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Anatomy of a Rupture: Identity Maintenance in the 1844 Latter-day Saint Reform Sect

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ANATOMY OF A RUPTURE: IDENTITY MAINTENANCE
IN THE 1844 LATTER-DAY SAINT REFORM SECT

by

Robert M. Call

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

History

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ABSTRACT

Anatomy of a Rupture: Identity Maintenance in the 1844 Latter-day Saint Reform Sect

by

Robert M. Call, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2017

Major Professor: Philip Barlow
Department: History

Dissent riddled Mormonism almost from the day of its inception. Competing prophets and dissatisfied adherents challenged Joseph Smith's leadership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Perhaps the most serious of Smith's challengers was the dissent of his counselor William Law. In 1844, Law confronted Smith over the implementation of the latter's doctrinal innovations (particularly plural marriage) and Zion building activities in Nauvoo, Illinois. At the height of the dissent movement, anti-Mormon citizens in the region (some say inflamed by Law's newspaper the *Nauvoo Expositor*) assassinated Smith. The assassination caused a religious rupture in Mormonism called the Succession Crisis.

This thesis examines identity formation, maintenance, and evolution in Law's 1844 dissenting group. It argues that several factors, notably estrangement and social networks, were key in forming the group's identity. As other scholars acknowledge, the group intended on a Mormon reformation. It also argues that a more accurate understanding of the dissent organization is one of an extralegal internal reform body rather than (as current scholarship puts forth) an external separatist church. The reform sect maintained their

distinct identity during the closing months of 1844, but evolved into the 1845 Church of Christ that Sidney Rigdon helmed. Lastly, this thesis surveys the reformers' navigation of a turbulent religious climate and offers some analysis on why those reformers most committed to Mormonism ultimately rested in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

(169 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Anatomy of a Rupture: Identity Maintenance in the 1844 Latter-day Saint Reform Sect

Robert M. Call

Joseph Smith, the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, managed dissent throughout his prophetic career. Most of the earliest dissenters came and went with little lasting impact on Mormonism—the church maintained a coherent structure despite attempted disjuncture. However, when Smith was assassinated in June 1844 (just fourteen years after he established the church), the Mormon community ruptured. Claimants to Smith’s ecclesiastical office competed for church-wide leadership. Brigham Young led thousands westward to the Rocky Mountains, but thousands of Mormons rejected Young and his version of Mormonism. This crisis over succession sparked the growth of schisms in the young American faith.

Much of the scholarship on dissenters and schisms in Mormonism focuses on why the divisions occurred—the reasons for dissatisfaction. The scholarship also tends to be biographical in nature, focusing on the lead dissenter. Lacking in the scholarship is the “how” of dissent and schisms—how did schisms form, how did they maintain distinct identity, and how did they evolve. This thesis utilizes William Law’s 1844 dissenting group as a case study to answer these questions. By looking at the “how” we learn that Law’s organization was an extralegal internal reform body (not a separatist church), that evolved into Sidney Rigdon’s 1845 Church of Christ, and that many dissenters stayed true to their reform goals by aligning themselves with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the 1860s.

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The staff and volunteers at several depositories have been very helpful, most notably the LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City and the Community of Christ Library and Archives in Independence, Missouri. This project could not have been accomplished without the facilities and resources made available at both locations. I thank Rachel Killebrew at the Community of Christ for graciously opening their archives to me and going out of her way to pull records and give suggestions for research paths. Team

members at The Joseph Smith Papers at the Church History Library, particularly Dr. Mark Ashurst-McGee and Dr. Christopher Blythe, encouraged me and gave me opportunities to improve my history abilities.

It would be negligent to not thank the faculty in Brigham Young University's family history program, where I did my undergraduate studies, for the preparation they gave me. While I highly value the contributions every faculty member made to my education, I name just a few here. First, Dr. Gerald Haslam who first put the idea of graduate studies into my head. Second, Dr. Amy Harris who gave countless hours of advice on graduate school and the intersection of family history and traditional history. Dr. Harris always encouraged me to pursue additional studies even when I doubted. Lastly, Jill Crandell—professor, mentor, employer, internship director—who unfailingly supported me in all my pursuits. Her mentorship in academic and professional family history is indispensable.

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Robert M. Call

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On June 11, 1844, Jane Silverthorn Law and her friends hurriedly threw her belongings into trunks to flee the Mormon stronghold of Nauvoo, Illinois. Jane must have been exhausted. Not yet thirty years old, Jane had three little boys to watch after and was days away from giving birth to a fourth. While Jane packed, her husband William and his brother Wilson (recently widowed) rode side-by-side in a carriage past the neat brick homes and shops that lined Nauvoo's streets. The Law brothers had no destination—their ride was simply a bold act of defiance. The night before, their printing press, office furniture, issues of their newspaper, and the press's type were piled high and burned by order of Nauvoo's city council. Death threats reached the Law family that evening too.¹ Though William and Wilson's brazen carriage ride was meant to show bravery, they still thought it best (with several of their closest friends) to take flight from Nauvoo. These families had come out in open opposition to Joseph Smith—God's prophet to the Mormon people and mayor of Nauvoo—and his brother Hyrum because they thought the Smith brothers were corrupt in their civic, economic, and religious dealings. By the end of the month, precious life slipped from the brothers as blood flowed from Joseph and Hyrum's veins. Mormonism was in jeopardy.

In the months leading up to Joseph Smith's assassination in 1844, the founder of Mormonism experienced intense opposition to his leadership. William Law, a counselor to

¹ William Law, Diary, in *William Law: Biographical Essay, Nauvoo Diary, Correspondence, Interview*, ed. Lyndon W. Cook (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Co., 1994), 56-57; William Law, interview by Wilhelm Wyle, March 30, 1887, in *William Law*, Cook, 126.

Smith in the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) led the threatening element. Law acted in concert with a handful of other prominent citizens of Nauvoo, Illinois, in their dissent from Smith over his economic practices, political engagement, and doctrinal developments. Though the 1844 Nauvoo dissenters are assessed as “the most serious challenge to [Smith’s] leadership,”² the current scholarship on the group is narrowly focused and presents a simplified narrative; it limits itself by making Law the primary actor and is generally confined to a six-month period between January and June 1844.

A solution to the narrow narrative is two-pronged. First, expand the scope to include the other publishers of the *Nauvoo Expositor* (the dissenters’ paper) and to the officers of the dissenting movement. Second, contextualize the dissenters in their key doings before the revolt (as some scholars have done) and, more importantly, trace the activities of the dissenters from post-Smith assassination until moderate Mormonism (one that rejected plural marriage, kingdom building, and esoteric temple rituals) found a stable home in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS Church) at its formation in 1860.³ Pushing past subjective boundaries in these ways elucidates the complexities of the 1844 dissent and improves our understanding of the movement’s nature, dynamics, and fate. Specifically, I will argue that the dissenters were internal reformers and not founders of a separatist church nor did their organization simply disintegrate after Smith’s assassination. Beyond expanding the scholarship on the 1844 Nauvoo dissenters, this

² Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer, eds., *Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism* (Independence, Missouri: John Whitmer Books, 2007), 4.

³ Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), xi-xii, 361-69.

project is about identities of schismatic religious groups—how identities were formed, maintained, and how they evolved.

Five chapters form this thesis. The remainder of this chapter provides a review of the scholarship on William Law, Mormon dissent, and some key works on American religion in general. Scholarship on Mormon dissent, while good, is limited in scope—particularly the treatments on Law. The second chapter establishes historical context for the 1844 dissent by examining several previous dissent movements. Parallels between Law’s dissent and prior Mormon dissents illuminate key themes in identities of schismatic groups. The second chapter reviews background material—reasons for dissent and rocky relationships with Smith—that informed the development of the 1844 dissent movement’s identity.

Chapter three discusses the initial stages of schismatic identity formation. This chapter presents the spread of the dissent message and the social isolation of dissenters. Community imposed and self-inflicted ostracism drove dissenters to find support in a network of family and friends which resulted in the spread of the dissent. These factors contributed to the formation of a group schismatic identity. Most scholars portray Law as establishing an external organization competing with Smith’s church. This was not the case. Law’s organization is more accurately understood as an internal sect or branch (which the dissenters portrayed as purified) operating extralegally within the LDS Church. Lastly, chapter three uncovers methods to recruit new dissenters and to forge a public identity.

Chapter four discusses the drawing, blurring, and modification of schismatic boundaries. A period of intense religious rupture in Mormonism known as the Succession

Crisis challenged boundary maintenance. The reaction and non-reaction of the reformers following Smith's death (which caused the Succession Crisis) bolsters the claim that Law did not see himself as a Smith replacement or successor. Centers and peripheries constructed from geography, access to secret temple ritual, and leadership were important in creating (schismatic) Mormon identities. The Succession Crisis spawned multiple competing Mormon centers and the dissenters navigated that turbulent religious climate.

Most scholars engaged with William Law close the dissent narrative at the end of 1844 because they believe Law's "church" disintegrated at that point. For instance, *Mapping Mormonism* details the paths of more than twenty factions of Mormonism in a schematic labeled the "Divergent Paths of the Restoration." A small blip on the diagram represents Law's short-lived "church." No out-going lines connect his organization to the myriads of others—it simply ends.⁴ Chapter four presents evidence that though Law left Mormonism himself, the reform sect did not disintegrate; rather, it evolved into Sidney Rigdon's Church of Christ. The reformers were vital to the Church of Christ and their departure from it contributed to its demise. The RLDS Church attracted the dissenters who remained committed to Mormonism. This moderate version of the faith represented most closely the 1844 reformation the dissenters worked towards. The closing chapter of the thesis summarizes key findings and offers suggestions for further research pertaining to dissent in early Mormonism.

The methods employed in this thesis and its findings encourage a fresh approach to dissent and schism in Mormonism. Much of the scholarship sets a dissenter's reason for

⁴ Brandon S. Plewe, et al., eds., *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2012), 67.

rebellion in a biographical narrative. This type of scholarship answers the “why” of dissent—which is crucial and informative—but it generally does not examine the “how.” Coming to an understanding of how a dissent movement grows, functions, evolves is enlightening because it reveals the material effect of a dissenter’s opposition to the mother community. This study also suggests that terms like “reformation,” “reorganization,” and “sect” are better descriptors than “church” and “apostate” when discussing schism in Mormonism. Lastly, the research presented in this thesis demonstrates that the Succession Crisis was perhaps more about a competition between radical (meaning those sects that included principles such as plural marriage, esoteric temple rituals, and Zion building as practiced in the 1840s) and moderate (those who rejected the radical practices and adhered to Mormonism as it was in the 1830s) forms of Mormonism than it was about valid authority claims—the split in the Mormon community was perhaps more about the identity of the faith than it was about who had proper authority to lead the church.

Lastly, a word on related subjects that could not be included in a project of this size or are beyond its scope. Whether church officials followed protocol in ecclesiastical courts is not investigated because minutes from those meetings are not publicly available. Though the rumor mill claimed the dissenters participated in murdering the Smith brothers none of the nine indicted men were LDS dissenters.⁵ Dozens were involved in the murders and sorting out what role each played may be impossible and is certainly beyond this project. Examining how the Mormon community perceived the dissenters would be interesting. The court cases and military tribunals involving the dissenters would undoubtedly provide

⁵ Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (Urban: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 51.

interesting perspectives, but the restraints of a thesis prevent a fair investigation; perhaps a future project could examine them. The legal implications of the *Expositor's* destruction are dealt with elsewhere and do not directly pertain to schismatic identity making.⁶ Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister use three hundred pages to untangle their theory (that includes the *Expositor*) that the murder of Smith was a political assassination; such a convoluted narrative cannot be included in this thesis.⁷ These disclaimers only show that the story of the 1844 dissent movement has many facets; uncovering the identity of the 1844 reform sect is only the beginning.

Historiographical Review

An understanding of the broader framework that supported American religion during the period of the dissent comes from Nathan O. Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity*. Democratization was important in at least three ways during the opening decades of the nineteenth century. First, a leveling of the playing field among the laity and clergy occurred. Church-goers preferred trained clergyman less and less. Similarly, democratization "empowered ordinary people." Lastly, democratization enabled the upending of oppressive arrangements which resulted in the pursuit of new aspirations for "religious and social harmony." Each element is found within the 1844 reform movement; the challenge is thinking about these notions as they played out within a religious tradition already exhibiting the concept of democratization. Hatch's work takes

⁶ Dallin H. Oaks, "Legally Suppressing the *Nauvoo Expositor*," in *Sustaining the Law: Joseph Smith's Legal Encounters*, eds. Gordon A. Madsen, Jeffrey N. Walker, and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2014), 427-459.

⁷ Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister, *Junius & Joseph: Presidential Politics and the Assassination of the First Mormon Prophet* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2005).

advantage of the wide array of print material (newspapers, pamphlets, tracts, etc.) as well as journals and biographies.⁸ Similarly, this thesis relies heavily on the well-spring of newspapers that appeared in Mormonism in the 1840s and on the numerous letters and journals produced by the reformers and their contemporaries.

Two shorter works on conflict in American religions proved helpful. The religious career of Robert Matthews crossed some of the same issues faced by the 1844 reform movement. Some of these themes were: prophets, the rise of new religious movements, controversy in religious leaders, and social networks. Paul E. Johnson's and Sean Wilentz's biography of Matthews, *The Kingdom of Matthias*, appropriately gave insights on these topics.⁹ Kyle T. Bulthuis's article, "Preacher Politics and People Power: Congregational Conflicts in New York City, 1810-1830," while set in a highly urban locale, offers good parallels to the 1844 reform movement. Bulthuis explores issues of authority, congregational division and union, social and personal conflict, the use of the press in religious conflict, and identity—all subjects found in the reform movement.¹⁰

Notably, Edwin Scott Gaustad's *Dissent in American Religion* is also beneficial. Gaustad reminds us that dissenters must be taken seriously because they worked relentlessly towards their causes and were not resisting for the sake of resisting. Gaustad describes dissenters as "a powerful if unpredictable engine." Three types of dissenters are presented in his work: schismatics, heretics, and misfits. Misfits are those who refuse to

⁸ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 9-11.

⁹ Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Kyle T. Bulthuis, "Preacher Politics and People Power: Congregational Conflicts in New York City, 1810-1830," *American Society of Church History* 78, 2 (June 2009): 261-82.

conform no matter the case and are often received by society in wildly different ways. Heretics are hard to define in America because of the great variety of faith traditions and the lack of an established church. However, because of the dominance of Judeo-Christian teachings a heretic is conceived as one who goes against the “ethical, personal monotheism” promoted by that culture. Lastly, schismatics are those who break from the faith, often because of the sins perceived in the mother church. “Schism then,” Gaustad concludes “became not a sin but a duty.” Because schismatics frequently sought to change the church to the unpolluted teachings of the New Testament or a “pre-Constantine simplicity,” schismatics were not intending for a separation, but were seeking reform.¹¹ These classifications, and accompanying explanations, are beneficial to grasping the 1844 movement; especially in seeing it simultaneously as a schism and a reform.

The scholarship on the 1844 dissenters is presented in two categories: 1) works on William Law and 2) scholarship that mentions the dissenters. A third category on general Mormon dissent also applies. In general, the scholarship advances a compact narrative: William Law objected to polygamy and was concerned about Joseph Smith’s political and economic activities. Law established an opposition church and published the *Nauvoo Expositor*. Smith, as mayor, directed the *Expositor*’s press destroyed and Law fled Nauvoo. Law’s church lingered for several months after his flight, but disintegrated when Law ended his association with Mormonism. Post-Nauvoo, Law lived a peaceful life in Illinois and Wisconsin.¹²

¹¹ Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 4, 8-9, 41-42, 85.

¹² Steve L. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, (Independence, Missouri: Herald House,

The scholar most engaged with William Law, and the most frequently cited, is Lyndon W. Cook. Cook published two articles in *BYU Studies* on Law in the early 1980s. The first was “‘Brother Joseph is Truly a Wonderful Man, He is All We Could Wish a Prophet to Be’: Pre-1844 Letters of William Law” and the second was titled “William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter.”¹³ In 1994, Cook republished these articles and paired them with annotated primary sources in a small volume *William Law: Biographical Essay, Nauvoo Diary, Correspondence, Interview*.¹⁴ Cook’s work is sympathetic to Law, but he portrays the dissenter as a faithful Latter-day Saint who apostatized.

Cook utilizes two approaches: biographically contextualizing Law’s dissent and exploration of the reasons for his dissatisfaction. Cook defines dissent in three broad topics (political, economic, and social), but discussed in five specific categories: 1) Smith adhered to the law at his own convenience, 2) Smith unified church and state, 3) Smith disregarded the church’s judicial order, 4) Smith attempted to control financial affairs of church members with ecclesiastical authority, and 5) Smith was a fallen prophet because of his doctrinal innovations (the most important reason according to Cook).¹⁵ This survey of Law’s dissent and the biographical material are Cook’s greatest contributions to the field. Missing from Cook’s work, however, is an analysis of Law’s fellow dissenters, the

2001), 29-30; Lyndon W. Cook, "William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter," *BYU Studies* 21, 1 (1982): 47-72.

¹³ Lyndon W. Cook, “‘Brother Joseph Is Truly A Wonderful Man, He Is All We Could Wish a Prophet to Be’: Pre-1844 Letters of William Law,” *BYU Studies* 20, 2 (1980): 207-218; Cook, "William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter," 47-72.

¹⁴ Lyndon W. Cook, *William Law: Biographical Essay, Nauvoo Diary, Correspondence, Interview* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Co., 1994).

¹⁵ Cook, "William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter," 56.

institutionalization of their dissent, and the fate of the group during the tumultuous Succession Crisis.

Three scholars have published on Law since the advent of Cook's articles. These works parallel Cook's studies. John F. Glaser's 1986 "The Disaffection of William Law," published in *Restoration Studies*, primarily rehashes Cook's article—analysis of Law's dissent, short biography of Law, little to no engagement with the other dissenters—but presents it with an RLDS overtone. That is, Glaser is more sympathetic to Law suggesting that he was correct in concluding Smith erred in doctrinal innovations (particularly polygamy). Glaser's article notes that most scholars see Law as puzzling, calls for non-hagiographical histories, and notes that "human emotions" must be considered in analyzing Law's dissent.¹⁶

The *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* published Grant H. Palmer's 2012 article "Why William and Jane Law Left the LDS Church in 1844." Palmer gives three reasons for the Laws' departure: 1) Joseph Smith orchestrated the attempted assassination of Lilburn W. Boggs, 2) Joseph Smith offered to swap wives with William Law, 3) Joseph Smith's merged church and state with the establishment of the Council of Fifty.¹⁷ Palmer's third reason for William and Jane's dissent is sustained by reliable sources, but his first two are not. His principal source is Joseph H. Jackson's 1844 exposé of Mormonism. Jackson was of highly questionable character and his exposé is typically

¹⁶ John Frederick Glaser, "The Disaffection of William Law," *Restoration Studies* 3 (1986): 163-75.

¹⁷ Grant H. Palmer, "Why William and Jane Law Left the LDS Church in 1844," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 32, 2 (2012): 43-51.

not taken seriously by other scholars.¹⁸ Furthermore, Palmer ignores William Law's outright denial that Smith proposed to swap wives. If Smith had done so, it would have been excellent fodder for William—who considered Smith an extremely immoral man.¹⁹ Both Glaser's and Palmer's articles illustrate that the scholarship on the dissenters needs to be expanded.

In 2016, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw wrote an article for *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* titled “‘There’s the Boy I can Trust’: Dennison Lott Harris’ [sic] First-Person Account of the Conspiracy of Nauvoo and Events Surrounding Joseph Smith’s ‘Last Charge’ to the Twelve Apostles.”²⁰ The “conspiracy of Nauvoo” in question was the dissent Law led, but Bradshaw chooses to almost entirely relegate this element of Harris’s account to an appendix titled “William Law’s 1844 Trajectory of Apostasy.” Like scholars before him, Bradshaw focuses on Law’s reasons for dissent (highlighting polygamy) and rehearsing the events of January to June 1844 Law reported in his diary. Bradshaw does offer some further contextualization of Law’s dissent, but his scope reinforces the scholarship’s pattern of limiting analysis to Law and the first six months of 1844.

Virtually every volume that includes the Nauvoo period of Mormonism mentions Law and the dissenters. Most repeat the narrative, and cite the articles, described above. Three prominent works on this era of Mormonism give a sense of the typical treatment of Law. In *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* Robert Bruce Flanders incorporates the

¹⁸ See for example: Brian C. Hales and Gregory L. Smith, “A Response to Grant Palmer’s ‘Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo,’” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 12 (2014): 227-228.

¹⁹ William Law to Wilhelm Wyle, letter, January 7, 1887, in *William Law*, Cook, 102-104.

²⁰ Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “‘There’s the Boy I can Trust’: Dennison Lott Harris’ First-Person Account of the Conspiracy of Nauvoo and Events Surrounding Joseph Smith’s ‘Last Charge’ to the Twelve Apostles,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 21 (2016): 23-117.

dissent movement into his narrative of Joseph Smith's final days; however, the few sentences on the dissent echo the standard narrative: anger over polygamy and other doctrines, establishment of a separatist church, the *Nauvoo Expositor* and its destruction. A refreshing dimension in Flanders's assessment is the decentralization of Law; he notes that opposition to Smith grew among prominent church and community leaders—evening naming them and their positions.²¹

The second monograph is Richard Lyman Bushman's *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*. Bushman paints the dissenters as a dynamic, active, and interesting collective who acted together in opposing Smith. Though Bushman opens the discussion to include additional actors, he uses them (like Flanders) to arrive at Smith's assassination.²² The compact nature of Flanders's and Bushman's discussions hampers their ability to explore the complex nature of the movement and uses it only as a tool to advance their narratives; fitting enough as their object was not to explore the dissent in detail.

D. Michael Quinn's influential volume, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* explores the evolution of authority and theology in Mormonism during Smith's lifetime and the early stages of Brigham Young's presidency of the LDS Church. As this thesis runs into issues of power in Mormonism—though primarily as it relates to identity formation and not as a major issue itself—Quinn's insights and research into William Law are considered. Most of Quinn's numerous references to Law are facts or analysis found elsewhere; because Quinn's work is not directly related to William Law, few of his insights

²¹ Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 308.

²² Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 327-41.

on the topic are unique. Quinn, like other scholars, frequently refers to Law's dissenting organization as a distinct ecclesiastical entity.²³

Interestingly, the few published volumes on Mormon dissent contribute little to the literature on the 1844 Nauvoo dissenters. These volumes are collections of essays on dissenters or their movements, rather than syntheses on Mormon dissent. *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, by Steven L. Shields, is an encyclopedic-like catalog of dissenters and schisms in Mormonism. The entry on Law is simplistic and repeats the narrative described above.²⁴ Since Shield's catalog was first published, three volumes—each a collection of essays—have been produced: *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* (Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher editors), *Mormon Mavericks* (John Sillito and Susan Staker editors), and *Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism* (Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer editors).²⁵ Though these volumes acknowledge Law's importance to Mormon dissent and collectively publish more than forty-five essays on dissenters or dissenting movements (at least thirty-three of which treat unique subjects), not one examines the 1844 dissenters. Launius, in his 1994 introduction to *Differing Visions*, explains the exclusion of Law because of “serious recent scholarship,” likely referring to

²³ D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1994), 119, 125-27, 137. Perhaps Quinn's most unique assertion not found elsewhere in the scholarship is that William Law's excommunication was an action of Smith's political body, the Council of Fifty, rather than an ecclesiastical trial. Since Quinn published *Origins of Power*, the Council of Fifty minutes have been released. Extensive minutes were kept for the meeting held on the day of Law's excommunication (18 April 1844), but no mention is made to engaging in any ecclesiastical disciplinary action. See: Matthew J. Grow, et al, *The Joseph Smith Papers: Administration Records: Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844-January 1846* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church Historian's Press, 2016), 108-30.

²⁴ Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 29-30.

²⁵ Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, eds. *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); John Sillito and Susan Staker, eds., *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters*, (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2002); Bringhurst and Hamer, *Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism*.

Cook's articles. Law's absence from the volumes and Launius's statement suggest a stagnation in the scholarship. A fresh investigation—one with an expanded scope and new perspectives—into the 1844 Nauvoo dissenters will clarify identity formation, maintenance, and evolution in schismatic religious groups.

CHAPTER 2
SEEDS OF DISSENT: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR
UNDERSTANDING THE 1844 DISSENT MOVEMENT

As the historiographical review demonstrated, very little scholarly work looks at the broad trends in Mormon dissent. Much has been written on individual dissenters or dissent movements, but this has not been synthesized to a notable extent. The analysis presented here is not intended to be complete, but it does draw out principles of dissent applicable to the 1844 campaign against Joseph Smith. A brief consideration of the economic, political, and religious anxieties experienced by the Nauvoo dissenters provides context for the movement. Lastly, key episodes in 1842 and 1843 further contextualize the dissenting group.

Survey of Mormon Dissent to 1844

Mormonism possessed a history (despite its short existence) rife with dissent by the time Law and his associates came out against Joseph Smith. Dissent took three primary forms in the period prior to 1844: first, competing prophets without an ecclesiastical structure; second, small—but organized—schisms led by a prophet or president; third, schisms that posed serious threats to Smith’s prophetic leadership. This survey reveals several themes of dissent manifested in the 1844 movement.

Competing Prophets & Early Schisms

Perhaps the earliest challenge to Smith’s prophetic leadership was Hiram Page’s use of the prophetic voice in the summer of 1830—mere months after the church was

organized. The large Whitmer clan to which Page belonged was a founding family of the LDS Church. This clan closely observed Smith's prophetic activities and supported him in that role. These activities include the use of seer stones for translating the Book of Mormon; Page's name is still found on the opening leaves of that book as a witness to its veracity. Seer stones were familiar to the Whitmer family and when Page dug up his own black seer stone and had revelations it was not surprising to them. Page's revelations, which many considered genuine, about Zion building threatened the infant church's ecclesiastical structure. Many in Page's extended kin network were drawn to his revelations.²⁶ It was not until September 1830 that Smith addressed the issue with his own heavenly revelation: "no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith Jun., for he receiveth them even as Moses."²⁷ This put the matter to rest for the small church and Smith had Page's revelations burned and his seer stone ground to powder. The Page incident illustrates, among other themes, that Smith quickly became no stranger to prophetic competition. Smith's destruction of the medium that represented that competition is a theme repeated elsewhere, including the 1844 dissent.

As the Page incident demonstrates, early Mormonism was awash with charismatic spiritual gifts. Visions, speaking in tongues, healings, prophecies, and supernatural impressions were not uncommon. Many gifts were practiced in Ohio in 1830 and 1831 while Smith still resided in New York. When he arrived in Ohio, Smith was shocked at the extreme nature of some gifts and he carefully reigned in the excessiveness while still

²⁶ Ronald E. Romig, *Eighth Witness: The Biography of John Whitmer* (Independence, Missouri: John Whitmer Books, 2014), 79.

²⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 28: 1-2.

allowing for their manifestation—after all Smith founded his church on visions of God, Jesus, angels, and spiritual translations.²⁸ As Smith established boundaries that defined what was and was not acceptable, some individuals, unwilling to curb their excitement, found themselves in the peripheries of Mormonism. In its opening years, Mormonism was pocked with individuals who, seeking an outlet for their gifts, claimed prophetic leadership.

None of these prophets gained lasting traction and little is left in the historical record about their doings; however, their dissent is pertinent because it represents one form of tension in early Mormonism. Black Pete (so called because of his former slave status) was a leader among those ecstatic Mormons who contorted, wriggled, chased angels, screamed and yelled (in unknown languages) to imaginary audiences, and claimed fire had no effect on their bodies.²⁹ Ms. Hubble also claimed leadership because of her spiritual gifts. Without giving detail, John Whitmer called Ms. Hubble a hypocrite and implied that Smith’s February 1831 revelation was given in response to Hubble. Smith’s revelation, given in the voice of Jesus, stated that no one besides Smith was “appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations until he be taken, if he abide in me.” Whitmer remembered that this revelation restored “unity and harmony” to the young church.³⁰

While Black Pete and Ms. Hubble each gained some sort of following, it appears they did not establish a distinct church structure. George Albert Smith (apostle and cousin

²⁸ Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 146-52.

²⁹ W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 112-13.

³⁰ Bruce N. Westergren, ed., *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1995), 37-38, 41; Doctrine and Covenants 43:3. The exact identity of Ms. Hubble remains unknown, though she may have been Laura Fuller Hubbell or “Mrs. Louisa Hubbell.” See: Michael Hubbard MacKay et al., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Documents Volume 1: July 1828-June 1831* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 257n95.

to Joseph Smith and Brigham Young loyalist) provides information on three men—Wycam Clark, John Noah, and Mr. Hoton—who did establish competing churches. Clark, baptized in the first wave of Ohio converts, claimed to be the true prophet for the LDS Church. He and five others set forth to “carry the whole world” with Mormonism, but their Pure Church of Christ dissolved after just two or three meetings. John Noah also believed he was a prophet. His follower Mr. Hawley traveled from New York to tell Smith he was a fallen prophet (for allowing fashion errors as George A. Smith recalled) and proceeded to preach Kirtland’s streets. His midnight lamentations became so irritating to the community that Brigham Young threatened to whip him—ending Hawley’s howling. Lastly, Mr. Hoton (as president) and Mr. Montague (as bishop) gathered approximately ten other dissenters into the Independent Church. This church made their creed the Bible, leaving behind the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith, and lived for two or three months in a communal order patterned after the New Testament. Montague accused Hoton of being too liberal in taking food for himself and Hoton accused Montague of being too liberal with Mrs. Hoton. Their church also ended.³¹

Though little information is known about these early dissenters and schisms (and is filtered through Smith and Young loyalists) some conclusions can be made about dissent during this early period. First, charismatic individuals laying claims to unsanctioned

³¹ George A. Smith, "Divine Origin of 'Mormonism'—Doings and Sayings of Early Opposers and Apostates," January 10, 1858, Great Salt Lake City, Utah Territory, in *Journal of Discourses Delivered by President Brigham Young, His Two Counsellors, The Twelve Apostles, and Others*, ed. Amasa Lyman (Liverpool and London: Latter-Day Saints' Book Depot, 1860), 7:114; George A. Smith, "Historical Discourse," November 15, 1864, Ogden City, Utah Territory, in *Journal of Discourses Delivered by President Brigham Young, His Two Counsellors, The Twelve Apostles, and Others*, ed. Amasa Lyman (Liverpool: B. Young, Jun., 1867), 11:4, 6-7. George A. Smith did not recall the given names of either Mr. Hoton or Mr. Hawley.

spiritual gifts placed themselves outside the bounds of acceptable worship; nonetheless, these charisma-embracing leaders appealed to some in the LDS community—though church authorities squelched support with their own use of charismata. Other dissenters claimed the charismatic office of prophet, but they routinized that charisma themselves by establishing an ecclesiastical structure. Exactly why these organizations failed is not known, but it appears they imploded from within rather than collapsing from external pressure.

Competing charismatic prophets were not limited to the opening months of the church's history—they continued to appear throughout Smith's career, such as Francis Gladden Bishop and Oliver Olney. The church tried both men in early 1842. In March, the High Council tried Bishop for "setting himself up as a prophet and Revelator to the Church."³² The High Council found Bishop's revelations inconsistent with Smith's canonized revelations. Many at the trial sorrowed over, felt shame about, and mocked Bishop's writings. Just as Smith destroyed Page's seer stone and writings, he burned Bishop's revelations.³³

The High Council tried Oliver Olney two days after Bishop and withdrew fellowship from Olney and requested his priesthood license.³⁴ Thereafter, Olney reevaluated his position in the church and removed his name from the membership rolls.³⁵

³² Richard L. Saunders, "Francis Gladden Bishop and His Culture of Dissent," 103-107; John S. Dinger, ed., *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2011), 406-7n17.

³³ Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Journals Volume 2: December 1841-April 1843* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church Historian's Press, 2011), 43-44.

³⁴ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 407.

³⁵ Richard G. Moore, "The Writings of Oliver H. Olney: Early Mormon Dissident; Would be Reformer," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013): 61.

In an editorial that appeared in the church's paper just weeks after the Bishop and Olney incidents, Smith warned the church body about false prophets and spiritual manifestations. He noted Olney's refusal to allow the council to inspect his revelations was clear evidence Olney "loves darkness rather than light."³⁶ The Bishop and Olney experiences demonstrate that by the Nauvoo period, the LDS Church had developed clear methods of managing dissent in their ranks. Ecclesiastical trials would be used to exclude the 1844 dissenters—a move that solidified their identity.

Significant Dissent from 1837 to 1839

As the LDS Church experienced persecution in Missouri and financial disaster in Ohio, scores dissented or simply walked away from Mormonism. One of those dissenters was Isaac Russell. The nature of Russell's dissent is not entirely clear, but it appears he felt the church abandoned the cause of Zion as the church's membership scattered during the Mormon War. In January 1839, Russell wrote to his cousin in Alston, England, who led the LDS branch Russell established there as a missionary. Russell told his friends and relatives of his spiritual call to lead a few righteous Latter-day Saints "into the wilderness" to build Zion ("a city of Peace, a place of Refuge") with the Native Americans. Russell, with his close friends and family, was excommunicated on April 26, 1839.³⁷

Russell's dissent in Missouri is important for three reasons. First, the movement highlights the common dissent theme of reformation or purification of the church. Second,

³⁶ Editor [Joseph Smith], "Try the Spirits," *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois), April 1, 1842, 743.

³⁷ Paul C. Russell, "The Biography of Isaac Russell," typescript, MSS 4101, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Joseph Smith and B.H. Roberts, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News, 1905), 3:343-44; Smith and Roberts, *History of the Church*, 3:336.

twenty-three of the thirty-one individuals excommunicated at the April meeting were connected to Russell through kinship and social networks. Ten of the individuals were connected either by blood or marriage to the Russell family. Isaac Russell was instrumental in the conversion of the Jacob Scott family in Canada. Eleven Scott family members were excommunicated. The Scott family returned to the LDS Church in 1841, but dissented again in 1844 with their fellow Irish-Canadian friend William Law. John Goodson and his wife (the remaining two dissenters) were family friends as well—John and Isaac proselytized together on the first LDS mission to England in 1837. Lastly, the Russell dissent centered on establishing a religious geographic center. These three themes—reformation, social networks, geographic centers—reappear in the 1844 dissent movement.

In 1837 and 1838, Joseph Smith experienced the most serious challenge to his leadership yet. This dissent involved members of the First Presidency, an Assistant President, members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and other leaders. Interwoven economic, political, and religious concerns came to a head and threatened to tear the church apart. These dissenters believed Smith exercised too much influence, under the auspices of his religious authority, over the economic (especially) and political aspects of their lives. Opposition to Smith was manifested in a public rebellion intent on reformation. The 1837 dissent shares several themes found in earlier dissents and the later Nauvoo movement.

Economic factors figured most prominently in this early dissent movement. In April 1837, the High Council in Missouri questioned William W. Phelps and John Whitmer—members of the presidency of the church in Missouri—about several of their questionable activities including their management of church funds. A resolution was reached, but when

Phelps and Whitmer transferred mortgaged property to the church and threatened legal action if not paid immediately, Smith gave a revelation stating the men should be released from their church offices if they did not repent.³⁸ Smith employed charisma to manage this dissent like he did with Page and the Ohio enthusiasts before.

Economic problems also contributed to dissent in Kirtland in 1837. Because church leaders accumulated personal debts on behalf of the church, they established the Kirtland Safety Society Anti-Banking Company to help resolve the debts. Several factors (including a nation-wide financial panic) led to the failure of the banking institution. Joseph Smith, as the society's treasurer, warned the community of the impending failure and resigned. Others—apostles and brothers Luke and Lyman Johnson, first presidency members Frederick G. Williams and Oliver Cowdery, Missouri church president David Whitmer, and Warren Parrish—continued with the venture. Despite their efforts, the bank failed, blame fell on Smith, and the dissenters charged Smith with false prophethood. In return, the dissenters were accused of stealing assets from the bank and printing “currency long after the institution's capital-stock was gone.”³⁹ Economic factors figured in the 1844 dissent movement as well, though less prominently.

While Joseph Smith was in Missouri on church business in November, several of the Kirtland dissenters (Warren Parrish, John F. Boynton, Luke S. Johnson, and Joseph Coe) organized in some sort of unspecified ecclesiastical structure. They set “themselves to be the old standard” and reclaimed the church's original name of “Church of Christ.” By

³⁸ LeLand Homer Gentry and Todd M. Compton, *Fire and Sword: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri, 1836-1839* (Sandy, Utah: Gregg Kofford Books, 2010), 69-72.

³⁹ Gentry and Compton, *Fire and Sword*, 72-76.

the spring of 1838 these Kirtland dissenters became divided—some even rejecting religion altogether.⁴⁰ The dissenters indicated, by adopting the original name of the LDS Church, that they still believed in Mormonism but that it needed to reform to its earliest roots.

During the winter of 1837 and 1838, while the Kirtland dissenters hammered out their path, the dissenters in Missouri (the Missouri presidency, Lyman E. Johnson, Oliver Cowdery, and Frederick G. Williams) pursued a parallel course; in fact, the groups exchanged letters. Correspondence between Oliver Cowdery in Missouri and his brothers in Kirtland (aligned with Parrish) indicate the two groups shared similar views and worked towards the similar goal of church reformation. Cowdery expressed his hope for a reform, but offered caution in a letter to his brother:

[T]hose who have taken a stand [in Kirtland] against those wicked doctrines heretofore taught, they may be instrumental in preserving the church of Christ on earth. But if they do[,] it will be by a holy walk and Godly conduct—not by following those with enthusiastick [sic] slandering examples set before us for a few months past.⁴¹

The kinship connections among the dissenters are apparent not only from the Cowdery brothers, but also the Johnson brothers and the Whitmer brothers who all dissented at this time. Furthermore, the dissenters were linked through close association in church service, likely building friendships. Social networks were prominent in the formation of a group identity during the 1837 dissent and Russell's dissent and they were instrumental to the foundations of the 1844 dissent as well.

⁴⁰ Smith and Roberts, *History of the Church*, 2:258; George A. Smith to Josiah Fleming, letter, March 29, 1838, George A. Smith Papers, 1834-1877, MS 1322, bx 10, fd 9, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereafter referred to as CHL.

⁴¹ Oliver Cowdery to Warren Cowdery and Lyman Cowdery, letter, February 24, 1838, Letters of Oliver Cowdery, JS0923, Mormon Polygamy Documents, accessed March 6, 2017, <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/master-index/>.

The 1837 dissent movement also involved geographic centers. When the High Council examined Phelps and John Whitmer some of their concerns involved the site of Far West, Missouri. Phelps and Whitmer selected the site of Far West—and the accompanying temple—as the center of the church’s gathering in Missouri. The High Council wanted to know what authority the men had in making that decision. Furthermore, Whitmer and Phelps denied lots in the city to prominent church leaders (including the High Council) who complained that they were equally invested in the cause of Zion and should be given lots. It appeared to the High Council that the Missouri presidency pushed them away from the center of place of the church—from its spot of gathering and its future temple. The literal exclusion from the center was reflected in the presidency’s withholding knowledge about the building of Zion at Far West.⁴² Clearly, who had control of the church’s center was important to the High Council. When the dissenters met in January 1838, they made plans for removing from Far West and locating as a group elsewhere so “they may live in peace.”⁴³ Physically excluding themselves (because they felt ostracized) indicates the solidification of a schismatic group identity. The concerns over control of the church’s center place and the plans for removal are paralleled in the later dissent movements.

The dissenting group’s minutes reveal their self-perception and their primary concerns. The clerk noted that those present were “members of the church of Latter Day Saints.” (Joseph Smith adopted this name for his organization in 1834 to replace the generic

⁴² Gentry and Compton, *Fire and Sword*, 69-72.

⁴³ Oliver Cowdery to Warren Cowdery and Lyman Cowdery, letter, February 4, 1838, Letters of Oliver Cowdery, JS0923, Mormon Polygamy Documents, accessed March 6, 2017, <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/master-index/>.

“Church of Christ” name.) Clearly, the dissenters believed they were a part of God’s approved organization. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss political (a perceived unification of church and state), economic (church dictated use of personal property), and religious (sustain church leaders whether right or wrong) concerns.⁴⁴ The complaints lodged against Joseph Smith by the 1837 dissenters reveal the movement was not simply a splitting of hairs over doctrinal issues or a claim to prophetic authority. No, the church was corrupted on three fronts and a reformation was needed. These concerns and the self-perception of this dissent movement are analogous to the concerns and perception of the 1844 reform movement.

Overview of Causes of the 1844 Dissent Movement

As with all dissenters, William Law and his associates sought to correct Mormonism to an acceptable identity. The 1844 dissenters wanted an “original Mormonism” not convoluted with radical theology or prophetic projects such as sealing mankind in a web of relationships or zealous Zion building. Previous scholarship organizes the movement’s reasons for dissent into economic, political, and religious concerns. An exploration of these areas provides context for the 1844 reform movement and places markers establishing the boundaries separating the reform body from the larger LDS community.

⁴⁴ Oliver Cowdery to Warren Cowdery and Lyman Cowdery, letter, February 4, 1838, Letters of Oliver Cowdery, JS0923, Mormon Polygamy Documents, accessed March 6, 2017, <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/master-index/>.

Economic Concerns

The most pronounced concerns of the 1844 dissent movement were political and religious in nature. However, economic anxieties had a place as well; three of the fifteen resolutions published in the *Nauvoo Expositor* were economically focused. Analysis of these resolutions reveals that the dissenters believed Smith was operating a large-scale property scheme in Nauvoo. Few studies of Nauvoo examine the city's economics and only some consider the nature of property sales and purchases.⁴⁵ The type of study needed to fully evaluate the dissenters' complaints is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, contemporary sources do offer some light on whether the dissenters' claims were warranted. More plausible for the thesis is an explanation of the property scheme as the dissenters perceived it. This brief analysis demonstrates that the dissenters thought Smith's Nauvoo Zion building (in an economic sense) went too far, was mismanaged, and fostered corruption. This perception prompted the dissenters to seek an earlier version of Mormonism not entangled with intense Zion building.

The dissenters believed that Joseph Smith exercised unwarranted influence, due to his religious position, in financial matters. The sixth resolution stated: "the Book of Doctrine and Covenants makes it the duty of the Bishop to take charge of the financial affairs of the Church." This is a probable allusion to an earlier revelation assigning spiritual

⁴⁵ Catherine Mary Wycoff's thesis provides a historiography of the economic literature on Nauvoo. See: Catherine Mary Wycoff, "Markets and the Mormon Conflict: Nauvoo, Illinois, 1839-1846," (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2009), 2-5; See also: Glen M. Leonard, "Recent Writings on Mormon Nauvoo," *Western Illinois Regional Studies* 11, 2 (Fall 1988): 87. Leonard's 2002 *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* devotes a chapter to Nauvoo economics, but he does not address in detail the areas that distressed the dissenters. See: Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 2002), 141-72.

duties to the First Presidency and temporal duties to bishops.⁴⁶ The dissenters saw this revelation as the final word on who managed the church's financial responsibilities. They apparently did not consider the January 1841 conference resolution that elected Joseph Smith as the "sole Trustee-in-Trust" for the church as valid.⁴⁷ This action gave Smith necessary ecclesiastical authority to manage financial affairs of the LDS Church. Three days later, Smith filed his appointment with the County Recorder (citing Illinois law). This document gave him legal authority "to receive[,] acquire[,] manage[,] or convey property real[,] personal[,] or mixed for the sole use and benefit of said church."⁴⁸ Citation of the Doctrine and Covenants (published in Kirtland in 1835) indicates the dissenters' preference for the division of responsibilities as they existed during an earlier period and not Smith's merger of economic and religious powers in his Illinois Zion.

The dissenters also believed Joseph Smith used his position as trustee-in-trust (which they thought was ecclesiastically unwarranted) to purchase property for himself rather than the church.⁴⁹ Prior to the creation of the trustee-in-trust position, individuals and committees acquired, in their own names, property for the church. Understandably, confusion ensued and an August 1841 conference resolved to streamline property management by handing over "all deeds, bonds, and properties" to the trustee-in-trust. By 1842, the church used printed deed forms that explicitly stated Smith acted as the church's trustee-in-trust. Despite efforts to separate Smith's personal property from the church

⁴⁶ "Resolutions," *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 2; Doctrine and Covenants 107:68.

⁴⁷ Smith and Roberts, *History of the Church*, 4:286.

⁴⁸ "Appointment as Trustee, 2 February 1841," The Joseph Smith Papers, 2017, accessed March 9, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appointment-as-trustee-2-february-1841/1?highlight=trustee>.

⁴⁹ "Resolutions," *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 2; Cook, "William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter," 61-62.

property he purchased as trustee-in-trust, a court ruled after his death that he violated an Illinois statute limiting religious holdings to ten acres; thus, all property he purchased as trustee-in-trust beyond the acreage cap the court considered personal property.⁵⁰

Interestingly, the dissenters themselves—some of whom were experienced lawyers pursuing legal cases against Smith during their dissent—made no reference to the ten-acre limit. Doing so would have significantly strengthened their case. Definite conclusions cannot be made, but it seems as if neither the dissenters nor Smith were aware of the ten-acre cap on religious property. Regardless, the dissenters were suspicious of Smith's motives. In his study of Nauvoo, Robert Bruce Flanders concludes Mormon and non-Mormon land speculation was a common practice in Nauvoo. Because little is known about the quality of the land or its improvements “the prices paid are not a reliable indication of its relative expensiveness.”⁵¹ The dissenters saw Smith's land speculation as a means to line his own pockets.⁵² Flanders's also notes that Smith promoted Main Street as a place for the market and others—including Robert D. Foster, the Laws, and the Higbees—promoted Mulholland Street as the primary market. Both parties in this rivalry believed that competition from the other left their own property unsold.⁵³

The dissenters also believed church donations were not used properly. The dissenters wrote, “we look upon the sending of special agents abroad to collect funds for the Temple and other purposes as a humbug...as we do not believe that the monies and

⁵⁰ Dallin H. Oaks and Joseph I. Bentley, “Joseph Smith and Legal Process: In the Wake of the Steamboat Nauvoo,” *BYU Law Review* no. 735 (1976): 747-49, 776-78.

⁵¹ Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, 140-41.

⁵² “Resolutions,” *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 2.

⁵³ Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, 188-189; William Law, interview by Wilhelm Wyle, March 30, 1887, in *William Law*, Cook, 116-17.

property so collected, have been applied as the donors expected.”⁵⁴ A full financial audit of the LDS Church as it existed in the 1840s does not exist and is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, some observations can be made. Two major public work projects existed in Nauvoo: the Nauvoo Temple for religious worship and the Nauvoo House as a hotel. The community considered these buildings religious endeavors and funded them by donations to the church.⁵⁵ Volumes of meticulous financial records kept by church clerks, the Nauvoo Temple Building Committee, the Nauvoo Temple Recorder, and the Nauvoo House Association document thousands of monetary and in-kind donations made by church members from across the United States, Canada, and England. The ledgers carefully record disbursements of funds to workers, the Nauvoo House Association, the Nauvoo Temple Committee, and other related committees.⁵⁶ While both projects moved slower than preferred (the dissenters specifically complained about the Nauvoo House) the ledgers attest to careful and precise management of funds.

The economic concerns enumerated by the 1844 dissenters testify to their desire for a return to an earlier Mormonism. They rejected the church’s 1841 decision to confer on Joseph Smith the office of trustee-in-trust, preferring instead to rely on bishops as outlined in published scripture. The dissenters feared investing so much economic and religious power into one individual would lead to tyranny and self-aggrandizement. The dissenters were locked into a competition (fueled by land speculation and a doctrine of gathering)

⁵⁴ "Resolutions," *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 2.

⁵⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 124:22-28, 60.

⁵⁶ Joseph Smith, *The Book of the Law of the Lord*, 1840-1846, bound manuscript, MS 22507, CHL; Nauvoo Temple, *Building Committee Records*, 1841-1852, bound and loose manuscripts, CR 342 9, CHL; Trustee-in-Trust, *Tithing Daybooks*, 1842-1847, bound manuscripts, CR 5 71, CHL; Trustee-in-Trust, *Ledgers*, 1841-1846, bound manuscripts, CR 5 70, CHL; Nauvoo House Association, *Records*, 1841-1846, bound manuscripts, MS 2375, CHL.

with their religious leader for economic dominance—and both sides felt they were losing out.⁵⁷ Religious donations from across the continent and ocean facilitated the largest public works projects in one of Illinois’s largest cities; the dissenters did not believe these large-scale ventures were managed correctly. Mormon Zion building in Nauvoo became very real, very fast and the dissenters feared real-world economic problems such as fraud, corruption, or simple mismanagement. These concerns marked the dissenters as a group that wanted to detangle the Mormonism they were experiencing in Nauvoo and return to a less convoluted system of belief.

Political Concerns

The 1844 dissenters perceived Joseph Smith as disregarding established civil and ecclesiastical order to benefit his interests. Law repeatedly complained in his 1844 diary that the ecclesiastical trials releasing him from the First Presidency and terminating his church membership disregarded church protocol.⁵⁸ By 1838, the process for disciplining a member of the First Presidency, such as William Law, was established. An 1831 revelation stated if “a President of the High Priesthood” (i.e., First Presidency) transgressed he would be tried by “the common council of the church” (i.e., Presiding Bishopric and twelve high priests).⁵⁹ The minutes from Law’s January 1844 trial releasing him from the First Presidency have not been located, but Law thought it was “illegal, inasmuch as I was appointed by revelation (so called) first and twice after by unanimous voice of ~~the~~ general

⁵⁷ Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, 188-189.

⁵⁸ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 46, 51, 52-54.

⁵⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 107:82-84; John A. Widtsoe, *Priesthood and Church Government in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1939), 214.

Conferences.”⁶⁰ Apparently Law thought his case should be brought before a general conference of the church. Smith refused to grant Law’s wish at the April 1844 conference. He stated, likely referencing the breach between himself and Law, “these [little petty difficulties] are too trivial a nature to occupy the attention of so large a body.” Within two weeks, the church excommunicated William Law as a private member.⁶¹ Law refused to believe these ecclesiastical trials were carried out properly, instead chalking them up as additional evidence of Joseph Smith’s disregard for established order.

Law saw a parallel of Smith’s disregard for ecclesiastical order in his interactions with civil law. Law’s primary political concerns rested in Smith’s handling of Missouri’s extradition attempts in 1842 and 1843. Smith avoided extradition in 1842 by employing a liberal interpretation of habeas corpus and in 1843 by a city council ordinance that prohibited arresting Smith on “old Missouri charges.”⁶² Legal historian Jeffery N. Walker offers a very in-depth analysis of the legal grounds employed by Nauvoo civic officials to preserve Smith’s freedom during Missouri’s multiple extradition attempts. He acknowledges that some—both in Smith’s day and later observers—assert that Smith’s use of habeas corpus was not warranted. Walker maintains, however, that “the idea that Joseph’s use of habeas corpus was not fully within the laws of his day is not supported by careful legal analysis.”⁶³ Regardless, the dissenters perceived Smith acting outside of civil law.

⁶⁰ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 46.

⁶¹ Cook, "William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter," 60-61.

⁶² Cook, "William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter," 56-58.

⁶³ Jeffrey N. Walker, “Invoking Habeas Corpus in Missouri and Illinois,” in *Sustaining the Law: Joseph Smith’s Legal Encounters*, eds. Gordon A. Madsen, Jeffrey N. Walker, and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2014), 358.

The dissenters' general political concern was a unification of church and state in Nauvoo. Dissenter Francis M. Higbee complained that Hyrum Smith pretended to receive a political revelation directing church members in their votes. Disgusted with Hyrum, Higbee described him as "one who will trifle with the things of God, and feign converse with the Divinity, for the sake of carrying an election." Higbee warned the citizens of Hancock County that a vote for Hyrum Smith in his 1844 state legislature campaign was a vote for Joseph Smith as president of the United States, an office Joseph was seeking. Higbee claimed Joseph was "a man who contends all governments are to be put down and the one established upon its ruins."⁶⁴ The dissenters believed the Smith brothers would not stop for anything in their quest for power; even going so far as to invoke God and combine all governments into one with themselves at the head. A consolidation of powers in Nauvoo frightened the dissenters.

Religious Concerns

The 1844 Nauvoo dissenters saw a dichotomy in their faith tradition—original and contemporary Mormonism. The *Expositor* reaffirmed their belief in an earlier version of their faith. "We all verily believe, and many of us know of a surety, that the religion of the Latter Day Saints, as *originally taught* by Joseph Smith, which is contained in the Old and New Testaments, Book of [Doctrine and] Covenants, and Book of Mormon is verily true." (emphasis added) However, Mormonism had changed: "We hope many items of doctrine, *as now taught*...considerate men will treat with contempt; for we declare them heretical and damnable."(emphasis added) The dissenters repeatedly decried three doctrines: "[A]

⁶⁴ Francis M. Higbee to Citizens of Hancock County, letter, June 5, 1844, in *Nauvoo* (Illinois) *Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 3.

plurality of Gods...the plurality of wives...the doctrine of unconditional sealing up to eternal life against all crimes except that of shedding [sic] innocent blood.”⁶⁵ These statements portray the dissenters as seekers of a Mormonism typified by the Kirtland period; a Mormonism not convoluted by Smith’s later innovations, usually described as “Nauvoo theology.”

The dichotomy expressed by the dissenters fits in well with the popular belief that “Nauvoo theology” broke in a revolutionary manner from Smith’s earlier teachings. In relation to the dissenters it could be proposed that their dissent represented an effort to retain earlier teachings. However, Terryl Givens illustrates that Smith’s teachings on the nature of God that so bothered the dissenters had its seeds in the 1830s. Givens concludes, “Smith’s Nauvoo theology was elaboration of rather than rupture with his earliest theology.”⁶⁶ Elsewhere Givens convincingly argues that four of Smith’s unique and defining teachings—a God capable of feeling and suffering, a premortal existence of mankind, theosis, and Zion building—were rooted in the earliest days of the church and not sudden apparitions in Nauvoo.⁶⁷ The doctrinal complaints lodged by the dissenters were tied to these teachings, so the question is asked: If Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo theology was not a radical departure from his earlier teachings, then why did the 1844 dissenters perceive it to be?

⁶⁵ “Preamble,” and “Resolutions,” *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 1-2.

⁶⁶ Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 102-3.

⁶⁷ Terryl L. Givens, “The Prophecy of Enoch as Restoration Blueprint,” (18th Annual Arrington Lecture, Logan, Utah, September 20, 2012).

The answer is twofold: 1) In Nauvoo the radical aspects of Smith's theology became more explicit and permanent. 2) Disjointed, abstract radical teachings were organized and concretized in the 1840s. In other words, the 1844 dissenters witnessed abstruse teachings become a lived reality—hard to ignore if disagreeable to one's opinions. The political and economic concerns expressed by the dissenters sprouted from Nauvoo's Zion building projects. The church's previous Zion building efforts (which did foster dissent) paled to Nauvoo's achievements.⁶⁸ Nauvoo was not enough for Smith. In January 1844, he announced his campaign for the presidency of the United States. Statements made by Smith and minutes from the Council of Fifty (an organization charged with establishing a government preparatory to Jesus's Second Coming) demonstrate that Smith believed his "theodemocracy" would benefit all people regardless of church affiliation.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, a literal Zion quickly became very real to the dissenters. A "blow at tyranny and oppression" was needed and they would sacrifice life and property to do it if necessary.⁷⁰

Besides building an earthly Zion, Smith introduced rituals promising a heavenly Zion composed of exalted beings tied eternally together in family relationships. Smith selected William Law to participate in the first administration of those rituals. This made Law part of an elite esoteric ritual performing group—it placed him at the most center point of Mormonism. This ritual taught participants about God's sacred history and their role in that eternal timeline.⁷¹ That role included becoming priests and kings and priestesses and

⁶⁸ Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, v.

⁶⁹ Grow, *Council of Fifty*, xx, xxxvi-xxxvii.

⁷⁰ "Preamble," *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 1.

⁷¹ Hedges, *Journals Volume 2*, 53-54; Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise*, 258-59.

queens to God in his heavenly kingdom.⁷² Smith found evidence in the Bible and Book of Mormon for the sealing power at the heart of these ceremonies and he issued a revelation in 1831 that stated “you shall be given power to seal [converts with God’s approval] up unto eternal life.”⁷³ This sealing power was utilized in a second ritual that confirmed the promises made in the endowment.⁷⁴ William Law did not participate in this second ritual, though he likely heard whispers as he associated closely with those who did.⁷⁵

At the very least, William and his wife Jane read the revelation on celestial marriage which stated that if a couple kept ritual covenants and committed no murder then they obtain “exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads.” Furthermore, the revelation defined heavenly glory as “a continuation of the seeds forever and ever,” which meant people could be “gods, because they have no end.”⁷⁶ The endowment and sealing rituals turned abstract teachings into concrete actions. It was these doctrines—assured salvation as a god in God the Father’s heavenly kingdom—that turned the dissenters away.

Moreover, Smith physically recorded the revelation on celestial marriage (which includes plural marriage) and sealed men to multiple women as eternal companions—both actions that actualized his teachings. William and Jane Law stressed in their affidavits the reading of a physical document on plural marriage. The doctrine was not idle musings or a

⁷² Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Brent M. Rogers, *The Joseph Smith Papers: Journals Volume 3: May 1843-June 1844* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church Historian's Press, 2015), 66; Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace*, 260-61.

⁷³ Matthew 16:19; Helaman 10:7; Doctrine and Covenants 1:8; Doctrine and Covenants 68:12.

⁷⁴ Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace*, 260-61.

⁷⁵ Andrew F. Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question,” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1981), 88, 102, 120.

⁷⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 132:19-20.

misheard statement—the document was real, material, tangible.⁷⁷ The dissenters did not want a manuscript revelation not approved by the general church body. They preferred the published and canonized scriptures which were church-sanctioned during the Kirtland period.

Not everyone in Nauvoo was aware that the celestial marriage revelation allowed for living plural marriage sealings. On January 5, 1844, Jacob Scott (not yet a dissenter) wrote a letter to his daughter revealing his partial understanding of the manuscript revelation. He states: “[I]n some cases where a man has been married to two or three wives, and they are dead, he has been married to them all.” Jacob looked forward to being sealed to his deceased wife: “I would be respectably glad,” he wrote to his family in Canada, “to have you all here to witness our second nuptials.” However, in later letters (since destroyed) Jacob “turned against spiritual wifery, etc., and made bitter attacks.”⁷⁸ Jacob was likely upset about a “plurality of *living* wives” as his son Isaac was.⁷⁹ (A compelling yet unresolved question is whether Jacob’s widowed daughter Sarah was indeed a plural wife of Joseph Smith as some evidence suggests. The scholarship is divided on whether

⁷⁷ William Law, Affidavit, May 4, 1844, in *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 2; Jane Law, Affidavit, May 4, 1844, in *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 2.

⁷⁸ Jacob Scott to Mary Warnock, letter, January 5, 1844; Paul M. Hanson, Note, April 30, 1937, in Fred L. Young to The First Presidency, letter, July 7, 1958, P79-2, F17, Community of Christ Library and Archives, Independence, Missouri. Hereafter referred to as CoC. Young’s letter noted that he copied notes on the outside of a box of Hanson’s archival material. The note concerning Jacob Scott’s later letters reads “I was told by Elder James McKiernan, one of the seven presidents of the Seventy, who placed the three letters from Jacob Scott, contained in envelopes 1 and 2, in my hands, that there were other letters of later date, but because of what they contained it was thought best to destroy them; that Jacob Scott in these later letters turned against spiritual wifery, etc., and made bitter attacks.”

⁷⁹ Isaac and Sarah Scott to Calvin and Abigail Hall, letter, June 16, 1844, in “The Death of a Mormon Dictator: Letters of Massachusetts Mormons, 1843-1848,” ed. George F. Partridge, *The New England Quarterly* 9, 4 (December 1936), 594.

this union existed.⁸⁰ If so, perhaps this caused some in the Scott family to turn bitter towards Smith.) The ethereal concept of multiple heavenly sealings was fine by Jacob; but an earthly implementation of the doctrine was not acceptable.

What likely bothered the 1844 dissenters was not the creation of a Nauvoo theology—teachings in Nauvoo were firmly rooted in the Kirtland era—but the arrangement and implementation of Smith’s earlier teachings. Unelaborated New Testament, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants passages concerning a sealing power were arranged and interpreted to mean sealing couples together in eternal marriages and sealing them to eternal life where they could become gods—having no end. Appalling to the dissenters was the permanence of the written form of the doctrines. Secret ritual performance infused abstract concepts with materiality. This too unnerved the dissenters.⁸¹ Smith’s long standing Zion concepts were not new, but in Nauvoo they were implemented more fully. The dissenters thought Smith overextended his religious authority into political and economic realms. The materiality of rituals, written arrangements of doctrine, and Zion building signaled to the dissenters that Smith’s theology was organized and implemented in Nauvoo in ways they could not tolerate—a reformation was needed.

Prelude to Dissent: 1842 & 1843 Activities

The 1844 dissent movement’s roots stretched back in time through 1843 and into 1842. One dissenter, writing in June 1844, looked back on the previous two years with

⁸⁰ Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), 2:272-273; George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy: “...but we called it celestial marriage”* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2008), 218.

⁸¹ "Resolutions," *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 2.

chagrin: “But because of the things that *are* and *have been* taught in the Church [of Jesus Christ] of Latter Day Saints for two years past which now assume a *portentous aspect*, I say because of these things we are in trouble.”⁸² For the dissenters, the problems began with John C. Bennett’s “spiritual wifery” scandal, but they did not end with his expulsion from the Mormon community. No, things continued to worsen as they realized Joseph Smith himself taught and practiced plural marriage—no better than Bennett’s “spiritual wifery” in their eyes. A brief outline of pertinent events in 1842 and 1843 sets the stage for the 1844 dissent movement.

The 1842 Bennett Scandal

The opening months of 1842 were tumultuous for the LDS Church. Joseph Smith managed heretical revelations from Francis G. Bishop and Oliver Olney. But compared to Smith’s temporary counselor, John C. Bennett, the competing prophets warranted little attention. Bennett used his positions of power—ecclesiastical, civil, and military—to engage in secretive sexual relationships. Smith chose Bennett in April 1841 as a temporary counselor until Sidney Rigdon’s health returned. Since that time, Smith learned Bennett was unfaithful to the wife he deserted and was a confidence man.⁸³ Despite a breach between the men, a partial rebuilding of trust occurred.

⁸² Isaac and Sarah Scott to Calvin and Abigail Hall, letter, June 16, 1844, in “The Death of a Mormon Dictator,” Partridge, 594.

⁸³ “Minutes of the General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Held at the City of Nauvoo, Hancock Co. Ill.,” *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois), April 15, 1841, 387; Andrew F. Smith, *The Saintly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 62-80.

In April 1841, the same month Bennett assumed Rigdon's position, Smith married his first Nauvoo plural wife.⁸⁴ He carefully micromanaged the teaching and practice of this doctrine as he invited others to participate. Because of Bennett's close ties to Smith, it is probable he heard early rumors of plural marriage, but Smith did not authorize Bennett's involvement. Bennett responded by creating his own system that allowed sexual promiscuity—essentially one-night stands—if it was kept quiet.⁸⁵ Over the course of several months, Smith counseled privately with Bennett to change his behavior. Bennett's course did not change and his system spread rapidly through Nauvoo—some attached Smith's name to it. Finally, on May 11, 1842, Joseph Smith excommunicated Bennett. The First Presidency (Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and William Law) and twelve high priests (nine apostles and three bishops) published a notice in the church's paper in June 1842 that Bennett no longer held church membership.⁸⁶

John C. Bennett's illicit activities in the spring of 1842 entrapped others in similar behavior. On May 21, the Nauvoo Stake Presidency (including future dissenter Austin Cowles) and High Council convened a disciplinary meeting to try Chauncey L. Higbee. The council charged Higbee with "unchaste and un-virtuous conduct" with several women. Higbee claimed innocence. Three unnamed witnesses testified that Higbee "taught the doctrine that it was right to have free intercourse with women if it was kept secret &c and also taught that Joseph Smith autherised [sic] him to practise [sic] these things." The council excommunicated Higbee. Testimonies recorded later that week reveal Bennett

⁸⁴ Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:435; Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 56-57.

⁸⁵ Smith, *The Sainly Scoundrel*, 80-83.

⁸⁶ "Notice," *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois), June 15, 1842, 830.

taught Higbee that free intercourse was church sanctioned. Bennett promised to perform necessary abortions. Days before his trial, Higbee testified that Joseph Smith “never did teach me in private or public that any illicit intercourse” was permissible.⁸⁷ Two years later Chauncey L. Higbee became a prominent dissenter.

The 1843 Fissure from Smith

Research done by Andrew F. Ehat demonstrates that neither Hyrum Smith, William Law, nor William Marks (Nauvoo Stake President) knew Smith practiced plural marriage while Bennett taught illicit intercourse. These men “led a crusade to purify Nauvoo of all such immoralities” which meant they “unwittingly [worked] against Joseph Smith’s practice of plural marriage.”⁸⁸ These men and other church officials labored to uncover unauthorized plural marriages, misapplications of the doctrine, or uses of the doctrine as justification for sexual misconduct. Between May 1842 and April 1844, the Nauvoo High Council heard twenty-three cases of sexual misconduct, many directly or indirectly tied to the Bennett scandal.⁸⁹ During this campaign, William Law became an ardent opponent to plural marriage.

Throughout 1842 and the first half of 1843 William Law remained unaware (or in denial) of Joseph Smith’s plural marriage teachings. Brigham Young recalled an early 1843 meeting where Hyrum Smith, William Marks, and William Law strongly resisted Joseph’s attempts to teach polygamy. Young remembered Law declaring, “[i]f an angel from heaven

⁸⁷ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 414-17n40, n41, n42, n46; Chauncey L. Higbee, Affidavit, May 17, 1842, in *Affidavits and Certificates, Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett’s Letters, Nauvoo Aug. 31, 1842*, M230.9 A257 1842, CHL.

⁸⁸ Ehat, “Introduction of Temple Ordinances,” 46.

⁸⁹ Gary James Bergera, “‘Illicit Intercourse,’ Plural Marriage, and the Nauvoo Stake High Council, 1840-1844,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, 23 (2003): 64.

was to reveal to me that a man should have more than one wife, if it were in my power I would kill him.” Hyrum Smith echoed Law’s sentiment, though Young remembered Hyrum’s statement with less violence: “If an angel from heaven should come and preach such doctrine [you] would be sure to see his cloven foot and blackness over his head.”⁹⁰ Within a few months, William Law learned of plural marriage—though not from an angel.

Law likely learned about the doctrine and practice of plural marriage sometime in July 1843. A few months previous, Law’s fellow anti-polygamy crusader Hyrum Smith accepted the doctrine and on July 12, 1843 he requested Joseph to produce a written form of the revelation. Hyrum thought a written revelation may persuade Joseph’s wife Emma to remain committed to the doctrine.⁹¹ Hyrum also thought newcomers to the doctrine would be convinced by the document. Law swore before Justice of the Peace (and fellow dissenter) Robert D. Foster:

I hereby certify that Hyrum Smith did, (in his office,) read to me a certain written document, which he said was a revelation from God, he said that he was with Joseph when it was received. He afterwards gave me the document to read, and I took it to my house, and read it, and showed it to my wife, and returned it next day. The revelation (so called) authorized certain men to have more wives than one at a time, in this world and in the world to come. It said this was the *law*, and commanded Joseph to enter into the *law*.—And also that he should administer to others. Several other items were in the revelation, supporting the above doctrines.⁹²

William and Jane Law “were just turned upside down by” the document Hyrum gave William. They did not know what to do. Law thought Joseph would reject the written revelation, but he acknowledged its veracity. The men talked it over extensively, but did

⁹⁰ Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, *Joseph Smith's Quorum of the Anointed, 1842-1845: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2005), 17n1.

⁹¹ Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:64.

⁹² William Law, Affidavit, May 4, 1844.

not come to terms. “From that time on,” Law recalled “the breach between us became more open and more decided every day.”⁹³

Word of the written revelation spread through the community. If Ebenezer Robinson remembered dates correctly, Austin Cowles confronted him about the revelation before Robinson left Nauvoo on a mission on July 31. Cowles’s own daughter Elvira was married plurally to Joseph Smith on June 1, 1843, but it is unknown if Austin knew of the sealing or ever discovered it. Whatever the case, Cowles heard Hyrum Smith read the revelation to the Nauvoo Stake Presidency (to which Cowles belonged) and the High Council on August 12, 1843. Of the fifteen men in the room three rejected the revelation (William Marks, Austin Cowles, and Leonard Sobey) causing a divide in the council. Exactly six weeks later, September 23, Austin Cowles resigned his position as a counselor to William Marks.⁹⁴ Within a few months Cowles became an integral member of the 1844 dissent movement.

Throughout the remainder of 1843, Cowles and Law vocally opposed plural marriage. Eli Norton testified in January 1844 that he “knew Bro[ther] Law was opposed [to polygamy]” and believed him a traitor because of it. Daniel Cairns recounted that same month: “Bro[ther] Law and me had [a] conversation about stories afloat on spiritual wifes [sic]. He thought it was from the devil—and we must put it down.” Law told Cairns he knew plural marriage was taught and it tore families apart. Warren Smith’s testimony suggests it was known throughout Nauvoo that Law rejected polygamy.⁹⁵ One reminiscent

⁹³ William Law, interview by Wilhelm Wyle, March 30, 1887, in *William Law*, Cook, 128.

⁹⁴ Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 2:139-44; Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 472.

⁹⁵ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 202-3, 207.

account from a close observer noted “Cowles was far more outspoken, and energetic in his opposition to that doctrine than almost any other man in Nauvoo. In fact, I think his opposition excelled all others.”⁹⁶

Four contemporary accounts indicate William and Jane Law desired Smith to seal them in a monogamous ceremony in 1843. Those accounts are: 1) A cryptic statement made by John Scott (son of the Jacob Scott discussed above) on April 18, 1844 before the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The minutes from this meeting are unavailable, but two transcriptions have been published.⁹⁷ 2) A May 24, 1844 journal entry from Alexander Neibaur.⁹⁸ 3) William Clayton’s June 12, 1844 journal entry.⁹⁹ 4) A history of June 1844 prepared by William Clayton for the Council of Fifty record book.¹⁰⁰ The last three accounts (two recorded by Clayton) give the story from Joseph Smith’s perspective (Neibaur’s record) and Hyrum Smith’s perspective (Clayton’s records). The first, John Scott’s cryptic statement, appears to be a recounting of William Law’s telling of the story. Neibaur’s account is the most complete and Clayton’s two brief summaries agree with Neibaur. A transcription of Neibaur’s journal entry is presented below. Following Neibaur’s account is a possible reconstruction of Law’s story as reported by Scott.

⁹⁶ “Items of Personal History of the Editor,” *The Return* (Richmond, Missouri), February 1891, 29.

⁹⁷ The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Minutes, April 18, 1844, in *New Mormon Studies CD-ROM: A Comprehensive Resource Library* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Smith Research Associates, 1998); *Minutes of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1835-1893* (Salt Lake City, Utah: n.p., 2010), 32-33.

⁹⁸ Alexander Neibaur, Journal, 1841 February-1862 April, entry for 24 May [1844], MS 1674, CHL.

⁹⁹ George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1995), 133. Unfortunately, Clayton summarized into one sentence Hyrum Smith’s two-hour retelling of William Law’s difficulties.

¹⁰⁰ Grow, *Council of Fifty*, 191-92.

Neibaur May 24, 1844 Journal Entry

[T]old about Mr Wm Law = wisht to be Married to his Wife for Eternity Mr Smith said would Inquire of the Lord Answered no because Law was a Adulterous person, Mrs Law wandet to know why she could not be Married to Mr Law Mr S said would not wound her feeling by telling her, some days after Mr Smith going towards his Office Mrs Law stood in the door beckoned to him smore [some more] the once did not know wheter she bekoned to him went across to Inquire yes place to walk in no one but herself in the house, she drawing her Arms around him if you wont seal me to my husband Seal myself unto you, he Said stand away & pushing her Gently aside giving her a denial & going out, when Mr Law came home he Inquiret who had been in his Absence, she said no one but Br Joseph, he then demandet what had pass Mrs L then told Joseph wandet her to be Married to him.¹⁰¹

Reconstruction of Scott's April 18, 1844 Statement

Note: Text in bold represents the transcription while my conjectural insertions are in normal typeface.

William Law spoke **yesterday** about **Gods—more wives—full Mormons—Law spoke against Joseph—and spoke about William Law's, rights.** to be sealed—Joseph **Went to Wm.'s wife to attempt to seduce her.—Joseph wanted her to come into the order** of the Anointed Quorum. The Laws were **not privileged to [be] se[a]led unless he, William, obe[ye]d, & marry more women, it is a privilege to be seal[e]d to him—William watched for his opportunity. Wm. was out of the house, Joseph was in the bedroom[,] Joseph attempted to take her abed.—repent, &--kill him—spare his life. she told her husband, get time told William.—Joseph swore, &c—Wm told Joseph [blank] Wm wife lied some when, [blank] Joseph said you did [blank] Joseph acknowledged--& sealed William & wife.—was not a more gallant scoundrel ever hung between the heavens and the earth.**¹⁰²

A complete resolution of the differences in these accounts may not be possible.

However, a possible storyline can be constructed. William and Jane wanted to have their marriage sealed and they asked Joseph to perform the ceremony. Joseph prayed and refused to perform the sealing because Law either committed adultery or rejected plural marriage

¹⁰¹ Neibaur, Journal, entry for 24 May [1844].

¹⁰² The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Minutes, April 18, 1844; *Minutes of the Apostles*, 32-33.

(or both). When Jane and Joseph were alone in the Law home improper advances were made. William believed Joseph tried to seduce Jane, but Joseph said Jane hugged him and requested to be sealed to Joseph. Both parties accused the other of lies. William reported Joseph acknowledged wrongdoing and sealed the couple. Whatever occurred, the relationship between the men was rocky in 1843 and by the close of the year Law thought the church needed a reformation.

Several themes wove their way through dissent in early Mormonism. Charismata induced some of Smith's followers to challenge his prophethood with their own abilities and some established competing churches. Smith initially managed dissent through charisma, but he developed a system of ecclesiastical trials for dissent management. In some instances, Smith destroyed the physical representation of dissent. Social networks often connected dissenters who sought economic, political, and religious reformation in the church. Geographic centers were also important in some schisms. Each of these themes are found, to some degree or another, in the Nauvoo dissent movement. For the 1844 dissenters, Smith's doctrinal innovations and Zion building were too material in religious, political, and economic ways. Some dissenters (such as the Scott family and Chauncey L. Higbee) had rocky relationships with the church prior to the 1844 dissent. Others, like William and Jane Law and Austin Cowles, worked against plural marriage as early as 1842.

CHAPTER 3

THE REFORM BODY TAKES SHAPE: IDENTITY FORMATION & EMBODIMENT

This chapter explores the formative stages of religious rupture by analyzing the structural beginnings of the 1844 schismatic group, the goals of the reform movement, and the movement's congelation into a distinct body. Ruptures involve both social estrangement and ecclesiastical distancing. Social networks (particularly webs comprised of kin and friends) established the base population of the schism. Interpersonal bonds were utilized in the recruitment process to spread the movement's message and bring others into the dissenting sect. After the establishment of a base collective, the dissenters held formal (though private invitation-only) meetings to determine the group's goals.

Most scholars assert that the reform movement's purpose was the establishment of a separatist or competing church; however, describing it as such misrepresents the movement's goals and actions. The 1844 reform movement is most accurately termed a "sect" or "branch." The sect worked towards detangling church and state in Nauvoo and purifying the church of perceived immorality and corruption. The reform sect planned and enacted proselytizing efforts. The sect's most impactful tool was their newspaper titled the Nauvoo Expositor. Congelation and material representation of group identity occurred through the newspaper. The city council (dominated by Joseph Smith loyalists) physically enacted their verbal attacks about the dissenters by destroying the Expositor's press. To the city council, destroying the reformers' identity marker symbolically crushed the ideology of the reform movement.

Structural Beginnings of Schisms

Because a schism is not born fully formed in a single day, it is necessary to investigate the gestation period. This section probes the social and formal estrangement experienced by some dissenters, associations within the schism, the dissent recruitment process, and early private schismatic meetings. This probing reveals that social networks are foundational to schismatic body formation. These networks connect individuals, facilitate idea exchange, and bring others into the group.

Social and Formal Estrangement

William Law's first diary entry, dated January 1, 1844, documents the earliest known meeting of the dissenters. This entry illustrates that by January 1844 a small group of Nauvoo citizens trusted each other in sharing feelings of doctrinal discontent. These were people on the cusp of both social and formal estrangement. Law's diary entry reads:

The evening of this day I have spent at my brother Wilson Law's, a small party of friends were assembled there, and after partaking of an excellent supper, ~~we conversed upon various subjects, amongst the rest the Doctrine (so called) of plurality and Community of wives; they were strongly disapproved,~~ refreshment we returned home.¹⁰³

Family and friends gathered informally and shared personal feelings of dissatisfaction with the radical identity overtaking Mormonism. The entry mutes the feelings of individuals, but Law let loose his personal opinions when reflecting in his journal.

Law thanked God for saving him from the "vortex of iniquity" and wrote that remembering the scenes of the previous months "paralizes the nerves, chills the currents of

¹⁰³ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 38.

the heart, and drives the brain almost to madness.”¹⁰⁴ Law’s record attests to the reform sect’s organic growth. It began with a network of friends and family—privately feeling opposed to Smith’s doings—sharing opinions during informal social functions; thus, private notions of dissatisfaction congealed into the beginnings of a group identity. Furthermore, the fact that the meeting occurred suggests the group felt socially estranged, or at least different from, the surrounding community.

Others in Nauvoo, observing Law’s separation, circulated rumors concerning him. The rumors further estranged Law from the community. On January 2, 1844 rumors reached Law’s ears that Smith told the city council and police to watch Law carefully because he was a Brutus—a traitor. Fearful for his life, Law went to the Smith brothers and Joseph told Law “he never intended any such idea to be conveyed.”¹⁰⁵ The rumors stemmed from a December 29, 1843 city council meeting where Smith—acting as mayor—directed the councilmen and police to clean up the city. Smith warned the council that the Missourians (his old enemies) planted a mole in Nauvoo to aid in his extradition. He called the unidentified individual a “dough head” and a “Brutus” and said “I have ^had^ pretended friends who have betrayed me[,] as I am informed.”¹⁰⁶ Some present thought Law fit the bill of a traitorous confidant and spread rumors to that effect. Their assumption reveals that some in the community perceived the divide between Law and Smith even before formal ecclesiastical separation occurred.

¹⁰⁴ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 37.

¹⁰⁵ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 38.

¹⁰⁶ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 197.

Attempting to heal the social estrangement, Smith called a special meeting with the council and police for January 3 and, when the rumors persisted, a second meeting for January 5. The first investigative meeting discovered policeman and bishop Daniel Cairns as the source of the Law rumors. In a conversation with Eli Norton, Cairns insinuated that Law was the traitor Smith spoke of. Norton reached this conclusion because Law lost a significant financial investment in a hemp farm (indicating economic concerns) and expressed strong opposition to polygamy (indicating religious concerns); thus, the two men supposed Law had grievances against Smith. Cairns admitted to the council that Law never spoke disrespectfully of Smith or the church. Law defended his comments about polygamy by noting the Smith brothers “blowed it all up” to the High Council and Elders Quorum in 1843. Smith cryptically told the council concerning polygamy: “The man who promises to keep a secret and does not keep it he is a liar and not to be trusted.” The Smiths and Law reaffirmed their loyal friendship. The investigation satisfied Law who was pleased that both Hyrum and Joseph spoke favorably of him to the council including trusting him with their lives.¹⁰⁷ Social estrangement was temporarily relieved for Law.

On January 4, whispered rumors named Law and William Marks (his fellow post-Bennett anti-polygamy campaigner) as the traitors who must be killed. Smith rejected the rumors when Law confronted him about them, but his anger got the better of him when he called the Law brothers fools who should be watched. Law understood the words as a threat. The second investigative meeting concluded the rumors began with Warren Smith (no relation to Joseph Smith). Warren regarded Law’s and Isaac Hill’s (a business associate

¹⁰⁷ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 199-204; William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 41.

of Law) opposition to polygamy as traitorous.¹⁰⁸ As Warren's rumors wound through the grapevine—including anti-polygamist Leonard Sobey and future dissenter Francis M. Higbee—they amplified to include death threats. Joseph Smith reprimanded Sobey and wanted Cairns and Warren Smith expelled from the police force. The council retained them. Smith told the council he had no prejudice towards Marks or Law, describing them as “lovely men.” The Law brothers reaffirmed their loyalty, requested an end to the rumors, and wished the police to stay out of their affairs. From Law's perspective, the incident ended Law's personal friendship with Smith.¹⁰⁹ Law's relationship with Smith represented the social estrangement he experienced in Nauvoo—only partially healed.

Francis M. Higbee, who testified he heard rumors from unnamed sources, faced the threat of social estrangement at the investigative meetings as well. After Higbee left the meeting, Joseph Smith told the council that Higbee “better stay at home & hold his tongue, lest rumor turn upon him” because his testimony was bunk and his character unsavory. Smith thought no one should associate with Higbee. These remarks were crossed out—perhaps an indication that Smith regretted them. Law recorded more detail in his diary. Smith insinuated that Higbee caused trouble for the church during the Missouri persecutions, was sexually promiscuous, and carried a sexually transmitted disease. These remarks offended Law who could not believe them.¹¹⁰ Whether rumors about Higbee did

¹⁰⁸ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 45; William Law, Daybook, 1841-1842, bound manuscript, 3, 5, 8, MS 8829, CHL.

¹⁰⁹ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 204-210; Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 452; William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 45.

¹¹⁰ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 45-46; Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 208-9, 221-42, 242n83.

begin circulating or if people began disassociating from him is not known, but it does demonstrate the potential power of social estrangement.

Within a week, Law learned he no longer held a place in the central councils of the LDS Church. On January 8, Smith and Law exchanged heated words in the street. Smith accused William, Jane, and Wilson Law of spreading rumors about him. William wrote that Smith did not (or perhaps would not) name the perpetrators. Because of the rumors, Smith excluded Law from the Anointed Quorum and the First Presidency. Law responded with “unpleasant words” and “told him his cause was not only unjust but dishonourable.” Feeling liberated, Law blasted Smith over polygamy saying “it was of the Devil and that he should put it down.” God was on his side, Law told Smith, for opposing the “base error” of plural marriage. Law saw the confrontation as a departure point: “I feel relieved from a most embarrassing situation I cannot fellowship the abominations which I verily know are practiced by this man, concequently [sic] I am glad to be free from him, and from so vile an association.”¹¹¹ A formal estrangement—official release from ecclesiastical responsibilities—relieved Law from a conflict of identities and pushed him further towards the peripheries of Mormonism.

The newly realized freedom was not all positive. Law thought the release from the First Presidency was ecclesiastically illegal and unprecedented (compounded later by his excommunication). Law apparently thought the trial was illegal because he received no prior notification and was not present at the hearing, as was stipulated for releasing First

¹¹¹ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 46; Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 159.

Presidency members for transgression.¹¹² However, it is possible Smith released Law not for transgression, but because he felt Law should no longer serve in that compacity. This logic may have justified the sudden release and precluded the necessary trial. No official minutes from any council documenting the release exist. Whatever the case, Law was conflicted. The proceedings were illegal and should not have occurred, Law ruminated, but an official disassociation from Smith freed him to forge his own Mormon identity.

Though Law called his release from the First Presidency illegal, he said nothing about losing his place in the Anointed Quorum (the esoteric ritual performing group). He and Jane stopped attending meetings of that council—a singular move—on December 30, 1843. At that day’s meeting Joseph Smith spoke on integrity and “showed that the lack of sustaining this principle led men to apostasy.” Smith’s preaching apparently obliquely referenced Law. Bathsheba W. Smith (member of the Anointed Quorum, future general president of the Relief Society, and wife of apostle and Smith cousin George A. Smith) recalled when the Quorum excluded Law (probably on January 6, 1844) one person hesitated in voting him out. Smith explained earnestly that “it would be doing a serious wrong to retain him longer.” All present then consented and voted to exclude Law from the council.¹¹³ For months, Law felt internal pressure because of a conflict in identities, but now the pressure found a relief valve when formal action separated him from the central-most centers of Mormonism. The estrangement (social and formal) Law experienced facilitated the forging of a distinct Mormon identity.

¹¹² William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 46; Cook, "William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter," 59-60; Doctrine and Covenants 107:72-84.

¹¹³ Anderson and Bergera, *Joseph Smith's Quorum of the Anointed*, 48-49, 49n48, 52.

Final formal disassociation came for several dissenters in April and May. On April 18, 1844, thirty-two men discussed the church membership of William, Jane, and Wilson Law and Robert D. Foster. None of the First Presidency (Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon) attended, but six members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and seven High Councilors did. Brigham Young presided. Though official church minutes are not available, two unofficial cryptic transcripts with unspecified origins are. Because of the nature of the sources, it is impossible to conclude with finality the reasons for the excommunications. However, some tentative assertions can be made. The council seemingly excommunicated Foster for publicly denigrating the character of Joseph Smith. Foster reportedly called Smith a murderer, counterfeiter, and adulterer. Foster even implied he aborted Joseph's illegitimate children. A vague notation suggests Foster may have told people to not purchase land from Smith.¹¹⁴

Circumstantial evidence indicates the council excommunicated the Laws, like they did Foster, for publicly disparaging Smith. The incomplete transcripts suggest William spoke negatively to John Scott about Smith. Law reportedly told Scott about the plurality of gods and wives and rehearsed his version of Smith's attempted seduction of Jane.¹¹⁵ Without doubt, the Smith brothers blamed Jane for the fiasco; therefore, it is plausible that Smith loyalists believed the Laws spread lies about their leader. This theory is consistent with Smith's releasing William Law from the First Presidency and Anointed Quorum for "injuring him by telling evil of him" in January. Whatever the case, the *History of the*

¹¹⁴ Cook, "William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter," 60; The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Minutes, April 18, 1844.

¹¹⁵ The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Minutes, April 18, 1844.

Church generically records “unchristianlike conduct” as the reason for the excommunications. In May, the church excommunicated dissenters James Blakeslee, Francis M. Higbee, Charles Ivins, and Austin Cowles for apostasy.¹¹⁶ Excommunication was the final step in formal disassociation from the church.

Social Networks in Identity Formation

Earlier episodes of Mormon dissent (notably Hiram Page, Isaac Russell, and 1837 movements) demonstrated interpersonal bonds were frequently important to dissent. Most social scientists attest to the place of kinship and friendship networks in bringing people into religious movements. These relationships “are primary avenues of proselytizing” and “are fundamental to most conversions” asserts Lewis R. Rambo. Personal relationships provide a secure environment that “sustains the new life of the convert.”¹¹⁷ Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge examine the role of “interpersonal bonds” (i.e. kinship and friendship networks) as a significant factor—in conjunction with deprivation relief and direct rewards—in the recruiting practices of cults and sects. Such groups draw membership from those experiencing deprivations or have a grievance. The cult or sect must give ideological relief for deprivations and provide direct rewards for joining the group. Direct rewards usually correlate with deprivations. Rewards can be as intangible as affection, status, and power or as material as food, shelter, and clothing. However, in many cases neither deprivation relief nor direct rewards are sufficient for gaining new recruits. Stark and Bainbridge conclude from their research that interpersonal bonds “play an

¹¹⁶ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 46; Smith and Roberts, *History of the Church*, 3:341, 398.

¹¹⁷ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 108-9.

essential role in recruitment to cults and sects” and in some cases, are “essential to the initial formation” of these bodies.¹¹⁸ An organization’s message frequently travels from person to person along connections inherent to friendship and kinship networks; thus, a group expands its influence—and sometimes establishes itself—through family and friends.

The role of kinship networks in the formation of the 1844 reform sect is apparent. Three pairs of brothers—William and Wilson Law, Robert D. and Charles A. Foster, and Francis M. and Chauncey L. Higbee—made up six of the twelve key dissenters. Their positions as publishers of the *Nauvoo Expositor* made them perhaps the most prominent dissenters. Jane Silverthorn Law, wife to William, actively participated as well. One wonders if these friends were the ones that shared their dislike for plural marriage over dinner at Wilson Law’s home in January.¹¹⁹

The extended Scott family—the ones who first dissented with Isaac Russell—also helped form the movement. Widowed patriarch Jacob Scott participated in the 1844 movement as an officer of the reform sect. Jacob’s daughter-in-law obliquely termed her husband’s sister Ann a dissenter. That same daughter-in-law, Sarah, and her husband Isaac vocally supported Law’s actions.¹²⁰ The youngest son in the family, twenty-year-old Robert, attended dissent meetings in 1844—though as a spy for Joseph Smith.¹²¹ Similarly,

¹¹⁸ Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, “Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects,” *American Journal of Sociology* 85, 6 (May 1980): 1377, 1379-80, 1392.

¹¹⁹ “Publishers,” *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 1; The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Minutes, April 18, 1844; William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 38.

¹²⁰ James Blakeslee, Diary, typescript, 39, P 2, J55, CoC; Isaac and Sarah Scott to Calvin and Abigail Hall, letter, June 16, 1844, and February 6, 1845, in “The Death of a Mormon Dictator,” Partridge, 593-96, 601-4.

¹²¹ Dennison L. Harris, Statement, May 15, 1881, manuscript, 1, MS 2725, CHL.

the Hicks family also made up some of the earliest 1844 dissenters. One source referenced “two of the Hickes” at early dissent meetings. John Scott (a non-dissenting member of the Scott family) found on a visit to Hampton, Illinois, in 1848 that “Wm. Hicks is very hard against the Church, also John & Robert indeed the[y] are a pack of fools from first to last.”¹²² These kinship networks were vital to the formation of the 1844 reform sect for both leadership and membership purposes.

Interpersonal bonds built on friendships were also central in the sect’s formative stages. The Law and Scott families both originated in Northern Ireland and settled in Churchville, Ontario, Canada, where they associated with the LDS Church in the 1830s. The miraculous healing of a Law child catalyzed the baptisms of Jacob Scott and his daughter Ann. William Law baptized some of the Scott family and was pleased when extended Scott kin joined the church.¹²³ Jacob and William worked together in the branch leadership in Churchville and the close friendship between the families continued through Nauvoo.¹²⁴ Evidence suggests that the Hicks family also migrated from Northern Ireland, were baptized while in Upper Canada, and associated with Law pre-dissent.¹²⁵ Brothers

¹²² Harris, Statement, 1; John Scott, Journal, 1847-1848, 1855-1856, bound manuscript, March 9, 1848, MS 23693, CHL; William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 59.

¹²³ F.M. Cooper, “Spiritual Reminiscences In the Life of Sister Ann Davis, of Lyons, Wisconsin,” *Autumn Leaves*, December 1890, 567; William Law to Isaac Russell, letter, November 10, 1837, in “Pre-1844 Letters of William Law,” Cook, 4.

¹²⁴ “Churchville, April 24, 1837,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio), May 1837, 511-512; Jacob Scott to Joseph Smith, letter, December 14, 1841, Newel K. Whitney Papers, MS 76, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Jacob Scott to Mary Warnock, letter, March 24, 1842, P12-1, F4, CoC; Jacob Scott to Mary Warnock, letter, February 28, 1843, P12-1, F5, CoC; Jacob Scott to Mary Warnock, letter, January 5, 1844.

¹²⁵ William Law to Isaac Russell, letter, January 17, 1839, in “Pre-1844 Letters of William Law,” Cook, 5-6, 11n46; “John Alexander B. Hicks,” The Hahn Library, 2007, accessed March 6, 2017, <http://www.hahnlibrary.net/cgi-bin/genealogy/igmget.pl/n=Hicks-Stuewer?I0050>

Robert D. and Charles A. Foster immigrated to the United States from Great Britain.¹²⁶

When the dissenters attempted to recruit James Cowley they bonded with him because of shared origins in the United Kingdom.¹²⁷

An extensive 1881 statement made by Dennison L. Harris (who served as a bishop in Utah for the LDS Church) provides further evidence of social networks in sect building. Austin Cowles invited Dennison to a secret dissent meeting and expected him to use his familial connection to convince Dennison's father to attend. Furthermore, Dennison explained he "being intimate friends [with Robert Scott] we found during the week that both of us had been invited" to the meeting. The invitations were extended because, as Dennison remembered it, "Robert had been reared by Wm. Law, and I had been a neighbor of Austin Cowles and consequently they esteemed us as friends, and we did them."¹²⁸ This account demonstrates that the preexisting friendship between Dennison and Robert facilitated a flow of information concerning the formative meetings of the sect and that the dissenters leveraged interpersonal bonds between the Harris, Cowles, Law, and Scott families to bring others into their movement.

James Blakeslee's 1845 reminiscent journal offers additional insight into the importance of friendships networks. While preaching on the East Coast Blakeslee heard rumors of polygamy in Nauvoo and "many other evil reports." The rumors appeared in "letters forwarded to different individuals in the East from their friends in Nauvoo and

¹²⁶ "Death at Canandaigua of Dr. Charles A. Foster," *Democrat Chronicle* (Rochester, New York), November 26, 1904, in "Misc. New York Newspapers, 1900-2014 Articles," Uncle Dale's Readings in Early Mormon History, January 22, 2015, accessed March 6, 2017, <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/ny/miscNYS4.htm#112604>.

¹²⁷ Mathias Cowley, *Reminiscences*, 1856, bound manuscript, MS 23692, CHL.

¹²⁸ Harris, Statement, 1-3.

other places.” It is important to note that Blakeslee did not hear rumors from newspapers or exposés, but from friends writing to each other. Blakeslee investigated the claims when he reached Nauvoo in mid-1843. He wrote, “on visiting the Saints in that place with whom I had formerly been acquainted in the East, I found many of them dissatisfied.”¹²⁹ Blakeslee then attempted to use his friendship with the Cowley family to gain their support for the dissent movement.¹³⁰ In two separate scenes—one in the East and one at church headquarters—Blakeslee noted the importance of friendship networks in spreading the dissent message and in bringing people together in their feelings of dissatisfaction.

When the interpersonal bonds between the dissenters are examined it becomes apparent that they were key in the formation process of the 1844 reform sect. During this early formative stage, the dissenters did not publish their opinions nor did they hold public meetings for the curious; no, the dissent message spread first through interpersonal channels. The most widespread and significant challenges to Smith’s leadership came from those that circulated through friendship and kinship networks. Hiram Page strengthened his dissent with support from his influential kinship network. Isaac Russell’s challenge resulted in the excommunication of at least twenty-three individuals connected through kinship and friendship networks. The 1837 dissent in Kirtland and Missouri gained strength from the prominent Whitmer, Johnson, and Cowdery families. And the 1844 reform sect formed through a web of people connected through friendship and kinship.

¹²⁹ Blakeslee, *Diary*, 36-38.

¹³⁰ Cowley, *Reminiscences*, 1856.

The Recruitment Process

Accounts left by Abiathar B. Williams, Merinus G. Eaton, Dennison L. Harris, and Mathias Cowley reveal a pattern of recruitment implemented by the dissenters during the early spring of 1844. The outreach model focused on recruiting one person at a time rather than mass meetings intended to draw in many people at once. First, a dissenter (relying on his social networks) familiarized a recruit to the dissent message in a one-on-one situation. That same day (usually), the dissenter introduced the recruit to other dissenters. The group explained Joseph Smith's polygamy and perhaps other grievances with the LDS Church. The dissenters validated their grievances by sharing personal stories of female friends or family members who had polygamy encounters with Smith. On some occasions, the recruit met these women. The recruit was then invited to attend secret dissent meetings.¹³¹ The selective recruitment model facilitated a cautious expansion of the dissent movement and a tight control of public knowledge concerning the movement.

Early Schismatic Meetings

The earliest schismatic meetings would remain almost completely unknown if not for Dennison L. Harris's 1881 statement. Harris, who was nineteen in 1844, was a Joseph Smith and Brigham Young loyalist. His recounting of the early schismatic meetings may be skewed by time or a desire to portray the dissenters negatively, but much of his statement fits within known doings of the dissenters and no significant claims have been disproven. Thus, Harris's statement can be used with relative confidence as the backbone for understanding the early meetings of the dissenters. Harris does not provide exact dates in

¹³¹ A.B. Williams and M.G. Eaton Affidavits, March 27, 1844, in *Nauvoo (Illinois) Neighbor*, April 17, 1844, 2; Harris, Statement, 1-5; Cowley, Reminiscences, 1856.

his account, only noting the events occurred in spring 1844, but the timeline suggested by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw is logical and fits with known information. Bradshaw suggests that the three Sunday meetings described by Harris occurred the first three Sundays of March (3rd, 10th, and 17th).¹³²

Sometime in late February or early March, before Dennison Harris and his friend Robert Scott attended any meetings, Dennison's father Emer asked Joseph Smith's opinion on whether the young men should participate. Smith advised Emer to excuse himself from attending but that Dennison and Robert should go. The morning of the first meeting, the young men visited with Smith who instructed them to "pay strict attention and do the best we could to learn, and remember all the proceedings."¹³³ Apparently, Smith thought he could use Dennison's and Robert's close relationship with the dissenters to discover their intentions.

The meetings that Harris and Scott attended were not public worship services, rather they were secretive organizational meetings. Harris described the first meeting: "they were counselling together and working up the system and planning how to get at things the best." Harris described the reformers as plotting against Joseph Smith. Their main motivation, as Harris remembered, was opposition to polygamy. After reporting the details of this first meeting to Smith, he told Harris and Scott to visit with him the following Sunday morning before the second meeting, which the young men did. During the second meeting the reformers "went on with their arrangements," made plans for the week, and invited Harris and Scott to attend a third meeting. Just as before, Harris and Scott visited

¹³² Harris, Statement, 1-5; Bradshaw, "There's the Boy I can Trust," 31-39.

¹³³ Harris, Statement, 1.

with Smith the third Sunday morning. Smith told young Dennison and Robert that he believed the dissenters would reach a conclusion and ask the young men to make a covenant or agreement—which he warned against. Harris recalled Smith’s fears that the dissenters may kill the spies, but thought they probably would not because of their age. Smith counseled Dennison and Robert, “Don’t flinch, if you have to die, die like men, you will be martyrs to the cause, and your crown can be no greater.” Smith’s warning must have echoed in the minds of Dennison and Robert as they passed by armed guards in the alley and doorway to the third meeting.¹³⁴

Excitement was in the air when Austin Cowles and William Law greeted the young men. “They talked about Joseph[,] denouncing him and accusing him[,]” recalled Dennison. As an aside to the main deliberations, Cowles and Law were unsuccessful in persuading Dennison and Robert to join the reformers in acting against Smith. After the group counseled together the two hundred men present prepared themselves for an oath by standing at the table and holding a bible up in the right hand. When the oath taker was properly situated Francis M. Higbee, a justice of the peace, administered the following oath, “You solemnly swear before God and all holy angels and these your brethren, by whom you are surrounded, that you will give your life, your liberty, your influence, your all for the destruction of Joseph Smith and his party, so help you God.” Following the administration of the oath, three women told the group that Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and others made plural marriage propositions to them. The woman then took the oath as well.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Harris, Statement, 1-2.

¹³⁵ Harris, Statement, 2-3.

Despite the proceedings—the counseling, testimonies, and oath taking—Dennison and Robert remained unconvinced. Law and Cowles tried again to persuade them Smith was wrong. “[Smith] was in transgression, that he was a fallen prophet,” the dissenters said, “and that the Church would be destroyed except action be taken at once against him—a strong one, one that would tell.” Again, Dennison and Robert claimed ignorance and therefore could not join the reformers. “They then told us that Joseph had read the revelation on celestial marriage to the High Council,” remembered Dennison, “and that Joseph had instructed them in this revelation, and that he had tried to make them believe it.” Staying loyal to Smith, Dennison and Robert continued in their refusal to take the oath. The reformers explained “they were combining and entering into a conspiracy for the protection and salvation of the Church.”¹³⁶ Clearly, the dissenters saw themselves as acting in holy disobedience to preserve the true faith.

With yet another refusal to take the oath, the reformers informed the young men, as Harris recalled nearly forty years later, they must be killed because they knew too much. Two armed men took Dennison and Robert towards the cellar and were followed by Cowles, the Law brothers, and one of the Fosters (who threatened to cut their throats). The young men were saved from what appeared to be certain death because someone from the crowd called for more counseling before action was taken. It was determined that too much suspicion would arise in the Harris and Scott families if Dennison and Robert disappeared. Furthermore, the families knew where the young men were and would connect their disappearance with the meeting. It was concluded that Dennison and Robert should be

¹³⁶ Harris, Statement, 2-3.

spared under the threat of death if they revealed anything about the meetings. The guards escorted Dennison and Robert out of the meeting and towards the Mississippi River reminding them again to stay silent.¹³⁷

As the guards left, Dennison spotted Joseph Smith's hand from behind the river bank waving he and Robert over. Dennison and Robert ran past Smith along the river so the guards would not notice him. After going a ways, Smith and Robert's brother John (one of Smith's body guards) met Dennison and Robert and the four men continued walking along the river until they reached Smith's property. Dennison and Robert recited the proceedings of the third meeting to which Smith replied: "Brethren, you do not know what this will terminate in." John Scott, embracing Joseph, asked "O Brother Joseph, Brother Joseph, do you think they are going to kill you[?]" Joseph did not respond directly, but cryptically told them that he would soon leave and would not be with them. He was pressed further whether he thought he would be killed, but still avoided the question by saying he would go away for twenty years or more to rest.¹³⁸ The private and secretive dissent meetings instilled fear into Joseph Smith.

Two contemporary affidavits, made March 27 and published in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* April 17, 1844, corroborate the secret meetings Harris remembered. Abiathar B. Williams and Marenus G. Eaton testified that on or about March 15 Joseph H. Jackson invited them to attend a secret meeting the following evening. Jackson told Williams that Robert D. Foster, Chauncey L. Higbee, and the Law brothers "were red-hot for a conspiracy" and expected that "in two weeks there should be not one of the Smith family

¹³⁷ Harris, Statement, 1-2.

¹³⁸ Harris, Statement, 3-5.

left in Nauvoo.” Jackson told the men Robert D. Foster had unspecified troubles in his family and that Chauncey L. Higbee had seen men tied, killed with a sword through the heart, and decapitated.¹³⁹

Eaton and Jackson met Robert D. Foster and Chauncey L. Higbee at the Keystone Store. Chauncey told Eaton polygamy was practiced in Nauvoo and he was sure (not necessarily witnessed) men were killed in Missouri for knowing secrets. Robert related an experience where an unspecified man (implying Joseph Smith) told his wife about polygamy and tried to seduce her while he was away. Robert returned home to find the man and his wife sharing dinner. When the man left, Sarah (Robert’s wife) refused to tell him what transpired between herself and the man—even after Robert drew a pistol. Sarah fainted when Robert gave her a pistol for defense. When Sarah regained consciousness, she told her husband what occurred.¹⁴⁰ These affidavits corroborate Harris’s statement in several ways: 1) the dissenters held secret meetings, 2) polygamy was a major concern to the dissenters, 3) the dissenters desired to curb Smith’s power, 4) female dissenters claimed Smith made illicit proposals to them, and 5) the dissenters sometimes threatened violence.

On March 23, 1844 (several days before the affidavits) Eaton and Williams informed Smith of their interactions with the dissenters. Smith’s journal entry for the day only indicates he rode out of Nauvoo and counseled with unnamed individuals. William Clayton, however, recorded that he, Smith, and Alexander Neibaur went to the Foster

¹³⁹ A.B. Williams and M.G. Eaton Affidavits, March 27, 1844, in *Nauvoo (Illinois) Neighbor*; A.B. Williams and M.G. Eaton Affidavits, March 27, 1844, in *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois), May 15, 1844, 541-42.

¹⁴⁰ A.B. Williams and M.G. Eaton Affidavits, March 27, 1844, in *Nauvoo (Illinois) Neighbor*; A.B. Williams and M.G. Eaton Affidavits, March 27, 1844, in *Times and Seasons*.

home, but found no one there. The trio located Sarah Foster at a neighbor's house. Smith asked her whether the accusations made by her husband—if she and Smith had dinner while her husband was away, if Smith taught Sarah about polygamy, or if he proposed a sexual relationship—were true. Smith also asked Sarah if he ever used indecent language in her presence or whether he did anything immoral. Sarah told Smith and those present that all the accusations were false.¹⁴¹

The following day Joseph Smith—feeling emboldened by reports from Harris, Scott, Williams, Eaton, and Sarah Foster—remarked publicly for the first time about the dissent movement. Smith “related what was told me yesterday by Mr [Merinus G.] Eaton. that Wm. Law. Wilson Law. R[obert] D. Foster. Chaunc[e]y L. Higbee. & Joseph [H.] Jackson had held a caucus, desig[n]ing to destroy all the Smith family in a few weeks.” Smith’s comments turned the private dissent movement into a public operation acting against the community. Rhetoric used by Smith cast the dissenters as lying “apostates” working against the first family of the church. The movement went hand-in-hand with other “wicked powers” who worked against God.¹⁴² These remarks established clear boundaries between the reform movement and the rest of the LDS Church.

The Reform Movement’s Goals

The 1844 dissent movement is frequently termed an “opposition church” or “reform church” intended as a rival organization to Smith’s own church. These terms and the typical

¹⁴¹ Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 207, 207n906.

¹⁴² Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 207-8n907.

discussion associated with them cast the dissenters in a separatist or seceder light.¹⁴³ While the term “reform church” acknowledges that the dissenters were seeking to fix Mormonism, it still carries a separatist connotation. Talking about the reform movement in these terms misrepresents the goals of the movement and the reformers’ self-perception. Terminology that more accurately describes the organization is “sect” or the term “branch” which the dissenters used on occasion. Mormonism used the second term to describe a local congregation of the LDS Church. This terminology reflects the group’s object to purify the church from within rather than separating from it. The reform movement’s goals are recognized as two intertwined vines, one being political and the other being religious. Religion and politics were too entangled for the dissenters and they believed a complete unsnarling was necessary to obtain reformation.

Dissenters as Puritans, Not Separatists

On Sunday April 28, 1844, the dissenters officially organized themselves. The events of this day marked a turning point for the dissenters. Meetings before this date were private and focused on planning the dissent movement. Now the meetings were public and they openly and actively proselytized for a Mormon reformation. Joseph Smith felt betrayed. His journal records his perspective of the meeting’s purpose:

There was a meeting at Gen^s W^m. & Wilsons [sic] Laws— near the saw mill— of those who had been cut off from the church & their dupes— Several affidavits were taken and read against Joseph and othe[r]s— Wm Law. Wilson Law. Austin D Cowles John Scott sen. Francis M. Higbee D D. Foster and Robert Pie[r]ce. were

¹⁴³ Steven L. Shields, “The Latter Day Saint Movement: A Study in Survival,” in *When Prophets Die: The Postcharismatic Fate of New Religious Movements*, ed. Timothy Miller (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 60; Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 406n71; Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace*, 359; Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, 308; Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 531, 537-38.

appointed a committee[e] to visit the diff[er]ent family[e]s of the city & see who would joinn the new chu[r]ch— (IE) W^m Law was it was decided that Joseph was a fallen— prophet. &c— & W^m Law was appointed in his place. Austin— Cows [sic]& Wilson Law Counillors [counselors]— R. D Foster & F M. Higbee to the 12 apostles.— &c as report Says— El[der]— James Blakely [Blakeslee] preahd [preached] up Joseph in the A.M. & P M. joind th[e] anties.— Chas Ivins Bishop—
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Smith's terminology indicates he saw this meeting and the hierarchy that was installed as a separatist movement. He noted those involved were no longer members of the LDS Church and described their organization as a "new chu[r]ch." Smith described William Law as the head of this new church just as Smith was head of LDS Church— implying that Law was president and prophet. The other officers in the organization, as noted by Smith, reflect the leadership structure of general officers in the LDS Church: Austin Cowles and Wilson Law as counselors to William Law, Robert D. Foster and Francis M. Higbee as apostles, and Charles Ivins as bishop.

Smith's description of the April 28 meeting is frequently martialed as evidence that Law established a separatist church with himself as prophet or president. Additional contemporary accounts suggest otherwise. The anti-Mormon paper *The Warsaw Signal* reported the dissenters still used Mormon scripture such as the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants and that "the only essential difference being in relation to the inspiration of Joe Smith. The seceders [sic] believe that Joe *was* a prophet, but that he is now fallen from grace. They have a new prophet, who is William Law." The following week the *Signal* printed a correction after hearing through the grapevine that Law "says no man can assume the Spirit of Prophecy" and denied being a prophet. The *Signal* instead

¹⁴⁴ Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 239.

called Law “President of the New Church.”¹⁴⁵ It appears that the information in neither article was first-hand, but it does indicate Law did not see himself in the same charismatic office as Joseph Smith—he did not claim to be a prophet.

Two accounts left by dissenters seem to corroborate to a degree the theory that the dissenters organized a separatist church. The first is letter from Charles A. Foster published June 12 in the *Daily Evening Gazette* in St. Louis. In speaking of the dissenters Foster wrote, “They early in April last, resolved themselves into a new Society, styled the ‘Reformed Mormon Church,’ and appointed William Law their President.” In the letter, Foster also refers to Smith loyalists as belonging to the “old church party” and the dissenters as the “new party.”¹⁴⁶ Isaac Scott wrote to his in-laws about the “Reformed Mormon Church” (a term he also used) on June 16: “Those who have been thus unlawfully cut off have called a conference; protested against these things; and reorganized the church. William Law is chosen president; Charles Ivans [sic], bishop, with the other necessary officers.”¹⁴⁷ The term “Reformed Mormon Church” could suggest a separatist church, but the phrase “reorganized the church” implies the dissenters saw themselves as fixing (i.e. restoring or reforming) the LDS Church. Scott also describes the officers as “unlawfully cut off” from the LDS Church. This echoes Law’s own statements—made after this April

¹⁴⁵ “Matters and Things at Nauvoo,” *The Warsaw (Illinois) Signal*, May 8, 1844, and, Untitled Editorial, *The Warsaw (Illinois) Signal*, May 15, 1844, in “Warsaw, Hancock County, Warsaw Signal (Message) Jan.-June 1844 Articles,” Uncle Dale’s Readings in Early Mormon History, January 1, 2006, accessed March 12, 2017, <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/IL/sign1844.htm#0508>.

¹⁴⁶ Charles A. Foster to Mr. Editor, letter, June 12, 1844. In *Daily Evening Gazette* (St. Louis, Missouri), June 12, 1844, in “Misc. St. Louis Newspapers, 1844-1849 Articles,” Uncle Dale’s Readings in Early Mormon History, July 24, 2008, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/mo/miscstl3.htm#061244>.

¹⁴⁷ Isaac and Sarah Scott to Calvin and Abigail Hall, letter, June 16, 1844, in “The Death of a Mormon Dictator,” Partridge, 595-96.

reorganization—insisting he was still a member of the LDS Church and had no need to be reinstated.¹⁴⁸

These statements, the *Signal* articles, and Smith’s journal, could be used to support the theory that Law formed a separatist church, but significant additional evidence indicates otherwise. James Blakeslee’s journal clarifies the authority structure of the reform sect and reveals how the dissenters saw themselves. Blakeslee’s account is the most thorough account left by a reformer—and the only one left by an officer—detailing the sect’s authority structure. He wrote:

[O]n the 28th of April A.D. 1844 several of the Saints met in Nauvoo and organized a branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints by duly appointing Presd. Wm. Law presiding Elder and Austin Cowles and James Blakeslee his councillors, [sic] and Charles Ivins Bishop and J.Y. Green and Jacob Scott his councillors, [sic] who together with Presd Law and his councillors [sic] were all ordained and set apart to their respective offices by a unanimous vote. And Br. J.M. Cole was appointed secretary.¹⁴⁹

Blakeslee’s recounting of the sect’s ecclesiastical structure and the terminology used to describe that hierarchy demonstrate the dissenters established a reformed (albeit extralegal) Latter-day Saint congregation within the existing structure of the LDS Church. Most important is Blakeslee’s description of the meeting’s purpose: “the Saints met...and organized a branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.” The term “branch” was used in Latter-day Saint lingo to denominate a jurisdiction subordinate to the church hierarchy of stake leaders and general church officers. Blakeslee did not talk as if he and the others organized a separatist, independent church meant to replace the LDS Church; rather, it was a “branch *of* the Church.” Blakeslee’s use of the terms “presiding elder” and

¹⁴⁸ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 52-53.

¹⁴⁹ Blakeslee, Diary, 39.

“bishop,” pertained to local LDS congregations. For instance, when the Ramus Stake (about twenty miles east and south of Nauvoo) was dissolved in 1841, it became a branch with a presiding elder and a bishop.¹⁵⁰ Though Smith refers to “apostles” and claims that Law replaced himself at the head of the church, Blakeslee—one of the officers in the reform movement—does not reference general officers or a general church hierarchy. His terminology reflects local, subordinate congregations of the LDS Church; indicating the dissenters established a reformed congregation within Smith’s organization (though without his approval) and not a separatist church challenging it.

During the spring of 1844 the dissenters made statements demonstrating they thought of themselves as members of the LDS Church seeking a reformation. William Law’s April 19 journal entry describes his excommunication the previous day “as illegal, and, therefore corrupt.” In May, Law told Rigdon during a reconciliation attempt: “we had not been cut off from the Church legally, and therefore did not ask to be restored.” Of course, Law recognized most general church officers no longer considered him a member of the church, but his point was that the process had not been done as God revealed and was therefore invalid—Law retained church membership. Rigdon supported Law’s claim. Rigdon told Law “he knew the proceedings were illegal and very wrong” and agreed that the church should “publish that fact to the world.”¹⁵¹

At a public preaching meeting at Quincy, Illinois, in May, Blakeslee and a Higbee brother denigrated Smith but reassured the audience they retained membership in the LDS

¹⁵⁰ Smith and Roberts, *History of the Church*, 4:467-68.

¹⁵¹ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 52-53.

Church.¹⁵² If Blakeslee and Higbee organized a competition church, it seems probable they would have portrayed themselves as ambassadors for that organization and not as reformed members of the LDS Church. In his journal, Blakeslee noted they believed “that the Lord would take care of the honest in heart among his people, and cleanse the Church in due time from all iniquity and filthiness.”¹⁵³ Dennison L. Harris echoed this sentiment when he remembered the dissenters telling him they acted for the “protection and salvation of the Church.”¹⁵⁴ These statements show that the dissenters did not view themselves as separatists establishing a competition church—they were internal reformers seeking a purification of the existing organization.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence that the 1844 dissenters considered themselves internal reformers, rather than external separatists comes from their own newspaper. The most blatant evidence is the failure of the *Nauvoo Expositor* to mention the establishment of a new church. In fact, no reference to the April 28 organizational meeting is made at all. Instead, the context of the repeated phrases “this church” or “the church” implied the dissenters retained LDS membership (though LDS authorities had excommunicated William Law, Jane Law, Wilson Law, Robert D. Foster, Francis M. Higbee, Charles Ivins, and Austin Cowles). Surely, if the dissenters placed William Law at the head of a new and competing church, such an important power position would have been mentioned in passing somewhere in their official “Preamble” or “Resolutions.” Concerning the excommunications, the *Expositor* repeated Law’s logic: the ecclesiastical

¹⁵² “The Mormons,” *Quincy* (Illinois) *Whig*, May 22, 1844, in “Adams County, Illinois, Quincy Whig, Herald, &c., 1844 Articles,” Uncle Dale’s Readings in Early Mormon History, January 1, 2006, accessed March 12, 2017, <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/IL/whig1844.htm#0522>.

¹⁵³ Blakeslee, *Diary*, 40.

¹⁵⁴ Harris, *Statement*, 3.

court did not adhere to proper procedure as dictated by revelation in canonized scripture. Because the correct process was not followed the tribunal's actions were "unjust and unauthorized by the laws of the Church, and consequently null and void."¹⁵⁵ The excommunicated dissenters believed themselves to be legitimate members of the LDS Church.

Furthermore, the reformers requested all men with church preaching licenses who knowingly taught doctrine "contrary to the laws of God, or the laws of our country, to cease preaching, and to come and make satisfaction, and have their licenses renewed."¹⁵⁶ While this may have been a symbolic request, it conveyed to the community the belief that the reformers possessed authority to grant official LDS Church preaching licenses. The terminology used by the dissenters, the structure of their sect, statements made while proselytizing, and information from their newspaper lead to the conclusion that the 1844 dissenters did not establish a separatist competition church, but an internal (extralegal) reform sect.

Achieving Reform by Political Means

Political complaints were a significant element of the dissent movement. One primary political goal dominated the minds of the reformers: a detangling of church and state in Nauvoo. The reformers believed this would be accomplished by a repeal of the Nauvoo City Charter and by curbing Joseph Smith's political power and ambitions. The reformers did not shy from their political goals. The *Prospectus of the Nauvoo Expositor*,

¹⁵⁵ "Preamble," and "Resolutions," *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 1.

¹⁵⁶ "Resolutions," *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 1.

published May 10, 1844, prominently featured the political dimensions of the movement. Though the paper would be “open for the admission of all courteous communications of a Religious, Moral, Social, Literary, or Political character” the only topic elaborated in the *Prospectus* was politics. The publishers and editor committed themselves “to oppose, with uncompromising hostility, any *Union of Church and State*, or any preliminary step tending to the same.”¹⁵⁷ The *Prospectus* conveyed in clear terms that political reform was a major arm of the dissent movement.

A simple modification of the existing political structure or adding checks on power in Nauvoo was not enough. No, it was not about pruning dead or sickly branches or nipping problems in the bud—the reformers wanted to yank out the entire tree at its roots. And the roots, in this case, were the powers in the Nauvoo City Charter. The reformers felt it was a “sacred duty” owed to the nation that they work towards “the *UNCONDITIONAL REPEAL OF THE NAUVOO CITY CHARTER*.” The reformers claimed that there were “many *gross abuses exercised under the pretended authorities of the Nauvoo City Charter*, by the legislative authorities of said city; and the unsupportable *oppressions of the Ministerial powers in carrying out the unjust, illegal, and unconstitutional ordinances of the same*.”¹⁵⁸ This was harsh and uncompromising language. The reformers saw Nauvoo’s founding document itself as unconstitutional. At the December 1844 session of the Illinois congress,

¹⁵⁷ Prospectus of the Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor, May 10, 1844, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Prospectus of the Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor, May 10, 1844, 1.

after most dissenters fled Nauvoo, the city's charter was revoked.¹⁵⁹ In this goal, the reformers succeeded.

The frustrations of the reformers were not unwarranted, but their claims that the charter (while it was still in place) was void of authority and composed of unconstitutional ordinances were extreme and cannot be supported. James L. Kimball, Jr., a Mormon historian well-versed in Nauvoo's charter, notes that the only "provision significantly different" in Nauvoo's charter from the other six city charters in Illinois at the time was the ability of the city council to remove city officers "at pleasure" from their office. The similarities among the charters is evidenced by the fifty or more sections (of fifty-seven) in Nauvoo's charter that are near duplicates copied from others. Kimball notes the powers granted in the charters were never "termed 'anti-republican' until the Mormons obtained and used them." The content of the charter was not a problem, but it was "the manner in which it was interpreted and used by the city council" that was at issue.¹⁶⁰

The reformers were most dissatisfied with use of habeas corpus in Nauvoo. Sylvester Emmons (the *Expositor's* editor) and Francis M. Higbee both decried in the *Expositor* the use of habeas corpus by city officials. Higbee wrote, referencing Joseph Smith, "You are voting for a man who refuses to suffer criminals to be brought to justice, but in the stead thereof, rescues them from the just demands of the law, by *Habeas*

¹⁵⁹ Illinois Congress, *Laws of the State of Illinois, Passed By The Fourteenth General Assembly at Their Regular Session, Began and Held at Springfield, December 2nd, 1844* (Springfield: Waters & Weber, Public Printers, 1845), 187-88.

¹⁶⁰ James L. Kimball, Jr., "The Nauvoo Charter: A Reinterpretation," in *Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited: Nauvoo in Mormon History*, eds. Roger D. Launius and John E. Hallwas (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 41, 44-45.

Corpus.”¹⁶¹ Though Higbee implies that such legal maneuvering occurred on multiple occasions, the *Expositor* details only the case of Jeremiah Smith. From 1838 to 1840 Jeremiah operated government-contracted mills in Iowa Territory for which he received no payment. In 1842 and 1843, Jeremiah sought payment in Washington D.C.; the government payed him \$4,000—intended for another Jeremiah Smith of Iowa Territory. Following his arrest, the courts dismissed Jeremiah’s case in February 1844. Additional warrants were issued and authorities arrested him in Nauvoo on May 29, 1844.¹⁶² Before the arrest, however, Mayor Joseph Smith granted a writ of habeas corpus to Jeremiah. This writ allowed him to appear before the municipal court of Nauvoo rather than United States Circuit Court Judge Nathaniel Pope. The Nauvoo court released Jeremiah, thereby infuriating many in the region.¹⁶³

Some of the outraged citizens were the reformers. In their opinions, the case of Jeremiah Smith illustrated the unconstitutional powers in the city charter. How could a local court fine the United States as they did in Jeremiah’s case? How could the federal government remain calm? Would Illinois authorities allow this? The reformers were dumbfounded that a local court intervened to allow a criminal freedom. Nauvoo set a precedent that would lead to corruption. “[T]here is every reason to believe that Nauvoo will become a sink of refuge for every offender who can carry in spoils enough to buy protection,” warned the *Expositor*. The reformers believed Joseph Smith exercised so much

¹⁶¹ Francis M. Higbee to Citizens of Hancock County, letter, June 5, 1844, in *Nauvoo* (Illinois) *Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 3.

¹⁶² Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 449-50.

¹⁶³ Brent M. Rogers, “‘Armed men are coming from the state of Missouri’: Federalism, Interstate Affairs, and Joseph Smith’s Final Attempt to Secure Federal Intervention in Nauvoo,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 109, 2 (Summer 2016): 159.

control in Nauvoo that he could hide criminals.¹⁶⁴ Habeas corpus gave too much power to Nauvoo and Joseph Smith. Their solution was a repeal of the charter.

Proselytizing Efforts of the Reformers

In the late spring of 1844 the dissenters took public action in accomplishing their goals. This was a shift from earlier private activities that garnered little attention. The enactment of the reform included public preaching, proselytizing, publication of a newspaper, and Sabbath worship services. These actions not only reveal a schismatic group's best plans to achieve reform goals, but also the fully formed identity of a schismatic sect seeking reformation.

The first public meeting held by the dissenters was the April 28, 1844 organizational meeting. Some mistakenly identify a public conference on April 21, due to an error in Law's diary. On June 1, Law wrote, "[s]ince our Conference April 21st we have held public meetings every sabbath [sic] day." But Law's entry for April 21 contains no reference to a public or private meeting. In fact, he spent that day getting to the bottom of his excommunication. He wrote to William Marks demanding to know "who our accuser was, what [they] accused [us] of, who the witnesses were, what they proved &c, and by whom we were tried."¹⁶⁵ If the dissenters held a public conference that day, Law certainly would have mentioned it. Additionally, the journals of Joseph Smith and James Blakeslee describe a public conference of the dissenters occurring on April 28 and nothing of significance on April 21, 1844.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Untitled Editorial, *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 3.

¹⁶⁵ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 51, 54-55.

¹⁶⁶ Hedges, *Journals Volume 3: May 1843-June 1844*, 293; Blakeslee, Diary, 39.

Descriptions of the April 28 meeting place it in the tradition of conferences of the LDS Church. Such conferences were public meetings intended for the entire body of church membership; these meeting prominently featured the presenting of church officers. Three dissenters (William Law, James Blakeslee, and Isaac Scott) term the April 28 meeting a conference—indicating it was a large, public gathering. The primary purpose of the meeting was installing officers and appointing a proselytizing committee to expand the reform branch’s membership. Blakeslee noted the officers “were all ordained and set apart to their respective offices by unanimous vote.”¹⁶⁷ Utilizing the voices of those present to sustain officers echoes the practice of traditional LDS Church conferences.

The April 28 meeting launched a public proselytizing campaign. Previously, dissenters privately invited recruits into their circle, but now they publicly went from family to family in Nauvoo seeking to instill reformist tendencies. Joseph Smith recorded the names of the Nauvoo proselytizing committee: “Austin D Cowles[,] John Scott sen. [should read Jacob Scott sen.,] Francis M. Higbee, D D. Foster [Robert D. Foster] and Robert Pie[r]ce.”¹⁶⁸ The committee presumed Nauvoo’s citizenry would revolt when the Smith family’s “folly and wickedness” was exposed; however, no rising in the streets occurred. Law reported some LDS Church members “say they will follow [Joseph Smith] to Hell if he goes there.” Law recognized the dissenters represented a minority in Nauvoo, but they had no fear, trusted God, and felt “determined to oppose iniquity and vindicate truth.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 54; Blakeslee, Diary, 39; Isaac and Sarah Scott to Calvin and Abigail Hall, letter, June 16, 1844, in “The Death of a Mormon Dictator,” Partridge, 595-96.

¹⁶⁸ Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 293.

¹⁶⁹ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 52.

Proselytizing reached into the surrounding countryside and extended at least as far as Quincy. A Quincy paper described James Blakeslee's and Francis M. Higbee's preaching: "[T]hey painted [Joseph] Smith, as any thing [sic] but the Saint he claims to be—and as a man, to the last degree, corrupt in his morals and religion." Blakeslee and Higbee called Smith a "rough customer" and denounced polygamy.¹⁷⁰ Smith loyalist John P. Green rebutted the reformers' claims and later complained to Smith that Blakeslee and Higbee were "abusing Joseph. & the 12" at the courthouse in Quincy.¹⁷¹ The *Warsaw Signal* summarized a Sabbath meeting: "Law preached in Nauvoo, and in the severest terms denounced Smith, for his arbitrary and immoral conduct." Law's language convinced the editor of the *Signal* that the break between Law and Smith was permanent though others thought otherwise.¹⁷²

Reporting on another Sabbath meeting in May, the *Signal* described success for the reform branch. "On last Sunday, there were about three hundred assembled at Mr. Law's house in Nauvoo, and listened with much seeming pleasure to a sermon from Elder Blakely [sic]." Blakeslee spoke on the unification of church and state in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith's polygamy, and described Smith as a "fallen Prophet." Francis M. Higbee read resolutions and affidavits "testifying to Joe's villainy" and called for withdrawing fellowship from Smith. Law "gave his reasons in strong language" for breaking with Smith. Despite the severe rupture with Smith, the dissenters reaffirmed their belief in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants.¹⁷³ These reports corroborate Harris's recollection that two

¹⁷⁰ "The Mormons," *Quincy (Illinois) Whig*, May 22, 1844.

¹⁷¹ Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 248.

¹⁷² "Matters and Things at Nauvoo," *The Warsaw (Illinois) Signal*, May 8, 1844.

¹⁷³ Untitled Editorial, *The Warsaw (Illinois) Signal*, May 15, 1844.

hundred dissenters privately gathered to oppose Smith for the “protection and salvation of the church.”¹⁷⁴ The extensive proselytizing efforts demonstrate the dissent movement embraced the identity of a schismatic sect intended to publicly reform Mormonism. The reform sect sought to maintain a Mormon identity distinct from Joseph Smith’s identity.

Identity Embodied in the Press

The 1844 reformers solidified a unique identity by producing a newspaper, titled *Nauvoo Expositor*, at church headquarters in Illinois. Printing the paper unified the dissenters and portrayed them as an organized collective. In the *Expositor*, the dissenters organized their ideas and defined their boundaries—it represented their identity. The paper gave the dissenters a unified message and was a banner calling others to the reformation movement. Publication of an inflammatory dissenting paper enraged the Mormon community, most of whom were Joseph Smith loyalists. To the community, the paper symbolized the dissenters and their distasteful identity. Destroying the *Expositor* and its press was an act intended to pragmatically end the dissent movement and symbolically rid Nauvoo—“a beautiful situation” as the word meant to the Saints—of a group identified as unsavory.

Printing the Expositor, Forging Identity

The most important tool for the reform sect’s proselytizing efforts was the publication of a newspaper. But the paper was more than just a tool for spreading ideas—it also forged their distinct identity. The dissenters released the *Prospectus of the Nauvoo*

¹⁷⁴ Harris, Statement, 3.

Expositor on May 10, 1844; less than two weeks after their public organizational meeting in April. As discussed above, the *Prospectus* billed the upcoming newspaper as one concerned mostly with political matters. Several American ideals were important to the publishers: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state. Religious and moral issues were entangled with the political abuses. The *Prospectus* decried “political revelations” and “moral imperfections.” The *Expositor* would be printed weekly on Fridays for at least one year. The paper employed Sylvester Emmons as editor and enlisted six publishers: William Law, Wilson Law, Charles Ivins, Francis M. Higbee, Chauncey L. Higbee, Robert D. Foster, and Charles A. Foster.¹⁷⁵ These men set themselves apart from the community in a unified fashion with the public promise of an upcoming paper; the *Prospectus* established boundaries marking the group identity as pure and moral while others in the community were corrupt and immoral.

The *Expositor* appeared June 7, exactly four weeks after the *Prospectus*, as promised. William Law expressed his excitement: “This day the Nauvoo Expositor goes forth to the world, rich with facts, such expositions as make the guilty tremble and rage.” They printed one-thousand copies and immediately sent out five-hundred.¹⁷⁶ The dissenters had grand visions for the paper. James Blakeslee saw it as a means “to send the truth more speedily to the world.”¹⁷⁷ Law described its purpose as “set[ting] forth deeds of the most dark, cruel and damning eve perpetrated by any people under the name of religion since the world began.”¹⁷⁸ The paper itself stated “[w]e are earnestly seeking to explode the

¹⁷⁵ *Prospectus of the Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, May 10, 1844, 1.

¹⁷⁶ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 55.

¹⁷⁷ Blakeslee, Diary, 39.

¹⁷⁸ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 55.

vicious principles of Joseph Smith, and those who practice the same abominations and whoredoms [sic]...[to] enjoy those glorious privileges which nature's God and our country's laws have guaranteed [sic]us."¹⁷⁹ Isaac Scott wrote his in-laws that he would send them the *Expositor* so they could "judge for themselves."¹⁸⁰ Embodied in the pages of the *Expositor* were all the complaints from the dissenters; it represented the identity of the reform movement and served as a rallying point where like-minded people could coalesce into a mass distinct from the mother community.

The *Expositor* contained four sheets of six columns each with a variety of subject matter, but mostly pertaining to the movement's goal of religious and political reform. Articles in the paper lambasted Joseph and Hyrum Smith on their political activities, published a list of Joseph's court cases, and accused Joseph of misuse of habeas corpus. Articles reprinted from other newspapers cast the dissenters and the *Expositor* in a good light. Other reprinted articles discussed the need for separation of church and state—leaving the reader to draw parallels with Nauvoo. Several individuals with rocky relationships with Smith or the LDS Church placed advertisements and notices: William Law and Wilson Law; Sylvester Emmons; Chauncey L. Higbee; Robert D. Foster; John M. Finch (non-LDS Nauvoo merchant who likely attended dissent meetings and participated in mob violence against the LDS Church);¹⁸¹ Augustine Spencer (non-LDS Nauvoo citizen fined by Mayor Joseph Smith for a physical confrontation and then wrote

¹⁷⁹ "Preamble," *Nauvoo* (Illinois) *Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 1.

¹⁸⁰ Isaac and Sarah Scott to Calvin and Abigail Hall, letter, June 16, 1844, in "The Death of a Mormon Dictator," Partridge, 596.

¹⁸¹ Bradshaw, "There's the Boy I can Trust," 99n108; Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 405.

a popular letter disparaging Smith);¹⁸² and Lucinda Sagers (whose husband had committed adultery, likely in connection with Bennett's scandal).¹⁸³ Most importantly, the *Expositor* published the preamble, resolutions, and affidavits from the reform branch setting forth their complaints and goals.

In publishing the *Expositor*, the dissenters told the Nauvoo community—and they hoped the world—that they existed as an organized body pushing back against Smith and the political and religious abuses they perceived. Included in the pages of the *Expositor* were all the items that made their identity distinct from the identity of the larger Mormon community. They still believed in “the religion of the Latter Day Saints,” but as it was “originally taught by Joseph Smith.” They believed in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants. But Joseph Smith was now hypocritical, oppressive, immoral, and a teacher of false doctrines, they told their readers. Putting their ideas to paper actualized and delineated the movement's otherness. Boldly disseminating their ideology in a physical format signaled the group's fixed identity. Private reformation within the church did not work, now was the time to make the reformation public.¹⁸⁴ The *Expositor* allowed the reform movement to express and strengthen their identity by increasing the movement's numbers and resolve.

¹⁸² Richard W. Sadler and Claudia S. Sadler, “Augustine Spencer: Nauvoo Gentile, Joseph Smith Antagonist,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 12, 2 (Fall 2011): 33-35.

¹⁸³ Bergera, “Illicit Intercourse,” 88-90; Gary James Bergera, “Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841-1844,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, 3 (2006): 3n4.

¹⁸⁴ “Preamble,” *Nauvoo (Illinois) Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 1.

Obliterating the Expositor, Destroying Identity

The decision to destroy the *Expositor* and its press came after two days of extremely intense city council meetings. The first meeting, lasting from 10:00 AM to 6:30 PM on Saturday June 8 (the day after the *Expositor* was published), was primarily concerned with complaints and accusations depicting the bad character of the dissenters; though some discussion about how to stop the *Expositor* did occur. The second meeting lasted for seven hours on Monday June 10. In this meeting, the characters of the dissenters were again brought up, the legal options for destroying the *Expositor* were explored, and the council resolved—citing laws on public nuisances—to destroy the paper and press. This is important because the legal logic behind destruction of the press/paper was only connected to the character of the dissenters by the libel that they produced. Thus, numerous emotional reasons urged the councilmen to destroy the printing establishment, but the decision rested on (in their opinion) legal ground.

Minutes from the meetings reveal two factors pertaining to identity and the dissenters. First, the city council's accusations about the character of the dissenters reveals the community perceived a distinct identity between themselves and the reformers. The individual identities—the characters—of the dissenters were corrupt and immoral, reasoned the councilmen, and therefore different than their own. Second, the destruction of the paper and press was not only a practical way to end the *Expositor*, but it was also a symbolic move to erase the dissent movement from the city. Such a move signaled to the Mormon community (including the dissenters) that the identity and influence of the reform movement was incorrect, unwanted, and unneeded.

Throughout the two days of meetings, the city council offered their own anecdotes and took testimonies from others concerning the bad character of the dissidents. Whether all accusations were true is not known, but the city council minutes show that Joseph Smith loyalists reciprocated the dissenters' charges of immorality. Disparaging the dissenters' characters facilitated the formation of a distinct (and unwanted) identity of the dissent movement, and by implication the *Expositor*. Some dissenters were ungrateful and hypocritical. Sylvester Emmons (a recipient of financial support from Nauvoo citizens) helped create the city ordinances as a councilman, but now cried they were unconstitutional. Others were dishonest like Joseph H. Jackson who was accused of theft and declaring he would live by robbery. Robert D. Foster attempted reconciliation with Joseph Smith under false pretenses and then lied about Smith in public. William Law stole flour from Peter Haws—nearly causing the Haws family to starve. Recalling this infuriated Haws so much “he could not say one word[,] [he] was boiling over.” Jackson was a violent person. He made threats to murder Joseph Smith and threatened to kill anyone who tried to stop him from kidnapping Hyrum Smith's daughter.¹⁸⁵

The character disparaging continued. The dissenters were rampant counterfeiters. Testimony was offered proving the Laws possessed counterfeiting dies; Joseph H. Jackson was a counterfeiter who tried enlisting others by implying that the Laws (“men high in the church” but not Joseph Smith) engaged in the practice. Francis M. Higbee tried to recruit counterfeiters by showing them fake bills. The dissenters were misers and cruel to the poor. Hyrum Smith wondered what good the Fosters, Higbees, or Laws ever did for the

¹⁸⁵ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 238-66.

community—they oppressed the poor and Hyrum protected them from the community's anger. At one point, William Law took Joseph Smith's last forty dollars to recover a debt. Law threatened to imprison the poor in the city for debts nearly (but not completely) resolved. Andrew L. Lamoreaux fed the starving poor (from his own pocket and credit at Law's mercantile store) when driven from Missouri. Law demanded Lamoreaux pay his credit in cash—which had all been spent on feeding the poor—and refused to accept property as payment. Later Lamoreaux provided Law food to feed the poor at an Independence Day feast hosted by Robert D. Foster. Law gave the food out as if it was his own—not mentioning the generosity of Lamoreaux.¹⁸⁶

Perhaps most distressing to the city council was the sexual immorality displayed by the dissenters. Francis M. Higbee admitted to Hyrum Smith he had syphilis. Extensive testimony proved Wilson Law's alleged promiscuity as well. Wilson courted an orphaned girl, sixteen or seventeen years of age, who was warned by her employer about Wilson's character. Eventually the girl confessed that Wilson seduced her, but she promised to do right. Regardless, she slept with Wilson again. Hyrum Smith reported that when William Law was sick—perhaps believing he was on his deathbed—admitted he was “guilty of adultery & was not fit to live or die, [he] had sinned against his own soul.” Crossed from the record was Joseph Smith's characterization of the Laws: “Mayor said if he had kept a whore from Canada here and since & had done every thing [sic] [he] would have been as good a man as William & Wilson Law.” The city council believed these men were corrupt and immoral. The flaws in their characters were manifest in the past and now that same

¹⁸⁶ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 238-66.

bad character was found in the pages of the *Expositor*—the physical representation of the dissent movement.¹⁸⁷

Equally distressing to the councilmen were the instances of libel in the *Expositor*. The content of the paper would stir up trouble, destroy the peace, and incite mobs. Joseph Smith read William Law's statement in the *Expositor* and said "the truth of God was transformed into a lie" by Law. The dissenters only wanted what happened in Missouri: "to raise a mob on us and take the spoil." Austin Cowles's statements were equally ridiculous and false, the Smith brothers said. Joseph and Hyrum discussed plural marriage and their claim that Cowles gave a false statement turned into a defense of the celestial marriage revelation and sealing rituals. The councilmen also labeled the *Expositor*'s article on habeas corpus as false.¹⁸⁸

The libel and incendiary rhetoric in the *Expositor* would cause a repeat of the horrors in Missouri. The councilmen remembered the Missouri mobs. Council recorder Phineas Richards recalled the dreadfulness of the massacre at Hawn's Mill where his fifteen-year-old son was killed. Evidence of violence was already in Nauvoo. William Law once led a dozen men to Joseph Smith's home late at night, Smith and Daniel Cairns testified, to extradite him to Missouri—Smith was afraid he would be killed if he returned to that state. Death threats were issued against Joseph and Nauvoo women were afraid to go to Hancock County's seat in Carthage. Joseph made two statements to the council that proved to prophetic: "[I]t will not be 5 years before this city [is] in ashes and we [will be]

¹⁸⁷ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 238-66.

¹⁸⁸ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 238-66.

in our Gore.” He also stated that “he would rather die tomorrow and have the thing [meaning the *Expositor* and its press] smashed, than live and have it grow.”¹⁸⁹

In the dramatic closing minutes of the meeting William W. Phelps rallied the room in a thrilling manner. Phelps expressed anger (referencing the orphaned servant) that Wilson Law had destroyed “the Character of a child.” The room cheered when Phelps asked if anyone in the room “wanted to avenge the [virginal] blood of that Innocent female.” Phelps alluded to the Tea Party in Boston. The room cheered “No!!!” when asked if they were restricting anybody’s rights. Phelps reminded the room that the Laws mistreated the poor and that they must take “active measures to put down iniquity.” A resolution to demolish the *Expositor*’s press was read and passed by the council. Rubbing salt in the wound, the petition of ten men (including dissenter Jacob Scott’s son John) to have Robert D. Foster’s barn removed was read and passed by the city. The barn and its premise was apparently full of filth and was “a Perfect Nuisance, and dangerous to the health of citizens.” Phelps called on the emotion of the men, worked up over two days of character disparagement, and relied on legal logic that no rights were restricted to convince the council to remove the press.¹⁹⁰

Fourteen years previous when the LDS Church had just been organized Hiram Page’s prophetic voice rose from within, emanated from the medium of his small black seer stone, and found material expression on a few manuscript pages. This voice competed with Joseph Smith’s own prophetic voice and threatened to rip apart the small church of

¹⁸⁹ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 238-66.

¹⁹⁰ Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 261-66.

only sixty-two members.¹⁹¹ In response, Smith ground the stone to powder and burned the manuscript—destroying the physical representation of dissent in his church. Again, in 1842 when Francis Gladden Bishop preached in Nauvoo’s streets, challenging Smith’s prophetic leadership, his manuscript revelations were taken before an ecclesiastical council and burned under Smith’s direction.¹⁹² In 1844, when the dissenters rose up against Smith, offering perhaps the most serious challenge to his leadership yet, he reacted again to destroy the physical representation of the challenge. The foul press symbolized the flawed identities of the malcontents—eradicating the city of the press symbolized putting an end to the dissenters.

The destruction of the *Expositor*’s press—a scene unmatched in Nauvoo—occurred while several of the publishers were away from Nauvoo. The dissenters were incensed. In the evening of June 10 William Law wrote his perspective of what transpired. Carthage citizens invited the Law brothers with Robert D. Foster and Charles Ivins to speak “on the subject of Nauvoo legislation, usurpation &c &c.” that day. A big crowd was expected. William expressed his confidence to the audience in the rule of law to resolve the problems in Nauvoo. He called for patience and told the crowd that mob violence would accomplish nothing—it would only “create a false sympathy” for Joseph Smith. While speaking to the Carthaginians, someone warned Law the destruction of the press was imminent but he thought the warning was preposterous. “I could not even suspect men of being such fools,” wrote Law, “but to my utter astonishment tonight upon returning from Carthage to Nauvoo I found our press had actually been demolished.” Law was told that the marshal forced the

¹⁹¹ Romig, *Eighth Witness*, 79-82.

¹⁹² Hedges, *Journals Volume 2*, 43-44.

establishment's door open, smashed the type and press in the street, and created a bonfire on top of the press with the office's tables, desks, and papers. Reportedly, the marshal threatened to burn the homes of the proprietors if they caused trouble. Law reflected on the day's events: "Our absence on that occasion was perhaps for the best as it may have saved the shedding [sic] of blood."¹⁹³

The reaction from dissenter Isaac Scott, written less than a week following the press's destruction, reveals the anger and contempt he held for Joseph Smith and his loyalists. In a letter to his in-laws he sarcastically called Nauvoo a "*land of boasted liberty*, this Sanctum-Sanctorum of all the Earth." Scott did not think that holiness and freedom truly existed in Nauvoo. When it came to the destruction of the press Scott was livid:

Joseph and his clan could not bear the truth to come out; so after the first number came out Joseph called his Sanhedrin together; tried the press; condemned it as a nuisance and ordered the city marshal to take three hundred armed men and go and burn the press, and if any offered resistance, to *rip them from the guts to the gizzard*. These are his own words. They went and burnt the press, papers, and household furniture.¹⁹⁴

James Blakeslee, writing several months later, was equally upset but more optimistic. He noted the order to destroy the press was carried out by "the (would be) good, virtuous, law abiding citizens of Nauvoo" which caused "no small stir among the citizens." But Blakeslee saw the destruction of the press as beneficial: "I have no doubt but that it served to open the eyes of many of the honest in heart to the true character of that people

¹⁹³ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 55-56.

¹⁹⁴ Isaac and Sarah Scott to Calvin and Abigail Hall, letter, June 16, 1844, in "The Death of a Mormon Dictator," Partridge, 594-95.

in their fallen state.”¹⁹⁵ The dissenters saw the actions of the city council as additional evidence of the corrupt nature of the religiously drenched government of Nauvoo.

The 1844 reform sect’s group identity began with social and formal estrangement enacted through gossip and church judicial processes. Dissent spread through social networks and early meetings of the dissenters were done in private. The dissenters did not establish a separatist church, but an extralegal branch of the LDS Church set towards political and religious reform in Nauvoo. Beginning in late April, the dissenters went public with their reform goals and undertook traditional proselytizing efforts. The *Nauvoo Expositor* embodied the reform sect’s identity and the city council sought to defeat that identity by destroying the dissenters’ characters and paper.

¹⁹⁵ Blakeslee, Diary, 39.

CHAPTER 4
TURBULENT ENVIRONMENTS: MANAGING IDENTITY
DURING EXTREME RELIGIOUS RUPTURE

Chapters two and three examined identity formation in schismatic sects. This fourth chapter continues our Mormon case study by investigating the ways a schismatic sect strengthens its distinctiveness and manages identity when the religious community around it explodes. Several factors are discussed: 1) The fashioning of theological centers and peripheries in Mormonism and their effect on schismatic identities. 2) Management of distinct identities when competing sects come into contact. 3) Evolution of distinct identities during a time of rupture. 4) The various reactions of dissenters to an elongated period of rupture. Some dissenters leave the religious scene almost immediately and others linger during the rupture, but some continue an earnest search for a church organization embracing ideals matching their own. This chapter describes the foundational role the 1844 reformers played in the formation of Sidney Rigdon's Church of Christ.¹⁹⁶ Lastly, the tenacious reformers searching for original Mormonism during the turbulent Succession Crisis found the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints most closely represented the Mormonism they sought.

¹⁹⁶ Larry C. Porter is perhaps the scholar who comes closest to the assertion. His chapter, as an aside to the activities of William E. McLellin, references William Law, James Blakeslee, Austin Cowles, and Joseph M. Cole as all having connections with Rigdon, but does not explore in depth their role in forming Rigdon's church. See: Larry C. Porter, "The Odyssey of William Earl McLellin: Man of Diversity, 1806-83," in *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831-1836*, eds. Jan Shipps and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1994), 331-37, 371n227-228.

Identity Maintenance in the Face of Rupture

This section investigates the continued solidification of the reform sect's distinct identity through geographic removal and while Mormonism experienced a religious rupture—caused by the assassination of Joseph Smith—that tore the community apart. Mormon centers and peripheries were vital to the rupture and the several group identities. Identities in Mormonism were inextricably tied to geographic centers and central leaders. Thus, when Smith was killed and expulsion threatened the LDS Church, the very identity of Mormonism was at stake. Because Nauvoo represented everything wrong about Mormonism to the reform sect, they physically removed themselves from that Mormon center before the general expulsion. Removal enabled a more distinct identity and marked the boundary between reformed Mormons and the “church at Nauvoo.” The reformers' reactions to Smith's death and the Succession Crisis show that though they were distinct from the church at Nauvoo, the reformers still saw themselves as a part of the larger Mormon community.

Geographic Removal and Identity Formation

Violence against the printing establishment and rumors of impending bodily violence caused the reformers to fear for their safety. Blakeslee recorded in his diary fear that the violence enacted against the *Expositor* would also “wreak its vengeance on our persons.”¹⁹⁷ Law's fears were similar. On June 11 Law heard rumors “that a combination is entered into to take away our lives (Law's & Foster).”¹⁹⁸ Law's term “combination” (a

¹⁹⁷ Blakeslee, Diary, 39.

¹⁹⁸ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 56.

contemporary term denoting conspiracy used repeatedly in the Book of Mormon connoting Satan-fathered wickedness) indicates he believed an organized effort, not a lone angry individual, would end his life.

Law believed city authorities banned speech disrespectful of the city's ordinances, charter, or citizens. Disrespectful speech was punishable by a \$500 fine and six-months imprisonment. This was a government-sanctioned conspiracy, Law thought, to seize property and to "get us into their prisons to take away our lives." City council minutes show the ordinance pertained to slander or libel against citizens—notably different than simply speaking "disrespectfully." The council carefully acted within legal bounds and noted due process and constitutional rights would be upheld.¹⁹⁹ Destruction of the printing establishment partially justified Law's fears, but his remarks reveal a degree of paranoia.

Law's paranoia about Smith's murderous plans persisted throughout his life. In 1887, Law described the assassination attempt against Lilburn W. Boggs as orchestrated by Smith. Robert D. Foster and Law believed Smith arranged the fatal poisoning of his secretaries James Mulholland (a Scott son-in-law) and Robert B. Thompson. Law watched Mulholland die in 1839 "and the symptoms looked very suspicious." When asked why they were killed, Law, smiling, replied "[t]hey knew too much, probably."²⁰⁰ Emma Smith's 1839 letter to her husband describes Mulholland's death (which occurred in her home) as a tragedy, but does not suggest foul play.²⁰¹ After Law's public interview, the Scott family

¹⁹⁹ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 56; Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 259, 263-65.

²⁰⁰ William Law, interview by Wilhelm Wyle, March 30, 1887, in *William Law*, Cook, 118.

²⁰¹ Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, letter, December 6, 1839, The Joseph Smith Papers, 2017, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-from-emma-smith-6-december-1839/1>.

adamantly refuted rumors of Mulholland's poisoning; brain fever took his life after the Missouri persecutions. "We never heard from friend or foe," testified William and Mary (Scott) Warnock, "till now, that he was poisoned."²⁰² These accounts suggest Law's bitterness and paranoia grew over time.

Law told the 1887 interviewer poison threatened his own life in Nauvoo, but was spared because he forewent Smith's dinner party where the murder would occur. Law also thought Smith sent nearly two dozen Native Americans to kill him. The Law brothers and their friends "kept good watch all night, with barricaded windows and doors and guns and pistols" to defend themselves, but nothing happened. Apparently, the Native Americans were harmless.²⁰³ Though time or the anti-Mormon interviewer may have distorted or dramatized Law's 1887 reminiscence, he and Blakeslee's contemporary diaries indicate they were afraid for their property and lives. The identities of the reform sect and the larger Mormon community were at such odds that physical safety was at stake.

On June 11, the threats of violence compelled the dissenters to counsel together on "the best method to save the honest in heart. The group determined it "wisdom to retire from the midst of a den of robbers, and murderers."²⁰⁴ Their exodus began the following day and the families packed belongings immediately. While friends helped pack, William and Wilson defiantly rode through Nauvoo. How many dissenters fled the city in mid-June is not known, but at least eight families (primarily reform leaders) did leave. Packing their

²⁰² William Warnock and Mary Warnock, Affidavit, September 26, 1892, in *The Saints Herald* (Lamoni, Iowa), October 29, 1892, 698.

²⁰³ William Law, interview by Wilhelm Wyle, March 30, 1887, in *William Law*, Cook, 118-119, 120-21.

²⁰⁴ Blakeslee, Diary, 39; William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 56.

belongings into wagons and carriages, the families boarded a steamboat in Nauvoo bound for Iowa Territory's young capitol in Burlington, a journey of approximately thirty-miles. The trip was rainy and much of their belongings were not protected from the weather—or the passengers. Darkness came and the steamboat stayed a night on the river. The dissenters reached Burlington in the late afternoon of June 13.²⁰⁵

Upon arrival, the dissenters retained rooms at the Western Hotel and stored belongings in a warehouse on the river. Law was grateful (despite being unable to rent a home at a decent price) to leave Nauvoo: “We feel very thankful to God for his kind deliverance, and g[o]odness in preserving our lives.” The blessings continued when Jane (Silverthorn) Law woke up in labor at 3:30 in the morning of June 14. Jane delivered, with Dr. Robert D. Foster's help, “a fine boy” an hour later. Jane's early labor came because she “suffered great fatigue and anxiety,” wrote William, “from our leaving home so suddenly.” For her travails the Lord blessed her, the Laws thought, with an easier labor and recovery than usual. That afternoon the dissenters found ten rooms (perhaps indicating a total of ten families in the group) at the National Hotel which they rented for a month. Jane Law stayed with her newborn at the Western Hotel for three days and then traveled the quarter mile to the National Hotel—after childbirth she was usually laid up for two weeks.²⁰⁶

The dissenters saw God's hand in protecting them and bringing them out of Nauvoo. The circumstances surrounding the flight from that place were “most bitter and wounding to our feelings.” Nauvoo was a “den of robbers, and murderers” and “worse than

²⁰⁵ Wilson Law, Affidavit, August 28, 1848, in “Wilson Law: A Sidelight on the *Expositor* Incident,” Steven G. Barnett, *Brigham Young University Studies* 19, 2 (Winter 1979): 244-46; William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 56-57.

²⁰⁶ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 57-59.

Sodom.” In their minds, the flight from wickedness was analogous to the stories of Lehi in the Book of Mormon or Lot in the Old Testament. When in Nauvoo, the dissenters developed an identity related to, but distinct from, the Mormon community. They wanted a reformation to “original Mormonism.” Their efforts in Nauvoo seemed fruitless. In fleeing Nauvoo, the dissenters put physical distance between themselves and what they detested. The reformers no longer intermingled with old (corrupt) associates. Geographic separation established physical boundaries. Physical separation from Nauvoo allowed the dissenters to cultivate and maintain a distinct identity.

Community Rupture and Cohesion

A mob murdered Joseph and Hyrum Smith in the late afternoon of June 27, 1844. The assassination threw the Mormon community into a state of shock. Apostles John Taylor and Willard Richards, who survived the mob that killed the Smiths, advised members of the LDS Church to remain calm and not take violent vengeance. The cries of the Mormon people were heard from every street.²⁰⁷ One Nauvoo citizen wrote about learning of the murders, “morning [of June 28] I met O.P. Rockwell coming with his horse upon the run through the City holloing, Joseph is killed! Joseph is killed! They have killed him[!] They have killed him! God damn them they have killed him. Every man[,] woman[,] and child were in mourning.”²⁰⁸ The violence enacted against their leaders could very well be enacted on the community as a whole. The mobs threatened to expel the Mormon people

²⁰⁷ Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace*, 398-400; Nathan C. Cheney to Charles Beebe, letter, June 28-29, 1844, Nathan C. Cheney Papers, 1844-1848, MS 480, fd 1. CHL.

²⁰⁸ Ethan L. Call and Christine Shaffer Call, ed., *The Journal of Anson Call* (Afton, Wyoming: n.p., 1986), 28.

from their Zion with a temple on the hill. The murders left the Mormon people without a clearly designated leader and a fear of forced removal—the LDS Church ruptured.

Over the course of his life, Joseph Smith opened doors to at least eight options for succession to his ecclesiastical office. This was not an elaborate back-up plan, but a confusing set of differing instructions. Historian D. Michael Quinn summarized the methods:

- 1) a counselor in the First Presidency,
- 2) a special appointment,
- 3) an Associate President,
- 4) the Presiding Patriarch,
- 5) the Council of Fifty,
- 6) the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,
- 7) three priesthood councils,
- 8) a descendant of Joseph Smith, Jr.²⁰⁹

Various succession claimants arose within Mormonism in the weeks, months, and years after the fateful assassinations. The competing leaders usually established competing gathering places. By providing the Mormon people a leader and new Zion, the succession claimants hoped to restore to the scattered Saints their proper identity. Though some leaders gained massive followings (Brigham Young most notably), the unification attempts failed to bring all Mormon people into a cohesive body. As more leaders staked their claims—literally and figuratively—more factions formed. Instead of ultimate cohesion, Mormonism achieved ultimate rupture.

When the mob assassinated the Smith brothers and while the Mormons in Hancock County despaired, the reform sect looked for a relocation spot where they could maintain

²⁰⁹ D. Michael Quinn, “The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 16, 2 (Winter 1976): 187.

their distinct identity. News of the double-murder in Carthage spread like wildfire through the region. Some of the reformers, who were conducting business in nearby Fort Madison, Iowa, learned of the event the morning of June 28. The news bewildered the dissenters. William Law recorded the group's reaction: "We could hardly believe it possible, and the manner of it was the most astonishing part of it all." In July, Law wrote to his friend Isaac Hill about the murders: "I look on calmly, and while the wicked slay the wicked, I believe I can see the hand of a blasphemed God stretched out in judgment, the cries of innocence [sic] and virtue, have ascended up before the throne of God, and he has taken sudden vengeance." Having spent months trying to reform Mormonism, the dissenters sympathized little for the men they thought polluted their beloved faith: "During the latter part of their lives they knew no mercy, and in their last moments they found none. Thus the wicked may prosper for a time, but the hour of retribution is sure to overtake them." Law called Smith a servant of Satan, one of the false prophets foretold by Jesus.²¹⁰

A powerful leadership vacuum overtook the LDS Church sucking in many claimants to Joseph's position of power after his death. But Law avoided the dash for church-wide power and authority. His last journal entry, made June 28, 1844, disparaged Smith in the harshest tone found in his journal, but he did not write about being Smith's successor—he felt his work was done.²¹¹ In fact, none of Law's later extent letters or his interview mention taking up Smith's leadership position; evidence that Law saw himself as an internal reformer and not one usurping Smith's office during his life or filling the

²¹⁰ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 60-61; William Law to Isaac Hill, letter, 20 July 1844, MS 3473. CHL.

²¹¹ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 60-61.

void after his death. Perhaps the most significant evidence comes from James Blakeslee's August 1844 letter to fellow dissenter Jacob Scott (who fled to his prior home in Canada):

Thus you see, sir, that the church is left without an earthly head, unless the promise of the Lord shall be fulfilled, which saith, that if he removed Joseph, he would appoint another in his stead. But as this has not yet been done, what is the church to do?²¹²

Blakeslee named several succession options available to the Mormon community, but none was William Law.²¹³ If, in the summer of 1844, Law believed he was ordained as president and prophet of the church, the opportune moment to publicly assume that position had arrived. The 1844 reformers did not view William Law as president of the LDS Church nor their reform branch organized in April as a reorganization of, or replacement to, the church's general leadership structure. William Law was not a Smith replacement nor was he a Smith successor.

With the loss of their head, the Mormon community broke and their identity shook. Without Joseph Smith, anti-Mormon locals thought the LDS Church would dissipate.²¹⁴ The community sought to retain Smith's identity by picking up and continuing his

²¹² James Blakeslee to Jacob Scott, letter, August 16, 1844, in "Succession in the Presidency," ed. Heman C. Smith, *Journal of History* 2, 1 (January 1909): 304. Efforts to locate the original letter at the Community of Christ Library and Archives and the LDS Church History Library have been unsuccessful, though the substantial portion preserved in Heman C. Smith's 1909 article is interesting: "But alas, what a change one year has made. Even the space of about one year, or a little more, has successfully introduced into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, a sufficient amount of false doctrine, to deceive and lead away nearly all the church at Nauvoo, while the Prophet and Patriarch of the church have been barbarously murdered by the hand of a gang of demons in human shape. Thus you see, sir, that the church is left without an earthly head, unless the promise of the Lord shall be fulfilled, which saith, that if he removed Joseph, he would appoint another in his stead. But as this has not yet been done, what is the church to do? Now sir, if I have been correctly informed, some of the members of the church at Nauvoo, want Stephen Markham for their head, and others Sidney Rigdon, and others President Marks, and others Little Joseph, and others B. Young, and some others P. P. Pratt, and if they can all have their choice, we shall soon have a multiplicity of churches of Latter Day Saints."

²¹³ James Blakeslee to Jacob Scott, letter, August 16, 1844, in "Succession in the Presidency," Smith, 304.

²¹⁴ Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, 307-8.

prophetic projects. Decades later, supporters of Brigham Young even remembered Young looking and sounding like Smith—donning his identity—at a pivotal meeting in August 1844. Succession claimants took up the torch of different prophetic projects, seeking something on which they could rebuild identity.²¹⁵ As Mormons coalesced around competing leaders and projects, individuals united but the Mormon community divided. The reform sect’s reaction places them as a part of the confused community—waiting for a head of the church, waiting for someone reflecting an “original Mormonism.” The reformers saw this period of confusion as the moment when God would reform the identity of the church. Joseph Smith, the polluter of Mormonism in their eyes, was gone and the church could reform to an original Mormon identity.

Centers and Peripheries in Identity Formation

The succession crisis brought into focus issues of centers and peripheries in Mormonism. Two types of centers impacted the unfolding of the succession battle. The physical location of church headquarters at Nauvoo was the first center. The second was a figurative center built around access to ritual performance. These centers overlapped significantly because, in most instances, esoteric ritual performance occurred at church headquarters. In addition to these centers, formal ecclesiastical inclusion and exclusion apparatuses pulled people to and pushed others from the centers—especially key power-holding individuals. Succession claimants used centers and inclusion/exclusion mechanisms to bolster their claims. Doing so contributed to the formation of competing

²¹⁵ Christopher James Blythe, “Recreating Religion: The Response to Joseph Smith’s Innovations in the Second Prophetic Generation of Mormonism,” (master’s thesis, Utah State University, 2011), 1.

Mormon identities. The maintenance and evolution of the reform sect's identity is closely connected to the myriads of competing identities.

The short history of the LDS Church prior to the assassination of Joseph Smith can be understood in terms of seeking a center place. The concept of "gathering" catalyzed the search for a center place. In December 1830, eight months after the church organized in New York, the church decided to gather in Ohio after significant proselytizing success in the Western Reserve. God commanded the gathering: "escape the power of the enemy, and be gathered unto me a righteous people, without spot and blameless." In Ohio, Jesus promised to give the Saints his law and promised they would "be endowed with power from on high" and bestowed a blessing so great it was not "known among the children of men." Jesus actualized his promises in the LDS Church's first temple in Kirtland, Ohio. Simultaneously, the church gathered in Missouri because it was a "land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion."²¹⁶ In fact, Jesus told the Saints the existing town of Independence was the "center place" of Zion and it needed a temple. Persecution in Ohio and Missouri drove the LDS Church to establish a new gathering place in Nauvoo.

In the months following Joseph Smith's assassination, Nauvoo represented the authority of the Quorum of the Twelve and competitors established other locations as center places. James J. Strang claimed Smith wrote him a letter days before his death appointing him as his successor and Wisconsin as a new gathering place. The letter read in part:

to him [Strang] shall the gathering of the people be, for he shall plant a stake of Zion in Wisconsin; and I will establish it, and there shall my people have peace and

²¹⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 37:1; 38:31-32; 57:1-2.

rest, and shall not be moved, for it shall be established on the prairie on White River in the lands of Racine and Walworth.²¹⁷

In Nauvoo, the Twelve rejected the letter and warned Strang was “leading [literally and figuratively] the saints astray.”²¹⁸ When the Twelve excommunicated Strang—an exclusion mechanism—they signaled to the Mormon community that neither Strang nor Wisconsin were legitimate centers of Mormonism.

Esoteric rituals, practiced by an elite few, developed as a parallel center in Mormonism. Smith chose his closest confidants as ritual participants. The faith performed rituals from the beginning—baptism, confirmation, and communion—as inclusion mechanisms. Later, Smith introduced additional rituals at the Kirtland Temple, such as the washing of feet practiced by some. These rituals constructed concentric circles that narrowed the figurative center of Mormonism. In Nauvoo, the rituals were more intricate and restricted to a select few—creating a smaller concentric circle. The Nauvoo rituals included an “endowment” teachings mankind’s place in God’s sacred history; a “sealing” binding spouses into eternal marriages; and a “second anointing” promising eternal life.²¹⁹ These rituals further fulfilled Jesus’s promises to teach God’s law and bestow (or endow) “power from on high” upon the Saints if they gathered to the center place.

In May 1842, the first group of men performed the endowment ritual. This group included William Law.²²⁰ However, Law did not participate in the other rituals (though he may have been sealed) which was probably due to his rejection of plural marriage. Not that

²¹⁷ Joseph Smith to James J. Strang, letter, June 18, 1844, (Letter of Appointment), in *“God Has Made Us a Kingdom”*: James Strang and the Midwest Mormons, Vickie Cleverley Speek (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2006), 357-60.

²¹⁸ “To the Saints,” *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois), September 2, 1844, 631.

²¹⁹ Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace*, 258-61.

²²⁰ Anderson and Berger, *Joseph Smith's Quorum of the Anointed*, xxiii-xxiv.

the other rituals required participants to marry plurally, but Law's rejection of the doctrine—let alone the practice—likely signified to Smith that Law was not a “full Mormon” and could not be admitted to the very center of Mormonism.²²¹ This placed Law in an awkward position: he was both at the center of the church in some ways, but also outside in others. When William and Jane stopped attending the Anointed Quorum (a group of endowment participants) in December 1843 and when that inner circle formally excluded them in January 1844 they were distanced from the LDS Church's center of centers. Thus, William and Jane advanced towards the peripheries of Mormonism.

Sidney Rigdon's situation was analogous to Law's. As a member of the First Presidency and practitioner of some rituals, but not all, Rigdon found himself partially at the center of Mormonism. Rigdon and the Twelve both leveraged ritual access to bolster claims of authority in the weeks after Smith's assassination. Not fully aware of all of Smith's rituals, Rigdon created his own that included ordaining commanders in God's army. Rigdon also advocated Pittsburgh as a gathering place. The Twelve rebutted Rigdon—they alone knew all of Smith's esoteric rituals and Nauvoo was the center.²²² The Twelve told Nauvoo church members Smith's rituals were meant for all, but could only be performed on a large scale within the walls of the temple rather than the small upper floor of Smith's merchandise store. The Twelve invited all into the centers of Mormonism. Thus, the Nauvoo Temple tied the two centers of the faith—gathering at a physical location and esoteric ritual performance—together. The Twelve's claims competed with Rigdon's

²²¹ Ehat, “Introduction of Temple Ordinances,” 74-75.

²²² Ehat, “Introduction of Temple Ordinances,” 197-205; Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2006), 339-45, 352-55.

rituals and gathering in Pittsburgh. Like they did with Strang before, the Twelve excommunicated Rigdon intimating to the Mormon community that Rigdon's center was illegitimate.

When the reformers moved away from Nauvoo they rejected that place, and by association the temple rituals, as the center of Mormonism. Nauvoo represented all that was wrong about the church. Nauvoo was corrupt, wicked, and plagued by esoteric rituals.²²³ The only reformers known to participate in the rituals were William and Jane Law. The couple rejected the esotericism by the end of 1843. In January 1844, Jacob Scott wrote with excitement to his children about the prospect of being sealed to their deceased mother, but he turned bitter when he learned that a man could be sealed to more than one living wife. The reformers rejected Nauvoo as a center and did not, at least initially, accept Strang's or Rigdon's centers either; however, they did see potential in uniting with George M. Hinkle's Mormon center at Buffalo, Iowa Territory.

Maintaining Distinct Identity

Having removed themselves geographically from the church at Nauvoo, but still feeling as if they belonged to Mormonism, the reformers set out to find others with whom they could unite. George M. Hinkle's organization, "The Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride the Lamb's Wife," offered a potential home for the reformers. The short history of Hinkle's church and his expulsion from the LDS Church reiterates the importance of estrangement in schism formation. Hinkle's church illustrates some ways schisms established distinct

²²³ "Resolutions," *Nauvoo* (Illinois) *Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 2.

boundaries to craft new identities. Interactions between Hinkle's church and the reform sect demonstrate how the organizations maintained distinct identities, but were also on a course for an eventual merger.

Hinkle's Mormon Schism and Identity Formation

George M. Hinkle was an early and committed convert to the LDS Church. Baptized in 1832, Hinkle served on the High Council in Missouri from 1836 to 1838. As a commissioned colonel in the Missouri state militia, he commanded the Caldwell County militia and defended Far West and De Witt during the Mormon War. Events during the attack on Far West alienated Hinkle from the Mormon community. On October 31, 1838 Hinkle, as commander of the militia, escorted Joseph Smith and other leaders to meet with the anti-Mormon General Lucas. Smith believed the meeting with Lucas was to negotiate the Mormon surrender of Far West; however, Lucas did not allow negotiations and Hinkle turned the church leaders over as prisoners.²²⁴ This act resulted in Smith's infamous imprisonment in Liberty Jail until April 1839 and branded Hinkle as traitor.

Hinkle maintained he acted to prevent a massacre—like the one at Hawn's Mill the day before—of the LDS people at Far West, but the details of the surrender of the town remain unclear to this day. Leland H. Gentry and Todd M. Compton propose three likely scenarios of the day's events. First, Hinkle did (as he claimed) betray Smith to save the rest of the church. Second, Hinkle may have believed General Lucas would release the prisoners once negotiations were complete, but there was a misunderstanding between Hinkle and Lucas. Lastly, General Lucas may have acted deceitfully—not much of a stretch

²²⁴ Hedges, *Journals Volume 2*, 462; Gentry and Compton, *Fire and Sword*, 373-74.

considering his feelings about Mormons—and never intended to release Smith or negotiate a peaceful surrender.²²⁵ Whatever occurred, the community perceived Hinkle as a traitor and excommunicated him and several others because they “left us in the time of our perils, persecutions and dangers, and were acting against the interests of the Church.”²²⁶ Thus, social and formal estrangement pushed Hinkle from the community and he set a course to establish a new center of Mormonism.

Hinkle and his family left Missouri and relocated in Mercer County in Western Illinois. Here “he began life over again but continued to preach the Restored Gospel.”²²⁷ Hinkle’s primary message was the restoration of the house of Israel prior to Jesus’s second coming. Distraught that no church observed all the ordinances found in the New Testament, Hinkle repeatedly asked Jesus in prayer what was to be done. His answer came in the form of revelation. Hinkle was told “to go forward and build up a church unto him [Jesus], called by a NEW NAME, and set it in order by practising [sic] in it ALL the ordinances of the gospel” outlined in the New Testament. Consequently, Hinkle gathered a few followers and organized a church June 24, 1840 called “The Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride the Lamb’s Wife.” The essential ordinances in the church were “[b]aptism, confirmation by the laying on of hands, the right hand of fellowship, the holy kiss, the washing of feet, the holy sacrament of bread and wine, fasting, and the blessing of infants by the ministry...[and] the anointing with oil and praying over and laying hands on the sick.”²²⁸ Hinkle instructed his followers to purchase town lots in Buffalo, Iowa Territory, (across from Mercer

²²⁵ Gentry and Compton, *Fire and Sword*, 373-74.

²²⁶ Smith and Roberts, *History of the Church*, 3:284.

²²⁷ J.G. Hinkle, “Elder G.M. Hinkle,” October 5, 1920, typescript, 3, P85, F52, CoC.

²²⁸ “History of the Rise and Progress of this Church,” *The Ensign* (Buffalo, Iowa Territory), July 15, 1844, 13-14.

County) to build a new gathering place. Like Mormonism, Zion would be a new city built on the American continent preparatory for Jesus's second coming.²²⁹ Though the LDS Church expelled Hinkle, his appetite for preaching and a religious community was not suppressed.

Though Hinkle's church grew out of his experiences with Mormonism—sharing doctrinal emphases and basic Christian rituals—he branded it with a distinct identity. Hinkle's organization was neither a branch of the LDS Church (as the reform sect was) nor was it a reorganization of the LDS Church (as were other bodies)—it was a distinct and independent church. The new name of Hinkle's church (which he believed fulfilled ancient prophecy) set his community's identity apart from all others. In giving his church's history, Hinkle did not mention his connection with the LDS Church. Hinkle wanted his schism so far removed from Mormonism that neither his church's name nor its history would cause confusion about the schism's distinct identity.

Despite his attempts at crafting a distinct identity, Hinkle was not completely successful. In August 1844, when a local paper compared Hinkle's church to Smith's church, Hinkle adamantly refuted the idea. He claimed no similarities between the churches existed and declared, “[o]ne thing we have to say, and we want it distinctly understood—we have no bond of union or fellowship existing between us and the Mormons.”²³⁰ Though Hinkle denied it, doctrinal similarities did exist: a restoration of lost rituals, a restoration of Israel, an American Zion, and preparation for Jesus's imminent return. (Admittedly, Hinkle's newspaper does not mention unique LDS texts such as the Book of Mormon or

²²⁹ “Zion,” and “Correction,” *The Ensign* (Buffalo, Iowa Territory), January, 1844, 106, 110.

²³⁰ “On Politics,” *The Ensign* (Buffalo, Iowa Territory), August 1844, 29.

Doctrine and Covenants.) Hinkle's expression of Mormonism was intentionally far removed from its roots. A unique ecclesiastical history, a new center for gathering, non-LDS rituals (the holy kiss and right hand of fellowship), and a new church name all worked together to define boundaries and establish a distinct identity.

Maintaining Identity During Inter-Schism Exchanges

In June 1844, the reform sect contacted Hinkle's church because they did not feel welcome in Burlington and desired to fellowship with others in the Mormon tradition. William Law tried to make inroads with the citizens of Burlington, but was not successful. Though the Burlingtonians agreed with Law in disapproving of Smith's actions, they did not sympathize with the reformers. Writing about the citizenry in general, Law noted the community was "a mean, heartless set at best." On June 17, just days after landing in Burlington, James Blakeslee left for Buffalo, a place approximately sixty-five miles up the Mississippi River. The journey's express purpose was visiting Hinkle and William E. McLellin to "know what they were about."²³¹ The dissenters did not feel at home in Burlington, but maybe they would in Buffalo.

Blakeslee arrived in Buffalo while Hinkle and McLellin were preparing for a conference of The Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride the Lamb's Wife. The men welcomed Blakeslee warmly and he remained in Buffalo for the June 24-25 conference.²³² The events of this conference proved pivotal to Hinkle's blossoming church and eventually led to the church's merger with Sidney Rigdon's Church of Christ in April 1845. The conference

²³¹ William Law, Diary, in *William Law*, Cook, 57-59; Blakeslee, Diary, 39-40.

²³² Blakeslee, Diary, 39-40.

chose Hinkle and McLellin as the church's first apostles.²³³ Several years earlier, the LDS Church chose McLellin as one of their first apostles (he later left that organization) and the similar position he held in Hinkle's church signaled a partial realignment with Mormonism in general.²³⁴ The conference also added McLellin to the church's presidency which resulted in a debate between himself and Hinkle concerning authority dynamics in the three-man presidency. Lastly, the conference decided newcomers to The Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride the Lamb's Wife must be rebaptized; previous baptisms—including LDS baptisms—were not valid.²³⁵ This requirement established a clear boundary between Hinkle's and Smith's organizations; Latter-day Saints could not float freely between the two bodies as if they were one entity.

It is not known if Blakeslee's presence influenced the resolution on baptism; previously Hinkle's church did allow free movement into their church from the LDS Church. An individual's rebaptism was necessary for at least one of four reasons. First and foremost, baptism signified loyalty to Hinkle. Second, proper authority to perform baptisms was necessary. Similarly, the manner of baptism was important. Lastly, transgression of God's laws necessitated baptism as a renewal of religious commitment. None of the 1844 dissenters were rebaptized; perhaps they did not desire to join Hinkle's group or they were prevented from doing so. Hinkle and McLellin derived their authority from the same source as the reformers and were baptized in the same mode; thus, it seems probable Hinkle believed the dissenters needed to demonstrate commitment to either

²³³ "Conference Minutes," *The Ensign* (Buffalo, Iowa Territory), October 1844, 63.

²³⁴ Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, *The Joseph Smith Papers: Journals Volume 1: 1832-1839* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church Historian's Press, 2008), 423-24.

²³⁵ "Conference Minutes," *The Ensign* (Buffalo, Iowa Territory), October 1844, 63.

himself as head of the church or to God's commandments. Consequently, the two groups maintained distinct identities during the summer and fall of 1844.

This interaction illustrates the workings of identities in schismatic groups. Ostracism from the dominant Mormon church caused the Nauvoo reformers to seek positive relationships with other Mormon schisms. What Blakeslee found in Hinkle's church pleased him: a community of saints, friendly members, and the teaching of the "first principles of the Gospel."²³⁶ These were the basics the reformers searched for. However, a formal integration of the reformers into Hinkle's schism required ritual participation acknowledging Hinkle's superior authority (or significant transgression of God's laws), which the reformers refused to do. Thus, schisms could exist on friendly terms, but resist official merger.

Contrasting Hinkle's schism with the reform sect uncovers the sect's self-perception. In writing about Hinkle and McLellin, Blakeslee described them as "formerly belonged to the Church of Christ, or Mormons." This phrasing sets Hinkle's church apart from the larger Mormon community in two ways: 1) the phrase "formerly belonged" communicates an official association no longer existed. 2) Blakeslee separates his organization ("a branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints") from Hinkle and McLellin by calling them former members of the "Church of Christ." Blakeslee distanced himself by using Smith's most recent name for the church to describe his connection to Mormonism and an older name of Smith's church to describe Hinkle's and McLellin's associations. Blakeslee clearly saw a distinction between himself and Hinkle's

²³⁶ Blakeslee, Diary, 39-40.

group. Blakeslee was closer to the center of Mormonism (despite his misgivings) and Hinkle was in the distant peripheries.

Despite differences, Hinkle's church and the reform sect remained neutral—if not friendly—towards each other during the summer and fall of 1844. In mid-July, Blakeslee convinced Law and the others to relocate from Nauvoo and Burlington to Hampton, Illinois, seventeen miles northeast of Hinkle and McLellin. McLellin likely suggested Hampton as a relocation spot to Blakeslee. McLellin alternated between residences in Buffalo and Hampton (working as a physician) since his expulsion from Missouri in 1839.²³⁷ The reformers considered Hampton as a resting place and established roots there. Cowles and the other dissenters liked Hampton so much they purchased lands and were glad to have “escaped from a City where abomination reigns.”²³⁸ Robert D. Foster purchased a town lot and store in Milan (between Hampton and Buffalo).²³⁹ Blakeslee felt the area safe enough that he relocated his family there in August. The existing residents were kind to the newcomers and treated them with respect.²⁴⁰

The reformers geographically separated themselves from both Hinkle's church and the church in Nauvoo; they viewed Hampton as a new gathering place where the dissenters would cultivate and maintain their reformed Mormon identity. Austin Cowles wrote that when they selected Hampton, they hoped that it would please “our friends that would think it good to live with us.” Hampton's favorable reputation was attractive. Some said it was

²³⁷ Porter, “The Odyssey of William Earl McLellin,” 328-30.

²³⁸ Austin Cowles to Heman Hyde, letter, August 16, 1844, Brigham Young Incoming Correspondence, 1839-1877, CR 1234 1, bx 2, fd 5, CHL.

²³⁹ Harman G. and Louisa Reynolds to Robert D. Foster, deed, August 12, 1844, Rock Island County [Illinois] Recorder, Deed Records, 1835-1927, vol. F, p. 116-17, Family History Library microfilm 1415936.

²⁴⁰ Blakeslee, Diary, 40.

the best region on the Mississippi River—it had good water power and a healthy climate. Cowles reported that only four people died in Hampton during the previous six years. Other dissenters longed to be in Hampton. Sarah (Hall) Scott, Jacob Scott’s daughter-in-law, wrote to her mother from Nauvoo in July:

It is very warm here and quite sickly; for my part I wish I was in a healthier place. Those that have left the Church and reorganized have settled at a town called Hampton in this state, one hundred miles up the river. It is said to be a healthy place.”²⁴¹

The climate and religious atmosphere would benefit Sarah. Cowles wanted his friends Heman Hyde and Nauvoo Stake President William Marks to visit him in Hampton. A week’s stay, he wrote, would convince them to relocate. Cowles passed advice to his children still in Nauvoo: “the voice of an affectionate father is to leave that sickly country and locate where you will be truly pleased[,] remember your father has never guessed wrong as yet concerning the church.”²⁴² The reform sect’s distinct identity was maintained and strengthened by a gathering in Hampton facilitated by the friendship and kinship networks of the reformers.

In Hampton, the reformers continued their religious activities and waited for a purification of the LDS Church. Blakeslee wrote the reformers “concluded to stand still a little and see the salvation of God.” They believed God would preserve the true saints (the “honest in heart”) in Nauvoo and that they should gather in Hampton. Blakeslee implied the reformers perceived themselves as pure members of the church waiting for a general

²⁴¹ Isaac and Sarah Scott to Calvin and Abigail Hall, letter, July 22 and August 9, 1844, in “The Death of a Mormon Dictator: Letters of Massachusetts Mormons, 1843-1848,” ed. George F. Partridge, *The New England Quarterly* 9, 4 (December 1936), 598-99.

²⁴² Austin Cowles to Heman Hyde, letter, August 16, 1844.

reformation when he wrote God would “cleanse the Church in due time from all iniquity and filthiness.”²⁴³ The reformers prophesied while in Hampton, emphasized faith in Christ, and the cleansing power of Christ’s atonement. They worshiped together at least three times a week and tried to function as a religious body “the best we could under existing circumstances” during their stay in Hampton.²⁴⁴

Towards a Merger of Mormon Factions

In the fall of 1844, rumors circulated that Emma Smith, Joseph’s widow, may give her allegiance to the reformers. A local paper reported: “It is said [Emma Smith] is weak in the faith, and that she has purchased property at Hampton, where Law and other seceding mormons [sic] reside, where it is probable she may remove.”²⁴⁵ Emma Smith’s support would have empowered the reform sect, but it seems probable she did not seriously entertain thoughts of relocating to Hampton. (Emma Smith is not found as a grantee in the deed indexes.) In August, Joseph H. Jackson’s incendiary exposé came off the press and may have sparked the relocation rumors. Jackson claimed Joseph Smith tried to arrange a “wife swap” with the Laws.²⁴⁶ No evidence supports Jackson’s claim. Writing in 1887, William Law denied the claims forthright: “Joseph Smith never proposed anything of the kind to me or to my wife, but he and Emma knew our sentiments in relation to spiritual wives and polygamy.”²⁴⁷ Jackson’s own character is highly questionable and he published

²⁴³ Blakeslee, Diary, 40; Austin Cowles to Heman Hyde, letter, August 16, 1844.

²⁴⁴ Blakeslee, Diary, 41; William E. McLellin to Sidney Rigdon, letter, December 23, 1844, in *Latter Day Saint’s Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), January 15, 1845, 91-93.

²⁴⁵ “Mormons,” *Hawk Eye* (Burlington, Iowa Territory), September 12, 1844, 3.

²⁴⁶ Joseph H. Jackson, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Experience of Joseph H. Jackson in Nauvoo, Disclosing the Depths of Mormon Villainy* (Warsaw, Illinois: n.p., 1844), 20-27.

²⁴⁷ William Law to Wilhelm Wyle, letter, January 7, 1887, in *William Law*, Cook, 102-4.

the exposé when upset that Hyrum Smith did not allow Jackson to marry his daughter.²⁴⁸ Jackson likely fabricated the claims.

During this period, John C. Bennett—another man of dubious character—returned to the Mormon scene and associated with the reform branch in Hampton. Brigham Young warned the LDS in September: “If you make Sidney Rigdon your president and leader, you will soon have John C. Bennett here, with the Laws and Fosters all the murderous clan.”²⁴⁹ Apparently, Bennett had already contacted the reformers in Hampton—or at least there were rumors he would do so—and, in Young’s opinion, an alliance between Rigdon, Bennett, and Law would be detrimental.

What Bennett did in Hampton is not known; however, during this time Bennett produced a letter Joseph Smith purportedly wrote (considered fraudulent by most) appointing Rigdon his successor. Rigdon’s supporters published the letter believing it authentic, but Rigdon himself apparently never thought it legitimate. In October, Young received a letter from Buffalo informing him that Bennett resided in Hampton.²⁵⁰ It is possible Bennett worked towards a merger of the reform sect and Rigdon’s Mormon faction.

While Bennett made his moves in Nauvoo and Hampton, William E. McLellin and George M. Hinkle split ways—significantly impacting The Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride the Lamb’s Wife and the reform sect. At the June conference in Buffalo, McLellin

²⁴⁸ Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 176.

²⁴⁹ “Trial of Elder Rigdon,” *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois), September 15, 1844, 667.

²⁵⁰ Smith, *The Sainly Scoundrel*, 142-43; Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 358-359, 362n33; J. Matteson to Brigham Young, letter, October 23, 1844, Brigham Young Office Files 1832-1878, CR 1234 1, bx 20 fd 7, CHL.

presented a plan where the church's president and his counselors (a position McLellin just acquired) would be equal in authority, rotating who was at the head. Hinkle objected and suspended the discussion until the October Conference.²⁵¹ "But near the approach of the October conference," noted one observer, "[there was] a visible effect on the aspirant, [and McLellin was] portraying a dissatisfied mind."²⁵² The conference minutes reported McLellin withdrew his position and Hinkle's plan for the presidency prevailed.²⁵³

Reasons for the sudden shift are not fully understood, but because McLellin went directly to Hampton from the conference it may be surmised he saw better opportunity with the reform sect. McLellin resigned the editorship of Hinkle's paper and rumors spread of his permanent relocation to Hampton. Hinkle and McLellin tried talking things out, but they "became excited, hard talk ensued, & at present," reported a resident of Buffalo on October 23, "the prospect is flattering for the lawyers." McLellin's temper got the better of him as Hinkle remained calm: "Dr. [McLellin] gave full scope to his wusser [i.e. worse] feelings."²⁵⁴ McLellin's relocation from Buffalo to Hampton was a literal moving from one center of Mormonism to another. Despite the falling out, McLellin's connections with Hinkle's church and the reform sect in 1844 established a network of associates that proved pivotal in the merger of Mormon factions.

²⁵¹ George M. Hinkle, "To the 'Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride, the Lams Wife,'" and "Conference Minutes," *The Ensign* (Buffalo, Iowa Territory), October 1844, 59-63.

²⁵² J. Matteson to Brigham Young, letter, October 23, 1844.

²⁵³ "Conference Minutes," *The Ensign* (Buffalo, Iowa Territory), November 1844, 78-79.

²⁵⁴ J. Matteson to Brigham Young, letter, October 23, 1844; William E. McLellin, "Farewell Address," *The Ensign* (Buffalo, Iowa Territory), October 1844, 58-59; J. Matteson to Brigham Young, letter, October 23, 1844.

Evolution of Schismatic Identity

Immediately following the death of Joseph Smith, the differences between two primary succession claimants, Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon, tore the Nauvoo community apart. These men struggled to gain control of Mormonism's center in Nauvoo by establishing themselves as the God-ordained leader of the church. Brigham Young won out by appealing to the people's desire for access to the ultimate center of Mormonism—the temple. Rigdon left Nauvoo to build a new center in Pittsburgh where he advertised himself as returning to original Mormonism. This message mirrored the reform sect's own goals and his claim as a legitimate surviving member of the First Presidency echoed William Law's own logic. During the fall of 1844 the reformers worked towards a reorganization of the church with Rigdon and Law at its head. Though Law dropped out, the reform sect was integral to the foundation and building up of Rigdon's church. In fact, the 1844 reform sect did not disintegrate at the end of 1844—it evolved into Rigdon's Church of Christ. The reformers actively participated in the Church of Christ, but began petering off in early 1846. Rigdon's church ceased to function in 1847 partially because the reformers withdrew their support.

Development of Rigdon's Mormonism

The development of Sidney Rigdon's center of Mormonism, Pittsburgh, as presented in the opening weeks of the Succession Crisis is traced to his renewed commitment to Joseph Smith and the church in the spring of 1844. His renewed energy for the cause was infused with his energy for creating God's political kingdom on earth. On March 19, Smith invited Rigdon into the Council of Fifty and selected him as his vice-

presidential candidate on May 6.²⁵⁵ Rigdon had just arrived in Pittsburgh, under Smith's direction, to preach Mormonism and establish Pennsylvania residency (presidential campaigns required separate states of residence for the president and vice president candidates) when Smith was killed in June. Rigdon immediately returned to headquarters in Nauvoo to sort out the church's succession question. During the first week of August, Rigdon preached and counselled with various church leaders and asserted his right as guardian to the church and spokesperson for the deceased Joseph Smith. The meetings climaxed when, on August 8, Rigdon and Young presented their claims before the church membership gathered in Nauvoo.²⁵⁶

Rigdon's August 8 speech stressed keeping the church hierarchy intact as it existed before Smith was assassinated—allowing Rigdon to retain his position in the First Presidency. Though Joseph (President of the Church) and Hyrum (Assistant President of the Church) were gone, argued Rigdon, they still “act in the same relation that they always stood.” This pattern was designed by Jehovah and should be followed by the other priesthood offices and quorums; including Rigdon in the First Presidency. Rigdon's own position as defined by revelation was “equal with [Smith] in holding the keys of this last kingdom,” and it was his duty “to receive the oracles for the whole church.” Rigdon succinctly summarized his proposal: “I might act in my calling of my own will I should be a spokesman for our prophet who has been taken from us.”²⁵⁷ Such a proposal rejected a

²⁵⁵ Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 332-34.

²⁵⁶ Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 331, 335-38.

²⁵⁷ LaJean Purcell Carruth and Robin Scott Jensen, “Sidney Rigdon's Pea to the Saints: Transcription of Thomas Bullock's Shorthand Notes from the August 8, 1844, Morning Meeting,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, 2 (2014), 133-39.

reorganization of the First Presidency and allowed Rigdon to stay at the center (and at the head of the hierarchy) of Mormonism.

In the afternoon, Brigham Young spoke to the general church membership. Young's claims focused on the Twelve's authority to perform rituals and govern the church—placing the Twelve at the figurative center of Mormonism. The Twelve alone had the “keys of the kingdom of God in all the world” and the ability to learn God's mind on governing the church. Brigham Young promised the membership the Twelve would finish Smith's temple project and administer esoteric salvific rituals to the general church membership. Anyone who participated in the rituals would, if faithful, enter heaven: “We have all the signs and tokens to give to the porter at the door, and he will let us in.”²⁵⁸ Brigham Young's speech won over the membership at church headquarters and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was selected as a de facto First Presidency.

The divide between Rigdon and the Twelve widened throughout the remainder of August. Rigdon preached against polygamy and hinted that the Smith brothers and the Twelve brought iniquity into the church. Rigdon gathered a following and ordained some as commanders in God's army. Most grievously to the Twelve, Rigdon administered unauthorized endowment rituals and ordained men as prophets, priests, and kings—functions that Smith only authorized the Twelve to perform. Despite reconciliation attempts by the Twelve, Rigdon rejected the Twelve and Nauvoo (claiming the city would be destroyed) as the center of Mormonism and established himself and Pittsburgh—the site of Rigdon's apocalyptic battles—as a new center. Because Rigdon refused unification with

²⁵⁸ Smith and Roberts, *History of the Church*, 7:233, 235, 240.

the Twelve, they withdrew fellowship and requested his ministerial license; exclusion mechanisms pushing Rigdon towards the peripheries and limited his power to act in the Mormon community.²⁵⁹

The final separation between Rigdon and the Twelve came on September 8, 1844 during a six-hour public trial of his membership before the High Council. Rigdon did not attend and William Marks was the only person to defend him. Marks testified Rigdon and Smith were on good terms when the latter was killed. Marks also valued Rigdon's position as the only surviving member of the First Presidency; this made Rigdon, Marks believed, the last prophet, seer, and revelator in the church—without Rigdon to receive revelations the church could not function. The Twelve demonstrated that Rigdon had caused many problems in the past, not fulfilled his duty in Nauvoo, gave false revelations, and usurped authority in performing unauthorized rituals. The High Council excommunicated Rigdon and nearly the entire congregation voted in favor of the council's decision.²⁶⁰

Two days later, Rigdon left Nauvoo for the last time and returned to Pittsburgh to build his center of Mormonism. Some LDS in Nauvoo and the branches in Pittsburgh and Brighton, Pennsylvania, supported Rigdon early in his new path. In speaking about the Twelve, the Pittsburgh branch rejected polygamy and stated: “we hold no fellowship with them, and as a branch of the true church, standing upon the original platform, and the acknowledged and received doctrine of said church, we do not consider ourselves identified with them.” They chose to support Rigdon as the “first president of the church.”²⁶¹ In

²⁵⁹ Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 352-355.

²⁶⁰ Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 355-357.

²⁶¹ Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 359; “Minutes of a Conference held in Pittsburgh, Oct. 12th 1844,” *The Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), October 15, 1844, 11-

distinguishing between themselves and the Twelve, Rigdon's supporters crafted an identity portraying themselves as legitimate members of the church centered on a Mormonism from an earlier period.

Statements published by Rigdon in mid-October 1844 illuminate his goal in establishing a new center of Mormonism. The church needed to be rid of "strange doctrines" that had no place in the "true religious belief of said church." Rigdon indicated he perceived himself as part of the main Mormon body by using the name of the church Smith and the Twelve used in Nauvoo; his efforts aimed for a reformation of the existing church organization—not the establishment of a competition church. Rigdon wanted a return to things when "the church was formed and organized." A goal further evidenced by the adoption of the name *The Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* for his newspaper. This was the same title used by the LDS Church for its paper in Kirtland a decade earlier. The paper intended "to contend for the same doctrines,, [sic] order of church government and discipline, maintained by that paper when first published in Kirtland."²⁶² Rigdon was rolling Mormonism back to a time before Nauvoo—just as William Law's reformers wanted.

Evolution of Factional Identities

The desire for a Mormon reformation brought Rigdon's faction and the reform sect together and William Law initially supported the unification. Though Law abruptly ended

12; James M. Gregg to Sidney Rigdon, letter, October 14, 1844, in *The Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), October 15, 1844, 12; *To the Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, broadside, September 8, 1844, M292.2 T627 1844, CHL.

²⁶² "Prospectus, for The Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate," *The Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), October 15, 1844, 16.

his association with Mormonism just before the formal unification meeting, the other reform sect leaders carried out their plans. During the fall of 1844, Rigdon and Law exchanged ideas in personal correspondence (no longer extant) and Rigdon's paper. The correspondence likely dealt with Law's place in the First Presidency. *The Messenger and Advocate* repeatedly published arguments supporting Rigdon's office in the First Presidency. The paper informed its readers that the Twelve were subordinate to the First Presidency. This argument invalidated the Twelve's excommunication of Rigdon—a parallel to Law's logic about his own excommunication. In May 1844, Rigdon sympathized with Law about the illegal ecclesiastical trials. Surely, now that Rigdon himself lost his standing in the First Presidency to the Twelve, Law expected Rigdon to empathize with him. It seems probable, based on the articles in Rigdon's paper and that the men corresponded during this period, that in late 1844 Law and Rigdon agreed that together they rightfully constituted the First Presidency—giving them right and responsibility to govern the church.

A letter by McLellin published in Rigdon's paper in January 1845 supports this supposition. The letter reads in part:

[T]he Lord has shown to me that by a union of President Law and yourself, together with each, your friends, that all the honest in heart among the Latter Day Saints and throughout the world will UNITE also, and form that company who will follow the savior robed in white linen.²⁶³

²⁶³ William E. McLellin to Sidney Rigdon, letter, December 23, 1844, in *Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), January 15, 1845, 91-93.

In this letter, McLellin revealed his role in bringing Law and Rigdon together. The proposed merger demonstrates independently developed factions sometimes coalesce around a common cause.

A revelatory experience graced the reformers in Hampton days after McLellin wrote his letter. The experience prompted McLellin and Law to travel to Pittsburgh. In Pittsburgh, LDS elders (who “had not defiled their garments, or polluted their priesthood”) would reorganize the Kingdom of God. The reformers anticipated the time when the righteous would gather in a holy community prepared to meet Jesus at his second coming.²⁶⁴ When McLellin and Law arrived in Kirtland on the journey to Pittsburgh they discovered Rigdon addressing a congregation in the Kirtland Temple about the immoralities of polygamy. Rigdon invited Law to speak and his address “settled the question [about polygamy] forever on the public mind.” For the next several days the men preached in Kirtland, Painesville, and Cleveland. Success in Kirtland prompted the organization of a branch in that place.²⁶⁵

Plans for the merger were discussed in Ohio, but Law and Rigdon had a falling out. “The conversation was a friendly one,” recalled Rigdon in July 1845, “but terminated in convincing both parties that our religious views were so widely different that no union could exist, and so we parted, agreeing to disagree.”²⁶⁶ Despite this difference, Law finished the journey to Pittsburg with McLellin, but left before the conference began.

²⁶⁴ Blakeslee, *Diary*, 41-44.

²⁶⁵ Sidney Rigdon to Mr. Editor, letter, no date, in *The Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), March 15, 1845, 145-46.

²⁶⁶ “The Mormons,” *The Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), July 15, 1845, 265.

Details of the fateful discussion and Law's reasons for aborting his participation in the merger are not known. However, William Clayton noted on May 3, 1845 that dissenter Charles Ivins reported Austin Cowles (who attended the Pittsburgh conference) disclosing that "Rigdon's [sic] party is very much divided both in doctrine and sentiment." Rigdon differed from McLellin in sentiment and from Law on fifteen points of doctrine—one of which was a supposed rejection of the Book of Mormon by Rigdon. However, official minutes from Rigdon's conference note the Book of Mormon as canon.²⁶⁷ It is unlikely the details in Clayton's report were accurate. Regardless, Law disagreed with Rigdon on so many points he could not support him. Law's preaching in Ohio in February 1845 were likely his last efforts to reform Mormonism.

Despite Law's refusal to support Rigdon other reformers continued with their plans. After McLellin and Law left Hampton, the remaining reformers continued worship services while waiting for the church's reorganization in Pittsburgh. In February or March 1845, James Blakeslee received a revelation that his "presence was needed at the ensuing conference." Blakeslee thought the journey was impossible and resisted the revelation. However, Jesus opened the way for Blakeslee and he prepared for the conference. Just before Blakeslee left Hampton, the reformers baptized a young school teacher named David L. Lathrop and confirmed him a member of the church. Lathrop, Blakeslee, and Austin Cowles left Hampton March 20 "in good health & spirits, greatly rejoicing in that the Lord had made known our duty." While at Cincinnati on March 30, the reformers met with Charles A. Foster, Frederick Merryweather, and Christian Seichrist. The reformers

²⁶⁷ Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 164; "Preamble and Resolutions, of the Church of Christ," *The Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), April 15, 1845, 176.

arrived in Pittsburgh on April 3 and learned that Law abandoned the plan. Though disappointed, the reformers determined to move forward.²⁶⁸

The conference convened, as planned, on the morning of Sunday April 6, 1845. Sidney Rigdon preached first on the priesthood. His base text was 1 Peter 2:9: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into marvelous light.” This scripture impressed upon the minds of the congregants the importance of a priesthood organization. As Rigdon spoke on being called out of darkness perhaps some thought about leaving the darkness of Nauvoo. In the afternoon session, the congregants signified unification and loyalty to the cause by partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Twenty-nine people were baptized that evening.²⁶⁹ Success blessed the conference from the beginning.

The reorganization of church officers at Rigdon’s conference demonstrates the reform sect’s foundational role in creating Rigdon’s Church of Christ. Rigdon appointed three clerks as the first officers of the reorganized church: William E. McLellin, Joseph M. Cole, and George W. Robinson. Two of the clerks were associated with the reform branch: Cole since its organization a year before and McLellin for the previous six months. Following the appointments, Rigdon asked those he previously ordained as prophets, priests, and kings be organized into a new governing body called the Quorum of Seventy-Three. The quorum included Austin Cowles, James Blakeslee, Joseph M. Cole, William E. McLellin, and David L. Lathrop from the reform branch. Also initiated were their

²⁶⁸ Blakeslee, *Diary*, 55-56.

²⁶⁹ “Minutes Of a Conference of the Church of Christ, held in the City of Pittsburgh, commencing on the 6th an ending on the 11th of April, A.D. 1845,” *The Latter Day Saint’s Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), April 15, 1845, 168.

associates Christian Seichrist, Frederick Merryweather, and George M. Hinkle. Rigdon “surrendered the control and management of the kingdom of God” to the quorum. When asked what Rigdon’s ecclesiastical office should be Joseph M. Cole nominated him as the first president. William E. McLellin managed the voting process and the quorum confirmed Rigdon in that position. McLellin and Cole administered a covenant to the quorum to stand by Rigdon until he met Jesus at the second coming on Mount Olivet. This ritual further unified the church’s officers.²⁷⁰

The installation of the Quorum of Seventy-Three and the First Presidency initiated the reorganization of the church’s hierarchy. A third of the Quorum of the Twelve came from the reform sect: James Blakeslee, Joseph M. Cole, William E. McLellin, and David L. Lathrop. A committee (including Cole, McLellin, and Hinkle) investigated the proposed Pittsburgh Stake President and the conference sustained him in that office. Amidst other officers, Rigdon chose Frederick Merryweather as a one of the Presidents of the Seventies and Austin Cowles as President of the High Priest’s Quorum.²⁷¹ Blakeslee was ecstatic

²⁷⁰ “Minutes Of a Conference of the Church of Christ, held in the City of Pittsburgh, commencing on the 6th an ending on the 11th of April, A.D. 1845,” *The Latter Day Saint’s Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), April 15, 1845, 168-69. James Blakeslee recorded the covenant made by the Quorum of Seventy-Three: “A general covenant to be entered into at the time of consecration. All standing on their feet, with their right hands uplifted to heaven. The first general Covenant[:] Brethren we here in the name of Jesus Christ, the head of this Kingdom, bind ourselves to each other in the presence of God, Angels and each other, that we will stand by each other in all righteousness before God until the time of the end, in order that this Kingdom may triumph according to the promise and mind of God: and being in the rest of God, and universal peace to the whole earth. And by this voluntary act we seal the blessings of God upon each other’s heads, until that day when heaven and earth rest in perfect peace and joy, even so, Amen.” Blakeslee also recorded two other rituals performed in the Church of Christ: “The covenants relative to hereditary, local, or particular diseases of men, their women, and children, should be entered into on the knees with the right hand raised toward heaven. The last or final dedication covenant after washing and anointing should be entered into standing on the feet with both hands uplifted to God. The words to be used are to be given by the spirit of God at the time suiting the occasion and the persons consecrated and dedicated.” (Blakeslee, Diary, 59.)

²⁷¹ “Minutes Of a Conference of the Church of Christ, held in the City of Pittsburgh, commencing on the 6th an ending on the 11th of April, A.D. 1845,” *The Latter Day Saint’s Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), April 15, 1845, 172.

about the reorganization of the church: “the spirit of the Lord was poured out in a powerful manner indeed...the Lord accepted the organization, and placed his seal upon it, to the joy of our hearts, while we could say that we more than realized our most sanguine expectations, thank the Lord.”²⁷²

In addition to utilizing the reformers and their associates, Rigdon relied on his extended kinship network to reorganize the Church of Christ. In fact, Joseph M. Cole married Rigdon’s cousin Eliza James the previous year. Rigdon asked Eliza’s brothers (and his cousins) Samuel and Lewis James to serve in the Quorum of Seventy-Three. Samuel was also a counselor to Rigdon in the First Presidency. In addition to these two cousins, least four other Rigdon relatives filled the Quorum of Seventy-Three: Carvel Rigdon (brother), Algernon S. Rigdon (son), John W. Rigdon (son), and George W. Robinson (son-in-law). These men acted in other offices as well. Carvel Rigdon served as the church’s patriarch—an important office in the Mormon tradition. George W. Robinson was an apostle and Lewis James sat on the church’s general high council.²⁷³ In reorganizing the Church of Christ in Pittsburgh, Sidney Rigdon depended upon his kinship connections to fill some of the most important positions in its ecclesiastical structure.

Members of the reform sect played a prominent role in the organization of Rigdon’s church. In the fall of 1844, the reformers communicated with Rigdon about a possible merger. The idea intrigued them because Rigdon advocated a return to an earlier, more moderate version of the faith as found during the Kirtland era of LDS history; the reform

²⁷² Blakeslee, *Diary*, 56.

²⁷³ “Minutes Of a Conference of the Church of Christ, held in the City of Pittsburgh, commencing on the 6th an ending on the 11th of April, A.D. 1845,” *The Latter Day Saint’s Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), April 15, 1845, 168-69, 172.

campaign worked towards a return to “original Mormonism.” As a manifestation of this desire, Rigdon named his paper after the LDS Church’s Kirtland newspaper. The yearning for the original church was so strong that the April 1845 conference reverted to calling themselves after the original LDS name—the Church of Christ.²⁷⁴ The reformers and Rigdon agreed about Nauvoo’s corruption. Several spiritual manifestations prompted the reformers’ unification with Rigdon, though Law himself reneged his association with organized Mormonism at the last minute. The reform sect’s role in effecting the organization and filling prominent positions in Rigdon’s hierarchy makes it evident the reform branch did not, as suggested by other scholars, dissipate at the end of 1844—the reform sect evolved into Rigdon’s 1845 Church of Christ.

More than just acting administratively in their positions in the Church of Christ, the reformers took ministerial action in building this organization. James Blakeslee, Austin Cowles, William E. McLellin and George M. Hinkle returned to their homes on the Mississippi River to initiate proselytizing. Their efforts were an enormous success and highly popular—drawing listeners from forty miles away. By June 1845 the reformers added approximately one-hundred people to Rigdon’s church and set apart fifteen for the ministry.²⁷⁵ Blakeslee’s missionary journal, dating from April 1845 to April 1846, attests to the success experienced in the Midwest. On one occasion, he recorded confirming twenty people as members of the Church of Christ.²⁷⁶ In his Hancock County home, an

²⁷⁴ “Minutes Of a Conference of the Church of Christ, held in the City of Pittsburgh, commencing on the 6th an ending on the 11th of April, A.D. 1845,” *The Latter Day Saint’s Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), April 15, 1845, 168.

²⁷⁵ William E. McLellin to Sidney Rigdon, letter, June 18, 1845, in *Messenger and Advocate of the Church of Christ* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), July 15, 1845, 267-68.

²⁷⁶ Blakeslee, *Diary*, 42.

angel appeared to Joseph M. Cole—as if a physical being was present—and showed him Rigdon’s new Zion center place in the Cumberland Valley. Cole’s typical sign of devotion to a faith was serving as a secretary—a position he filled for the Nauvoo High Council, the 1844 reform sect, and the Church of Christ—but his zeal for Rigdon’s church caused him to baptize fifteen people with his brother-in-law in La Harpe, Illinois.²⁷⁷ These activities attest to the reformer’s allegiance to and necessary function in the Church of Christ.

Disintegration of Cohesive Identity

Though the Church of Christ initially experienced success (fueled by the efforts of the 1844 reformers, George M. Hinkle, and William E. McLellin) his influence within the sphere of Mormonism diminished and his 1845 reorganization essentially disintegrated in 1847. The reformers’ exit from his church partially caused the disintegration. In September 1845, Austin Cowles took up his Rigdon-designated post in Kirtland to lead the church in that locality.²⁷⁸ While in Kirtland, Cowles and McLellin—Rigdon’s president of the church-wide High Priest’s Quorum and an apostle respectively—became convinced that the church should gather at that place rather than Rigdon’s proposed Zion in the Cumberland Valley.²⁷⁹ Furthermore, Cowles expressed complaints to Rigdon similar to his earlier issues with Joseph Smith. Rigdon’s action led Cowles to conclude “that any Ecclesiastical power that assumes a superior ~~power~~ authority [illegible] in such an act manifests itself as antichrist.” Rigdon used ecclesiastical exclusion apparatuses,

²⁷⁷ “Minutes,” *Messenger and Advocate of the Church of Christ* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), November 1845, 397-98.

²⁷⁸ Austin Cowles to Sidney Rigdon, letter, September 11, 1845, in *Messenger and Advocate of the Church of Christ* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), September 15, 1845, 334-35.

²⁷⁹ Porter, “The Odyssey of William Earl McLellin,” 338.

specifically excommunication, incorrectly—just as Smith did with William Law.²⁸⁰

Rigdon reacted to Cowles's departure in the March 1846 issue of his paper:

If all attempts to become a leader to a church, which receive the book of Doctrine and Covenants as of divine origin, by any one whom Joseph Smith never ordained to that office, is not a species of maniacism, it is one of the most stupid and ignorant efforts ever made by man; though it should be the self-styled modern Joshua, Austin Cowles.²⁸¹

Rigdon believed Cowles was attempting to lead God's chosen people into the promised land just as Joshua did in the Old Testament. The analogy portrays Cowles as a successor to Joseph Smith like Joshua succeeded Moses in leading the Israelites. At the Church of Christ's April 1846 conference (one year after the reorganization) Rigdon filled McLellin's and Cowles's positions with others.²⁸²

James Blakeslee stayed with Rigdon longer than Cowles and McLellin, but not by much. By January 1846 Blakeslee corresponded with cousins in Wisconsin—ardent supporters of succession claimant James J. Strang.²⁸³ In 1853, Blakeslee gave his answer for leaving Rigdon: "I withdrew from his order of things, as I looked upon them to be the works of the flesh, and stood still a while, to see the salvation of God." His phrase, "works of the flesh" was a generic phrase Blakeslee used to describe corruption he saw in multiple Mormon factions.²⁸⁴ Perhaps it was a reference to Rigdon's abuses of power that Cowles perceived. In January 1847, knowledge of Blakeslee's dissatisfaction with Rigdon spread

²⁸⁰ Austin Cowles to Sidney Rigdon, letter, February 1846, P39-4, F2, CoC.

²⁸¹ "Strangest of the Strange," *Messenger and Advocate of the Church of Christ* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), March 1846, 457-58.

²⁸² "Minutes," *Messenger and Advocate of the Church of Christ* (Greencastle, Pennsylvania), June 1846, 466, 470.

²⁸³ William Shepard, "James Blakeslee, the Old Soldier of Mormonism," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 17 (January 1997): 122.

²⁸⁴ James Blakeslee to Charles B. Thompson, letter, February 20, 1853, in *Zion's Harbinger, and Baneemy's Organ* (St. Louis, Missouri), March 1853, 20-22.

through his kinship connections to Strang's followers in Wisconsin. Blakeslee's cousin reported that James forfeited his place as president of Rigdon's Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Blakeslee moved to Wisconsin in summer 1847 and Strang selected him as a member of the High Council that fall.²⁸⁵

In 1846 and 1847 Rigdon quickly lost key leaders—William E. McLellin, Austin Cowles, and James Blakeslee among them. These men helped create his church. The reformers in Hampton encouraged Rigdon to lead the church as a surviving member of the First Presidency. They went to Pittsburgh in 1845 to reorganize the church under Rigdon's leadership and the original Mormon name "Church of Christ." At the reorganization, the 1844 reformers took up the reigns of leadership for Rigdon: Joseph M. Cole nominated Rigdon as president of the church; the reformers with their associates and kin (and others) governed the conference as part of the Quorum of Seventy-Three; Austin Cowles acted as the church-wide President of the High Priests Quorum; one-third of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (including its president) came from the reform sect. The reformers proselytized for Rigdon and built a stronghold for his church in Illinois and Iowa. Rigdon lamented the loss of these leaders. Dissolving quickly, the Church of Christ ceased to function in 1847 when Jesus failed to make his second coming, as Rigdon promised he would, and the group failed to make payments on their communal farm.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Benjamin G. Wright to Brothers, letter, January 30, 1847, in *Zion's Reveille* (Voree, Wisconsin), February 11, 1847, 19; Shepard, "James Blakeslee, the Old Soldier of Mormonism," 123-26.

²⁸⁶ Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 391-92.

Navigating a Tumultuous Religious Climate

In the years following the disbanding of the Church of Christ, the reformers navigated a tumultuous religious climate. For the Mormon community as a whole, the selection of the Twelve at Nauvoo to lead the church did not end the Succession Crisis. Though thousands followed Brigham Young to Utah, thousands remained behind looking for a leader they could support. The activities of the 1844 reformers reveal three types of reactions to the Succession Crisis: 1) An abandonment of Mormonism altogether. This group included William Law. 2) Minimal interaction with Mormon factions. These reformers lived mostly apart from Mormonism. 3) Volatile factional association until the establishment of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The RLDS Church was acceptable to the reformers because it was a moderate expression of Mormonism that rejected plural marriage, kingdom building, and esoteric temple rituals.

No Affiliation with Mormonism

After the turbulent months of 1844, several dissent leaders apparently left Mormonism completely. James Y. Green (counselor to reform bishop Charles Ivins) sometimes farmed, politicked, or practiced medicine across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo in Montrose, Iowa. By 1860 the Green family moved to Sullivan County, Missouri, and James likely passed away soon after.²⁸⁷ Though an officer in the reform sect, Green's role in the movement appears minimal. Francis M. Higbee stayed in Hancock County and

²⁸⁷ 1850 U.S. Census of Montrose, Lee, Iowa, population schedule, p. 407 (back), J.Y. Green Sen. household; www.familysearch.org: accessed 22 February 2017; "Lee County, Iowa, July 17, 1851," *The Burlington (Iowa) Hawk-Eye*, July 24, 1851, 2; 1860 U.S. Census of Sullivan County, Iowa, population schedule, p. 155, James Y. Green household; www.familysearch.org: accessed 22 February 2017.

was taken prisoner during the Battle of Nauvoo in 1846. Sometime after 1850, Francis moved to Cumberland, Rhode Island, where he died in 1856.²⁸⁸ Chauncey L. Higbee stayed in Western Illinois. He practiced law, worked as a circuit and appellate court judge, and was elected to the Illinois legislature and senate. He died in Pittsfield, Illinois, in 1884.²⁸⁹ Charles A. Foster worked as a physician in Ohio, Illinois, Mississippi, Tennessee, and New York. He managed hospitals for the Union Army and was mayor of Vicksburg, Mississippi, during Reconstruction. Foster died in Canandaigua, New York, in 1904. His history with the LDS Church was not a secret. An interview Foster granted near the end of his life reflected his disgust with Mormonism.²⁹⁰

Near the end of his life William Law also expressed disgust with Mormonism in an interview, but he kept his Mormon history a secret until then. When an author asked if he was the William Law “who played such an important part in the Nauvoo events of 1843 and 1844,” Law answered, “I am unfortunately the one.” He did not regret his actions, but that the author discovered him. He told the author, “for over forty years I have been almost entirely silent on the subject” of Mormonism “and will so continue after this.” The author wanted an interview with Law and persisted. Law eventually conceded and gave his only interview on Mormonism on March 30, 1887. Before the interview, Law told the author

²⁸⁸ Joseph Lathrop, Statement, 1848, Collected Information Concerning the Battle of Nauvoo, MS 14282, bx 1, fd 3, CHL; “Francis Marion Higbee,” Nauvoo Community Project, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://nauvoo.byu.edu/ViewPerson.aspx?ID=36815>.

²⁸⁹ “Chauncey L. Higbee Papers, 1823-1927,” *Chronicling Illinois: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum*, 2002, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://alplm-cdi.com/chroniclingillinois/items/show/284>; Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 406.

²⁹⁰ “Death at Canandaigua of Dr. Charles A. Foster,” *Democrat Chronicle* (Rochester, New York), November 26, 1904; “With the Mormons in Nauvoo, Illinois,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, New York), November 30, 1899, in “Misc. New York Newspapers, 1870-99 Articles,” Uncle Dale’s Readings in Early Mormon History, January 16, 2015, accessed March 6, 2017, <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/ny/miscNYS5.htm#113099>.

“the great mistake of my life is my having anything to do with Mormonism.” The interview reflected that sentiment. Law was vicious, angry, and rancorous.²⁹¹ After leaving Nauvoo, the family moved around some, but settled in Shullsburg, Wisconsin.²⁹² Here Wilson died in 1876 and Jane in 1882. After Jane died William became “very lonesome and unhappy.” William died January 19, 1892.²⁹³

Law described some of the prominent players in the Succession Crisis: John C. Bennett was “a scoundrel, but very smart” who made “a bad pair” with Joseph Smith. Emma Smith was greedy for money and power; all the Smith’s “were infidels, if not atheists.” Joseph Smith III, then president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, was “a chip off the old block and would be just as bad as his father if he had the ability.” David Whitmer was always a “crank.” Law was more sympathetic to Rigdon; he was a good biblical historian and “eloquent preacher,” but a “disappointed man” who “[w]ould be leader if he could.” Brigham Young was enigmatic to Law who described him as “deep, quiet.” Law concluded Young was a “wicked man.”²⁹⁴ These assessments reveal a man who lost all hope for a faith tradition he once loved. William Law wanted no affiliation with Mormonism whatsoever.

Minimal Affiliation with Mormonism

Though Charles Ivins did not affiliate with Mormonism after the expulsion from Nauvoo in 1846, he was the only dissenter who attempted a reconciliation with the Twelve.

²⁹¹ William Law to Wilhelm Wyle, letter, January 7, 1887, in *William Law*, Cook, 102-4; William Law, interview by Wilhelm Wyle, March 30, 1887, in *William Law*, Cook, 115-36.

²⁹² Cook, "William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter," 71-72.

²⁹³ Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 421-22; William Law to Wilhelm Wyle, letter, January 20, 1887, in *William Law*, Cook, 105-10.

²⁹⁴ William Law to Wilhelm Wyle, letters, January 20 & 27, 1887, in *William Law*, Cook, 105-10.

Ivins wrote to Brigham Young twice seeking a settlement, first on November 7, 1844 and then again in July 1845. In the letters, Ivins expressed frustration with rumors concerning his loyalty to Joseph Smith, the Twelve, and supposed support for Sidney Rigdon. Ivins admitted to early uncertainty about Rigdon's claims, but concluded Rigdon was wrong and thought the Twelve should lead the church. His "confidence for the work is stronger than Ever [sic] it was" Ivins reaffirmed. Ivins defended the course he took prior to Smith's death: "I have said if Joseph was guilty of what Laws[,] Fosters[,] and others swore to[,] he was a scoundrel—and I say so yet—and allways [sic] will. But I only had their word for it. I never said I knew it was true this was the reason I never acted." When asked to make affidavits against Joseph he refused because he knew "nothing of a criminal nature" in Joseph.²⁹⁵ Ivins's explanation and defense, however, did not resolve the issue that he was not only the bishop in the reform sect, but was also a publisher of the *Expositor*.

In his letters, Ivins expressed anxiety about the safety of his life and property; it appears these concerns are what ultimately drove him from fellowshipping with the Twelve. Because people in Nauvoo thought Ivins supported Rigdon he (and those he assisted financially) received death threats. Since coming to Nauvoo, Ivins sacrificed thousands of dollars for the church, he told Young, and had \$300 of property stolen. Ivins chalked up the threats and burglaries to hypocrites "sailing under religious coulars [sic]," but still found it hard to endure. The final straw came when, while writing his July 1845 letter, Ivins learned someone burned his ferry boats in Nauvoo and Daniel Cairns had taken

²⁹⁵ Charles Ivins to Brigham Young, letter, November 7, 1844, Brigham Young Incoming Correspondence, 1839-1877, CR 1234 1, bx 20, fd 6, CHL; Charles Ivins to Brigham Young, letter, July 1845, Brigham Young Incoming Correspondence, 1839-1877, CR 1234 1, bx 20, fd 13, CHL.

possession of the ferry. Ivins thought it was a conspiracy to steal his business. In the midst of writing, Ivins became paranoid—with no evidence to speak of—that Young secretly sanctioned Cairns’s actions. By the time Ivins finished composing his letter he had given up: “all I can say is of no use as I am a dam[me]d old apostate and I say in return dam all and Every one [sic] engaged in the matter—or that sanctions it.”²⁹⁶ The realities of human mischievousness, imperfection, and maliciousness finally got to Ivins and he spent the remainder of his life ten miles downriver from Nauvoo in Keokuk, Iowa, where he died in 1875.²⁹⁷

Joseph M. Cole stayed in La Harpe, Illinois, for several years following his disassociation from Rigdon. From his home in La Harpe, Cole listened to canons firing during the Battle of Nauvoo. A few days later, he saw humor when the militia attacked tall rosinweeds mistaken for Mormons. In 1847 or 1848, George M. Hinkle tried establishing a church and the Coles may have supported the endeavor; at least, they allowed Hinkle to stay at their home. In 1852, Cole and other La Harpe men went to the gold diggings in California.²⁹⁸ The company stopped at the Mormon settlement in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Cole wrote home that some men feared being in Council Bluffs because of their role in the murders of the Smith brothers. Two men disguised themselves and opted to leave Council Bluffs and take a different route. Cole wrote “I have no fears of the Mormons I have been received in a friendly way by all who formerly knew me.” However, the troubles a family

²⁹⁶ Charles Ivins to Brigham Young, letter, November 7, 1844; Charles Ivins to Brigham Young, letter, July 1845, Brigham Young Incoming Correspondence, 1839-1877, CR 1234 1, bx 20, fd 13, CHL.

²⁹⁷ Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 418.

²⁹⁸ Samuel James Reader, *Autobiography*, Volume 1, 1901-1908, 143-45, 147-49, 191-92, 222, Samuel Reader Coll. #483, bx 4, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. Hereafter referred to as KSHS.

friend experienced in polygamy disheartened Cole.²⁹⁹ Later, he migrated to Kansas during the Border War concerning slavery. Though an anti-abolitionist, Cole was also anti-slavery. He died near present-day Topeka in 1858.³⁰⁰

Following his troubles in Nauvoo, Robert D. Foster continued his physician practice in Ohio and New York before moving to Iroquois County, Illinois. Foster accumulated a significant amount of wealth—more than \$55,000 by 1860.³⁰¹ During the 1850s and 1860s, Foster is not known to have affiliated with any LDS faction, but by the mid-1870s he corresponded with Joseph Smith III, president and prophet of the RLDS Church. Smith III sent Foster a Book of Mormon, Parley P. Pratt’s 1837 pamphlet “A Voice of Warning,” and a photograph of himself that Foster’s daughter prized.³⁰²

In 1875, the RLDS newspaper published a lengthy letter Foster wrote the previous year to Smith III. Foster’s letter is interesting because it does not mention the *Expositor* and praises Joseph Smith Jr. Foster recalled several instances that to him were “incontrovertible evidence of the fact that your father was no false pretender; but that he was a true prophet of the living God.” Foster did not repeat any old Nauvoo complaints, but did swipe at Brigham Young’s branch of Mormonism. Whether Foster formally associated with the RLDS Church is unknown, but he closed his letter “[w]ith

²⁹⁹ Joseph M. Cole to Adelia B. Cole, letter, May 19, 1852, MS 3756, CHL.

³⁰⁰ Samuel James Reader, Autobiography, Volume 2, 1901-1908, 1-2, Samuel Reader Coll. #483, bx 4, KSHS; “Joseph M. Cole,” memorial #66441764, Find A Grave, March 3, 2011, accessed March 8, 2017, <https://findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=66441764>.

³⁰¹ 1850 U.S. Census of Canandaigua, Ontario, New York, population schedule, p. 174 (back), Robert D. Foster household; www.familysearch.org; accessed 22 February 2017; 1860 U.S. Census of Loda, Iroquois, Illinois, population schedule, p. 297, Robert D. Foster household; www.familysearch.org; accessed 22 February 2017.

³⁰² Robert D. Foster to Joseph Smith III, letter, February 14, 1874, in “A Testimony of the Past,” *The True Latter Day Saints Herald* (Plano, Illinois), April 15, 1875, 225-30.

considerations of very kind regards, I am, sir, yours for the truth.” Foster was apparently reconciled to some degree with his LDS past and built positive connections with the moderate branch of Mormonism, but retained hostile feelings towards the radical branch.³⁰³ He died in Loda, Illinois, three years after his letter was published.³⁰⁴

Arriving at the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

Austin Cowles remained in Kirtland after his falling out with Rigdon in early 1846. By April 1847, Cowles won the confidence of James J. Strang who appointed him to preside over the Kirtland district of his church. Cowles continued with Strang for a year, but separated from him over a disagreement about authority.³⁰⁵ When James C. Brewster organized his church in the summer of 1848 in Kirtland, Austin Cowles united with it. Cowles edited several issues of Brewster’s paper *The Olive Branch*. This church was satisfactory to Cowles until June 1849 when Brewster presented two revelations Cowles (and eleven others) rejected. The twelve dissenters, led by Cowles, hijacked Brewster’s conference and managed it as they saw fit. However, the dissenters drafted humble resolutions seeking to mend their broken relationship with Brewster.³⁰⁶ Cowles and his fellow dissenters were excommunicated by Brewster in September 1849 for their actions at the June conference.³⁰⁷

³⁰³ Robert D. Foster to Joseph Smith III, letter, February 14, 1874, in “A Testimony of the Past,” *The True Latter Day Saints Herald* (Plano, Illinois), April 15, 1875, 225-30; Abraham C. Hodge, Statement, June 23, 1856, Joseph Smith History Documents, CR 100 396, bx 1, fd 92. CHL.

³⁰⁴ Hedges, *Journals Volume 3*, 406-7.

³⁰⁵ Todd Compton and William Shepard, “Austin A. Cowles: Chronology,” September 2000, typescript, 36-37, P129, F14, CoC.

³⁰⁶ Compton and Shepard, “Austin A. Cowles: Chronology,” 38; “Minutes of the General Assembly,” and “To the Brethren and Saints scattered abroad in every Land,” *The Olive Branch or Herald of Peace and Truth to all Saints* (Springfield, Illinois), July 1, 1849, 2-6.

³⁰⁷ “Minutes of a Special Conference,” *The Olive Branch or Herald of Peace and Truth to all Saints* (Springfield, Illinois), October 1849, 50.

In an August 1849 letter to Strang, Cowles reviewed existing factions of Mormonism. He named nine supposed gathering places, but “[n]one of them,” Cowles evaluated, “are of any worth.” Not only did Mormonism have many centers, but it also had many leaders. “[F]or our Spiritual Edification we have prophet Brigham [Young] Prophet Strang prophet Wm Smith Prophet McLellin Prophet Gladden [Bishop] Prophet Brewster.” Cowles predicted the list of prophets would expand. With a hint of jest, Cowles surmised: “if we do not get the word of the Lord there must be many mistakes.” Interestingly, Cowles saw himself as a prophet: “I myself commenced prophesying in 1843 Concerning the Church,” and he assessed himself as “one of the most Successful as yet.” But Cowles learned prophets could fail and he did not want to be a false witness before God; he resolved this problem by not prophesying in God’s name, but in his own.³⁰⁸ Cowles’s assessment of Mormonism reveals the confusion the Latter-day Saints faced, but he was confident in his ability to accurately navigate the tumultuous climate.

Though Jacob Scott died in Nauvoo in January 1845 his children (some being involved with the dissent movement) experienced nearly the full spectrum of the Succession Crisis. John Scott (witness at Law’s excommunication trial) remained faithful to Brigham Young; he migrated to the Salt Lake Valley in 1848, completed two missions, married five wives polygamously, and fathered thirty-six children. Jacob’s daughter Mary (to whom he wrote frequently) and her family were quite active in the RLDS Church. Robert Scott, one of the young men who spied for Joseph Smith, remained aloof from the factions of Mormonism. He moved to Wisconsin and married Be-mash-e-kwe, a medicine

³⁰⁸ Austin Cowles to James J. Strang, letter, August 24, 1849, P11-9, F1, CoC.

woman from the Ojibwe tribe. Sarah Scott Mulholland Mullinder initially expressed loyalty to the Twelve when she was sealed to Heber C. Kimball in the Nauvoo Temple. However, by 1850 Sarah lived in Burlington, Wisconsin, adjacent to Strang's Mormon gathering in Voree. It is possible Sarah associated with Strang, but she may have simply moved to Burlington to be near her siblings Ann Scott Davis and Isaac Scott—siblings who did participate in the religious gathering to Voree.³⁰⁹

In early summer 1846, Ann and Isaac, with their families, migrated to Voree to support Strang's succession claim. Their stint with Strang was short—not even six months. Ann Scott Davis commented “[w]e soon became disgusted with Strang's teachings and actions.” Because they did not know who to follow, this period was “dark and cloudy” Ann remarked.³¹⁰ The family's exit from Strang's church was anything but uneventful. Taking their cue from Law's 1844 reform movement, dissidents from Strang's church tried internal reform. Their motto echoed the 1844 reform movement: original Mormonism, separation of church and state, adherence to civil law, no secret organizations, and no illicit intercourse. The dissenters launched—with Isaac Scott as an editor—an anti-Strang newspaper. Opposition meetings (some at Isaac Scott's home) planned to reorganize the church in April 1847. Strang's response to the dissenters was vitriolic and plans for a reorganization failed to materialize.³¹¹ However, McLellin and Cowles reorganized the church in Kirtland during this same period. Isaac Scott supported it because it was built

³⁰⁹ Edith Colborn Scott, ed., *History and Descendants of Jacob Scott-John Scott, 1782-1996 in Two Volumes*, (Emmett, Idaho: n.p. 1997), 1.1, 4.1, 5.1-5.5, 8.1, 9.1.

³¹⁰ F.M. Cooper, “Spiritual Reminiscences.—No. 2 In the Life of Sister Ann Davis, of Lyons, Wisconsin,” *Autumn Leaves*, January 1891, 19.

³¹¹ *The New Era and Herald of Zion's Watchmen* (Voree, Wisconsin), January 1847, February 1847. M292.49 N532 v. 1 1847. CHL.

“on the original platform upon which God planted his Church at its original organization in these last days.”³¹² McLellin’s movement did not last long, however, and the Scott and Davis families were left again without an organized church.

James Blakeslee associated with Strang (even as an apostle) after he left Rigdon’s church because he thought Strang’s authority claims were valid and because he “preached up the pure principles of the gospel, and preached down everything that looked like iniquity.” But after seeing “the works of the flesh manifested” in Strang, Blakeslee withdrew from that faction. Discouraged after repeated fallings out, Blakeslee thought “the whole church was rejected” because it did not keep the commandments; therefore, “God was under no obligation to the church, to appoint another in his (Joseph’s) stead.” Blakeslee had no option but to wait. After a while, he united with William Smith, but left him after once again seeing “the works of the flesh.” Blakeslee then investigated Charles B. Thompson and committed to his church by February 1853.³¹³ Blakeslee remained with Thompson for the next several years until he joined with the New Organization—the precursor to the RLDS Church.

The formation of the RLDS Church was a slow process, especially considering the speed at which Mormon factions sprung up (and disintegrated). After the death of Joseph Smith, many LDS congregations remained independent. Or, if they did align with a succession claimant, their allegiances were just as volatile as Cowles, Blakeslee, and the

³¹² Isaac F. Scott to William E. McLellin, letter, April 4, 1848, in *The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ* (Kirtland, Ohio), May 1848, 87-88.

³¹³ James Blakeslee to Charles B. Thompson, letter, February 20, 1853, in *Zion’s Harbinger, and Baneemy’s Organ* (St. Louis, Missouri), March 1853, 20-22; Joseph Smith, III and Heman C. Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1805-1890* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1896): 3:756-60.

Scott family. During this period of disorganization many believed Joseph Smith III, son of Joseph and Emma Smith, was his father's rightful successor. In 1851, Jason Briggs received a revelation near Beloit, Wisconsin, that promised the faithful would be gathered and a descendant of Joseph Smith Jr. would lead the people. Briggs was commanded to continue preaching. For nearly a decade Briggs and others unified many congregations with this message into an association called the "New Organization." Finally, at a conference held at Amboy, Illinois, on April 6, 1860, Joseph Smith III accepted the call to be prophet and president of the church.³¹⁴

James Blakeslee and Austin Cowles both joined the RLDS Church. Before the young Joseph took up his father's mantle, New Organization missionaries visited the men. Cowles took interest initially, but opposed the RLDS Church for a time after its organization. He changed his mind, however, and by early 1864 actively participated in the RLDS congregation in Decatur County, Iowa.³¹⁵ His 1872 obituary praised Cowles for his forty years of service to the church and his "firm and decided stand against" polygamy.³¹⁶ Time worked on Blakeslee before he joined the New Organization, but he became an active proselytizer for that movement. The 1860 Amboy Conference, selected Blakeslee as one of the Presidents of the Quorum of the Seventies—a general office in the church.³¹⁷ Later that year, the church asked Blakeslee to serve as an apostle. He worked in that capacity

³¹⁴ Mark A. Scherer, *The Journey of a People: The Era of Reorganization, 1844 to 1946* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ Seminary Press, 2013), 80-106.

³¹⁵ Frederick B. Blair, comp., *The Memoirs of President W.W. Blair* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1908), 18, 43-44; "Special Conference," *The True Latter-Day-Saints' Herald* (Plano, Illinois), June 1, 1864, 171.

³¹⁶ "Died," *The True Latter Day Saints' Herald* (Plano, Illinois), March 1, 1872, 160.

³¹⁷ Edmund C. Briggs, "Autobiographic Sketch and Incidents in the Early History of the Reorganization.—No. 10," *The Saints' Herald* (Lamoni, Iowa), March 6, 1901, 184; Smith and Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church*: 3:758-59; "The Mormon Conference," *The True Latter Day Saints's Herald* (Cincinnati, Ohio), May 1860, 105.

until his death in 1866.³¹⁸ Cowles's and Blakeslee's rapid movements among LDS factions reveal they did not find the reformed, original Mormonism their Nauvoo dissent aimed for. Once they found the RLDS Church, however, the men remained committed until death; suggesting the RLDS Church embraced the ideals Blakeslee and Cowles searched for.

The RLDS Church attracted many early converts to Mormonism including some Nauvoo reformers. Roger D. Launius, biographer of Joseph Smith III, described the younger Joseph as more moderate and practical, and less doctrinally explosive than his father. Launius concluded that two important differences between father and son enabled the success of the RLDS Church. First, Smith III rejected plural marriage. Second, the younger Smith accomplished Zion building at a much slower, realistic rate than Nauvoo's attempt. In the RLDS Church, accusations of a merger of church and state would not have been as warranted as they were in Nauvoo.³¹⁹ Is it any wonder, then, that some of the 1844 reformers found a home in the RLDS Church? These two issues—polygamy and a merger of ecclesiastical and civil powers—were at the heart of their 1844 reform movement.

Nauvoo dissenter Isaac Scott attended the Amboy Conference for his family and friends to critically examine the claims and nature of Joseph Smith III at the dawn of this new era in Mormonism. As Scott once expressed it, they were tired of “having been the rounds of Latterday [sic] Saintism.”³²⁰ Scott liked what he found at Amboy and in Joseph Smith III. He was pleased to hear James Blakeslee preach at the conference. This

³¹⁸ “Minutes of the Semi-Annual Conference,” *The True Latter Day Saints' Herald* (Cincinnati, Ohio), October 1860, 236; “Obituary,” *The True Latter Day Saints' Herald* (Plano, Illinois), January 1, 1867, 5-6.

³¹⁹ Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet*, xi-xii, 361-69.

³²⁰ Isaac F. Scott to William E. McLellin, letter, April 4, 1848, in *The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ* (Kirtland, Ohio), May 1848, 87-88.

reorganization of the church, Scott remarked, would not be polluted by “seducing spirits and doctrines of Devils” such as those practiced in Salt Lake City—a thinly veiled reference to plural marriage. Scott noted that in physical appearance the young Joseph was very different than his father. In the same breath, he wrote that Smith III seemed “to be very honest & sincere.” Perhaps subconsciously Scott drew a parallel between the characters of the two Smiths; the 1844 reformers thought Joseph Smith Jr. was dishonest and power seeking, but Smith III did not appear to possess those traits—just as he did not possess his father’s physical characteristics.³²¹

Though the 1860 reorganization promised a moderate Mormonism, it still held on to the charismatic expressions that brought the Scott family and others into the original church in the 1830s. Scott wrote to his siblings about the Amboy Conference:

I never attended a Conferance [sic] in my life where the gifts of the Gospel such as speaking in Toungius [sic] Propheying And preaching by the gift and power of the Holy one of Israel was manifested to such an extent, and with such power.³²²

This new manifestation of Mormonism would be moderate, but not too moderate. It rejected the Zion building and radical doctrines of Nauvoo, but embraced the spiritual gifts of early Mormonism. The reformers were satisfied.

Following the death of Joseph Smith, Mormonism’s identity fractured. Competing claims from succession leaders gave rise to competing Mormon centers. The 1844 reform sect maintained their distinct identity by removing to Hampton, Illinois. While in Hampton, the reformers built associations with other Mormon factions and united with Sidney Rigdon in their common goal of reforming the church to an earlier Mormonism. The reformers’

³²¹ Isaac F. Scott to Brother and Sister, letter, April 22, 1860, P13, F129, CoC.

³²² Isaac F. Scott to Brother and Sister, letter, April 22, 1860.

foundational place in reorganizing the church under Rigdon's leadership demonstrates that the reform sect did not disintegrate in 1844, but evolved into the 1845 Church of Christ. After the Church of Christ ceased functioning (partly due the reformers' exit from that organization) the dissenters were involved with Mormonism to various degrees—several moved from one Mormon church to the next briskly. Eventually, the RLDS Church fulfilled the reformers' desire for a Mormonism void of plural marriage and excessive kingdom building.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Mormonism, like many religious traditions, is rife with dissent. The founding charismatic prophet of the faith, Joseph Smith, met dissent almost from the day he organized the Church of Christ and his death sparked the movement's fracturing. Edwin Scott Gaustad groups dissent into categories of misfits, heretics and schismatics. Perhaps misfits and heretics are proper labels for some of Smith's earliest challengers. Black Pete and Ms. Hubble refused to conform to established teachings by taking Smith's inclusion of charismatic expression to the extreme. Hiram Page also mimicked Smith's prophetic ability of receiving revelations through the medium of a seer stone. Though some would define seer stone use as extreme charisma, it fit well into the Mormon tradition; thus, boxing Page into misfit or heretic categories is difficult. Gaustad defines schismatics as those seeking to reform the faith and this category aptly applies to several of Smith's challengers—the 1837 Kirtland and Missouri dissenters, Isaac Russell, and William Law. This thesis set out to get at the nuts and bolts of schismatic group identities. Specifically, William Law's dissenting group served as a lens to examine the formation, maintenance, and evolution of schismatic identities.

Decentralizing Law and enlarging the investigative chronology allowed this thesis to expand the scholarship on Law's group and Mormon dissent in general. Current scholarship accurately categorizes Law's dissent into economic, political, and religious anxieties and provides examples for each concern. This project briefly examined these categorizations and concluded that for the 1844 dissenters Smith's theological innovations

progressed too rapidly in material ways. Chiefly, plural marriage tied to other doctrines and esoteric rituals repelled the dissenters and Zion building activities in Nauvoo triggered fears of economic self-aggrandizement and abuses of civil and ecclesiastical governing powers.

The third chapter uncovered the formation process of Law's reform sect and covered the standard January to June 1844 time frame employed by other scholars. Processes of social and formal estrangement pushed the dissenters from the centers of Mormonism to its peripheries. The initial group identity formed through existing networks of kin and friends—a pattern found in earlier Mormon dissent movements. These networks facilitated the transmission of the dissent message and the recruitment process. Little is known about the earliest dissent meetings but available sources indicate the dissenters met in private to plan a method of enacting a reform for the “protection and salvation of the Church.” As the dissenters worked towards the reformation (in the spirit of most schismatics identified by Gaustad) they did not establish a separatist external church to compete with Smith's LDS Church. Rather, the dissenters instituted a hierarchal structure that defined themselves as an (extralegal) branch of the existing LDS Church. Their goal was to reform Mormonism from within, not compete with it from without. The *Nauvoo Expositor* embodied the reform sect's identity. The Nauvoo city council's destruction of the *Expositor* was both a practical and symbolic means of purging the city of an unwanted element of their community.

The fourth chapter explored issues of identity maintenance and evolution in schismatic bodies. Both figurative and literal centers and peripheries were instrumental to

shaping dominant and schismatic Mormon identities. Mormonism taught the necessity of a literal gathering of the righteous which created a center place for the faith. Concurrently, esoteric ritual performance occurred at the center place. This facilitated the formation of a figurative Mormon center composed of ritual participants. These rituals were mechanisms of inclusion while other practices (primarily excommunication) were mechanisms of exclusion that pushed individuals away from the dominant Mormon center. Because Nauvoo, as the primary center, represented everything wrong with the faith, the dissenters sought out other Mormon centers. Their associations with, and the history of, The Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride the Lamb's wife in Buffalo, Iowa Territory, demonstrate that schisms maintained distinct identities by crafting ecclesiastical histories, requiring ritual participation, and establishing boundaries through geographic distancing.

Schismatic identities also evolved through association with other schisms. Common goals and power-holding individuals served as bridges between these groups. Parallels between Sidney Rigdon's Mormon faction and the reform sect placed the two groups on a path of evolution resulting in the reorganization of the LDS Church in Pittsburgh in 1845 in the form of the Church of Christ. The role the reformers played (despite Law's last minute personal abandonment of the cause) in effecting the Church of Christ demonstrates that the 1844 reform sect did not dissipate by the end of that year—it evolved into the 1845 Church of Christ. In this church, the reformers thought they found the reformed original Mormonism they were after and they worked earnestly in building up that organization. As the reformers withdrew support for Rigdon, the Church of Christ grew weaker and it ceased functioning (not solely because of the reformers' desertions) in 1847. Those reformers who remained committed to Mormonism continued their search for

the original faith (sometimes jointly) for the next several years—rapidly moving from one leader to the next in the Succession Crisis.

When the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints formed in 1860 it represented a moderate form of Mormonism. The RLDS Church rejected plural marriage and extreme Zion building just as the reformers did in Nauvoo in 1844. This attracted the reformers. After years of volatile faction association, the reformers found a viable home for the original Mormonism they were after. By 1844, several prominent Latter-day Saints felt they could no longer identify with the Mormonism they experienced in Nauvoo. They set out to refashion the faith by forming a distinct group identity they maintained and developed during a period of intense religious rupture. Several of the reformers, though, never lost sight of their goals and found a home in the RLDS Church.

The narrative and analysis presented in this thesis do more than just round out and correct the story of the dissent of William Law and his associates—it uncovers the mechanics of a dissent movement, or, how the parts function together as a whole. Most scholarship on Mormon dissent limits itself by only examining the “why” or the “who” behind dissent—not the how. The scholarship usually investigates reasons for dissent and casts them in a biographical narrative, which is enlightening and necessary, but the “how” behind dissent movements is often neglected. This thesis offers a pattern of schism formation, maintenance, and evolution that can be applied to other dissent movements. Social networks must be identified and traced to fully understand a dissenting organization. This thesis also suggests that more nuanced terms, such as “reformation,” “reorganization,” and “sect,” more accurately describe how dissenting Mormon organizations functioned and

perceived themselves. Besides the “how” of dissent, this project demonstrates that the Succession Crisis was more than just a battle of claimants to Joseph Smith’s leadership position. For some of the laity in Mormonism, the crisis was whether their faith would don a moderate or radical identity. This split in the community manifested itself before the crisis over succession occurred and only grew wider after Smith was assassinated. This study’s findings and methods can serve as patterns for future research into religious dissent.

Dissent in Mormonism is a fascinating subject that has yet to be fully explored. Scholars have produced myriads of articles, chapters, theses, and books on the subject, but most do not take a broad or holistic approach. Much of the scholarship, including this thesis, primarily zeros in on an individual dissenter or stitches together a narrative of a movement by looking at its key players—resulting in works that are mostly biographical in nature. This project has attempted to move past that paradigm in a small way by not just telling the story of William Law, but by looking at how schisms form and evolve over time. More can be done though. What kinds of internal or external pressures erupted into open dissent? What other methods disseminated the dissent message? The economics, politics, and demographics of dissent should be pushed further. Why were some movements more successful than others? Can trends in dissent movements be discovered? How did church hierarchies respond to and manage dissent? How did the laity react to and perceive dissenters? These are just a few questions that may spark a broader approach to dissent in Mormonism and thereby contribute to a deepened understanding of religious dissent more broadly.

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