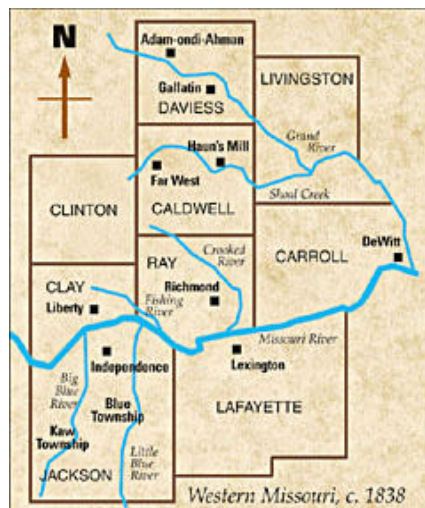

From High Hopes to Despair: The Missouri Period, 1831-39

An overview of a decade of tensions and trials.

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The Missouri period is considered one of the darkest eras in the story of the latter-day Church. During 1831-39, the Latter-day Saints' hopes of a Zion community in Jackson County were dashed by misunderstandings, animosity, and mob action, culminating in the confiscation and destruction of property, and expulsion of some 8,000 to 10,000 Latter-day Saints by order of the state's chief executive. In the pages of many history books, discussion of the Missouri "Mormon episode" consists of only a few pages and footnotes. But to Latter-day Saints, the scenes that transpired on Missouri soil—principally in Jackson, Clay, Ray, Carroll, Caldwell, Daviess, and Livingston Counties—continue to be a significant part of the Church's spiritual heritage. As we study the Doctrine and Covenants and Church history this year, it is beneficial to have a perspective on those early years.



A map of the nine counties in central western Missouri where Church history events took place.

Early Beginnings in Missouri

In September 1830, less than six months after the organization of the Church, the Lord called Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer Jr. to travel from New York to what was then the western frontier border of the United States to preach the gospel to the Lamanites. In the same revelation the Lord further revealed that "no man knoweth where the city Zion shall be built, but ... I say unto you that it shall be on the borders by the Lamanites" (**D&C 28:9**). At the time, the idea of a "Zion" as established by the prophet Enoch had only just begun to be made known to the Prophet Joseph Smith. However, by December 1830, the Prophet learned that the kind of society described in **Moses 6-7** was a society of true believers who "were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness" (**Moses 7:18**). Through these and other revelations, it was clear to the Prophet that a permanent settlement would need to be established in the western borders of Missouri.

Shortly before Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer Jr. left for Missouri and their mission to the Lamanites, Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson were called to accompany them (see **D&C 32**). Taking leave of the Saints in mid-October from Fayette, New York, the four elders traveled to northeastern Ohio, where they preached the restored gospel to Sidney Rigdon, a former Baptist and Campbellite minister, and many of his followers. In a few weeks the missionaries baptized approximately 130 converts. Among them was Frederick G. Williams, who joined the elders in their trek west. Following an arduous winter journey, the five missionaries arrived in Independence in January 1831. This marked the beginning of a Latter-day Saint presence in Missouri.

The mission to the Lamanites living just over the western Missouri border in today's Kansas was short lived. Unaware of some legal restrictions, the elders had failed to receive necessary permission from government authorities to preach. Upon learning of their activities among the Shawnee and Delaware tribes, Robert W. Cummins, the government agent for the region, ordered them out of the territory. After counseling together, they decided that Parley P. Pratt should return to report their activities to the Prophet Joseph Smith, while the others would remain in Independence. When Elder Pratt arrived in Kirtland in March 1831, he found that the Prophet Joseph Smith had moved there according to the Lord's commandment (see **D&C 37:3**).

By mid-May 1831, New York Saints from the Colesville, Fayette, and Manchester branches had assembled in Ohio. A conference was called, and on the day following its close a revelation was received calling Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and more than a dozen pairs of missionaries to travel to Missouri. The Lord also said He would reveal to them the location of the land of their inheritance (see [D&C 52:2-5](#)). The Prophet arrived in Jackson County, Missouri, in mid-July 1831 and received a revelation on 20 July. "This is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion," the Lord declared. "Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place; and a spot for the temple is lying westward, upon a lot which is not far from the courthouse" ([D&C 57:2-3](#)). On 2 August, Sidney Rigdon dedicated this area for the Latter-day Saints. The following day the Prophet led a group of Church members to a grassy knoll on the outskirts west of Independence and there designated and dedicated the spot for a temple that would be part of the New Jerusalem.

Jackson County, 1831-33

With this newly acquired understanding of the location for Zion, Church members were called and appointed under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith and Bishops Edward Partridge and Newel K. Whitney to journey to Missouri and take up residence there (see [D&C 57:15-16](#); [D&C 63:41](#); [D&C 72:15-17, 24-26](#)). In addition, Latter-day Saints in Ohio were expected to consecrate their property and money so that lands in Jackson County could be purchased (see [D&C 42:34-35](#); [D&C 57:4-8](#); [D&C 58:51](#); [D&C 63:25-31](#)). However, everyone was not yet expected to gather to Zion. Even the Prophet Joseph Smith continued to live in the Kirtland area, which remained the headquarters of the Church until 1838. However, by mid-1833 Latter-day Saints in Jackson County numbered 1,000 to 1,200, with four branches of the Church in Kaw Township and another branch in Blue Township, Jackson County.

Their growing presence and the cultural, social, political, religious, and economic differences between the local settlers and the Latter-day Saints fostered tension until conflict became the natural outgrowth. The tensions reached a climax on 20 July 1833, when a group of local citizens confronted Church leaders in Independence and demanded that the Latter-day Saints leave the county, pledging that no one would be harmed or molested and that they would be given sufficient time to dispose of their property and businesses if they complied.

When their demands were rejected, a mob ransacked the printing office of the Church-operated newspaper, the *Evening and Morning Star*, which was also the home of William W. Phelps, the Church printer. Press and type were thrown into the street, printed materials destroyed, and the building all but demolished. The nearby Church-owned store was spared a similar fate when store clerk A. Sidney Gilbert agreed to cease its operation. Two men, Bishop Edward Partridge and Charles Allen, were publicly tarred and feathered at the county courthouse.

With little recourse, three days later Church leaders signed a memorandum promising that at least half of the Latter-day Saints would leave the county by January 1834 and that the other half would be gone by April 1834. With this agreement in place, much of the agitation ceased. However, in October 1833, when Jackson County citizens learned that the Prophet Joseph Smith had advised the Saints to remain on their property and seek to resolve the problem through legal channels, violence erupted again. From 31 October to 5 November, mob vigilantes attacked the Latter-day Saint settlements, destroying homes and property. Men were whipped, women and children threatened, and shots exchanged, resulting in the deaths of one Latter-day Saint and two Missourians. To avoid further conflict and bloodshed, Jackson County officials and Church leaders negotiated a peace settlement, and the Latter-day Saints agreed to leave. Within a few weeks, nearly every Church member had left the county.

Members wondered why the Lord, who had designated this land for Zion and had given promises regarding it, would allow the Missouri members to be driven from it. For the faithful, there was understanding to be had in the Lord's prophetic words given in August 1831 that "after much tribulation come the blessings" ([D&C 58:4](#)) and that, further, they had been sent to Zion, "that you might be honored in laying the foundation, and in bearing record of the land upon which the Zion of God shall stand" ([D&C 58:7](#)). The Lord later testified that "Zion shall not be moved out of her place, notwithstanding her children are scattered" ([D&C 101:17](#)).

Clay County (1833-36)

Following their expulsion from Jackson County, a handful of the Latter-day Saints relocated in neighboring Van Buren and Lafayette Counties, but most sought refuge to the north across the Missouri River in Clay County. Here, they found the local citizenry more open than Jackson County's old-time settlers. Meanwhile, Church leaders petitioned Missouri governor Daniel Dunklin and U.S. president Andrew Jackson for redress, outlining their grievances against the Jackson County residents (see [D&C 101:86-88](#)). They employed the services of Alexander W. Doniphan, a young attorney residing in Liberty, Missouri, to assist them in their petitions.

Governor Dunklin responded by promising state assistance in restoring them to their lands, and the Lord gave Joseph Smith a revelation calling for the organization of Zion's Camp (see [D&C 103](#)). In June 1834 this company, more than 200 strong, arrived in Missouri, ready to assist the governor. However, Governor Dunklin changed his mind and

refused to intervene. Without the authority of the governor to back up their demands, Church leaders realized that reinstatement in Jackson County would be difficult. After efforts failed to peacefully resolve matters, Zion's Camp was disbanded, and the Lord informed the Prophet that the redemption of Zion's center place would be in the Lord's own due time (see **D&C 105:19, 31-32**). Thinking that this redemption would occur in their lifetimes, Latter-day Saints continued to move to Missouri and settle primarily in Clay County. Yet by the summer of 1836, continued immigration there caused many of Clay County's local residents to ask Church members to leave their county also. This time, however, Latter-day Saints were permitted to search out new lands and relocate more peacefully.

Caldwell County (1836-39)

As early as 1834, Latter-day Saint families began to settle north and east of Clay County in the more sparsely populated Ray County. By March 1836, Missouri Church leaders began searching for a permanent site for settlement in the even less inhabited regions north of Ray County. After extensive explorations, the Church purchased a one-mile square plot situated near Shoal Creek on 8 August 1836. The site was subsequently named Far West.

As Latter-day Saint numbers began to increase in this new region, some believed that the Mormon problem might be solved if a county was created exclusively for them. Alexander Doniphan, Clay County's representative to the state legislature and a friend to the Latter-day Saints, spearheaded a bill to create the new county, Caldwell County. Passage of Doniphan's bill came on 29 December 1836 and actually called for the establishment of two counties. The first, 18 by 24 miles, was created in behalf of the Latter-day Saints and was named in honor of Matthew Caldwell of Kentucky, a friend, Indian scout, and fellow soldier of Joseph Doniphan, father of Alexander Doniphan. Far West was designated as the county seat. The second, Daviess County, situated to the north of Caldwell was nearly 24 miles square and named after Colonel Joseph H. Daviess, another friend of Doniphan's father and a commander killed at the battle of Tippecanoe in Indiana in 1811. Gallatin was selected as the county seat, and anyone was allowed to settle there, although Church members were expected to confine themselves to Caldwell County.

While Far West was the largest community in Caldwell County, additional settlements were established on or near Shoal, Log, Bush, Mill, Panther, Mud, and Plum Creeks, and Crooked River. Many of these settlements were named after their founders or other prominent inhabitants, including the Allred settlement (William, William M., and Wiley Allred); the Curtis settlement (Jeremiah Curtis); the Carter settlement (Simeon and Orlando Carter); the Durfey settlement (James and Perry Durfey); the Free settlement (Absalom and Joseph Free), the Lyon settlement, also called Salem (Aaron C. Lyon); the Myers settlement (Jacob Myers); the Plumb settlement (Merlin Plumb); the Stevens settlement (Roswell Stevens); and the Haun's Mill settlement (Jacob Haun). These sites were all later abandoned when Latter-day Saints were expelled from the state in 1839.

The Prophet Joseph Smith visited Far West for the first time for only a few days in late October and early November 1837 before returning to Kirtland, Ohio. But in January 1838, the Prophet was forced to flee Kirtland. He arrived in Far West on 14 March 1838, thus making Far West the headquarters of the Church. Little is known about the precise location of the Prophet's home in Far West. He and his family lived here for less than eight months, during which seven revelations were received, including the Lord's instructions on the official name of the Church (see **D&C 115:3-4**), the construction of the Far West temple (see **D&C 115:7-12**), the mission of the Apostles "over the great waters" to Great Britain (see **D&C 118:3-5**), and the law of tithing (see **D&C 119**).

By late 1838 the Latter-day Saint population in and around Far West numbered 4,000 to 5,000 inhabitants, making it the largest community in northwestern Missouri. Conservative figures put the Caldwell County total population at about 8,000, although it may have been as high as 10,000. Following the 27 October 1838 issuance of the governor's extermination order, most Latter-day Saints sold their lands and homes at substantially reduced prices or simply abandoned their property.

Daviess County (1837-38)

In 1837 a few Latter-day Saints began settling in Daviess County, north of Caldwell, but most came in 1838. One of the most prominent settlers in the county was Lyman Wight. In February 1838 he purchased a farm and established a ferry on the Grand River in an area known as Spring Hill. On 19 May 1838, while visiting Elder Wight, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation disclosing that Spring Hill "is named by the Lord Adam-on-di-Ahman, because ... it is the place where Adam shall come to visit his people" (**D&C 116:1**).

Consequently, during the summer of 1838 a major settlement was established at Adam-on-di-Ahman (called "Diahman" for short), and it became the most populated community in the county. On 28 June 1838, the Prophet Joseph Smith organized a stake in Adam-on-di-Ahman, with John Smith, brother of Joseph Smith Sr. and uncle to the Prophet, as president, and Reynolds Cahoon and Lyman Wight as counselors. Vinson Knight was called as acting bishop. A temple site at Adam-on-di-Ahman was also dedicated by Brigham Young. Besides Diahman, Latter-day Saint settlers had gathered in the Marrow-bone (also called Ambrosia), Honeycreek, Lickfork, and Grindstone Forks

settlements. Hostilities erupted in mid-October 1838, forcing many in these outlying areas to move to Diahman for safety and protection, swelling its population to as many as 1,500. When Church leaders agreed to surrender and leave the state in November 1838, Latter-day Saints evacuated Daviess County and relocated temporarily in Caldwell County before making their way out of the state in early 1839. After the Latter-day Saints left, Adam-ondi-Ahman became known as Cravensville, after John Cravens. By the early 1870s, most of the remaining settlers, who were not Church members, had abandoned the community.

Civil Conflict and Exodus

From August through November 1838, a number of civil disturbances broke out between the Missourians and the Latter-day Saints living in northern Missouri. The entire conflict, known as the Mormon War, grew primarily out of religious intolerance by a significant portion of the local population residing in the northern counties, but a number of Latter-day Saints were also to blame for their involvement in hostilities against their neighbors. The most tragic scene associated with these hostilities was a skirmish between Caldwell County militia (LDS) and the Ray County militia (non-LDS) at Crooked River. It resulted in the deaths of four men: one Missourian and three members of the Caldwell company, including Elder David W. Patten of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The most brutal event was the attack at Haun's Mill in eastern Caldwell County on 30 October. In a community unprepared for an attack, 17 Latter-day Saint men and boys were killed and another 14 wounded. The Mormon War quickly came to an end in late October and early November when Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs called out 2,500 state troops to march on Far West and issued the "Extermination Order," which called for the removal of all Mormons living in the state. At first Church members gathered at Far West to defend themselves. As anti-Mormon militia lay siege to Far West, Church leaders recognized the gravity of the situation and agreed to meet with state officials outside the city to negotiate a settlement. Once outside, the Prophet Joseph Smith and others were arrested and forced to capitulate to the governor's demands.

Following the surrender, more than 60 men were taken into state custody. A preliminary hearing was held between 12 and 29 November in Richmond in the 5th Judicial Circuit Court of Judge Austin A. King. At the conclusion of the hearing, Judge King ordered that the Prophet Joseph Smith, President Sidney Rigdon, and President Hyrum Smith (the First Presidency), Caleb Baldwin, Alexander McRae, and Lyman Wight be held in jail in Liberty, Missouri, to stand trial the following spring on the charge of treason against the state. In addition, Elder Parley P. Pratt of the Quorum of the Twelve and four others were ordered to remain in the jail at Richmond, Missouri. Elder Pratt and three others were subsequently ordered to Boone County Jail in Columbia, Missouri, to await a hearing.

With some Church leaders languishing in prison, Elder Brigham Young, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, supervised the removal of Church members from Missouri. Adams County, Illinois, including the city of Quincy some 170 miles eastward, became the temporary gathering place for the exiles. During the winter and early spring of 1839, hundreds of homeless families made their way across northern Missouri to the Mississippi River and crossed over into Quincy. There, citizens opened their hearts and homes to the suffering Saints, providing them with food and temporary employment.

Final hearings for the Latter-day Saint prisoners in Liberty and Columbia Jails were never held. On 25 January 1839, President Sidney Rigdon was to be released from Liberty Jail by order of the court. However, it was 5 February before he was finally set free. The Prophet Joseph, President Hyrum Smith, Caleb Baldwin, Alexander McRae, and Lyman Wight remained confined until they were transported during the first week in April to Gallatin in Daviess County for another hearing. Shortly after their arrival, Judge Thomas Burch decided to change the location of the trial to Columbia. While en route, on the evening of 16 April, William Morgan, the Daviess County sheriff, permitted the prisoners to escape. On 22 April these brethren arrived in Quincy to the great rejoicing of their families and friends.

Meanwhile, the Latter-day Saint prisoners in Columbia Jail remained confined for several more months. With little hope that their case would ever come to trial, Elder Parley P. Pratt and one other successfully escaped. The other two were eventually released.

The Prophet Joseph Smith continued to ponder whether the Latter-day Saints should try to return to Missouri and build a temple at the "center place." The Lord revealed, "When I give a commandment to any of the sons of men to do a work unto my name, and those sons of men go with all their might and with all they have to perform that work, and cease not their diligence, and their enemies come upon them and hinder them from performing that work, behold, it behooveth me to require that work no more at the hands of those sons of men, but to accept of their offerings ... to build up a city and a house unto my name, in Jackson county, Missouri" (**D&C 124:49, 51**).