

A Community Abandoned: W. W. Phelps' 1839 Letter to Sally Waterman Phelps from Far West, Missouri

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During the early years of Mormonism, few men played a more prominent role in the religious movement than William W. Phelps. In April 1830, while engaged in a successful publishing and journalism career in Canandaigua, New York, Phelps secured a copy of the Book of Mormon. After reading it, he was convinced of its truthfulness but postponed baptism for over a year. Finally, in June 1831, he moved his family to Kirtland, Ohio, to unite with the Church. Soon after his baptism, Phelps was called as the first Church printer and publisher and was instructed to move to Independence, Missouri (D&C 55:4; 57:11).¹

In 1832, Phelps purchased a printing press in Cincinnati and shipped it to Independence. Here he began printing the *Evening and Morning Star*, the Church's first newspaper, and the lesser-known secular newspaper, the *Upper Missouri Advertiser*. He also began making preparations to publish a number of Joseph Smith's revelations in book form. These efforts were cut short on 20 July 1833 with the destruction of the press and type by a Jackson County vigilante force. Following the expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County in November 1833, the Phelps family, along with the majority of displaced Saints, sought temporary refuge in Clay County. In 1834, after the unsuccessful attempt by Zion's Camp to reclaim Mormon lands in Jackson County, Church leaders gathered in Clay County to organize the Missouri presidency and high council. On 3 July, David Whitmer, one of the Three Witnesses, was chosen president of

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the Church in Missouri, with William and John Whitmer as counselors.²

In May 1835, Phelps' duties in Missouri were temporarily interrupted when Joseph Smith requested that W. W. return to Kirtland to replace Oliver Cowdery as editor of the *Messenger and Advocate*. In addition to his duties associated with the *Messenger and Advocate*, Phelps assisted with the printing of other Church publications, including the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants and the *Northern Times*, a political newspaper. A gifted poet, he also worked closely with Emma Smith in the compilation and publication of the first Latter-day Saint hymnal. Of the ninety hymns printed in the collection, one-third (thirty-one) were written by him. While in Kirtland, Joseph Smith began a preliminary translation of the Book of Abraham, choosing Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps as scribes for the project. In this capacity, W. W. also helped draft a number of significant Church documents and doctrinal treatises. He also actively participated in the Kirtland School of the Elders and the Hebrew School, received the Kirtland endowment, and, in his capacity of one of the "presidents of the Church," presided at the solemn assembly and dedication services of the Kirtland Temple. In April 1836, following an eleven-month absence from his family, he returned to Missouri to resume his duties in the Missouri presidency.³

Between 1836–38, David Whitmer, the senior member of the Missouri presidency, rarely functioned, being in Ohio most of the time and leaving Phelps and John Whitmer to oversee the Church operations. It was while Phelps was conducting the affairs of the Missouri presidency that he experienced a spiritual decline and loss of faith. In 1836, he and John Whitmer made several land purchases in newly created Caldwell County using Church funds. However, it was not until 1838 when the discovery was made that the two leaders had purchased and sold property in their own names and retained some of the profits from the sales. Perhaps more incriminating was the fact that the Missouri presidency also sold Church property in Jackson County, an act interpreted by their brethren as totally disregarding the commandments given in the revelations. (See D&C 57:1–4; 101:67–75; 105:26–29.) In early February 1838, the Missouri high council met to discuss the actions of the Missouri presidency, and a vote was taken wherein they were rejected as a presidency but retained their Church membership. Thomas B. Marsh and David W. Patten, the two senior members of the Twelve, were then sustained as presidents pro tem. A month later, on 10 March, the three former presidents still had not made adequate reconciliation concerning the situation, so the council voted unanimously that W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer were "no longer members of the church of Christ." Marcellus F. Cowdery, nephew of Oliver, objected to the action taken by the council and was disfellowshipped as a result of his protest. The Mormon Prophet arrived at Far West four days later and, in a meeting on 15 March, gave his approval to the action taken by the high council.⁴

The Missouri high council waited for the Prophet's arrival at Far West before taking any action in the cases of the associate president, Oliver Cowdery,

and the Missouri president, David Whitmer. Oliver moved to Missouri during the late summer or fall of 1837 after being accused of adultery as well as mismanagement in connection with the Kirtland bank and its collapse. Joseph, aware that Oliver was teetering, issued a formal announcement concerning Oliver's status in the Church. "Oliver Cowdery has been in transgression," Joseph reported. "I trust [however] that he will yet humble himself and magnify his calling, but if he should not, the Church will be under the necessity of raising their hands against him."⁵ After Oliver arrived in Missouri, his dissatisfaction continued to deepen, and he began stirring up trouble and making his own accusations, particularly against Joseph. Being accused of infidelity himself and knowing the Mormon leader had entered into a polygamous relationship, Cowdery violated the personal trust he shared with Joseph by spreading information concerning the Prophet's plural marriage to Fanny Alger and accusing him of adultery.⁶ The second elder also became partner with the Missouri presidency in selling property in Jackson County contrary to the revelations and informed others that he did not believe the Church had any authority to dictate in temporal matters. One month after the Prophet's arrival in Far West, the Missouri high council met to discuss Oliver's attitude and conduct. Cowdery received notice of the hearing and the allegations made against him but chose not to appear before the body. Instead, he wrote a formal letter wherein he preferred discussing only two of the accusations. After lengthy discussion, six of the charges were sustained by the council, and the body severed his membership on 12 April 1838.⁷

The day after Oliver Cowdery's hearing, the council met to consider David Whitmer. Upon learning that his brother-in-law had been excommunicated, Whitmer addressed a letter to John Murdock, stating that he had decided to "withdraw from your fellowship and communion." The council met to consider the matter anyway, and Alanson Ripley preferred charges against the Book of Mormon witness, whereupon the council voted in favor of excommunication. During the same meeting, the high council also ruled against Lyman E. Johnson, one of the Twelve.⁸ There was one additional Whitmer casualty—Jacob. Although there are no extant Church records indicating his formal separation from Mormonism, following the departure of his brothers from the faith, he likewise alienated himself from the main body of believers.⁹

The disaffection of two other leaders should be noted. The first is that of Apostle William E. McLellin. According to McLellin's own statements, his disenchantment with Mormonism and its leaders began in 1836 when he left the main body of the Church for a brief time. He returned, however, and was sustained as a member of Twelve as late as November 1837. During that same month, he apparently settled in Far West, as the records indicate he accepted a commission in the Missouri state militia. However, by April 1838, his loyalty to the Church was again brought into question. On 11 May, a trial was held for McLellin wherein he stated he had no confidence in the leaders of the Church.

It is not known whether this trial constituted his excommunication, but his complete break with Mormonism occurred about this time. Unlike the other dissidents who chose to remain in the Mormon community, soon after losing his membership, he relocated in Clay County.¹⁰

A final figure is that of Frederick G. Williams, counselor to Joseph Smith in the First Presidency. As early as May 1837, Williams was wavering. According to one source, his problems started when he began to believe in the revelations of an unnamed sister in the Church. The matter was investigated, but apparently no action was taken. Incidents surrounding the collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society during the summer generated more discord between the Prophet and his counselor, forcing Joseph to personally drop him from the presidency. In spite of the rift with the Prophet, Williams moved to Missouri where he remained a member of the Church but took up a close association with the Missouri presidency and other dissidents. At a conference of the Church held in Far West on 7 November, Williams' vacancy in the Church's First Presidency was filled by Hyrum Smith, who was officially sustained as the new second counselor. Even though Williams was not as active in his opposition, his association with the other dissidents put him in their camp.¹¹

In Kirtland, Mormon expatriates were eventually successful in forcing the Church leadership to leave the community. However, Mormon leaders were not about to let this happen in Far West. In June 1838, with the exception of McLellin, all the dissenters were still living in Far West where, in spite of their minority status, they continued to conduct their subversive activities in an attempt to undermine the Mormon leadership. It was at this time that the Mormon leadership perceived that if they allowed their former associates to carry out their lawsuits and deviant operations unchecked, "they would destroy the Church," so a decision was made to encourage them to leave Far West.¹² The group targeted the five whom they considered to be the most threatening—Oliver Cowdery, David and John Whitmer, W. W. Phelps, and Lyman Johnson. Although these tactics proved to be less than diplomatic, they nonetheless produced the necessary results; and an ultimatum was issued publicly and individually to the detractors letting them know they were no longer welcome in Far West.

On Sunday, 17 June, Sidney Rigdon's infamous "Salt Sermon" produced the desired results. Although no complete account of Rigdon's remarks is in existence, it was later reported he used as the basis for his text the words of Jesus from St. Matthew, "If the salt have lost its savour, it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men" (Matthew 5:13; 3 Nephi 12:13; or possibly D&C 101:39–40; 103:8–10).¹³ Rigdon intended to send a clear message to the ex-Mormon detractors with the scriptural metaphor. Corrill stated the ardent counselor "did not call names in his sermon, yet it was plainly understood that he meant that [the] dissenters, or those who had denied

the faith, ought to be cast out and literally trodden under foot."¹⁴

Rigdon's remarks and other rhetorical threats made against the dissenters were, as Reed Peck wrote, "undoubtedly a farce acted to frighten these men from the county."¹⁵ Nonetheless, these actions produced the desired results; and "in three or four days, several of the dissenters became much alarmed and fled from the place in great fright, and their families soon followed, but their property was attached for debt."¹⁶ Oliver Cowdery, David and John Whitmer, and Lyman Johnson fled Far West under duress on Tuesday, 19 June.¹⁷ They first went to Clay County where they found refuge at the home of William E. McLellin and remained for several days while awaiting the arrival of their families. They took up a permanent residence in Richmond in Ray County.¹⁸ Jacob Whitmer and Marcellus Cowdery probably left Far West about this same time.¹⁹

Corrill wrote that the intimidation "compelled others of the dissenters to confess and give satisfaction to the Church."²⁰ He was likely referring to Phelps, who immediately made restitution with the Mormon leaders and was not forced to leave the Mormon city. About this same time, Frederick G. Williams also came back in favor with the Mormon hierarchy, as evidenced by the fact that on 8 July, Joseph Smith received a revelation in behalf of both Phelps and Williams. "Verily, thus saith the Lord, in consequence of their transgressions their former standing has been taken away from them," the revelation read, "and now, if they will be saved, let them be ordained as Elders in my Church to preach my Gospel and travel abroad."²¹ Phelps' repentance appears to have been short-lived. At the time of the surrender to the Missouri officials, he was one of the Mormon peace negotiators. However, during the Richmond hearings held in the latter part of November, he became a witness for the state, testifying against Church leaders. His actions led to his excommunication by the Twelve at a conference in Quincy on 17 March 1839.²²

In spite of his disaffection, Phelps remained in Far West throughout the winter and spring of 1838–39. His relationship with Church leaders, particularly Brigham Young and other members of the Twelve, was no doubt strained but obviously was not enough to warrant his moving away from the main membership of the Church. By the end of March 1839, almost all the Latter-day Saints still loyal to Mormonism and Joseph Smith's leadership had left Caldwell County, finding temporary settlement in Quincy, Illinois. A small number of Mormons remained, most of whom had abandoned the faith, although, like the Phelps family, they still expected to leave the area.

On 1 May 1839, William wrote a seven-page letter from Far West to his wife Sally, who was in St. Louis, probably making preparations to move to Dayton, Ohio, where her own immediate family resided. Sally left William to take care of three of their seven children—Henry (10), James (6), and Lydia (4). Each is mentioned by Phelps in the letter. He also mentions that the oldest son, sixteen-year-old Waterman (his first name was William but he went by Waterman), had

found employment in Liberty. The fact that Phelps makes no mention of nineteen-year-old Mehitable and thirteen-year-old Sarah suggests they may have accompanied their mother to St. Louis.²³



*“House of John Whitmer in Far West, Mo. on this 80 acres containing temple lot. Jan. 16, 1906.”
Courtesy of LDS Historical Department Archives*

In the letter, one senses Phelps’ apostate attitude and embitterment toward the Mormon leadership, as he informs his wife of several events he notes had recently transpired—most notably the return on 26 April (only five days previous to his writing the letter) of several members of the Twelve to rededicate the temple site before taking leave of their mission to Great Britain. In addition, Phelps had learned of the escape of Joseph Smith and his companions from the local Missouri authorities but was not aware of all the facts surrounding their release. He also describes the abandoned conditions of the once-prosperous and thriving Far West community, noting that John Whitmer had returned to take up his former residence. Finally, the letter reveals William’s genuine devotion to their children, his love for Sally, his hope that she would write more often, and his desire to be reunited with her. The letter, which is located in the LDS Church Archives in Salt Lake City, is as follows:

[p. 1] Far West (Mo.) May 1, 1839

Dear Sally: One month has gone and having received but one letter in this time I sit down heavy hearted to write out this page which I had reserved to answer yours. You must certainly have forgotten the run of the mails. A letter should be handed to the St. Louis post office on Saturday evening, or Monday evening to reach Far West on Tuesday week. Your first letter's last date was Apr. 10 mail[ed] Sunday "14" and reach[ed] April 23d. By the last mail I received the second letter from McCombe.²⁴ He is in Springfield with Burr Riggs,²⁵ and likes it well.

The children being disappointed at your not writing every mail feels melancholy and cast down. The best way I can fix it it [sic] considerable time before I can move, and without your writi[ng] in answer to to [sic] what I want answered, it will take longer. I have directed Mr. Wood²⁶ and Reed Peck²⁷ to see you if they can and state the thing as it is.

I hardly know what to say, but I hope you are contented, and will wait patiently. Whether you write to comfort us or not, for God knows I want you happy whether I am or not.

[p. 2] One of the least of all the forcible tricks of of [sic] the Mormons, was performed on the morning of the 26th [of] April in secret darkness about three o'clock in the morning. Probably seven shepherds [apostles] and eight principal men, from Quincy (Ill.) and elsewhere, assembled on the big house cellar, and laid one huge stone in addition to those already there, to fulfill the revelation given the 26th of April one year ago.²⁸ I think they strained at a camel and swallowed a gnat. They cut off from their Church all the Canadians here and put off.²⁹ They give no notice, nor no trial to these unoffending men, women and children, but "off with their heads," like the day of Buckingham. I think the people of Caldwell on the 4th of next July will remove those untimely laid stones and spoil the Mormons glory as awfully as God smashed their Liberty pole, with a flash of lightning last Summer.³⁰ Norman Shearer and Darwin Chase have got clear; the rest are indicted, at Richmond.³¹

The widow Gilbert³² and Rachel Kingsley,³³ I am informed have formed a connection in business for the purpose supplying the Far West market with fresh fish in time of needs [sic]. Suckers and Cod! (I suppose.)

If you would take pains to call on John N. Cheney,³⁴ lottery vender, you might get \$3.04 and I could pay her here after you send me word of the collection. I believe \$2.12 is hers.

John Whitmer is enlarging his buildings—has bought and removed Henry Woods house just before his south door, for a kitchen. He seems to be preparing to stick in Far West a while.³⁵

[p. 3] As I sometimes feel a little practical, I hope you will not be offended at the following libertanza (a new word) addressed to you in your absence:—So All is Well.

'Tis sweet to think of days gone by,
 When hope expected pleasures double,
 Would leave no room for care or trouble;
 When love was sparkling in thine eye,
 And roses bloom'd upon thy cheek,
 1 And all thy words and ways were meek:—
 When married life was truly pleasant;
 And all the varied pass'd [past] and present—
 Time, had not evil tales to tell
 Of you and I—so all is well.
 'Tis sweet to think of days go 'long,

While we were blessed with heirs, as treasure,
To share their lot of care and pleasure,
And mingle with the mighty throng;—
2 Had upper deep its tongues of glee,
“As well as starry eyes to see;”
They’d say the married life was pleasant;
And all the varied pass’d [past] and present—
Time, had no evil tales to tell
Of you and I, So all is well.

’Tis sweet to think of days to come,
When we can taste the bliss of heaven,
And bid adieu to earthly leaven,
And be, O be always at home:—
3 [p. 4] Where none are known but real friends,
And love and beauty never ends;
And where united life is pleasant—
And all eternal pass’d [past] and present—
Time, has no evil tales to tell
Of you and I, So all is well.

The weather, the past week, has been beautiful and very growing. Everything appears like a sea of green. Vegetation is nearly a month in advance of last year.

The everlasting fields, certainly present a wilderness of beauty with but few spots of timber; and, when the thermometer in April ranges in the shade, at 80o and 85o, you may readily calculate that we feel a good deal like summer:—

“That oft has swept the toiling race of men,
“And all their labor’d monuments away.”

There is such a wide difference in the aspect and prospect of Far West, that I hardly know how to describe it to you. The inhabitants are gone. The sound of the hammer, and the bustle of business have ceased; The grass is growing in the streets, or where they were: The fences have disappeared, and nothing but empty houses, and the moaning of the Spring breeze, tell what was in Zion (so revealed.) My love of it has vanished.

[p. 5] Since I wrote to you about the escape of Joseph and Co. it has been reported that he bribed the guard with six thousand dollars.³⁶ I presume he did. I have also learned that, at the sham meeting at the big house cellar, there not being a quorum of the old “Twelve” present, they had recourse to “shift,” and ordained Wilford Woodruff, and Geo. Smith as apostles, which, with H C Kimbel, Orson Pratt, Brigham Young (old ones) and John E Page and John Taylor (new ones), made seven.³⁷ They prayed (in vain) Sung Adam ondi Ahman and closed.³⁸ There were others there. This looks a little like choosing or loving darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. You know I think as much of pure religion as ever, but this foolish mocking disgusts me, and all decent people. Force the fulfillment of Jo’s revelation! You might as well dam the the [sic] waters of [the] Missouri River with a lime siddle! It was undoubtedly done to strengthen the faith of weak members, and for effect abroad: as I understand the Twelve are a going to try their luck again among the nations: Tis really a pity they cannot get a looking glass large enough to

see the saw log in their own eyes while they are endeavoring to pull the slab out of the neighboring nations. All I can say is: "Physician save thyself!"

[p. 6] Whether you laugh or cry, I have one thing to confess, and that is I never was so lonesome before. I have copied and corrected your letter and it has been read by many—all of whom pronounce it a very good one; but one person has discoursed anything that could be bettered. Mr. Scott³⁹ said: if you had said you wanted to see your husband as much as your children, you would have told this truth, and finished the story.

The children are very lonesome I know from their actions, and more so, since Waterman went to work at Liberty. James says Father are you going to let me go where mother is? Lydia says she wants to see mother. I have got some cloth for James and Henry some clothes. I shall have to get some also for Lydia, but I hardly know how they will be made, as I know of nobody that can be had to sew.

Cleminson⁴⁰ is now proposing to move as soon as he can. Reed Peck, and his folks, and Maynard⁴¹ and his family, mean to leave this week.

The people that have been staying and trading here this winter past, now the Mormons have gone, show visible signs of discontent. I think myself they are quite lonesome.

There is a mysterious hanging back about resettling Far West. Some say it is on account of John's⁴² mortgage; some one thing and some another. God save the Just.

[p. 7] Joseph⁴³ came out from Liberty on Sunday last to see me. He feels very bad. He owes about two hundred dollars which he cannot pay, and he wants to move out of the state when I go. I do not know how to advise him. Waterman does not go ahead much: he cannot [page torn] work. If I do not seel the cows I [page torn] of letting him ride Gin and drive them by land.

There was a steam boat sunk last week between Liberty and Lexington landings—I have sold both wheels for linen cloth.

The April no [number] of the Ladies Book is a grand one and had you wrote as I expected I should have sent it to you. I hope hereafter, whether you ever see us or not you will not fail to weekly lodge a letter on Saturday in the post office—My next one will be directed to "Sally Waterman" and franked so you will know how to enquire. If you want to see us, hurry your letters. If you want the Ladies Book say so. If you want money say so. I may have some for you.

Sally Phelps

Even so,
W. W. Phelps

The story of William's return to Mormonism is frequently cited in Mormon circles. He also subsequently abandoned Far West. Precisely when he and the children left is not known. However, by 1840, the entire family was living in Dayton, Ohio. Orson Hyde and John E. Page, both members of the Twelve, met up with Phelps while passing through Dayton in June. By this time, William desired reconciliation with the Church's leadership. Considering his former prominent Church station and the circumstances relating to his excommunication, Hyde and Page advised Phelps to write Joseph Smith. The prodigal wrote a heartfelt letter requesting forgiveness and fellowship. Believing his confession to be sincere, the two apostles attached a letter recommending clemency.⁴⁴ The Prophet's reply was written in prose to the poetic Phelps: "Come on, dear brother, since the war is past, For friends at first, are friends again at last."⁴⁵



Grave marker of William W. Phelps (1792-1872),
Salt Lake City Cemetery, Salt Lake City, Utah.
Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh

Notes

1. For a summary of W. W. Phelps' early background and conversion to Mormonism, see Bruce A. Van Orden, "By That Book I Learned the Right Way to God": The Conversion of William W. Phelps," in Larry C. Porter, Milton V. Backman Jr., and Susan Easton Black, eds., *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: New York* (Provo: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1992), 203–13.

2. Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. 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), 70–71. See also Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., 2d. ed. rev., B. H. Roberts, ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–51), 2:122–24.

3. See Bruce A. Van Orden, "W. W. Phelps: His Ohio Contributions, 1835–36," in Milton V. Backman Jr., ed., *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Ohio* (Provo: Department of Church History and Doctrine, 1990), 45–62; and Bruce A. Van Orden, "Writing to Zion: The William W. Phelps Kirtland Letters (1835–1836)," *BYU Studies* 33, No. 3 (1993): 542–93.

4. Cannon and Cook, *The Far West Record*, 135–41, 145–51; and *History of the Church* 3:3–8. There is some question as to whether Phelps actually lost his membership in the Church. He was probably only disfellowshipped, as evidenced by the fact that in late June and early July 1838, he had made restitution and Joseph Smith had received a revelation restoring William to full fellowship and appointing him to once again preach the gospel. *History of the Church*, 3:283–84. Furthermore, there is no record of a rebaptism, suggesting he had retained his membership.

5. *History of the Church*, 2:511.

6. For information concerning Cowdery's possible infidelity, as well as his charges of adultery against Joseph Smith, see Robert G. Mouritsen, *The Office of Associate President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972), 107–11.

7. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 162–71; and *History of the Church*, 3:16–18. Kenneth H. Winn contends that Cowdery hoped his resistance would help to maintain the original purity of the Church. Believing he could no longer compromise his "individual rights and liberties [which were] affirmed by republican culture," and feeling the Church was becoming more and more theocratic, Cowdery decided to separate from Mormonism. See Kenneth H. Winn, "Republican Dissent in the Kingdom of God," in *Exiles in a Land of Liberty* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 106–28.

8. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 171–78; and *History of the Church*, 3:18–20.

9. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989), 127.

10. Larry C. Porter, "The Odyssey of William Earl McLellin: Man of Diversity, 1806–83," *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836*, eds. Jan Shippis and John W. Welch (Provo: *BYU Studies*, and Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 321–23; see also 368, note #178.

11. Frederick Granger Williams, "Frederick Granger Williams of the First Presidency of the Church," *BYU Studies* 12 (Spring 1972): 252–59.

12. John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Commonly Called Mormons), Including an Account of Their Doctrine and Discipline; with Reasons of the Author for Leaving the Church* (St. Louis: For the Author, 1839), 30.

13. *Ibid.*, 29–30; and Reed Peck, "The Reed Peck Manuscript," typescript (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, n.d.), 6–7.

14. Corrill, *A Brief History*, 30. For a historical analysis of Rigdon's address, see John E. 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; and F. Mark McKiernan, "Sidney Rigdon's Missouri Speeches," *BYU Studies* 11 (Autumn 1970): 90–103.

15. Peck, "Manuscript," 7. John Whitmer claimed their homes were watched, their families abused, and their lives threatened. See Bruce N. Westergren, ed., *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* (Salt Lake City: Signature Press, 1995), 184.

16. Corrill, *A Brief History*, 30.

17. George W. Robinson recorded in Smith's "Scriptory Book" the following entry about the flight of the dissenters: "These men took warning, and soon they were seen

bounding over the prairie like the scape Goat to carry off[ff] their own sins we have not seen them since, their influence is gone, and they are in a miserable condition." Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith, Volume 2: Journal, 1832–1842* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 2:249.

18. Porter, "The Odyssey of William Earl McLellin," 324.

19. Following his own disaffection, Thomas B. Marsh recalled Jacob Whitmer settled in Richmond along with his two other brothers. Thomas B. Marsh, "History of Thomas Baldwin Marsh," *Millennial Star* 26 (25 June 1864): 406. Jacob remained in Richmond where he was a farmer and shoe cobbler. Tom Bogdon, "Early Mormon Impact in Ray County Remains After Century and a Half of History," *Ray County Mirror* 6 (September 1986): 6. As noted, Marcellus Cowdery was disfellowshipped in March 1838. Reed Peck indicated in his history that the Far West citizens wanted to rid the community of the "Cowderies," with obvious reference to Marcellus, Oliver's nephew. Peck, "Manuscript," 6. At the time of the dissenters' disaffection from Mormonism in May and June 1838, the total number who left the Church (including wives and children) numbered in the vicinity of 34–35 members. The total household size of the men is given in parentheses: William E. McLellin (5), Oliver Cowdery (5), David Whitmer (4), John Whitmer (5), Jacob Whitmer (7), Lyman E. Johnson (ca. 4), and Marcellus Cowdery (ca. 4).

20. Corrill, *A Brief History*, 30.

21. *History of the Church*, 3:46 note.

22. *Ibid.*, 3:283–84.

23. William and Sally had ten children. Sabrina (22) married in 1837 and was therefore no longer living with the family. Three other children died in infancy: Jerusha (b. 1 November 1821, d. 13 January 1822), Mary (b. 19 October 1830, d. 21 November 1831), and Princetta (b. 20 March 1837, d. 31 August 1838).

24. No information is known about McCombe.

25. Burr Riggs became disaffected from Mormonism during the Missouri period. He was excommunicated by the Twelve on 17 March 1839. After leaving Missouri, he settled in Quincy, Illinois, where he died in 1860.

26. No information is known about Wood.

27. Reed Peck disaffected from Mormonism during the Missouri period and testified against the Church during the preliminary hearing in Richmond in November 1838. He was excommunicated from the Church by the Twelve during a conference held in Quincy, Illinois, on 17 March 1839. In September, he wrote a manuscript treatise about the Mormon persecutions and activities in Missouri.

28. The revelation being referred to is D&C 115:7–12. How Phelps learned about the details surrounding the 26 April meeting and rededication of the Far West Temple site is not known, but his facts are nearly correct. Later in the letter, Phelps mentioned by name the five previously ordained apostles who were present—Young, Kimball, Pratt, Page, and Taylor—and the two who were ordained on the occasion of the meeting—Woodruff and G. A. Smith. Phelps further stated that the apostles were accompanied by "eight principal men" from Quincy and elsewhere. Wilford Woodruff recorded that in addition to the seven members of the Twelve, another eighteen Latter-day Saints were also present: William Barton, Darwin Chase, Hiram Clark, John W. Clark, William C. Clark, Alpheus Cutler, Artemesia Granger, Sarah Granger, Richard Howard, Stephen Markham, Hezekiah Peck, Martha Peck, Mary Ann Peck, Shadrach Roundy, Daniel Shearer, Norman Shearer, Elias Smith, and Theodore Turley (spelling corrected by the author). Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal: Vol 1*, 29 December 1833 to 31 December 1840, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 327.

29. Woodruff recorded the names of thirty individuals cut off from the Church by

the Twelve, namely: a Sister Cavanaugh, William Dawson Sr. and wife, Freeborn Gardner, Simeon Gardner, Luman Gibbs, a Brother Griggs and wife, John Goodson and wife, Jotham Maynard, Nelson Maynard, George Miller, George Nelson, Joseph Nelson, his wife, and mother, Isaac Russell, Mary Russell, Ann Scott, Isaac Scott, Jacob Scott Sr. and wife, Jacob Scott Jr., George Walters, Robert Walton, a Sister Walton (possibly Robert's wife), Ann Wanless, and William Warnock and wife (spelling corrected by the author). Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journals*, 1:326–27.

30. Phelps is referring to an incident that took place on 5 July 1838, the day after the original dedication of the Far West Temple property. Concerning this incident, Luman Shurtliff wrote:

On the 3rd of July [1838], I, with several others of my company, went into the timber of Goose Creek, got the largest tree we could and made a liberty pole, and on the 4th of July, 1838, the brethren and their families assembled in Far West to celebrate the day and to lay the cornerstone of our temple in the city of Far West.

Early in the morning we raised the pole, raised the Stars and Stripes and then laid the cornerstone of our temple. We then assembled under the flag of our nation and had an oration delivered by Sidney Rigdon. . . .

After the services, the multitude dispersed. This was on Saturday. On Sunday a cloud came over Far West, charged with electricity, and lightning fell upon our liberty pole and shivered it to the ground. When the news reached me, I involuntarily proclaimed, "Farewell to our liberty in Missouri." Luman Andros Shurtliff, *Biographical Sketch of the Life of Luman Andros Shurtliff*, typescript, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 33.

31. At the conclusion of the Richmond preliminary hearing in November 1838, Parley P. Pratt, Norman Shearer, Darwin Chase, Luman Gibbs, and Morris Phelps were charged with murder in connection with the death of Moses Rowland in the Battle of Crooked River and ordered by Judge Austin A. King to remain in the Richmond jail to await trial. On 24 April 1839, Judge King released Shearer and Chase after an imprisonment of over five months. Morris Phelps, *Reminiscences and Journal*, typescript #3, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah, 21. Their release came just in time for them to be at the 26 April gathering at Far West, and, as noted, Wilford Woodruff indicated they were present. Woodruff also indicated Shearer and Chase were ordained to the office of seventy on that occasion. Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journals*, 1:327.

32. Elizabeth Van Benthusen Gilbert was the widow of Algernon Sidney Gilbert, agent to Bishop Edward Partridge in Missouri. Algernon died in June 1834 from the effects of cholera. Elizabeth remained with the main body of the Church and eventually came to Utah where she was cared for by Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner. Information concerning her death is not known.

33. There is not much information on Rachel Kingsley. She is listed in the Nauvoo Temple Register as having received her endowment in the Nauvoo Temple on 22 January 1846.

34. No information is known about John N. Cheney.

35. John Whitmer returned to Far West in the spring of 1839 and lived in a house about a half mile east of the Far West Temple site until his death on 11 July 1878. At his death, he owned 625 acres. His grave is in the Kingston Cemetery. No information is known about Henry Woods.

36. On 6 April 1839, Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Caleb Baldwin, Alexander McCrae, and Lyman Wight were taken from Liberty jail to Gallatin for trial. However, shortly after the court convened, a change of venue was granted to hold the hearing in Columbia,

Boone County, Missouri. On 15 August, the guard set out with the prisoners. Later that night, the guard allowed them to escape. *History of the Church*, 3:309, 319–21.

37. See explanation in note #28 above.

38. The hymn, “Adam-ondi-Ahman,” (also known as “The Earth Was Once a Garden Place”) was written by Phelps and included in the 1835 hymnal—Hymn 23. *A Collection of Sacred Hymns, For the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams & Co., 1835), 29–30.

39. Phelps is possibly referring to Jacob Scott Sr., Jacob Scott Jr., or Isaac Scott, each of whom was mentioned by Wilford Woodruff as being cut off from the Church by the Twelve at the 26 April 1839 meeting at Far West. Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff Journals*, 1:326.

40. John Cleminson, clerk of the Caldwell County court was a non-Mormon who lived among the Latter-day Saints and who was willing to be a witness for the state during the Richmond hearings.

41. Phelps is possibly referring to Jotham or Nelson Maynard, both of whom are mentioned by Wilford Woodruff as being cut off from the Church by the Twelve at the 26 April 1839 meeting at Far West. Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff Journals*, 1:326.

42. Phelps is referring to John Whitmer who held the Church mortgage to the Far West property.

43. To whom Phelps is referring is not known.

44. W. W. Phelps to Joseph Smith, 29 June 1840; and Orson Hyde and John E. Page to the First Presidency,” 29 June 1840, *History of the Church*, 4:141–43.

45. Joseph Smith to W. W. Phelps, 22 July 1840, *History of the Church*, 4:164.