

In This Issue: Returning to Nauvoo

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During the past few decades, there has been an ever-increasing interest in early Mormon history, particularly the period of history associated with Joseph Smith and the exodus of the Saints under Brigham Young to the Intermountain West. This growing interest in the early Mormon past has extended to a wide range of scholars, writers, and interested observers, but it has also been evident among the general Church membership of the Latter-day Saints and other Restoration groups. Given this, a statement made by Joseph Smith in 1842 seems significant: “Generations yet unborn will dwell with peculiar delight upon the scenes we have passed through, the privations that we have endured; the untiring zeal that we have manifested; the all but insurmountable difficulties that we have overcome in laying the foundation of a work that brought about the glory and blessing which they now realize.”¹

One of the “scenes” that has garnered considerable historical interest, particularly among members of the LDS community, was President Gordon B. Hinckley’s announcement given during the closing session of the April 1999 General Conference stating that the Church would reconstruct the Nauvoo Temple. “I feel impressed to announce that among all the temples we are constructing, we plan to rebuild the Nauvoo Temple,” he said. “A member of the Church and his family have provided a very substantial contribution to make this possible. We are grateful to him. It will be awhile before it happens, but the architects have begun their work. . . . The new building will stand as a memorial to those who built the first structure there on the banks of the Mississippi.”²

The public statement came as a surprise to just about everyone, including many among the General Authorities. However, his pronouncement that the temple would be built as a tribute to the Nauvoo Saints was quite typical and fitting of this Church leader whose lifelong teachings and expressions have reflected admiration and appreciation of the Saints of earlier generations.

While the RLDS Church has maintained a continual existence in Nauvoo, efforts by the LDS Church to become reestablished in Nauvoo came nearly a hundred years after the general Mormon exodus.³ Through a number of purchases, beginning in 1937 and continuing until 1962, the LDS Church secured ownership of the original temple block property.⁴ Shortly thereafter, the Church developed the property, turning it into a historical site where visitors could learn more about the history of the temple, see a number of temple artifacts, and view a general outline of the temple's dimensions. The year 1962 also marked the beginning of Nauvoo Restoration, Inc. (NRI), at the time an independent, non-profit organization devoted to purchasing and restoring former Mormon-owned properties, home sites, and businesses.

The Church's acquisition of the temple property and the restoration efforts of NRI (numbering over thirty sites that are now Church owned and managed) have been the primary factors that have brought about an increased historical interest and awareness about Nauvoo in earlier times and the physical presence of the Church in the community.⁵ In subsequent years, the performance of the annual outdoor musical pageant, "Nauvoo: City of Joseph" (1976), the building of a large LDS Visitors Center and Relief Society Monument (1978), and the organization of the Nauvoo Stake (1979) are additional signs that the Latter-day Saints have indeed returned once again to Nauvoo.

In light of these facts, the following words, given by President John Taylor in 1882, appear to have seen remarkable fulfillment. Speaking in 1882, he said: "As a people or community, we can abide our time, but I will say to you Latter-day Saints, that there is nothing of which you have been despoiled by oppressive acts or mobocratic rule, but that you will again possess, or your children after you. Your rights in Ohio, your rights in Jackson, Clay, Caldwell and Davies counties in Missouri, will yet be restored to you. Your possessions, of which you have been fraudulently despoiled in Missouri and Illinois, you will again possess, and that without force, or fraud or violence. The Lord has a way of His own in regulating such matters."⁶

This last and final issue of the *Nauvoo Journal*⁷ is dedicated to the early Saints who helped Nauvoo rise to become a city set on a hill and to those in more recent times who helped make it possible to return again.

Notes

1. Joseph Smith, *Times and Seasons* 3 (May 1842): 776.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, Conference Report, 3–4 April 1999, 117; see also *Ensign* 29 (May 1999): 89; and "Nauvoo Temple to Be Rebuilt," *Ibid.*, 111.
3. Joseph Smith's wife Emma and their children remained in Nauvoo and later became affiliated with the Reorganization. Several properties, including the Homestead, Mansion House, Nauvoo House, and Red Brick Store, were subsequently acquired by the RLDS Church, which continues to manage the properties.
4. Robert C. Freeman, "Out of the Ashes: The Story of the Nauvoo Temple,"

Religious Studies Center Newsletter 14, no. 2 (January 2000): 1–5. See also David R. Crockett, “The Nauvoo Temple: A Monument of the Saints,” in this issue.

5. Nauvoo Restoration was founded by Dr. J. LeRoy Kimball. In 1954, Kimball purchased the Nauvoo home of his great-grandfather, Heber C. Kimball, and restored it. Thereafter, Kimball took an interest in restoring other early Mormon homes and properties. See “Janet Brigham, “Nauvoo Today: Building Again the City Beautiful,” *Ensign* 10 (March 1980): 44–47; Golden A. Buchmiller, “Dr. Nauvoo’ Honored in S.L.,” *Church News* 51, no. 14 (4 April 1981): 13; “He Saved Old Nauvoo from the Ruin of Time,” *Church News* 57, no. 5 (31 January 1987): 10; and R. Scott Lloyd, “Era of Restoration Ends in Nauvoo,” *Church News* 60, no. 40 (6 October 1990): 14.

6. *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–1886), 23:61–62.

7. Beginning with the spring issue of 2000, the name of the *Nauvoo Journal* will change to *Mormon Historical Studies*, affiliated with, and published by, the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation. The biannual journal will continue to bring a new look to the study of Mormonism, as has the *Nauvoo Journal* for eleven years.