

Missionary Activities in New England in the Early 1830s

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Religion played a very important role in early American history. It was largely for religious purposes that America was founded. Many people from the New England area were descendants of deeply religious progenitors and played important roles in the founding of America. During the nineteenth century, the New England states had been trodden and combed for converts by various denominations. Methodist circuit riders, Presbyterian preachers, Baptist revivalists, and Reformed Baptist ministers competed for the souls of men and women—all reaping a harvest for their respective religions.¹

What New England had not heard, up to this time, was the message of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ from the Mormons. The message centered in the fact that the new and everlasting covenant had been reestablished and was patterned after the teachings of Jesus Christ's meridian Church. In order for Mormonism to flourish and succeed, it had to meet certain conditions. It had to offer something new, different, and challenging and yet have a familiar gospel message. This somewhat-familiar gospel message presented new and challenging doctrine.

The New England states of the early 1830s became the focus of a good deal of the early missionary labors. Because of New Englanders' religious background and zeal for freedom, the message of Mormonism flourished, and many of them became converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. From their ranks came a great number of the early leaders of the Church, and they often gave much-needed financial assistance to the young and growing organization. For a period, many of these New Englanders formed the bulwark of the Church.²

Fortunately, some of the missionaries who labored in New England kept records of their activities. These sources reveal important and valuable information about the locations of their labors, the manner in which they taught, and the gospel message they preached. This paper will review these records, follow the course of the missionaries' travels, and report how the gospel was taken to the people of New England in the early 1830s.

New England States Missionaries of the Early 1830s

Jared Carter, Orson Hyde, Samuel Smith, Orson Pratt, and Lyman Johnson proselytized as some of the earliest missionaries in the New England states during the early 1830s. During the early years of the Church, missionaries labored largely in the states where they had been born and reared, often beginning with visits to their friends and relatives. Richard S. Williams's 1969 study of early missionaries in New England noted that missionary work "was largely done on a 'freelance' system for the 'called' missionary system in the Church [and] was something which developed gradually."³ That is, these early elders were not presided over by a mission president, nor did they serve within a specific geographical boundary. They did not have a reporting system, and they traveled where the Spirit directed. Initially some elders were self-appointed in their call to labor as missionaries. However, by February 9, 1831, revelation directed "that it shall not be given to any one to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by some one who has authority" (D&C 42:11).

Jared Carter,⁴ one of the very first missionaries—if not the first missionary—to New England, is a good illustration of freelance missionary service. In fall 1831 he left on his first mission for the Church. The introductory words of Carter's journal are most interesting: "I now commence to give some short sketches of a mission that I performed from Ohio to Vermont, after I had been to Kirtland, where I received the authority of an apostle. I commenced a mission to the east on the 22nd day of September 1831, with Brother Ebenezer Page."⁵ Carter's historic four-month mission to New England concluded in February 1832. According to his journal, he held numerous meetings and baptized twenty-five people,

resulting in the organization of the first branch of the Church in the New England states at Benson, Vermont. Carter's journal has many entries about the workings of the gifts of the Spirit. The journal is replete with incidences of healing and prophecy.

Jared Carter also served a second mission to New England from April 5 to October 19, 1832. Throughout this six-month mission, Jared had at least five different companions: Sylvester Smith, Gideon Carter, Simeon Carter, John Carter, and Calvin Stoddard. Carter centered his ministry in Benson, Vermont, and like the spokes of a wheel proselytized in various directions. Upon returning to Kirtland, Carter reported that his missionary labors had taken him to the states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Vermont, and that he had baptized seventy-nine souls.⁶ *The Evening and the Morning Star* in November 1832 gives the account that new branches of the Church had been established in New England "at Benson, North Troy, and Charleston, Vermont; at Bath, New Hampshire; [and] in N[orth] Rowley and Boston, Massachusetts."⁷

At the time Carter was serving his first mission to New England, a new era of missionary activity began for the Church, following the actions taken at the Amherst Conference. This conference was held on January 25, 1832, in Amherst, Lorain County, Ohio. At the request of the priesthood members gathered at this conference, Joseph Smith inquired of the Lord regarding His will concerning them and their duties. As a result the Prophet received the seventy-fifth section of the Doctrine and Covenants. In this section, two sets of missionaries were appointed to proselytize in the "eastern countries": Orson Hyde with Samuel H. Smith and Orson Pratt with Lyman Johnson (see D&C 75:13–14). The Hyde-Smith and Pratt-Johnson missionary journeys would open up most of New England to Mormonism.

Orson Hyde,⁸ a native of Connecticut, turned twenty-seven in January 1832, at the time of his missionary call. Samuel Smith,⁹ a younger brother of Joseph Smith, was twenty-three years old at the time of his mission call to the eastern states.¹⁰ Elders Hyde and Smith commenced their difficult mission on February 1, 1832, from Kirtland, Ohio, and returned to Kirtland on December 22, 1832—serving for almost eleven months. The efforts of Orson Hyde and Samuel H. Smith were confined to the area east of the

Connecticut River, in a line from Providence, Rhode Island, to Boston and vicinity, including Bradford, and on to Saco and Farmington, Maine. Their two-thousand-mile mission took them to Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Maine. The following report of their mission was published in *The Evening and the Morning Star*: “BROTHERS Orson Hyde, and Samuel H. Smith, have just returned to this place [Kirtland, Ohio], in good health and spirits, saying, that they had built up four churches; one in the state of Maine; two in Massachusetts, and one in Pennsylvania—They have baptized sixty or more, disciples, who they say, are strong in the faith, rejoicing in the Holy One of Israel.”¹¹

Orson Pratt¹² was twenty-one at the time of his mission call and was one of the best-educated of these early missionaries. Lyman Johnson,¹³ the son of John Johnson, was born near the birthplace of Joseph Smith in Windsor County, Vermont, and had New England roots, as did many of the early missionaries. Called at age twenty-one as a companion to Orson Pratt, this was the first of many missions for Lyman to the eastern states. Elders Pratt and Johnson began their mission on February 3, 1832, two days after Hyde and Smith began their missions, and returned to Kirtland on February 13, 1833. The missionary labors of Orson Pratt and Lyman Johnson were mainly within the area bounded by the Connecticut and Hudson rivers. Eleven months into their mission, Elder Pratt reported the following from Bath, New Hampshire:

DEAR brethren, we have traveled in the states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut; and we baptized four in Blakely, Pennsylvania; and also my brother on Long Island; eight in Madison, Connecticut; twenty in Bath, New Hampshire; twenty seven in Charleston Vermont; and eighteen in Troy, Vermont. We went to a conference which was held in Spafford, New York, on the tenth of November, where brother Lyman (Johnson) baptized eight: he then, in company with brother Hazen Aldrich, started for Ohio; and I, in company with brother William Snow, started for Bath and Charleston, and baptized twelve by the way.¹⁴

Come the end of October 1832, Elders Pratt and Johnson began their return trip to Kirtland, Ohio. Orson Pratt, however, had a

change of heart and decided to continue his mission while Elder Johnson returned home alone. Elder Pratt preached the gospel for three more months—the coldest of his mission. His companions came from the local rank and file members of the Church—William and Erastus Snow.¹⁵ Orson Pratt started for home on January 28, 1833, and arrived in Kirtland on February 17, 1833. Once home, he gave a brief summation of his mission, testifying that he had “traveled on foot nearly 4,000 miles, attended 207 meetings, mostly in places where they had not heard of the word, baptized 104 persons, and organized several new branches of the Church.”¹⁶

Orson Pratt had not been home for more than a month when Joseph Smith asked him and Lyman Johnson to return to the eastern states to look after the affairs of the Church and proselytize. This second mission lasted six months, “during which,” Pratt recorded, “I travelled about 2000 miles, attended and baptized upwards of 50 persons.”¹⁷

As the Church became more completely organized, the number of appointed missions increased. With time there came a combination of freelance and appointed missions, but for the most part of the early 1830s, it was still an era of the freelance system, one without a special call from the Prophet or other Church leaders. An example of a self-appointed missionary was Erastus Snow, a convert of Pratt and Johnson in February 1833, who labored as a home missionary in the vicinity of St. Johnsbury, Vermont. He preached the gospel and encouraged new members in the area.¹⁸

The missionaries who served in New England between 1830 and 1834 had much in common with each other as well as considerable diversity of personality and talent, all of which contributed to the success of their proselytizing. Their formal education was limited. Upon reading their writings, however, one quickly becomes acquainted with their powerful and compelling personalities. Orson Hyde and Orson Pratt showed the greatest refinement in literary style, but some of the others were also competent with the pen. It is impressive to read their numerous letters, reports, journals, and publications and feel the powerful spirit that comes through their writings.

Having been reared in New England, these early missionaries had great empathy for New Englanders who were not satisfied with

the traditional Christian churches, which did not practice the ancient gospel of Christ in its original simple purity. Like the missionaries themselves, these people were seeking a restoration of the ancient gospel. Prior to joining the Church, many of the early missionaries had also been “seekers.” That is, they believed in God and Christ but were not satisfied with traditional Christian churches. Their conversions, for the most part, came through reading the Book of Mormon, receiving a personal spiritual witness of its truthfulness, and becoming convinced that Joseph Smith was a prophet, chosen by God, through whom the priesthood and the ancient Church of Christ had been restored. Their own early seeking no doubt helped them empathize with many in New England who were experiencing a similar quest.

Missionary Travel

The missionary headquarters of the Church in the early 1830s was in Kirtland, Ohio. As Milton Backman notes:

Kirtland was a favorable location for organizing and directing the missionary program. A few miles north of the community was the “Old Girdled Road,” one of the main highways of the Western Reserve, which connected Cleveland with settlements in western Pennsylvania and New York. Fairport Harbor was also nearby; there members could board sailing vessels that would carry them along the shores of Lake Erie. After proceeding east to Buffalo, New York, missionaries could skirt Lake Erie and Lake Ontario and penetrate upper Canada, or they could travel along the Erie Canal to the Hudson River. From the Albany region, elders could move south toward New York City or continue east into New England.¹⁹

The missionaries’ enthusiasm seemed boundless as they looked forward to sharing with the people of New England their vision of God’s plan for the salvation of the world. They believed their task was to bring as many as possible to Christ, laying the foundation for the gathering of Zion. In seeking to accomplish this, they used whatever means of travel were available to them that they could afford. They traveled by stage and vessel, but most often they covered the ground on foot.

During the early 1830s the missionaries subsisted in much the same way as their New Testament predecessors, who were sent out

carrying “neither purse, nor scrip” (Luke 10:4). Decades before the Mormon elders, circuit-riding Methodist ministers had adopted the purseless pattern of proselytizing with a good measure of success. The Mormon elders were commanded in revelation to “take ye no thought for the morrow, for what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or wherewithal ye shall be clothed” (D&C 84:81). While proselytizing they had little if any luggage with them, and they generally lacked means to sustain themselves. They relied largely on financial donations and other help from faithful Saints and friends. Small cash contributions accumulated to help pay for overnight stays in taverns, though the missionaries often slept at the homes of Church members and others, ate with them, and wore clothes donated by them. Orson Hyde and Samuel Smith reported, “went on 7 miles; feet very sore; came to Mr. Phelps Tavern, he offered to entertain us if we would tarry and preach. Accordingly we did so and had an attentive congregation and warmed through faithfully.”²⁰

The missionaries were reluctant to accept more than the absolute necessities, knowing that many of the Saints and New Englanders alike could hardly meet their own needs. On September 30, 1832, Orson Hyde recorded, “Spoke with power and authority and sounded a tremendous alarm; and they were going to raise a contribution for us, but we had money enough and thanked them.”²¹ There was a blessing in following the primitive, purseless pattern of the New Testament proselytizing. Missionaries often bore witness that relying on the Lord and on the Saints for all their needs was a blessing. It helped them draw closer to the Spirit of the Lord and brought them into direct contact with the people of New England. As Jared Carter noted in his summation of his first mission, “I have been directed by the Spirit to bless in the name of Christ in many places or houses and I have found even by what I have seen and heard that the consequences of blessing has been like leavening among measures of meal.”²²

Missionaries today think nothing of traveling around the world to their missions of labor or from city to city by automobile or public conveyance. So it was with the early missionaries. They thought nothing of walking many miles a day to meet their various appointments. Orson Hyde and Samuel Smith, for example, spent a week in November walking from town to town in Maine. On

Sunday they preached to a large group in Waterborough, and “some were melted down into tears.” On Tuesday Orson Hyde recorded that they traveled twenty-five miles to York and preached two or three times during the day. On Wednesday they traveled seven miles into a neighborhood and preached. On Friday they traveled on to Portsmouth and “called from house to house,” all the time in the rain—it “rained very hard, night came on, and no family would keep [them] over night.” They were forced to spend the night outside in the miserable rain.²³

The Message

The gospel message the New England missionaries carried was found in the Bible—one of faith, hope, love, and salvation that the missionaries believed had profound implications. The ancient gospel of Jesus Christ, lost through apostasy, had been restored, and new witnesses of the reality of the living Christ had appeared. Joseph Smith had seen Him, along with the Father, in a vision in 1820. Later, after a series of visits from an angel named Moroni, Joseph had received and translated an ancient record, the Book of Mormon,²⁴ itself another testament of Jesus Christ as well as a history of ancient inhabitants of the American continent and Christ’s ministry among them.²⁵ In addition, the priesthood, the authority to perform saving ordinances and otherwise act in the name of God, had been restored to the Prophet Joseph, who in 1830 had been commanded to organize the Church, the restored kingdom of God.²⁶

The missionaries also preached to the people of New England that the restoration of the gospel was one of the final heralds of the rapidly approaching Millennium. Though the world could not escape the wars and calamities that prophecy declared would precede the Millennium, those who accepted and lived the restored gospel would find spiritual salvation. For example, Elders Hyde and Smith reported that they preached for two hours by the Spirit, laying the work of the gospel and the gathering before a congregation. Some people wept under their preaching as they “warned them of the judgments of God that were coming, told them that war and desolation awaited them, . . . and then read the first part of the

33rd chapter of Ezekiel.”²⁷ Orson Pratt recorded on August 25, 1833, “I preached in Charleston [Vermont] upon the subject of the Millennium.”²⁸

Furthermore, the missionaries carried the message that a gathering place had been designated where the Saints of God would build a loving, righteous community prepared to meet the Savior and reign with Him when He finally came in glory. Preaching by request at a schoolhouse in front of a congregation of forty to fifty people, Orson Hyde spoke on the gathering and the Second Coming of Christ. He recorded, “[I] spake with authority; the Lord was with me; gave them a loud call to arise and trim their lamps and go forth.”²⁹ The message to gather to Zion was usually reserved for covenant members of the Church. The missionaries felt it their duty to persuade the members to gather with the Saints in either Kirtland or Missouri.³⁰ The missionaries believed that a prerequisite to the Millennium was the process of gathering the Saints from the nations of the earth to the center of Zion, a belief found in the writing of all the missionaries.

The nearness of the Millennium weighed heavily upon the early Latter-day Saints. Revelation in the days of these missionaries attested to the nearness of the Millennium. In a number of revelations in the early 1830s the Savior said in one form or another, “I come quickly” (D&C 33:18; see also D&C 34:12; 39:24; 41:4; 54:10; 87:8). For them the Restoration itself was a sign that they lived in the last days, adding urgency to the task of taking their message beyond Ohio. All the “signs of the times,” and particularly natural disasters, were often interpreted as foreshadowing the calamities that would befall the nations before the Second Coming. The missionaries, then, felt responsible not only to gather the honest in heart into the gospel fold but also to warn all others of the impending apocalypse.³¹

Preaching the message of the gospel was not without opposition. While the message of Mormonism was relatively new to the people of New England, it did not take long for the local clergy to realize that their congregations were diminishing. Opposition came in the form of various ministers denying a place to preach, attempted tar and feathering, and pamphlets and newspapers publishing defamatory information about the elders and the message they preached.

In Boston a Freewill Baptist elder, Mr. Joshua V. Himes, interviewed Samuel Smith and Orson Hyde.³² Not long after, Himes published the following in a pamphlet: "I have had several interviews with these men, and have examined their book, called the 'Book of Mormon,' have endeavored to acquaint myself with the details of their history and principles, have put the result of my inquiries in writing, and am satisfied of the delusions and absurdity of their system, and of its evil tendency."³³

Because the message of the missionaries was to preach and to warn, if people rejected their warning after having ample opportunity to understand and accept it, the missionaries sometimes bore witness against them before the Lord. Whether they shook the dust off their feet against a city or a household or washed their feet as a testimony against offenders, such actions symbolized their belief that they had done their duty, and the fate of the unbelievers was now in the hands of the Lord.³⁴

Preaching the Gospel Message

Since nearly everywhere the missionaries went was unworked territory, they tried to find the best and fastest way possible to share their message with large groups of people. They sought out local ministers,³⁵ attempted to secure speaking engagements before their congregations, and often succeeded in doing so.³⁶ If a meeting was arranged, then the missionaries would go house to house to announce the appointment. Usually this initial contact with the people was a good way to sort out those who were interested in the message of the Restoration. Those interested often invited the missionaries to their homes for further investigation.

The elders also used all available means to advertise meetings, including making announcements in other churches, posting hand-bills, and sending the message by word of mouth through Church members and friends.³⁷

The missionaries also preached regularly in private homes. Latter-day Saints and members of other faiths alike invited friends and neighbors into their homes to hear these messengers.³⁸

Referrals from members and friends were their most important missionary tool. No matter where they went, they first contacted

people with whom they were acquainted or to whom they had some kind of introduction. Jared Carter arrived at Benson, Vermont, for example, because he had former acquaintances and connections there.³⁹ His labors in Benson resulted in twenty-seven baptisms; the town of Benson became the first branch of the Church in New England. It is important to note that the success rate of conversions was significantly higher when missionaries preached in private homes and worked off referrals from members and previous acquaintances.

Proselytizing among family members often brought mixed results. When these missionaries had first received the gospel themselves, often their first thought was to share it with their family and friends. Many times these missionaries would head straight to the communities where family and friends lived. Moreover, it was usually the reason a missionary was called to labor in a particular region—he had family roots there. Such was the case with Jared Carter, Orson Pratt, Lyman Johnson, Orson Hyde, and Samuel Smith. When Jared Carter arrived in the eastern states, one of the first stops was at Moors, Vermont, where his brother-in-law Ira Ames resided. Within three days Ira was convinced of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and was willing to be baptized.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Orson Pratt was not so fortunate when he labored with his sister Laura and his brother-in-law Mr. North. They were unbelieving. Orson reported, “We saw that they rejected our testimony, and, must I tell?—we took our things and left them, and tears from all eyes freely ran.”⁴¹

When they were not preaching in barns, stores, chapels, rented halls, or homes, the missionaries might be found preaching in the streets, a common practice of the time.

The Power of Conversion Is in the Spirit and Service

The gifts of the Spirit were abundant during these missions to New England. They were viewed as sacred and deeply personal, not to be touted as part of the missionary message or used as evidence to unbelievers, but diaries recorded many of these, including miraculous healings in connection with priesthood blessings. The lame and deaf were healed.⁴² Satan was cast out,⁴³ and the sick who had been in the grip of death were healed. When Jared Carter visited

Andover at the conclusion of preaching, he went home with a Mr. Howard to stay the night. There he met Mr. Howard's mother, who had been lame for seventeen years. In the evening she told Elder Carter that she thought she had faith to be healed. "Well," said [Carter], 'you are going to have your faith brought to the test.'" Elder Carter blessed her in the name of Christ, and "she arose and walked and was made whole."⁴⁴

For the most part, the missionaries tried to avoid making a public show of things they considered sacred. They refused to give blessings if it appeared that the request was some kind of test for the curious or unbelieving. The same was true of speaking in tongues. Many of the missionaries had witnessed or experienced this gift, and it was not uncommon among early converts. There is no evidence, however, that Church leaders encouraged the missionaries to pray for it or use it as a conversion tool. It was a sign that followed belief, not an evidence for unbelievers.

The gifts of the Spirit enjoyed by the missionaries and Saints also included dreams, visions, and prophecies. When Jared Carter conversed about the Book of Mormon with his nephew, William Carter, William became convinced that the book was the work of the Lord but was not ready to obey the Lord. Jared, having testified in the Spirit of the Lord, grieved at his nephew's reluctance. Consequently, Jared cried mightily to Heavenly Father and "at length, felt the power of prophecy to him and expressed to him that this was the very day that he would obey the commands if ever." William's heart was softened, and he repented. That same day he was baptized and "received the Spirit of the Lord to his soul."⁴⁵

All these techniques of taking the gospel to the people of New England might well have amounted to little if the missionaries themselves had not exemplified the qualities essential for success in the missionary work. The Doctrine and Covenants states: "And faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify him for the work. Remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence" (D&C 4:5–6). The journals and correspondence of the missionaries in New England demonstrate that these were the qualities that served them best. Their uncommon love for the people seemed to know no bounds. They willingly sacrificed personal com-

forts for the greater cause of missionary service, and though not timid, they demonstrated a deep humility that helped many feel the genuineness of their convictions. The adage that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care applies here. Orson Hyde demonstrated this generosity of spirit when he recorded, "Labored some after sleeping awhile in the morning, having set up all the night with the dead."⁴⁶ On another occasion he and Lyman Johnson "husked corn all day; talked considerable with Mr. W. He seemed to believe what we told him."⁴⁷ Adhering to these essential qualities often brought about wonderful blessings such as the outpouring of the Spirit during a teaching situation or other meeting. On May 17, 1832, Elder Hyde wrote, "Labored with one family all the morning and the Lord blessed us and them with His Spirit, and we left them in tears." Then later that same day Elder Hyde "held a meeting with the brethren, and the Lord poured out His Spirit in a wonderful manner. We had a heavy melting time, like seasons at Kirtland and more powerful, *The Lord is Good!*"⁴⁸

Above all, the missionaries attributed their success to their willingness to follow the dictates of the Spirit. A good example of this principle is in Jared Carter's journal: "From this place I went to Galen, on the west, where I found my brother-in-law, Abroes Ames. Now when I came here, I began to discover why the spirit directed me on to Galen, which was so much contrary to what had been my former calculation."⁴⁹ Abroes was with Jared's brother, who had prejudiced him against the work of the Book of Mormon. Elder Carter was able to counter the damage done by reasoning with Abroes in the Spirit.

Sometimes the Spirit directed the missionaries to withhold preaching the message of the Restoration,⁵⁰ and at other times listening to the promptings of the Spirit saved them from bodily harm at the hands of unruly mobs that were prepared to tar and feather the missionaries.⁵¹ Furthermore, these missionaries relied on the direction of the Spirit to know when to terminate their missions. Unlike today, these early missionaries had no predetermined length of time to fulfill their missions. The Spirit directed them when to make their return home.

The efficacy of prayer on the part of the missionaries to open the way up to accomplish the purposes of the Lord cannot be over-

looked. On one occasion Elders Hyde and Smith both “asked the Lord to provide a home for us and open a way that we might preach in the village.”⁵² Accordingly, at the next house they entered, a man offered his hospitality and assisted them in obtaining a place to preach that evening.

The Church in New England in the 1830s

The Church in the 1830s was different from the Church of today—not necessarily in doctrinal teachings but mostly in procedures and policies. From the beginning, doctrinal essentials have stayed the same “first principles”: the Atonement of Christ, the Apostasy and Restoration, modern revelation, priesthood authority, the Second Coming and the Millennium, and so on.⁵³ Joseph Smith’s Articles of Faith were not yet written, but most of the ideas in them were fairly widely taught. In addition, the idea that the Saints were a “covenant people” and that in being baptized they had accepted a “new and everlasting covenant” was very much on their minds.

The wide range of doctrines not being taught by the missionaries in New England included “eternal progression,” salvation for the dead, the Word of Wisdom, eternal marriage, and all the doctrines and practices relating to the temple ordinances. These doctrines were later revealed to Joseph Smith during the years in Nauvoo. These and other refinements would come “line upon line” as the Saints were better prepared to receive them and as the need for additional light became apparent.

The doctrine that the heavens had multiple kingdoms, for example, was introduced in Hiram, Ohio, while some of the early elders were proselytizing in New England. Joseph Smith received the revelation in February 1832. Word of the new doctrine did not reach most missionaries for some time.⁵⁴ Currently, there is no evidence that it was widely taught as a means of conversion, but the account of the vision was read by the missionaries to the members for instruction and edification.⁵⁵

Along with proselytizing duties the elders were actively engaged in selling subscriptions to the *The Evening and the Morning Star*, the Church’s first official newspaper, published in Independence,

Missouri, from June 1832 through September 1834.⁵⁶ This monthly newspaper, edited by William W. Phelps, sold for one dollar a year and was considered an important proselytizing tool.⁵⁷

Church organization was also different. In the 1830s the stake was not the basic administrative unit in the Church, and there were no “wards” until the 1840s. The journals speak of “conferences.” In New England, as throughout the early Church, each local “church,” or “branch,” had a president, and groups of branches were organized into “conferences.” Whenever the organized conferences met, their meetings were also called conferences. There were also public preaching meetings, scheduled by the missionaries strictly for missionary purposes. In these gatherings the elders were not reluctant to take up collections, partly because money was needed to pay for hired halls.

Today the administration of the sacrament occurs in a weekly Sunday meeting known as sacrament meeting. This was not the case in the early Church. There were no regular sacrament meetings as Latter-day Saints know them today. Rather, there were prayer or preaching meetings, sometimes in homes and sometimes in rented halls or chapels, where the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was often administered.

Church discipline was often more public because members were asked to confess their transgressions in open meetings, and when disciplinary actions were decided upon they were announced in the conferences as well as in local branch meetings. While the branch president ran the affairs of the local Church, it was the missionaries who regulated the affairs of the Church membership. When a member’s status was called into question, it was usually the missionaries who presided and settled the affair.⁵⁸

The Word of Wisdom in the 1830s was not practiced as it is today. Total abstinence from alcohol was not yet required. The Word of Wisdom, revealed through Joseph Smith in 1833, came “not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation and the word of wisdom, showing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints” (D&C 89:2). Adherence was always encouraged and drunkenness was forbidden, but it took many years for the present interpretation and practice to mature. It is not evident through the writings of the missionaries whether they preached

the Word of Wisdom strongly. They were most concerned with the avoidance of excess alcohol, particularly drunkenness.

Finally, there were other subtle differences between missionary work in the 1830s and missionary work today. Modern missionary work is highly structured and closely supervised, complete with detailed weekly reports. In 1830 the missionaries were only loosely supervised. Even though they occasionally sent reports through the mail, there were no forms to fill out or reporting meetings to attend. Modern missionaries must remain within their assigned areas, but the missionaries of the 1830s paid little attention to boundaries. Also, most of the missionaries were married.

Conclusion

Mormonism's impressive successes in New England in the early 1830s attest to both the power and uniqueness of the message and the diligence adhered to by the missionaries when taking the gospel message to the people of New England. The unique message centered around the events of the Restoration of Christ's Church and the translation of the Book of Mormon. This message also included a warning to the faithful to withdraw from "Babylon" with the hope that they could help build Zion. This was a powerful motive that provided converts with a vision of the future not to be found in other denominations.

However, the message alone was not enough to persuade all to join the Church; it was the message coupled with the testimonies and diligence of the missionaries. These early missionaries to New England were able to demonstrate through their preaching and sacrifice that they were true ambassadors of Jesus Christ and His gospel. They followed the Spirit in their labors, served the people of New England with love and sacrifice, and used whatever means available to preach the gospel and bear testimony. Their historic labors brought into the Church, from the seedbed of this nation's religious freedom and democracy, some of the most stalwart and committed men and women of New England.

NOTES

¹The several decades preceding the emergence of the Mormon missionaries were dominated by the Methodists and the Baptists. One out of every four New Englanders was a Methodist. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, in their book *The Churching of America, 1776–1900: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 54–108, tell the story of the rise of religions and sects of any consequence in America during that time period. Chapter 3, “The Upstart Sects Win America, 1776–1850,” tells how the Methodist system of taking religion to the people of America prevailed against the traditional colonial churches of the Congregationalists and Episcopalians.

²Some of these men were Amasa Lyman, William Snow, Zerubbabel Snow, Erastus Snow, Winslow Farr, Lorin Farr, Hazen Aldrich, Orson Johnson, John Badger, John Ducan, and Daniel S. Miles (see Richard Shelton Williams, “The Missionary Movements of the LDS Church in New England, 1830–1850” [master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1969], 1).

³Williams, “Missionary Movements,” 11.

⁴Jared Carter first heard of the Book of Mormon in January 1831 while visiting Colesville, New York, on a business trip. While there he heard the story of Joseph Smith and the coming forth of the “golden bible.” After hearing about it, he prayed to the Lord for divine guidance concerning what he had heard and became convinced that the story and the record were true. After about a month, during which time he studied, reflected, inquired, and interviewed believers, he was baptized by Hyrum Smith on February 20, 1831. He joined the Saints at Colesville, New York, and moved with them to Ohio. He and his family settled in Amherst.

⁵Jared Carter Journal, Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 6; hereafter cited as Church Archives.

⁶Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 19, 1832, Church Archives; hereafter cited as Journal History.

⁷*The Evening and the Morning Star*, November 1832, 6.

⁸Orson Hyde as a fourteen-year-old youth walked six hundred miles to Ohio, where he worked in diverse occupations. In 1827, stirred by a revival in Kirtland, he became converted to the Methodist faith. Later, like many “seekers” being influenced by Sidney Rigdon, he joined the Reformed Baptist movement, also known as the Campbellite movement, which claimed to have restored the ancient order of things. He became an active and successful preacher, missionary, and pastor. Then, in fall 1830, he was given a copy of the Book of Mormon by missionaries passing through the area. Though opposed to it at first, he ultimately became convinced of its truthfulness, and in fall 1831 he was baptized by Sidney Rigdon, who had joined the Church the previous December. Orson performed several missions over the next few years. After his mission to New England he became one of the original members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in

1835, continued spending nearly all his time as a missionary, wrote the first missionary tract, and in 1837 went to England with Heber C. Kimball. After his return, Elder Hyde found himself caught up in the confusion swirling around Joseph Smith in the Missouri crisis, and as a result of what he later called a period of “affliction and darkness,” he was dropped from the Twelve on May 4, 1839, just as the rest of his brethren were beginning to prepare to go to England. After a time of torment, anguish, and repentance, Orson was restored to fellowship in the Church and to membership in the Quorum of the Twelve on June 27, 1839. He remained in America, however, until his departure for Palestine in early 1841 (see Lawrence R. Flake, *Prophets and Apostles of the Last Dispensation* [Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001], 329–31).

⁹Samuel Smith was one of the earliest followers, being the third person to be baptized in this dispensation, following Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Being one of the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon became a very significant part of his testimony as a missionary. After his mission to New England he would be called to the first Kirtland Stake high council (see Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan, eds., *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000], 1138).

¹⁰Garr, Cannon, and Cowan, *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, 1138.

¹¹*The Evening and the Morning Star*, February 1833, 69.

¹²Orson Pratt was especially interested in geography, grammar, mathematics, and surveying. Highly philosophical in nature, he argued points of doctrine with great precision and often rehearsed the events of the Restoration as evidence of fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. He and his older brother, Parley, would write much of the literature used by the missionaries in the years to come. Converted to the Church through the instrumentality of his brother Parley, he would be called as one of the original Twelve soon after his mission to the East (see Garr, Cannon, and Cowan, *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, 939–40).

¹³See Flake, *Prophets and Apostles of the Last Dispensation*, 377–78.

¹⁴*The Evening and the Morning Star*, March 1833, 78.

¹⁵Hazen Alrich and William Snow were converts of these early New England missionaries. See Orson Pratt Journal, October 26 and November 8, 1832, Church Archives.

¹⁶Journal History, February 17, 1833.

¹⁷*Millennial Star*, September 23, 1833, 72.

¹⁸Andrew Karl Larson, *Erastus Snow: The Life of a Missionary and Pioneer for the Early Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971), 18.

¹⁹Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 102.

²⁰Orson Hyde Journal, June 14, 1832, Church Archives.

²¹Orson Hyde Journal, September 30, 1832.

²²Jared Carter Journal, 20.

²³Orson Hyde Journal, November 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 1832.

²⁴Jared Carter Journal, May 28, 1832.

²⁵An examination of the journal accounts leaves little evidence that the missionaries preached what was actually in the Book of Mormon. Nearly all accounts mention the preaching of the events that brought forth the Book of Mormon. Samuel Smith, one of the Eight Witnesses, often bore his testimony of the truthfulness and reality of the Book of Mormon. One of Orson Hyde's favorite topics was the events that led up to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Terryl L. Givens comes to the same conclusion in his book *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84–85.

²⁶Orson Pratt Journal, July 6, 1833, Church Archives. One of the favorite topics of the missionaries was the restoration of the priesthood. It was one of the distinguishing factors among the various religions. On one occasion Orson Hyde said, "Had the greatest liberty and freedom of speech that I have had since I left Kirtland; subject was the 'Priesthood'—spoke about two hours" (Orson Hyde Journal, August 12, 1832).

²⁷Orson Hyde Journal, November 17, 1832.

²⁸Orson Pratt Journal, August 25, 1833.

²⁹Orson Hyde Journal, September 23, 1832.

³⁰Orson Hyde Journal, August 5, 1832

³¹See, for example, Orson Hyde Journal, November 17, 1832.

³²See Orson Hyde Journal, June 30, 1832.

³³Williams, "Missionary Movements," 27.

³⁴See, for example, Orson Hyde Journal, September 16, 1832.

³⁵See, for example, Orson Hyde Journal, July 14, 1832.

³⁶The journals of these early missionaries reported greater success obtaining preaching appointments in meetinghouses of other religions during the first initial spreading of the message of Mormonism. Once the word was out across New England most ministers refused the missionaries an opportunity to preach in the community churches.

³⁷See, for example, Orson Hyde Journal, September 15, 1832; August 7, 1832.

³⁸See, for example, Orson Hyde Journal, June 29, 1832.

³⁹See Jared Carter Journal, 7.

⁴⁰See Jared Carter Journal, July 23, 1832; July 26, 1832.

⁴¹Orson Hyde Journal, September 15 and 16, 1832.

⁴²See, for example, Jared Carter Journal, April 27, 1832.

⁴³See, for example, Jared Carter Journal, May 26, 1832.

⁴⁴Jared Carter Journal, June 14, 1832.

⁴⁵Jared Carter Journal, July 5, 1832.

⁴⁶Orson Hyde Journal, November 1, 1832.

⁴⁷Orson Hyde Journal, October 26, 1832.

⁴⁸Orson Hyde Journal, May 17, 1832; emphasis in the original.

⁴⁹Jared Carter Journal, 8.

⁵⁰See, for example, Orson Hyde Journal, October 20, 1832.

⁵¹Orson Hyde, Journal, July 16 and 17, 1832.

⁵²Orson Hyde, Journal, April 16, 1832.

⁵³See, for example, Orson Pratt Journal, July 10 and 18, 1832.

⁵⁴Orson Hyde Journal, March 28, 1832.

⁵⁵See Orson Hyde Journal, August 13, 1832; see also Orson Hyde Journal, March 27, 1832.

⁵⁶The *Star*, as the elders called it, was an important tool for the missionaries, members of the Church, and prospective converts. The monthly publication kept elders informed of Church activities in Kirtland and Missouri. More importantly it included many revelations that were not published elsewhere and were not widely available. Furthermore, the *Star* printed various gospel messages, testimonials of the truthfulness of the gospel, and articles on the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. It also reported activities of missionaries laboring in the mission fields.

⁵⁷See, for example, Orson Hyde Journal, July 27, 1832.

⁵⁸See, for example, Orson Hyde Journal, May 19, 1832.