

Sampson Avard: The First Danite

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In 1974, *BYU Studies* published an article by Leland H. Gentry entitled, "The Danite Band of 1838." The article, one of the first serious academic studies of the Danites, presented Gentry's interpretation of the events of the 1838 Mormon War, focusing on the development and organization of the group commonly known as the Danites. Throughout his narrative, Gentry discusses the activities of Sampson Avard, the reported leader and organizer of the Danite society. He presents a very sketchy background of him, which includes little more than a description of his actions between October 1835, when he joined the Latter-day Saints, until his excommunication on 17 March 1839. Gentry further characterizes him as a malevolent shadow, seeking power and destruction. In his conclusion, he placed the responsibility for the actions taken by the Missouriians against the Saints in northern Missouri squarely on the shoulders of Avard.¹

Since Gentry's article first appeared, other Mormon historians have attempted to explain the Danites and their activities in Missouri, including Avard's connections. However, in the opinion of the writer, these studies still have not adequately explored his life and, more specifically, his Mormon activities prior to the establishment of the Danites, the leadership role he played, and his disaffection from the Church.² Although Sampson Avard was a relatively minor character in early LDS history, this paper is an attempt to examine more thoroughly and to explain this controversial figure and his role in the Danite organization.

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Early Life

Sampson Avard was born on 27 October 1800 in St. Peter Port, on the Isle of Guernsey, to Ann Avard.³ Around 1818, the family immigrated to the United States, settling in Georgetown, in the District of Columbia.⁴ The District of Columbia was still recovering from the devastation of the War of 1812 and had little to offer new immigrants. As one Englishman who passed through the District in 1817 wrote, “Here is fine natural scenery, but no decidedly great natural advantages; little external commerce, a barren soil, a scanty population, enfeebled too by the deadly weight of absolute slavery and in no direct means of communication with the western country.”⁵ However, the Avard family was not alone in moving to the area; about half a dozen other English families settled in Georgetown around the same time.⁶

Sampson remained in Georgetown for about ten years. During that time, some of the responsibility for the financial support of the family probably fell on his shoulders.⁷ He later met Eliza H. Ball, a native of Virginia, and the two were married on 14 September 1828. They had a daughter about a year later, whom they named Virginia, and then moved to Frederick County, Virginia. In late 1830, they had another child, this time a boy, whom they named John.⁸

During his family’s stay in Frederick County, Sampson’s life began to change in ways that would shape the rest of his life. During this time, Campbellite preachers were spreading their ideas through Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and modern West Virginia.⁹ Sampson embraced the principles of the Campbellite movement and soon began to preach its doctrines.¹⁰ During this same period, he also took up the practice of medicine, likely representing one of the irregular disciplines common in the period.¹¹ Until this time, Sampson had probably worked as a farmer or fieldworker to support his family, but he had greater aspirations. By practicing medicine, he may have hoped to be able to earn more and raise his social standing in the community.

Conversion to Mormonism

In 1835, Sampson Avard moved his family once more, this time settling in Beaver, Beaver County, Pennsylvania.¹² Here he set up his medical practice and began preaching again. However, Avard’s decision to move his family to Beaver is peculiar because of the circumstances in the area. The local population was not open to religious reform, and the Campbellite message that Avard brought was probably met with little success. Preaching in Beaver must have been a test of his faith and religious fervor. At the same time, the

town already had a number of doctors, so Avard's attempts at developing a medical practice likely faced many difficulties.¹³

Shortly after his arrival in Beaver, Avard became interested in Mormonism, probably through the Church's newspaper, *The Messenger and Advocate*. Sometime in late September or early October, he wrote to the editor of the paper, Oliver Cowdery, in Kirtland, Ohio, asking for more information about the doctrine of the Mormons. Cowdery wrote back on 22 October 1835, explaining to him "the first principles of the gospel" and suggesting that he visit the Church in Kirtland.¹⁴ Perhaps also in response to the letter, Orson Pratt left Kirtland on a mission to Beaver County. He spent two or three weeks in the area, facing some difficulty. However, in a letter published in the November 1835 issue of *The Messenger and Advocate*, Pratt wrote: "I baptized three in Freedom [Beaver County], one of which (Sampson Avard) I ordained an elder, he formerly had belonged to the Campbellites, and had preached among them. After parting with two books of Mormon; four books of Revelations, and obtaining 14 subscribers for the *Messenger and Advocate*, I left them with Elder Avard to continue the work."¹⁵

Avard's baptism in early November left him excited and hopeful. He had big plans for the future, and these plans, coupled with the religious and professional obstacles he faced in Beaver, led him to write Oliver Cowdery at the end of November and to ask about opportunities in Kirtland. He told Cowdery of his desire to establish a medical practice in Kirtland, he asked about the possibility of giving a series of lectures to the Saints on the subject of philosophy, and he inquired about the possibility of his wife's establishing a female school. Sadly, when Cowdery's letter arrived in late December, the response was not promising. Cowdery wrote that Dr. Frederick G. Williams already attended to the Mormon community, so a medical practice would not be successful. Also, because of the Saints' involvement in the School of the Prophets, as well as the decision of many to move to Missouri in the spring of 1836, the ideas of lecturing and establishing a school would likely fail.¹⁶ Faced with such poor prospects, Avard decided to remain in Beaver.

During 1836, Avard continued to work both in his position as branch president and as a doctor.¹⁷ In the course of the year, he assisted Erastus Snow and Lorenzo Dow Young as they passed through the region doing missionary work.¹⁸ He also made occasional trips to Kirtland. It may have been through these visits that he came to know Sidney Rigdon, Jared Carter, and other leading Mormons who would later play a prominent role in his life.¹⁹ His family, however, did not have the same zeal for this new religion. When he decided to move to Kirtland at the beginning of 1837, they did not follow.²⁰

Avard's Kirtland Activities

In Kirtland Avard quickly became involved in both business and Church activities. He received his patriarchal blessing, probably from Joseph Smith Sr.²¹ He participated actively in his elders quorum and received his endowment in the Kirtland Temple on 3 April 1837.²² Shortly thereafter, he became a high priest, sitting on the high council at a meeting in May.²³ At the same time, he went into business with Zebedee Coltrin and Sidney Rigdon, establishing a mercantile firm.²⁴

By late May, Sampson Avard was probably considered an important member of the Kirtland community. But Kirtland was a town in turmoil. The Kirtland Safety Society, officially established under the guidance of the First Presidency on 2 January 1837, was failing. Specie payments had been stopped before the end of January, and people began to lose confidence in the society's ability to back its notes.²⁵ As confidence in the society waned, so did many Saints' trust in the Church leadership. Many assumed that Joseph Smith had prophesied that the banking establishment could not fail, so the economic collapse compounded into a spiritual crisis.²⁶ This crisis was heightened by the growing discontent of some Church leaders who resented the increasingly regimented and hierarchical policies dictated by the First Presidency.²⁷

In late May or early June, the dissenters called a meeting in the temple to discuss the possibility of removing Joseph Smith as prophet and replacing him with David Whitmer.²⁸ Some faithful members attended as well and strongly opposed the dissenters' measures, preventing them from making any decisions. Brigham Young attended the meeting and later described the situation as "a crisis when earth and hell seemed leagued to overthrow the Prophet and Church of God. The knees of many of the strongest of men in the Church faltered."²⁹ One of the many who stumbled was Sampson Avard.

Avard's Activities in Ontario, Canada

When the attempt to seize control of the Church failed in Kirtland, the dissenters turned their attention toward the Church's Canadian branches. For this task, they chose Avard. Although it is unclear whether Avard had himself become disenchanted with the Church leadership, he accepted the invitation to help take control of the Church in Canada. The dissenters provided him with a letter authorizing him to replace John Taylor as President of the Church in Canada, and in early June, he started for Toronto.³⁰ Avard had great plans for the Canadian mission. Along the way, he stopped to visit the different branches, reorganizing the leadership and sending others on

short-term missions.³¹ When he reached Toronto, he went to the house of John Taylor, the President of the Church in Canada, and announced that he had been sent from Kirtland as the new President. After examining the letter that he brought, Taylor gave up control of the branches and went on a short-term mission himself.³² Avard then continued his reorganization, visiting congregations to the north of Toronto.

However, the success of the dissenters' plan was short-lived. On 27 July 1837, Joseph Smith, accompanied by Sidney Rigdon and Thomas B. Marsh, set out on a tour of the Church branches in the Ontario area.³³ They traveled first to Toronto, going directly to the house of John Taylor. By this time, Taylor had returned from his missionary work. He was surprised that they came to him instead of Avard, and when he asked them, they declared that they were unaware of the change in the presidency. As Taylor later wrote, Joseph Smith "stated that he [Avard] was never sent, and that I had no business to give up my presidency to him. . . . He seemed very much annoyed."³⁴ Together, they set out to put the Church back in order. Some days later, while they held a conference in Scarborough, they caught up with Avard.³⁵ Smith reproved him sharply, suspending him from his office and ordering him home. Removed from his position and out of favor with the Prophet, Sampson Avard returned to his family in Beaver.³⁶

Meanwhile, the conflict in Kirtland grew worse. The dissenters, led by Warren Parrish, left the Church and declared themselves the Church of Christ, or "old standard."³⁷ Using force and intimidation, they persecuted the Saints and tried to take control of the temple. They also initiated various lawsuits against Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon designed to tie up the First Presidency's time and energy, diverting them from difficulties within the Church. By 12 January 1838, things had escalated to such a point that Smith and Rigdon were forced to flee Kirtland for Far West, Missouri.³⁸

Far West, Missouri, and the Establishment of the Danite Organization

Arriving in Far West in March, Joseph Smith discovered that there were also dissenters among the Saints there. The group, which included Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Frederick G. Williams, W. W. Phelps, John Whitmer, and others, maintained a correspondence with the "old standard" dissenters in Kirtland.³⁹ Although they had been removed from their leadership positions in February, they remained in the area, attacking the Church and spreading rumors among the Saints. When Smith and Rigdon learned of the extent of the trouble, they knew something had to be done if they hoped to prevent a repetition of the events of Ohio. By mid-April, the leading dissenters had all been excommunicated by the Missouri high coun-

cil.⁴⁰

So it was when Sampson Avard arrived in Far West in late May 1838.⁴¹ In the course of the winter, he had resolved the charges of misconduct with the Kirtland high council and had been reinstated as a high priest.⁴² Perhaps it was an attempt to prove his dedication to the Church and the Prophet that brought him to Far West. This time he brought his family with him, settling them in St. Joseph in nearby Buchanan County.⁴³

Upon his arrival in Far West, he quickly reintegrated himself into Mormon society, renewing friendships with Jared Carter and Sidney Rigdon. He became involved in Church activities and participated actively in his priesthood quorum. He also established himself in the community, practicing medicine among the Saints.⁴⁴ Within a short time, he had regained his previous stature within the Church.

Meanwhile, the dissenters continued to be a thorn in the side of Church leaders. Although they were excommunicated in April, they were still prominent figures in Far West with a good deal of influence.⁴⁵ By mid-June, prominent Mormons were no longer willing to allow the apostate group to harass the Church. Avard himself is a good example of this change in attitude. When he arrived in Far West at the end of May, he still treated Oliver Cowdery in a friendly manner, but within a few weeks, his attitude changed drastically.⁴⁶ During the first week of June 1838, Jared Carter and Dimick B. Huntington called a secret meeting in Far West, which Sampson Avard probably attended, to discuss how the community might remove Cowdery and the other dissenters.⁴⁷ Although no definite plans were made, this meeting marked the beginning of a new organization among the body of the Saints. At the time, the group was known as “the Brother of Gideon,” in reference to Jared Carter.⁴⁸

In the weeks and months to follow, the Brother of Gideon became an important part of the Mormon community. On 17 June, Sidney Rigdon delivered what would later be known as the “Salt Sermon.” Reed Peck described the discourse, saying: “From this scripture [Matthew 5:13] he undertook to prove that when men embrace the gospel and afterwards lose their faith it is the duty of the Saints to trample them under their feet. . . . He said to the people that it is the duty of this people to trample them into the earth, and if the county cannot be freed from them any other way I will assist to trample them down or to erect a gallows on the square of Far West and hang them up . . . and it would be an act at which the angels would smile with approbation.”⁴⁹

Rigdon did not mention any names in the speech, but the following day the dissenters received a letter, demanding that they leave Far West within three days “or a more fatal calamity shall befall you.”⁵⁰ Eighty-four Mormon

citizens of Caldwell County signed the letter, including Hyrum Smith, Jared Carter, and Sampson Avard.⁵¹ Within a matter of a few days, the dissenters were forced out of the county.

Danite Activities, July–August 1838

After the flight of the dissenters, the power and influence of the Brother of Gideon grew steadily. Along with the First Presidency, the organization continued its program of purifying the Church.⁵² A series of meetings were held to call dissenters to repentance, and the Brother of Gideon was on hand to supervise the process. Sampson Avard quickly rose to prominence within the group.⁵³ When the group was reorganized at the end of June under the name Daughter of Zion, or Danites, he was made brigadier-general of the band.⁵⁴

Avard became the principal teacher of the Far West Danites, explaining the rules and goals of the society in their weekly meetings.⁵⁵ The group generally met in secluded, guarded locations, and the members were bound with oaths of secrecy. Their numbers grew quickly, and by the time hostilities broke out between the Mormons and their neighbors in September, the society had about three hundred members, one-third of the Mormon men in Missouri.⁵⁶

The Danite leaders also began to take on a more prominent role in the community. During the Fourth of July celebration, Sampson Avard and other Danite leaders took the stand while the Mormon militia and Church leadership passed in review.⁵⁷ The parade ended at the temple site on the town square, where they gathered to lay the cornerstones of the temple.⁵⁸ After the cornerstone ceremony, Sidney Rigdon addressed the congregation. His speech, later called the Church's "Declaration of Independence," reflected the militant spirit that had begun creeping into the Church and resulted in the establishment of the Danites. At the end of the discourse, he declared that the Saints would no longer accept either threats of mobs or "vexatious law suits."⁵⁹

The following Sunday, 8 July, in the presence of a select group, Joseph Smith received the Law of Consecration and Tithing.⁶⁰ Avard, along with Jared Carter and George W. Robinson, was present for the announcement.⁶¹ During the following weeks, Avard went to work to support the new measures proposed by the First Presidency. He helped to stop the filing of lawsuits against the Church leadership, threatening to beat those who tried.⁶² He also began to visit the Saints, trying to convince them to obey the form of consecration. Though some did consecrate their surplus property as directed, many did not.⁶³ The failure of consecration led the Danites to

begin advocating the organization of agricultural cooperatives.⁶⁴ Avard redoubled his efforts, visiting the various settlements in and around Far West to try to convince them to join the firms.⁶⁵

The last, and greatest, display of the Danite organization's increasing power took place at the beginning of August. On Saturday, 4 August 1838, two days before the county elections, Sampson Avard called a meeting in Far West and announced that the Danites had neglected their duty "in not inquiring of the Lord through the prophet what persons should be supported as candidates at the upcoming election."⁶⁶ A committee was sent to the Presidency, who wrote up a ticket of whom the people should vote for in the Caldwell County election. The tickets were printed, and Avard had the Danites distribute them throughout the county. Through their efforts, all those listed on the ticket were elected.⁶⁷

However, in Daviess County, the Saints were not the majority. On 6 August, before the polls opened in Gallatin, some of the Missourians decided to keep the Mormons from voting. A fight broke out between the two groups, and though the Mormons were victorious, they left town without voting.⁶⁸ No one was killed in the conflict, but the next day news reached Far West that two Mormons were dead and that the Missourians would not allow their brethren to bury them.⁶⁹ Sampson Avard called for volunteers to accompany him to Adam-ondi-Ahman, and a company of about twenty, including the First Presidency, was organized and left immediately.⁷⁰

Upon their arrival in Adam-ondi-Ahman, the Danites found that the reports of mob activity were greatly exaggerated. Nevertheless, in an attempt to help reassure the agitated Daviess Mormons, they decided to visit the justice of the peace, Adam Black, the following day. On the morning of 8 August, a small group led by Lyman Wight stopped at the judge's house, asking him to sign an agreement obligating him to maintain the peace between the Mormons and Missourians.⁷¹ Black refused to sign, and the group left.

When Wight returned with Black's response, the entire Mormon force marched for Black's house. Upon their arrival, Avard led a small group into the house to speak with Black. Avard presented him with the Mormons' proposal and "told him he '*must sign it, or die.*'"⁷² Black still refused to sign the document but wrote his own statement, which they accepted. They then returned to Adam-ondi-Ahman where they stayed the next day before returning to Far West.⁷³

Although the expedition was considered successful, the Mormon actions had negative consequences. After the Mormon company left Daviess County, Judge Black and other prominent citizens of the county traveled to Richmond and swore out writs against various Mormons, including Lyman Wight and Joseph Smith. Interestingly, Sampson Avard was not charged for

his role in the expedition.⁷⁴

The events in Daviess are important, as they illustrate the growing rift between the attitude of Joseph Smith and that of the Danite leaders. Although he was not adverse to the use of arms to support Mormon privileges, Smith took a more moderate position throughout the expedition than Avard. Avard believed that the Danites were justified in using any means necessary to advance the goals of the Church. His speeches to the Danite society often took on fiery tones; yet, in the Danite meeting that he had attended at the end of June, Joseph Smith's remarks were quite different. John Corrill later testified: "President Smith got up and made general remarks, about, in substance, as follows: relating the oppressions the society had suffered, and they wanted to be prepared for further events; but he said he wished to do nothing unlawful, and, if the people would let him alone, they would preach the gospel and live in peace."⁷⁵

The difference between Smith and Avard is illustrated quite well in the accounts of their visit to Judge Black. Black himself noted this difference in his description of the events. He said that when they were leaving the house, Avard threatened him, saying that "he could shoot a man who would not sign [the] obligation and drink his heart's blood." Black then asked Joseph Smith "if he protected Dr. Avard in his savage disposition, or if he possessed such a heart? he replied no."⁷⁶ Smith rejected Avard's aggressive measures, and when the forces returned to Far West, he removed Avard from his position within the Danites.⁷⁷

Avard's Diminishing Role, the Richmond Hearing, and Excommunication

After his removal from the Danite leadership, Avard continued to participate in the Mormon community—but without the zeal he once had. At the same time, after his removal, it appears that the Danite organization in Far West practically ceased to function. In the conflicts of September and October, the individual Danites were assigned to positions in the Mormon militia forces and did not act as an independent military body.⁷⁸

As the conflict between the Missourians and Mormons reached its climax, Avard's role in the events became smaller and smaller. When Mormon troops rode to the defense of the Saints of Dewitt in mid-September, Avard remained in Far West.⁷⁹ A month later, in mid-October, when Joseph Smith organized the expedition to Daviess County, Avard went with the troops, serving in his new position of surgeon. He later reported that he attended a meeting for planning the attacks on Gallatin and Millport; however, though he may have had an advisory role, he was not selected as a leader.⁸⁰ The following day he accompanied Captain David W. Patten's company in their

attack on Gallatin.⁸¹ Avar returned to Far West soon after, arriving days before most of the Mormon forces.⁸²

By the end of October, the state militia, responding to the Mormon attacks in Daviess County, began to close in on Far West. On the night of 25 October, a small force under the command of Captain Patten was sent out to meet a contingent of the state militia near Crooked River, to the south of Far West. Avar was called out to go with the men as surgeon, but he decided instead to remain in Far West and sleep. The next morning Avar was awakened with the news that a battle had been fought, and he joined the relief party.⁸³ He tended the wounded and helped escort them back to Far West.⁸⁴

By 31 October, a superior force of Missourians had surrounded the Mormon community. However, the Mormon forces were determined not to surrender. Joseph Smith called the people together and gave them a rousing speech, encouraging the Mormon forces to fight bravely and promising that “the angels of the Lord would appear in our defense and fight our battles.”⁸⁵ Although he had lost some of his zeal, Sampson Avar believed the promises of the Prophet. A Liberty, Missouri, newspaper recalled Avar’s description of these events:

Smith . . . assured them they were in no danger from the militia; “that when the militia should reach Far West a legion of angels were to descend direct[ly] over the temple lot and sweep the mob with a lesson of destruction that [Avar] believed this, and to see the angels descend, stationed himself near temple lot as the militia approached, and while looking up to see the heavens open and the angels appear, there came a runner to tell him that Joseph and the other leaders had surrendered,” and he said, “I lost all faith and am no longer a Mormon.”⁸⁶

Joseph Smith’s decision to surrender the Mormon forces came as a great surprise to the loyal defenders, especially Avar. According to his account, the surrender destroyed whatever remained of his faith in Mormonism. That night, perhaps fearing prosecution by the Missourians, he fled Far West, probably trying to reach his family in St. Joseph.⁸⁷

Avar did not get far in his escape and was found the next day by a militia patrol in Platte County, hiding in some brush.⁸⁸ After some discussion with state officials, he was offered legal immunity if he would testify against the Church leadership. Fearing for his own life, he accepted the offer.⁸⁹ He cooperated with the Missourians, preparing a list of Mormons who were involved in the Mormon aggressions.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, he remained with the other prisoners “in chains, closely confined under a strong guard” until the court of inquiry began on 12 November in Richmond.⁹¹ At this point, much to the surprise of Mormon leaders, Avar was sworn in as the first witness for



Richmond, Ray County, Missouri Courthouse, 1999. The Richmond court of inquiry or preliminary hearing for the sixty-four Mormon prisoners was held in the second "brick" courthouse at this site from 12–29 November 1838.

Sampson Avard was the main witness for the prosecution. The present courthouse, completed in 1915, is the fourth county courthouse.

Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh.

the prosecution.⁹²

Avard's testimony went on for two days and provided an account of the development and teachings of the Danites, as well as the activities of the Mormon community during that fall. However, the narrative of events that he provided was not entirely accurate. Throughout his testimony, he minimized his own part in the events of the previous months, focusing instead on the actions of Joseph Smith. Also, the greater part of his testimony dealt with the Danites, which created the impression that they continued to play a significant role through the October conflict. The position of the Danites was further obscured in later testimony by the fact that many Mormons did not distinguish between the Mormon militia forces and the Danite organization.⁹³ After all the testimony was heard, the Mormon leaders were bound over to Liberty Jail until the spring term of court, and Avard was free to rejoin his family.

The Church leadership responded quickly to Avard's actions in Richmond. On 17 March 1839, Avard was excommunicated by a Church conference in Quincy, Illinois, along with other notable Mormons who tes-

EVIDENCE

Given before the Hon. Austin A. King, judge of the fifth judicial circuit in the State of Missouri, at the court-house in Richmond, in a criminal court of inquiry begun Nov. 12, 1838, on the trial of Joseph Smith, jr., and others, for high treason, and other crimes against the State.

State vs. Joseph Smith, jr., Hiram Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Parley P. Pratt, Lyman Wight, Amasa Lyman, George W. Robinson, Caleb Baldwin, Alanson Ripley, Washington Voorhees, Sidney Turnur, John Buchanan, Jacob Gates, Chandler Haldbrook, George W. Harris, Jesse D. Hunter, Andrew Whitlock, Martin C. Alred, William Alred, George Grant, Darwin Chase, Elijah Newman, Alvin G. Tippetts, Zedekiah Owens, Isaac Morley, Thomas Beck, Moses Clawson, John J. Turnur, Daniel Shearer, Daniel S. Thomas, Alexander McRay, Elisha Edwards, John S. Higbey, Ebenezer Page, Benjamin Covey, Ebenezer Robinson, Lyman Gibbs, James M. Henderson, David Pettigrew, Edward Partridge, Francis Higbey, David Framp-ton, George Kimble, Joseph W. Younger, Henry Zabriski, Allen J. Stout, Sheffield Daniels, Silas Manard, Anthony Head, Benjamin Jones, Daniel Carn, John T. Earl, and Norman Shearer; who were charged with the several crimes of high treason against the State, murder, burglary, arson, robbery, and larceny.

Sampson Avar, a witness produced, sworn, and examined on behalf of the State, deposes and saith: That about four months ago, a band, called the Daughters of Zion, (since called the Danite band,) was formed of the members of the Mormon church, the original object of which was to drive from the county of Caldwell all those who dissented from the Mormon church; in which they succeeded admirably and to the satisfaction of those concerned. I consider Joseph Smith, jr., as the prime mover and organizer of this Danite band. The officers of the band, according to their grades, were brought before him, at a school house, together with Hiram Smith and Sidney Rigdon: the three composing the first presidency of the whole church. Joseph Smith, jr., blessed them, and prophesied over them: declaring that they should be the means, in the hands of God, of bringing forth the millennial kingdom. It was stated by Joseph Smith, jr., that it was necessary this band should be bound together by a covenant, that those who revealed the secrets of the society should be put to death. The covenant taken by all the Danite band was as follows, to wit: They declared, holding up their right hands, "In the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, I do solemnly obligate myself ever to conceal, and never to reveal, the secret purposes of this society called the Daughters of Zion. Should I ever do the same, I hold my life as the forfeiture."²¹ The prophet, Joseph Smith, jr., together with his two counselors, (Hiram Smith and Sidney Rigdon,) were considered as the supreme head of the church; and the Danite band felt themselves as much bound to

Sampson Avar's published court testimony in Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &c., in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons; and Evidence Given Before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the State of Missouri, at the Courthouse in Richmond, In a Criminal Court of Inquiry, Begun November 12, 1838, On the Trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and Others, for High Treason and Other Crimes Against the State (*Fayette, Missouri: General Assembly, 1841*), 97.

Avar was the key witness for the prosecution in the 12–29 November 1838 preliminary hearing held against Joseph Smith and sixty-three other Mormon defendants in Richmond, Missouri. His testimony comprises eleven pages of the Document (pages 97–108).

Image courtesy of Alexander L. Baugh.

tified against the First Presidency.⁹⁴ His removal from the Church did not trouble him, and the next month, on 10 April 1839, he appeared before the grand jury in Daviess County, testifying once more about the events of the previous autumn.⁹⁵

After his appearance before the grand jury, Avard left both Missouri and his Mormon experiences behind him. Together with his family, he left Missouri, settling near Edwardsville in Madison County, Illinois.⁹⁶ During the family's first years in Illinois, they lived outside of town in a small cabin, where Avard's wife Eliza taught school. In 1842, he presented a couple of lectures on Mormonism, though it is unknown what he said.⁹⁷ He worked in the area as a doctor until shortly after 1850, at which point he abandoned the profession and returned to farming.⁹⁸ In 1843, another daughter was born, whom they named Ann.⁹⁹ Avard remained in Madison County for the rest of his life, passing away on 15 April 1869.¹⁰⁰ However, during those thirty years, he never again rose to prominence in the community, having apparently lost both the ambition and religious conviction he had shown among the Mormons.¹⁰¹

Mormon Perceptions of Avard and the Danites

In the years following Avard's disenchantment with Mormonism, perceptions both of the Danites and his role in the organization changed. As they existed in Far West, the Danites were simply a loyalist group that helped to enforce orthodoxy among the Saints. However, after the Mormon surrender, the image of the Danite organization began to change. The Mormon community, playing off the Missourians' perception of the Danites, began to systematically blame the group for attacks on non-Mormon homes during the Mormon War. As Oliver Huntington described it, "every mysterious trick and bold adventure which had been transacted, was planned upon [the Danites]. . . . Thus they became, in a great measure, the scapegoats of the people, bearing off every charge, unless, it was personal."¹⁰² Due in part to its new image, the Church leadership distanced itself from the Danite movement.¹⁰³

In much the same way, the memory of Sampson Avard changed over the years. During much of his time in the Church, Avard was considered by some to be an exemplary member of the Mormon community. As John D. Lee wrote, "in the days of our prosperity [Avard] had looked like an angel to me."¹⁰⁴ After his removal from the Church, however, those who remained to tell stories of Sampson Avard were mostly his enemies. The dissenters of Far West regarded him as a villain, whereas those who spent the winter in Liberty's dungeon considered him a traitor.¹⁰⁵ By the end of the nineteenth century, some Mormons no longer even admitted that Avard had ever really

been a member of the Church, describing him instead as a fugitive from the law who hid for a time among the Mormons.¹⁰⁶

In the end, Sampson Avard remains a somewhat mysterious figure. In many ways, his actions are open to varying interpretations. He was a gifted man, described by one writer as “a very eccentric genius, fluent, imaginative, sarcastic, and very quick in replying to questions.”¹⁰⁷ He was a man of faith, as seen in his devotion both to the Campbellites and the Mormons, but he was also full of ambition; and we may never know for sure what motivated him to act as he did. Perhaps it was a mixture of both.

Notes

1. See Leland H. Gentry, “The Danite Band of 1838,” *BYU Studies* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1974): 421–50.

2. More recent historical examinations of the Missouri Danites include John E. Thompson, “A Chronology of the Danite Meetings in Adam-ondi-Ahman, Missouri, July to September 1938,” *Restoration* 4 (January 1985):11–14; David J. Whittaker, “The Book of Daniel in Early Mormon Thought,” in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 155–201, see particularly pages 166–74; William G. Hartley, “Danite and Militia Captain,” in *My Best for the Kingdom: History and Autobiography of John Lowe Butler, A Mormon Frontiersman* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1993), 41–50; D. Michael Quinn, “The Danites of Far West Missouri,” and “Danites in 1838: A Partial List” (Appendix 3), in *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Book, 1994), 92–103, 479–90; Stephen C. LeSueur, “The Danites Reconsidered: Were They Vigilantes or Just the Mormon Version of the Elks Club?” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 14 (1994): 35–52; and Alexander L. Baugh, “Dissenters, Danites, and the Resurgence of Militant Mormonism” (Chapter 4), in “A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense of Northern Missouri” (PhD dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1996), 68–101. In addition, Stephen C. LeSueur provides information and his interpretation of the Danite society in *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987).

3. The Isle of Guernsey is one of the Channel Islands, an island group belonging to the United Kingdom. The islands lie just off the coast of France in the English Channel. The year of birth listed is from the “Book of Patriarchal Blessings Index,” as quoted in Susan Easton Black, comp., *Membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1848*, 50 vols. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 2:801–2. This information was self-reported; however, according to the U.S. Federal Census of 1850 and 1860, he later came to believe that he was actually born in 1803. The name of his mother is found in the 1820 U.S. Federal Census. Nothing is known of his father. A search for birth records from the Isle of Guernsey proved unsuccessful.

4. With the declaration of peace with France on 27 June 1814, the economy of the Channel Islands, which was based on privateering and smuggling, went into decline. In the years to come, many islanders left their homes in search of opportunity. A number of them went to the United States and settled in Ohio and probably maintained a correspondence with their homeland, encouraging others to immigrate. See Raoul Lemprière,

History of the Channel Islands (London: Ebenezer Baylis & Son Limited, 1974), 146–50; and John Uttley, *A Short History of the Channel Islands* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1967), 157. The source of the date of the Avard family's move to the District of Columbia is based on the U.S. Federal Census of 1820 and the U.S. Federal Census of 1870.

5. Henry Fearon, *Sketches of America, A Narrative of a Journey of Five Thousand Miles through the Eastern and Western States of America* (London: by the author, 1819); quoted in Constance Green, *Washington: Village and Capitol, 1800–1878* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 73.

6. Green, *Washington*, 73.

7. In the U.S. Federal Census of 1820, Ann Avard is listed as the head of household, indicating that her husband was probably deceased. As either the eldest or second-oldest son, Sampson likely worked to help support the family.

8. Wesley Pippenger, *District of Columbia Marriage Licenses: Register 1, 1811–1858* (Westminster, Maryland: Family Line Publications, 1994), 17; and U.S. Federal Census, 1860. The date of birth of Virginia Avard is based on information reported in the U.S. Federal Census of 1830 and 1850. The date of birth of John M. Avard is based on information reported in the U.S. Federal Census of 1850.

9. The Campbellites, or Disciples of Christ, led by Alexander Campbell, began as a group of reformers within the Baptist Church. They advocated a restoration of the primitive beliefs and practices of New Testament Christianity by “abandoning all historic human theology.” However, by 1829, other more orthodox Baptists were no longer comfortable with the reformers’ beliefs and actions. On 22 August 1829, the Beaver Baptist Association, based in Beaver, Pennsylvania, withdrew its fellowship from the reformers, an action that was followed by all other Regular Baptist associations in the area. See Beaver Baptist Association Minutes, 20–22 August 1829, photocopy, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. The Campbellites’ desire to return to a pure form of worship especially lent itself to Mormon missionary efforts. Many important early Mormon leaders were part of the movement, including Sidney Rigdon. For more information about the beliefs of the Disciples of Christ and their impact on Mormonism, see A. T. DeGroot, *Disciple Thought: A History* (Ft. Worth: Texas Christian University, 1968); and Milton Backman, “The Quest for a Restoration: The Birth of Mormonism in Ohio,” *BYU Studies* 12, no. 4 (Fall 1972): 346–64.

10. Elden J. Watson, ed., *The Orson Pratt Journals* (Salt Lake City: Elden J. Watson, 1975), 73.

11. The most common of the irregular schools was Thomsonian medicine, a medical system that was popular throughout the United States especially in the 1830s and 1840s. Thomsonianism was a reaction against medical practices of the time, which relied heavily on the use of calomel and bloodletting, relying instead on the use of herbs for healing, and also included dietary moderation and condemnation of the use of alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea. Anyone could become a Thomsonian practitioner with the purchase of an instruction book and the right to practice, both of which were sold by traveling salesmen for a total of \$22. Thomsonianism played an important part in the development of Mormon thought on the subject of medicine and healthy living. Other Mormon Thomsonian practitioners include Frederick G. Williams and Willard Richards. However, regular physicians of the period were dismissive of their methods and characterized them as quacks. As one doctor said, an irregular practitioner was “a *demagogue*; and relies, for his success on nearly the same arts, with his political and religious . . . brethren.” See James Harvey Young, “American Medical Quackery in the Age of the

Common Man," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 4 (March 1961): 581. See also Frederick Waite, "Thomsonianism in Ohio," *Ohio Archeological and Historical Quarterly* 49 (1940): 322–31; Alex Berman and Michael A. Flannery, *America's Botanic-Medical Movements: Vox Populi* (New York: Pharmaceutical Press, 2001); Robert Divett, "Medicine and the Mormons: A Historical Perspective," *Dialogue* 12, no. 3 (Fall 1979): 16–25; and N. Lee Smith, "Herbal Remedies: God's Medicine?" *Dialogue* 12, no. 3 (Fall 1979): 37–43.

12. The date of the Avard family's move to Pennsylvania is based on the fact that they first appear in the tax records of Beaver in 1836. See Helen Clear, Gladys Schmidt, and Mae Winne, eds., *Complete Index of Remaining Tax Records, Beaver County, Pennsylvania, 1802–1840* (New Brighton, Pennsylvania: by the authors, 1982), 27.

13. It was the Beaver Association that had first anathematized Campbell's reformers in 1829 (see endnote 8), and according to the accounts of Mormon missionaries such as Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow, the area was still not open to new beliefs. Also, according to an 1837 city directory, Beaver already had four other doctors, which would necessarily limit the size of his medical practice. See Watson, *Pratt Journals*, 73; Erastus Snow, *Journal*, 23–24, typescript, Perry Special Collections; and Joseph Bausman, *History of Beaver County, Pennsylvania; including its early settlement; its erection into a separate county; its subsequent growth and development; sketches of its boroughs, villages, and townships; portraits of some of its prominent citizens; statistics, etc.* (Philadelphia and Chicago: A. Warner & Co., 1888), 383–84.

14. Oliver Cowdery, *Oliver Cowdery Letter Book* (microfilm), 55, LDS Church Archives, Family and Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives). The word "first" is underlined in the letter.

15. Watson, ed., *Pratt Journals*, 74. Leland Gentry assumed that Avard lived in the borough of Freedom, as he was baptized there. However, tax records indicate that he actually lived a few miles away in the town of Beaver at the time. Leland H. Gentry, "The Danite Band of 1838," *BYU Studies* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1974): 425.

16. Cowdery, *Letter Book*, 67.

17. Clear, et al., *Complete Index of Remaining Tax Records*, 27.

18. Snow, *Journal*, 24–25; and James Little, "Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 14 (1946): 51–52.

19. The historical record discusses only one of these visits to Kirtland. See Snow, *Journal*, 25. However, when Avard appeared in Kirtland in early 1837, he immediately became prominent both in Church leadership and in the community. It is at least certain that he had come to know Sidney Rigdon well. When Lorenzo Young reported on his experience with Avard to the First Presidency in 1836, he noted that "circumstances developed that Avard and Elder Sidney Rigdon were on quite intimate terms, and that the latter was considerably tinctured with the ideas and spirit of the former." See Little, "Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young," 51. By May, he was on the high council in Kirtland and had gone into business with Rigdon and Zebedee Coltrin. He may have simply risen quickly, but he probably had gotten to know a number of Mormon leaders before he moved to Kirtland.

20. Sampson Avard's family apparently never joined the LDS Church. Black shows no other Avard listing for them in *Membership of the Church*. That they remained in Beaver is based on the appearance of Avard's name in the tax records of Beaver County (Clear, et al., *Complete Index of Remaining Tax Records*, 27), and the inability of the author to find any instance of the family in the records of Geauga County, Ohio.

21. Black, *Membership of the Church*, 2:801.

22. Lyndon Cook and Milton Backman, eds., *Kirtland Elder's Quorum Record, 1836–1841* (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book, 1985), 24, 26. The endowment practiced at the time is different from that practiced in Mormon temples today. This earlier ritual consisted of ceremonial washing in scented whiskey, anointing with oil, and a blessing.

23. Fred Collier and William Harwell, eds., *Kirtland Council Minute Book* (Salt Lake City: Collier's Publishing Company, 1996), 181.

24. The firm apparently had some financial difficulties and was sued twice for debt. See Oliver Cowdery, Docket, 57, microfilm, LDS Church Archives; and Geauga County Court of Common Pleas, Book U, 612–13. The firm may also have had some dealings with Jared Carter, who transferred five hundred shares of stock in the Kirtland Safety Society Bank in early 1837. See Kirtland Safety Society Ledger, 3, microfilm, Perry Special Collections.

25. Milton Backman, *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1983), 317. For a complete discussion of the Kirtland Safety Society Bank and the reasons for its failure, see Marvin Hill, C. Keith Rooker, and Larry Wimmer, *The Kirtland Economy Revisited: A Market Critique of Sectarian Economics* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977).

26. Few individuals lost significant amounts of money in the banking failure, so the loss of faith in the First Presidency was probably not completely caused by economic considerations. Although Joseph Smith insisted that he never said he prophesied that the bank would not fail, many individuals, including Wilford Woodruff, Warren Parrish, and John Boynton, believed he did. See Hill and Rooker, *The Kirtland Economy Revisited*, 65; and Max Parkin, "The Nature and Causes of Internal and External Conflict of the Mormons in Ohio between 1830 and 1838" (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 1966), 296–300.

27. Marvin Hill, "Cultural Crisis in the Mormon Kingdom: A Reconsideration of the Causes of Kirtland Dissent," *Church History* 49, no. 3 (September 1980): 286–97. Dissenters of the time included Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Martin Harris, Frederick G. Williams, Warren Parrish, John Boynton, Jared Carter, and other notable figures.

28. Max Parkin speculates that the decision to make David Whitmer President of the Church was based on a revelation of July 1834 that authorized Whitmer to "become a leader or Prophet . . . on conditions that he [i.e., Joseph Smith Jun.] did not live to God himself." Parkin, "The Nature and Cause of Internal and External Conflict," 311n74. Lucy Mack Smith also records that at about the same time, a girl who was living at the house of David Whitmer began receiving prophecies through a seer-stone. One of the prophecies stated that Joseph "would fall from his office because of transgression, and either David Whitmer or Martin Harris would be appointed in his place." Scot Proctor and Maurine Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 336.

29. *Deseret News Weekly*, 7, no. 49 (10 February 1858): 386. As a member of the Kirtland high council, Avard may have been invited to participate in this meeting.

30. John Taylor attributed Avard's decision to side with the dissenters to his "pompous, vain" nature. This conclusion was made in his later years, though, and may have been biased by later events. See John Taylor, History of John Taylor, by himself, 14, LDS Church Archives; and Joseph Horne, Reminiscences and Diary, 1858 Jan–[1861], microfilm, LDS Church Archives.

31. See Taylor, History of John Taylor, 12; and Horne, Reminiscences and Diary.

32. Taylor, History of John Taylor, 12.

33. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B.

H. Roberts, 2nd ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 2:502 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).

34. Taylor, *History of John Taylor*, 13.

35. Taylor, *History of John Taylor*, 13. Others wrote about the conference in Scarborough, but no mention is made of Avard or even of Joseph Smith. See James Leithead, *History of James Leithead*, typescript, Perry Special Collections; and Isaac Russell to Theodore Turley, 9 November 1837, Perry Special Collections.

36. Although Joseph Smith suspended him from his office, the high priests quorum took no action until 15 October 1837. At that point, they resolved to “send a letter requesting Dr. Avard to come to Kirtland and give satisfaction to the quorums of High Priests and also appointed Brother Jame[s] to take his licence [sic] until the request was complied with.” Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 196. The two who brought the charges against Avard, Brothers James and Winchester, appear to have been from western Pennsylvania. All these developments suggest that Avard did not return to Kirtland but went to Beaver instead. The record does not show how Avard responded to the high council’s demands.

37. See Parkin, “The Nature and Causes of Internal and External Conflict,” 314–15; and Backman, *The Heavens Resound*, 327–28.

38. Parkin, “The Nature and Causes of Internal and External Conflict,” 317.

39. Oliver Cowdery, Letter from Far West, 21 January 1838, typescript, Perry Special Collections. The group also included Jacob Whitmer and Lyman E. Johnson, an Apostle. They began meeting at the house of Oliver Cowdery in January 1838. Their primary complaints revolved around the developing temporal programs of the Church (i.e., the Church injunction against selling property in Jackson County, Missouri), and “endeavoring to make it a rule of faith . . . to uphold a certain man or men right or wrong.” The Far West dissenters were quite vocal about their views, which quickly brought them into conflict with other Church leaders in Far West. On 5 February 1838, the Missouri stake presidency, made up of David Whitmer, John Whitmer, and W. W. Phelps, was removed from their offices, and Thomas B. Marsh and David W. Patten were made presidents *pro tempore* until the arrival of Smith and Rigdon. See *History of the Church*, 3:4–6. For more information about the causes of Cowdery’s and Whitmer’s dissent, see Hill, “Cultural Crisis in the Mormon Kingdom.”

40. The high council excommunicated John Whitmer and W. W. Phelps on 10 March 1838 for “unchristian-like conduct,” including the selling of lands in Jackson County contrary to revelation and selling Church-owned land to the Saints for a profit. Oliver Cowdery was excommunicated on 12 April on various charges, including selling land in Jackson County, instigating “vexatious law suits,” and accusing Joseph Smith of adultery. (Cowdery would not accept Smith’s plural marriage to Fanny Alger.) The next day, David Whitmer was also excommunicated, primarily for neglecting his duties, sympathizing with the dissenters, and disregarding the Word of Wisdom. See *History of the Church*, 3:6–19.

41. The date of Avard’s arrival in Far West comes from a letter written by Oliver Cowdery dated 2 June 1838. See Oliver Cowdery to Warren Cowdery, 2 June 1838, in Stanley Gunn, *Oliver Cowdery: Second Elder and Scribe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), 263–66.

42. There is no record of Avard’s visit to Kirtland or his reinstatement. However, upon his arrival in Far West, he seems to have been immediately accepted by the Church leadership, serving on the Far West high council on 23 June and acting as an official at the July 4th activities. See Donald Cannon and Lyndon Cook, eds., *The Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City:

Deseret Book Company, 1983), 189; and *Elder's Journal*, 1, no. 4 (August 1838): 60.

43. The assumption that Avard's family accompanied him to Missouri is based on the fact that Eliza Avard gave birth to their second son, Henry, sometime between July and November in Missouri. See U.S. Federal Census of 1850 and 1860. In his Army discharge records, Henry reported his place of birth as St. Joseph County, Missouri, so his family probably did not actually live in Far West but rather lived in St. Joseph. Madison County [Illinois] Discharge Records, 1865–1918, microfilm, Family History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

44. Nearly every source refers to Sampson Avard by the title of "doctor." Sidney Rigdon referred to him as "a physician, who resided in Far West." Sidney Rigdon, *An Appeal to the American People: Being an Account of the Persecutions of the Church of Latter Day Saints; and the Barbarities Inflicted on Them by the Inhabitants of the State of Missouri* (Cincinnati: Glens and Shepard, Stereotypers and Printers, 1840), 23. However, the only source suggesting that Avard was practicing medicine is in a letter from Parley P. Pratt dated 9 December 1838, which refers to him as "famaly [sic] Doct. Avard." See Dean Jessee and David Whitaker, "The Last Months of Mormonism in Missouri: The Albert Perry Rockwood Journal," *BYU Studies* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 33.

45. John Corrill later decried their actions, saying: "The dissenters kept up a kind of secret opposition to the presidency and the church. They would occasionally speak against them, influence the minds of the members against them, and occasionally correspond with the enemies abroad . . . if they were suffered to remain they would destroy the Church" John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints (Commonly Called Mormons)* (St. Louis: by the author, 1839), 30. The dissenters also initiated a series of lawsuits against the First Presidency. See Cowdery, Letter from Far West, 13.

46. In his letter of 2 June 1838, Cowdery wrote, "Avard arrived some time since. He appears very friendly but I look upon him with so much contempt, that he will probably get but little from me." Oliver Cowdery to Warren Cowdery, 2 June 1838, in Gunn, *Oliver Cowdery*, 263. Why Cowdery felt this way toward Avard is unclear; however, it may have been because of Avard's change of heart and return to fellowship after his Canadian experience.

47. See Reed Peck, Manuscript, 6, typescript, Perry Special Collections. Peck described Carter and Huntington as "two of Smiths greatest courtiers." Jared Carter was a member of the high council in Far West at the time. Although he had been among the dissenters in Kirtland, after he moved to Far West in October, Carter had become one of the most ardent supporters of the Prophet Joseph. See Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 338. In a letter of 10 March 1838, Oliver Cowdery complained that Carter was teaching "that Joseph Smith Junr. was the only mediator between God & this generation! . . . All who are not on his (J's) side would be cursed." Cowdery, Letter from Far West, 10. Carter knew Avard from the Kirtland high council, as well as from other business dealings. See endnote 23. Others who attended this meeting were Thomas B. Marsh and John Corrill.

48. Jared Carter had a brother named Gideon Carter. Although they did not attend the meeting, the First Presidency knew of the organization of the Brother of Gideon. The following Sunday, 10 June, John D. Lee records that Joseph Smith ordered the Brother of Gideon to remove a man from the meetinghouse for wearing his hat during the services. See John Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled, or Life and Confessions of John D. Lee* (Lewiston, Pennsylvania: Sun Publishing Company, 1882), 42. Over the coming months, the name of the organization would evolve, eventually coming to be known as the Danites.

49. Peck, Manuscript, 8. For a complete discussion of the Salt Sermon, see John

Thompson, "The Far West Dissenters and the Gamblers at Vicksburg: An Examination of the Documentary Evidence and Historical Context of Sidney Rigdon's Salt Sermon," *Restoration* 5 (January 1986): 21–27.

50. *Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &c., in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons; and Evidence Given Before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the State of Missouri, at the Courthouse in Richmond, In a Criminal Court of Inquiry, Begun November 12, 1838, On the Trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and Others, for High Treason and Other Crimes Against the State* (Fayette, Missouri: General Assembly, 1841), 103. Avard testified that Sidney Rigdon wrote the letter, whereas many historians contend that Avard wrote it himself. See Baugh, "A Call to Arms," 76. In either case, the signers of the petition were all probably involved with the Brother of Gideon to some degree.

51. The question of the First Presidency's role in the activities of the Brother of Gideon and the Danites has been debated for years. From the evidence available, it appears that they were involved or at least aware of Danite activities between June and August. For more information, see LeSueur, "The Danites Reconsidered," 35–51; Anderson, "Clarification of Bogg's 'Order,'" 62–83; and Gentry, "The Danite Band," 442–49.

52. John Corrill recorded that the members of the Brother of Gideon "meant to cleanse their own members first, and then the church." Corrill, *A Brief History*, 31.

53. For a description of Avard's role in these meetings, see the testimony of W. W. Phelps in *Document*, 122.

54. The Danite band was organized along military lines. At the Richmond Court of Inquiry, Reed Peck listed the officers of the Danite organization as follows: "Jared Carter was captain general of the band, Cornelius P. Lott, major general, and Sampson Avard brig. General." *Document*, 117. He later switched Lott and Avard, describing the latter as "major general." See Peck, "Manuscript." However, William Swartzell, a member of the Danite organization, describes him as "brigadier general," so he probably held the lesser rank. See William Swartzell, *Mormonism Exposed, being a journal of a residence in Missouri from the 28th of May to the 20th of August, 1838* (Pekin, Ohio: by the author, 1840), 30. Swartzell incorrectly refers to Avard as "Mr. Eberly."

55. As noted by Stephen LeSueur, "nearly all sources—Mormons and dissenters—agree that Sampson Avard was the group's 'teacher and active agent.'" LeSueur, "The Danites Reconsidered," 36. The major tenets of the group were (1) complete obedience to the First Presidency and (2) supporting one another in all things. According to Avard, these teachings came directly from Joseph Smith. See Avard's testimony in *Document*, 98. However, some members of the society, such as John Corrill, Reed Peck, and Lorenzo Young, disagreed with some of Avard's teachings, such as the idea of swearing to a lie to free a fellow Danite, obeying or supporting individuals right or wrong, and the idea of killing dissenters. Many also rejected the extreme nature of punishments reserved for covenant breakers. There is no real evidence that such punishments were ever executed, so they may have been only hollow threats. Nevertheless, at least one account describes Avard as living in fear of retaliation after leaving the Church. Martin Litvin, comp., *Voices of the Prairie Land* (Galesburg, Illinois: Mother Bickerdyke Historical Collection, 1972), 2:563. For a complete discussion of the teachings of the Danite society, see Gentry, "The Danite Band," 430–33.

56. John Corrill estimated the size of the Danite organization at three hundred, although other accounts have a much larger number. For a discussion of the size of the Danite forces, see Baugh, "A Call to Arms," 96.

57. *Elders Journal*, 1, no. 4 (August 1838): 60.

58. Dean Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1989–1992), 2:248.

59. Rigdon's oration is reprinted in Peter Crawley, "Two Rare Missouri Documents," *BYU Studies* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1974): 518–27. In the final paragraphs, Rigdon states: "And that mob that comes on us to disturb us; it shall be between us and them a war of extermination, for we will follow them, till the last drop of their blood is spilled, or else they will have to exterminate us." Crawley, "Two Rare Missouri Documents," 527. The speech was printed in the Church newspaper office and was widely distributed throughout the county. *Elders Journal*, 1, no. 4 (August 1838): 54. For a full discussion of the July 4th activities, see Baugh, "A Call to Arms," 86–90.

60. This revelation, now incorporated in the Doctrine and Covenants as section 119, is now simply known as the law of tithing. However, when it was introduced, it required that the members of the Church consecrate "all their surplus property" to the Lord as well.

61. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:256. George Robinson was Joseph Smith's clerk, as well as a colonel in the Danite organization.

62. For a description of the event, see Peck, Manuscript, 10. Also, see the testimony of John Corrill, John Cleminson, and W. W. Phelps in *Document*.

63. In his entry for 27 July 1838, George Robinson wrote that "the brethren or saints have come up day after day to consecrate, and to bring their offerings into the store house of the lord." Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:262. However, others were not so positive in their assessment of the law of consecration. John Corrill wrote: "Shortly after the Danites became organized, they set out to enforce the law of consecration; but this did not amount to much." Corrill, *A Brief History*, 46. Reed Peck wrote: "Many consecrated land in Jackson[,] Clay[,] and Caldwell Counties, others brought forward furniture, horses, &c, &c, but it all adde[d] little to the church fund & I conclude fell far short of satisfying the presidency." Peck, "Manuscript," 12.

64. The members of the agricultural firms deeded their lands to the firm and then worked the fields communally. Each member then received a wage for each day's work, as well as a share of the profits. Excess funds were to be used to increase the company's holdings. For a greater discussion of the agricultural firms, see Lyndon Cook, *Joseph Smith and the Law of Consecration* (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book, 1985), 80–81. The Danite movement supported the development of such firms both in Far West and in Adam-ondi-Ahman. See Swartzell, *Mormonism Exposed*, 23–24.

65. See Peck, "Manuscript," 12; Corrill, *A Brief History*, 46; and "Elder John Brush—By Two Friends," *Autumn Leaves* 4, no. 3 (March 1891): 129. Corrill wrote that "Smith said that every man must act his own feelings, whether to join or not, yet great exertions were used, and especially by Doctor Arverd [sic], to persuade all to join."

66. Peck, Manuscript, 14.

67. Peck, Manuscript, 14. The creation of an election ticket by the Danites and the First Presidency is also described in Corrill, *A Brief History*, 33. Corrill mentions that "there was some murmuring and fault finding after the election, by those opposed to the proceedings, but this was soon put down by the Danite influence."

68. For a complete discussion of the Election Day Battle, see Reed C. Durham, "Election Day Battle at Gallatin," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1972), 36–61. Although they were not the instigators of the violence, various Danites were involved in the fighting, including John Butler and John D. Lee. See William G. Hartley, *My Best for the Kingdom: History and Autobiography of John Lowe Butler, a Mormon Frontiersman* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1993), 50.

69. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:268.

70. Sampson Avarad later testified that he was the leader of the relief expedition. See Avarad testimony in *Document*, 98. The trip to Adam-ondi-Ahman is the only known instance of a Danite military exercise. According to George W. Robinson, the group included “Prests Smith Rigdon and H[yrum] Smith, all the first presidency, General [Elias] Higbee, Gen. [Sampson] Avarad myself and many others. . . . [I]t was put upon me to take command in consequence of my holding the office of *Colonel*. Whose duty it is to command one regiment.” Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:268. Elias Higbee had taken Jared Carter’s place in the Danite leadership in mid-July. Peck, Manuscript, 11–12.

71. Lyman Wight was a veteran of the War of 1812 and a member of the stake presidency in Adam-ondi-Ahman, as well as the leader of the Danites in Daviess County. For more information about his role in the Danite organization, see Swartzell, *Mormonism Exposed*.

72. Swartzell, *Mormonism Exposed*, 30. The text is italicized in the document. Also, see the testimony of Adam Black in *Document*, 161.

73. William Swartzell wrote that the day after the Adam Black expedition was spent wrestling and relaxing. That evening, “Brigadier General Eberly [Avarad] made a very eloquent speech, in which he congratulated the band of warriors for their consummate bravery, and noble daring in their recent attack on the house of Mr. Black.” Swartzell, *Mormonism Exposed*, 31. The time of their return is found in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:271.

74. See LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*, 68; and Baugh, “A Call to Arms,” 111–13.

75. Testimony of John Corrill in *Document*, 111. For a sample of Avarad’s teachings, see Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:178–80. In general, the military measures advocated by Joseph Smith were defensive in nature, whereas both Danite leaders and dissenters saw the organization as an instrument to expand the Mormon kingdom. See *Document*, 111, 116–17.

76. See testimony of Adam Black in *Document*, 162.

77. Differences in dispositions, coupled with complaints by faithful Mormons about the teachings of the Danite society, probably led to Avarad’s removal. See Little, “Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young,” 52–53; and Anderson, “Clarifications of Bogg’s ‘Order,’” 67. In his own testimony, Avarad tells of the loss of his command among the Danites, although he does not give a date. *Document*, 99.

78. Alexander L. Baugh and William G. Hartley have noted the integration of Danite members into the Mormon defense forces. See Baugh, “A Call to Arms,” 96–97; and Hartley, *My Best for the Kingdom*, 48–49.

79. *Document*, 98.

80. *Document*, 99. Smith later claimed that Avarad lied about the meeting, saying that it never took place. See Clark V. Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions: Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 43. As part of the expedition, the Mormon forces attacked the towns of Gallatin and Millport, plundering goods and burning homes. For a complete discussion of the Mormon offensive in Daviess County, see Baugh, “A Call to Arms,” 182–217; and LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War*, 117–28.

81. Avarad’s court testimony indicated that he participated in the attack on Gallatin. *Document*, 99–100. Morris Phelps later suggested that Avarad personally burned down Stollings’ grocery store in Gallatin during the attack. Morris Phelps, *Reminiscences* (microfilm), 10, LDS Church Archives. Also, Joseph Smith later suggested that Avarad had stolen the account books of the store. *Journal History of the Church*, 27 June 1839, LDS Church Archives.

82. In his testimony, Avard described the correspondence between Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, who remained in Far West, during the campaign in Daviess. *Document*, 99. This description can be taken as evidence of his presence in Far West during the Mormon offensive.

83. Testimony of Sampson Avard, in *Document*, 107. Avard tended David Patten, James Hendricks, and the other Mormons wounded at Crooked River. Allen Stout confirmed his presence, adding that it was Avard who encouraged the Mormons in the regions outside the city to come to Far West. Allen Stout, *Journal*, 10, typescript, Perry Special Collections.

84. For a complete discussion of the Battle of Crooked River, see Baugh, "A Call to Arms," 218–52.

85. Testimony of Sampson Avard, in *Document*, 107. Smith's promise of the help of angels to fight the battle is also recorded by James Owens, *Document*, 113. See also Peck, *Manuscript*, 11.

86. *Liberty Tribune* (Liberty, Missouri), 9 April 1886, 4.

87. Peck, *Manuscript*, 24. Avard's family, as previously noted, was probably in St. Joseph during the conflict. See endnote 42. Avard was intercepted in his flight by a militia patrol in Platte County, just south of St. Joseph. *Document*, 90; and Peck, *Manuscript*, 260.

88. *History of the Church*, 3:192–93.

89. Rigdon, *An Appeal to the American People*, 66. Shortly before the court hearing, Avard told Oliver Olney "that if he wanted to save himself, he must swear hard against the heads of the Church. . . . I intend to do it, he [Avard] said, in order to escape, for if I do not, they will take my life." *History of the Church*, 3:209–10.

90. Peck, *Manuscript*, 26.

91. *Missouri Republican* (St. Louis, Missouri), 20 November 1838.

92. The court of inquiry was a preliminary hearing to see if the state had enough evidence to prosecute Mormon leaders, such as Lyman Wight, Joseph Smith, and Sidney Rigdon, for treason, arson, murder, and other charges. For a complete discussion of the court of inquiry, see Stephen LeSueur, "High Treason and Murder': The Examination of Mormon Prisoners at Richmond, Missouri in November 1838," *BYU Studies* 26, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 3–30.

93. See Baugh, "A Call to Arms," 96–97.

94. *Journal History of the Church*, 17 March 1839, LDS Church Archives. Others who were excommunicated at the time included George M. Hinkle, John Corrill, Reed Peck, W. W. Phelps, Frederick G. Williams, and Thomas B. Marsh. On the other hand, no other Danite leader was excommunicated. From this, it seems clear that Avard was removed from the Church for being a turncoat—not for his part in the Danite organization. This focus on Avard's treachery is referred to in two accounts from the Nauvoo period. When he resigned as mayor on 19 May 1842, John C. Bennett assured the City Council that he would not "become a second Avard. . . . [I]t will then be known whether I am a traitor or a true man." *History of the Church*, 5:13. In council proceedings in 1844, Hyrum Smith made much the same reference, equating John Corrill and Sampson Avard. *History of the Church*, 6:163. The only thing these two had in common was that they both testified against the Church at the Richmond trial.

95. *Journal History of the Church*, 10 April 1839, LDS Church Archives. For a full discussion of the Daviess County appearance, see Alexander L. Baugh, "'We Took Our Change of Venue to the State of Illinois': The Gallatin Hearing and the Escape of Joseph Smith and the Mormon Prisoners from Missouri, April 1839," *Mormon Historical Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 61–65.

96. U.S. Federal Census, 1840.

97. See Litvin, *Voices of the Prairie Land*, 2:563.

98. U.S. Federal Census, 1850; and Madison County (Illinois) Census, 1855. Thomsonianism went into decline following the death of Samuel Thomson in 1843, and this may have contributed to Avard's decision to give up the practice of medicine. Waite, "Thomsonianism in Ohio," 328.

99. U.S. Federal Census, 1850 and 1860.

100. Madison County Court, County Probate Records, Book G, 70.

101. Sampson Avard does not appear in any of the available histories of Madison County. He also fails to appear in Church records of the area.

102. Oliver Huntington, *Diary of Oliver B. Huntington*, 36, typescript, Perry Special Collections.

103. An entry in the Prophet's published history seems to suggest that Joseph Smith may have later outright denied the existence of the Danites. At a Nauvoo City Council meeting held on 3 January 1844, the report of the meeting states that Joseph Smith said the following: "The Danite system alluded to by [Eli] Norton never had any existence. It was a term made use of by some of the brethren in Far West, and grew out of an expression I made use of when the brethren were preparing to defend themselves from the Missouri mob, in reference to the stealing of Macaiah's images (Judges chapter 18)—If the enemy comes, the Danites will be after them, meaning the brethren in self-defense." However, the precise meaning of the statement is unclear. Was he suggesting the society never existed? Perhaps not, as his statement clearly reveals that he referred to some of the brethren as Danites. John Taylor later denied the existence of the Danites. See President John Taylor's dictation (ca. 1884), LDS Church Archives. However, it should be noted that Taylor did not arrive in Missouri until late August 1838 (he settled in De Witt, Carroll County), and did not come to Far West until the second week of October and therefore may not have been fully knowledgeable about the Danite group. Significantly, a former resident of Caldwell County who was not a member of the Church during the Mormon War wrote that when the missionaries approached him in Illinois in 1844, "they said they had repented and acknowledged [sic] doing wrong in missuri [sic] and other places and they did not teach the same principles." Abner Blackburn, *Diary*, 2, typescript, Perry Special Collections.

104. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 94.

105. John Corrill wrote that Avard "was as grand a villain as his wit and ability would admit of." Corrill, *A Brief History*, 31. Lyman Wight described him as "a man whose character was perfectly run down in all classes of society, and he being a stranger palmed himself upon the Mormon Church." Rollin J. Britton, "Early Days on Grand River and the Mormon War," *Missouri Historical Review* 14, no. 2 (January 1920): 236.

106. See Solomon Hancock, *Autobiography*, microfilm, Perry Special Collections.

107. Peter H. Burnett, *Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1880), 63.