

# Conversing with “Mr. Kirtland”: An Interview With Karl Ricks Anderson

*Interviewed by Richard D. McClellan*

## Introduction

Karl Ricks Anderson was born in Salt Lake City, Utah. From 1957–60, he served in the Swiss-Austrian Mission. Soon after receiving his bachelor’s (1964) and MBA (1966) from the University of Utah, Karl took a position with Borg-Warner Corporation, bringing him to northern Ohio, where he has spent nearly all of his time since. Eventually, he went to work for Systemation, Inc., where he served as both a senior vice president and a director.

Karl has gained fame as “Mr. Kirtland” from his devotion and love for the Kirtland area and by his tireless efforts to restore it. In 1989, Karl published his insightful *Joseph Smith’s Kirtland*, and he is currently working on another Kirtland-related book. He has published articles in several publications, including the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, the *Historical Atlas of Mormonism*, and, more recently, the *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*. He has been working to bring about restoration efforts in Kirtland for over twenty-five years, which efforts are starting to come to fruition with several buildings and a major road redesign currently underway and scheduled for completion in 2003.

Karl has sat on the board of directors for the Boy Scouts of America for twenty-five years, serving as district chairman, vice president, and council

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RICHARD D. MCCLELLAN received a bachelor’s degree in English from BYU in 2000 and is currently working on his MBA at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. He has published articles in the *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* and *Mormon Historical Studies*. He wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Cheryl McClellan (his mother) for transcribing the interview.

commissioner. He is the president of the Cleveland chapter of the Association for Systems Management and is an officer and board member of the Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith Family Foundation.

Karl has also been heavily involved in his service to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, serving as stake president, regional representative, and family history area advisor to the North America Northeast Area. He has served for twenty-one years as a seminary and institute teacher and has been the institute director for northern Ohio since 1994. He is currently the patriarch of the Kirtland Stake and teaches an institute class entitled "History of the Church in the Ohio." He and his wife Joyce have spent thirty-two years in the Cleveland area, where they have raised seven children.

The following interview was conducted on 18 April 2001.

### The Interview

RICHARD: You are not a historian by trade, but a businessman. How did you get into business?

KARL: My professional career has pretty much been business. My father owned a small printing company and printed three weekly newspapers. I grew up in the plant—operating equipment and selling advertising for the newspaper and other publications. And so I developed a love for business from when I was very young. My mother wanted me to play the violin, my father offered me an opportunity for business, and I broke my mother's heart [laughter].

RICHARD: You were born in Salt Lake City and received both of your degrees from the University of Utah, so how did you end up in Ohio?

KARL: When I graduated from MBA school, a national company headquartered in Chicago interviewed me and hired me and put me on a management training program where they put me in four plants—two in Illinois near Nauvoo, one in New York near the Sacred Grove, and the last one here in Cleveland. Interestingly—although I haven't thought of this for a long time—all three are near Church sites. And then I picked one of the four to go to work for—after they had all looked at me. The one with the best offer was Pesco Products, a division at Borg Warner on the east side of Cleveland. They hired me after the training program.

RICHARD: You and your brother Richard have both taken a major interest in Mormon history. Was this interest bred into you by your parents when you were children?

KARL: I think it was, yes; they had a love for the Church and a love for Joseph Smith, but mine was probably also bred in heavily through Richard. He's my senior by almost twelve years. Our parents bred in both of us a love

for the Church and a dedication to the Church. They took time to help us learn and encouraged learning beyond just the Church.

RICHARD: What roles and callings have you held in the LDS Church during your time here in Ohio?

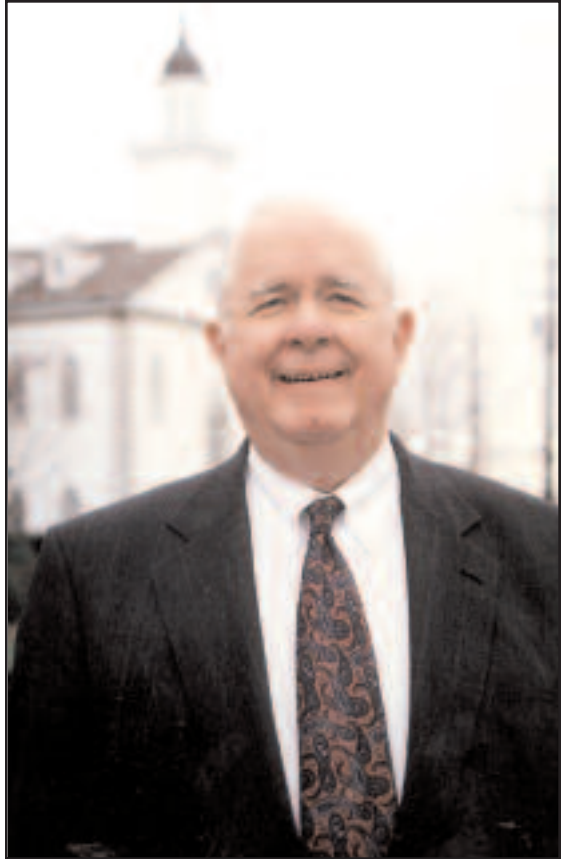
KARL: I've been on the high council. I've served as stake president, regional representative, advisor to the area presidency for family history, and patriarch, in addition to teaching. Of course, teaching encompasses all the other positions.

RICHARD: How long have you been teaching with the Church Education System?

KARL: I'm in my seventh year. When I graduated from college, I had a desire to join CES, and Richard already had worked for CES and was then teaching at BYU. He told me that I had a knack for business and that I should pursue it and make some money. And if I wanted to teach, I would have an opportunity to teach early-morning seminary wherever I was. I taught fifteen years as an early-morning teacher in addition to my business career.

RICHARD: Why is Kirtland so special to you?

KARL: That's a good question. I have become convinced that the Lord put me here. As a teenager, I wondered where I would spend my life, and I felt then that I would not stay in Utah but would help build up the Church elsewhere. It seems like it was meant for me to be here because I have moved to Ohio three times. When I was on the training program, I worked here



*Karl Ricks Anderson*  
*Photo courtesy of Karl Ricks Anderson*

three months. Then they moved me to New York. And then when we put the permanent deal together, it was back here, so I moved back a second time. And then the Borg Warner Division encountered financial problems here and they decided to sell it; so I transferred to Detroit for two years in 1970 and thought again I was gone from Ohio. Then, a software company that I eventually joined and helped manage asked me to come back to Cleveland. And so we have moved here three times. I've told my wife if we were to ever move away again, the Lord would have to be very plain about it because I felt I was somewhat like Jonah—I didn't want to test Him the fourth time.

RICHARD: In Mormon history circles, you're affectionately termed "Mr. Kirtland." As someone who is not professionally trained in history, how did you gain this title and how do you feel about it?

KARL: Well, I feel I gained the title by longevity because we moved here to Ohio thirty-four years ago. How do I feel about it? I feel honored and privileged to be associated with Kirtland for so many years. Initially, the association was as a priesthood leader. I received very strong spiritual promptings about what needed to be done in Kirtland and initiated many of those things as a priesthood leader. And then I became a historian by presenting historical information to LDS Church leaders—to every General Authority who came here. When I was a stake president, a General Authority came every quarter to conference. So four times a year, it became a standard thing that I took them to Kirtland. I was surprised that very few really understood what happened in Kirtland. Beyond the temple, most did not realize that anything of importance had happened here. So I began to put presentations together about Kirtland so I could place something in their hands like making a proposal in business. I put together all kinds of history and tried to sum up the importance of the Kirtland period for visitors. The longer I served, the better those presentations became until I was asked by two of the Church leaders to write the first book on Kirtland.

RICHARD: By whom?

KARL: One was Rex Reeve Sr. who was the Area President. He called me into his office and asked me to commit to him that I would write a book, even if it took publishing it with my own money. I was to see that it was published. And so I made a commitment to him. Let's just say that President Benson also desired that it be done. But President Reeve—that was a formal commitment, and it required that because I would never have seen the book through. It was the most difficult thing I think I have ever done. It took several drafts before it came out in its final form, and each one was painful.

RICHARD: You've called Kirtland the best-kept secret in the Church. Why do you say that?

KARL: Because so few members of the Church really understand what happened here. Everyone recognizes the temple. For whatever reason, everyone views the Church as having been established in New York. Joseph Smith received the Book of Mormon in New York along with the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods. And somehow members think the Saints stopped in Kirtland to build the temple, and then everything else happened in Nauvoo. That has been the general feeling of people over the years. That is why I talk about its being the best-kept secret because the Church was here longer than any of our other early sites and—if we look at significant events in Church history—more happened in Kirtland than anywhere else. In New York, the Church began; but to me there are three things that happened in Kirtland from which everything branches.

First, it was the teaching period of the Church. President Hinckley likes to refer to it as being the teaching period. And out of teaching came our first formal school, the School of the Prophets. Kirtland impacted all our scriptures. The first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants—almost half of the current Doctrine and Covenants plus many revelations that were not put into the Doctrine and Covenants—were received here. By far, more revelations were given here than anywhere else. Nearly all of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible was received here, except for a few chapters. The Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price had its origins here—that is, the mummies and the papyrus from which the Book of Abraham came were brought here. The last chapter of Moses was given here. The second edition of the Book of Mormon was printed here as well. So Kirtland impacted virtually all our scriptures.

Second, in addition to the teaching period, this was the organizational period. Members somehow feel the Church was organized in New York. Probably we could use a better term than “organize” for what happened on April 6. We could say that it began or was founded or that it was established, but in Kirtland all of our organizational structure that we have in the Church today was put in place—from the First Presidency to the Quorum of the Twelve, multiple quorums of the Seventy, the first stake, the first stake president, patriarch, bishop, and high priests. Much of our quorum organization took place here. It was our organizational period.

Third, I like to think of Kirtland as also being our Pentecostal period, out of which came all the manifestations and appearances. We have four locations where the Father and Son have appeared. We have ten appearances of the Savior (four of which were with the Father). All of these are well documented. I think there are more that are not documented, but these are the ones that are formally documented. Possibly the major prophet of every dispensation came here. Certainly we know that Adam, Abraham,

Moses, Elias, Elijah, and Peter, James, and John were here. We have that firmly documented, plus angels. And of course, to me, Kirtland—everything in Kirtland—is the temple. I think everything in New York from the beginning pointed toward the building of the temple and restoring the keys therein. Everything since has been implementing what transpired in the temple.

RICHARD: Is Kirtland coming out of obscurity? And if it is, what has brought that about?

KARL: It is barely coming out of obscurity, but it is coming. And I think the recognition the Church of Jesus Christ has shown by its willingness to restore and develop the sites in Kirtland is what is really bringing it out. Once the sites are developed, people are going to realize the significance—but it will take many years of people's visiting. The fun thing about visitors in Kirtland is to see their surprise when you start telling them all that happened here. They don't realize it. For example, the project was announced in the *Church News* a year ago with a statement that there were four appearances here of the Father and Son. The *Church News* forwarded an email to me requesting documentation of those appearances, asking me if I would respond. I did not quite know how to respond to a high priest who had been in the Church all his life. I felt like simply saying, "Have you ever read the Doctrine and Covenants?" We have two of these appearances recorded, of course, in Sections 76 and 137. The third was on the Morley Farm, well documented by our first historian, John Whitmer, and others. And then in the Whitney Store—also well documented.

RICHARD: You have mentioned the renovations currently taking place in Kirtland. How do you feel about the renovation and restoration efforts that are going on right now, and how have you been involved in those efforts?

KARL: How do I feel about the restoration of all the sites? It's been the result of the work of many people over many years. I began my efforts to see the restoration in 1974. I still have a copy of the first proposal we made to the First Presidency twenty-six years ago. In essence, we were asking pretty much for what we are going to have now. But it has taken that long. From one standpoint, I am disappointed I have not been more effective, but from another standpoint, I am just delighted that we are seeing it come to fruition. But I want to emphasize this has involved the efforts of a lot of people. I have just been privileged to be here and be the point person for much of what has happened—watching the acquisition of property as well as making proposal after proposal over the years.

RICHARD: What vision do you have for future developments in Kirtland?

KARL: Oh, boy! There are so many additional sites important to

Church history that surround Kirtland. For example, I would like to see us somehow utilize eight publicly owned and maintained sites, such as the quarry from which temple stone was taken in a state park in Kirtland, or the Shaker Heights park where missionaries were sent to read the revelation to the Shakers (D&C 49), or the site of the Church conference in Orange near the Cleveland polo field. Also, without question, the Church is eventually going to want to do some restoration on the Morley farm. Although it is not included in the first phase, the farm is so significant that just the importance of that site will drive restoration work to happen there.

RICHARD: How has the study of this area affected your understanding of yourself as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

KARL: How has it affected me, as an ordinary member of the Church? My studies have given me a witness that I never dreamed I would have to such an extent of the reality of the Savior, the divine calling of Joseph Smith, and the importance of temples in our lives. Those three things have affected me as a member more than anything. You receive a testimony of the reality of these things when you stand in the places where the Savior stood, where you know that He has appeared to a minimum of twenty to thirty and even many more people here, and then you read their testimonies. At every site in Kirtland—each of our key sites—Christ has borne a first-hand testimony of himself. We often read the Doctrine and Covenants without having that stand out in bold letters. He does live, and I know that because of my experiences in Kirtland. And anybody who really studies Church history can get that witness for himself or herself.

RICHARD: How have your roles in the Church augmented your interest in Church history?

KARL: In the first stake conference I conducted as a stake president, I read Hyrum Smith's prophecy about the rebuilding of Kirtland as well as the Lord's statement in Section 124, verse 83, promising that He would build up Kirtland. When I was first called in 1974, that was one of the first strong impressions I had as a leader—that the role of the members of this area would be to build up Kirtland. That should be our main goal, and it would be accomplished through doing missionary work and strengthening Church members. I gave that as a challenge to the stake. We had to build up the Church to do it, and we had other things we needed to do to build up the Church. The stake patriarch, following that, came up to me and shared with me that he felt I was not alone at the pulpit when I gave that challenge. I felt a strong spiritual direction to set that as a goal. So while I served both as a stake president and regional representative, which carried through thirteen years here, building up the Church in Kirtland became one of the main thrusts of my callings.

RICHARD: How has your recent calling as patriarch enlarged or contributed to your understanding of early Mormon history? What linkages have you felt to early Kirtland as the stake's patriarch?

KARL: In the letter I send out to everyone receiving a blessing, I tell them that the tradition of receiving patriarchal blessings was first established here in Kirtland. I quote Benjamin Johnson, who said that it brought him "more joy" than he "had ever before known" to receive his blessing here in Kirtland from Joseph Smith Sr. Serving as a patriarch, I am probably more sensitive to the spiritual aspects of the Church's history, especially our mission to gather Israel. Perhaps the main thing is the witness that I receive of the Savior and Joseph Smith's divine calling that grows deeper with every blessing I give.

RICHARD: Have you faced any major challenges in developing important sites in Kirtland?

KARL: Oh, boy!

RICHARD: And I invite stories . . .

KARL: Some publishable, some not! Yes. The biggest challenge without question dates back to when we first started out with proposals to develop sites back in '74 and '75, twenty-six and twenty-seven years ago. Almost to a person, the General Authorities responded, "We don't want to have another Nauvoo in the Church." That has been the biggest obstacle. The Church did not want to be in a position where more money would have to be spent than would be reasonable. But President Benson had very strong feelings about Kirtland—mainly because he came to Kirtland, and he lifted the scourge that was put on Kirtland; I think that was why he felt so strong about Kirtland, because the Lord had prompted him to remove the scourge or curse. He wanted to see something done here. He shared with me—and this is an experience I will never forget—that in a meeting somebody had said to him, "We're not going to have another Nauvoo." And President Benson said to me, "I told them that's absolutely correct, we're not. But we are going to have a Kirtland, and it's going to be everything that Kirtland ought to be."

There are a lot more stories. The first properties we acquired here in Kirtland were a result of very strong inspiration and direction, so strong that it was tangible. There was a bar on the triangle kitty corner from the Whitney Store, and I had an impression one morning when I got up that I should have our real estate agent (whom we had used to purchase the property for the stake center) go and inquire as to the status of that property as soon as business hours were open. He asked if it had to be done that day. I told him that I would appreciate it if he could, and I would like him to report back as soon as he had something. He called me later that afternoon, and he



said, "Before I report, why is it that you wanted me to do it today?" I did not respond in a meaningful way. He then said he had found the owner of the bar, who happened to have the paperwork on his desk, unbeknownst to us, to renew the bar's lease. I believe it was a seven-year lease. It had gone through his attorneys, the people operating the bar had signed the lease, and the attorneys had reviewed it and recommended that he sign it. He responded that he was going to sign it that day—in fact, within an hour of when the real estate agent called him. But he said, "If you have someone interested I would rather sell it than lease it. You made it an hour before I would have signed a long-term lease." So within one day we had approval to purchase the property. The owner of the property called the people leasing it and told them he had found a buyer, and they thought he was trying to bluff them into buying it. They called his bluff and said, "We're not going to buy it." So he said, "Well, I gave you a chance." Before that property closed, we put it in the name of one of the local banks in an escrow account so nobody would know the Church bought it. The day that it closed, I was in the real estate agent's office, and the owner of the property called and he said, "I know you can't divulge who bought it, but if I could talk to them, I'd like to." So he handed me the phone. The owner said, "I don't know who you are, but I just want to say 'God bless you.'" That was his response. And that was one of the first pieces of property that we bought here. That is the kind of strong spiritual direction that has kept me going over the years; otherwise, I would have been discouraged. I had an opportunity to leave Cleveland and had a strong impression I should stay; these are the things that have kept me here. You know, with these kinds of experiences, you do not have to be a brain surgeon to determine who is behind what has happened. I do not claim any credit—I give the Lord all the credit because He has really directed every step.

**RICHARD:** In the thirty-two years you have lived here, what developments of historic significance have you witnessed in the growth of the LDS and RLDS (or Community of Christ) relationship?

**KARL:** We made a decision very early that we needed to have a close relationship with the RLDS Church, and so we frequently associated with their leaders. We annually published a letter to members of the stake asking them to be very kind and respectful of the RLDS Church when they visited the temple—because they have the same love for the temple as we do and because they are serving us by serving the temple so well. That has been something I have felt strongly about—that we needed to be respectful of the RLDS (or Community of Christ) Church and treat its members like brothers and sisters because of our common heritage and their righteous goals and desires. As we have come down the road, they have invited us to attend their events; we have invited them to attend ours. We have treated them like

equals. That does not give specific points of history, but it is the common heritage we have that we have needed to respect.

RICHARD: Let's go back to *Joseph Smith's Kirtland*. How did this book come about?

KARL: It came about because of all the presentations I made to the General Authorities over the years. They would get thicker and thicker and were well received and enlightening to everybody we would give them to. And so they grew. Then I was asked to take what I had done and to extend it into a book on Kirtland. I responded to the request. There were many times I would have given up, but I remembered having made that commitment in such a definite way that I had to see it through.

RICHARD: What about the nitty-gritty part? What was the editorial process like for someone untrained as a writer?

KARL: Well, I hired a local editor and took my first draft to her and let her read it. I came back in for her to give me her reactions. She suggested we start with one chapter, and she said to me, "You only have one active sentence in that whole chapter!" My response was, "Is that good or bad?" That's where I began. I never had a love for English at all in any of my school subjects, but that's where I began. We went through almost every sentence in those first chapters. We worked them over together. She would say to me, "Now what is it you are trying to say with this sentence?" And I would say, "Well, it's what I just said!" And she would say, "Well, tell me in your own words, again." And I would tell her. And she would say, "Now write that down!" That was a long and painful process.

RICHARD: How long?

KARL: That process probably lasted for three years.

RICHARD: How long was the whole process?

KARL: Probably fourteen years without my knowing it was happening—because I would gather historical accounts and I would gather journal accounts. And Richard, my brother, was very kind. When he ran across an account from Kirtland in his research, he would send it along. He was very liberal to share whatever he had with me. I also asked his opinion frequently. However, the hard part was not the research; it was the actual writing.

RICHARD: Did you have any favorite primary sources in your writing?

KARL: Well, the *History of Joseph Smith* (published now as the *History of the Church*) that was dictated and supervised by Joseph was my favorite primary source. I put more weight on that than anything.

RICHARD: What about some of your favorite stories from the life of Joseph or some of the other early Kirtland Saints?

KARL: One from Wilford Woodruff that I just love comes after Zion's Camp. He and a companion walked to Tennessee, and his leg became lame



*Karl Ricks Anderson giving his usual Kirtland area tour.  
Photo courtesy of Karl Ricks Anderson*

in an alligator swamp. He was sitting there on a log in the alligator swamp not able to walk. His companion had apparently endured as much as he could and told him he was sorry, but he was leaving him in the swamp and going back to Kirtland. Wilford knelt down in the mud and prayed, and the Lord healed him. He then walked to Memphis and stopped at a hotel and explained to the owner that he was a preacher and had no money. The hotel owner, wanting to have some fun, was willing to give him a room if he would preach because he didn't look like a preacher. The hotel owner thought that it would be the best entertainment around to invite people to see this guy who was muddy and lame try to preach. He ended up preaching for his board and room and preached to over five hundred people. That is one of my favorite stories. I don't know why, but I love that story; it shows that the Lord does His work through willing men and women of faith.

A favorite Joseph Smith story probably centers around William McLellin, when William and some other brethren challenged Joseph, eliciting one of my favorite Joseph quotes. McLellin, thinking he could write revelations better than Joseph, failed in the attempt. Joseph made the observation that McLellin had "more learning than sense." I love that quote, possibly because he was such a practical person and because that showed his practicality. Beyond that, there are many great accounts. Another one was Joseph's expression of sympathy for McLellin, showing he really was not

laughing at him. Rather, Joseph commiserated with him, saying it was an awful responsibility to write in the name of the Lord. That is another of my favorite quotes because it showed that Joseph never really asked for or wanted to be a translator or revelator, but it came with the calling. He felt sorry for McLellin, observing that it was an awful responsibility to write in the name of the Lord—he could understand McLellin’s frustration. So it was both sides—it’s not just one side of that story but it’s both sides. And that is probably one of my favorite of Joseph Smith. When we finish, I will think of others that I should have said, I know.

RICHARD: That’s okay. As you have studied Joseph’s life, what traits have particularly impressed you and which traits have surprised you during the early Kirtland times?

KARL: One that has particularly impressed me is his devotion to do what the Lord wanted him to do. Joseph said in Kirtland that he made a rule for himself that when the Lord commands, he would do it. When he first arrived in Kirtland, the “Big Family,” or the extended Morley family that was living their version of the Law of Consecration, was experiencing all kinds of problems and challenges. There were people who had been offended and problems that needed to be straightened out. Joseph’s nature—by nature that’s where Joseph did his best—was getting in and helping people. He had great empathy. He was able to communicate well and gain the love and respect of the people. His inclination was to jump in and help solve problems. But in the first revelation given in Kirtland, the Lord said Joseph was to call Edward Partridge to be bishop and turn these duties over to him. So Joseph went back to translating and receiving revelations and dutifully handed that part over to Partridge. That impresses me because I have a great sensitivity to Joseph. I think he would rather have gotten out and solved problems and not done the translating or been receiving revelations. Yet he put that first and gave the rest to other people, when as prophet you would think he could have chosen. If I could do what I wanted to do, it would probably not be writing; it would be out with people. That’s one thing that impresses me. I know that’s probably not a great, significant thing. And then, what surprises me? Normally, I might say that one of the things that surprises me is his willingness to lay everything on the line, including his life. Except the more I know Joseph, it does not surprise me. And maybe it’s one of the things that impresses me most—after the tarring and feathering when he received permanent injuries to his ribs, his tooth, and hair and lost his son and his whole private life was threatened. He knew from then on that nothing was off limits for the adversary working against him. It is in the letter he wrote back to Emma from Missouri—he left the week after the tarring and feathering—and then he wrote Emma a letter in which he says, “I will

try to be contented with my lot. God is my friend. In Him I shall find comfort. I've given my life into His hands. I am prepared to go at His call. I desire to be with Christ. I count not my life dear to me, only to do His will." And that last sentence is really the key. "I count not my life dear to me, only to do His will." That would be one of the things that used to surprise me, but now it is not surprising—his willingness to give everything. The more you get to know Joseph Smith, this was who he was. His life was not dear to him—only to do God's will.

RICHARD: As you study the lives of other early Kirtland leaders, who do you feel deserves more attention or credit from historians and others?

KARL: The one that deserves more credit, a very clear answer, is one that many people do not like—Sidney Rigdon—mainly because others have received credit. Brigham Young received full credit; and others have too, such as Heber C. Kimball, Wilford Woodruff, and Parley Pratt. All those get full credit, but Sidney Rigdon—we need to begin to forgive him and consider him in a more positive light. Many members of the Church have not forgiven Sidney for the confrontation with Brigham Young or the supposed statement of Sidney in the Liberty Jail, of which I am not sure we have an accurate recording. Supposedly, he said he had suffered more than Christ. If he did say it, I do not think he was in his right mind. But I am not sure it was recorded accurately. So those are the two things that people hold against Sidney—the confrontation with Brigham Young and that statement.

I think the cause for both of these, if the statement is true, is traceable to the brain concussion that he received in Hiram in the tarring and feathering. Sidney did not volunteer to be tarred and feathered with Joseph. He was taken out and tarred and feathered because of his leadership role in the Church as first counselor to Joseph Smith. I think doctors today would agree that, according to the descriptions, his beating could have caused a severe brain concussion, which can alter personality. I think his later problems are traceable back to the tarring and feathering.

I view Sidney Rigdon as being a great general who fell in battle—that battle being the tarring and feathering—with the adversary directing those who administered the injuries. The Lord told Sidney that he was like John the Baptist, which is certainly one of the greatest callings anybody could have. Like John, he was given the mission to prepare for Christ and Elijah to come to Kirtland. He was called to watch over Joseph. He was also called to be Joseph's scribe and spokesman. In all those missions, he served well; and by the end of the Kirtland years, he essentially had fulfilled them all. But he's never gotten credit for that. I feel bad that his name is not prominently displayed in the restoration of Kirtland. I think we need to begin to recognize Sidney for what he did. He sacrificed everything—his life, his fami-

ly—and he sacrificed it all in Kirtland for the Church. Joseph said that Sidney’s success in life was assured if Sidney would have stayed as a minister in Mentor. His wants were not only supplied but anticipated. He was looked to for advice. He was provided a house. Joseph Smith said that Sidney stood to lose everything when he joined the Church. He sacrificed everything monetarily; he sacrificed for the Church. One day, he will be recognized.

RICHARD: Who are the scoundrels of the Kirtland era, and has their story been told adequately?

KARL: The scoundrels we have, both in and out of the Church. My personal feeling is their stories have not been told adequately, nor should they be. If I had my druthers in Hiram, we probably would not talk much about the tarring and feathering, especially with townspeople and others. With the scoundrels, we don’t know enough about them to judge them, and I think their stories are better left untold. How’s that for ducking? We do want to accentuate the positive in Kirtland.

RICHARD: How about the scoundrels as an affection term? Who are the real characters? Who are the people who strike you as being the most eccentric or the most odd?

KARL: Well, one I wish we knew more about in Kirtland is Porter Rockwell. We just don’t see him mentioned much. Whom else could we pick as real characters? You can name them as well as I can. Parley Pratt, obviously, has to come to the top. We know that because of the bulldog run and his brashness in going to the Shakers and shaking his tails at them and almost being thrown out because of it. His brashness strikes me. Wilford Woodruff is one of the most solid, and his faith was so strong, like the alligator story. It did not bother him that his companion left; it didn’t phase him. Who else? Joseph Smith himself was one of the most appealing characters, playing with children, protecting animals, and often doing the unexpected.

RICHARD: We have talked extensively about *Joseph Smith’s Kirtland* and what you learned from that project. What projects are you working on right now?

KARL: I am trying to undertake another book—one that I think will reflect the heart of Kirtland—and that’s the Savior. The theme will be the Savior in Kirtland—the witnesses of Him the evidences of Him. I am in the same boat again of how hard it is to write and then try to take the time to write when there is not a lot of time. I’m also involved in completing the road—the road, out in Kirtland—aside from restoration kinds of things. I have been working on that project.

RICHARD: What future projects do you hope to tackle?

KARL: Good question! I am so caught up in what I am doing I don’t

think a lot about it. Obviously, retirement would be a nice thing to think about. My more sane moments tell me I will never really be satisfied with retirement. One of the most pleasing things to me is having others catch the spirit of Kirtland. More and more are catching the spirit and getting involved. With all the new facilities coming to Kirtland, my concern is turned toward the question, "Are we really telling the spiritual message in addition to telling about buildings, factories, and businesses?" The key thing is the spiritual side—not the physical side. Are we really going to tell a message? For example, at each of our key spots, we have a beautiful, first-hand testimony of the Savior about himself. Are we going to tell that? Are people who visit these sites going to understand the sacredness of the ground rather than look at boots or shoes or sawmills or that kind of thing? Are tourists coming through the sites going to hear some of the familiar scriptures they know? And will they associate those words with that site? During July, for example, during the pageant season, we run people through like cattle because we do not have time to give the message. Many people leave having seen the Whitney Store and the things the Saints used to buy. But have they really understood the spiritual significance of it and felt the sacredness of the site? Has their testimony been increased as a result of having been here? That is where my attention is now turned more than anything. This is my concern and where I am turning my attention. If visitors do not feel the spirit and develop an increased testimony, the money will not have been spent wisely.

RICHARD: What research projects do you hope others will tackle?

KARL: None that I'd dare talk about publicly.

RICHARD: In what ways has your path to becoming a historian been similar to and in what ways different from your brother's path?

KARL: As I mentioned before, Richard told me I could pursue my business interests and still satisfy my other desires. In many ways, this is parallel, I believe, to the path he took, doing research and writing, but teaching to allow him to do that. I pursued business to allow me to do other things, one of which is to tell the story of Kirtland. I think the Lord in His—I won't say "wisdom" because I don't know that it was wise—but the Lord in His judgment put me here. Richard has been a great support. He has guided me. I seek his opinion, and he has been there for me. He would say, "You can't put that in if you can't document it." So he has taught me a lot about the discipline of being a historian, one on one. For example, in *Joseph Smith's Kirtland*, I wrote that based on the account of Artemus Millett's son, the women didn't crush their glasses for the temple plaster. Richard said, "You would be wiser to say that apparently this story is apocryphal rather than say they didn't crush their china. Qualify this because your point is still made, but you



aren't out on a limb if an account comes out. You can't say, 'nobody did it' simply because we have no account." He has also taught me not to overstate positions. For example, I think that possibly fifty to a hundred people saw the Savior in Kirtland. He has said to me, "Twenty to thirty you can firmly establish, and it is astounding enough that there are that many. You don't need to say there were fifty to a hundred. Just say twenty to thirty because you can back that up." That's the kind of thing he has taught me.

RICHARD: At the age of thirteen, I fell asleep during one of your lectures . . . .

KARL: With my own son!

RICHARD: Yes, with your own son. Yet here I am today attentively interviewing you. Have you been through a similar maturing process of your own as your interests in and understandings of Church history increased?

KARL: Yes, without question. I hope I have learned to channel my zeal to try to establish Kirtland in the minds of others. Initially, I came across to others as saying, "Kirtland was the only place Church history ever occurred." I have learned to back off and not depreciate other areas to state the case for Kirtland. That's a good case in point. There has been a process of learning history and the accounts. No one knows everything. It seems I knew far more about Kirtland twenty-five years ago than I do today. I have come to realize that the more you understand, the more you know you have yet to learn. There has certainly been a maturing. Perhaps the biggest area of maturing has been in developing patience—having worked on this for so many years (for twenty-seven years), I have learned that the timetable of the Lord is different than our timetable. I was determined to see that everything was done in the 1970s. I have probably not yet fully learned to be patient—there are still things I would like to see done that are not being done—but I have learned to be more accepting of a different timetable.

RICHARD: How have you managed to juggle a successful business career, intense Church service, and a family of nine, while still managing to create a name for yourself in Mormon history that well exceeds the level of hobbyist?

KARL: Oh, boy! Burn the candle at both ends—that's probably the answer. Yes, burn the candle at both ends. How have I managed to do it? Really, trying to put the important things first, so that the things that do not get done are, hopefully, the things that don't matter. That is probably the biggest thing because you can't do it all. And there are things that do drop by the wayside. Like on the current book, when I make progress, I have to discipline myself to get to bed early, around nine in the evening, and get up at 3 a.m. to start writing, because the only good time is from 3 to 8 a.m. Many times, when the schedule doesn't allow it, it's easy to slip out of that.



Then you don't make progress; so disciplining yourself is a major part of it—and deciding what's the most important. I still should be disciplining myself more.

RICHARD: To what extent do you feel that living locally has helped you better understand the Kirtland history that you study?

KARL: Certainly standing on the site you get feelings and an understanding and spirit you can't get anywhere else. Intellectually, you make a different decision from Salt Lake City than if you are sitting at the site. Being here makes me more practical in my approach. I don't know that I would want to say less scholarly or intellectual, but I would say more practical. One of the things that I hear most from people who read *Joseph Smith's Kirtland* is that there is a spirit about it that probably comes from my being on the site—one that I would not have been able to produce as well if we were living somewhere else. So there is both the practicality and the spiritual aspect of the location. Your father says we feel the sites in Kirtland through our feet, and that's it.

RICHARD: Have you been able to use many local sources?

KARL: Probably not many because local sources often don't understand the Mormon period enough. Although I have used some local sources, most are colored by their views of the Mormons, which in times past have not been positive.

RICHARD: Do you see important niches for other local historians, like yourself, to fill?

KARL: Oh yes. There are so many things that lie waiting to be researched. There are great chapters in Church history that have never been uncovered—that could be dug out using the great research facilities we have here.

RICHARD: What words of encouragement would you offer to aspiring local or young historians?

KARL: Don't think that everything has been written. Don't think that everything has been found. And don't worry because others have a name and you don't. Just worry about what you can contribute, and the rest takes care of itself. Another lesson that Richard taught me, and that other historians might be served by, is to write from a perspective of faith. The purpose of writing history—and this is marked by my parents, by Richard, by my faith, and by priesthood experience—the value of history (I think Elder Theodore Tuttle said this) is to develop faith. So when I'm confronted with two accounts, I'll choose the account that will build faith rather than introduce doubt. I have a simple faith in what Joseph Smith or other leaders said. We weren't there; why would we doubt? Perhaps I cannot overstate this point because historians who tend to last are the ones who write from the per-

spective of faith.

RICHARD: Do you think that avoiding anything that might introduce doubt would lead to a dilution of truth and a reduction of history to a bunch of fuzzy fairy tales?

KARL: Again, history comes down to the historians who last. No, I don't think writing from a perspective of faith does dilute truth because there is enough truth that is faith building that you don't have to waste time going after the truth that is not. Others will always do that. The purpose—if we looked at what is for our long-range good individually and as members—is to find those things that will build faith because the adversary will always provide enough doubt. There are always things you can pick at. Some choose to write from a sour or negative perspective. I have taken the same sources some of these have used. I can take the same statement from the same source and, where it was shown to be negative, I have shown it to be positive. It is the same source and the same statement, but it all depends on how you look at it. It becomes a way of thinking if you are not careful.

If we look at Joseph's life, he struggled at times. Lorenzo Snow said, "I saw Joseph Smith the Prophet do things which I did not approve of . . . when I saw the weaknesses and imperfections in him I thanked God. . . . I was pleased to see those weaknesses for I knew I myself had weaknesses and I thought there was a chance for me. These weaknesses I knew were in Joseph Smith and these weaknesses I knew were in Heber C. Kimball, but my knowing this did not impair them in my estimation." If you look at Joseph and say, "I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt," then you begin to realize that nobody is perfect. Everybody is going to have weaknesses.

Some of these critics of Joseph, Hyrum, Brigham, and Sidney and some of the critics of other early leaders are going to have to stand before those people some day and account for their criticism. I do not want to have to account for a negative interpretation of something when it may not be accurate (or even if accurate) if I was not understanding or forgiving. By this, I don't mean that we can ignore facts that may not be to our liking. We have a responsibility to acknowledge fact—for example, the Kirtland Safety Society bank. There were mistakes made by Joseph Smith and other early leaders, and that is fact and we have to acknowledge. But just as it is wrong to overstate what cannot be documented—such as women not crushing china or the number who saw the Savior in Kirtland—it is wrong for us 170 years later to judge motives or to diminish the character or callings of historical figures. Sometimes a mistake is just that—a mistake. We cannot imply that Joseph's mistakes with the bank or problems as a Kirtland merchant mean that he wasn't inspired or was less of a prophet. It just meant that the Lord let him learn from experience. Just as Brigham Young con-

cluded, Joseph wasn't cut out to be a businessman. He was too kindhearted. We can't read more into it than that. You can see the warts; you can see those things. If we use them to build faith, that's what the Savior asked us to do—"judge not." In a way, we judge when we pick out and elaborate on the negatives. There's not enough time to spend on both.

That's how I look at it, and maybe that's because I am coming at it later in life. I want to be known as someone who built faith in the Lord's prophet. You take President Hinckley's perspective. It does not build to look at the negative. Rather, we can take the same time and do something to build faith. Look at all the negative things said about the Savior, and He was perfect. Take the Pharisees of the day—they found things that they criticized. There's not enough time to build up some and tear down others. So you build faith and let the rest take care of themselves. You'll always have plenty of people going after the negative. I do the other.

Whom do I want to be known as? I want to be known as somebody who helped build faith. If you are looking for things to build faith, it is amazing what you find. You don't ever come across them if you are looking for the other. Historians tend to find exactly what they are looking for. We can all find what we are looking for.