

A. I know it was built by 1830. I also know that they started homesteading it by 1824. They built just a small log shack that they lived in while they were building the main house.

Q. How big is it?

A. It's pretty big for the time it was built. The log cabin part was two story, and it's fifty by, I think, eighteen feet. I should remember, as much work as I did in it. There is another part that was built on to it a few years after that, which wasn't log cabin style. It's a pretty good-sized home.

Q. How did Samantha know Emma? Was it through relations in town?

A. I would assume that she probably knew of her. How well she would have known her I have no idea. But with the turmoil that took place, the rest of them leaving, and her staying here, I would say she would have taken her in even if she didn't know them very well—that's the kind of woman she was.

Q. Well, you certainly do have a great history.

A. I don't know how great it is, but it's long, [chuckles]

Q. We appreciate you sitting here with us and telling us about it.

A. I hope it helped you in some way. It would have been a lot more fun if I could have said my great-grandfather shot Joseph and you could have gone home with that story, but it just don't work, [chuckles]

## **Estel Neff**

*Nauvoo, Illinois*

*Birthday: September 29, 1928*

*Interview on November 15, 2001, in his bookstore by Jedediah Briggs Rachel Alley also present*

Q. [Jedediah Briggs] Tell me a little about your personal history.

A. [Estel Neff] I was born in Hancock County in 1928 about halfway between Nauvoo and Carthage. I've lived in the Nauvoo area all my life. I went to a country grade school, a one-room school. I went to Carthage for high school. Then I went to the University of Illinois for two years in Champaign, Illinois, for two years. I've dealt with the happenings of Nauvoo for as long as I can remember.

The first thing I can remember about Nauvoo is with the RLDS Church [Community of Christ]. They had a camp or reunion here every summer and would come and spend two weekends in Nauvoo. I had cousins from Iowa that came down here as well, and I'd get to camp with them. As we got older and into high school, my parents told me that I was related to Joseph Smith and that I was a descendent of Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack through their daughter Katharine [also spelled Catherine]. I knew there was something about this relationship, but my parents didn't tell us until that age on account of persecution from the other kids. Anything about Joseph Smith or the Mormons was usually negative, and here in Hancock County they'd make fun of it. My parents saved me from that ridicule.

I went to the University of Illinois for two years and did my research thesis on Joseph Smith and Nauvoo—I got an A. I don't know where my thesis is now, but my mother says she probably threw it away. She didn't keep anything around that she didn't need. She always disposed of a lot of things.

After two years of college I married my present wife. We've been married for fifty-three years. We've raised five daughters, and I think I'm still half sane, [chuckles] After we got married we worked for my dad and farmed for a couple of years. We then went out on our own to run a dairy farm and went in partnership with someone, but things didn't go too well.

We moved to Kirksville, Missouri, and we had milk cows for a doctor from St. Louis. That got tiresome, so we moved back to Illinois, and I got a job as a professional farm manager for the State Central Bank at Keokuk, Iowa. They had a lot of farms that I managed for nonresident owners. I think I was there for fourteen years, and then I went into business on my own. I was a grain dryer dealer for Behlen Manufacturing Company from Nebraska, and I represented them for approximately thirty years. Along with that I bought a grain elevator with some partners. We had two grain elevators. We sold commercial feed until 1986, then I left the grain elevators and sat out a couple of years.

Then I told my wife I was going to open a bookstore. We came to Nauvoo to look for a place to open one, but there wasn't any place available. Finally, we located a spot in Hamilton, between Carthage, Illinois, and Nauvoo. I was there for ten years before a spot opened up in Nauvoo. I've been in Nauvoo for four years, and I've had the bookstore for fourteen years. It gets better all the time since I started my own business. It took some time to develop it, but it's about the most interesting profession I've ever had. There's a lot of fine people. I learn a lot. You never get too old to learn. I don't care how much you know, you're going to learn some more. In about 1988, in fact, the first year I opened the book store, I saw on the TV that the Mormon History Association was going to meet in Quincy, Illinois. I wanted to find out about that. I heard about a Mormon fellow in Nauvoo that owned a paper, and he'd probably be able to tell me how to get there and whether I'd be welcome or not—because I wasn't a member.

So I came up here to Nauvoo and saw Mike Trapp for the first time in my life. I think the next day we rode down to Quincy together, if I remember right. I attended that day's session and every day until it was over with. While I was there, I met a lady there by the name of Oma Wilcox from Utah. She was a descendent of the Ellison family, whom I am a descendent of from my father's side.

My wife was writing a book about the fifth generation of the Ellison family and had been corresponding with this lady about how to get their descendants from the Ellisons that went west—one Ellison went west—the same as the Smith family. In the Smith family, the only one that went west was Hyrum's widow. The Ellison family came over in 1842—the father and mother and eight children. Three of the children were already married when they came over from England. John was the oldest. When the exodus came, Hyrum's widow went west, and the rest of the Smiths stayed here. John Ellison went west and the rest of the Ellisons stayed here. Most of them are still here between Carthage and Nauvoo. About every other person out there, in that area, is related to me—or I'm related to them. Most of them claim me.

That's the way we got started. When we started the bookstore, I didn't have to go out and buy a book; I just started digging out boxes from under my bed and the closets, and we opened up the bookstore. I had been buying

historical books about the area and Mormonism-related books, most of them anti-Mormon books. If you read enough of those anti-Mormon books, they'll almost convert you—but you know they're all wrong after you've read the Book of Mormon.

In 1991 the Smith family had a reunion out here. I heard about it, called the visitors' center, and asked how I could get tickets to go to it, because I wanted to go to it. The gal turned me over to the director. Brother Hyrum Smith. I told him what I wanted, and he asked, "Why do you want to come?" I said that I was descendant of the Smith family through Katharine, who was Joseph and Hyrum's sister. He said he was descended through Hyrum, so that would make us cousins. He told me that I didn't have to join anything, just come up and enjoy it. So I did.

We always talked to each other twice a year on the phone and had become good friends. After I called him for something one time, he said that he understood that I was taking the missionary lessons. I told him I was. He asked me if I intended to join, and I told him that I did. He told me not to set the date until I talked to him. I said, "You wouldn't come all the way from Seattle, Washington, just to see me get baptized." And he said no, but that he was going to perform the baptism. He said, "You can't get baptized unless I do it. That would be wrong." That was Hyrum Mack Smith. He used to be the head of the visitors' center here in Nauvoo in 1990.

After I got myself baptized, I spent a lot of time at the visitors' center. Susan Easton Black was on her mission here—she set up the Land and Record Office, and we got to be good friends. She left a message there that if I was ever going to get baptized, they were to notify her. One night I got a call from her, and she told me she was going to speak at my baptism. Susan Easton Black and Paul Peel—he and his wife were on a mission here in Nauvoo—and he spoke also. We filled the chapel. It was the largest baptism they ever had in this ward—about 135, by far the biggest we ever had. From then on it's been a good blessing. I keep meeting fine Mormons. I've never met a bad one yet. I have met some almost as odd as I am.

Q. What do you mean by that?

A. Well, just different. Some people think I'm different. You'll never get to see this on this thing [pointing to the recorder], but I have long hair, a ponytail, and a full beard. I've had that beard for twenty-six years. I grew it for the bicentennial year back in 1976. I started it in 1975, and I've had it ever since. It's been trimmed once.

Q. Has it just been growing?

A. Well, it doesn't grow anymore. It just falls out. Most people think that I look like Joseph III or Joseph F. They say I have a resemblance to both of them, and I can see it—if I take my glasses off. With the glasses it's not so much. I've been around here for a while, and I'm still enjoying life. As far as I know, I'm still happy. Do you have any more questions for me?

Q. Could you tell me about the book Hugh Nibley signed for you?

A. He wrote in the first book, "Dear Sister Neff" instead of "Brother Neff." So I went and bought another book and specified that I wanted it to say Brother Neff. He signed it, "Dear Edsel, Attila, Estel, do I got it right now? I hope so." I still have both books.

Q. Your name comes from Germany, right?

A. The Neff side came from the German-Swiss border area. As near as we can trace, the “Estel” is back to Attila the Hun. He was a bad German guy in the early history of the country. We had spent years trying to figure out where that name came from. My grandmother told me that she had just heard of it—she gave that name to my uncle. It came down to me, and she didn’t know where it came from exactly. So my wife did her research, and she believes that it came from Attila the Hun. So I think it’s a German name that comes from Attila the Hun.

Q. In your ancestry your mother’s side comes through Katharine, the younger sister of Joseph Smith Jr. She is your third-great-grandmother?

A. Yes.

Q. Who did she marry?

A. Wilkens Salisbury. They lived out in Ramus, Illinois. Solomon J. Salisbury was her son. His daughter was my great-grandmother Ella Sherman. She had a son whose name was Elmer Sherman, who is my grandfather. His daughter, my mother, was Gayle Sherman. That’s my whole family history.

Q. Your father’s side was Ellison, and they were members also?

A. Yes. They were converted in England.

Q. Do you know your family history on that side?

A. Matthew and Jane were the parents that came over in 1842 with their eight children. I’m a descendant of their daughter Lucy. She married Jon Thornber. Then they had a daughter that married a Siegfried. My grandmother Lucy Siegfried married Chapin Neff, and then my dad was Glen Neff.

Q. You talked about doing a thesis in college about Joseph Smith. Why did you want to do it on him?

A. It was supposed to be a subject that you could document well. It was supposed to be connected with history.

It meant more to me because I'm a descendant of Joseph Smith and was affiliated with Nauvoo—especially as a young kid. Nauvoo came to my mind and the Smith family. I asked the instructor about it, and she said it would be fine, as long as I documented everything I wrote. I went over to the university library, which had everything that I needed to document. That's the way it happened.

Q. What did you think about your ancestor once you started researching him more?

A. I didn't really get into the doctrine or anything like that, only about polygamy and the Mormon War here in Hancock County. I didn't know too much about it at the time. It was a short thesis, and it only was supposed to be seven pages. We had to document where we found all the information—it was called a research thesis." It came easy once I got into it.

Q. Is that what helped you get into learning about Mormons and the history as well?

A. I think I was interested in modern history when I was in high school. I learned about World War I; but World War II was happening when I was in high school. When I was growing up all the grown-ups talked about World War I; of course. World War II happened when I was growing up in high school from '42 to '46. I didn't care about ancient history as much. The least of my worries was ancient history.

Q. Why did you come here to Nauvoo to start a bookstore?

A. Because I have a store full of local history—Mormon history, anti-Mormon books, Indians, and the Old West. This is where the tourists are.

Q. It says on the outside of this building "Temple House." What is the meaning of that?

A. Only that it's a half a block from the Nauvoo Temple location and built in 1868 to 1869.

Q. Was this built during the same period as the first Nauvoo Temple?

A. No, it was built in 1869 after the Mormons left. I think the two steps leading into the store are temple stones. They sure look like they're cut stones. Nobody knows of any stonecutters in Nauvoo after the Mormons left. The Icarians built some buildings out of the temple's stones. There were a lot of houses built here with the temple stones—a lot of people just wanted to clean up the mess and took what they wanted.

Q. What are the causes or conflicts that forced the Mormons to leave Nauvoo in 1846?

A. It was an extension of the pattern in Kirtland. They grew so fast that people got scared. People didn't know anything about Mormons. The only thing published about them was anti. They then went to Missouri and got run out of there for the same reason. The Missourians were afraid that the Mormons were going to start to take over. It always happened when they gathered. When they got run out of Missouri, they came over to Nauvoo. Warsaw was the biggest town in the county, about five hundred in population. Within a couple of years they had five to ten thousand people with them. It got up to twenty thousand, they say. Warsaw was still five hundred. The non-Mormons didn't control the county anymore. The Mormons could elect anyone they wanted to office—they even elected a Mormon sheriff. The people didn't like that. People didn't read the Book of Mormon and didn't understand what it was about. It was just fear, basically. Another thing was that people used the Church as a cover-up to steal things. They joined the Church, not necessarily to participate in it, but they would become a member. There were cattle thieves and horse stealers. They lived here or around Nauvoo. It's all documented. It's just like today. Drug dealers don't go out to the middle of the desert and sell drugs to each other, but they go where the people are and the money is—otherwise you can't do business. Here in Nauvoo there were lots of horses and cattle, and they would steal them. In fact, there is a book called *Banditti of the Prairie*. It's written about a guy in Montrose. He tells a story about three governors from three states that hired him to infiltrate a gang that would steal horses and cattle from around here. The gang would take them off to Missouri and down into St. Louis, where there was a market for horses and cattle. They would sell them there. They would go to Cincinnati, Ohio, and they would rob people all over there. They had a place there where they were reprinting bogus money. They'd buy this bogus money and sell it in Chicago, Detroit, and Columbus. He got infiltrated into this gang and made the whole circle with them one time. He testified against them in court. There were three of them that they got the goods on. They had a trial—I think it was in Burlington or Fort Madison. They hung three of them. But the rope broke on one of them. They felt bad about that. They told him that if he confessed to everything, then they wouldn't hang him. He didn't confess, because there were a lot of other people involved. So they did hang him again, and the rope didn't break. It was pretty wild country around here. This was the frontier. People don't realize that. The Mormons had just come from Missouri, which was the absolute frontier. It was Indian territory out west past Independence. When the Mormons first came here, Iowa wasn't even a state yet—it was Iowa territory. Eighteen forty-six is when it became a state, the year of the exodus.

Q. The Mormons actually helped Iowa become a state because of their population.

A. There's so much history in Nauvoo besides the Mormons. You've got the Icarians, who split and left. Half of them went to Texas and the other half to southwest Iowa. They were French communists, who lived communally. The men lived in one house and the women in another, but they would all eat together. That was the only time that the women and men were supposed to be together. I don't think that has ever worked yet. They got frustrated and split up and left. Then you've got the German Catholics, who came in after the Icarians left. They've been kind of the thriving source here ever since.

Q. What story were you telling me about the Mormons who would always steal things?

A. We used to get together at the local coffee shop. It was a gathering place where farmers would get together and tell wild stories. When I went in there one day, there were only two people in there. There was one guy I've known ever since I was a little kid, and he was telling the other guy a wild story about how bad the Mormons were—that they would steal anything. In fact, his grandmother would tell him stories about how they used to steal clothes right off the

clothesline. I happened to know him and how old he was. I knew his dad and about how old he would have been. So I knew how old his grandmother would have been. I listened for a while: then finally I got up, went down to the table where they were talking, and said, "Now, Neil, when did your grandmother die?" He told me. I said, "That means she would have been born around 1890, or something like that?" He agreed. I said, "Well, tell me how she ever saw Mormons steal clothes off the line when they run them all out of here in 1846? That was fifty years before she was born" He said, "That wouldn't figure, would it?" I said, "She didn't tell you that. That story has just been handed down to you from your family year after year. Your great-grandmother might have said something like that. But until you get your years right, you probably ought not tell that story anymore." He got mad, and of course he didn't speak to me for two or three years. He does speak now, or rather he grunts. He's avoided me ever since. I can tell you another one that just happened last week. I went over here across the street to the antique mall. There was a lady that works in there. She had always said, "Be sure and let me know when they're going to have the open house, because I want to go see it. I understand that's the only time non-Mormons can go in there." I told her she was right. So I went in. Another lady was there, and I said, "You've got your tickets to the open house yet?" She said, "No, I don't think I even want to go in that thing." I said, "Well, you might want to consider it because that'll be the only chance you get to go in it unless you join the Church." She said, "Well, I'm not going to join the Church, I'll tell you that." I said, "Well, you ought to get some tickets anyway. You might be more at ease if you knew what was in there." She sat there for a little bit, then said, "I'll tell you this. I wish every one of them would get out of this town." [chuckles] And she knew who I was. I've listened to that all my life. You've got a lady down here in the grocery store that bad-mouths the Mormons all the time. Of course she only does that when she thinks they're not Mormons. When Mormons are there, she don't say much.

Q. Are there any interesting stories that come through your ancestors?

A. Katharine Smith bought forty acres out here of what they call the "shake-rag district" between Ramus and Burnside, Illinois. After the exodus, when she was having financial problems and couldn't make the payment on it for one or two years, she wrote a letter to Brigham Young and told him the problems. He sent her money from Salt Lake to make the payment. I have two letters in her own handwriting that she wrote, not stating anything of importance. She was in Lamoni, Iowa, at one time, and she wrote a letter to her son that she was going to get on a train on such and such a day, and she wanted him to meet her. In another letter she was writing to one of her daughters to get her some certain kind of material in Burlington, Iowa. She wanted a certain kind of material to make a blouse or dress or something. I have both of those actual letters in her handwriting. I know of very little else that she had left. Solomon J. wrote a book just before he died of his reminiscences and about what he remembered of his mother and everything. They intended to go to St. Louis when they left here. They came to Nauvoo, built a raft, and headed down the Mississippi River to go to St. Louis. They went south of Warsaw, Illinois, and met a steamer, but it swamped and they lost all of their possessions, but they did save their lives on an island. Katharine and her husband spent that cold winter on that island, with wild game, and they had to cut wood for fire. Then they came back to Nauvoo after that terrible winter. Katharine and her husband got word to somebody in Ramus to come and get them and meet them in Warsaw. Somebody brought two wagons to haul their possessions in. Katharine and her husband were nearly dead on their back. The guy asked them where the rest of their stuff was, and they told them that was all that they had. Solomon states in his book that when the fellow finally came to get Katharine and her husband and saw how destitute they were, he broke down next to the wagon wheel and cried and cried and cried. Katharine said that they were used not to having anything. So that's how they got back to Ramus, and they stayed there the rest of their lives. Solomon stayed out there his whole life, and his family all lived there.

Q. What is your understanding of how Joseph Smith was viewed by his enemies in the 1840s, and how is he viewed by succeeding generations down to the present?

A. His enemies thought him to be a farce. Nobody ever accused him of being a fallen prophet when they were

his enemies. They just thought he was a shyster who was taking his people, their money, possessions, and anything else. They tried to institute twice the Order of Enoch, when everybody gave their property to the Church. I believe Brigham Young even tried to initiate that afterward when they got to Utah. But the law of consecration just did not seem to work, and so it finally came down to tithing. Everybody knew he was a polygamist among the antis. I think, as far as history is concerned, everybody knows that he was. He didn't call it that. He just called it being sealed to women. Todd Compton's book *In Sacred Loneliness* researched thirty-three of them that he was sealed to here in Nauvoo. It all started back in Kirtland when he got the first inkling that he was to start this principle. He told Emma and Hyrum that he couldn't tell them everything that the Lord had told him because the people weren't ready for it. It had to come slower and slower, because most people weren't ready for it—though some of them accepted it. That was the big thing. That just shook the local people up something terrible—the polygamists, the horse thieves, the cattle rustlers, and the fear that they could never have control of their country again. So basically just fear.

Q. You think that the local citizens feared something they didn't understand?

A. Of course they didn't understand it. You couldn't tell an anti anything. If you ever try to read an anti book, you'll understand that.

Q. Did the politics at the time have anything to do with the conflicts?

A. Yes. By the election results, they probably did vote as a bloc. The antis thought that the leaders made them vote in a certain way. I think it was how it is today. Joseph Smith probably said that he was going to vote for someone, and the members, if they believed in the Prophet, didn't want to vote against him. But I have found nothing where he ordered them to vote.

Q. How do you think that Joseph Smith is viewed today?

A. Definitely in a better light. From Joseph Smith to Brigham Young all the way down to the present one, Gordon B. Hinckley, I think each one is viewed better and better.

Q. What do the people around Nauvoo say about Joseph Smith today?

A. People generally don't speak too well of him, unless they're Mormon. It's a hand-me-down deal. Nobody knows anything—only what's been handed down to them from five generations past. That's how it's been all of my life.

I've got a second insight on it because when I joined the Church I didn't tell anybody; I didn't get it put into the paper or nothing. Most of the antis that I had known all my life didn't know that I was a member, and I didn't bother to tell them. So they always spattered off to me, and I wouldn't say anything back to them. I would listen just to find out all I could.

Q. Is the current restoration process that started back in the 1950s good or bad for Nauvoo?

A. Most people would say that it has been good. There are probably eight or ten families that would object to anything—even though they're Catholics, they'd probably object to building a new Catholic church. There are just always people that are against things. We've got a few in this town, and that's the way it will always be. It never changes.

Q. Do you think the tourism has helped stimulate the economy?

A. Definitely. This town would have dried up and blown away. We only have one industry here, and that's the cheese factory. It employs about seventy or eighty people. Everyone else that works and lives here has to go to Fort Madison or Keokuk; there's no other jobs here besides working in a restaurant.

Q. What was your reaction about the announcement of the rebuilding of the Nauvoo Temple?

A. About four years ago Elder Ricks, who was in charge of the visitors' center, called me one night and said that there were some people here from Utah interested in spending some money in Nauvoo. They wanted to know if I'd come up and visit with them. They wanted to talk to someone that has lived here all their life. I went up to the visitors' center, and they introduced me to a father and son, who sat on my right, and maybe an uncle on my left. The older fellow on my left had to be seventy- eight to eighty years old. We visited and they asked a lot of questions about what I thought the townspeople would do if they spent a pile of money in here somewhere. I told them what I thought, which was there would probably be about half a dozen families that would object to anything. I told them that if they came in here and were going to do something, that they'd better announce it and do it the next day—don't talk about it and let all the antis bad-mouth it for a year or two. I told them that I thought it would go over all right.

They talked to me how I thought they should spend their money. I wasn't a longtime member of the Church at that time, so I didn't know much about it. They had just closed the Catholic girls' school here, and I told them that it would be a good idea to buy that, because I knew that BYU was having a semester in Nauvoo. BYU had been doing that for a couple of years, and it had had a hard time finding a place for the kids to stay. I told them that I didn't know whether BYU would be interested in something like that or even if the Catholics would sell it, but it's sitting there empty. The local people might like to see that school stay there. I told them that that would take an awful big pile of money. Everything went quiet, and the old fellow said, "We've got that kind of money." We talked about things in general for a while—mostly about non-Mormons and their attitudes and what they thought about the restoration program.

Finally, I think the father said, "What would be the ultimate? If you could do anything you wanted to in this town for the betterment (and they did bring out betterment of the town and the Church), what would you do?"

I said, "Well, depending on what BYU does with the academy—if you got that bought, if they wanted it to hold school there—but if they're not interested in it and it's still sitting there vacant after they'd got it, you just might tear it down and get it out of the way and build the temple."

Things got quiet then. Finally, I got the nerve to say, "That would take an awful pile of money."

It went quiet for about twenty seconds again. Finally the old fellow on the left says, “We’ve got that kind of money.”

We just all went home, and I forgot who they were. They weren’t common names in the Church—I can recognize a Marriott or Huntsman or a name like that, but I’d only heard of one of the names before in the Church, but the other one I never had. I aggravated myself for forgetting their names, but President Hinckley Finally announced it later at April conference.

Q. How much time passed between the interview you had and the announcement of the Nauvoo Temple?

A. It was about two years. I had no idea he was going to announce it. Most people were pretty jubilant about it except eight or ten families around town. They started bad-mouthing it. I’m going to say Five or six weeks after he announced that, a fellow walked in one day, introduced himself, and told me he was an attorney from Salt Lake City. He represented the people that are putting up the temple. He understood that they visited with me, and they gave him my name so that he could visit with me. Therefore, I talked to them and their attorney. I’ve never told anybody their names yet, because it is to be an anonymous gift, and that’s the way it’s going to be unless the Church announces it. Then I’ll tell them whether they’re right or wrong.

Q. What’s the general feeling about the temple now that it’s close to completion?

A. As a town it’s pretty well accepted except for eight or ten people around.

Q. How do you think the temple will affect things here in Nauvoo?

A. That, I wish I knew. I’ve never participated in an open house before—as far as my business is concerned—and I don’t know what to order for the store. Everyone says that I’ll have bare walls when it’s over with. I’ve never experienced anything like that. It’ll be like that for a little time. They’ll be mobs of people here every day for the open house.

My concern is that the people who come here will be considerate and congenial with the natives. We get people here in this store from Salt Lake or California that don’t act proper, and we’ve had to ask them to leave. They have just not been taught how to act. They do not own this town. They do not own my bookstore. They have no right to pull up to someone’s lawn and park on it even if they can’t find any parking. They don’t have the right to do that—it’s against the law. I hope they come in here and act congenial and proper, because if you get one or two that don’t, it’ll make every paper in the Midwest. Anything that’s bad gets in the paper, but anything nice doesn’t get in the paper. I hope people just remember that they’re guests in this town.

Q. Are you excited for the Nauvoo Temple to go in?

A. Yes. Right after it was announced, an architect came to visit me. He got word that I knew a little about it. In fact, he came back a second time. I feel like basically Fin the only one who had some early input into it. Well, I knew that something was going to happen someday.

Q. What has your contact been with the Joseph Smith Academy?

A. When BYU came here with its first semester in Nauvoo about eight or nine semesters ago, it had classes in the evenings three nights a week. I started to go to them. I attended all of them. After about three years BYU gave me a graduation certificate for the University of Nauvoo. I'm very pleased about that. I just kept going every semester, and they'd bring in another group of kids.

I just kept going until after the fifth one they gave me a master's degree from the University of Nauvoo. Last year the ultimate came, and they gave me an honorary doctorate degree from the Joseph Smith Academy. I'm the only person anywhere in the world that holds those three degrees. They hang on my wall in the store. I'm very proud of that—I've learned a lot. I've caught a couple of instructors in mistakes, usually in local history, but I didn't embarrass them, just told them afterward. Usually in local history.

Q. How has the contact with the students been?

A. It was a lot easier to get acquainted with the students when there were only forty or forty-five of them here. With a hundred and twenty of them, it's hard to get acquainted with all of them.

We've got one girl that's a stand out now (I know she won't care if I say this), but she's got her hair dyed real red—a tall girl. She comes into the store, and she talks freely enough. I asked her what her name was: Elizabeth. Libby. I told her that I'd never remember that, so I'd have to give her a nickname. She asked me what I was going to nickname her, and I told her "Big Red." She said that she'd give me a nickname. I told her that that would be fine—she could call me "ornery." [chuckles] She hasn't called me "ornery" yet.

It was a lot easier to get acquainted with the five boys that were in each class when they only had forty to forty-five students. Four or five boys is all they had. Some of those boys would come in here and spend a whole afternoon sometimes in the wintertime when it wasn't busy. It's been real good. The girl students have been the same way. I haven't had any problems with any of them, and I don't expect to have.

Q. You talked about the possibility of tearing down the old Catholic school. What do you think the Church will want to do with it now?

A. I think that they'll tear the monastery down. I understand that it's not built how they want it. It would take a major renovation project to make it usable. The chapel in there is not conducive to an LDS chapel. I presume they've taken most of that out. I wouldn't feel right being in there—I think other people might feel that way. I think that they'll tear it down. I've had one other person tell me that they think that it will be a visitors' center for the temple, but I've got no way of knowing. We should know pretty quick. Probably within a week. If they're going to tear it down, they'll start next week. The sisters moved out today.

Q. What do you see for the future of Nauvoo?

A. I would like to see slow growth. I don't want there to be any "Mormon war." I think slow growth, and we shouldn't push it too hard. The Mormons have been accepted real well in most instances. They've created some feelings because they've doubled everybody's real estate taxes because of the people coming in are paying twice for what the house is worth. They sell a house somewhere in California, and the property values are high. They sell a house for three hundred thousand, and they have three hundred to spend—there aren't houses in Nauvoo worth that much, hardly. It's doubled people's taxes and tripled them in some cases in two years' time.

I don't know how many people are going to come in and run this temple. I'm not entirely in favor in what they're doing on the flat—building all those houses down there. I understand and see that they're going to look like period houses of the 1840s. But there wasn't that many brick houses in the 1840s. My understanding was that when the NRI came in here, they were supposed to do a restoration. That's certainly not a restoration—that's new building. There isn't a thing that they're building down there that's linked to anything that sat on that property before. Don't tell everybody this, but I understand that's what the agreement was. That's what they made with Nauvoo—that it would just be a restoration project. They want to build the temple; they are restoring the temple.

Q. What do you know about Joseph Smith's watch?

A. Joseph Smith's watch is supposed to be in Carthage. It's been secret. It has been appraised. It's been authenticated as a watch of that period. The Church has offered to buy it. I was talking to a person who was a go-between. The Church didn't get it bought, and the other people still own it. The man who acts as a go-between just told me about this very recently. He's getting to be an old man, and he told me that before he dies he's going to tell me who's got it. Eventually he's going to tell me who's got that watch. That's all I know about that.

Q. How was it when you met President Hinckley?

A. President Hinckley came here to dedicate the memorial at the end of Parley Street. He met the governor at the Seventies Hall. I was fortunate to get a press pass that morning, and I told my wife that I was going to try to shake hands with President Hinckley. I had shook hands with President Hunter when he was here. She told me that I'd never make it, but I told her that I'd try and get lucky.

When we got to the Seventies Hall, where he was going to meet the governor, the governor was already on the front step. We went around and came in the back door. Everybody was there—probably about seventy. Then a car came around, and they let President Hinckley out at the back door of the Seventies Hall. Actually, he got out because he's pretty agile for his age. He just opened the door and got out, and then he opened the door to the Seventies Hall. I don't know what made him look back, but he looked back. Everybody else in the car hadn't even got out of the car yet but were still in there talking. He already had the door open to the Seventies Hall and was standing in the doorway.

Everybody backed up and made an aisle right straight through to the front door where the governor was. He didn't know what to do, and we all just stood there and stared at him. He just stood there and stared at us and waved. Finally, it hit me to step out in that aisle and hold out my hand. I done that, and he came right to me. I got to shake hands with him.

About that time somebody run up and told him that I was a descendant of Joseph Senior and Lucy Mack, and that I was a recent convert to the Church. His mind is real sharp, and I told him, ‘T’m a descendant of Katharine.’”

He kind of turned around and looked at me awhile and said, after a short moment’s pause, “I want to welcome you back.” We visited a little while about this and that. Then he had to go and meet the governor. I got my picture taken while I was standing there.

Q. Do you have any final comments?

A. Only that I really enjoy having you students come to Nauvoo and visit my store and become acquainted with me. We both learn something every time. You people are real fortunate to have Brother Dahl as your leader down there and your teachers. I haven’t got acquainted with your teachers because they’re all new this semester. The old timers that have been here are great, and I’ve got real acquainted with them. They come up and use my library once in a while. You’re all welcome to do it. That’s the way it works. We’re all here to get along and love each other and learn a little more. Thank you.

## **Edward J. Newton**

*Burnside, Illinois*

*Birthday: March 31, 1945*

*Interview on November 8, 2001, at the Joseph Smith Academy by Jeff Johnson Jessica Titckett also present*

Q. [Jeff Johnson] Thank you for letting us take time to interview you, Mr. Newton. Tell me where you were born and little about yourself.

A [Ed Newton] I was born March 31,1945, in Sacred Heart Hospital in Fort Madison. Iowa. My family home was in Powellton, Illinois, which is seven miles east of Nauvoo.

Q. Is that where your mother is from?

A. Yes, that’s my mother’s family farm. Her great-grandfather, Henry Thornber. was born in Lancashire, England. He was converted to Mormonism there. He and his mother and sisters came over here. His older sister, Margaret, and her husband, Abraham Shaw, were already here.

Q. Do you know any interesting chronicles your ancestors recorded in their journals on their way to America?