



Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial, 2009. Photograph by Gary L. Boatright Jr.

Historical Landscape of the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial

Gary L. Boatright Jr.

As the cold of the New England winter took hold of the Vermont countryside in December 1805, a fire warmed the frame home where Joseph Smith and his wife, Lucy Mack Smith, lived. In late 1804 or early 1805, the couple, along with their three living children, Alvin (7), Hyrum (5), and Sophronia (2), had moved into the home which stood on property purchased by Solomon Mack, Lucy's father in August 1804. It was here on Monday, December 23, 1805, that the Smiths welcomed another son, Joseph Smith Jr., into their family. Although he spent only three short years on the farm, for more than a century the site has been known by his name—the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial. This essay looks at the history of the site and the forces that helped to shape it into the landscape that it is today.

Native Inhabitants

Before the arrival of the Europeans, four groups of people inhabited the region—the Paleoindians, the Archaic culture, the Woodland culture, and the most recent group, the Abenaki.¹ Each of these groups modified their way of life as the environment and landscape around them changed due to geological and meteorological forces. In response to these forces, these groups also modified the surrounding environment to accommodate their needs and beliefs.

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the Abenaki culture inhabited the region, settling in villages along the Connecticut River Valley in Vermont and

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New Hampshire. As with their predecessors, the culture of these people revolved around the changing seasons of the area:

Beginning in late April or early May, the Abenaki planted corn, beans, and squash in fertile floodplains near their villages. The Vermont climate with its late spring and early fall frosts, limited the Abenaki reliance on agriculture . . . Horticulture played an important role but was supplemental to hunting, fishing, and gathering. . . . During the summer, the women generally tended to food crops and gathered berries, fruits, nuts, and other edible vegetation. The nuts and dried berries were stored for winter. The men fished and hunted small mammals such as muskrats.

In the fall, family bands headed to their hunting territories to hunt for meat and skins, primarily moose and deer, with some beaver and muskrat as well. . . .

The Abenaki spent most of the winter in the larger villages, living off foods prepared earlier, such as dried and smoked meat, corn, and wild plant foods. Mid winter, usually February, was the beginning of the main hunting period, as stored food supplies began to run low. . . .

As spring came, the Abenaki returned to the larger villages. Maple trees were tapped for sap, and groundnuts and spring greens collected. Bird hunting . . . and fishing for shad, salmon, and alewives were very important during this period.²

Land ownership did not exist among the Abenaki and earlier peoples until the arrival of the Europeans. Before the coming of the white man, the Native American's hunting territories were identified by rough boundaries and trails, areas heavily tied to the watershed of the area.³

European and Colonial Settlement, 1609–1804

Europeans first entered the area that is now Vermont in June 1609, when Samuel de Champlain, the French explorer, visited the lake that now bears his name. Over the next century, Europeans explored and trapped the region, but it was not until 1763 that Vermont saw an increase in the number of settlers within its borders.⁴ The increase was due primarily to the creation of over a hundred townships from land grants distributed under the authority of King George III by Governor Benning Wentworth.⁵ One of the townships was Sharon, organized on August 17, 1761, comprising 21,400 acres.⁶ Sharon was granted to a settler by the name of John Taylor and sixty-one associates, and a drawing was held to distribute the parcels. John Downing received 127 acres in the northwest portion of the township. This parcel included much of the one hundred acres that Solomon Mack purchased in 1804.⁷ Downing, like most other individuals who received these early land grants, did not settle the land, but held on to it for speculative purposes. In the mid 1760s, only forty to fifty thousand acres were actually held by settlers; the rest was held by speculators. In fact, in 1769, only fifty-one of the 128 townships had any residents at all.⁸

David Morris was likely the second owner of the property, but it was the third owner, Samuel Shepherd II, who actually first operated a farm on the land and built the first structures.⁹

The Solomon Mack Farm, 1804–1811

On August 27, 1804, at the age of seventy-two, Solomon Mack purchased from Samuel Shepherd II “about one hundred acres . . . more or less,” including improvements.¹⁰ Given Mack’s elderly age at the time of the acquisition, it is highly unlikely that he would have purchased land requiring significant amounts of clearing or construction. The hundred-acre farm straddled the boundary line dividing Sharon and Royalton Townships, most of the acreage being on the Sharon side.

Bisecting the farm was a road, later called the Old Sharon Road, connecting the towns of Sharon and Royalton.¹¹ White Brook, a small stream that bisects the farm, flows through the low areas near the road and served as a water source for the Solomon Mack home and what is now referred to as the Daniel



Fig. 1. Photograph taken in 1905 showing the remains of the foundation of the Joseph Smith Sr. home where Joseph Smith Jr. was born December 23, 1805. Photograph courtesy Church History Library.



Fig. 2. In the foreground can be seen the foundation of the Solomon Mack home, ca. 1907. On the hill in the background is the remnant of the apple orchard believed to have been planted during the time Solomon Mack owned the property. Photograph by George Edward Anderson. Image courtesy Church History Library.

Mack home.¹² To the east of the Solomon Mack home on a hill rising above White Brook was the home rented by Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith. “Here it was,” Lucy Mack Smith wrote, “that my son Joseph was born” on December 23, 1805 (see Figs. 1 and 2).¹³

When the Smiths moved into the home on the Mack farm, they did not move into a rough-cut log cabin, as generally believed. The stone cellar and the size of the foundation suggest that the home was a traditional New England-style post and beam home, finished with clapboard siding and a central chimney.¹⁴ The home was of modest size. From measurements and photographs taken at the site in 1905, it appears that the home was twenty by twenty-two feet, with the front door facing southeast. The size of the foundation and the architectural tradition of the time both suggest that the home was a story and a half tall. The main floor included a small entry, kitchen, pantry, parlor, and a bedroom for the parents. The half-floor garret was most likely used as a bedroom for the Smith children.

Similar in style to the birthplace home, the Solomon Mack home was somewhat larger. It is believed that Solomon Mack lived in this home while the Smiths occupied the home on the hill. Following the Smiths' move from the farm, Mack may have moved into the birthplace home and lived there until the farm was sold in 1811.

Following the 1804 purchase, the Macks and the Smiths continued to improve the farm. The apple orchard that Utahn Junius F. Wells reported as being near the birthplace home during his 1894 visit was believed to have been planted by Solomon Mack, possibly with help from the Smiths.¹⁵ It is known that shortly after the Smiths purchased land and developed a farm in Palmyra, New York, they too planted an apple orchard.¹⁶ While living on his father-in-law's property, Joseph Smith Sr. farmed a portion of the sixty-eight acres he rented. Although it is not possible to determine exactly what was grown and produced on the farm, typical crops in New England during this period included hay, corn, rye, beans, potatoes, oats, and turnips. The Smith's would also have had farm animals, including oxen. Oxen were more sure footed on the rocky hillsides than horses and were less expensive to feed. They could also be used as a food source when needed.¹⁷ The Smiths lived in the birthplace home for only a few years. The family moved from the farm in late 1807 or early 1808.

Post-Mack Occupation, 1811–1905

Between 1805 and 1811, three homes, a number of barns, and other buildings existed on the property which comprises the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial property. These homes are known today as the birthplace home, the Solomon Mack home, and the Daniel Mack home. After Solomon Mack sold the one hundred-acre farm on May 11, 1811, the property passed through a series of owners. Many of these owners modified the landscape as its primary use shifted from farming to grazing livestock.

In August 1894, on assignment from the First Presidency of the LDS Church, Junius F. Wells traveled to Sharon, Vermont, to learn firsthand about the Solomon Mack property and more specifically, Joseph Smith's birthplace home. By that time, all the Mack structures had been dismantled. In one of the many affidavits obtained by Wells, Benjamin Latham, a resident of the area, stated that Bela Durkee, one-time owner of the property, dismantled the Solomon Mack home and its associated outbuildings before he sold the farm in 1859.¹⁸ Although there are no statements regarding the birthplace home and the Daniel Mack home, Wells believed that these two homes and their associated outbuildings were also dismantled, since there was no evidence suggesting that the buildings simply fell into disrepair.¹⁹ Another evidence of a usage

shift was the decrease in use of the road connecting Sharon to Royalton, and new roads were built in the area to better meet the needs of the surrounding communities.²⁰ Despite the changes in the use of the landscape, Wells wrote, “It is probable that the place has not changed in its physical appearance for at least eighty years.”²¹

During his 1894 visit, Wells inquired at the Sharon Town Clerk’s office regarding the location of the home where Joseph Smith was born. Wells and his group were directed to travel “2 ½ miles, to the farm house of Harvey Smith [no relation to Joseph],” who took Wells

about three quarters of a mile further, where we left the vehicle and walked across the fields to a magnificent eminence in a pasture, . . . where we found the cellar walls and the foundations of the old house in which Joseph was born. The hearthstone is also left. The foundation shows that the house was about 22 x 24 feet in size; the cellar is 8 feet wide by 20 feet long. . . . About the house and all over the hill, on which it is located are some very old apple trees. . . . Down to the left of this site is the old Mack house. . . . It is also gone and only the foundations left.²²

During this visit to the birthplace site the idea came to Wells to commemorate the life of the Joseph Smith by erecting a monument at his birthplace. However, the idea would wait more than a decade before it came to fruition.

Junius F. Wells and the Development of the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial

During Wells’ 1894 visit to Sharon, he had the idea to construct a monument on the site of the Prophet’s birth. “That thought remained dormant for a number of years,” explained Wells, “but when the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Prophet approached, it seemed to me that it was a proper time to revive it.”²³ In March 1905, he began discussions with R. C. Bowers Company of Montpelier, Vermont, regarding the possibility of constructing a monument. Wells also began negotiations with C. H. Robinson, owner of the birthplace property.

On May 23, 1905, Wells purchased sixty-eight acres of land straddling the Sharon and Royalton town line. Of the sixty-eight acres, forty-six acres were originally part of the Solomon Mack farm, including the birthplace home and the Solomon Mack home. Since the “old Sharon road” had been abandoned for years, a small tract of land comprising one and one-tenth acres was purchased to connect the land to Dairy Hill Road, the closest road that provided access to the area. Wells also negotiated the purchase of two springs lying near the northeastern section of the property.²⁴ Pipes would eventually be laid to carry water from the springs to the birthplace home site.

Following the purchase, Wells wrote a description of the landscape, emphasizing the area surrounding the birthplace home:

The foundations of the farmhouse are still in place; also the walls of the cellar and the hearthstone and the door stone; some of the stable foundation and much of a stone wall that inclosed [*sic*] the barnyard and extended far beyond to fence off the orchard still stand. The old well, now filled with boulders, is still visible and contains water. The orchard of apple trees was quite extensive and many of the old trees, the trunks of some of them two feet in diameter, are still standing and bearing fruit. . . . Dimly marked on the hillside is the grass covered road that formerly led down from the farm house to the old Sharon road, along the right bank of the White Brook, a beautiful little stream, abounding in trout, that flows through the property and about equally divides the lands of the old Mack farm. It is an isolated, quiet, lovely, sylvan spot; surrounded by some of the most charming scenery of the Green Mountains which varied and extended views are obtained from many points of vantage on the premises.²⁵

As Wells contemplated the design and materials for a monument, he wrote the Utah born non-Mormon sculptor Cyrus Dallin for his advice and recommendations. In an undated letter to Wells, Dallin frequently refers to a book titled *The History of Architecture* by James Fergusson. Dallin wrote that Fergusson believed that “the most obvious mode of obtaining architectural effect is by the largeness of the materials employed.” The letter continues: “The Egyptians, Hindoes, Cyclopeans, seized on this and carried it to the utmost legitimate extent,” and “[the] obelisk . . . owe[s] much of [its] grandeur to the magnitude of the materials employed in [its] construction.” Dallin further emphasized the significance of the size of monuments: “Massiveness is the expression of giant power and the apparent eternity of duration which it conveys.”²⁶ Wells took to heart Dallin’s design suggestions for the Joseph Smith Memorial Monument, eventually settling on an obelisk structure modeled after the famed obelisk of Egypt. To ensure permanence and grandeur, granite for the monument came from the famous quarry at Barre, Vermont.²⁷

In his June 1905 report to the First Presidency, Wells contemplated two possible sites for the monument. The first was to build the monument directly on the birthplace home, unless “it was desirable to preserve the ruins of it.” The second location he proposed was “upon the higher ground a few feet to the eastward” of the birthplace home.²⁸ In July 1905, Wells received approval to proceed with the construction of the monument. The location chosen for the monument was the latter suggested by Wells, on the hill just to the east of the birthplace home site.

The development of the farm as a commemorative site had a significant impact on the landscape surrounding the remains of the birthplace home. As mentioned, Wells purchased a small tract of land which connected the birth-



Fig. 3. The Memorial Cottage under construction, 1905. Photograph courtesy Church History Library.



Fig. 4. The Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial shortly after the developments by Junius F. Wells, ca. 1907. Photograph by George Edward Anderson. Image courtesy Church History Library.

place site to Dairy Hill Road. However, a single-lane road had to be constructed to allow access to the site by those working on the monument and the other development projects.

In addition, in late July or early August 1905, Wells proposed the construction of a memorial cottage to be built over the birthplace home cellar.²⁹ The hearthstone of the original home would be incorporated into the construction of the cottage and would be placed in the exact location in which it rested in the original home. On August 9, 1905, Wells received a telegram from LDS Church President Joseph F. Smith authorizing the construction of what would become known as the Memorial Cottage on the site of the birthplace home.³⁰ Additionally, Wells salvaged the doorstep of the original birthplace home. This was used as the back doorstep of the Memorial Cottage (see Fig. 3).

During the construction of the two projects, the landscape changed as a new era for the site emerged. Land was graded, roads were built, and mounds of rock and fill material were moved around the site as the monument, cottage,



Fig. 5. Dedication of the Joseph Smith Memorial, December 23, 1905. Photograph courtesy Church History Library.



Fig. 5a. Close-up of the individuals who attended the dedication of the Joseph Smith Memorial, December 23, 1905. Among those in attendance were Joseph F. Smith (President of the Church), Anthon H. Lund (Second Counselor In the First Presidency), Francis M. Lyman (Apostle), John Henry Smith (Apostle), Charles W. Penrose (Apostle), Hyrum M. Smith (Apostle), George Albert Smith (Apostle), Joseph F. Smith Jr. (Historian's Office, son of President Smith), Ina Smith (daughter of President Smith), Ida Smith (wife of Hyrum M. Smith), Lorin C. Farr (who was baptized in 1832 and had lived with the Prophet Joseph Smith), Angus M. Cannon (patriarch), Frank Y. Taylor (president of the Granite Stake, Susa Young Gates (daughter of Brigham Young), George F. Richards (of the Tooele Stake), Alice Richards (wife of George F. Richards), Edith Smith (historian of the Smith family), and John McDonald (friend of President Smith). Photograph courtesy Church History Library.

and other site features took shape. Numerous photographs from this period document the changing landscape (see Fig. 4).

On December 23, 1905, with construction of the monument and cottage complete, the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial was dedicated by Joseph F. Smith (see Figs. 5 and 5a). In his dedicatory prayer, President Smith implied what the long-term purpose of the site would be:

O God, we ask Thee, in the name of Thy Son Jesus Christ, that Thou wilt bless and sanctify all the land surrounding this spot, sacred to the memory of all Thy people, it being the birthplace of Thy servant Joseph. May it be hallowed by Thy people. May Thy blessing abide upon it, that it may be a blessed place, where Thy people may visit from time to time and rejoice in contemplating Thy goodness in that Thou has restored to the earth the fullness of the Gospel of Thy Son.³¹

With the harsh Vermont winter quickly approaching, Wells began planning improvements for the site that would take place over the next several years.



Fig. 6. View of Wells Lane toward Dairy Hill Road, ca. 1907. The newly planted maple trees are on each side of the road. Photograph George Edward Anderson. Image courtesy Church History Library.

Continued Development and Property Improvements, 1906–1959

The year 1906 brought a flurry of activity to the birthplace memorial which would continue over the next few years. This period saw the development and enhancement of the landscape through planting plans and an effort to reforest areas of the site. The site also saw the construction of numerous buildings on the property which were built to support the use of the land as a commemorative site and farm.

Among Junius F. Wells' papers is an undated document simply titled "Tree Record" that lists a number of planting projects undertaken at the memorial by Wells between 1906 and 1909. The first major planting project was to enhance the drive from Dairy Hill Road to the monument. The narrow road, named after Wells, was lined with "a double row of maple trees, about an inch [and] a half in diameter."³² Over time, the trees matured, creating a beautiful allée leading to the monument (see Fig. 6).



Fig. 7. “First Presidency Row,” ca. 1907. The pines were planted in honor of the First Presidency as part of a memorial planting program by Junius F. Wells. Photograph by George Edward Anderson. Image courtesy Church History Library.

In September 1906, Wells also began what could be described as a memorial planting program. This program included planting trees in remembrance of specific people or groups of people within the Church. The first of these plantings was what Wells called “the First Presidency Row.” He wrote that these rows of trees commenced at the “North west corner of the farm” and consisted of a spruce and pine trees.³³ Similar tree arrangements would be planted over the next few years (Fig. 7).

During the spring of 1907, Wells began a reforestation project. He wrote that he “set out on the hill around by the sugar orchard call[ed] Apostles grove about 650 maple trees an inch in diameter.” Wells also planted around two hundred pines and spruces, which were “five to seven years old,” between the ice house and the “tie” shed.³⁴ An additional two hundred pines and spruces were planted north of the tie shed.

In 1907, the first formal effort to landscape the area around the site began. Wells contracted with Dana Dow, a landscape architect from Ipswich, Massachusetts, to create a landscape design for the area surrounding the monument and the Memorial Cottage. This detailed design created a park-like setting around the monument. Included in the design were walkways to improve cir-

cultivation among the site elements. At the eastern-most end of Wells Lane a loop was created that circled the monument and the Memorial Cottage. Bordering the loop road, southwest of the cottage, a lily pond was constructed. The planting plan also details the location of manicured lawns, flower beds, additional trees, and other landscape elements. It also provides details regarding the types of plants that should be planted in the flower beds and other areas of the site. Based on the historical record, it appears that this planting plan was the basis for landscaping the area immediately around the monument until the cottage was torn down in 1959 and replaced by the current visitors' center and director's home in 1961.

The year 1908 was an aggressive planting year for Wells. Wells wrote: "Spring of 1908 there were set out on Apostles Grove hill about 450 additional maples and some pines & spruces near the cottage. There were set out about thirty apple trees in the old orchard, trees two or three years old. In September a hemlock & a pine were planted . . . among the arboretae [sic] near the lily pond."³⁵ In his description of the site, he wrote of an ice pond built below the farm house. In describing the ponds then being constructed, he further noted that "the presence of standing water in this almost ideal landscape completes its beauty, and is very grateful and refreshing in the summer time."³⁶

In 1909 Wells continued and expanded his memorial tree program. Five additional pines were planted in an "X" formation, and six more were planted in two triangle patterns near the First Presidency Row. In November 1909, Wells and C. H. Robinson, whom Wells hired to be the caretaker of the site, "laid out Missionary hill for the purpose of planting trees thereon, by the missionaries who visit the Prophet's birthplace from time to time."³⁷ He describes the location of Missionary Hill as "left of the avenue and covers the last hill coming into the grounds."³⁸ It was anticipated that this program would continue for some time, but there is very little mention of it after 1911.

When the site was purchased in 1905, Wells frequently mentioned the old apple orchard near the birthplace home site and expressed a desire to renew the orchard with new plantings. This was begun in 1911. That spring, he ordered about three hundred trees to plant. The trees, consisting of two varieties of apples, were planted twenty-five to thirty feet apart on a four-acre section of the site which lay to the south-southeast of the monument.³⁹ He encouraged that a two-foot high fence be built around the four-acre orchard, but it is unclear whether this was ever built.⁴⁰ Other fences were put in place at the site, which Wells described as "boundary and division fences."⁴¹ As named, these fences marked the outer boundaries of the property and divided the property according to the type of use.

As is customary in Vermont, the maple trees at the Joseph Smith Memorial were tapped annually and the sap boiled into maple sugar and syrup. In



Fig. 8. Farm house and barn at the Joseph Smith Memorial Farm, ca. 1950. Photograph courtesy Church History Library.

1911, Frank Brown, the newly appointed steward of the site, reported they “have made more than six hundred pounds of sugar [and] syrup.”⁴²

This period also saw a substantial increase in the number of structures on the site. An undated inventory of structures exist which appears to have been prepared in the two or three years before or after 1911, listing the structures that had been built at the memorial. Among the buildings listed by Wells were a large tie shed, storage house and auto house [garage?], bureau house, ice house, dairy barn, a farm house with cellar and attic, woodshed, horse barn, granary, silos, a large shed, corn-crib, horse stable, buggy shed, wood shed, and chicken coop.⁴³ The barn and farmhouse complex were located on Dairy Hill Road, north of the main entrance drive of the memorial (see Fig. 8). The location of other buildings appears on maps and planting plans for the period.

The inventory, along with other documents from the period, provides significant insight into the day-to-day use of the land. In a letter dated May 25, 1908, Wells identifies four primary uses of the site: “We have three hundred acres of land, comprising of wood, pasture and farmland, but as a whole the most valuable as a park.”⁴⁴ Farming continued to be a dominant practice at the memorial, so much that the site was frequently referred to as The Joseph Smith Memorial Farm. From an annual expense report for 1918 one is able to see what was farmed in a typical year. The crops listed are wheat, apples,

beans, onions, hay, oats, corn, barley, potatoes, and carrots. Some of the crops (primarily wheat, apples, beans and onions) were grown were sold to generate income for the upkeep of the memorial. The site was also used to pasture and raise farm animals, some of which, like the crops, were sold to generate income. The animals raised and used on the farm included horses, cattle, hogs, sheep and chickens. Income was made primarily from the sale of hogs, lambs, poultry, eggs, milk, and sheep's wool.⁴⁵ Some of structures at the site were specifically used to house many of these animals.

The site was also home to one or two families who served as stewards of the property, hosting visitors and serving as tour guides. It is known that a family lived in the Memorial Cottage and it is likely the farm house was used by an additional family or property caretakers.

With people living at the site full-time, and as the number of visitors increased from year to year, it became necessary to build infrastructure that would supply water to the Memorial Cottage and other buildings. With White Brook bisecting the property, and because of the proximity of a number of springs, multiple sources of water were available. As mentioned, one well was used by the Smiths near the birthplace home in the early nineteenth century. It was identified by Wells in 1894 and again in 1905, and was used for some time after the construction of the Memorial Cottage (see Fig. 9).

In his report to the First Presidency in 1905, Wells said that as part of the original land purchase he "bargained for two springs lying near the northeasterly corner of the property."⁴⁶ Three years later Wells wrote that reservoirs were developed to capture and store water from the springs. Pipes were then laid to carry the water from the reservoir to the structures near the monument. One of these reservoirs is clearly visible today on the access road that leads to the top of Patriarch Hill. The location of the second has not been identified.

Wells frequently suggested that a dam across White Brook also be constructed to supplement the springs as a water source. A small dam and pump house were built in 1969, supplying the site with an additional source of wa-



Fig. 9. Photograph showing the location of the well (now covered) that was adjacent to the birth home site and the Memorial Cottage, 2002. Photograph courtesy Alexander L. Baugh.

ter. To provide additional water for irrigation, in 1994 the holding capacity of the dam was increased by building out a small pond.⁴⁷

Besides the roads previously discussed, a number of other traffic circulation features were developed throughout the site. These additional roads led from the monument to the remains of the two Mack homes near White Brook. They also allowed visitors access to Patriarch Hill, Apostles Grove, and the water reservoirs.⁴⁸ A second road was built to Dairy Hill Road to provide access from the farm houses and other buildings to the monument area. Following the completion of these major developments, the site remained relatively unchanged for decades.

A New Era, 1959–1997

In the mid-1950s, Junius M. Jackson, president of the New England Mission, began to advocate for a major redevelopment of the birthplace site. The main building, the Memorial Cottage, needed significant repairs; “the roof, the porch, the heating system, the paint,” all needed attention.⁴⁹ Jackson also believed the site also “needed improvements for more adequate and appropriate facilities for telling visitors the story of Joseph Smith.”⁵⁰ In 1956, LDS Church President David O. McKay visited the site to consider Jackson’s proposals. Shortly after McKay’s visit, the Church Building Committee, guided by Harold W. Burton, the supervising architect for the Church, and Irvin T. Nelson, the Church’s landscape architect, presented a number of reports and recommendations to the Church’s leadership. From these, Church leaders agreed to a major transformation at the birthplace, primary of which was the decision to tear down the Memorial Cottage, which had been serving the site for more than fifty years, and replace it with a new visitors’ center and a home for the site director.⁵¹

By August 1959, the Memorial Cottage had been torn down, and additional site work had begun. A major part of the work called for grading and terracing of the hill on which the monument stood so that a scenic view of the monument could be had from the south by framing it with two new symmetrical buildings, a director’s home to the west, and a visitors’ center to the east. Between the two buildings, plans called for a pentagon-shaped reflecting pool called “Mirror Lake” (see Fig. 10). In addition, a terraced walkway was constructed, allowing visitors to walk to the monument. The two buildings and the walkways were constructed using native Vermont “slatestone,” ingeniously “connecting” the site to Vermont.⁵² This “connection” was stated more openly in the exhibits housed in the visitors’ center, particularly the placement of the Mack/Smith hearthstone as the main focal point in the visitors’ center (see Fig. 11). A second lane was added to the entrance drive, and the circular

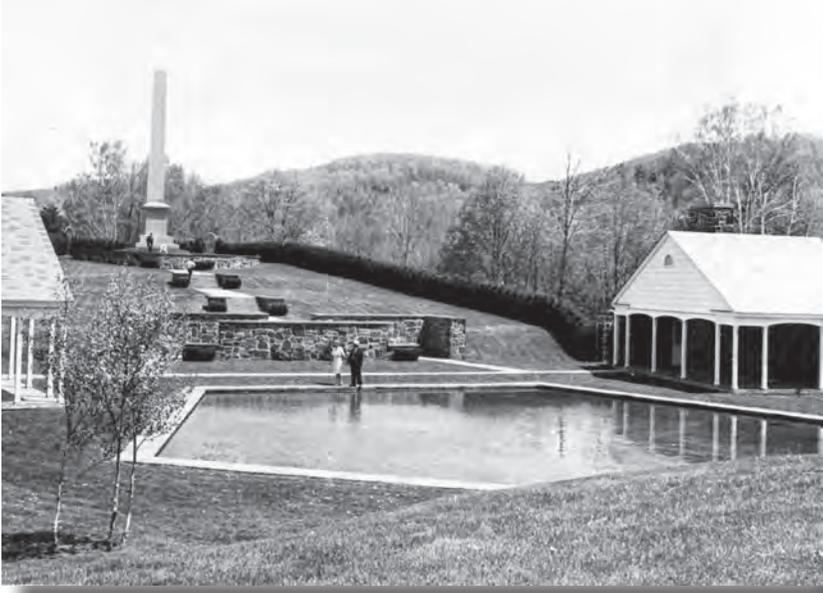


Fig. 10. Photograph showing the reflecting pond at the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial, 1961. The director's home can be partially seen on the left; and the visitors' center can be partially seen on the right. Both structures were completed in 1961. Photograph courtesy Church History Library.



Fig. 11. Original hearthstone from the birth home displayed in the visitors' center, 2006. Photograph courtesy Alexander L. Baugh.



Fig. 12. Photograph taken in 2002 showing the commemorative area near the site of the home where Joseph Smith Jr. was born December 23, 1805, and the location where the Memorial Cottage stood from 1905–1959. This site is not on the exact spot, but is quite a few feet from where the home and the Memorial Cottage once stood. The stone to the left of the bench is the original step stone used at the entrance of the birthplace home.
Photograph courtesy Alexander L. Baugh.

Fig. 12a. Original step stone from the birth home, 2002. A small plaque attached to the top of the stone reads: “This stone was the front doorstep of the Solomon Mack home where Joseph Smith was born. It was also the back doorstep of the Cottage which stood here from 1905 until 1959.” Photograph courtesy Alexander L. Baugh.



roadway around the monument was paved and improved by adding a parking area near the visitors' center. Public restrooms and picnic facilities were also constructed. Though not a part of the original improvement plan, the latter were added to the site by John E. Carr, the president of the New England Mission. The site was completed and dedicated in October 1961.⁵³

Since the purchase of the site by Wells in 1905, a large part of the land that had been cleared has once again become woodlands. Much of this took place naturally, but other areas were replanted, as discussed earlier. Ivin T. Nelson, the Church's landscape architect, designed the area to keep its park-like setting immediately surrounding the monument and the new structures. The lawn to the south of the new buildings gently sloped up a hill upon which thirty-eight blue spruce trees were planted, one representing each year of Joseph Smith's life.⁵⁴ Two of these trees were brought from Utah to reflect the ties of the site to the Church in Utah.⁵⁵

In 1963, two years after the dedication of the new visitors' center and director's home, a stone was set near the location where the hearthstone of the birthplace home originally rested.⁵⁶ The step stone used at the entrance of the birthplace home and the back door of the Memorial Cottage were later added to the spot. Over time, this spot became somewhat of a memorial itself, where people could sit and enjoy the peaceful settings of the memorial (see Figs. 12 and 12a).

During this period of extensive redevelopment, an LDS chapel was built on the property. Local members of the Church began raising funds for the building in as early as 1950. Ten years later, in July 1960, a building committee was organized with Esther May George as its chair. By the summer of 1961 enough money had been raised for the building, and a groundbreaking ceremony took place on August 24, 1961. In April 1964, though not yet complete, the building was functional enough that local Church members were able to assemble to watch general conference broadcast via satellite. Construction was finally completed in 1965, and on June 27, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, the South Royalton Chapel was officially dedicated.⁵⁷ In late 1983, a new wing was added to the chapel, which has since been enlarged.

Development of Camp Joseph

Throughout the world the Church has developed campgrounds for use by LDS congregations. Over time, a campground facility had informally developed at the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial property west of the monument. In 1997, leaders of the Montpelier Vermont Stake began discussing the possibility of making improvements to the camp, which had come to be

known as Camp Joseph. A formal ground-breaking ceremony was held on May 31, 1997; and just over a year later, on June 27, 1998, the newly improved Camp Joseph was dedicated by Elder Marlin K. Jensen, who at the time was the Area President of the North America Northeast Area. The improved camp now comprises a lodge, a covered pavilion, restrooms, an athletic field, an archery range, a swimming pond, and fifteen small sleeping cabins. Nearby there is a natural amphitheater where benches have been placed to accommodate gatherings of large groups.

In and near Camp Joseph, two trees, named the Hyrum tree and the Joseph tree, are marked by painted wood signs. The Joseph tree is a large oak, which has been dated back to 1776, that serves as a witness tree for the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith (see Fig. 13). The Hyrum tree stands near the camp's amphitheater, and is actually two trees that have grown together.



Fig. 13. Oak tree, known as the Joseph Tree, 2009. Photograph courtesy Gary L. Boatright Jr.

Conclusion

Since its development in 1905, thousands of people have visited the Prophet's birthplace, stood in the shadow of the granite monument, and visited what was once the Solomon Mack farm. For more than one hundred years, the efforts of the Church at the memorial have been centered in the philosophy similar to that espoused by Junius F. Wells: "To commemorate the event [of Joseph Smith's birth] and to express to mankind their love and reverence for him as a Prophet of God."⁵⁸ Unfortunately, Wells' plans destroyed the original site of the birthplace home. Furthermore, much of what remained of the original landscape was destroyed through extensive grading and reshaping of the ground needed to accommodate the design and construction of the director's home, visitors' center, roads, and walkways. However, the redevelopment of

the site undertaken by the Church in the early 1960s has helped reestablished the commemorative atmosphere of the property.

No effort has been made to reconstruct the birth home or any other structure that existed on the site in 1805. Today, it would be possible to build an accurate reconstruction of the birth home due to recent research by staff of the LDS Church History Department.⁵⁹ However, reconstructing the 1805 landscape would be time-consuming and costly, if not almost impossible, since it would require the demolition of the current structures, including the Joseph Smith Monument, which itself is now a historic element of the landscape of the memorial.

A long-term preservation and maintenance strategy is essential to the future of the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial. This will ensure that the site will be preserved and available for future visitors to enjoy, as they remember the birth, life, and mission of Joseph Smith Jr.

Notes

1. Klyza, Christopher McGrory, and Stephen C. Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont: A Natural and Cultural History* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England 1999), 27.
2. Klyza and Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont*, 31–33.
3. Klyza and Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont*, 33.
4. Klyza and Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont*, 45.
5. Klyza and Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont*, 53.
6. Sharon Town Land Records, in T. Michael Smith, Kirk B. Henrichsen, and Don Enders, A Technical Report on the Birthplace Home of Joseph Smith Jr., Church History Department, June 2006, 71. Much of this report was also published in T. Michael Smith, Kirk B. Henrichsen, and Donald L. Enders, “The Birthplace Home of Joseph Smith Jr.,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2005), 19–67.
7. Smith, Henrichsen, and Enders, A Technical Report on the Birthplace Home of Joseph Smith Jr., 11.
8. Klyza and Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont*, 53.
9. Smith, Henrichsen, and Enders, A Technical Report on the Birthplace Home of Joseph Smith Jr., 11.
10. Junius F. Wells, Report on Joseph Smith’s Birthplace, June 1905, 2, Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
11. At present, this road is interpreted by the on-site LDS missionaries as “the main highway through this part of the country when the Mack’s lived here,” and visitors hear that it was the main artery between Boston and Montreal. Research has shown this to be inaccurate. A 1796 map titled “A correct map of the State of Vermont, from actual survey” by James Whitelaw, Esqr., surveyor general, engraved by Amos Doolittle, does not show the supposed turnpike road.
12. The Daniel Mack home was not a part of the original one hundred-acre farm.
13. Lucy Mack Smith, History, Church History Library, 37; Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1996), 253.

14. See Smith, Henrichsen, and Enders, A Technical Report on the Birthplace Home of Joseph Smith Jr.
15. Wells, Report on Joseph Smith's Birthplace, 21.
16. Environmental Design & Research, P. C., Cultural Landscape Report for the Joseph Smith Historic Farm; Site History, Existing Conditions, Analysis, and Recommendations, prepared for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999, 37–38.
17. Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life: 1890–1840* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1989), 16.
18. Wells, Report on Joseph Smith's Birthplace, 21.
19. Junius F. Wells to Hannah Corrilla Free Wells, August 15, 1894, 2, Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library.
20. See Wells, Report on Joseph Smith's Birthplace, 13.
21. Wells, Report on Joseph Smith's Birthplace, 19.
22. Junius F. Wells to Hannah Corrilla Free Wells, August 15, 1894, 5.
23. Joseph F. Smith, *Proceedings at the Dedication of the Joseph Smith Memorial Monument at Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont, December 23, 1905* [1906], 10.
24. Wells, Report on Joseph Smith's Birthplace, 13–14.
25. Wells, Report on Joseph Smith's Birthplace, 19.
26. S. C. Dallin to Junius F. Wells, n.d., Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library.
27. Smith, *Proceedings*, 23.
28. Wells, Report on Joseph Smith's Birthplace, 23.
29. Smith, *Proceedings*, 15.
30. Joseph F. Smith to Junius F. Wells, August 9, 1905, Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library.
31. Smith, *Proceedings*, 23.
32. Junius F. Wells, Tree Record, n. d., 1, Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library.
33. Wells, Tree Record, 2.
34. Wells, Tree Record, 1.
35. Wells, Tree Record, 2–3.
36. Junius F. Wells to Joseph F. Smith, May 25, 1908, Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library.
37. Wells, Tree Record, 4–5.
38. Wells, Tree Record, 5.
39. Junius F. Wells to Frank L. Brown, March 20, 1911, Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library.
40. Junius F. Wells to Bishop Charles W. Nibley and Counselors, March 14, 1911, Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library.
41. Junius F. Wells to Joseph F. Smith, May 25, 1908.
42. Frank L. Brown to Junius F. Wells, April 27, 1911, Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library.
43. Junius F. Wells, Inventory of Property, n. d., 3, Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library.
44. Junius F. Wells to Joseph F. Smith, May 25, 1908.
45. Annual expense report for the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial, 1918, Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library.
46. Wells, Report on Joseph Smith's Birthplace, 14.
47. Joseph Mender, Facilities Manager of the Sharon Vermont FM Group, to Gary L. Boatright Jr., December 18, 2008.

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48. Junius F. Wells to Joseph F. Smith, May 25, 1908.
 49. Carter E. Grant, "Epochal Events at the Prophet's Birthplace," *Improvement Era* 64, no. 5 (May 1961): 301.
 50. Dedicatory Services for the Director's Residence and Bureau of Information at the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial, October 15, 1961, Church History Library.
 51. Grant, "Epochal Events at the Prophet's Birthplace," 326.
 52. Grant, "Epochal Events at the Prophet's Birthplace," 326; and Keith A. Ereksion, "American Prophet, New England Town: The Memory of Joseph Smith in Vermont," MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 2002, 244.
 53. Dedicatory Services for the Director's Residence and Bureau of Information at the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial, October 15, 1961.
 54. Grant, "Epochal Events at the Prophet's Birthplace," 326.
 55. Ereksion, "American Prophet, New England Town: The Memory of Joseph Smith in Vermont," 245.
 56. Ereksion, "American Prophet, New England Town: The Memory of Joseph Smith in Vermont," 253.
 57. Ereksion, "American Prophet, New England Town: The Memory of Joseph Smith in Vermont," 241.
 58. One Hundred Years Ago, Junius F. Wells Papers, Church History Library. This document appears to be a draft of a letter that was to be sent out soliciting for funds from Church organizations and members to assist with the development of the Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial. No copy of the final draft, if there was one, has been located.
 59. See Smith, Henrichsen, and Enders, A Technical Report on the Birthplace Home of Joseph Smith Jr.