



Wilford C. Wood, date unknown, ca. 1950s. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.

A Man of Vision and Determination: A Photographic Essay and Tribute to Wilford C. Wood

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The following photographic essay and tribute were part of a media presentation at a banquet held in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building on May 28, 2009, honoring the life and contributions of Wilford C. Wood. The event was sponsored by the LDS Church History Department and the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation.

The number of historic LDS Church history sites, documents, and artifacts acquired by Wilford C. Wood during his lifetime is impressive. However, perhaps his greatest legacy will be his purchase of some of the most well known early Mormon history sites owned by the Church today. Significantly, when Wilford C. Wood was born in 1893, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints did not hold title to a single site where a revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants was received or recorded. However, as a result of his years of vision and service, the Church eventually came to own the property or location where forty-eight sections of the Doctrine and Covenants were received. Some of the sites now owned by the Church include the Nauvoo Temple property, Liberty Jail, Adam-ondi-Ahman, the Joseph Smith and Isaac Hale properties in Harmony (now Oakland), Pennsylvania, the John Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio, the Newel K. Whitney store in Kirtland, Ohio, and numerous historic Nauvoo buildings. This essay highlights some of the major historic contributions made by Wilford C. Wood.

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Photograph 1. Wilford C. Wood (far right) as an LDS missionary presiding at a baptismal service, ca. 1915–1918. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.



Photograph 2. Wilford C. and Lillian W. Wood home, 3621 South 550 West, Bountiful, Utah, 2009. Photograph by Kenneth R. Mays.

Photograph 1

As a young man, Wilford C. Wood served a full-time mission from 1915–1918 to the Northern States. While on this mission, Wood developed a love for the Book of Mormon and the Prophet Joseph Smith, gaining the desire to visit the sites where the Prophet had been. In this photograph he is seen in at the far right holding the ladder while assisting at a winter baptismal service.

Photograph 2

In December 1918, less than four months after returning from his mission, Wilford married Lillian Woodbury. The couple lived in a log cabin while he built this comfortable home situated close to his father and mother's home. Wilford and Lillian raised their two daughters, Mary and Leila, in this home, and spent their entire married lives here.

Photograph 3

Wilford chose the fur business as his livelihood. His successful efforts provided resources which he unselfishly utilized over the years for the acquisition of historic sites, documents, and artifacts. His business activities fre-



Photograph 3. Wilford C. Wood, date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.



Photograph 4. Willard and Rebecca Bean, and Lillian W. Wood on the third floor of the E. B. Grandin print shop, Palmyra, New York, date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.



Photograph 5. Wilford C. and Lillian W. Wood, date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.

quently took him to New York, necessitating that he travel across the country on numerous occasions, which he did primarily by automobile. While traveling, Wilford took the opportunity to visit various sites connected to events of Latter-day Saint history.

Photograph 4

In the course of their travels back East, Wilford and Lillian Wood became acquainted with Willard and Rebecca Bean, who pioneered the return of Latter-day Saints to the Palmyra, New York area. By assignment from President Joseph F. Smith, the Beans lived in the Joseph Smith Sr. frame home on the Smith Manchester farm for about twenty-four years. Photograph 4 shows Lillian and the Beans on the third floor of the E. B. Grandin print shop in Palmyra where the first edition of the Book of Mormon was published. Following their mission, Rebecca Bean became an employee of Wilford Wood in his fur business. Wood's granddaughter, Sheila Price, remembers Rebecca as her babysitter. Rebecca was known to the Price children affectionately as "Beany."

Photograph 5

Wilford Wood's interest in visiting the places where Joseph Smith had lived grew into a desire to do everything he could to acquire and preserve those historic properties. This two-fold interest in acquiring and preserving these sites became Wilford Wood's personal mission. His strong feelings that Church history needed to be preserved led to a personal implementation of his personal mantra, "*Lest we forget.*" Wilford's wife, Lillian, seen with him in this image, was totally supportive of all he did. When Wilford called or wired for money needed for an acquisition, Lillian would go to the bank to withdraw the funds from a standing line of credit secured by their personal property, then transfer the money to him by wire.

Photograph 6

In 1936, Wilford C. Wood acquired the death masks (casts) of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. George Cannon (1794–1844) is reported to have made the masks at the time the bodies of the martyrs were being prepared for burial. The masks eventually came into the possession of Philo Dibble and remained in his possession until 1885, when he sold them to Harrie Brown, a sculptor living in Logan, Utah. Wood purchased the death masks from Brown's widow, Alzina Brown. Over the years, Hyrum's death mask began to crack in the chin area. To prevent further damage, some repair work was done in about 1980.



Photograph 6. Joseph and Hyrum Smith death masks, 2009. Photograph courtesy of Kenneth R. Mays.



Photograph 7. Nauvoo Opera House located on the original Nauvoo Temple block, date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.

The Wood family donated the casts to the LDS Church in 1990, which are displayed in the Church History Museum in Salt Lake City.

Photograph 7

On the occasion of Wilford Wood's attempt to purchase the first parcel of the original Nauvoo Temple property in 1937, things came to a point where negotiations began to bog down. Wood felt impressed to say to those selling the property: "Are you going to make us pay an exorbitant price for the blood of a martyred Prophet when you know this property rightfully belongs to the Mormon people?" Mr. Anton, the banker, replied, "'We will sell the lot for \$900.00.' I clasped his hand, then the hand of the cashier of the bank and the agreement was made and signed."

The acquisition of the Nauvoo Opera House, seen here, was one of seven purchases Wood made over a period of several years to acquire what was most of the original Nauvoo Temple site. Wood's bargaining skills and inspiration were key factors in successfully acquiring these and other properties. Daughter Mary remembered that her father was very determined. "Sometimes it took him years to be able to buy a piece of land or an item he felt was important. He would keep working on it until finally things worked out so people were willing to sell."

Photograph 8

In 1938, Wilford Wood purchased the *Times and Seasons* building and the original John Taylor home in Nauvoo, Illinois. The complex, once owned by James Ivins, originally consisted of three buildings. The northern-most build-



Photograph 8.
Times and Seasons
building (left)
and the John
Taylor home,
Nauvoo, Illinois,
date unknown.
Photograph
courtesy of the
Wilford C. Wood
family.



Photograph 9. Homer R. Stevens-Carl B. Fischer home on the property of the original Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri, date unknown, ca. 1939. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.



Photograph 10. Basement of the Homer R. Stevens-Carl B. Fischer home showing the original stonework of the Liberty Jail, date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.

ing was razed in 1913 and subsequently rebuilt in 1978 as the Nauvoo Post Office.

Photographs 9 and 10

In 1900, Homer R. Stevens purchased the Liberty Jail property. At that time, a portion of the original jail remained. In 1903 he built a home on the site (Photograph 8). In building the home, Stevens incorporated the original jail floor and part of the original walls as part of the basement of the residence (Photograph 9). On June 19, 1939, Wilford Wood purchased the home from Carl B. Fischer. Wood acquired another home north of the Stevens-Fisher home from Isabel Doan on October 13, 1949. Beginning that same year, LDS missionary couples lived in the Stevens-Fisher home to provide information to visitors. In 1963, the two homes were replaced by a modern LDS Visitors' Center, the central feature being a replica of the Liberty Jail.

Photograph 11

This image shows Wilford and Lillian W. Wood on the occasion of the purchase of thirty-eight acres at what Latter-day Saints identify as the region known as Adam-ondi-Ahman, Daviess County, Missouri. That purchase included the location identified as Tower Hill, and the remains of a cabin built by Lyman Wight in 1838 just off the brow of the hill. The purchase was finalized on June 27, 1944, the one hundredth anniversary of the Joseph and Hyrum Smith's martyrdom.



Photograph 11. Wilford C. and Lillian W. Wood (far right) and the sellers of the Adam-ondi-Ahman property on Tower Hill on the occasion of the Wood's purchase of the property, 1947. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.



Photograph 12. Joseph and Emma Smith home site, Harmony (now Oakland), Pennsylvania, 2009. Photograph by Kenneth R. Mays.



Photograph 13. Isaac and Elizabeth Hale home-site, Harmony (now Oakland), Pennsylvania, 2007. Photograph by Kenneth R. Mays.

Photograph 12

In 1946, Wilford Wood purchased Joseph Smith's Harmony (now Oakland), Pennsylvania, property, which originally consisted of thirteen acres. The following year he conveyed the property to the LDS Church. Joseph and Emma lived in Harmony from December 1827 until August 1830. Numerous events took place at this site, including the beginning of the translation of the Book of Mormon, and the birth and death of Joseph and Emma's first child, Alvin, born June 14, 1828. Joseph and Emma left Harmony in August 1830.

Photograph 13

In 1948, Wilford Wood purchased the Harmony property formerly owned by Isaac and Elizabeth Lewis Hale, Emma's parents. That same year, Wood conveyed the property to the LDS Church. It was here that Joseph and Emma first met in November 1825. The Prophet boarded at the Hale home while employed by Josiah Stowell of South Bainbridge (now Afton), New York.

Photograph 14

In 1956, Wilford Wood purchased the John Johnson home and farm in Hiram, Ohio, in behalf of the LDS Church. Joseph and Emma lived with the Johnson family in 1831–1832, and it was while they were boarding with the Johnsons that the Prophet and Sidney Rigdon were tarred and feathered on the evening of March 24–25, 1832. Seventeen sections of the present edition of the Doctrine in Covenants were also received here, including Section 1, known as the "Preface," and Section 76, known as "The Vision." Through the years many parts of the home have been remodeled and restored. On many occasions, Wood personally assisted in the upgrading of the structure. He also staffed it with site missionaries, whom he also supervised.

Photograph 15

In addition to historical sites and structures, Wilford Wood acquired numerous early Mormon artifacts and documents of historical significance. This image shows Wilford examining the court records of the trial of those accused of participating in the attack at Cartage Jail. The trial documents were a valuable resource to Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill in their writing of *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975).



Photograph 14. Wilford C. and Lillian W. Wood refurbishing the John Johnson home, Hiram, Ohio, date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.



Photograph 15. Wilford C. Wood examining the court records of the trial of the accused assassins of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.



Photograph 16. "Mother's Home of Learning," part of the Wood museum, 2008.
Photograph by Kenneth R. Mays.



Photograph 17. Wilford C. Wood museum, 2009. Photograph by Kenneth R. Mays.



Photograph 18. LDS Church President David O. McKay and Wilford C. Wood, date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.



Photograph 19. Wilford C. Wood and granddaughter Sheila Glade (Price) at the end of Parley Street, Nauvoo, Illinois, date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.

Photographs 16 and 17

Wilford C. and Lillian W. Wood allowed visitors to view the documents and artifacts Wilford acquired, which they housed and displayed in their museum in Bountiful, Utah. The museum is actually a complex of two stone structures connected by an elevated walkway. The smaller of the two is the home where Wilford was born, which he named “Mother’s Home of Learning” (Photograph 16). The larger building is where Wilford also operated his fur business (Photograph 17). The museum complex was dedicated in 1961 by LDS Church President David O. McKay.

Photograph 18

Wilford C. Wood was personally acquainted with several presidents of the LDS Church, including Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, and David O. McKay. Here he spends a moment with President David O. McKay.

Photograph 19

This image shows Wilford C. Wood with his granddaughter Sheila Glade (Price) in Nauvoo, Illinois, where Parley Street meets the Mississippi River. Sheila is the daughter of Leilah W. Glade, who served as Wilford’s secretary for many years. Spending time with her mother as she worked with her grandfather afforded Sheila many personal experiences and memories of her grandparents.

Photographs 20 and 21

One of Wilford C. Wood’s most significant acquisitions was a full set of uncut pages of the first edition of Book of Mormon printed in 1830 (Photograph 19). From these pages, Wood published a facsimile edition of the first edition of the Book of Mormon so it could be made available to the public under the title *Joseph Smith Begins His Work* (Salt Lake City: *Deseret News Press*, 1958). In this publishing endeavor he worked with the company’s young assistant plant and sales manager, Thomas S. Monson (Photograph 20). Later, Wood published a facsimile edition of the 1833 Book of Commandments and the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants under the title *Joseph Smith Begins His Work, Volume II* (1962).



Photograph 20. Lillian W. Wood holding the set of the uncut sheets of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, 1984. Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh.



Photograph 21. Thomas S. Monson (left), Wilford C. Wood (right), and an employee with *Deseret News* Publishing Company examine the layout of *Joseph Smith Begins His Work* (Salt Lake City: *Deseret News* Press, 1958), date unknown, ca. 1958. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.



Photograph 22. Horatio (Harkey) Kile in front of the Newel K. Whitney Store. Kile sold the store to Wilford C. Wood in 1965. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family.

Photograph 22

Three years before he passed away, Wilford C. Wood purchased the most expensive historical site or acquisition of his fruitful mission, the Newel K. Whitney store in Kirtland, Ohio. According to the Wood family, he woke up one morning and had the feeling he needed to purchase the store. In typical Wilford-like style, he was on a plane the very next day. He purchased the store on December 19, 1965 from Horatio (Harkey) Kile.

Following Wilford Wood's death in 1968, his wife, Lillian, maintained his legacy by continuing her support of all that her husband had worked for and accomplished. As the owner of the Whitney store for a number of years, Lillian let members of the Kirtland Stake, over which Karl Anderson presided, use the building for special meetings, missionary conferences, and Church history tours. On October 16, 1979, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley formally received title to the Newel K. Whitney store from Lillian Wood. On August 25, 1984, President Gordon B. Hinckley, Second Counselor in the First Presidency presided over the dedication of the building. President Ezra Taft, Benson,

President of the Quorum of the Twelve, who also had a long-time interest in Kirtland and the Whitney store, offered the dedicatory prayer.

Kirtland historian Karl Ricks Anderson met the Woods when he was a young returned missionary and knew them personally for many years. Anderson notes that because of the acquisition of the John Johnson home in Hiram, and the Newel K. Whitney Store in Kirtland, the lives of thousands of Church members, missionaries, and nonmembers have been blessed. Anderson feels that if Wood had not purchased those sites when he did, they may not have been available today at any price.

The Latter-day Saint community would have a difficult time finding a more effective guardian of early LDS Church history than Wilford C. Wood. He was indeed a man of vision and determination. His contributions and commitment to preserve the past are without parallel and incalculable.

A Tribute to Wilford C. Wood

*A farm boy walked into a grove
On a springtime morning bright.
A Prophet he became that day,
In a flood of heaven's light.*

*How marvelous to see the place
Where truth was thus displayed,
To follow in that Prophet's path
And pray where Joseph prayed.*

*Visions, prayers, and revelations
Carried on the sacred story;
From holy angels priesthood came,
With keys and rights and glory.*

*In Hiram and in Liberty,
The opposition burned,
One longs to be there now, today,
To learn where Joseph learned.*

*The sites where Joseph taught and served
Are priceless to us all.
'Twas there that he and faithful others
Magnified their call.*

*Like them, may we all trust the Lord,
In faith so deeply felt,
And seek His will, as we too
Kneel on ground where Joseph knelt.*

*Let minds learn now the sacred tale
With fervor; better yet,
Let hearts be filled with gratitude
And joy—"Lest we forget!"*

*Kirtland, Adam-ondi-Ahman,
Hiram's homestead too,
Harmony and Susquehanna,
The temple in Nauvoo.*

*On roads, in groves, or dingy jails,
Where disbelievers mocked,
Indeed, my soul forever yearns
To walk where Joseph walked.*

Kenneth R. Mays