

# INTRODUCTION

The journals of Newel Knight are one of a handful of essential manuscript sources that every historian of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints relies upon to understand its early history. The Joseph Smith Papers Project has recently transcribed and made available many official histories or assigned histories from the early Church in print and on the Web.<sup>1</sup> They have also included other important documents, like the early history of Parley P. Pratt and Lucy Mack Smith. Left out of this massive project is a transcription of Newel Knight's journals. He was one of the very earliest Latter-day Saint converts and maintained a lifelong friendship and close association with Joseph Smith. He was one of a few early members of the Church to write about the earliest events in Latter-day Saint history with direct experience with some of the most foundational events. Knight died in January 1847, north of Winter Quarters, at the young age of forty-six. During the last five years of his life, he wrote a personal history composed of two elements,

---

1. See the introductions for *JSP*, H1, and H2.

## INTRODUCTION

an autobiography and a journal, which form this valuable historical record. Though extremely important, it has always been a difficult source because it is only found in its full rendition in several different manuscripts. It is frequently cited but not always understood. This publication of his history pieces together his manuscripts and offers a way to cite and use his history more precisely.

Knight first penned a lengthy autobiography that told his life story up through the early 1840s. As he wrote, he was aware of and interacted with the official Church histories being written and compiled at the same time. Knowing that Joseph Smith's history up to 1834 was being published serially in Nauvoo's *Times and Seasons*, Knight decided to copy from and link his experiences to it. Therefore, Knight's recollections up to the year 1834 borrow extensively from Joseph Smith's published history, while including his own insights. Knight's autobiography also narrates his personal, family, and community experiences that did not involve Joseph Smith, making it a rich source of early Church history.

His writing was done in phases. Around 1844, having caught up with the Church's history and his own life story, he began a second phase of writing. He started a journal, a diary-type record with dated entries, that contains his own observations and scrawls about what was happening in the Church after Joseph Smith's death. This material records invaluable 1846–47 details about the exodus from Nauvoo and Knight's leadership role in the large advance company that created Camp Ponca far northwest of Winter Quarters.

Found in both the autobiography and journal sections are rich source materials for understanding the Church's foundational years and the lives and circumstances of the early believers. The heart of Knight's voluminous writings, which he designed for his posterity, concerns his association with Joseph Smith, his deeply felt commitment to the Church, and his personal religious experiences. Knight wrote:

To know that I have seen and witnessed these important events with my natural eyes, and also to know of a surety that the heavens have been opened to my view, that I have beheld the majesty on high and heard the voic[e] of my Redeemer which has spoken words of comfort and instruction to me, fills my whole being with gratitude

to my heavenly father while I write these things which are verrily true. And I write them that my posterity and future generations may know of them and that I may leave a faithful testimony of the things which I do know to be verrily true.

For the foundational years of the Church, first-person records are not numerous, and extensive accounts like Knight's are rare. His writings therefore merit publication, circulation, consultation, and study.

Newel's widow, Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey Knight, preserved his records and brought them west with her to Utah in 1850. The autobiography and journal holographs are now a valuable collection in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints's Church History Library in Salt Lake City. They are catalogued as MS 767, "Newel Knight Autobiography and Journal."<sup>2</sup>

## NEWEL KNIGHT, A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Newel Knight (1800–1847) was a close and loyal friend of Joseph Smith Jr. from 1826,<sup>3</sup> when Joseph became a hired hand for the Knight family, until Joseph's death in 1844.<sup>4</sup> Born at Marlboro, Vermont, on September 13, 1800, Newel Knight was the son of Joseph Knight Sr. and Polly Peck.<sup>5</sup> When Newel was about eight years old, his family moved to the Colesville, New York, area. He married Sally Colburn on June 7, 1825. When Joseph Smith became one of Joseph Knight's hired hands late in 1826, he told some of the Knights about his encounters with the divine. The Knights provided him with material assistance during his Book of

---

2. Working as a Brigham Young University history professor and research historian with BYU's Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History, William Hartley, coeditor of this volume, wrote and published *Stand by My Servant Joseph: The Story of the Joseph Knight Family and the Restoration*. For that history, the Newel Knight records proved foundational. Knowing their value, Michael MacKay obtained permission from the Church History Department and from the Smith Institute to edit them for this publication.

3. See *JSP*, D1:50–58, 345–52.

4. "Death of Newel Knight," *Deseret Evening News*, May 25, 1907, 6; "Knight, Newel," in Jenson, *Biographical Encyclopedia*, 2:775.

5. See Jenson, *Biographical Encyclopedia*, 775.

## INTRODUCTION



*Bird's Eye View of Home of Joseph Smith, "The Mormon Prophet," Near Susquehanna, PA., 1907. George Edward Anderson Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University.*

Mormon translation work—paper, food, money, and more—and helped him court Emma Hale.

Joseph Smith organized the Church in April 1830. In May 1830, Newel Knight was the first of the extended Knight family network to be baptized. Before this, Joseph Smith cast out an evil spirit from Knight. That moment has often been lauded as the first miracle performed in Latter-day Saint history, thanks to Joseph Smith's resounding interest in the event, which he described in detail in his history.<sup>6</sup> Upon regaining himself, Knight experienced a vision of heaven and other revelations, according to his own history. With the baptism of Knight's parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins, the Colesville Branch of the Church was organized. Hyrum Smith, the Prophet's brother, presided briefly, and then Newel succeeded him as the branch's president. By the end of 1830, some sixty Knight relatives had embraced the Church. Newel Knight continued to preside over this branch throughout its relocations in 1831, first to upper Ohio and then to Jackson County, Missouri.<sup>7</sup>

After local residents drove the Saints out of Jackson County in the fall and winter of 1833, Newel and his wife Sally found temporary

---

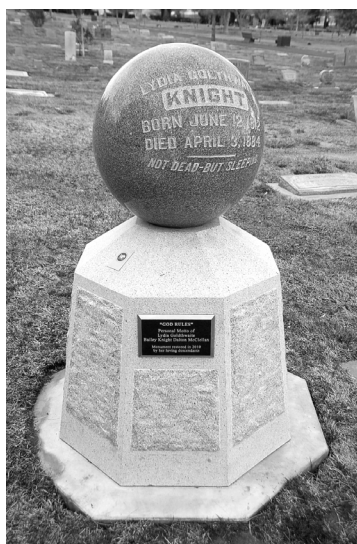
6. Smith, *History*, 1838–1856, vol. A-1, 40–53.

7. *JSP*, D1:172, 264, 268; *JSP*, D2:3–4, 12, 22, 31.

quarters in Clay County.<sup>8</sup> When the Church's second high council was organized in Missouri in 1834, Knight was appointed to it. He would serve on three more high councils.<sup>9</sup> In September 1834, Sally died. Knight went to Kirtland, Ohio, to help with temple construction and to be "endowed with power from on high" (Doctrine and Covenants 38:32). While there, he married Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey on November 24, 1835. Theirs was the first marriage Joseph Smith performed by priesthood authority.<sup>10</sup> As he attested in his history, he and Lydia participated in the Kirtland Temple dedication events.

One day in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith, in his private journal, paid tribute to Knight for being one of his loyal friends from the beginnings of the Restoration.<sup>11</sup> Not long after that, Knight, heartbroken when mobs stormed Carthage Jail and killed Joseph and Hyrum Smith, his longtime friends, accepted the Twelve Apostles as the successors. Newel, Lydia, and their family left Nauvoo during the 1846 spring wave of refugees. Later that year, assigned as Brigham Young's representative and head of a high council, Knight gave spiritual leadership to those at George Miller's Ponca Encampment above Winter Quarters, in what today is northern Nebraska. Knight died there on January 11, 1847, a mile west of today's town of Niobrara.

His widow, Lydia, and their children went west to Utah in 1850, taking Newel's journals and diaries with them. Among Newel and Lydia's



Lydia Knight's headstone at Saint George City Cemetery.

8. JSP, D2:147–56.

9. JSP, D4:90, 94, 594.

10. Joseph Smith, Journal, November 24, 1835; Jenson, *Biographical Encyclopedia*, 774–75.

11. JSP, J2:115–19.



Newel Knight's obelisk monument at Niobrara, Nebraska, erected by his son Jesse Knight.

nine children was Jesse Knight, born in Nauvoo, who became one of Utah's earliest wealthy businessmen. In 1908 Jesse Knight directed the erection of an obelisk monument at the Ponca site that honors Newel Knight and others who died there.

### PRESENTING KNIGHT'S WRITING IN FIVE PARTS

In this volume, we present Newel Knight's journals in five parts in mostly chronological periods. Each part begins with a brief biographical summary about Knight and the corresponding period of Latter-day Saint history.

Part 1 covers the period from Knight's birth in 1800 up to June of 1834. This period is a cohesive unit due to Knight's heavy borrowing from the *Times and Seasons* installments of Joseph Smith's "History of the Church"; that history extended only to 1834, from which point Newel continued writing independently.

Part 2, 1834 to 1836, primarily deals with Knight's departure from Clay County and his experiences for about a year in Kirtland. He draws

from no outside record but from his own recollections and notes that he jotted down.

Part 3 contains Knight's autobiographical writings over three years, from May 1836 until May 1839. It covers Knight's struggles in Clay and then Caldwell Counties to make a living as a miller and coexist with fellow Saints.

Part 4 covers the six-year period from when the Knight family crossed the Mississippi River in May 1839, to the Church conference in the Nauvoo Temple in October 1845, when plans for the mass exodus from Nauvoo were announced. Most of what Knight wrote about leaving Missouri and his years in Nauvoo is original, his own recollections.

Part 5 documents the 1845 to 1847 period. By 1845 Knight and his pen had brought his life narrative up to the current time. The journal part of his record ended, and he then started writing about his life as it progressed, keeping a regular diary (as a set of more incremental, snapshot-like, autobiographical writings) up until his death.

## NEWEL KNIGHT'S ORIGINAL JOURNALS

As early as 1830, Knight wrote history on scraps of paper. It appears that in 1839 he became interested in autobiography when he participated in compiling Joseph Smith's history. Joseph Smith's diary records on July 4, and 5, 1839, "Assisted by Br. Newel Knight dictating History."<sup>12</sup> They apparently reminisced about the night when Joseph cast a devil out of him, nearly ten years earlier, in 1830. After recording that experience, Joseph Smith's history then describes Knight's visions of eternity, which he alone experienced.<sup>13</sup> "He afterwards related his experience as follows," the history explained. Probably the "afterwards" was while Knight assisted Joseph Smith with the history in July 1839.

Joseph Smith's history was published serially in Nauvoo's *Times and Seasons* between March 1, 1842, and February 15, 1846. Knight read each installment closely, which seemed to inspire him to write his own experiences, complimentary to the official history. He did his journal

---

12. *JSP*, J1:345.

13. Smith, *History*, 1838–1856, vol. A-1, 48.

writing, at least the best and final version, while in Nauvoo. He began by writing his own recollections, some from memory, some copied from pages he had written previously. His wife, Lydia, explained that “Considerable of the author’s [Newel’s] journal was kept on detached pieces of paper, and no doubt many interesting & valuable portions are lost.”<sup>14</sup>

For the 1830 to 1834 period, Knight extracted a good deal of information from Joseph Smith’s history, painstakingly copying sections that related directly to his own experiences. Interested in supporting the official history of the Church, he sometimes altered Joseph Smith’s first-person account to read as though it were Knight’s own first-person account. Because the copying of large blocks of Joseph Smith’s history verbatim was tedious work, Knight’s narrative often notes material he intended to copy over when he had time, but he never did so.

Our featured text, which we call version 1, is the material found in folder 1 in the MS 767 manuscript file in the Church History Library titled “Newel Knight Autobiography and Journal.” The version 1 journal and diary materials are in Newel’s handwriting, primarily written in brown, or occasionally blue, ink and mostly on lined paper. Given the grammatical errors and the edits made during the writing process—such as cross-outs, inserted words, blank spaces, and poem lines and stanzas crossed out and rewritten (as if being changed at the time)—the manuscript seems to be the original and not a later copy by Lydia or others. Newel is most likely the redactor. Based on the flow of the narrative and the handwriting, we suspect, but cannot prove, that Newel copied this version 1 from some of his scrap paper notes and a probable set of marked up and crossed out trial drafts long since discarded. Therefore, version 1 is a compiled edition of his history.

Version 1 consists of six different groupings or sets of pages using different types of paper. It is clearly a compilation. Some is written on folded pages with string through the spine holding the folds together, as though it were used as an individual record at some point. An archivist gave each grouping in version 1 an identification, such as item 1, item 2, and so on. One set has some serious water damage in the midspine

---

14. Lydia Knight, handwritten statement, Santa Clara, Utah, February 14, 1873.



region. Another has several pages with small pieces of the outside edges chipped away, removing pieces of the original text.

His history is written from a retrospective position, combining in-the-moment narration with reflective personal insights. Once his history reaches May 1845, he appears to be writing journal entries with dated entries, but only occasionally.<sup>15</sup> These diary entries continue, though not contiguously, until he dies in January 1847. After Newel's death, his widow, Lydia, became the caretaker of his papers. She had promised him she would be sure his children had and read his record. She took his writings with her to Utah when she emigrated there in 1850 and worked on them to ready them for publication (see version 5 below).

In Brigham Young University's L. Tom Perry Special Collections are scraps of paper, part of Lydia Knight's papers, that inform us about Newel's records. These papers are important because their authors were eyewitnesses to the events and they often used earlier manuscripts that are no longer extant. Though they have the potential to introduce tradition into the record, they also have the potential to offer a historical understanding of the events included in Newel's records. We have added these into the footnotes and transcripts of the autobiography so that researchers can reference them accurately and use them carefully to interpret Newel's records.

## VERSIONS 1–3

Version 1, Newel Knight's original, incomplete draft, is our featured text. However, the Church History Library has two other drafts termed "Newel Knight's Autobiography and Journal." Both differ from our version 1 and offer interesting insights into the manuscript. Unfortunately, these versions are in two different hands and their handwriting has not been identified. Each is a shortened, cleaner iteration of the version 1 text. Clearly, they are attempts to create a narration short enough to be easily read and understood. It is likely someone produced these intending to publish Newel's journal, which was done in 1883. Nonetheless, all three versions are important in the development of the

---

15. For example, his first entries are on May 24, June 14, and July 1, 13, 27, and 31.

Newel Knight history. At some point, Lydia Knight or someone in the Knight family donated versions 1, 2, and 3 to the Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

## VERSION 4: THE TIN BOX, BUNDLED PAGES VERSION

At some point before 1871, possibly spearheaded by Lydia, Newel's version 1 was copied, embellished, and extensively reworked. Version 4 consists of 2,347 small pages tied with string into small bundles, all normally kept in a tin box. Records show that Lydia Knight loaned the boxed version 4 bundles to the Church Historian's Office. On November 9, 1871, the "Historian's Office Journal" recorded, "RLC [Robert L. Campbell] read first 100 pages of Newel Knight's history, find it good and very similar to Joseph Smith's history." Six months later, a notation for April 9, 1872, reads, "Sister Knight received her tin box containing history of Newel Knight."

Version 4 is an edited, corrected rendition of version 1, attempting to ready it for publication. It cleans up the narration by changing Newel's words and sentences. Here, for example, is a comparison between one of Newel's statements in version 1 and its version 4 analogue:

**Folder 1:** Haveng settled my affairs to the best advantage I could I again comanced business yet not with out considerable loss which with the Sickness we had suffered the loss of health ^and other expenses attending^ I was reduced in my pecuniary affairs considerably. Yet not discouraged for all I did seemed to prosper in my hands. I was happy in the Society not only in the society of my Fathers imediate family but my noble aunts and Cousins lived in the vicinity so that I felt allwa cheered by the Society of my kindred

**Version 4:** In settling up my business affairs, I suffered a heavy loss (7) and this, with the expenses incurred by our sickness considerably reduced my pecuniary affairs. But I was not discouraged, for all my labor prospered in my hands, and I again entered into business. . . . so that I was happy, not only in the society of my father's immediate family but also ~~of my uncles aunts and cousins~~ ^of many relatives^ who lived in the same vicinity. (8) Peace, prosperity and plenty

## INTRODUCTION

seemed to crown our labors, and indeed we were a happy family, and my father rejoiced in having his children around him.

Version 4 is significantly longer than version 1 for three reasons:

1. It includes materials Newel wrote, some on small scraps of paper, which he failed to include in his version 1. To present version 1 properly, we have inserted into it and clearly identified those new additions made by version 4 in the footnotes and the text. Three salient additions are a Joseph Smith letter of August 20, 1830; another of December 2, 1830; and an 1833 Colesville Branch list of pledges for building a temple in Jackson County, none of which are recorded anywhere else.
2. The version 4 editor(s) added in extensive materials that Newel marked in version 1 to include later in his account, but apparently he never returned to the manuscript to finish his intended changes. We chose not to include those additions, but we do explain in footnotes what those materials consist of.
3. Version 4 contains historical materials and explanations not present in version 1 that the version 4 editor(s) created or inserted where they felt Knight's narrative needed them to convey his message. We exclude those embellishments as later historical interpretation, not written or intended by Knight. The version 4 revisers sometimes explain their willingness to introduce information not in Newel's accounts: "From the reading of Bro. Knight's Journal it would appear, as though he had taken no notice of the commandment given to him by revelation [Doctrine and Covenants 52], at the time he was ordained to the High Priesthood, at the June Conference. and So I will here introduce the facts as nearly as I am able to glean them."<sup>16</sup>

We have labeled version 4 the Allen version because Knight descendant Robert Allen in Salem, Utah, had the tin box and bundles in his private possession. This version had been shown only to a few privileged scholars and family members until it was copied and used in 2004 as part of the Joseph Smith Papers Project research. According to

---

16. Allen version, "Newel Knight autobiography circa 1871," 310.

## INTRODUCTION

Mr. Allen, the box and bundles came into his possession through grandparents Robert E. Allen and Inez Knight, daughter of Jesse Knight and granddaughter of Newel and Lydia Knight. During the Great Depression, the Jesse Knight mansion in Provo was sold to the Berg Mortuary, and Robert and Inez Allen moved from there into the top floor of the Knight Building, located in the Knight Block northeast of the intersection of Center Street and University Avenue. Robert Allen ran a business selling cameras. An employee named Don Harvey did darkroom work for him in the basement of the Knight Building, which also served as family storage. One day Harvey brought up from the basement a tin box containing bundles of small note pages, each tied in string, and gave it to Robert. Since then he has kept the bundles in his home, still with the original string and the tin box. In the early 1980s and a second time in the 1990s, Robert and his wife, Lucette, transcribed the bundled pages electronically with a word processor. In 2004 one of the Allen sons was designated to be the next caretaker of the bundles. The Church History Department has digitized the bundles (MS 19156) and the most recent Allen version (MS 17147).

### VERSION 5: THE 1883 PUBLISHED VERSION

In 1883 the *Juvenile Instructor* Office in Salt Lake City published “Newel Knight’s Journal.” It was part 3 in a book called *Scrap of Biography*, the tenth volume in the “Faith Promoting Series” that was designed to appeal to young readers. Ten years earlier, Lydia wrote about her efforts to revise Newel’s journals for publication as a small book and expressed regret she could not do a better job:

In presenting this little volume to the public I feel a great delicacy as I am aware of my incompetence to do justice to it but it being the dying request of my kind and faithful husband, I have done the best I could, and hope its readers will realize the true spirit and intent which prompts me to do so. Considerable of the author’s journal was kept on detached pieces of paper, and no doubt many interesting & valuable portions are lost, yet I trust enough is left to be a faithful testimony to the present, & future generations, that the author did know of a surety that God lives, and that He has spoken

## INTRODUCTION

to men from the heavens, in this generation and that He requires all men everywhere to repent, and be baptized for the remission of their Sins & have hands laid upon them for the reception of the Holy Ghost, by His servants who have been commissioned with authority from Him to act, and officiate in His name. Yet I am aware it is far short of that interest it would have contained, if he had lived to compile the work. Having done the best I could, I trust it will be acceptable to the dead and prove a blessing to the living. Which is the prayer of a humbled, and bereaved one.<sup>17</sup>

Comparisons show that “Newel Knight’s Journal” in *Scraps of Biography* is taken from the Allen version and varies very little from it.

In 1883 the office started a similar book series that featured life stories of Latter-day Saint women. The first volume was *Lydia Knight’s History*. For both of their life stories, Newel’s and Lydia’s, the source material was Newel’s journals, the revised and polished version 4. Lydia assisted in the writing of *Lydia Knight’s History*, but the author of her life story is “Homespun,” a pen name for Susa Young Gates. This version selectively enhances and extrapolates upon the Lydia narrative. That Newel and Lydia’s lives appeared in print at almost the same time strongly suggests that both Lydia and Susa Gates had a hand in polishing up Newel’s account for publication.

## NOTES ON EDITORIAL METHOD

Knight’s autobiography and journals are not easy to use. The various versions are not sufficiently self-evident for simple reading and research. As part of this project, we have made careful transcriptions of each of the versions listed above, producing parallel comparisons of all the texts. After careful textual analyses of the different journal versions and of Joseph Smith’s history installments, we provide here a usable, reliable transcription of the autobiography and journals. Because Knight often failed to indicate materials he copied from other sources, our transcription provides needed editorial remarks to show what is Knight’s own and what he borrowed. We provide informative footnotes but do not

---

17. Lydia Knight, handwritten statement, Santa Clara, Utah, February 14, 1873.

## INTRODUCTION

try to be completely comprehensive. We attempt to offer some firsthand sources, especially through the printed work of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, but we also simply try to point readers to some exemplary secondary literature describing a particular event. To be helpful to researchers and readers, we include short biographical introductions to each section of the journals.

We present the text of Knight's journal as fully and accurately as possible, retaining original spelling and punctuation unless clarification seems critical. We insert within square brackets [ ] our clarifications, which include correcting the spelling of especially garbled words, correcting misrecorded dates, identifying crossings-out and illegible words, and explaining where pages or parts of pages have been lost. We also use brackets to identify versions and other manuscripts that are used throughout. For clarity, we provide most dates in full, using a standardized form in square brackets. We divide Knight's narration into paragraphs where needed. In footnotes, we identify the people, places, and events mentioned.