

Joseph Smith's Topsfield Ancestors Commemorated

Kim R. Wilson

The ancestral roots of Joseph Smith Jr., the Prophet of the Restoration, extend deep into the New England soil of the village of Topsfield, Essex County, Massachusetts. For many years, organized groups, families, and individuals, tracing the ancestral history of the Smith family, have come to this peaceful community twenty miles north of Boston to search out the area where five generations of Smiths lived. Joseph Smith's Topsfield ancestors included Robert Smith (1626–1693), Samuel Smith I (1666–1748), Samuel Smith II (1714–1785), Asael Smith (1744–1830), and Joseph Smith Sr.

The former Smith homestead, once the home to all but Robert Smith, is now an upscale New England residential neighborhood with spacious yards and pleasant homes. The present home, located at 22 Boardman Lane, is now the residence of Brian and Cathy Rossanos and their young family and stands on the site where the original four-generation Smith home once stood. Also on the grounds is the original well that provided water to the Smith families who resided there. These same generations of Smiths worshiped at the Topsfield Congregational Church, which, in New England tradition, is located on the village green in the center of the community.

The Mormon Historic Sites Foundation was pleased to join with the Topsfield Historical Society under the leadership of Norman J. Isler, the Topsfield Congregational Church presided over by Pastor Norman B. Bendroth, the Topsfield town selectmen, and the Exeter New Hampshire Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, assisted by

David M. Keating (stake high counselor), in erecting and dedicating historical markers at the former Smith homestead and at the Congregational Church. These groups also jointly sponsored a series of events honoring the Topsfield ancestors of the Prophet Joseph Smith. On Friday evening, 14 October 2005, President Norman J. Isler conducted a public event at Collidge Hall in Topsfield attended by over three hundred Topsfield residents, Smith family members (many of whom traveled from the West for the occasion), and LDS Church members from New England.

President Isler recognized the presence of local community leaders and others, including Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve, who represented both The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Smith family, and representatives of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, including Kim R. Wilson and Richard Lambert, chair and vice-chair respectively, and Fred Woods, executive director, as well as The New England Latter-day Saints Choir under the direction of Daryl Smith. Joseph Fielding McConkie, professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University, delivered a paper on the contributions of five generations of Topsfield Smiths. (The full text of Professor McConkie's presentation is included in this edition of *Mormon Historical Studies*.)

The following morning, a meeting was held at the Congregational Church at which Elder Ballard offered remarks about the Prophet Joseph and his Topsfield ancestors, followed by the dedication of a historical marker on the grounds of the Topsfield Congregational Church by Bishop Rob Fitzgerald, who currently presides over the Georgetown Ward of the Exeter New Hampshire Stake. A second historical marker was dedicated by Elder Ballard at the homestead. The text for the two markers was composed by Alexander L. Baugh, an associate professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University, and Norman J. Isler. The inscriptions on the two markers read as follows:

Smith Homestead

In 1690, Thomas Dorman, an early Topsfield resident, built a sturdy New England home on this site. The home was subsequently occupied for many years by four generations of Smiths—Samuel I (1666–1748), Samuel II (1714–1785), Asael (1744–1830), and Joseph I (1771–1840). The home and property became known as the Smith Homestead. Samuel II, Topsfield's representative to the First Provincial Congress in 1774, attained the rank of captain in the Revolutionary War. Asael defended New York's northern border as an enlisted soldier in the Revolution. Joseph I was the father of Joseph Smith Jr., prophet and founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism). The original home was razed

between 1870–75. The current home was built in 1876. This monument is erected in honor of the Smith family of Topsfield whose lives and character exemplified the cultural, political, and religious values of the New England region and of a new and emerging nation.

Erected by the Topsfield Historical Society and the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, 2005.



Smith Homestead marker, Topsfield, Massachusetts, October 2005. The marker describes the four generations of Smiths who lived at this site, currently 22 Boardman Lane. The Topsfield Historical Society and the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation sponsored the placement of the marker. Photograph by David M. Keating.

Topsfield Congregational Church

Situated on Topsfield's Common, three Congregational meetinghouses have provided a place for spiritual communion and worship for over three hundred years. The first church was built in 1703, the second in 1759, and the present one in 1842. Five generations of the Robert Smith family of Topsfield, were Congregationalists, including: Robert (1626–1693), Samuel I (1666–1748), Samuel II (1714–1785), Asael (1744–1830), and Joseph I (1771–1840). Both Asael and Joseph Smith I were baptized in the second meetinghouse. Like many families in the area, the Smiths were noted for their Revolutionary patriotism and religious devotion. Joseph Smith

Jr. (1805–1844), prophet and founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is a descendant of the Topsfield Smiths.

Erected by the Topsfield Historical Society and the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, 2005.



Topsfield Congregational Church marker, Topsfield, Massachusetts, October 2005. The marker describes the religious and patriotic heritage of Topsfield's early settlers, including five generations of Joseph Smith's ancestors. The placement of the marker was done by the Topsfield Historical Society and the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation in cooperation with the Topsfield Congregational Church. Photograph by David M. Keating.

Following the dedication services, the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation and the Topsfield Historical Society hosted a luncheon at the Gould Barn, a pilgrim-era barn that has been restored by the Topsfield Historical Society. The invitation-only event was attended by public officials, the Congregational Church board of governors, members of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, Elder Ballard, and other representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

These several events brought together diverse groups whose history is inextricably entwined to honor the public spirit, faith, and contribu-

tions of the Topsfield Smiths. The warmest feelings of collegiality and mutual regard attended the occasions. There now stand two historical markers that will aid future visitors to Topsfield in understanding the contribution of the five generations of Smiths who resided there.



Portion of an early map of northeastern Massachusetts published in *The American Atlas* (1796), showing the community of Topsfield, situated twenty-five miles northeast of Boston. Five generations of Joseph Smith's ancestors lived in Topsfield. Asael Smith, grandfather of Joseph Smith, left Topsfield with his family in 1791, marking the end to over a century and a half of Smith family history in the community.



Topsfield Congregational Church marker dedication, Topsfield, Massachusetts, 16 October 2005. Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and a Smith descendant, participated in the dedication activities. Photograph by Fred E. Woods.