
The Relationship of Oliver Cowdery with Joseph Smith

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Introduction

IN THE FIRST NUMBER of the *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, Oliver Cowdery printed a September 7, 1834, letter he had written to his friend William W. Phelps. This became an anthem about the spirit of brotherhood that existed between Cowdery and Joseph Smith when the church was new:

Near the time of the sitting of the Sun, Sabbath evening, April 5th 1829, my natural eyes, for the first time beheld this brother. He then resided in Harmony, Susquehanna county Penn. On Monday the 6th, I assisted him in arranging some business of a temporal nature, and on Tuesday the 7th, commenced to write the book of Mormon. These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the *inspiration* of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of his bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth as he translated, with the *Urim and Thummim*, or, as the Nephites would have said, “Interpreters,” the history or record, called “The book of Mormon.”¹

At the first church conference on June 9, 1830, Joseph Smith was designated an apostle and first elder and Cowdery as apostle and second elder.² With the joint bestowal of the keys of the kingdom they were unequaled in the church.³ This article will focus on Oliver Cowdery’s interaction with Joseph Smith and explore his struggle to retain the spirituality the above quote suggests.

1. “Dear Brother,” *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1 (October 1834): 14, emphasis retained. Cowdery published Phelps’s October 20 response in the November 1834 *Messenger and Advocate*. This general procedure would be followed in the exchanges of letters between Cowdery and Phelps in the *Messenger and Advocate* through November 1835.

2. Doctrine and Covenants (2013 LDS edition, hereafter LDS D&C) 20:2; Doctrine and Covenants (1990 RLDS edition, hereafter RLDS D&C) 17:1b–c.

3. LDS D&C 27:12–13; RLDS D&C 26:3a–b; text based upon the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants 50:3. Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer were told by revelation in June 1829 they were not only apostles, their calling was comparable to the apostle Paul. They were commanded to “search out the Twelve.” See LDS D&C 18:9, 37; RLDS D&C 16:3a–b, 6a.

While Cowdery is thought to be second only to Smith, we examine the level of responsibility Oliver possessed in church government and the emerging role of Sidney Rigdon. The dissension that occurred in Kirtland, Ohio is also examined as differences between Smith and Cowdery accumulated to the point that their relationship was threatened. They became enemies shortly thereafter at Far West, Missouri.

* * *

The first known example of Oliver Cowdery being conflicted with Joseph Smith came in the summer of 1830. While living with the Whitmer family at Fayette, New York, Cowdery discovered what he believed was an error in the manuscript of the articles and covenants of the church. He wrote Joseph Smith at Harmony, Pennsylvania, and demanded the offending portion be removed so there would be “no priestcraft” among them. As members of the Whitmer family supported Cowdery’s criticisms, Smith wrote a response and afterward made a special visit and with considerable effort was able to convince them the writing was appropriate.⁴

Within a few weeks, Oliver Cowdery again took sides against the first elder when he joined members of the Whitmer family in defending messages received by Hiram Page about the upbuilding of Zion through the use of a seer stone.⁵ The resulting revelation, proclaimed at the second conference of the church at Fayette, New York, specified Joseph Smith alone held the “keys of mysteries and revelations,” and, thereby, he alone could receive “commandments and revelations” for the church. The message stipulated that Cowdery was subordinate to Smith—as Aaron was to Moses—and warned him to be obedient. Cowdery could testify to the truth of the revelations received by Smith and speak as led by “the Comforter” but could “not write by way of commandment.” Cowdery was called to “go unto the Lamanites and preach my gospel unto them.”⁶

Soon thereafter Peter Whitmer Jr., Parley P. Pratt, and Ziba Peterson were designated by revelations to join Cowdery on this mission.⁷ They left Manchester, New York in mid-October 1830 and arrived in the greater Kirtland, Ohio, area two weeks later. The missionaries remarkably baptized some 130 persons during three weeks

4. Manuscript History, Book A-1:50–51, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1932–51), 1:104–5. Both letters are not extant.

5. *History of the Church* 1:109–10 and 115. See Ezra Booth’s description of the stone and its properties in Ronald E. Romig, *Eighth Witness: The Biography of John Whitmer* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2014), 79. On Booth’s letters see H. Michael Marquardt, “Ezra Booth on Early Mormonism: A Look at His 1831 Letters,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 28 (2008): 65–87.

6. LDS D&C 28; RLDS D&C 27.

7. LDS D&C 30:5 and 32:1–3; RLDS D&C 29:2a and 31:1a–1c.

of preaching,⁸ but Cowdery again lost his bearings and proposed marriage to an unidentified woman in the township of Mayfield in Cuyahoga County.⁹

The missionaries, with the addition of Frederick G. Williams, left the Kirtland area for Missouri near the end of November while Sidney Rigdon and Edward Partridge arrived at Fayette to meet Joseph Smith early in December. The fact that Rigdon was mature, knowledgeable, and had served a dozen years as a respected minister did not bode well for Cowdery.

After arriving on the borders of the United States in Missouri by January 1831, the missionaries were prevented by Indian Agents from preaching among the Native Americans. A few converts were made among the settlers, but the Mormons were greeted with suspicion. Oliver Cowdery wrote on May 7, 1831, from Kaw Township, that the “Universalists[,] Atheists, Deists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and other professed Christians, priests and people: with all the devils from the infernal pit are united, and foaming out their own shame” in opposing them.¹⁰

Ezra Booth, who left in June with a group including Joseph Smith, traveled from Ohio to Jackson County, Missouri. Booth shortly afterward became disaffected, and wrote:

If a pure and pleasant fountain can send forth corrupt and bitter streams, then may the heart of that man [Cowdery] be pure, who enters into a matrimonial contract with a young lady, and obtains the consent of her parents; but as soon as his back is turned upon her, he violates his engagements, and prostitutes his honor by becoming the gallant of another, and resolves in his heart, and expresses resolutions to marry her.¹¹

Oliver would witness the arrival of missionaries, family groups, and the beginnings of settlements. The arrival of Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, William W. Phelps, Edward Partridge, Ezra Booth and others in mid-July 1831 was shortly followed by the Colesville members. Cowdery doubtlessly joined in construction projects and witnessed the dedication of the temple site and the consecration of the land of Zion. When W. W. Phelps was directed by revelation to remain in Missouri and

8. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The Impact of the First Preaching in Ohio,” in *Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness*, eds., John W. Welch and Larry E. Morris (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2006), 195–220 and Milton V. Backman Jr., “The Quest for a Restoration: The Birth of Mormonism in Ohio,” *BYU Studies* 12, no. 4 (Summer 1972): 346–64.

9. Cowdery’s “transgression” was investigated by six High Priests at Independence, Missouri in May 1832. After he “frankly confessed” and assured his inquisitors he had “made his confession to the individuals injured & received their forgiveness” the previous year. Conference Minutes, and Record Book, of Christ’s Church of Latter Day Saints, 27, Church History Library; see Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 48–49, May 26, 1832.

10. *History of the Church*, 1:182.

11. Ezra Booth to “Rev. & Dear Sir” [Ira Eddy], December 6, 1831, *Ohio Star* 2 (December 8, 1831): 1, Ravenna, Ohio.

be “printer unto the church,” Cowdery was assigned to be his assistant.”¹² He was one of ten elders who accompanied Joseph Smith on his August 9–27 return trip to Kirtland. The day after his arrival he was ordained by Sidney Rigdon to be a high priest.¹³

While staying at the John Johnson Sr. home at Hiram, Ohio, Oliver was caught up in the flurry of activities relative to the arrangement and correction of the revelations for the printing of the Book of Commandments at Independence. Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, Sidney Rigdon, and W. W. Phelps were told by revelation in November to be “stewards over the revelations and commandments” that had been and would be received.¹⁴ This was the beginning of the Literary Firm whose members would be concerned with publication of church literature including Joseph Smith’s revelations. A second November revelation assigned Oliver and John Whitmer to take the “commandments and the moneys ... unto the land of Zion.”¹⁵

Oliver and John left for Missouri on November 20 and arrived at Independence on January 5, 1832. As preparation for printing was a priority, a brick building was built soon after their arrival. They anxiously awaited the arrival of printing supplies.

As Oliver was laboring in obscurity in Missouri, it became apparent that Sidney Rigdon had replaced him as Joseph Smith’s second in command. Rigdon had worked harmoniously with Smith as a scribe and advisor in the Bible translation and was dependable and loyal. David Whitmer retrospectively explained that Rigdon “had more influence over him [Smith] than any other man living” and became “brother Joseph’s private counselor, and his most intimate friend and brother for some time after they met.” He acknowledged “all the brethren ... thought at the time just as Brother Joseph did about it.”¹⁶

It was Sidney Rigdon who shared with Joseph Smith the reception of the great vision about “the three glories” on February 16, 1832.¹⁷ Rigdon also took the lead in defending Smith against serious allegations made by Ezra Booth, who had withdrawn from the church after his return from Missouri. Publication of nine of Booth’s anti-Mormon letters that had appeared in the *Ohio Star* of Ravenna, Ohio, from October

12. LDS D&C 57:11–13; RLDS D&C 57:5a–b.

13. Welch and Morris, “Chronology,” *Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness*, xi.

14. LDS D&C 70:1–4; RLDS 70:1a–c.

15. LDS D&C 69:1–2; RLDS D&C 69:1a. See accounts of pertinent conferences at Hiram, Ohio on November 8, 9, and 11, 1831 in Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 28–32.

16. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: privately printed, 1887), 35. Cited in Romig, *Eighth Witness*, 120–21.

17. LDS and RLDS D&C 76.

13 to December 1831 influenced the withdrawal from the church of a significant number of Kirtland area members.¹⁸

Joseph Smith proclaimed a revelation in November 1831 that specified “that one be appointed of the high Priesthood to preside over the Priesthood.”¹⁹ Smith, therefore, became the Presiding High Priest over the church as he had been Presiding Elder over the church. The ordination occurred on January 25, 1832, at a conference at Amhurst, Ohio, when he was “acknowledged President of the High Priesthood” and was ordained to that office by Sidney Rigdon.²⁰

On March 8 Joseph Smith selected Jesse Gause, a forty-seven-year-old recent convert, who had been a Shaker and also a Quaker, and thirty-nine-year-old Sidney Rigdon to be his counselors in the church presidency.²¹ Historian Michael Quinn explained, “Smith ordained Gause a high priest, selected him and Sidney Rigdon as counselors instead of ‘second elder’ Cowdery, and placed Gause ahead of Rigdon.”²² Cowdery was in Missouri at the time.

While staying at the John Johnson Sr. farm at Hiram, Ohio, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon were beaten, tarred, and feathered by a mob on the night of March 24.²³ Rigdon’s injuries resulted in his temporally losing control of his mental faculties. Smith was influenced by unrest among the local population to leave for Missouri on April 1 with Bishop Newel K. Whitney, Peter Whitmer, and Jesse Gause. Rigdon joined them at nearby Warren. They purchased paper for the Missouri press at Wheeling, Virginia, and arrived at Independence on April 24.

Two days later Joseph Smith was “acknowledged by the High Priests in the land of Zion to be President of the High Priesthood, according to commandment and ordination in Ohio.” Areas of conflict between Smith, Rigdon and Bishop Edward

18. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Success* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 109–11.

19. See Gregory A. Prince, *Power from On High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 22. Prince explained, “This revelation, although received in November 1831 (see “Kirtland Revelation Book,” 84–86), was not published until 1835, when it was included in an expanded revelation dated 28 Mar. 1835 (DC, 1835, III).”

20. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 40.

21. For biographical information on Jesse Gause see: Robert W. Woodford, “Jesse Gause, Councilor of the Prophet,” *BYU Studies* 15, no. 3 (Spring 1975): 362–64; D. Michael Quinn, “Jesse Gause, Joseph Smith’s Little-Known Counselor,” *BYU Studies* 23, no. 4 (Fall 1983): 487–93; and Erin Jennings, “The Consequential Counselor: Restoring the Roots of Jesse Gause,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 182–227.

22. Quinn, *Origins of Power*, 41–42. Joseph Smith pronounced a revelation for Jesse Gause on March 15, 1832, which announced he was called to be a high priest, a counselor to Smith in the Presidency, and equally held the keys of the kingdom with the prophet. After Gause’s apostasy, Frederick G. Williams was called to be his replacement. The text omitted Gause’s name and added the name of Frederick G. Williams.

23. Van Wagoner, in *Sidney Rigdon*, 115, said the mob was composed of “infuriated Campbellites” possibly fortified by a “keg of whisky.” Reasons for the assault are discussed in William Shepard and H. Michael Marquardt in *Lost Apostles: Forgotten Members of Mormonism’s Original Quorum of Twelve* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2014), 20–22.

Partridge were resolved and Partridge “extended the right of fellowship to Smith.” Rigdon also “amicably settled” personal difficulties with the bishop.²⁴

Oliver Cowdery, W. W. Phelps, and John Whitmer met with their brethren, Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Jesse Gause on April 30 and agreed to print three thousand copies of the Book of Commandments. Significantly, Cowdery, Phelps, and Whitmer were not only authorized “to review” the Book of Commandments; they could also select which revelations should be printed and make grammatical corrections.²⁵ The print shop was consecrated in late May, and the first issue of *The Evening and the Morning Star* was printed in June.²⁶

Historian Ron Romig explained that a previously known charge against Cowdery was now addressed, “Cowdery was brought before a church court in Independence, for either a sexual transgression or at least an impropriety with a young woman, which apparently occurred in the fall of 1830 at Mayfield, Ohio.”²⁷ Smith and Rigdon had presumably left for Kirtland before a trial or hearing was conducted by Bishop Edward Partridge, Jesse Gause, and four other high priests on May 26. The account was apparently summarized from another source and later copied into the *Far West Record*. It stated that Cowdery had confessed his transgression to those present at the conference. It was recorded, “The reason why the above case was not taken into consideration by proper authority in the Church previous [to] this day, is that some of the Elders supposed that the affair had been adjusted last year when brother Oliver made his confession to the individuals injured & received their forgiveness.”²⁸

Oliver Cowdery married seventeen-year-old Elizabeth Ann Whitmer on December 18, 1832, at Independence.²⁹ He was shortly afterward passed over to be included in the church presidency. Joseph Smith received a revelation on March 8, 1833, indicating that Sidney Rigdon and Frederick Williams were equal with him “in holding the keys of this last kingdom.”³⁰ These two brethren were ordained on March 18 and were counselors to Joseph.³¹

24. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 43–45, April 26, 1832.

25. *Ibid.*, 46, April 30, 1832.

26. *Ibid.*, 49, May 29, 1832.

27. Romig, *Eighth Witness*, 163.

28. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 48–49, May 26, 1832. After his return to Ohio Gause left Kirtland with Zebedee Coltrin on June 1 on a mission to the Quakers. He withdrew from Mormonism about August 19 and was excommunicated on December 3, 1832. See Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839* (Salt Lake City: Church Historians Press, 2008), 10, cited hereafter as Jessee, *Journals, Volume 1*.

29. Romig, *Eighth Witness*, 191.

30. LDS D&C 90:6; RLDS D&C 87:3a.

31. Kirtland Council Minute Book, 16–17, Church History Library; Fred C. Collier and William S. Harwell, eds., *Kirtland Council Minute Book* (Salt Lake City: Collier’s Publishing, 1996), 10–11, March 18, 1833. These minutes, also known as Minute Book 1, are available under Administrative Records on the Joseph Smith Papers web site

Cowdery saw the rise of anti-Mormon discontent, which exploded into mob violence during the summer of 1833. He was witness to the destruction of the printing establishment, the tarring and feathering of Edward Partridge and Charles Allen, the destruction of personal property, and how unmitigated violence affected the community.³² Ron Romig said that with the destruction of the printing press, “three laborers lost their jobs and ‘three families including Oliver and Elizabeth [were] left destitute of the means of subsistence.’”³³ Cowdery was sent to church headquarters in Kirtland, arriving on August 9 to explain the devastation and to seek advice. Elizabeth remained with family members in Missouri.

The destruction of the press in Missouri was a catastrophic loss for the Mormons. On September 11, when Oliver Cowdery met with Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Newel K. Whitney, members of the Kirtland United Firm, it was determined that Cowdery would edit the *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, which would be published by the firm of F. G. Williams and Company.³⁴ Following his October trip to New York to purchase the press, Cowdery informed Ambrose Palmer of New Portage, Ohio, on October 30, that he would consecrate his time to the publication of the paper and hoped to make enough to obtain “the common comforts of life.”³⁵ He also wrote his older brother Warren at Freedom, New York, on December 2 that his “every moment” was devoted to preparing for the resumption of printing.³⁶

Cowdery met with members of the United Firm in the Kirtland printing office on December 18 for the dedication of the press. He received a blessing from Joseph Smith that included, “blessed of the Lord is bro Oliver nevertheless there are two evils in him that he must needs forsake or he cannot altogether escape the buffetings of the advers[ar]y if he shall forsak[e] these evils he shall be forgiven and shall be made like unto the bow which the Lord hath set in the heavens he shall be a sign and an ensign unto the nations.”³⁷ There is no explanation what the “two evils” were.

at <http://josephsmithpapers.org/the-papers>. On October 12, 1833, at Perrysburg, New York, Smith told Rigdon that he had been appointed by revelation as “a spokesman unto this people,” and in this capacity, would “know the certainty of all things pertaining to the things of my kingdom on the earth.” LDS D&C 100:9–11; RLDS D&C 97:3a–b.

32. Ron Romig’s account of violence against the Mormons, in *Eighth Witness*, 206–22, is compelling.

33. Ronald E. Romig, “Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery: A Historical Reflection of Her Life,” in Alexander L. Baugh, ed., *Days Never to be Forgotten* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 330.

34. Authorization for the renewal of printing is outlined in Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 18–19, September 11, 1833.

35. Oliver Cowdery to Ambrose Palmer, October 30, 1833, Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, 4, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California.

36. Oliver Cowdery to Warren A. Cowdery, December 2, 1833, Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, 11, Huntington Library.

37. Jessee, *Journals, Volume 1:21*, 23. Cowdery would edit monthly issues of *The Evening and the Morning Star* from December 1833 through September 1834 and of the *Messenger and Advocate* from October 1834 to May 1835 and

The high council was formed by revelation on February 17, 1834, to settle cases “which could not be settled by the church or the Bishop’s council to the satisfaction of the parties.” The church president could singularly preside over the council or he could preside with his counselors who would also be referred to as presidents. Only Joseph Smith had the right to “inquire and obtain the mind of the Lord,” but presidents Rigdon and Williams could preside over trials not meeting this criteria in his absence. Oliver Cowdery and eleven other high priests were chosen to be high councilors.³⁸

Shortly after the organization of the high council, Joseph Smith left on a trip from February 26 to March 28, 1834, with Parley P. Pratt to raise money and manpower for what would be known as the Camp of Israel or Zion’s Camp.³⁹ On March 9–11 they held several meetings at Freedom, Cattaraugus County, New York, and in the process spent time with Warren A. Cowdery, Oliver’s older brother. Warren was not unknown as Oliver had printed several of his letters in *The Evening and the Morning Star* and had been attempting to convert him.⁴⁰

On March 11 Heman Hyde was baptized, thus providing the groundwork for making Freedom a fertile area for spreading the gospel message.⁴¹ Heman’s son William, who was fifteen years old at the time, said his father in the early 1830s “began to hear something concerning the Book of Mormon.” This information came “through Warren A. Cowdery, whose farm joined with ours, Warren A. obtained from his brother Oliver. at an early date, some of the proof sheets to the book of Mormon some of which we had the privilege of perusing.”⁴² Warren was baptized by the fall of 1834 after Smith and Pratt’s March visit. In November he was selected to “be appointed and ordained a presiding high priest over my church, in the land of Freedom and the region round about.”⁴³

On April 19 Oliver was blessed “to assist brother Sidney in arranging the church covenants which are to be soon published.”⁴⁴ Then on September 24 at a high council

from April 1836 to January 1837.

38. LDS D&C 102; RLDS D&C 99; Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 26–29, February 17, 1834.

39. LDS D&C 103; RLDS D&C 100.

40. Warren A. Cowdery was born in Poultney, Vermont in 1788. He and his wife Rebecca would have eleven children. He was a physician, pharmacist, postmaster, and farmer.

41. Jessee, *Journals, Volume 1:32*, 34; see also Scott Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor, eds., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 133.

42. William Hyde Journal, 46, circa 1868–1873, MS 1549, Church History Library.

43. LDS D&C 106:1; RLDS D&C 103:1a. A critical study on Warren is lacking. See Lisa Olsen Tate, “Warren Cowdery D&C 106,” *Revelations in Context: The Stories Behind the Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Matthew McBride and James Goldberg (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016), 219–23.

44. Jessee, *Journals, Volume 1:41*.

meeting presided over by Joseph Smith, the appointment was extended to Joseph Smith and Frederick Williams “to arrange the items of the doctrine of Jesus Christ for the government of the church of Latter-Day Saints.”⁴⁵

Oliver Cowdery “was ordained an assistant President of the High and Holy Priesthood” on December 5, 1834. Oliver recorded the wording of the ordination prayer of Joseph Smith, “My brother, in the name of Jesus Christ who died was crucified for the sins of the world, I lay my hands upon thee, and ordain thee an assistant President of the high and holy p[r]iesthood in the church of the Latter Day Saints.”⁴⁶ Soon after the meeting Oliver made a record of it in a large book and titled it “Chapter 1.” Oliver wrote about the December 5 meeting:

Friday Evening, December 5, 1834. According to the direction of the Holy Spirit, Pr[e]sident Smith, assistant Presidents, Rigdon and Williams, assembled for the purpose of ordaining <first> High Counsellor Cowdery to the office of assistant President of the High and Holy Priesthood in the Church of the Latter-Day Saints.

It is necessary, for the special benefit of the reader, that he be instructed <into, or> concerning the power and authority of the above named Priesthood.

First. The office of the President is to preside over the whole Chu[r]ch; to be considered as the head; to receive revelations for the Church; to be a Seer, and Revelator <and Prophet—> having all the gifts of God:— having taking <Moses> for an ensample. Which is

Second the office and station of the above President Smith, according to the calling of God, and the ordination which he has received.

Second. The office of Assistant President is to assist in presiding over the whole chu[r]ch, and to officiate in the absence of the President, according to their <his> rank and appointment, viz: President Cowdery, first; President Rigdon Second, and President Williams Third, as they <were> are severally called. The office of this Priesthood is also to act as Spokesman—taking Aaron for an ensample.

The virtue of this the <above> Priesthood is to hold the keys of the kingdom of heaven, or the Church militant.

The reader may further understand, that Presidents <the> reason why President <High Counsellor> Cowdery was not previously ordained <to the Presidency,> was, in consequence of his necessary attendance in Zion, to assist Wm W. Phelps in conducting the printing business; but that this promise was made by the angel while in company with President Smith, at the time they received the office of the lesser priesthood. And

45. Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 61–63, September 24, 1834.

46. Jesse, *Journals*, Volume 1:47–48.

further: The circumstances and situation of the Church requiring, Presidents Rigdon and Williams were presently ordained, to assist the President Smith.⁴⁷

Historian Richard Bushman explained that Oliver Cowdery “took pains” to prove “his rightful place was at Joseph’s side. Then he listed himself as the first assistant president ahead of Sidney Rigdon. The account of this reinstatement would be more persuasive if someone besides Oliver himself had written it. He was the one to underscore his own importance in the Church hierarchy.”⁴⁸

Cowdery’s claim that he could not be ordained because he was “in Zion” assisting Phelps with the printing, is not convincing. He could have been ordained by Smith to be his “Assistant President” while he and Smith were together in Missouri in 1832, or while they served together at Kirtland anytime after August 9, 1833. The following day, December 6, Cowdery documented the ordinations of Hyrum Smith and Joseph Smith Sr. to the church presidency.

Although three new assistants had been added to the Presidency of the High Priesthood or church presidency, Sidney Rigdon continued as Joseph Smith’s second-in-command. Just three weeks later on December 28, Rigdon was president of the high council in a matter of limited importance and Cowdery was a member of the council and served as clerk.⁴⁹ A high council meeting of January 18, 1835, reflected the revised composition with six presidents over the high priesthood. Presidents Joseph Smith Jr., Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams presided over the high council. Presidents Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, and Joseph Smith Sr. served on the high council.⁵⁰

Less than a month later, with the addition of Martin Harris, the command to Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer to select the Twelve Apostles had been fulfilled as they had completed their selection from men who had participated in or supported Zion’s Camp. On February 14, nine of the twelve candidates were ordained by the three witnesses. Cowdery told the men, “You have been ordained to the Holy Priesthood. You have received it from those who had their power and authority from an angel.”⁵¹

47. Manuscript History, Book A-1:17 [separate section], CR 100 102, Church History Library, words written above the line are indicated by angled brackets <>. Also called History, 1834–1836; as cited in Matthew C. Godfrey, Brenden W. Rensink, Alex D. Smith, Max H Parkin and Alexander L. Baugh, eds., *Documents Volume 4: April 1834–September 1835* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2016), 194, 196. The manuscript volume was also used to copy Cowdery’s letters to W. W. Phelps and third person entries from Smith’s 1835–36 journal. In 1839 the volume was turned over to become the front cover for the manuscript history labeled A 1.

48. Richard L. Bushman, “Oliver’s Joseph,” Baugh, *Days Never to be Forgotten*, 4.

49. Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Books*, 67–68, December 28, 1834.

50. *Ibid.*, 68–70, January 18, 1835.

51. *Ibid.*, 70–84, February 14, 1835. See Shepard and Marquardt, *Lost Apostles*, 79–87, for the importance of the ordinations, the order in which the apostles were ordained, and the delayed blessings of Parley P. Pratt on February 21, while Thomas B. Marsh and Orson Pratt were ordained on April 26.

In a follow-up meeting with the nine newly ordained apostles on February 27, Oliver had reverted to his position as clerk and deferred to Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick Williams as the church presidency.⁵² Rigdon gave “ordination blessings” to men called to be seventies on February 28 and March 1,⁵³ and on March 7, he was nominated to “officiate in laying on hands in the name of the Lord to bestow the blessings” on men who supported the building of the Kirtland Temple.⁵⁴ On March 16, Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick Williams presided over the high council and Joseph Smith Sr. and Oliver Cowdery served on the high council.⁵⁵

Although Oliver Cowdery’s desire to be Joseph Smith’s primary assistant was not realized, there are no indications he was a malcontent. He appears to have been totally loyal at this time. Elizabeth had arrived at Kirtland from Missouri by October 1834.

The first apostolic mission began on May 4. Six pairs of apostles would take different routes for preaching, testifying, and holding conferences. They came together at Freedom, New York, for a conference from May 22–25 in the area Joseph Smith and Parley Pratt had successfully missionized the previous year.⁵⁶ Apostle William McLellin briefly noted in his journal, “Friday 22. We passed on to Elder [Warren] Cowdery’s and there we met with our brethren the twelve and found them all well and proceeded to business and opened our Conference.”⁵⁷ Records indicate that they established boundaries for the Freedom district, gave instructions on the Word of Wisdom, the gift of tongues, prophesying, and the redemption of Zion.⁵⁸

As the first apostolic mission was taking place, Oliver Cowdery announced in the May 1835 *Messenger and Advocate*, “business and other duties” required him to give up the editorship in favor of John Whitmer “late of Missouri.” He acknowledged the support he had received during his year and eight months of labor and referred to past and future events which had been and would be defined by Mormonism.⁵⁹ Ron Romig outlined Cowdery’s changing duties:

52. Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 84–87, February 27, 1835.

53. *Ibid.*, 87–104, February 28 and March 1, 1835.

54. *Ibid.*, 104–7, March 7, 1835.

55. *Ibid.*, 109–11, March 16, 1835.

56. In addition to the Smith-Pratt 1834 preaching at Freedom, Sidney Rigdon had recently presided over a large conference at Freedom. See “Freedom, April 3, 1835,” *Messenger and Advocate* 1 no. 7 (April 1835): 101–2.

57. Jan Shipp and John W. Welch, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, Brigham Young University and Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 178–79.

58. Ronald K. Esplin and Sharon E. Nielsen, “The Record of the Twelve, 1835: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles’ Call and 1835 Mission,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2012): 33–34, minutes recorded in Patriarchal Blessing Book 2, Church History Library. See also “‘The twelve’ have been blest,” *Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 10 (July 1835): 153.

59. “To the Patrons of the Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate,” *Ibid.*, 1, no. 8 (May 1835): 120–22.

John's assignment [to be editor of the *Messenger and Advocate*] freed Oliver Cowdery to once again function as Joseph's chief scribe and also concentrate on bringing out an updated edition of Joseph's revelations. This new work, to be called the Doctrine and Covenants, would combine the Lectures on Faith (the "doctrine"), delivered in Kirtland during December 1834, with Joseph's revelations (the "covenants"), many of which had formerly appeared in the interrupted Book of Commandments, but with the addition of fifty-seven new revelatory documents."⁶⁰

The Kirtland and Missouri presidents, minus Frederick Williams, met on August 4 to consider a letter Warren Cowdery had written Oliver on July 29. Obviously shared by Oliver, the letter created a firestorm as it charged that the apostles did not solicit money for the Kirtland Temple during their recent visit at Freedom. Warren maintained that Jared Carter, a high priest and a member of the Kirtland high council, had arrived to collect money the apostles should have raised. According to Warren, Carter was so flustered when the money was unavailable that he could not preach effectively but added that he generously helped raise over \$342. A letter from William McLellin to his wife added to the hierarchy's consternation as it maintained Orson Hyde had criticized Sidney Rigdon's school at Kirtland, and a Thomas Marsh letter came under fire for praising "the able" preaching of McLellin and Parley Pratt. The presidents, in a document composed by Oliver Cowdery, determined that the apostles had become "a kind of outlaws," acting independently of the Church Presidency. McLellin's and Hyde's priesthoods were silenced, and the remaining apostles were told to be humbler.⁶¹

During the course of the apostles' mission, and the absence of Joseph Smith and Frederick Williams on a mission in Michigan, a general assembly of the church was conducted on August 17, 1835, at Kirtland, at which Sidney Rigdon and Oliver Cowdery presented the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants for ratification by the church. After testimonies to the truth of the book by various quorum presidents and unanimous acceptance by the conference, W. W. Phelps read the "Article on Marriage." The article was evidently written by Oliver Cowdery, and after it was accepted unanimously, it was "ordered to be printed in said book." Cowdery then read the declaration, "Of Governments and Laws in General," which was also unanimously accepted.⁶²

The intent of the Article on Marriage about rumors of "fornication and polygamy" continues to be debated. For example, Richard Bushman wrote, "No one in-

60. Romig, *Eighth Witness*, 256.

61. Warren Cowdery's letter to Oliver dated July 29 is quoted in *History of the Church* 2:239. The chastising response to the apostles is cited in *Ibid.*, 2:239–41.

62. See Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 122–27, August 17, 1835 and *LDS History of the Church*, 2:243–50.

timated in 1835 that Joseph's actions caused the rumors."⁶³ Todd Compton believes the Article on Marriage was presented by Cowdery to counter the effects of Joseph Smith's polygamy and that "circumstantial evidence is strong that Cowdery's respect for Joseph diminished after that point."⁶⁴

The "Council of the Presidency of the Church," which included the Kirtland and Far West Presidents, met with several of the Twelve Apostles on September 26 to investigate events which occurred on their inaugural mission. William McLellin and Orson Hyde "frankly confessed" and were forgiven for criticizing Sidney Rigdon's school. The governing body examined Warren Cowdery's accusation that the apostles did not solicit funds for the Kirtland Temple and ruled, "it was proved before the council that said complaints originated in the minds of persons whose minds were darkened in consequence of covetousness or some other cause other than the Spirit of truth."⁶⁵

Oliver Cowdery was one of three presidents at a high council trial of William Smith on January 2, 1836. The presiding order was Frederick G. Williams, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer.⁶⁶

Oliver was not present at a dramatic meeting between the Church Presidency and the Twelve Apostles on January 16, 1836. The clerk, Warren Parrish, noted the apostles spoke "in a verry [*sic*] forcible, and explicit manner yet cool and deliberate." They complained about the disrespect they received on their recent mission. After Thomas B. Marsh, president of the apostles, "unbosom[ed] his feelings," the other eleven did the same. They remained furious about receiving during their mission a rebuking letter that suspended two of their number and "severely chastened" the remainder. The group of apostles continued to be angry because the Presidency rejected their counter-charges against Warren Cowdery and felt Oliver Cowdery had disrespected them "on a certain occasion, making use of language to one of the twelve that was unchristian." Joseph Smith said he and the Presidency had been disrespectful to the apostles but countered that the letter about Sidney Rigdon's school was also disrespectful. After apologies by the Presidency were accepted, a joyful covenant between the apostles and the Presidency was made to support each other.⁶⁷

63. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 324.

64. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 38.

65. Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 140, September, 26, 1835.

66. *Ibid.*, 153–54, January 2, 1836. David Whitmer is referred to as a "Priesident" because he was a member of the Missouri Presidency.

67. Jessee, *Journals, Volume 1:156–60*.

As recorded in his Sketch Book on February 25, Oliver noted that his brother Warren and family “arrived this morning from Freedom, N. Y.”⁶⁸ The next month Warren “confessed his mistake” about condemning the apostles in a meeting with Oliver, Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, and “the Twelve” on March 5. It was explained by Oliver that the apostles had filed charges against Warren who, in turn, agreed to publish an apology.⁶⁹ The carefully worded apology, dated March 7, 1836, was published in the *Messenger and Advocate*:

The undersigned although actuated by the purest motives at the time he wrote believing he had stated nothing but the truth, has since become satisfied from the best of evidence, that, that particular item in their instructions was not omitted as he had represented, he, therefore, most deeply regrets it, being sensible as he now is, that he was the cause (although innocent) of wounding the best of feelings, and depressing spirits buoyant with hope, while In the field of useful labor at a distance from home.⁷⁰

Oliver Cowdery’s Sketch Book, under date of March 19, indicates he and his brother Warren participated with Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Warren Parrish “in writing a prayer for the dedication of the house [Temple].”⁷¹

At the Kirtland Temple dedication on March 27, Sidney Rigdon delivered the principal sermon and sat with Joseph and Hyrum Smith in the second pulpit at the west end of the Temple. It was Oliver Cowdery, however, who went with Joseph Smith “behind the veil” in the Temple on April 3, where they received a series of visions which were afterwards recorded by Warren Cowdery. The account told that the “eyes of their understandings were opened. They saw the Lord standing upon the breast work of the pulpit” and were told, “Behold your sins are forgiven you,” and he accepted the dedicated building. The account also recorded that Moses, Elias and Elijah appeared and delivered keys or authority for the gathering of Israel, the gospel of Abraham, and “the keys of this dispensation.”⁷²

With the conclusion of the Pentecostal events, the hierarchy devoted themselves to facilitating renewed missionizing by the Twelve Apostles and Seventies and dealing with individual and church debt. The latter probably influenced a strange set of circumstances which led Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Oliver Cowdery to leave Kirtland on July 25 for Salem, Massachusetts. J. Christopher Con-

68. Oliver Cowdery’s Sketch Book, 17, February 25, 1836, MS 3429, Church History Library. Also in Leonard J. Arrington, “Oliver Cowdery’s Kirtland, Ohio, ‘Sketch Book,’” *BYU Studies* 12, no. 4 (1972): 425.

69. *Ibid.*, 426, March 5, 1836.

70. “Notice,” *Messenger and Advocate*, 2, no. 5 (February 1836): 263.

71. Arrington, “Oliver Cowdery’s Kirtland, Ohio, ‘Sketch Book,’” 426, March 19, 1836.

72. The third person account is in Jessee, *Journals, Volume 1*:219–22. First person account in *History of the Church* 2:435–36 and LDS D&C 110. Richard Bushman explained, “Joseph never mentioned the event in his other writings. There is no evidence he told the Kirtland Saints.” Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 320.

klings, in his *Joseph Smith Chronology*, explained: "At this time the Church is in dire financial stress, the Kirtland Temple having cost between \$40,000 and \$60,000. A brother named Burgess comes to Joseph and says that he knows of a large amount of money hidden away in the cellar of a certain house in Salem, Mass., which had belonged to a widow. The woman had died, and he is the only person who knows of the whereabouts of the treasure." When the party arrived at Salem, Burgess "claims that the town has changed so much that he cannot find the house, and soon afterwards he leaves them there."⁷³

Joseph Smith pronounced LDS D&C III at Salem on August 6, 1836 which reassured the party the trip was not made in vain and promised that "in due time" the "wealth pertaining to gold and silver shall be yours." The revelation also assured them the Lord would "give you power" to pay the church debts and "Concern not yourself about Zion" because the Lord would deal "mercifully with her."⁷⁴ They returned to Kirtland by September 13.

Historian Mark Staker explained that the revelation may have stimulated the men to consider "the idea of establishing a bank to raise money." A bank would foster "land development," which would enable the poor "to earn their way out of debt." As "gathering Saints" would be forced to purchase land from speculators at inflated prices, the Mormons reasoned it would be best if they controlled the process. He added, "The need to acquire land in Zion, which included Kirtland as its eastern-most border, took precedence over paying for debts as leaders moved more actively into real estate investment."⁷⁵

These financial realities were attested by Heber C. Kimball on his return to Kirtland after a mission in October 1836. He was "much grieved" by the "spirit of speculation" that was prevailing in the church as he found lots previously worth "about 150 dollars" were now "worth from 500 to 1000 dollars according to location." He also observed "some men who when I left could hardly get food to eat, I found on my return to be men of supposed great wealth." His observations included, "all seemed determined to become rich."⁷⁶

Oliver Cowdery was one of the "committee of directors" of the Kirtland Safety Society and served in various capacities. On November 2, articles of the Society were drawn up, and the directors began to sell stock. Sidney Rigdon was designated president and Joseph Smith cashier. Cowdery was dispatched to New York to purchase plates for printing bank notes, and Orson Hyde was designated to go to Columbus

73. J. Christopher Conkling, *A Joseph Smith Chronology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 92.

74. LDS D&C III:4-6.

75. Mark L. Staker, "Raising Money in Righteousness: Oliver Cowdery as Banker," in Baugh, *Days Never to be Forgotten*, 150.

76. "History of Heber Chase Kimball by His Own Dictation," 47-48, handwriting of Thomas Bullock, Heber C. Kimball Papers, MS 627, Church History Library, cited in Shepard and Marquardt *Lost Apostles*, 138.

to apply for a charter. Cowdery returned to Kirtland with the press and printed notes, but Hyde delayed his trip to Columbus until after the new year, thus missing the opportunity to ask potentially helpful Democratic representatives for help. Mark Staker explained, "Cowdery perhaps should have been selected to handle ... getting a charter approved. He had been to the Democrats' Convention in Columbus and was a personal friend of influential party members. Instead, bank investors gave Orson Hyde that task."⁷⁷

Assuming they would not receive a charter, the Kirtland Safety Society changed their strategy. Mark Staker explained that on January 2, 1837, they revised the "Articles of Agreement, transforming the society from a bank to a financial corporation." Presumably believing this would allow them to avoid the charter issue. They also "changed the name from the 'Kirtland Safety Society' to the 'Kirtland Safety Society Anti-Banking Company,' although it continued to be referred to in public discourse, private journals, letters, and historical memory as simply the Kirtland Safety Society."⁷⁸ The result was what Richard Bushman called a "partial land bank" whose notes, secured by land holding, "gave landowners liquidity to initiate commercial ventures when capital was lacking."⁷⁹

On January 6 Wilford Woodruff visited the Kirtland Safety Society office and wrote in his journal:

President Joseph Smith jr. declare in the presence of F Williams, D. Whitmer, S. Smith, W. Parrish, & others in the Deposit Office that he had received that morning the Word of the Lord upon the Subject of the Kirtland Safety Society. He was alone in a room by himself & he had not ownly the voice of the Spirit upon the Subject but even an audible voice. He did not tell us at that time what the LORD said upon the subject but remarked that if we would give heed to the Commandments the Lord had given this morning all would be well.⁸⁰

Opening on January 9, the infusion of currency initially stimulated the Kirtland economy as public works, manufacturing, and a variety of businesses provided employment. It also allowed Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and others of the hierarchy to borrow money and buy area farms.⁸¹

The Kirtland Safety Society opened at a precarious time as out-of-control inflation, increasing debt, and growing dissension within the church began to threaten

77. Staker, "Oliver Cowdery as Banker," in Baugh, *Days Never to be Forgotten*, 156.

78. Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith's Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Gregg Kofford Books, 2009), 477.

79. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 330.

80. Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 9 vols. (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983–85), 1:120, January 6, 1837.

81. Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People*, 482–83.

Mormon stability. The greater threat, however, was the reaction by regional anti-Mormons. The Bank of Geauga in nearby Painesville, for example, refused to accept Mormon banknotes. Mark Staker explained:

An 1834 law stated that unincorporated banks lending money could not collect their debts. Although this law was not widely known until the Kirtland Safety Society was in full operation and was apparently not enforced, any hint of impropriety made a financial institution less stable and easily destroyed through innuendo or blatant false accusations.⁸²

Enemies would use this statute, banking without a charter, in law suits against them. Add to that, Grandison Newell, a Mormon hating industrialist from Painesville, led the attack by acquiring all the Mormon banknotes he could and then redeeming them for specie. This, of course, helped drain the Mormons' limited supply of specie. Richard Bushman acknowledged "the bank failed within a month."⁸³

Wilford Woodruff attended a Seventies Quorum meeting on January 17 where president David Whitmer gave a dire prediction to the church:

He warned us to humble ourselves before God lest his hand rest upon us in anger for our pride & many sins that we were runing into in our days of prosperity as the ancient Nephites did & it does now appear evident that a scourge awates this stake of Zion even Kirtland if their [there] is not great repentance immediately & almost every Countenance indicates the above expectation esspecially the heads of the Church.⁸⁴

Woodruff mentioned that he heard "addresses from Presidents O Cowdery & J Smith Jr." on January 29. "JOSEPH blessed us in the name of the Lord & Said if we would be faithful we should rise above our [financial] imbarresments [*sic*] & be delivered from the hands of our enemies." Two days later he heard Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon speak "on the temporal business of the Church & Petitioned for a Charter to the Assembly of the State for the Kirtland Safety Society & the presidency of the Church bought the Monroe Charter."⁸⁵

The *Messenger and Advocate* in an announcement, dated February 1, said "The late firm of O. Cowdery & Co. is this day dissolved by mutual consent. The entire establishment is now owned by Joseph Smith Jr. and Sidney Rigdon." It also mentioned "W. A. Cowdery takes the editorial chair."⁸⁶ This cleared the way for Oliver Cowdery to travel to Monroe, Michigan, and become affiliated with the Bank of Monroe.

82. Staker, "Oliver Cowdery as Banker," in Baugh, *Days Never to be Forgotten*, 165.

83. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 330.

84. Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* 1:122, January 17, 1837.

85. *Ibid.*, 1:124, January 29 and 31, 1837, emphasis retained.

86. "Notice," *Messenger and Advocate* 3, no. 5 (February 1837): 458.

It was during Cowdery's brief stay at Monroe that he penned a final valedictory from Mormon newspapers which reaffirmed his belief in Mormonism:

It is only requisite for me to add that the doctrines which I commenced to preach some seven years since are as firmly believed by me as ever; and though persecutions have attended, and the rage and malice of men been heaped upon me, I feel equally as firm in the great and glorious cause as when first I received my mission from the holy messenger.⁸⁷

The Ohio Legislature rejected the Mormon application for a banking charter on February 10 while Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Oliver Cowdery were in Monroe negotiating with Bank of Monroe officials. Cowdery was appointed "as a director and vice president to serve until the end of the business year in July." The following day financial adjustments were made between the organizations, and Cowdery remained in Monroe.⁸⁸ His stay would be short as he was back in Kirtland by March 6. Mark Staker felt the "departure was not voluntary," but also noted that the Free Banking Act on March 15 "made the Bank of Monroe's charter irreverent and required the bank officials to be legal residents of the state." He additionally noted, "it is not clear if Oliver retained his former position as bank director in Kirtland when he returned, but after coming back from Monroe he remained aloof from the institution."⁸⁹

Cowdery arrived at Kirtland when the Kirtland Safety Society was drastically reducing the value of its bank notes, inflation was rampant, the church was floundering in debt, and important hierarchical members neared the end of their support for Joseph Smith. And a crisis was building in northern Missouri with the bishopric, high counselors, and apostles Thomas B. Marsh and David W. Patten forcing presidents William Phelps and John Whitmer to make concessions.⁹⁰

Oliver Cowdery was elected Justice of the Peace in Kirtland on April 29, 1837, when dissent was becoming rebellion. He served from June 14 to September 15, 1837. Wilford Woodruff attended a meeting in the Temple on Sunday, May 28, and noted the "spirits of murmuring, complaining, & of mutuny." It was "in the family Circle in the secret Chamber & in the streets untill many & some in high places had risen up against Joseph the servent whom God had raised up to lead Israel."⁹¹

The desperation gripping Kirtland was demonstrated the following day as president Sidney Rigdon attempted to conduct a trial for fellow counselor in the church presidency, Frederick G. Williams; president of the Missouri church David Whit-

87. "Valedictory," *Ibid.*, 3, No. 11 (August 1837): 548, Monroe, Michigan, Feb. 1837.

88. Staker, *Hearken O Ye People*, 494.

89. Staker, "Raising Money in Righteousness," 186.

90. See Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 107–9, April 3, 1837; 109–10, April 5, 1837; 110, April 7, 1837.

91. Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* 1:147–48, May 28, 1837.

mer; apostles Lyman Johnson and Parley Pratt; and Warren Parrish, Joseph Smith's former trusted scribe and associate in the Kirtland Safety Society. They had been charged by loyalists Able Lamb, Nathan Haskins, Harlow Redfield, Artemas Miller, and Isaac Rogers, who said they had been "aggrieved" by the conduct of the accused "which for some time past had been injurious to the Church." They charged, "We therefore desire that the High Council should be assembled and we should have an investigation of their behavior." Rigdon faced a procedural nightmare as he had no answer for objections raised about legitimacy and jurisdiction. Added to that, four of the high counselors, to varying degrees, agreed with the accused and would withdraw or be removed from the church by 1838. After much discussion and confusion, Rigdon acknowledged that he had previously judged Parley Pratt and excused himself. Oliver Cowdery said he could not preside as he had previously "expressed his opinion" about some of the defendants. The meeting broke-up in confusion.⁹²

On the same day, Lyman Johnson and Orson Pratt filed charges against Joseph Smith; Luke Johnson filed charges against Joseph Smith Sr.; and Warren Parrish filed charges against Sidney Rigdon. The charges were not acted upon by the high council.⁹³ Ron Romig indicated that David Whitmer left Kirtland for Missouri shortly after the trial. We can only speculate on Oliver Cowdery's reaction to the treatment his brother-in-law received.⁹⁴

As Joseph Smith and his supporters struggled to keep the church from fragmenting, Warren Cowdery's editorials in the *Messenger and Advocate* appear to have been supportive of the dissenters. The editorial in the May 1837 issue frankly said that there were good and bad Mormons at Kirtland. He bluntly declared, "If you come here to see perfection in the church and all living like saints of God; you will be disappointed, sadly disappointed."⁹⁵

Warren Cowdery's June editorial investigated the economic malaise that was gripping Kirtland. He contrasted the current economic status with that of the previous year. Calling the current period a "time of trial" because prices were nearly one hundred per cent higher than a year earlier and there was less employment. He ad-

92. Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 181–84, May 29, 1837. Wilford Woodruff noted the trial, "was considered not <law to> try <the president> before the high Council but before the Bishop. The Presidents withdrew. The council closed without transacting business." Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff Journal* 1:148, May 29, 1837.

93. Shepard and Marquardt, *Lost Apostles*, 141–43.

94. Romig, in *Eighth Witness*, 309–12, examined Lucy Smith's allegation that David Whitmer was one of several prominent Mormons who were deceived by a "young woman" at Kirtland who pretended to be able to see hidden things and to prophesy "by looking through a certain black stone." Romig sensitively outlined Whitmer's gradual slide out of Mormonism in "David Whitmer: Faithful Dissenter, Witness Apart." in *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History*, eds., Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 23–44.

95. "We, some few months since," *Messenger and Advocate* 3, no. 8 (May 1837): 507.

vised the readers to “indulge in no visionary schemes of worldly greatness,” to support good leaders, and to “Remember that the great Creator never made an independent man, and with equal propriety we might add he never made an infallible one.”⁹⁶

Apostles Thomas Marsh and David Patten arrived at Kirtland in mid-July and, after dealing with their disappointment of not being able to participate in the English mission, Marsh helped convince Parley and Orson Pratt to make peace with Joseph Smith and resume their duties in the Quorum of Apostles. He probably influenced Luke and Lyman Johnson and John Boynton to briefly return to their Quorum.⁹⁷ For unknown reasons Patten, who was brother-in-law to Warren Parrish, took it upon himself to seek out Oliver Cowdery and question him about an alleged affair between Joseph Smith and a local girl. She is mentioned in a January 1838 letter as Fanny Alger.⁹⁸ Thomas Marsh later testified that Patten asked Oliver if Joseph Smith “had confessed to his wife that he was guilty of adultery with a certain girl, when Oliver Cowdery cocked up his eye very knowingly and hesitated to answer the question, saying he did not know as he was bound to answer the question yet conveying the idea that it was true.”⁹⁹

Richard Bushman wrote about this alleged affair between Smith and Alger explaining, “Alger was fourteen when her family joined the Church in Mayfield, near Kirtland, in 1830. In 1836, after a time as a serving girl in the Smith household, she left Kirtland and was soon married.”¹⁰⁰ Leland H. Gentry and Todd Compton wrote that Cowdery may have started spreading the story in the summer of 1837 about the alleged adultery when he and Smith “were estranged over the bank failure.”¹⁰¹ Todd Compton credited the Smith-Cowdery estrangement of “Joseph’s relationship with Fanny” as a marriage.¹⁰²

Warren Cowdery’s July editorial contained an extensive review of the Kirtland Safety Society and captured the feelings of many about Joseph Smith’s financial

96. “A train of causes,” *Ibid.*, 3, no. 9 (June 1837): 522.

97. Shepard and Marquardt, *Lost Apostles*, 145.

98. Oliver Cowdery to Warren A. Cowdery, January 21, 1838, Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, 81, Huntington Library.

99. This visit of Patten with Cowdery is referred to at the church trial of Oliver Cowdery in Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 167, April 12, 1838.

100. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 323.

101. Leland H. Gentry and Todd M. Compton, *Fire and Sword: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri, 1836–39* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 79.

102. Todd Compton, “Fanny Alger Smith Custer: Mormonism’s First Plural Wife,” *Journal of Mormon History* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 200; Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 25–42. References to the Smith-Alger alleged affair are numerous. In part, see Brian C. Hales, “Fanny Alger and Joseph Smith’s Pre-Nauvoo Reputation,” *Journal of Mormon History* 35, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 112–90 and Don Bradley “Mormon Polygamy before Nauvoo?: The Relationship of Joseph Smith and Fanny Alger,” in *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy*, eds., Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2010), 14–58. See also Brian C. Hales, “Guilty of Such Folly?:” Accusations of Adultery or Polygamy Against Oliver Cowdery,” in Baugh, *Days Never to be Forgotten*, 279–93.

abilities. He wrote, “If we give all our privileges to one man, we virtually give him our money and our liberties, and made him a monarch, absolute and despotic, and ourselves abject slaves or fawning sycophants.” Warren said such a course would lead to “tyranny, and oppression” and the belief of infallibility. He reasoned:

We are not bankers, bank stock holders, or financiers. We believe that banking or financiering [*sic*] is as much a regular science, trade or business, as those of law, physic or divinity, and that a man may be an eminent civilian, and know nothing of consequence of the principles of medicine. He may be a celebrated divine, and be no mechanic[,] no financier, and be as liable to fail in the management of a bank, as he would in constructing a balloon or the mechanism of a watch if he had never seen either.¹⁰³

It was apparent when Warren Cowdery’s penned his July editorial that Kirtland was becoming ungovernable. Mark Staker attributed this to the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society and noted, “At one end of the spectrum was an expanding group of members who rejected the First Presidency’s leadership in economic affairs and viewed Joseph Smith as a fallen prophet even while accepting his earlier revelations.” They went by the name “the Church of Christ.” At “the other end of the spectrum” the loyalists were “known as lickskilletts.”¹⁰⁴

It is not known if the July number of the *Messenger and Advocate* was published before Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Thomas Marsh left Kirtland on July 27 to visit the Mormons in Canada. During their absence, a violent clash took place between the loyalists and dissidents in the Kirtland Temple on August 14. Lucy Smith recalled that Joseph Smith Sr.’s sermon on the bank affair incensed Warren Parrish who vigorously objected to the accusations. Joseph Sr. “appealed to Oliver Cowdery, who was justice of the peace,” to control Parrish “but Oliver never moved from his seat.” Apostle William Smith intervened and attempted to forcibly remove Parrish, but apostle John F. Boynton drew “a sword from his cane, presented it to William’s breast,” and threatened to run him through.¹⁰⁵

John W. Welch explained that Parrish “preferred charges of riot, and the State of Ohio commenced a suit against nineteen defendants in Kirtland.” The trial was on August 25–26 and “some seventy witnesses were called—twenty-two by the state, forty-eight by defense.” Cowdery ruled “the charge against them [defense] was not sustained, and they were therefore discharged.” Welch said Cowdery “simply let the two groups line up and shoot accusations at each other. And when the verbal assaults were over, he declared the Church-leader defendants the winners.” He added, “only

103. “It is a well known and established fact,” *Messenger and Advocate* 3, no. 10 (July 1837): 537–39.

104. Staker, *Hearken O Ye People*, 535.

105. Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 598.

two weeks later, on September 15, 1837, Oliver prematurely resigned as justice of the peace and left Kirtland for Missouri.¹⁰⁶

After Joseph Smith returned to Kirtland in late August he warned the Mormons through the *Messenger and Advocate*:

To the brethren and friends of the church of Latter Day Saints, I am disposed to say a word relative to the bills of the Kirtland Safety Society Bank. I hereby warn them to beware of speculators, renegadoes [renegades] and gamblers, who are duping the unsuspecting and the unwary, by palming upon them, those bills, which are of no worth, here. I discountenance and disapprove of any and all such practices. I know them to be detrimental to the best interests of society, as well as to the principles of religion.¹⁰⁷

At a conference held in the Kirtland Temple on September 3 the Kirtland stake was reorganized. The first order of business was the sustaining of church officers. The gathering was predominately composed of loyalists recruited by Brigham Young.¹⁰⁸ The minutes stated that Sidney Rigdon “introduced Joseph Smith Jr to the congregation to know if he should still act as their Pres[ident]. as the presiding officer of the church.” The vote was unanimous in his favor. Next Joseph Smith presented his two counselors Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams together with himself, “to constitute the three first presidents of the church.” They were sustained. Then Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith Sr., Hyrum Smith and John Smith were introduced for assistant counselors and accepted by vote. Apostles John Boynton and Luke and Lyman Johnson were not sustained. Four High Counselors were removed from office: John Johnson Sr., Joseph Coe, Joseph Kingsbury and Martin Harris.¹⁰⁹

The editors of the *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839* explained: “After December 1834, Cowdery ranked first among the assistants. Their separation here into counselors and assistant counselors with Cowdery among the latter clearly constituted a demotion for Cowdery, if not for Joseph Smith Sr. and Hyrum Smith, who were already ranked behind Rigdon and Williams.”¹¹⁰

Joseph Smith wrote a letter on September 4 to be delivered by Thomas Marsh to John Corrill and the church in Missouri. It spoke of recent difficulties at Kirtland “which are now about being settled” and referred them to consult Marsh and Hyrum Smith “that you may know how to proceed to set in order & regulate the affairs of

106. John W. Welch, “Oliver Cowdery as Editor, Defender, and Justice of the Peace in Kirtland,” in Baugh, *Days Never to be Forgotten*, 275.

107. “Caution,” *Messenger and Advocate* 3, no. 11 (August 1837): 560.

108. See Shepard and Marquardt, *Lost Apostles*, 148.

109. Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 184–87, September 3, 1837. Not an exact presentation of the minutes is in Jessee, *Journals, Volume 1:241–43*.

110. Jessee, *Journals, Volume 1:242*, note 63.

the Church in Zion whenever they become disorganized.”¹¹¹ He enclosed the minutes from the previous day and added additional thoughts on Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and others:

Oliver Cowdery has been in transgression, but as he is now chosen as one of the Presidents or councilors I trust that he will yet humble himself & magnify his calling but if he should not, the church will soon be under the necessity [necessity] of raising their hands against him Therefore pray for him, David Whitmer[,] Leonard Rich & others have been in transgression but we hope that they may be humble & ere long make satisfaction to the Church otherwise they cannot retain their standing. Therefore we say unto you beware of all disaffected Characters for they came not to build up but to destroy & scatter abroad

Joseph Smith then proclaimed a revelation which Thomas Marsh and others at Far West would interpret to mean they should punish John Whitmer and William Phelps:

Revelation to Joseph Smith Jr Given in Kirtland Geauga Co[unty], Ohio Sept 4th 1837 Making known the transgression of John Whitmer [and] W W. Phelps Verily thus saith the Lord unto you my Servent Joseph. My Servents John Whitmer & William W Phelps have done those things which are not pleasing in my sight. Therefore if they repent not they shall be removed out of their places Amen¹¹²

Luke and Lyman Johnson and John Boynton “made confession to the church” at Kirtland on September 10 and were restored to fellowship.¹¹³ Lyman Johnson departed shortly afterwards for Far West with his family.¹¹⁴ At a September 17 meeting of the Kirtland high council it was noted that “Pres. Rigdon then stated that it was necessary that the Church should have a general recorder & clerk, to fill the place of O. Cowdery who had lately removed to the West.” It also noted, George W. Robinson, Rigdon’s son-in-law, replaced Cowdery “as general clerk & recorder of the whole church.”¹¹⁵ Cowdery’s resignation as justice of the peace and hasty departure from Kirtland gave rise to speculation he had no choice but to leave.¹¹⁶

In a conference of elders meeting in the Kirtland Temple on September 17, it was voted unanimously “that Presidents J Smith Jr & S. Rigdon be requested by this

111. *Ibid.*, 241.

112. *Ibid.*, 244–45.

113. Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 188–89, September 10, 1837.

114. Shepard and Marquardt, *Lost Apostles*, 152.

115. Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 189–90, September 17, 1837.

116. Frederick G. Williams and Joseph Smith testified at Cowdery’s trial at Far West that he was involved in counterfeiting and left Kirtland to avoid being prosecuted. See Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 168–69, April 12, 1838.

conference to go & appoint other Stakes or places of gathering.”¹¹⁷ Smith and Rigdon, accompanied by Vinson Knight and William Smith, departed Kirtland for Far West on September 27.

The August and September numbers of the *Messenger and Advocate* included a “Prospectus For a new paper, to be published at Kirtland, Geauga co. Ohio, called the Elders’ Journal of the Church of the Latter Day Saints.” Signed by Sidney Rigdon, the Prospectus said it was to be edited by Joseph Smith.¹¹⁸ Two issues of the journal were printed each in Kirtland (October and November 1837) and Far West (July and August 1838).

A General Assembly was held at Far West on November 6–7 that included the First Presidency; apostles Thomas Marsh, William McLellin, Lyman Johnson, and William Smith; the Far West high council and others. Oliver Cowdery was present, but his authority level, if any, was not mentioned, but he was clerk. This November 6 business included the decision that the greater Far West area had “sufficient room” for continued consolidation and that building a temple should be postponed. The minutes concluded with, “All difficulties were satisfactorily settled except a matter between J. Smith jr. Oliver Cowdery and T. B. Marsh which was referred to themselves with the agreement that their settlement of the affair should be sufficient for the Council.”¹¹⁹

The second day of the assembly featured the unanimous sustaining of Joseph Smith as church president. Sidney Rigdon was sustained as one of the counselors, but Frederick G. Williams was objected by some of the brethren and was replaced by Hyrum Smith. David Whitmer, John Whitmer, and William Phelps were retained in the Far West Presidency after satisfying their critics.¹²⁰ Peace had been restored, but it would not last long.

Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon left Far West about November 10 and arrived at Kirtland a month later. During their trip, Oliver Cowdery was appointed standing

117. Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 190, September 17, 1837.

118. See “Prospectus,” *Messenger and Advocate* 3, no. 11 (August 1837): 545, 547 and “Prospectus,” *Ibid.*, 3, no. 12 (September 1837): 571, 574. Historian Peter Crawley commented, “Implicit with this announcement is a dissatisfaction with Warren A. Cowdery, editor of the *Messenger and Advocate*, who had been publishing ponderous articles on ancient history and philosophy and in the July 1837 issue had criticized Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon for their roles in the Kirtland Bank fiasco.” Peter Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, Volume One 1830–1847* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1997), 72. Phebe Woodruff wrote in her letter of March 1, 1838, “Doct[or] [Warren] Cowdery has withdrawn from the church.” Phebe Woodruff to “Dear Wilford,” March 1, 1838, Wilford Woodruff Collection, MS 19509, Folder 5, Church History Library. Phebe was summarizing a letter from Milton Holmes.

119. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 119–20, November 6, 1837. The unresolved issue concerned a meeting between Cowdery, Smith, and Marsh, evidently relating to a discussion about the girl Smith knew.

120. *Ibid.*, 121–24, November 7, 1837.

clerk for the high council on December 6 at Far West, and the following day Oliver and David Patten made a report of their exploration of the “north country.”¹²¹

During the journey of Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon and their party to Far West, Oliver Cowdery received information from his brother Warren at Kirtland informing him that Smith had broken his promise not to talk about the girl anymore. Oliver’s January 21, 1838, response to Warren included a copy of a letter he had sent to Smith. The letter explained about his period of sickness and how he was finally able to keep his promise to explore the area north of Far West. It also said he had received “recent intelligence from Kirtland” which gave him “so much surprise.” He continued, “I learn from Kirtland, by the last letters, that you have publicly [*sic*] said, that when you were here [Far West] I confessed to you that I had willfully lied about you—this compels me to ask you to correct that statement, and give me an explanation—until which you and myself are two.” It is possible Cowdery’s letter was not received by Smith.

Oliver’s letter to Warren was to the point and in response to the information he received:

You will see from the other page that your own and brother Lyman[']s requests concerning the Stated confession made to Mr. Smith, is, if I am to be credited, not so. From what he pretended to have made it, is to me unaccountable. I can assure you and bro. Lyman, that as God is to judge my soul at the last day, and as I hope for salvation in the world to come, I never confessed intimated <or admitted> that I ever willfully lied about him. When he was here we had some conversation in which in every instance, I did not fail to affirm that what I had said was strictly true. A dirty, nasty, filthy affair of his and Fanny Alger’s was talked over in which I strictly declared that I had never deviated from the truth on the matters, and as I supposed was admitted by himself. At any rate, just before leaving, he wanted to drop every past thing, in which had been a difficulty or difference— he called witnesses to the fact, gave me his hand in their presence, and I might have supposed of an honest man, calculated to say nothing of former matters. Never believe that Oliver will disgrace the gray hairs of his father, or the high sense of honor in the bosom of his bothers, so much as to acknowledge to Joseph Smith Jr. that he has lied about him.

The letter continued with Oliver recalling his early financial assistance for the Smith family and the course he “pursued in defending him before all men with my ability and talent.” Cowdery stated that when “Smith & Rigdon” arrived at Far West, “it will be my endeavor to seek a location for myself & friends some where else.”¹²²

121. *Ibid.*, 127, December 6, 1837, and 132, December 7, 1837, respectively.

122. Oliver Cowdery to Warren A. Cowdery, January 21, 1838, emphasis retained; includes a copy of a letter of Oliver Cowdery to Joseph Smith Jr. also dated January 21, 1838. Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, 80–83, Huntington Library.

On January 26, Thomas Marsh, David Patten, and High Counselors received the report of the committee they had assigned to meet with Oliver Cowdery, John and David Whitmer, and William Phelps. The committee said the individuals under investigation collectively maintained that the word of wisdom was not a commandment, selling their land in Jackson County was not a revelatory violation, and that “they would not be controlled by an ecclesiastical power or revelation whatever in their temporal concerns.” The council resolved to “no longer receive them as Presidents,” and considered that “the case be laid before the Church at different meetings held for that purpose.”¹²³

Oliver Cowdery acknowledged to his brothers Warren and Lyman on February 4 that the “radical principles” of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon have enabled the enthusiastic to “carry forward those damning doctrines to the subversion of the liberties of the whole church.” Oliver said he, W. W. Phelps, and David and John Whitmer had been questioned by a committee of the high council about the word of wisdom, selling land in Jackson County, Missouri, and “in not teaching the church to fulfil the consecration law.” He said if he had property and was sane, he “would not be dictated, influenced or controlled by any man or set of men by no tribunal of ecclesiastical pretences whatever. And when I or my family were sick or any other time, I would eat and drink what I thought would do me the most good: this was about the substance of what the others told them.”¹²⁴

From February 5–9, Thomas Marsh and David Patten chaired general assemblies at Far West and three satellite locations and overwhelmed the moderates with rhetoric based on Joseph Smith’s directive and revelation of September 4, 1837. David and John Whitmer and William Phelps were almost unanimously rejected as presidents of the Far West stake. Only a few wanted to delay the sentencing until the arrival of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon.¹²⁵

At a meeting of the high council and the bishopric on February 10 it was determined that Oliver Cowdery, William Phelps, and John Whitmer “stand no longer as Chairman & Clerk, to sign and record liceces [licenses].” Thomas Marsh and David Patten were also designated “Presidents, pro. tempor. of the Church of Latter Day Saints in Missouri” or until the arrival of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon.¹²⁶

123. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 135–36, January 26, 1838. The dissenters, Oliver Cowdery, Frederick G. Williams, David, John, and Jacob Whitmer, Lyman E. Johnson and W. W. Phelps, met on January 30, 1838 and determined to find a place “where they may live in peace.” See enclosure dated January 30, 1838 in Oliver Cowdery to Warren A. and Lyman Cowdery, February 4, 1838, Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, 85, Huntington Library.

124. Oliver Cowdery to Warren A. and Lyman Cowdery, February 4, 1838, Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, 83–84, Huntington Library, emphasis retained.

125. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 137–40, February 5–9, 1838. The proceedings were printed in the *Elders’ Journal* 1, no. 3 (July 1838): 44–45.

126. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 141, February 10, 1838.

Thomas Marsh wrote a letter to Joseph Smith on February 15, 1838, that informed the prophet things would be “a good degree straightened” by the time he arrived at Far West. They said the deposing of the Far West Presidency was accomplished to prevent “a rebellion” because the dissenters “undoubtedly” would have fractured the church. Responding to Smith’s request, Marsh said that the previous November at Far West, he and George W. Harris had enclosed certified statements “relative to what Oliver Cowdery said about the girl”—Fanny Alger, mentioned in Oliver’s January 21 letter to his brother Warren.

Thomas Marsh testified: “This may certify, that I heard O. Cowdery say to Joseph Smith Jr., while at George W. Harris’ house, in Far West, that he (Joseph) never confessed to him, (Oliver) that he was guilty of the crime alledged [*sic*] to him. And O. Cowdery gave me to understand that Joseph Smith Jr. never acknowledged to him, that he ever confessed to any one, that he was guilty of the above crime.” This was followed by George W. Harris’s statement: “This may certify, that I heard Oliver Cowdery say, in my house, that Joseph Smith Jr. never confessed to him, that he was guilty of the crime alledged against him, and Joseph asked if he ever said to him (Oliver) that he confessed to any one that he, (Joseph) was guilty of the above crime, and Oliver, after some hesitation, answered no.”

George M. Hinkle added his testimony that he sought out Oliver Cowdery the previous November to find out for himself if Joseph Smith admitted to him he was guilty of adultery:

This may certify, that having heard the report about the crime referred to, I asked Oliver Cowdery, last fall, when Joseph Smith was in Far West, if the report was true, for said I, if it is, as he is to be presented before the church, I wish to know the truth of this matter before hand. And he gave me to understand, either in plain words or implications, that it was false. I bear this testimony for the good of the honest hearted in the east, and else where, and for the good of brother Joseph Smith Jr.¹²⁷

Oliver Cowdery’s February 24 letter to brothers Warren and Lyman said he continued to be “a victim to receive the displeasure of men who profess to hold the connecting link between earth and heaven!” He believed the dissenting actions he and his associates had taken “may be instrumental in preserving the church of Christ on earth.”¹²⁸

Joseph Smith’s party was expected the first part of March, and the dissidents may have thought additional judgment would be put on hold until his arrival. They were mistaken, as four days before the Smith party reached Far West, John Whitmer

127. Thomas B. Marsh to “Beloved Brother Joseph,” February 15, 1838, *Elder’s Journal* 1, no. 3 (July 1838): 45.

128. Oliver Cowdery to Warren A. and Lyman Cowdery, February 25, 1838, Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, 89, Huntington Library.

and W. W. Phelps were charged with “persisting in unchristian-like conduct.”¹²⁹ They, together with David Whitmer, sent a short letter dated March 10, 1838, to Thomas Marsh which said: “Sir: It is contrary to the principles of the revelations of Jesus Christ, and his gospel, and the laws of the land, to try a person for an offence, by an illegal tribunal, or by men prejudiced against him or by authority that has given an opinion, or decision before hand or in his absence.”

The response was signed in a manner that was sure to infuriate, “Very Respectfully, we have the honor to be, David Whitmer, W. W. Phelps, John Whitmer: Presidents of the Church of Christ in Mo.” The letter was attested by Oliver in the words “Clerk of the High Council of the Church of Christ in in [*sic*] Mo. I certify the foregoing to be a true copy from the original. Oliver Cowdery, Clerk of High Council.”¹³⁰

The charges against John Whitmer and William Phelps included misuse of \$2,000 which had been subscribed “for the building a house to the Lord” in Far West. The verdict of the church trial was, “William W. Phelps and John Whitmer be no longer members of the church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, & be given over to the buffetings of Satan, until they learn to blaspheme no more against the authorities of God, nor fleece the flock of Christ.”¹³¹ Jurisdictional doubts about trying Lyman E. Johnson, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer delayed their trials until after the arrival of Joseph Smith.

As the trials were being conducted, Oliver Cowdery wrote to brothers Warren and Lyman that a trial for two apostles presiding over the high council was their “new fangled council.” He acknowledged, however, that the trial members, “will plead Smith’s instructions and justify themselves in trying Presidents of the church before a rabble and call it legal!”¹³²

Joseph Smith arrived at Far West on March 14 and shortly thereafter penned a statement for the church. It included, “But Wo to tyrants, Mobs, Aristocracy, Anarchy and Toryism: And all those who invent or seek out unrighteous and vexatious lawsuits under the pretext or color of law or office, either religious or political.”¹³³ In a March 29 letter to the Presidency in Kirtland Smith acknowledged, “The difficulties of the Church had been a[d]justed before arrival here by a Judicious High Council With T[homas]. B. Marsh & D[avid] W. Patten who acted as Pres. Pro. Tem. of the Church of zion being appointed by the voice of the Council & Church.” After stat-

129. See Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 146, March 10, 1838.

130. *Ibid.*, 146–47.

131. *Ibid.*, 149.

132. Oliver Cowdery to Warren A. and Lyman Cowdery, apparently written March 10, 1838, Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, 91, Huntington Library, emphasis retained.

133. Jessee, *Journals*, Volume 1:238.

ing, “Wm W. Phelps & John Whitmer having been cut off from the Church,” he said David Whitmer remains as yet.¹³⁴

Historian Mark A. Scherer said that after Smith and Rigdon settled in Far West they “determined not to allow the internal dissent to emerge once again.” He profoundly added, “Obedience became a test of fellowship.”¹³⁵ Thomas Marsh became “President Pro tempore of the Church in Zion” at the April 6 Conference, and David Patten and Brigham Young became assistant presidents.¹³⁶

The inevitable trial of Oliver Cowdery took place on April 12. Seymour Brunson filed nine charges against him and presumably Joseph Smith appointed Bishop Edward Partridge to preside over the high council. The charges were:

1st, For stirring up the enemy to persecute the brethren by urging on vexatious Lawsuits and thus distressing the innocent.

2nd, For seeking to destroying the character of President Joseph Smith jr by falsly [*sic*] insinuating that he was guilty of adultery &c.

3rd, For treating the Church with contempt by not attending meetings.

4th, For virtually denying the faith by declaring that he would not be governed by any ecclesiastical authority nor Revelation whatever in his temporal affairs

5th, For selling his lands in Jackson County contrary to the Revelations

6th, For writing and sending an insulting letter to President T. B. Marsh while on the High Council, attending to the duties of his office, as President of the Council and by insulting the whole Council with the contents of said letter

7th, For leaving the calling, in which God had appointed him, by Revelation, for the sake of filthy lucre, and turning to the practice of law.

8th, For disgracing the Church by L~~ie~~ing being connected in the ‘Bogus’ business [counterfeiting] as common report says.

9th For dishonesty Retaining notes after they had been paid and finally for leaving or forsaking the cause of God, and betaking himself to the beggarly elements of the world and neglecting his high and Holy Calling contrary to his profession.¹³⁷

The minutes said “It was not considered a difficult case” and only assigned one member of the high council to represent the plaintiff and one member for the de-

134. *Ibid.*, 246.

135. Mark A. Scherer, *The Journey of a People: The Era of Restoration, 1820 to 1844* (Independence, MO: Community of Christ Seminary Press, 2013), 292.

136. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 158, April 6, 1838.

137. *Ibid.*, 163, April 12, 1838.

fendant. Oliver Cowdery chose not to confront his accusers but instead sent a letter to Bishop Edward Partridge that said he wished “that those charges might have been defer[r]ed untill after my interview with President Smith.” Responding only to charges number five, “Selling lands in Jackson County,” and number four, “denying the faith,” Cowdery emphasized, “I will not be influenced, governed, or controlled, in my temporal interests by any ecclesiastical authority or pretended revelation whatever, contrary to my own judgment.” He added, he would not be controlled in his “temporal interests” which would take away his “Constitutional privileges.” He closed with, “I do not charge you, or any other person who differs with me on those points, of not being sincere; but such difference does exist, which I sincerely regret.”¹³⁸

The church court rejected the fourth and fifth charge with the sixth charge being withdrawn. The first charge, being guilty of using “vexatious Lawsuits” against church members was sustained. The second charge of falsely insinuating that Joseph Smith “was guilty of adultery,” brought forth sufficient testimony from George Hinkle, George W. Harris, David W. Patten, Thomas B. Marsh and Joseph Smith to have the charge sustained. The clerk, Ebenezer Robinson, for unknown reasons, minimally recorded Smith’s response to Oliver Cowdery’s statements: “Joseph Smith jr testifies that Oliver Cowdery had been his bosom friend, therefore he intrusted him with many things. He then gave a history respecting the girl business.”¹³⁹ Smith also said Cowdery was dishonest in his business dealings. Since so little of Joseph Smith’s testimony about himself, Cowdery, and the girl is available, it is disappointing that there is no full record of what he said.

Frederick G. Williams, who was vacillating between factions, said Oliver Cowdery admitted to him that “it was no harm to take that [bogus] money and pass it.” He added “it was reported Oliver was engaged in the Bogus money business.” Joseph Smith testified he was told by a non-Mormon at Kirtland that a warrant would shortly be issued charging Oliver with “making a purchase of Bogus money & dies to make the counterfeit money.” Smith additionally testified he told Oliver “if he was guilty he had better leave the country; but if he was innocent to stand a trial & he should come out clear.” He added, “but that night or the next he left the country.” Sidney Rigdon confirmed the allegations.

Bishop Partridge and his counselors decided, that the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 7th and 9th charges were sustained, while the 8th charge “was sustained satisfactorily [*sic*] by circumstantial evidence.” Oliver “was, therefore, considered no longer a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.” The high council sanctified the decision.¹⁴⁰

138. *Ibid.*, 164–66.

139. *Ibid.*, 168.

140. Trial minutes are in *Ibid.*, 162–69, April 12, 1838.

Thomas Marsh, David Patten, and Brigham Young presided over the high council in the trials of Lyman Johnson and David Whitmer. In both cases charges were filed by Alanson Ripley, and both sent letters instead of attending. Johnson said he was withdrawing himself from the “society and fellowship” of the Mormons, and David Whitmer told the court, “I hereby withdraw from your fellowship and communion—choosing to seek a place among the meek and humble, where the revelations of Heaven will be observed and the rights of men regarded.”¹⁴¹ Both men were no longer considered church members.

The former Mormons did not move from Far West, and the passions which led to conflict continued to be exasperated. John Corrill wrote about the tense interaction:

Notwithstanding the dissenters had left the church, yet the old strife kept up, and Smith and Rigdon, with others, complained much of the ill treatment which they had received from the dissenters and others, they said they had been persecuted from time to time with vexatious law suits; that mobs had arisen up against them, time after time; that they had been harassed to death, as it were, for seven or eight years, and they were determined to bear it no longer, for they had rather die than suffer such things¹⁴²

Sidney Rigdon preached what was called the “salt sermon” on June 17. John Corrill wrote that President Rigdon “delivered from the pulpit what I call the salt sermon; ‘If the salt have lost its savour, it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men,’ was his text, and although he did not call names in his sermon, yet it was plainly understood that he meant the dissenters, or those who denied the faith, ought to be cast out, and literally trodden under foot. He, indirectly, accused some of them with crime.”¹⁴³

In the same month a strong letter was issued “To Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, John Whitmer, William W. Phelps and Lyman E. Johnson.” Many of those who signed the warning were affiliated with an extra-legal group known as the Danites whose activities included cleansing the church. It was believed to have been written by Sidney Rigdon. It was a harsh assessment of their former friends:

Out of the county you shall go, and no power shall save you. And you shall have three days after you receive this communication *to you*, including twenty-four hours in each day, for you to depart with your families peaceably; which you may do undisturbed by

141. *Ibid.*, 173, 177, April 13, 1838.

142. John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints* (St. Louis: Printed for the Author, 1839), 29.

143. *Ibid.*, 30. The text is similar to Matthew 5:13. See also LDS D&C 101:40; RLDS D&C 98:5; and LDS D&C 103:10; RLDS D&C 100:2.

any person; but in that time, if you do not depart, we will use the means in our power to cause you to depart; for go you shall.¹⁴⁴

The document charged crimes to the dissenters. Oliver Cowdery was said to have been stealing, disturbing worshipers in the house of the Lord in Kirtland, taking away the rights of the members while justice of the peace, and “united with a gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars and blacklegs.” The warning ended with the words, “you have had the audacity to threaten us that, if we offered to disturb you, you would get up a mob from Clay and Ray counties. For the insult, if nothing else, and your threatening to shoot us if we offered to molest you, we will put you from the county of Caldwell so help us God.”¹⁴⁵

It was during this period that Sidney Rigdon is credited with writing a lengthy article in the August 1838 issue of the *Elders' Journal* that included public attacks on dissenters of the church. Historian Peter Crawley has written of those July and August issues of the church paper, “Rigdon undoubtedly did most of the editorial work on these two issues, and they reflect his militant stand against those who opposed the leaders of the Church.”¹⁴⁶ The comments by Rigdon were of the lowest level against his former associates Warren Parrish, Leonard Rich, John F. Boynton, Luke Johnson, and Stephen Burnett. Warren Cowdery was considered worthy of notice. He was labeled a “pitiful beggar,” incompetent and ignorant. On Warren the article said, “We have often heard it remarked by slave holders, that you should not make a negro equal with you, or he will try to walk over you. We have found the saying verified in this pious Doctor, for truly this niggardly spirit manifested itself in all its meanness; even in his writings, (and they were mean at best) ... But such was the conduct of this master of meanness.”¹⁴⁷

In December Joseph Smith wrote a letter while in Liberty Jail, “To the Church of Latter day Saints in Caldwell County, and all the Saints who are scattered abroad.” He said “Such characters as M’Lellin, John Whitmer, D, Whitmer, O, Cowdery, & Martin Harris who are too mean to mention and we had like to have forgotten.” These individuals were to receive the final condemnation, “Therefore we say unto you, Dear Brethren in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we deliver these Char-

144. Testimony given in November 1838 before Justice Austin A. King and other documents relating to the Missouri-Mormon conflict were collected and published in 1841. Missouri General Assembly, *Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &c. in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons; and the Evidence Given before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the State of Missouri, at the Court-House in Richmond, in a Criminal Court of Inquiry, begun November 12, 1838, on the trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and others, for High Treason and Other Crimes Against the State* (Fayette, MO: Printed at the office of the Boon’s Lick Democrat, 1841), 103, emphasis retained. See also Shepard and Marquardt, *Lost Apostles*, 178–80.

145. *Ibid.*, 103–6.

146. Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church Volume One 1830–1847*, 74.

147. “Argument to argument where I find it, Ridicule to ridicule; and scorn to scorn,” *Elders' Journal* 1, no. 4 (August 1838): 59.

acters unto the buffetings of Satan, untill the day of redemption, that they may be dealt with according to their works, and from henceforth their works shall be made manifest.”¹⁴⁸

Historian Jeffrey N. Walker traced Oliver Cowdery’s early post-Mormon experiences and said by August 1838 he had determined to return to Kirtland and join his brother Lyman in practicing law. Walker indicated that Oliver was back in Kirtland “by late 1838.” He studied law under Benjamin Bissell at Painesville who had “previously represented the Church’s interests in various lawsuits,” was admitted to the Ohio bar, and commenced practice with his brother Lyman as early as January 1840.¹⁴⁹ Oliver then moved from Kirtland to Tiffin, Ohio, in early 1842 where he continued practicing law, was active in Democratic Party functions, and at some point joined the Methodist Church.¹⁵⁰

A revelation by Joseph Smith in January 1841, announced at Nauvoo, Illinois, was to transfer whatever blessings and priesthood that Oliver Cowdery once held to Smith’s brother Hyrum who held the position of church patriarch. The document said that Hyrum may be a prophet, seer, and revelator to the church as well as Joseph, “that he may act in concert also, with my servant Joseph, and that he shall receive counsel from my servant Joseph, who shall shew unto him the keys, whereby he may ask and receive, and be crowned with the same blessings. I crown upon his head, the bishoprick, and blessing, and glory, and honor, and priesthood, and gifts of priesthood, that once were put upon him, that was my servant Oliver Cowdery.”¹⁵¹

Phineas H. Young, who was married to Oliver’s half-sister Lucy, had visited him three times that year and reported on December 14, 1842 to Willard Richards:

Brother Oliver is well and doing well as far as this time is Concerned, and his heart is still with his old friends, and I believe he would be with them in person and that soon if Brother Joseph only knew the true state of affairs;- at the time brother Oliver was driven from far west, we are all aware of the fact that many were laying to break him down that they might rise there by; say George M. Hin[k]le George W. Robinson, Thomas Marsh and others who Brother Joseph thought to be his friends, and they told many things

148. Joseph Smith “To the Church of Latter day Saints,” December 16, 1838, recorded in the Scriptorium Book of Joseph Smith Jr., 107, Church History Library.

149. Jeffery N. Walker, “Oliver Cowdery’s legal Practice in Tiffin, Ohio,” in Baugh, *Days Never to be Forgotten*, 303–5. Stanley R. Gunn in *Oliver Cowdery Second Elder and Scribe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962) 169, quoted a newspaper clipping dated March 3, 1840 in the *Painesville Telegraph* 6, no.9 (March 3, 1840); which said: “L. & O. Cowdery, Attorneys and Counsellors at Law and Solicitors in Chancery, Kirtland, Geauga County, Ohio. Office a few rods South of the Stone Temple.” Gunn indicates the ad was discontinued by September 17, 1840.

150. The issue of Oliver Cowdery joining the Methodist Church is discussed by Larry E. Morris, “The Private Character of the Man Who Bore That Testimony: Oliver Cowdery and his Critics,” *Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness*, 282–88.

151. “Extracts,” *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 15 (June 1, 1841): 428, same wording in Book of the Law of the Lord, 10–11, MS 22507, Church History Library. Compare wording with 1844 D&C 104:29; LDS D&C 124:95.

prejudicial to brother Oliver which he had no Chance whatever to Contradict, such for instance as that if he (Oliver) left the Church it would all go down, and all this sort of thing; which he never said, neither Came it into his heart¹⁵²

Joseph Smith's last known mention of Oliver Cowdery occurred in an afternoon meeting on April 19, 1843, with Brigham Young and seven members of the Quorum of Apostles. The clerk of the meeting, Willard Richards, recorded the prophet giving dictation about the Nauvoo House, the Apostolic missions, and a statement about Oliver: "Write to Oliver Cowdery. & ask him if he has not eat[en] corn husks long enough: if he is not [*illegible*] ready to return & go up to Jerusalem, Orson Hyde hath need of him." Richards noted, "A letter was written & signed by the me[m]bers of the Quorum present."¹⁵³ Calling Cowdery "one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon," "we reflect upon the time when we had met together, when we were brethren, when we were one, & took sweet counsel together." They asked him if he might abandon "his lonely solitary situation." After emphasizing they were brethren, not enemies, they told Oliver, "Your labor might be needed in Jerusalem, & you ought to be the servant of the living God."¹⁵⁴ For unknown reasons the letter was not mailed until December.

Oliver Cowdery's friendly Christmas day response was "strictly private— under no consideration is it to be exhibited to the public eye." He acknowledged he had been "a stranger in a strange land" but did not reply to the belated request to go to Jerusalem. He did refer to the time he left Far West and was concerned that his name be cleared and wrote:

There is another circumstance to which I must now adrest [address], in which you as members and principals in a great and increasing society, are interested: and in which also, whether in or out of that society, I feel, and must continue to feel sensibly and keenly. It is a certain publication, appended to which are many names who are, are were at the time, members of the Church of Latter Day Saints, charging myself with being connected with outlaws. I cannot speak definitely of this instrument, as I know nothing of it except what has been related by those who say they have seen it. Now, what I have to say concerning all the difficulty between myself and your Church, together with those charges last refer[r]ed to, is simply this: I believed at the time, and still believe, that ambitious and wicked men, envying the harmony existing between myself and the first elders of the Church, and hoping to get into some other men's birth right, by falsehoods the most foul and wicked, caused all this difficulty from beginning to

152. Phineas H. Young to "Dear Brethren's," December 14, 1842, Brigham Young office files, CR 1234 1, Box 44, Folder 5, Church History Library.

153. Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *Journals Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011), 370.

154. Epistle of the Twelve to Oliver Cowdery, April 19, 1843, draft in Luna Y. Thatcher Collection, MS 6140, Reel 1, Folder 4, Church History Library.

end. They succeeded in getting myself out of the Church; but since they themselves have gone to perdition, ought not old friends— long tried in the furnase [furnace] of affliction, to be friends still, even laying out of view any and all religious consideration?¹⁵⁵

Six months later Joseph and Hyrum Smith were murdered in Carthage, Illinois.

Summary

Oliver Cowdery's fall from grace apparently resulted from lack of control as opposed to malice. These lapses in concentration resulted in his not being retained as Second Elder and being placed in the undesirable position of attempting to reacquire past acceptability. His rehabilitation was hampered by Sidney Rigdon's reliability. To his credit, Cowdery made dramatic sacrifices to serve the church as scribe, newspaper editor, and High Counselor.

On December 5, 1834, Cowdery recorded minutes of a meeting in which he said he was ordained by Smith to be his "Assistant President." He said the ordination made him superior to Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams, authorizing him to preside over the church in Smith's absence, and be a spokesman for Smith like Aaron was to Moses. This subterfuge did not change his position in the hierarchy. Instead of becoming assistant president, he was a junior member of the Presidency. The following day Hyrum Smith and Joseph Smith Sr. were ordained to the Presidency and, like Cowdery, ranked below Rigdon and Williams. There was no real governing duties for these elders in actuality.

Although Oliver's passage through Mormonism is generally well documented, there are crucial gaps which have given rise to intense speculation. The authors could not determine when the relationship between Smith and Cowdery began to unravel but document why Smith decreed in November 1837 that Cowdery should be punished unless he repented. Oliver may have hoped he could reach an accommodation with Smith when he arrived at Far West. It is unknown why Smith did not meet with Oliver and seek reconciliation with his former associate.

Although there is evidence that Cowdery broke with Smith because of his alleged sexual relationship with Fanny Alger, the authors chose not to cite and interpret statements made about the subject many years later. Cowdery is often thought of as being weak because of his inconsistent journey through Mormonism. It is clear, however, that the Smith-Cowdery relationship degenerated to the point that each disrespected the other.

155. Oliver Cowdery to "Dear Brethren," December 25, 1843, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 39, Folder 11, Church History Library, emphasis retained.

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