

The Newell K. Whitney Collection

CHAD J. FLAKE*

The writing of history, always difficult, is made even more formidable in certain eras of Mormonism due to the lack of documentation. A review of the material published during the last two years on the New York period demonstrates some of the problems of solving various historic dilemma due to lack of adequate source material. This same lack of documentation is critical to the study of the Ohio period. Such problems as the mass-apostasy in Kirtland, and yet the seeming contradiction of the relatively little apostasy of Zion's Camp, which has been usually portrayed as rather a debacle; the position of the Kirtland Safety Society and affiliated banks in the total picture of Ohio settlement; the shift in consecration during the period; and the seemingly unnatural violence of the anti-Mormon activities on the Western Reserve, where innovative religion was not that uncommon, are a few of many events for which documentation is less than adequate. It is because of this lack of source material that the acquisition of the Newell K. Whitney collection by the BYU library is so very important. The Whitney collection is an aggregation of several hundred manuscripts and some rather important early imprints, kept together by the family of Newell K. Whitney, who as Presiding Bishop was given the responsibility of trying to settle some of the financial accounts, first in Kirtland, and later in Nauvoo. The collection is important both for its scope and for individual items.

Newel K. Whitney was born at Marlborough, Vermont, February 5, 1795. By 1814 he was a settler at Plattsburg, New York, and by 1817 had settled at Kirtland where he joined with Algernon Sidney Gilbert in a merchandising enterprise later called Gilbert and Whitney. Early in 1831 he joined the Mor-

*Professor Flake is Special Collections Librarian at Brigham Young University and editor of *Mormon Americana*.

Newel K. Whitney was born in Marlborough, Windham County, Vermont, February 5, 1795.

Brother Whitney, I lay my hands upon thy head in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I ask my heavenly Father to open the vision of my mind to know what I shall say unto thee, for thou art a strange man, and thy ways have been unlike the ways of other men: nevertheless thou hast sought to be a man of God, and to do away all thy unbelief and doubts, and in this the Lord has given thee strength. Inasmuch as thou knowest thy progenitors, and art assured concerning the lineage through which thou hast descended, I bless thee with a father's blessing, for thee and thy children after thee, for their inheritances to the end. And as thou art a descendant of Melchizedek one of the ⁵, thy posterity shall be like unto him before the Lord, for his heart shall be filled with the same Spirit from his youth up, and he shall be a benefit to thy posterity. Thou shalt be released from all incumbrances and go forth and do the will of the Lord; for thou hast long besought him for this thing, and in due time thou shalt have it, and thy soul shall be filled with joy when the Lord makes bare his arm for the good of the poor and needy. Thou hast an ungodly brother who knows not the Lord, neither does he understand his ways, though he supposes he is a minister of the gospel and makes his boasts that his feet are upon the Rock that cannot be moved. But as thou hast besought the Lord many times for him, and greatly desired his salvation, the Lord will hear and answer thy prayers: he will surround thy brother with judgments and lay upon him his afflicting hand, and he will fear and tremble and come to his senses, and yet obey the truth; for when his soul is bowed down with affliction he will remember what thou hast said, and then will he turn to the Lord. Thou shalt yet go to the great men of the earth and proclaim the gospel unto them, and the Lord will uphold thee and give his angels charge concerning thee that thou shalt be kept from death and every destruction. Thy father will yet come into the church, and his heart shall rejoice in his old age. I seal great blessings upon thee, even more than thy heart can now comprehend or understand. Thou shalt see thy Redeemer, and have the ministering of holy angels. Thy name is written in the Lamb's book of life, and thou shalt have a place with the sanctified when the Lord comes to reign with his people. In the name of Jesus Christ I seal these blessings upon thee, and thou shalt yet realize them and rejoice in them; even so. Amen.

Given in Kirtland, Ohio, September 14, 1835, by Patriarch Joseph Smith,
Olinus Cowdery, Clerk.

A patriarchal blessing by Joseph Smith Sr. on the head of Newel K. Whitney

To the Saints scattered abroad, the Bishop and his Counselors of Kirtland send greeting.

WHEREAS the church in Kirtland has taken into consideration the affairs of the Latter Day Saints in general, having opportunities of making themselves acquainted with the situation of the Saints throughout the continent, together, with the very flattering prospects of the prosperity of the cause of God in our land. And also of the peculiar condition of the city of Kirtland, which is a kind of first fruits of the cities, which the Lord has begun to build unto himself in these last days. It has been deemed of great importance to the prosperity of the cause of truth in general, that the Bishop and his counselors send abroad this their memorial to all the saints throughout the land, as well as to all well-wishers to the cause of Zion, in this our most happy country.

It is a fact well known, that the saints in the city of Kirtland have been called to endure a great fight of affliction for the truth's sake; and to bear a heavy burden in order that the foundation of the kingdom of God might be laid on a sure and certain base, so that the prophetic vision of Daniel might most certainly be fulfilled. That this kingdom might break in pieces all other kingdoms, and stand forever.

The exertions of the enemy to prevent this have been very great, and through their great exertions, they have given to the saints great trouble, and caused them much expense.—In addition to this, they have had to publish the word of the Lord, which has been attended with great expense: these together with building the house of the Lord, have embarrassed them very much; for when subscriptions failed, they went on and accomplished the work of building the house themselves, slighting all that they had, property, credit, and character, and by these means accomplished this great work which is the wonder and admiration of the world.

This they have done in faith believing that as the multitude of saints increased, that their liberality would abound towards those who regarding nothing but the salvation of the world, have thus exposed themselves to ruin, in order that the work of the gathering might not fail.

And besides all this, there have been a large number of poor who have had to receive assistance from the donations of the church, which have ten-

ded to increase its embarrassments. And now so numerous are the saints grown, that it is impracticable for them all to gather to the places which are now appointed for this purpose.

The church of Kirtland has, therefore, required at the hand of our beloved brethren Joseph Smith jun. and Sidney Rigdon; (men who have not thought their lives dear unto them, in order that the cause of God might be established,) Presidents, whom God has appointed to preside over the whole church, and the persons to whom this work belongs, that they should go forth, and lay off other stakes of Zion or places of gathering, so that the poor may have a place of refuge, or places of refuge, in the day of tribulation which is coming swiftly on the earth.

All these things will be attended with expense.

Feeling ourselves under great responsibility by virtue of our office and calling in the church of God, we present this our memorial to all the saints, making a most solemn appeal to the feelings, benevolence, and philanthropy, of all the saints into whose hands this our memorial comes, in faith and confidence, that this appeal will not be made in vain.

It is the fixed purpose of our God, and has been so from the beginning, as appears by the testimony of the ancient prophets, that the great work of the last days was to be accomplished by the tithing of his saints. The saints were required to bring their tithes into the store house, and after that, not before, they were to look for a blessing that there should not be room enough to receive it. See Malachi 3rd chapter 10th verse.

Our appeal then to the saints is founded on the best of testimony, that which no saint will feel to gainsay, but rejoice to obey. The saint of God will rejoice in all that the Lord does, and in doing all that the Lord requires.

The sacrifice of righteousness which the Lord requires will be offered with a willing heart, and ready mind, and with great joy, because they are counted worthy to offer up sacrifice for his name.

In making this appeal to the benevolence of the saints of God, we do not only take into consideration the situation of the poor, the embarrassments of the stake of Kirtland; but also their own interest; for every saint has an equal interest in building up of the Zion of

our God for it is after the Lord has built up Zion, that he will appear in his glory.—Psalms 102:16. We all look for the appearing of the great God, and our Savior Jesus Christ; but we shall look in vain, until Zion is built; for Zion is to be the dwelling place of our God when he comes.—Joel 3:21. Any one who will read this chapter with attention, will see that it treats of the last days, and of the Zion of the last days.

How then is the Lord to dwell in Zion, if Zion is not built up? This question we leave the saints to answer.—The salvation of the saints one and all depends on the building up of Zion; for without this there is no salvation; for deliverance in the last days is found in Zion, and in Jerusalem, and in the remnant whom the Lord our God shall call, or in other words, in the stakes which he shall appoint.—Joel 2:32.

It is in Zion where the Lord is to create upon every dwelling place, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and a smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night. It is upon the glory of Zion, that there will be a defense. It is in Zion that there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain, Isaiah 45:6. It is upon the walls of Zion, where the watchman shall see eye to eye Isaiah 52:8.

Whatever is glorious.—Whatever is desirable.—Whatever pertains to salvation, either temporal or spiritual. Our hopes, our expectations, our glory and our reward, all depend on our building up Zion according to the testimony of the prophets. For unless Zion is built our hopes perish, our expectations fail, our prospects are blasted, our salvation withers, and God will come and smite the whole earth with a curse.

Hear O ye saints of the last days! and let this our appeal have a favorable reception among you. Let every saint consider well the nature of his calling in the last days, and the great responsibility which rests upon him or her, as one to whom God has revealed his will, and make haste not only to the relief of Kirtland, but also to the building up of Zion.

Let every man, and every woman, give heed the very instant that they embrace the gospel, and exert themselves

with energy to send on meau-
to build up Zion. for our God bids us to haste the building of the city, saying, the time has come when the city must be pushed forward with unceasing exertions; for, behold, the day unless the day cometh, and the building of the city, they will not escape. Be admonished then O ye saints! and let not covetousness, which is idleness, nor worldly ambition hinder you; but gather up your gold and your silver, and all the means you have, and send on to the saints who are engaged in this great work of building the Zion of our God that there may be a place of refuge for you, and for your children in the day of God's vengeance, when he shall come down on Idumea, or the world, in his fury, and stamp them down in his wrath, and none shall escape, but the inhabitants of Zion.

What we say unto one, we say unto all, haste—haste—and delay not; for the hour of desolation does not linger, and with all the power that the saints have, and with all the diligence they can use, they will scarcely escape.

The time is not far distant when some of those who now deride and mock the saints for devoting their all to build up the Zion of God, will bless their name, for having provided a city of refuge, for them and their children, regardless of the ravings of ungodly priests, and the mockings of a stupid and ignorant people.

In the confidence which we have in the good sense and righteous principles of the multitude of the saints, we send this our memorial in the name of our master Jesus; believing that this appeal will be received with great kindness, and will be attended to with untiring perseverance, until the object for which it has been sent shall be accomplished.

And may the God of all grace, pour out his richest blessings on your heads, and crown you with abundance, that the Zion of our God may flourish, and cease not, until the righteousness thereof shall go forth as the light, and the salvation thereof as a lamp which burneth, is the prayer of your brethren in Christ Jesus.

N. K. WHITNEY,
R. CAHOON,
V. KNIGHT,

mon Church, and soon was appointed as a bishop in the Church. From then until 1848 he was vitally involved in the financial affairs of the Church.

The most important and exciting group of documents in the collection are early copies of eighteen revelations included in the *Book of Commandments* as well as two that were never published. These revelations are in the handwriting of such scribes as Oliver Cowdery, Frederick G. Williams, Newell K. Whitney, Sidney Rigdon, Orson Hyde, and John Whitmer.

The importance of these copies is attested to in the collection by a letter to Newell K. Whitney by Oliver Cowdery as follows:

Bishop Whitney:

Will you have the kindness to send us, by the bearer, the original copy of the Revelation given to 12 elders Feb. 1831 called "The Law of the Church"? We are preparing the old Star for re-printing, and have no copy from which to correct, and know of no other beside yours.

Your Ob't Serv't. Oliver Cowdery. Kirtland, Feb. 4, 1835.

Bishop Whitney:
 Will you have the kindness
 to send us, by the bearer, the original copy of
 the Revelation given to 12 elders Feb. 1831 called
 "The Law of the Church"? We are preparing the old Star
 for re-printing, and have no copy from which to cor-
 rect, and know of no other beside yours.
 Your Ob't. Serv't.
 Oliver Cowdery.
 Kirtland, Feb. 4, 1835. }

The implication is that Cowdery had copies of the other revelations, but the whereabouts of these copies remains a mystery, so that the Newell K. Whitney copies, though possibly differing slightly from the official copies used to print the *Book of Commandments*, remain the earliest copies owned by the Church.

Historically as important are the records which give glimpses into the problems of the financial structure of Kirtland. Kirtland—that is, the Mormon Kirtland—was being built in much the same manner later used in Nauvoo, except that

VERILY, I say unto you, concerning your brethren who have been afflicted, and persecuted, and cast out from the land of their inheritance. I the Lord have suffered the affliction to come upon them, wherewith they have been afflicted in consequence of their transgressions; yet, I will own them, and they shall be mine in that day when I shall come to make up my jewels.

Therefore, they must needs be chastened, and tried, even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son; for all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified.

Behold, I say unto you, there were jarrings, and contentions, & envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires among them; therefore by these things they polluted their inheritances. They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble.— In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me.

Verily, I say unto you, notwithstanding their sins my bowels are filled with compassion toward them: I will not utterly cast them off; and in the day of wrath I will remember mercy. I have sworn, and the decree hath gone forth by a former commandment which I have given unto you, that I would let fall the sword of mine indignation in the behalf of my people; and even as I have said, it shall come to pass. Mine indignation is soon to be poured out without measure upon all nations, and this will I do when the cup of their iniquity is full.

And in that day, all who are found upon the watch tower, or in other words, all mine Israel shall be saved. And they that have been scattered shall be gathered: and all they who have mourned shall be comforted; and all they who have given their lives for my name shall be crowned.

Therefore, let your hearts be comforted concerning Zion; for all flesh is in mine hands: be still, and know that I am God. Zion shall not be moved out of her place, notwithstanding her children are scattered, they that remain and are pure in heart shall return and come to their inheritances, they and their children, with songs of everlasting joy; to build up the waste places of Zion. And all these things, that the prophets might be fulfilled.

And behold, there is none other place appointed than that which I have appointed; neither shall there be any other place appointed than that which I have appointed for the work of the gathering of my saints, until the day cometh when there is found no more room for them; and then I have other places which I will appoint unto them, and they shall be called stakes, for the curtains, or the strength of Zion.

Behold, it is my will, that all they who call on my name, & worship me according to mine everlasting gospel, should gather together and stand in holy places, and prepare for the revelation which is to come when the veil of the covering of my temple, in my tabernacle, which hideth the earth, shall be taken off, and all flesh shall see me together. And every corruptible thing, both of man, or of the beasts of the field, or of the fowls of heaven or of the fish of the sea, that dwell upon all the face of the earth, shall be consumed; and also, that of element shall melt with fervent heat; and all things shall become new, that my knowledge and glory, may dwell upon all the earth.

And in that day the enmity of man, and the enmity

trodden under the feet of men. Behold, here is wisdom concerning the children of Zion; even many, but not all: they were found transgressors, therefore, they must needs be chastened. He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that abaseth himself shall be exalted.

And now, I will show unto you a parable that you may know my will concerning the redemption of Zion: A certain nobleman had a spot of land, very choice; and he said unto his servants, go ye into my vineyard; even upon this very choice piece of land, and plant twelve olive trees; and set watchmen round about them and build a tower, that one may overlook the land round about, to be a watchman upon the tower; that mine olive trees may not be broken down, when the enemy shall come to spoil, and take unto themselves the fruit of my vineyard.

Now the servants of the nobleman went and did as their lord commanded them; and planted the olive trees, and built a hedge round about, and set watchmen, and began to build the tower. And while they were yet laying the foundation thereof, they began to say among themselves, and what need hath my lord of this tower? And consulted for a long time, saying among themselves, What need hath my lord of this tower? seeing this is a time of peace! Might not this money be given to the exchangers? for there is no need of these things!

And while they were at variance one with another, they became very slothful, & they hearkened not unto the commandments of their lord: and the enemy came by night, and broke down the hedge, and the servants of the nobleman arose, and were affrighted, and fled: and the enemy destroyed their works, and broke down the olive trees.

Now behold, the nobleman, the lord of the vineyard, called upon his servants, and said unto them, Why! what is the cause of this great evil? Ought ye not to have done even as I commanded you? And after ye had planted the vineyard, and built the hedge round about, and set watchmen upon the walls thereof, built the tower also, and set a watchman upon the tower? and watched for my vineyard, and not have fallen asleep, lest the enemy should come upon you? and behold, the watchman upon the tower would have seen the enemy while he was yet afar off: and then ye could have made ready and kept the enemy from breaking down the hedge thereof, and saved my vineyard from the hands of the destroyer.

And the lord of the vineyard, said unto one of his servants, Go and gather together the residue of my servants; and take all the strength of mine house, which are my warriors, my young men, and they that are of middle age also, among all my servants, who are the strength of mine house, save those only whom I have appointed to tarry; and go ye straightway unto the land of my vineyard, and redeem my vineyard, for it is mine, I have bought it with money. Therefore get ye straightway unto my land; break down the walls of mine enemies; throw down their tower, and scatter their watchmen; and inasmuch as they gather together against you, avenge me of mine enemies; that by and by, I may come with the residue of mine house and possess the land.

And the servant said unto his lord, when shall these things be? And he said unto his servant, when I will; go ye straightway, and do all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and this shall be my seal and blessing upon you; A faithful and wise steward in the midst of mine house: A ruler in my kingdom.

A prepublication copy of Doctrine and Covenants Section 97 (1835), now Section 10

man. And there shall be no sorrow because there is no wisdom in me concerning all the churches inasmuch

land transactions, the early base for both Kirtland and Nauvoo (so interesting that Robert Flanders in his *Kingdom by the Mississippi* became so involved in the transactions that he lost sight of the accomplishment and spirit of Nauvoo) was not the whole base in Kirtland. The Kirtland Safety Society formed in 1836 was also very important. The manipulation that the leaders had to perform in order to try to build a kingdom virtually out of nothing was here further complicated by duplicity and the national bank failures of 1837. Documents of this period, and also correspondence between Newell and his brother, Samuel F., who remained in Kirtland, help one understand the modus operandi of the financial structure of Kirtland, as well as the attempt of the Church leaders to extricate themselves from legal problems arising from its failure after leaving Kirtland.

Some of the individual documents are fascinating. One cemetery plot seems to show members of the Church speculating on funeral plots. Quite possibly one of the most important historical documents is one of the indictments brought by William Parrish and the Johnson brothers against the leaders of the Church in May of 1838. The one in question reads:

To the Bishop & his council in Kirtland, the Stake of Zion.

We prefer the following charges against Pres. Joseph Smith, Jr. viz. for lying and misrepresentation.- Also for extortion—And for speaking disrespectfully against his brethren behind their backs.

Lyman E. Johnson. Orson Pratt. Kirtland, May 29th 1837.

*To the Bishop & his council in Kirtland
the Stake of Zion.
We prefer the following
charges against Pres. Joseph Smith Jr.
viz. for lying & misrepresentation - also
for extortion - and for speaking disre-
spectfully against his brethren behind
their backs. -
Lyman E. Johnson
Kirtland May 29th 1837 Orson Pratt*

Later in the century after the death of Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde became president of the Quorum of the Twelve

Apostles, and the two people next in succession to Brigham Young were Orson Hyde and Orson Pratt, both of whom Brigham distrusted. Therefore at the General Conference of October 1875, the Quorum was reshuffled so that these men were dropped in seniority. The reason given for this was that these two men had lost seniority due to the fact that they had been dropped from the Quorum during the Missouri and Nauvoo period. While the Orson Hyde difficulty, i.e. his testimony against Joseph Smith in the Missouri trial, was certainly enough to arouse Brigham Young's distrust, the problem of Orson Pratt in Nauvoo in 1842 is more complex. Brigham Young held that his excommunication from the Church in August 20, 1842, was questionable under the circumstances. (*History of the Church*, Vol. 5, pp. 254-256.) It may well be that his memory went back farther, and that this incident was the real reason for Orson Pratt's loss of seniority along with Orson Hyde's.

The acquisition of this fine collection as late as 1969 raises hopes that there are other documents in undisclosed closets, bank vaults and attics, that will help us piece together the history of the Church during its early periods.

To the Bishop of the Church of Christ in Zion.

This certifies, that

N. K. Whitney

Has been regularly received a member in the Church of Christ, organized according to law, and established by the Revelations of the Lord, on the 6th of April, 1830. And now being in good standing, and hereby covenanting to obey the Laws of said Church in all things; we recommend him as worthy to receive an inheritance among the Saints.

Kirtland Ohio July 1838

*Martin H. Peck
Joshua S. Holman
Jonathan Burham*

*Elders
Of said Church.*

J. S. Holman