gradually turned into the grape festival. The wine industry of course was here, and the cheese industry was here by the late '40s. So it became a grape festival. Then the owners went to Roquefort, France, where bleu cheese was originally manufactured. They became a sister city to Roquefort, France. They would have the wedding of the wine and cheese, and that's what made the city of Nauvoo as far as the Germans were concerned.

Q. So are you familiar with the beginning of the wine industry?

A. Yes. Actually the French Icarians are given credit for bringing in the wine industry—I think they were not here long enough to see it flourish. The Germans took up the wine growing and vineyards, and they were the ones that actually developed wine and started several breweries here.

They had breweries in Nauvoo, and the limestone caves where they would age their beer became the caves that made possible the aging of Nauvoo bleu cheese.

Q. Were any of your ancestors part of the wine industry?

A. [MK] Somewhat, if you go back far enough—distant cousins, aunts, and uncles. Yes.

Q. Why do you think it declined over the years?

A. Basically it declined because of a labor intensity that is required to raise grapes and to make wine. When I first came to Nauvoo, we still had seasonal labor coming in the fall to pick grapes and tomatoes. They were usually individuals from Mexico who came up and followed the harvest.

With the advent of minimum wages and the advent of Hardee's and the other fast-food establishments where the young people go get jobs, it was no longer possible for the vineyards to hire the young people to pick grapes and to do that sort of work. Labor was just not available. We had hundreds of orchards that succumbed as well, because of the lack of labor.

Q. When did the industry of the bleu cheese come about?

A. The late thirties, 1936–37, first through selling milk door-to-door.

Q. Since you were mayor for four years and also two years on the city council, what are some of the compliments and complaints you've heard about the Mormon culture in Nauvoo? How do the citizens feel about the culture, and what they have done on the flats of Nauvoo?

A. During the period when I was mayor, Dr. Leroy Kimball came to town. I dealt with Dr. Kimball politely. The problem with the Mormon Nauvoo Restoration, Inc. [NRI], is that it was super secret. Dr. Kimball said that the NRI "was not going to be a big deal. We are just buying a few houses, putting them together, and remodeling them, making them look good." Maybe this is what he had in mind at the particular time.

It seems to me that for whatever reason, the Church has an abundance of money, and what it really wants to do, it has the money to do it. Mormons were well organized, well schooled. The plans were put in place, and maybe the plans have been in place for years that they would return to Nauvoo, rebuild the temple, and restructure the flats the way it was back in 1839 to 1847. At any rate, there is a lot of animosity.

We have lived here for years and years, and there was not really a Mormon influence. We had the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [Community of Christ] down on the flat. We had the Methodists, Presbyterians, and the Catholics, and everybody knew everybody. When the Mormon families began moving in from Utah and those starting the Nauvoo restoration, they were a different group. They were pretty much exclusive and associated primarily with themselves. However, I don't know what is involved with their religious practices, and maybe that's the way they are. They are very family oriented, so perhaps they are member oriented as well.

Q. When Mormons started buying plots of land down on the flats, do you think they were secret about their

intentions on what they were going to do?

A. Yes, I am sure they were. They had Preston Kimball, who was an attorney and also a relative of Dr. Kimball, who was just buying land. No one knew for whom or what the land was for.

Q. In 1846 conflicts between the Mormons in Nauvoo and citizens in the surrounding areas led to the exodus of the Mormons. What is your understanding of what those conflicts might have been?

A. Well, what I say is hearsay. The things I understood was either you were with them or you were against them. It was that simple. There were just two sides of the street; the Mormons were on one side, and the rest of the people were on the other.

Consequently, if they felt like they got credit—whether they deserved the credit or not, I am not sure—but as I understood, parts of the army [Nauvoo Legion] were gatherers. They would just go out and surround a farmhouse and keep the farmer and his family in the house while other people took their livestock and loaded it up and brought it back to Nauvoo. Basically, you hear that story so many times, and it happened supposedly in Pontoosuc and in the Niota area, and also the Warsaw area. So where there is smoke, there has got to be some fire. Now whether those people were actually sent by Joseph Smith or whether they were just people working on the run, I have no way of knowing. This was over a hundred years ago.

Those were the stories that Margaret Ann and I have grown up with. The people who have lived here and continue to live here after the Mormon exodus say that is part of the reason, that they were not good neighbors.

Q. Any additional stories about how they [the Mormons] provoked people?

A. [MK] I think if someone came on my land and took my cattle—those were the stories. If they felt like they needed the meat to serve their people, they just went out and took it.

A. The people who were shut down for publishing the *Expositor* were critical of Joseph Smith and the way he was operating. The city court, which he had under his charter and had the right to do so, declared that the *Expositor* was causing problems, so they came in and confiscated all the type and the printing presses. That was the beginning of the end.

Q. Do you have any ancestors or relatives that are members of the Mormon faith?

A. I don't.

A. [MK] I have a great aunt that married one, apparently here in Nauvoo, and went west out to Utah in the

1840s. I don't know much about her. Christine Duland, her name was.

A. Other stories were that Joseph Smith was a womanizer; he had dozens of wives, and I don't think that is something deniable. It happened and supposedly does not happen anymore, but I think that was something that people were opposed to here. Philosophically, I don't know if they wanted many children, but that was a major concern of the people who were not Mormons.

Q. What stories have you heard about the polygamist Mormons in Nauvoo?

A. Modern-day?

Q. Today it is not legal to be practicing polygamy, and the LDS faith has done away with the practice. In Nauvoo it was a part of their faith it was doctrine. How do you feel about the practice?

A. [MK] Other than what is on TV, that is what I know. Recently a gentleman has defied Utah state laws, and he was on trial for the charges.

A. I think he was charged and found guilty because he appeared on TV and admitted to the fact that he had several wives, and that has just been lately. Around here it is not a concern.

Q. With Nauvoo having over 160 years of history now, what is the overall feeling about Mormon history?

A. They were a very industrious people, Joseph Smith was able to get a tremendous amount of things done. They built brick homes that are standing today; they had a brick factory. You have to say that the beginning of present-day Nauvoo has to be credited to Joseph Smith and his followers.

Q. Margaret Ann, did you have any ancestors that were a part of the Icarians?

A. [MK] Probably. I think of the Baxters. They were involved with the wine industry. My father is German, and mother Irish. Once the Germans and Icarians came in, they intermingled just like any other town with a bunch of different faiths and people.

Q. What legacy have the Icarians left for Nauvoo?

A. The vineyards. They had an idea, although the plan didn't work. You had Etienne Cabet, and of course his followers melted into the community and married Germans and other people. So even though you can trace your ancestors, it's not a situation where you can pinpoint whether your ancestors came in with the Icarians or not.

We had one lady, Lillian Snyder, who was an Icarian, and she can trace her ancestors all the way back to the Icarians.

Q. In modern-day Nauvoo, what other types of faiths are here?

A. Presbyterian, Mormon, Methodist, Lutheran. RLDS, Baptist, and Catholic.

Q. So we talked about the growth of the Mormon Church in the area, how they might have been secretive and had plans or other motives than stated. What are the feelings as the years have gone by and you've seen the Mormon Church restore buildings and build visitors' centers? I'm sure you two would like to see things stay as quiet as possible around here.

A. [MK] That's the main reason we settled here. We were gone for a while and came back twenty years ago because we liked it here. When the Mormons first started restoring down here, we thought it was wonderful, because the people on the flats were very poor. They had no money, and the Church gave them good money for their land.

A. It (much of the buildings and grounds) was an eyesore on the flats.

A. [MK] As time went on, it just seemed like more and more was gobbled up; and now with the traffic and all that is going on, it becomes a bit too much. One day when I went by I heard one of the guides talking to a group of people. I heard him say just as I went by that they wanted to keep Nauvoo a little sleepy river town. Well, it is certainly not going to happen. We're older and we can live with that, but the young people may be driven out.

The taxes will become higher before too many years. There will be all Mormons on the school boards, all Mormons on the councils, and their iiles and regulations will come into play.

A. If they have the majority, that's the way it goes, but really the influence is the tourists coming in, crowding the streets. And they have been rather rude. I am sure if you talked to some of the members of the Mormon church who have been here for many years, they will also attest to the fact that the people coming in have a feeling or attitude like they're thinking, "Dave Knowles was instrumental in running my ancestors out of Nauvoo 150 years ago, so I don't like him," even though none of us had anything to do with that.

When they started building the temple—the hustle, bustle, and closing streets and the things that went on—people were thinking that we couldn't do that if we wanted to do something. They wouldn't allow us to close the street to do this, but they can close the street. It had been a few years of disruptions that people are not really pleased with, but

maybe when the temple is completed and all the construction people have gone home and the temple is just doing those things which the temple is designed to do, hopefully things may calm down, but we will still have tourists come in March through November.

It's difficult for people like myself, or other people, to understand what a temple is all about when you put in thirty million dollars to a project and then claim you don't worship here. "We just do weddings and . . ."

A. [MK] They say it's the house of the Lord, but no one else is allowed in. Even not all Mormons are allowed in. We call our church the house of the Lord also, but our church is open to anyone at anytime.

A. It is really not important that I understand that. An awful lot of people think, "There is this nice chapel you have. They're building this temple, so what is it going to be used for?"

A. [MK] We are not unaware of the fact that everything that the Church has done is beautiful. The statue garden and all of the works they've done and everything they have restored are really pretty.

A. I am not critical of you or your religion—what you believe or how you believe—as long as you are not critical of what I believe. It's not so bad now as how it used to be. As a matter of fact, I don't think there are people going door-to-door here at all. In the past we have had some very aggressive missionaries who would come to the door and demand to come in and talk. We would tell them that we were happy with the Catholic Church.

I've read the Book of Mormon, and it's not that I am opposed to the information. I do a lot of reading, and my major is political science, so I am not a person who has closed ears, but it was difficult when missionaries would insist on coming in. Maybe someday in the near future you yourself will have to do a year or two of service somewhere; maybe you have already done it.

Q. Yes, I served a mission in Rome, Italy. I know how you feel at times. I have Jehovah's Witnesses knock on my door, and me being happy with my faith, it gets frustrating if they are too aggressive. We are trained to testify boldly but not to be overbearing.

How essential do you think the tourism in Nauvoo is for the economy?

A. The business people think it is okay. The question is with all the construction. I can't think of too many local people that are working down on the temple site. Most of them are people who have been brought in from other areas. Perhaps constructing the temple is specific in nature and requires a certain contractor to do the work. Basically tourism does help, to a degree, our local businesses. We didn't depend on tourism in the past, but when it does start to come in, you become more dependent on it.

Chicago Tribune reporter came down and interviewed some of the Mormon people. They [the Mormons] pointed out that the draft house is a house of sin. I think there is enough blame on both sides, and that we were going to have to learn to live together. I think that the Mormons are here—they're here to stay. Certainly Margaret Ann and I are here to stay, and we are just going to learn how to live together.

Q. What were your feelings, your initial reaction, when you first heard that the Mormons were going to build a temple here?

A. My question was, “Why?” Then I thought. *If it is going to sense a purpose, and if President Hinckley wants to go down in history as the temple builder, that’s fine.* He has a lot of money, apparently. I am not saying anything that I haven’t heard somewhere else.

I’m not sure anyone when we first heard thought too much about it, except “Why.” This was such a small community for such a large building. It really disrupts a sleepy river town.

Last Sunday the contractors had the road closed in front of the Catholic church, and my first inclination was, What are people going to do? How are they going to get to church? Why would they pick Friday morning to start the road project instead of Monday morning and try to get it done by Friday?

Q. Do you think things will change a lot when the temple is finished?

A. [M] It won’t change for us. I had a lady predict that she imagined Nauvoo would be 40,000 before ten years are up. We may have a big inflation in the population, but I can’t imagine it will be that much.

A. I was told a similar thing once the St. Louis Temple was built, but you just don’t see a lot of things besides the occasional wedding.

A. [MK] Do you foresee a lot of people moving in?

Q. I don’t think people will be bringing their families here. I can see a few elderly couples wanting to retire out here.

A. [MK] We have no infrastructure here. Our streets are not even wide enough for buses and all the things that go on.

Q. What would you like to see with the future of Nauvoo?

A. [MK] We could have gone a lot of different places to settle. We chose Nauvoo because it was a sleepy river town. I love the small town. I don’t enjoy the hustle and bustle of a larger town. I’m sure that it will settle down. It’s beautiful—that is, the things the Mormons are doing and building in Nauvoo.

Q. For the past few years now, BYU students have been attending school in Nauvoo. Have you ever been in any contact with some of the students here?

A. No, though I have spoken to a few.

Q. What are your feelings about the BYU students being here?

A. No problem at all. I think there's an awful lot to be said about Brigham Young University, and if it turns into a junior college someday, I say more power to them.

A. [MK] The other day I walked into the drugstore, and there must have been ten young students there who didn't make way, and I had to ask permission to get by because they were blocking the doorway. The next time you see them, they're stepping off the sidewalk and being very polite, but you have that everywhere in every situation. Some people are oblivious to what is going on, and others are polite and nice.

A. I think when the Church puts on big events, like *The City of Joseph*, they could have better control. It's a great production.

Q. Do you find Mormons taking an active role in the community?

A. Yes. They are more so, I think.

Q. Are there any other comments, anything else you would like to say?

A. No. I don't know of anything else that needs to be said. If I have any problems, then I can just blame them on Amy. [laughs]

John LaCroix

Bunside, Illinois

Birthday unknown (1925?)

Interview on October 4, 2001, in his home by Jeff Johnson

Patricia LaCroix and Jedediah Briggs also present