
“Long Shall His Blood . . . Stain Illinois”: Carthage Jail in Mormon Memory

Brian Q. Cannon

Much has been written about Latter-day Saints' collective memory of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith.¹ But scholars have hitherto paid insufficient attention to Carthage Jail itself as a space that invites remembering. Within a few years of the martyrdom, Governor Thomas Ford recognized that the events that unfolded at Carthage might transform a common county jail into sacred space. In his *History of Illinois* he observed, “Nauvoo and the Carthage Jail may become holy and venerable names, places of classic interest in another age; like Jerusalem, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives, and Mount Calvary to the Christian, and Mecca and Medina to the Turk.”² Oren B. Stier and J. Shawn Landres have observed that religiously motivated atrocities can “render places religiously charged.” Meanwhile when people commemorate those atrocities they “create of those sites sacred spaces.” The interpretation of sites with “violent histories” is often “contested.” The faithful must determine “(1) whether to remember at all (the conflict over remembrance itself); (2) if so, *how* to remember (the conflict over the manner of remembrance); and (3) what the resulting memorialization *means* (the conflict over the impact of remembrance).”³ For Latter-day Saints and for their Church, choosing what to commemorate and how to do so at Carthage Jail has been a somewhat contested evolutionary process. The martyrdom itself has been variously interpreted by Latter-day Saints as a preventable tragedy and

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a divinely ordained sacrifice of the prophets' blood. Some have recoiled from the murder, have been plunged into melancholy or anger in contemplating it, and have hated the site where it occurred. For others, the silent, serene setting of the murder has held out hope for peace and reconciliation with the murder and the murderers. For some visitors, touring the jail has been a valedictory experience, giving them the sense that the Latter-day Saints were morally superior and resilient when they faced persecution. Remembering the martyrdom has heightened their sense of identity as a separate people. Some have imagined the jail and the spirit there as an instrument of conversion. Others have envisioned the jail as a historic site where Latter-day Saints and Illinoisans could find common ground in a spirit of Christian charity.

Many Mormons, like Joseph Fielding, initially regarded Carthage Jail as a "cursed" site as a result of the murder of the Smith brothers.⁴ The shedding of prophets' blood at the jail and the physical evidence of their deaths—what John Taylor called "their innocent blood on the floor of the Carthage Jail"—became "a broad seal affixed to 'Mormonism' and "a witness to the truth of the everlasting gospel."⁵ Thus, it became important for Mormons to remember Carthage because of the curse that might follow the site and the murderers—evidence of God's justice—and as the site where the Prophet proved he was no charlatan.

JOSEPH SMITH.

TUNE—Star in the East.

Praise to the man who commun'd with Jehovah,
Jesus' anointed "that Prophet and Seer,"
Blessed to open the last dispensation;—
Kings shall extol him, and nations revere.

CHORUS—Hail to the Prophet, ascended to heaven,
Traitors and tyrants now fight him in vain,
Mingling with Gods, he can plan for his
brethren,
Death cannot conquer the hero again.

Praise to his mem'ry, he died as a martyr;
Honor'd and blest be his ever great name;
Long shall his blood, which was shed by assassins,

Stain Illinois, while the earth lauds his fame.

CHORUS—Hail to the Prophet, &c.

Great is his glory, and endless his priesthood,
Ever and ever the keys he will hold;
Faithful and true he will enter his kingdom,
Crown'd in the midst of the prophets of old.

CHORUS—Hail to the Prophet, &c.

SACRIFICE brings forth the blessings of heaven;
Earth must atone for the blood of that man!
Wake up the world for the conflict of justice,
Millions shall know "brother Joseph" again.

CHORUS—Hail to the Prophet, &c.

William W. Phelps, "Joseph Smith," published in the *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 14 (August 1, 1844): 607. The poem is now sung under the title "Praise to the Man." Note how in the second stanza, the third and fourth lines read: "Long shall his blood, which was shed by assassins, *Stain Illinois* while the earth lauds his fame." Image courtesy Alexander L.

Baugh.



Sketch of the jailor's bedroom in the Liberty Jail drawn by British artist Fredrick Hawkins Piercy in 1853. The drawing appears between pages 74 and 75 in *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (1855).

Fifteen months after the martyrdom, nearly sixty residents of Nauvoo, including apostles Heber C. Kimball, Parley P. Pratt, Brigham Young, Willard Richards, John Taylor, George A. Smith and Amasa Lyman, traveled to Carthage for legal business. After learning that the court was behind schedule, they made an impromptu visit to the jail, where they found the walls pocked with bullet marks and the stains of spattered blood on the jail floor. They examined the physical evidence of the murder and listened as Taylor and Richards narrated the events of the fateful afternoon and pointed out “the position in which the brethren stood to defend themselves at the time of the martyrdom.”⁶

The party of apostles and others who visited the jail apparently did so as an afterthought. Probably other Mormons on business in the county seat also visited the jail in the years immediately following the martyrdom. Others went out of their way to see the bullet holes and bloodstains. Shortly before they left Nauvoo, Horace and Helen Whitney visited the jailer and asked to see the upstairs room where the Prophet had spent his last hours. Nearly four decades later Helen recalled how “the stains of blood [had been] still quite visible,” and there were “a number of bullet holes in the door.” Exiting the jail, they stood by the well, where “Horace picked up a small chip covered with blood.” He took the relic home and safeguarded it as he crossed the plains.⁷

The visits to Carthage continued after the main body of Saints left Nauvoo. In 1860, for instance, Joseph F. Smith and his cousin Samuel Harrison Bailey Smith visited the jail en route to their mission field in Great Britain. Not only the faithful came to see the evidence of the murder. Frederick Piercy, a young British artist engaged by Mormon mission leaders in Liverpool to do sketches for an emigrants' guide sympathetic to Mormonism, visited in 1853. A girl showed him "the holes made in the wall by the bullets" as well as "the bullet hole in the door." She told him she had seen blood stains on the floor beneath the carpet. Piercy was "glad to leave" because "two lives unatoned for, and 'blood crying from the ground,' made the spot hateful." In 1857, a group of curious Hancock County residents visited the jail. They found bullet holes in a window pane and on the walls and casings that had been "preserved with scrupulous care" by the jailer. Local editors were prone to exaggeration as they boosted their communities, but the editor of the *Carthage Republican* claimed in 1867 that "many hundreds" visited the jail each year as sightseers.⁸

In 1866 the county sold the building to Bryant F. Peterson, who intended to make it his home. In 1867 Peterson showed a visiting journalist "the middle door, through which Hyrum Smith was shot." It appeared that in the intervening years "some reckless relic hunter had cut a chip from one side of the old bullet hole." A "blood-stain on the floor" was also visible, although souvenir hunters had chipped away at it, too. Peterson said that "very many" travelers from Utah had visited the jail, lingering in "awe for half an hour or more." Other visitors came to gloat over the death of the Mormon Prophet. "These generally give vent to their feeling in boisterous wonderment, and not infrequently seriously annoy families residing in the old building by their pertinacious desire to explore every part of the house."⁹

The number of Latter-day Saint visitors to Carthage increased in the 1880s and 1890s. In 1885, Franklin D. Richards and his son Charles visited. James and Eliza Browning, who had bought the building for their home, led the duo on a tour. The tour elicited a "wilderness" of contradictory emotions for Franklin. On the one hand, he was overcome with a peaceful sensation. The building "seems a place of peace," he wrote. On the other hand, Franklin was "filled with solemnity" as he contemplated "the mighty events which had transpired within its walls, of the dark cloud of sin which had rested upon it, and of the mighty martyrdom which had cried aloud to heaven and the ages from its bullet-torn frame." Franklin was overcome with both a deep "sadness" and "a compensating sensation of triumph" at the murderers' inability to thwart the church Joseph Smith had established.¹⁰

In 1888, Andrew Jensen visited the jail in company with Edward Stevenson and Joseph Smith Black while on a research trip collecting material for a



Photograph of the Carthage Jail by George Edward Anderson, May 3, 1907. The Church purchased the building from Eliza Browning in 1903 at a cost of \$4,000. Photograph courtesy Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

narrative history of the Church. The lady of the house, Elizabeth Browning, kindly gave the Utahns, two of whom had once lived in Nauvoo, the standard tour. She told them the supposed blood stain on the floor “could not be washed away.” The visit to the jail, combined with written accounts of the martyrdom, brought the events to life for the visitors. “We are enabled to grasp the situation thoroughly,” they reported. The scenes seemed “to pass in review before the eyes of our imagination so plainly and impressively, that the effects thereof surely will remain with us forever.”¹¹

Traveling to or from their field of labor, missionaries also took a detour through Carthage, often at the suggestion of their mission presidents, in an effort to connect with their heritage. In 1887, Elders C. A. Terry and R. S. Gibby visited the Browning home and asked for a tour. The Brownings were “very kind” and showed them the original stairway, the bullet hole in the bedroom door and “a dark stain on the floor which is supposed to be the blood of Hyrum.”¹² Similarly, Elder Samuel Spencer visited Carthage upon the recommendation of his mission president in 1895. Standing on the site of the martyrdom, Spencer “found that I had learned more about the building” than in everything he had read on the subject.¹³

In the spring of 1903 after her husband died, Eliza Browning decided to lease or sell the old jail. Having personally guided many Mormons through the structure, she knew of their intrinsic interest in the site and hoped to profit from it. G. Edmunds, a judge in Carthage and a friend of several Mormons in Utah, wrote to the First Presidency intimating that Browning would be willing to sell the jail. Joseph F. Smith replied that he and his associates had “not given any consideration” previously to the possibility of buying the building but that it would “please us to know what the place could be bought for.” When Edmunds replied that the Church could have it for \$4,000, Smith countered by offering \$3,000, but Browning held firm. On September 24, the First Presidency and Twelve Apostles appropriated \$4,000 for the purchase. Their decision guaranteed that the jail would be preserved and that Latter-day Saints would control any on-site interpretation of the martyrdom.¹⁴

Soon after the purchase, large, official Church groups began visiting the site, although it remained a private residence. Tenants, including John Califf, who rented the home from the Church, agreed to take hundreds of visitors a year through the building for an admission fee of fifteen cents per person. Lest the visitors be disappointed, Califf reportedly exaggerated the stain by smearing liquid on the floor just before some tour groups arrived. While they were in the Mississippi Valley for the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904, members of the Tabernacle Choir toured the jail. The next year, President German Ellsworth of the Northern States Mission organized a mission conference in Nauvoo and Carthage. After visiting sites in Nauvoo, the missionaries assembled in front of Joseph Smith’s Mansion House in Nauvoo, where they sang “Praise to the Man,” including the phrase, “long shall his blood, which was shed by assassins *stain Illinois* while the earth lauds his fame.” When he visited Carthage and saw the blood stains on the floor of the jail, one of the missionaries, G. A. Gamble, viewed it as “a literal fulfillment” of the hymn’s dark prophecy.¹⁵

In 1906, President Joseph F. Smith visited the jail on his way home from a European tour. He reportedly wept uncontrollably at the sight of the dark blood stain on the floor. Preston Nibley recalled that President Smith said, “I despise this place. It harrows up my feelings to come here.” These feelings may help to explain the Church’s initial failure to develop the site after it was purchased.¹⁶

Even without any restoration or development work, visits by individual members increased after the Church purchased the jail. By 1908, a visitors log in the jail contained the names of hundreds of Utahns. Two of them, Howard Driggs and J. Leo Fairbanks, detoured through Carthage in 1906 on their way home to Utah from Chicago. The duo visited William R. Hamilton, who claimed to have witnessed the killing and described it. At the jail they explored the room where the men had been held. While Fairbanks, an artist, sketched

the jail, Driggs “sat in a window of the old room and tried to picture the sweep of maddening passions of that tragic day.” Try as he might he could not imagine “the angry tumult, the crack of rifles, the cursing of the mob, the panic and the throbbing sorrow of a stricken people.” Rather than “haunting terror” or a “ghostly midnight feeling” he sensed only “peace.” Writing about his experiences, Driggs encouraged Latter-day Saints to make a pilgrimage to Carthage in order to strengthen their testimony, believing they would “leave with a deeper impression of the sublime seriousness of the work of Joseph Smith.” The Church had purchased the jail and other sites as “historic shrines—not to stir up bitter memories of the dead past; but to inspire and enrich the lessons of life our fathers, by their heroic struggles and sacrifices, have bequeathed to us as our greatest heritage.”¹⁷

As automobile ownership expanded in the 1920s, the number of visitors per year soared into the thousands. A key attraction for Mormon and non-Mormon alike was the “faint stains” of the martyrs’ blood, which local folklore said would not wash away. At about the same time that tourists were looking for traces of the blood, a Church committee revised the words of a favorite hymn, “Praise to the Man,” for publication in a new hymn book in 1927. The phrase “Long shall his blood, which was shed by assassins, *Stain Illinois* while the earth lauds his fame,” was changed to “Long shall his blood, which was shed by assassins, *Plead unto heav’n*, while the earth lauds his fame.”¹⁸

In 1934 Northern States Mission president George S. Romney assigned a missionary couple to conduct tours of the jail. Although missionaries from the Northern States Mission had previously gathered in Nauvoo and Carthage for mission conferences, this was the first time they began using the jail as a base for proselytizing. That first year they conducted tours not only for Mormons but for members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and local history buffs. To assist the missionaries, the Church produced a brochure for visitors. The brochure quoted from John Taylor’s account of the murder of the Smith brothers in the Doctrine and Covenants and explained that the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, combined with the suffering of John Taylor and Willard Richards at the site, “make this jail a sacred shrine.” Church leaders cooperated with civic officials in Carthage and the Illinois Historical Society to publicize the jail. In August 1935 the Historical Society erected a highway marker which read, “In the old Carthage Jail, which stands one block south of here, Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Prophet and Patriarch of the Mormon Church, were killed by a Mob on June 27, 1844.” When the Historical Society suggested that a similar marker be placed on the jail, Romney readily assented. He placed a temporary wooden marker on the jail that indicated, “On June 27, 1844, in this building, Joseph Smith, first prophet and president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,

and Hyrum Smith, his brother, patriarch of the church, were killed by a mob. They died as martyrs to the truth.” That month, in connection with a Carthage homecoming celebration, about four hundred people visited the jail.¹⁹

In 1939, Romney’s successor as mission president, Bryant S. Hinckley, expanded missionary efforts at Carthage and Nauvoo in preparation for a gala celebration of the founding of Nauvoo. In 1938, Hinckley approached C. Herrick Hamilton, supervising architect of the Illinois Department of Public Works and Engineering. Hammond agreed to engage Illinois employees in conducting historical research and drawing up plans and specifications for restoring the old jail and grounds to their original appearance. Hinckley promised that the Church would undertake the actual restoration. The men assigned by Hamilton to study the building concluded after careful investigation that the second story room where Joseph and Hyrum were murdered, as well as the stairway leading to the room, contained the original oak doors and walnut trim and flooring. They noted, though, that the pine flooring in the jail cell itself, where John Taylor had bled, was newer and had replaced the original flooring there. Before the study was completed, Hinckley asked the First Presidency to call a missionary-minded couple with construction skills to restore the jail to its original appearance and construct a visitors’ center next door. The Presidency tapped Joseph and Eunice McRae, who had previously directed the Western States Mission headquartered in Denver and edited the *Liahona*, a missionary magazine published by the Church. The McRaes arrived in Carthage March 29, 1938. On the day of their arrival they surveyed the building and inspected “the stains of blood still on the floor, as mute evidence of the terrible crime.” Although the locals were friendly, the yard itself looked “dreary.” They cleared away weeds, brush and “a dozen truck loads of trash.”²⁰

The McRaes took charge of restoring the building as nearly as possible to its appearance in 1844. They “explor[ed] every nook and cranny, forc[ed] [their] way into every crevice that would permit the body of a man with a flashlight to learn if any thing was left to reveal the story of the building.” After discovering that the mortar between the limestone blocks in the exterior wall was disintegrating, Mr. McRae reinforced the joints between the blocks with a cement mixture. Using paint remover and steel wool, the McRaes uncovered the original walnut and oak woodwork in the interior. They excavated the original well, decorated the interior of the jail with period furniture, and landscaped the grounds.²¹

Meanwhile, plans unfolded for the Nauvoo Centennial. Mission leaders worked with a committee organized by Chicago Stake President William A. Matheson to plan the two-day gala, complete with tours of historic homes, athletic contests, a cultural celebration, and a dance. Hundreds of members

from the Midwest and the Intermountain West converged on the Nauvoo area for the event. Collector Wilford C. Wood arranged with descendants of John Taylor to bring John Taylor's Book of Mormon to Carthage for the commemoration. After the Saturday festivities and Sunday morning services in Nauvoo, visitors motored to Carthage for a devotional service on Sunday afternoon, June 25. John K. Edmunds of the Chicago Stake Presidency spoke, followed by a silent tribute to "the martyred prophet and patriarch." A special souvenir program printed for the event indicated, "To all Latter-day Saints, this old jail is a sacred shrine, hallowed by the blood of innocent men who were martyred for the testimony of Jesus. It was upon this spot that Joseph Smith . . . sealed his testimony with his blood." Visitors toured the jail. The caretakers likely shared their perspective on the jail as a "miracle building." As they later wrote:

Had the jail been connected with the court house, as is the usual custom, it would have been torn down when that building was razed. Had it been built in close proximity it would have been removed for commercial reasons. Had the town grown to city size, the business section would have encroached upon it and modern structures would have taken its place. It is the oldest building in Carthage and the only one built entirely of stone. There is no doubt it had a mission to fill—to be a monument to the memory of the men who gave their lives here.²²

As the centennial of the Prophet's death approached, General Authorities encouraged bishops and branch presidents to commemorate the martyrdom in a special sacrament meeting. Opportunities to travel long distances were limited by the war effort, but Joseph F. Smith, Patriarch to the Church and a descendant of Hyrum, was assigned to travel to Carthage for the centennial. In a service at the jail on June 25, the patriarch spoke about Joseph Smith and offered a prayer. Later that evening he repaired to the gravesite of Joseph, Emma, and Hyrum in Nauvoo, joined by J. E. Vanderwood and J. C. Page from the Reorganized Church, President David Stoddard of the Northern States Mission, Joseph McRae, and Wilford C. Wood. In connection with the anniversary, McRae penned "The Story of the 'Old' Carthage Jail." Therein he observed that the murders at Carthage had "stained the history of Illinois and Hancock County and all the regrets and tears of the entire population can never wipe it out." The jail itself "still stands as a monument bathed in blood. Remove the building and dig up the soil, but the blood of the martyrs cannot be erased."²³

The McRaes remained in Carthage for twelve years. In 1950, Edward and Maude Dodge, the first in a succession of missionary couples who were called to spend a year at the site, replaced the McRaes. In one month alone in 1950, the Dodges welcomed seven hundred visitors to the jail, including 190 from



LDS Visitors' Center (left) and Carthage Jail (right), December 2001. The Visitors' Center was dedicated in 1963 by LDS Apostle Howard W. Hunter. Photograph courtesy Alexander L. Baugh.

Utah. Among the Utah visitors that summer were thirty-eight members of a charter bus tour of church history sites sponsored by the *Improvement Era*. The tour group inspected bullet holes in the door and “stains of the blood of the Patriarch Hyrum on the floor.” These physical remains of the attack were a tangible, material link to the dark days of 1844. To illustrate the perfect justice of God and the inability of sinners to hide their crimes, Dodge pointed out that the wood in the jailer’s bedroom was stained too deeply by blood to ever be washed clean. He related how Robert Ingram of Macomb, Illinois, told the Dodges that his mother as a young girl had “spent many hours trying to remove the blood stains from the jail floor,” to no avail.²⁴

The number of visitors continued to rise. Over 6,500 visited the jail between June and October 1953. Their visits seemed to fulfill Apostle Stephen L. Richards’s 1941 prediction that “the day will come when the righteous of the earth will look to [the jail] and make their pilgrimages to it in worshipful veneration of the ‘man who communed with Jehovah.’”²⁵ In order to accommodate the increased number of visitors, the Church constructed a visitors’ center next to the jail. In October 1963, Elder Howard W. Hunter dedicated

the new building. Earlier generations of visitors had been given Joseph and Eunice McRae's "Story of the 'Old' Carthage Jail," which proclaimed that the murder of Joseph and Hyrum "stained the history of Illinois and Hancock County." The apostle took a different tack. He told a crowd of six hundred attending the dedication that the visitors' center and jail site were "not reminders of a crime." Instead, Church leaders intended them to be "monuments to the two men who have sealed their testimonies with their blood." He assured the mayor of Carthage that "there has never been any hatred on the part of the Mormons toward the people of the Carthage community." The story of the murder and the victims' sealing of their testimony with their blood were inseparable, but Hunter wanted the focus to remain on Joseph and Hyrum and their deaths rather than on those who stormed the jail. He made his intent clear when he led nine mission presidents to the second floor of the jail that night. Seated in the room where Hyrum died, they listened as M. Ross Richards, president of the Gulf States Mission and a descendant of Willard Richards, related the events of the martyrdom. "In the dimly lighted room we could see the stains on the floor from Hyrum's blood, and near us was the window from which Joseph fell after the shots were fired," recorded Elder Hunter. They talked long into the night, sang "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief," and concluded with a prayer before retiring to the floor of the jail to sleep." Hunter wrote that he would "never forget" that evening.²⁶

Relatively few visitors in the 1960s spent a night in the jail, but many came away from the experience with a feeling for what had transpired there. Many were impressed by the stain they saw on the floor beneath a protective glass or plastic plate. One of them recalled that the sight of the blood "made me feel like I was somehow in touch with what happened there." Others noted how peaceful they felt in the immaculate jail with its "neat white curtains." Despite the incongruity between the sordid murder and the peaceful calm of the restored building, Alf Pratte came away with "the feeling that you now know Joseph better, and your testimony is a little stronger."²⁷

Caretakers and missionary couples assigned to the jail from the 1930s onward had sought to develop goodwill between local residents and Latter-day Saints—a low-key approach to missionary work. The content of brochures distributed at the jail in the 1970s suggests that proselytizing may have become more direct and overt during the administration of Spencer W. Kimball. In 1973, missionaries at the jail began distributing a pamphlet entitled *The Last Hours at Carthage*. The pamphlet presented the history of the martyrdom as evidence that Joseph Smith "gave his life as a testimony of his work," but it focused entirely on the past, recounting the Smith brothers' final hours in the jail, including John Taylor's singing of "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief."²⁸ Five years later, a revised version of the pamphlet added a few details, cor-

rected some historical inaccuracies, and incorporated a new missionary-related conclusion focused upon the present: “The Church survived the death of its leader and today offers to the world the gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings fulfillment, satisfaction, and joy in this life and the next to those who obey the Lord’s commandments.”²⁹ The revision of the Carthage pamphlet reflected a larger administrative shift in the orientation of sites in the Nauvoo area. As Janet Brigham, assistant editor for the *Ensign*, observed in 1980, at Nauvoo the original focus of Nauvoo Restoration had been “historical, aimed at accurately restoring” the buildings. By 1980, the focus was different. “Although historical restoration continues, the project is now also a missionary project.”³⁰

At about the same time that the proselytizing at Carthage became more focused, J. Leroy Kimball, the president of both Nauvoo Restoration and the Nauvoo Mission, decided to remove the protective cover that had been placed over the stain on the floorboards in the jailer’s bedroom. He instructed missionaries to no longer call visitors’ attention to the stain. According to Jim Kimball, his father decided to remove the protective plate after several people were unable to determine whether or not the stain was actually blood. As couple missionaries assigned to the jail came and went, the memory surrounding J. Leroy Kimball’s directive became garbled. When missionaries told one another that the directive had come from President Kimball, many assumed that this meant Spencer W. Kimball. Some missionaries became over zealous in their attempt to follow the prophet and chastised visitors who innocently inquired about the blood stain for their indiscretion.³¹

In 1982, a study undertaken by the Physical Facilities Department of the Church concluded that the visitors’ center there had “lost the crispness that an important historical site should have.” As president of Nauvoo Restoration, J. Leroy Kimball envisioned an expanded visitors’ center and park that would occupy the entire city block where the jail was located. Kimball enthusiastically promoted the project and raised funds for it from private donors. By 1986, the plans called for “a large visitors’ center like the one in Nauvoo, a huge reflecting pool, a very large paved plaza leading to the jail, a heroic-sized statue of the Prophet, and a parking lot.” Paul L. Anderson of the Historic Sites Division was shocked when he first heard of the idea. In a memo to Elder Dean L. Larsen, Anderson opposed the plans, fearing that they would overwhelm the historic jail. “Visitors should feel a closer personal connection to these events by standing in the actual place and imagining what happened. It would be difficult to maintain this focus if the new visitors’ center were much larger than the jail, its presentations too elaborate, and the grounds were a modern memorial plaza.”³²

Notwithstanding the concerns that Anderson and others expressed, plans for a new complex on the jail block proceeded. In addition to Kimball's enthusiasm for the project, a key reason for the progress was the need to accommodate rising numbers of tourists—as many as forty thousand per year. The old visitors' center was able to accommodate no more than seventy people at a time, and parking on the site was limited to ten parking stalls.³³

Church leaders publicly announced in June 1988 their plans for the \$750,000 renovation and development of the jail block. The new visitors' center would accommodate 140 people and contain parking stalls for sixty-nine cars and six buses. Six monuments would grace a walkway leading to the visitors' center, two of which would be replicas of the Mahonri Young statues of Joseph and Hyrum on Temple Square. Dunn indicated that the placement of these statues—the only replicas authorized by the First Presidency—demonstrated the site's importance to the Church. But the focal point at the end of the walkway would be the window from which Joseph Smith leaped or fell and the well. When the announcement was made, Ted Cannon, director of the Visitors' Centers at Carthage and Nauvoo, told a reporter from the *Peoria Journal Star* that Carthage was sacred to the Latter-day Saints, much as Calvary is “for Christians all over the world.”³⁴

The construction of a new visitors' center created an opportunity for professional historians to help shape the interpretation of the site. In order to improve upon the historical accuracy of previous renovations, Steven L. Olsen, Donald L. Enders, Steven Epperson, and Paul L. Anderson recommended that the summer kitchen be removed, since it had been added after 1844 and that the anachronistic well housing built in the 1940s be replaced with something closer to the original, as reflected in an 1845 publication. They also recommended that the floor timbers in the jail cell itself, which had been cut using circular saws, be replaced with vertically cut floor boards. They were confident that the flooring in the cell itself was a later addition. The flooring in the jailer's bedroom, however, would not be replaced, since they could not determine for certain whether it was original. The purpose of the renovations would be to “accurately depict the setting and conditions in which Joseph and Hyrum spent their final days” in order to permit “visitors to the jail [to] ‘approach the prophet Joseph and Hyrum, the grandeur of their spirits and the tragedy of their deaths.’”³⁵

After J. Leroy Kimball stepped down as head of NRI, his replacement, Elder Loren C. Dunn, who also presided over the North America Central Area, asked professionals in the Historic Sites Division to draft an interpretive master plan for the new visitors' center and jail. Steven L. Olsen, Paul L. Anderson, and Donald L. Enders proposed a museum-type exhibit for the visitors' center with artifacts on the life of Joseph Smith, along with an illustrated

slide-show narrating the events leading up to the martyrdom. Visitors would next tour the jail itself with missionary guides who would narrate the events of the martyrdom. The tour would conclude on the site of the excavated well where Joseph Smith had died. Reflecting the missionary and public relations focus of the 1980s, they suggested that the site be geared as much to non-members as to members. The presentation should be “honest” and “accurate” but also “sensitive.” Furthermore, it would “interpret only those portions of the story which will have the most profound impact for good on the visitors.” Following in the same vein as Howard W. Hunter in 1963, they advocated depicting Carthage as a “sacred” site and avoiding questions of “the guilt or even identity of the murderers,” including “the complicity of the residents or officials of Illinois.”³⁶

Dunn and his counselors opted for a dramatic film rather than an illustrated slide show, but they agreed that the presentation should be positive. On March 17, they asked the Curriculum Department to produce an audiovisual presentation for the visitors’ center. The theme of the film and of the entire site should be “a healing one.” The difficulty of placing a happy face on a murder meant that the events that transpired at Carthage itself would have to be peripheral. “While the death of Joseph and Hyrum will receive proper attention, the theme should be the message and life of the Prophet Joseph Smith.” Visitors should come away with “thoughtful understanding” rather than a fixation upon “dramatic violence.” In short, “the legacy of Joseph Smith, rather than his martyrdom, should be the main message of the film.”³⁷

On June 27, 1989 Gordon B. Hinckley dedicated the improvements on the jail block. New additions to the block included a visitors’ center with new artwork and a theater where a nineteen-minute film on the life of Joseph Smith is shown, a new statue of Joseph and Hyrum Smith by Dee Jay Bawden, and five



Statue of Joseph and Hyrum Smith on the Carthage Jail plaza by Dee Jay Bawden, 1989. Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh, October 2006.

commemorative monuments in the plaza leading to the visitors' center and jail. Both Dunn and Hinckley emphasized that Latter-day Saints had come to terms with the martyrdom. The intended message of the Church's restoration efforts at Carthage was "one of healing and reconciliation." The Church had restored the jail, President Hinckley stated, "out of respect and love for Joseph and Hyrum Smith" The jail block was dedicated "as a place hallowed and sacred to which people of all faiths may come and learn, may ponder and reflect, may mediate and pray while thinking upon the lives and works of those who died here." With all of the focus upon the life and legacy of Joseph and Hyrum, the mayors of Carthage, Warsaw, and Quincy, and Jayne Thompson, wife of Illinois Governor James R. Thompson, may not have fully understood the symbolic significance for Church leaders of their presence. While the Saints said they wanted to forget the murderers, these individuals were, Dunn later noted, "the modern-day counterparts" of those who had plotted or acquiesced to the murders of Joseph and Hyrum.³⁸

Speaking at BYU three months after the dedication, Dunn reinforced the Church's commitment to celebrating the life of Joseph Smith at Carthage rather than commemorating his death. Referring to the monuments that had been installed along the walkway leading to Carthage, Dunn said, "Joseph's testimony of the Savior found on the monuments leading to the Carthage Jail is more significant than the stain on the floor that some think is the blood of Hyrum."³⁹ Paul L. Anderson's prediction had been fulfilled—the monuments had eclipsed and overwhelmed the jail itself.

On June 26, 1994, 150 years after the martyrdom, Church leaders and members gathered at the jail site to remember the martyrdom and celebrate Joseph Smith's legacy. President Howard W. Hunter set the tone for the meeting, which was broadcast to meetinghouses across North America, by declaring that the best way to celebrate the martyrs' memory was to "magnify the message of their Master" by being "kinder with one another, more gentle and more forgiving." Gordon B. Hinckley related in some detail the events of the martyrdom, but his intent was to show that "those sad days are gone" and that "the testimonies which were sealed here in these very precincts . . . now nurture the faith of people around the world."⁴⁰

The focus at Carthage on the men who died rather than on their deaths continued into the twenty-first century. In 2001, about four hundred missionaries and members gathered for a sunrise devotional presided over by Nauvoo Mission President Richard K. Sager on the anniversary of the Prophet's death. Milton V. Backman Jr., emeritus professor of Church History and Doctrine at BYU, advised the audience to "concentrate on the triumph of [Joseph and Hyrum's] vision" rather than on "the tragedy of the loss."⁴¹

In the years that have passed since the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Carthage Jail has meant many things to the Latter-day Saints. Mormons have had to determine (1) whether to remember Carthage Jail as a significant site at all; (2) *how* to remember what occurred there; and (3) the meaning they will find in that site. In the years immediately following Joseph and Hyrum Smith's murders, as Latter-day Saints chafed under memories of the deaths, Latter-day Saints spoke negatively of the jail—it was “cursed,” “hateful,” and overshadowed with a “dark cloud of sin.” Even so, there was no better way to “grasp the situation thoroughly” and visualize what had transpired than to visit the jail, so many came. Once there, some were surprised by feelings of peace—they were at once on the site of the murder yet far removed from it in time and in emotion. Not so for Joseph F. Smith. Although the Church purchased the site during his tenure as president, it did nothing to restore the building or to develop the site, as it did at the Joseph Smith birthplace. Perhaps one reason was that the memories and legacy of the jail were too painful for President Smith. It was not until the 1930s that the Church identified the jail as a “shrine,” stationed tour guides there, and renovated it. The shrine was sacred, mission president Bryant S. Hinckley declared, because it was “hallowed by the blood” of Joseph and Hyrum. It was a “miracle building,” said Joseph McRae, because “the blood of the martyrs cannot be erased.” The blood on the floor was “mute evidence of the terrible crime” committed in 1844. As proselytizing became a more significant focus at both the jail and at Nauvoo, tour guides increasingly emphasized the lives and legacy of Joseph and Hyrum rather than the death, with its overtones of gentile complicity and guilt. As early as 1963, Howard W. Hunter had cautioned that the restored jail and visitors' center at Carthage were not designed as “reminders of a crime” but “monuments” to Joseph and Hyrum. But the plans for a larger visitors' center and monuments on the jail block transformed the site into a “memorial plaza.” Carthage was re-envisioned as a “site for healing” and a place to learn about the life and mission of Joseph Smith. Visitors would still be drawn to the jail to hear the grim story of the murder, but Church leaders hoped they would leave with a “thoughtful understanding”—especially of Joseph Smith's testimony of Jesus Christ. As Elder Loren C. Dunn said, the supposed relics of the death itself, including the “blood stains” on the floor, were less important for visitors to see than Joseph Smith's testimony of the Savior inscribed on a monument outside the jail.

The same temporal and emotional distance that allowed Latter-day Saint leaders to forget the crime of Carthage also enabled Illinois officials to remember. In 2004, the Illinois House approved a resolution stopping short of apologizing but expressing regret for the assassination of Joseph and Hyrum Smith at Carthage. Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn of Illinois met with Utah

officials and Church leaders in Salt Lake City to convey the lawmakers' sentiments. Following the meeting, Quinn told the press, "I want to express our official regrets to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for events that occurred in Nauvoo in 1844 and also in Carthage."⁴² The stain of the Prophets' blood on the floor at Carthage had nearly worn away.

Notes

1. See, for instance, Dean C. Jessee, "Return to Carthage: Writing the History of Joseph Smith's Martyrdom," *Journal of Mormon History* 8 (1981): 3–20; and Davis Bitton, *The Martyrdom Remembered: A One-Hundred-Fifty-Year Perspective on the Assassination of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1994).

2. Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois: From Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847*, 2 vols. (Chicago: S. C. Griggs, 1854), 2:360.

3. Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres, eds., *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 8, 9. See also David Grua, "Memoirs of the Persecuted: Persecution, Memory and the West as a Mormon Refuge" (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 2008). I am indebted to David Grua for calling my attention to Stier's and Landres's work and to the topic of religious violence and memory.

4. Andrew F. Ehat, ed., "'They Might Have Known That He Was Not a Fallen Prophet'—The Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding," *BYU Studies* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1979): 151.

5. John Taylor, "Martyrdom of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Brother Hyrum," in Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev. 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 6:629–31; also D&C 135:8.

6. Journal History of the Church, September 24, 1845, 1, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

7. Helen Marr Kimball Whitney, "Life Incidents," *Woman's Exponent* 11, no. 20 (March 15, 1883): 153; published in Jeni Broberg Holzapfel and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, eds., *A Woman's View: Helen Marr Whitney's Reminiscences of Early Church History* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1997), 255.

8. *Carthage Republican*, July 19, 1866, quoted in Joseph A. McRae and Eunice H. McRae, *Historical Facts Regarding the Liberty and Carthage Jails* (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing Co., 1954), 81–82; Francis M. Gibbons, *Joseph F. Smith: Patriarch and Preacher, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 53; Frederick Hawkins Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley*, ed. Fawn M. Brodie (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 96.

9. *Carthage Republican*, May 23, 1867, quoted in McRae and McRae, *Historical Facts Regarding the Liberty and Carthage Jails*, 82–83.

10. *Deseret News*, July 1, 1885.

11. *Deseret News*, October 31, 1888.

12. *Deseret News*, August 31, 1887.

13. *Deseret News*, February 2, 1895.

14. Journal History, May 21, 1903, 7; September 24, 1903, 4; G. Edmunds to Joseph F. Smith, May 1, 1903, and penciled notes by Smith; G. Edmunds to Joseph F. Smith, May 12, 1903, abstracts, Joseph F. Smith Incoming Correspondence, Scott G. Kenney Research Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young Uni-

versity, Provo, Utah.

15. *Deseret News*, January 30, 1904; October 14, 1905; June 30, 1909; G. A. Gamble, "A Trip to Nauvoo," *Improvement Era* 9, no. 1 (November 1905): 47; author's conversation with Joseph Johnstun, Springfield, Illinois, May 22, 2009. The mission conference at Nauvoo and Carthage was so memorable that it was repeated the following year. *Deseret News*, October 13, 1906.

16. Preston Nibley, *The Presidents of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1947), 252; Truman G. Madsen's recollection of a conversation with Preston Nibley, quoted in Blaine M. Yorgason, *From Orphaned Boy to Prophet of God: The Story of Joseph F. Smith* (Ogden: Living Scriptures, 2001), 356.

17. Howard R. Driggs, "Visits to Carthage," *Juvenile Instructor* 46, no. 6 (June 1911): 324; *Deseret News*, December 15, 1906. Other accounts of Hamilton's reminiscences regarding Carthage are found in John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), 228–30; and Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Correspondence between William R. Hamilton and Samuel H. B. Smith Regarding the Martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith," *Mormon Historical Studies* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 83–92.

18. *Journal History*, August 13, 1926, 4; George D. Pyper, *Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1939), 100.

19. *Journal History*, August 10, 1935, 6; August 16, 1935, 9; August 20, 1935, 7; September 7, 1935, 7; also folder labeled "Carthage Jail Articles and Pictures," historical files shared courtesy of Donald L. Enders, LDS Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as LDS Museum files).

20. Joseph Booton and Jerome V. Ray, "Report of Research Work and Restoration of Old Jail Building, Carthage, Illinois," March 1, 1939, 1, copy in folder labeled "Carthage Jail Articles Pictures," LDS Museum files; *Journal History*, February 5, 1938, 5; April 16, 1938, 8; June 24, 1944, 7–10; *Deseret News*, February 19, 1938; McRae and McRae, *Historical Facts Regarding the Liberty and Carthage Jails*, 117. Booton's and Ray's observation that the flooring in the cell itself (as opposed to the jailer's bedroom) had been replaced squares with the reminiscences of a Mr. Reimbolt of Nauvoo, who told Joseph McRae, "I was in Carthage with my delivery wagon one day and discovered they were working on the 'old' jail. I drove over and they were removing the floor from the north room upstairs (this is the cell room)." Joseph McRae, "The Story of the 'Old' Carthage Jail," *Deseret News*, June 24, 1944.

21. McRae and McRae, *Historical Facts Regarding the Liberty and Carthage Jails*, 112, 118; *Journal History*, October 31, 1953, 6.

22. *Journal History*, June 16, 1939; "Church Observes Carthage, Nauvoo Anniversaries," *Improvement Era* August 1939; "Souvenir Program Nauvoo Centennial and Carthage Jail Memorial, 1839–1939," folder labeled "Carthage Articles-Pictures," LDS Museum files; McRae and McRae, *Historical Facts Regarding the Liberty and Carthage Jails*, 118–19.

23. *Journal History*, June 24, 1944, 7–10.

24. *Journal History*, June 7, 1950, 7; October 31, 1953, 6; see also Clarence S. Barker, "From the Green Hills to Statuary Hall," *Improvement Era* 53, no. 8 (August 1950): 632.

25. *Journal History*, October 31, 1953, 6; August 30, 1941, 2–3.

26. "Story of the Old Carthage Jail," copy, n.d., folder labeled "Carthage Jail Articles Pictures," LDS Museum files; *Journal History*, October 27, 1963, 2; *Deseret News*, March 11, 1995.

27. *Journal History*, October 5, 1968; Jim F., Comment appended to Kevin Barney, Nauvoo Trivia, <http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2005/03/nauvoo-trivia/>, accessed

April 8, 2009.

28. *The Last Hours at Carthage* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1973), copy in folder labeled “Carthage Jail,” LDS Museum files.

29. *The Last Hours at Carthage* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978); copy in folder labeled “Carthage Jail,” LDS Museum files.

30. Janet Brigham, “Nauvoo Today: Building the City Beautiful,” *Ensign* 10, no. 3 (March 1980): 45.

31. J. [Jennifer] L. Lund, “Notes on Carthage Jail Blood Stains,” August 15, 2006, folder entitled “Carthage Jail Correspondence,” LDS Museum files. The report indicates that Donald L. Enders of the Church Historical Department recalled having heard that T. Edgar Lyon, the historian for Nauvoo Restoration, Incorporated, had “uncovered evidence that most, if not all, of the original flooring in the Jail had been removed late in the nineteenth century” and that “Lyon had a photograph of the building taken while the floors were being removed.” The report indicated further that Jim Kimball, son of J. LeRoy Kimball, “was not aware of Ed [Lyon] finding evidence that the floorboards had been replaced.” The photo Enders remembered having seen (attached to Lund’s report) comes from Wilford C. Wood’s album. It shows flooring being removed by two men and piled on the side of a room. However, the room pictured in the photograph does not appear to be the finished jailer’s bedroom, which is shown in a separate photo taken on the same day. In 1962, the First Presidency formed Nauvoo Restoration, Incorporated, headed by Salt Lake physician J. LeRoy Kimball, who had purchased and restored his great-grandfather Heber C. Kimball’s home. The corporation’s purpose was to purchase and restore Mormon homes in Nauvoo in order to “perpetuate in history the part played by the Mormon Pioneers in the buildings of the West,” announced David O. McKay. Although NRI initially confined its operations to Nauvoo, Carthage Jail eventually came under its purview. *Journal History*, June 28, 1962, 4; Brigham, “Nauvoo Today,” 44–47.

32. Dee Packer to Ray Bryant, October 27, 1982; Paul L. Anderson to Dean L. Larsen, May 14, 1986, folder labeled “Carthage Jail Correspondence,” LDS Museum files.

33. *Quincy Herald-Whig*, June 5, 1988, folder labeled “Carthage Jail Articles Pictures,” LDS Museum files.

34. *Quincy Herald-Whig*, June 5, 1988; *Deseret News*, June 11, 1988; *Peoria, Illinois Journal Star*, June 26, 1988, quoted in Bill McKeever, “Final Moments at Carthage Jail,” <http://www.mrm.org/death-of-joseph-smith>, accessed May 8, 2009.

35. Steven L. Olsen et al., to Loren C. Dunn, September 2, 1988, folder labeled “Carthage Jail Correspondence,” LDS Museum files.

36. Rick [Richard E. Turley] to Glen [M. Leonard], March 15, 1988; Steven C. Olsen, Paul L. Anderson and Donald L. Enders, “Carthage Jail Historic Site and Visitors Center,” March 14, 1988, folder labeled “Carthage Jail Correspondence,” LDS Museum files.

37. “Carthage Visitor’s Center Film,” Script draft no. 4, November 9, 1988, folder labeled “Carthage Visitor’s Center,” LDS Museum files.

38. *Deseret News*, July 8, 1989; September 30, 1989.

39. *Deseret News*, September 30, 1989.

40. *Deseret News*, July 2, 1994.

41. *Deseret News*, July 7, 2001.

42. *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 2004; *New York Times*, April 8, 2004; *Deseret News*, April 2, 2004.