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Kirtland
as a Center of
Missionary Activity, 1830-1838

Davis Bitton*

From the fall of 1830, when Parley P. Pratt and three other missionaries passed through Ohio on their way west, Kirtland was a center of Mormon missionary proselyting. Almost overnight a congregation sprang up in Kirtland and its vicinity, and immediately the message of the restored gospel began to be carried out from Kirtland. One of the new Ohio Saints, Frederick G. Williams, joined the Pratt party as it continued westward to Missouri. Others excitedly carried the news to friends and relatives in the vicinity of Kirtland and to other towns in the surrounding region. Undoubtedly some of the new Ohio members wrote letters to loved ones in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Vermont. Besides natural enthusiasm accompanying their conversion, the new Ohio members were doubtless inspired to preach the gospel by the strong mission-

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ary obligation repeatedly proclaimed in the early revelations. "O, ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day," said a revelation received by Joseph Smith for his father but applicable to all members. "For behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perisseth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul." 2

Beginning to hum with the good news of the restoration of the gospel at the end of 1830, Kirtland soon became the unquestioned center of the new Church's proselyting. By January there was a congregation of about one hundred there—apparently more than the total membership in the New York branches—and in May the New York saints began to move into the Kirtland area. By June, according to rough estimates, there were several hundred members of the Church, the majority of whom lived in Kirtland and its vicinity. 3

In February 1831 Joseph Smith received a revelation instructing the elders to gather in a conference at Kirtland. "And it shall come to pass that they shall go forth into the regions round about, and preach repentance unto the people. And many shall be converted, insomuch that ye shall obtain power to organize yourselves according to the laws of man." At the conference in June, 28 elders were called to travel to Missouri two by two, taking different routes, "preaching the word by the way." Those going to Missouri preached in different Ohio

2This revelation for the benefit of Joseph Smith, Sr. had wider applicability, as indicated by the plural "ye." Doctrine and Covenants (Salt Lake City, 1876), Section 4. Like other early revelations this one circulated in manuscript before its publication. For a particularly good description of missionary activity in the vicinity of Kirtland at the end of 1830 see the journal of Levi Ward Hancock (mimeographed copy at Princeton University Library). "All this part of the country," he said, "seemed to be awake and would listen to the new doctrine."

3One should be cautious about membership figures. See Joseph Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (rev. ed., Salt Lake City, 1956), 1:146, 175-79, 250. (Hereafter this work will be cited as DHC, standing for the common designation "Documentary History of the Church.") A contemporary newspaper account confirms the general picture: "Strange as it may appear, it is an unquestionable fact, that this singular sect have, within three or four weeks, made many proselytes in this county. The number of believers in the faith, in three or four of the Northern Townships, is said to exceed one hundred—among whom are many intelligent and respectable individuals. The prospects of obtaining still greater numbers in this county, is daily increasing." Western Courier (Ravenna, Ohio), May 26, 1831, reprinted in St. Louis Times, July 9, 1831. Ellsworth estimates that there were 600 to 800 Mormons by the summer of 1831. (Ellsworth, 69 ff.)
towns as they moved outward from Kirtland and returned a few months later, having made a long, sometimes circuitous missionary circuit. Some missionaries were sent east to "labor with their families." And others, "the residue of the elders," were instructed to remain in Ohio, where they watched over the churches, worked, and declared "the word in the regions about them." Already we see the broad outlines of the pattern that was followed for the next several years.

OHIO "SATURATED" WITH MISSIONARIES

From 1831 to 1837 no state received the "saturation" treatment that Ohio did. Over and over again it was criss-crossed by Mormon elders on their way or returning from other states. In addition, those unable to go on longer missions would often manage to find a few days for preaching in such towns as Amherst, Portage, or Newton. And elders living at home during the "off" season or winter months would often be available for short preaching tours. To cite one example among many of the relatively brief Ohio circuit, we find Hyrum Smith and Reynolds Cahoon leaving in December 1831 on a missionary tour that took them to Poncort, Leroy, Thompson, Rome, Bloomfield, Furnessytown, Hiram, and Wethersfield before their return to Kirtland. Their reception was uneven, at best, but they were not discouraged. Back in Kirtland, they rested "for a little season."

On January 14, 1832, Hyrum left again, this time in a different direction, and preached in Cleveland, Florence, and Amherst before returning to Kirtland. Such "swings" out of Kirtland and back were a constant recurrence between 1831 and 1838.

Missionaries could travel greater distances. The new convert Jared Carter was living in Amherst, Ohio in the fall of 1831, when he started his mission to Vermont. He was back home by the end of February 1832. For approximately two months he lived at home. But there was no rest for a Mormon elder; he preached in the neighboring towns of Brownham, Newloman,

1. Doctrine and Covenants 52 (hereafter referred to as D&C).
2. Hyrum Smith, Diary (1831-35), photocopy of holograph. Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah. The Church Historian's Office, the single most important center for the study of Mormon history, will henceforth be abbreviated as CHO. In all quotations from the early journals, I have taken the liberty of correcting a few spelling errors and occasionally adding punctuation for ease of reading; there have been no corrections of grammar or additions of words.
3. Jared Carter, Journal (1831-33), holograph, CHO.
Florence, and Hiram as well as in Amherst. Then he went into Kirtland to find out his "ministry" for the "ensuing season." Another mission to Vermont and New York started in April and ended in October with his return to the Kirtland area. This time he allowed himself a five-week respite, working "that my family might be made more comfortable," before starting on a mission to Michigan Territory.

Another great Kirtland missionary was Lorenzo Barnes. Barnes had lived in Norton, Medina County, Ohio since 1816. He was 21 years old when he was baptized on June 16, 1833. Less than a month later he was ordained an elder and was sent on a mission by "a council of High priests." He and Elial Strong held meetings at Larad, Westfield, Harmony, Jamestown, Pomfert, and Perrysburg "and in the regions round about." This tour was during August and September. In October Barnes was back in Kirtland, where he worked on the temple for three or four weeks and then returned to Norton to teach school during the winter. Note the rhythmic pattern—missionary journey, "rest and recovery," and then another foray.

In the spring of 1834 Barnes went with Joseph Smith on the unsuccessful military operation known as Zion's Camp. He remained in Missouri until October, when he received a license from the High Council and started on a missionary journey that lasted for over six months before he arrived back at his home in Ohio.

Barnes was home less than a month before he started on another mission in the spring of 1835. Without tracing his journey, we can notice that in general he went eastward to Pennsylvania, spent considerable time in Ohio along the way, and made an effort to visit relatives. After spending five-and-a-half months on this mission Barnes might have expected to work and help support his family. But he was called to Kirtland to study English grammar and Hebrew at the special school for elders. At the beginning of April he returned to Newton. There he held long conversations with his parents, who had not accepted the Mormon message, and continued to preach and baptize in the locality.

For such missionaries as Lorenzo Barnes and Jared Carter, Kirtland was a home base. Like medieval knights they left the

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1 The name is spelled both Barns and Barnes. The latter spelling is found in his handwriting on his journals. Lorenzo Barnes, Reminiscence and Journals (1812-39), holograph, CHO.
castle for repeated adventures in the dark world. In the sense that every Latter-day Saint was expected to be a missionary, of course, any home branch could function much as Kirtland did.

The pre-eminence of Kirtland was due in the first instance to the simple fact that it was a center of gathering and consequently there were more saints there than anywhere else. The other place of gathering, Jackson County, Missouri, bade fair to surpass the Ohio center and did function as a secondary center of proselyting activity. But Missouri’s role as a missionary center was weakened as early as 1833 by the outbreak of the “Missouri persecutions,” which forced the Missouri saints to move, to rebuild, and finally to flee from the state. Kirtland remained relatively free from such large-scale violence. Moreover, the organization of the Twelve and the Seventy at Kirtland in 1835 meant that the agencies most responsible for organizing and implementing the missionary effort were located in Kirtland. The situation did not change until 1838, when most of the Saints left Kirtland, just before Nauvoo, Illinois was established as a new place of refuge.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KIRTLAND MISSIONARIES

What were the general characteristics of missionary activity during the years of Kirtland’s hegemony? Helpful in answering this question are the Church periodicals of the 1830s, and the journals of the missionaries. Through such primary sources we can gain a good insight into what it meant to be a Mormon missionary during the first decade of the Church’s history. Here are some of the most striking characteristics of the Kirtland missionaries.

They preached in courthouses, schools, churches, barns, private dwellings and on streetcorners. In early 1833 David W.
Patten and his companion attended a Methodist meeting "and preached to them the gospel in its plainness and simplicity." The preference seems to have been for a public meeting in an available meeting hall, such as a church or courthouse.\textsuperscript{16} Often such places were available and appointments were given out—publicity was distributed—for one or more such meetings. One of the interesting terms common to the vocabulary of the age was "liberty." After the elders had presented their message they would "give liberty," i.e., open up the meeting to anyone who wanted to say anything. It was a procedure that put any attending clergy on the spot; silence might be interpreted as assent, but taking issue with the Mormons would simply lead to further discussion. One also encounters a slightly different usage of the term "liberty," as, for example, claiming to have had "good liberty" or merely "liberty" when speaking. This, I gather, referred to fluency that resulted when one spoke under the influence of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{11}

Although public meetings were the means by which the elders could reach the largest audience, they did not fail to meet with smaller groups, especially the families of friends and relatives or the families of those who put them up for the night. "Cottage meetings," of course, could easily grow if a few neighbors were invited in or if a private home had to be used as the only location for a "public" meeting. And going door to door was by no means uncommon. It does not seem to have been the systematic "tracting" of later years, blocking out areas of cities. More typically the missionaries knocked on the doors of farm houses as they made their way along a road. Or in the villages and small towns they would take a day or two to go from house to house.\textsuperscript{12} And quite early we find examples of street meetings, although they seem to have been held only when a meeting hall was unavailable.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{16}Parkin, 138. For description of the varied audiences see Higdon, 116-17.

\textsuperscript{11}When the first Mormon missionaries came to Ohio, Parley P. Pratt gave a sermon. Then he "gave liberty for anyone to reply," whereupon Sidney Rigdon arose and "advised the people not to contend against what they had heard." (Levi Ward Hancock Journal, p. 24.) Orson Hyde described an agonizing experience when he attempted to preach without enjoying "liberty" by saying "I was shut up." (Higdon, 94.)

\textsuperscript{12}Examples of going from house to house are found in the journals of Orson Hyde, Wilford Woodruff, and others.

\textsuperscript{13}Street meetings were held in Cincinnati by Lorenzo Barnes on the corner of Sixth and Vine, where a "large congregation . . . listened with great attention."
They presented a simple, direct message. Often they delivered standard sermons on such subjects as the prophecies of the Bible and their fulfillment, the Book of Mormon, the signs of the times, or the contrasts between New Testament Christianity and the religion people were familiar with. Here is how Lorenzo Barnes summarized his "manner of preaching":

Our manner of teaching the people generally was—in the first place to lay before them the first principles of the gospel: faith, repentance, baptism for the remission of sins, & the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. These we proved from the New Testament to the people were preached and practiced by the apostles and obeyed by the people in ancient days and Paul says if we or an angel from heaven preach any other let him be accursed & then by comparing the ancient order of things with the teachings of the present generation and [we] left the people to judge who were preaching the gospel that Paul did and who were preaching a different one.

Secondly showed what the power of Godliness was and who were denying it. Proved the necessity of more revelations wherever the Church of Christ is on the earth and then that according to the prophecies there will be more revelations given in the last days to bring about the great work that is to be accomplished. And then the prophecies concerning the restoration of the House of Israel and the means that God will make use of to bring about the great work. The covenants made to the Fathers, the coming of Christ, his kingdom and reign on earth &c. &c.

Much of the preaching was based on Biblical texts. What the missionaries were expected to avoid was abstruse theology or elaborate scriptural exegesis. The "mysteries" were considered not good matter for attracting converts. When Joseph Wrenchfield and Solomon Humphrey were sent east in 1831, a revelation instructed them to declare "none other things than the prophets and apostles, that which they have seen and heard and most assuredly believe, . . ."16

They made special efforts to convert family and friends. Understandably, the elders wished to carry the "pearl of great price" to their loved ones. In practical terms, too, it was in their home area among people who knew them that they stood the

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15Higdon, 72-79; Ellsworth, 50.
16There is no good study of the use of scriptures in Mormon theology. Barbara M. Higdon has rightfully pointed out that a few standard passages were used over and over again. (Higdon, 159-67.)
17D&C 52:36.
best chance of gaining a hearing. This double motivation helps to explain the frequency of trips by missionaries from Kirtland to New York State or Vermont or Massachusetts. As time went on the pattern continued; even late in the century it was not unusual for a person to be called on a special mission, exempted from the usual mission jurisdictions and the obligation of having a companion, in order to preach the gospel to relatives.)

These family confrontations could be laden with emotion. In the fall of 1832 Orson Hyde spent two days at Oxford, New Hampshire, with his brother Asahel, who failed to believe. Orson Hyde described his departure: "Left brother Asahel with hearts full of grief; united with him in prayer before we left. We shed many tears over each other, and I bade my brother, my own mother's child adieu, his wife and little ones farewell, to see my face no more." A few days later he called on his sister and brother-in-law in Great Falls, New Hampshire. At first the brother-in-law, a Mr. North, was quite friendly, helping to find a place for the missionaries to hold their meeting, putting up notices, and coming to listen. But when they heard the message, both Laura North and her husband were "quite unbelieving." Hyde's entry for the next day is pregnant with emotion:

Continued at Mr. North's; stayed at home in the forenoon with my sister, and tried to reason with her about the work, but all to no purpose. Mr. North came home from meeting and we tried further to reason with him but in vain. We saw that they objected to our testimony, and, must I tell?—we took our things and left them, and tears from all eyes freely ran, and we shook the dust of our feet against them, but it was like piercing my heart; and all I can say is 'The Will of the Lord Be Done.'

Other missionary diaries, such as those of Lorenzo Barnes, contain terse entries that merely hint at the crushing disappointment when loved ones rejected the gospel message.

OPPOSITIONS AND SUCCESSES

*Thy encountered much indifference and opposition.* On the discouraging side of the ledger the Mormon elders often found

37 Preaching to family and friends in New York, Vermont, and Massachusetts were the Carter brothers, Orson Hyde, Samuel H. Smith, Ebenezer Robinson, and many others.
a lack of interest. Or such interest as existed was often hostile, expressing itself in jeers, catcalls, and occasional violence. In 1832, Amasa Lyman scheduled a public meeting in Talmage, Ohio, but "there was [sic] no people that did attend." A few months later in Madison, Ohio he and his companion "cleansed our feet against thousands who rejected us." About the same time Jared Carter was preaching in his home state of Vermont. At Chesterfield he warned the people in a meeting. At the end of the meeting many gathered around him to criticize. When he finally departed, a group of people "followed me about half of a mile making ridicule [sic] of me." Later, at Plattsburg, he held a meeting but "without access to the hearts of the people."

Many good examples of the kind of discouragement faced by the Mormon missionaries are found in the 1832 missionary journal of Orson Hyde. The following excerpts reflect experiences in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts:

... preached in the village in the evening; prospects unfavorable...

Went on from Fairview 6 or 7 miles. I took off the dust of my feet against almost all—.

Went on to Mill Creek and found where Clavin sold a Book for $1.87½—found the people very hard; seemingly no salvation for them...

Preached in Mill Creek; prospects poor.

... labored in Erie with a number of families; prospects poor...

... preached in the village without much spirit and without much effect.

... found the people hard and unbelieving, and it really seems as though Satan had grasped them with his own foul chains.

Went on to Buffalo; found the people hard...

Prospects very poor in Candor where we are now—Prejudice rages and Satan roars.

From indifference the negative response ranged up to irate denunciations, threats, heckling and physical abuse. On July 17, 1832, Orson Hyde and his companion were holding a meeting in a private house. A mob of some hundred men gathered around the house and swore that they would tar and feather the elders. Fortunately "a little boy came into the house to see
if we were there and he did not see us, and went out and told them that we were not there, and they then disappeared swearing and scolding, and thus the Lord delivered us." Hyde tells of another occasion when "a numerous crowd came out and fired crackers during the meeting and made disturbance, and after the meeting the rabble set up a hugh and cry through the town and round the house like a pack of grizzly wolves determined to devour us, but the Lord sent them home and we retired to rest."

In 1835 Lyman Smith and Lewis Robbins attempted to preach in Havanna, New York, but were harrassed by men "throwing hard apples at them."" When they continued preaching, "the rowdies blew out their candles and kicked up a general row," forcing them to leave, and then pelted them "with a shower of mud." The same year George A. Smith and his companion were holding a meeting on Sullivan's Island when a Baptist deacon furnished a popgun and ammunition, which he passed in through the windows to a man who fired pop-gun wads of tow at me all the time I was preaching. He was an excellent shot with the pop-gun, the most of the wads hit me in the face. I caught several of them in my hands. Many of them were tickled, but some of them paid good attention. I finished my discourse without noticing the insult.

They encountered especially strong opposition from the clergy. The journals of the Kirtland missionaries are full of references to the clergy. In 1832, Amasa Lyman recorded that in Keene, Ohio he and his companion were "attacked by one of the teachers of Babylon who sought by sarcasm and blackguard to bring the work of the Lord into disrepute." The following year he tells of being "opposed by one of the teachers of Babylon" in Virginia. When Orson Hyde was able to arouse the interest of a congregation on his 1832 mission, a Methodist minister was "very much opposed but could not bring one thing to bear against the truth." In 1835 Lorenzo Barnes reported that in Clearmont County the "priests" did everything in their power to oppose Mormonism. "But all they could do," he continued, "was to read newspaper stories, call for signs and cry

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18George A. Smith, "My Journal," *The Instructor* (September, 1946), 416.
19*The Instructor* (October, 1946), 462. Other examples of "overt resistance" are itemized by Parkin, 150 ff.
false prophet, false teacher, delusion, imposition, &c." Almost every issue of the Church periodicals contained further examples of opposition from the clergy.20

It should perhaps be noticed that the clergy viewed the Mormon missionaries as rival preachers who could "upset" families and draw away members from congregations. Such concern was contumiously seen by the Mormon elders as selfish protection of the clerical "craft." Nor were feelings made more pleasant by Mormon references to "priests of Babylon," "priests of Baal," or "hireling priests." Such scathing contempt was made possible by the natural fervor of new converts, some of whom brought a previous anti-clericalism with them, by passages in the Mormon scriptures that condemned "priestcraft," and by the interesting fact that several of the most vocal elders had been preachers before their conversion. Perhaps the surprising thing is that occasionally they found a friendly, "candid" minister, and that conversions from the Protestant clergy continued to occur.21

They sometimes participated in debates. Responding to the attacks of the clergy the Mormon missionaries often challenged them to debate. The stories of these debates as recounted in the diaries and Church periodicals invariably present a picture of Mormon truth triumphing over sectarian error. One suspects that the encounters may have appeared different from the other side or from the point of view of many in the congregations. But probably the elders did fare remarkably well in verbal combat. Their message was one they were much better prepared to discuss than the person encountering it for the first time. They had personal experience and testimony to bring to bear against the rumor and unreliable newspaper stories of the opposition. And they had incredible self-confidence. In 1832 David Patten accepted a challenge to debate. He summarized

20 A few among many examples of efforts by the clergy to oppose the proselyting of the Mormon elders. See the Latter Day Saints Messenger and Advocate, 1 (1834-35), 7, 24, 44, 62, 75, 77; 2 (1835-36), 223-24, 237, 238. Organization of a mob by the local clergy in Tennessee is described in Vol. 2 (1836), pp. 365-67. (Hereafter this periodical will be cited as simply Messenger and Advocate.) Another example is found in The Elders' Journal, 1 (1837), 2-3. From the first appearance of the Mormons in Missouri, according to Oliver Cowdery, the clergy took the lead in opposing them. (DHC 1:182.)

21 There is not, to my knowledge, a good study of conversions of ministers to Mormonism, which started in 1830 and continues to the present day. For some intelligent comments on the social, geographical, and religious origins of early Mormon converts, see Ellsworth, ch. 13 and appendix.
the result as follows: "We went accordingly and we gave him the length of his own rope and he hung himself on lust." In 1836 Elias Hutchinson met a Presbyterian minister in debate and "confounded him so that he could not open his mouth." When someone complained that the Mormons were "not within reach of argument," the Messenger and Advocate responded:

This the writer knew, (if he knew anything about the church,) was not true—so far from it, that wherever our Elders have travelled abroad they have at all times, been ready, God giving them his Spirit, to stand up boldly, in defence of the religion they profess; and even 'beardless boys,' among them, have been able to confound the Priests of this generation . . . 22

Missionaries may have been encouraged to participate in such controversy by the early revelation instructing Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon to preach the gospel: "Wherefore, confound your enemies; call upon them to meet you both in public and in private; and inasmuch as you are faithful their shame shall be made manifest."

Church leaders were sometimes not entirely happy with the argumentative proclivities of the missionaries. The Messenger and Advocate wrote: "We sincerely hope our elders will not go round the country, challenging others to debate the subject of religion with them." If drawn into a debate the elders were instructed to make sure that the opponent was of "respectable standing," for a victory over "a man of no character" was a loss of time and reputation. This warning strongly suggests that some of the elders had won "cheap" victories. Although it had reservations, the periodical did not go so far as to forbid debating: "If they [the elders] are attacked, as they invariably will be, we commend them for defending themselves with the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." 23

A FIELD WHITE TO HARVEST

They sometimes found interested listeners and had remarkable success. It would be a mistake to notice the opposition—the slanderous rumor-mongering, the heckling, the doors slam-

22Messenger and Advocate, 2 (April, 1836), 294.
23Ibid., 2 (July, 1836), 351. For some of Joseph Smith's reservations on debating, growing out of experiences at Kirtland, see DHC 2:317-18, 330, 334-35, 340-41. In 1836 the elders were instructed "not to contend with others." DHC 2:431.
med in their faces, the occasional violence—at the expense of missionary successes. After all, the field was "white to the harvest." The same journals that tell of indifference and opposition also tell of interest and acceptance. In early 1833, after being rejected in several places, Amasa Lyman came to a town where he had a "very attentive congregation." Two years later Lorenzo Barnes preached in Salem, Ohio, where the people "listened with great attention & much of their prejudices [sic] apparently removed." Of another locality he reported that "many appear believing." Often he spoke to crowded congregations. In Clearmont County he found calls to preach "on the right hand and on the left."

A good indication of widespread receptivity is found in the Church periodicals. A spirit of jaunty optimism permeates such reports as the following 1835 statement summarizing the first "season's" activity of the Seventy:

They have traveled, through the assisting grace of God, and preached the fulness of the everlasting gospel in various States and generally with good success; many have been convinced, and 175 baptized into the Kingdom of Jesus... the mighty wheel rolls on like a bright cloud in the heavens unchecked by the efforts of men.24

Elders reporting their activities frequently told of the need for more laborers, for the doors were open and the field ready to harvest. Places where results were encouraging and additional elders needed included Huntington, Connecticut; Troy, Pennsylvania; Freedom, New York; Providence, Rhode Island; Liberty, Iowa; Jay, Vermont; Brookville, Indiana; and Clinton, Illinois.25 "We often ask," said the Messenger and Advocate in 1835, "when will the time arrive, or will it ever, that the number of laborers shall be equal to the harvest?"26

All in all, it was a breathtaking experience. "Who would have supposed," wrote Orson Pratt in 1835, "that the spread of truth would be so rapid?"27 The gospel was spreading, ac-

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24 Messenger and Advocate, 2 (January, 1836), 253. For interesting summaries of their successes—miles traveled, books sold, sermons, and baptisms—by individual missionaries, see pp. 235, 238, 255, 256.

25 The need for additional missionaries in different localities is exemplified by the Messenger and Advocate, 1 (1834-35), 8, 9, 43-46, 62, 64, 90, 93, 104, 142; 2 (1835-36), 224, 296.

26 Ibid., 1 (March, 1835), 93.

27 Ibid., p. 89.
From the central cordon of New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio the work had expanded westward to Missouri. Then from these older areas it moved outward to New England, to Illinois and Indiana. In addition to these main lines of expansion there were free-lance missionaries who traveled far and wide. As early as 1833 the word crossed into Canada. During 1835-36 New York, Pennsylvania, New England, and Canada received especially concentrated proselyting. A circle of 150 miles in radius from Palmyra would include at least three score branches, according to S. George Ellsworth, and another such circle drawn near the center of the Connecticut River Valley would include more than two score of New England and Canadian branches. The renewed persecutions in Missouri and the financial turmoil at Kirtland had some dampening effects on the missionary effort, but the general pattern of preaching continued, and important

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28Ibid., 1 (June, 1835), 141.
29Ellsworth, ch. 8. For permission to use the accompanying map, showing sites of Mormon branches between 1830 and 1840, I am indebted to Professor Ellsworth, Department of History, Utah State University. The version of the same map in his dissertation superimposes the location of the sites on a map showing population density.
new areas were opened up: Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina. Wilford Woodruff in the Fox Islands continued to enjoy success. And in 1837, in a bold, inspired move, the missionary program had been flung across the sea to England, where Heber C. Kimball and his colleagues achieved amazing results.

KIRTLAND’S ROLE IN THE MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES

What was the role of Kirtland during this important period stretching from about 1831 to 1837? We have already noticed that for several reasons Kirtland was the main center of missionary activity and have considered some of the chief features of the proselyting enterprise during these years. It is now time to examine more carefully the functions performed by Kirtland in this far-flung, complicated movement. Four points are deserving of particular attention:

1. Kirtland provided organization and direction. In some ways, of course, the missionary obligation was on every member. They were expected to teach others when they could and not wait to be “commanded in all things.” Furthermore, even as things became more fully planned and organized, missionary calls were often quite indefinite both as to place and as to duration. It was common, for example, to be called to preach the gospel in the East or the South. The day when Elders would be called on two-year missions, sent to carefully defined missionary fields, and there assigned to a specific companion and locality—all of this was far in the future.

But very early the Mormon leaders saw the advantages of some kind of planning and organization, and Kirtland was the place where it was done. The conference in June 1831 saw the naming of twenty-eight elders by name; they were told who was to travel with whom as companion, where to go, and general directions about route.20 This kind of supervision continued to be exercised by the Kirtland leaders, usually through the High Council. 21 In early 1832, for example, Jared Carter went from

20D&C 52. For a good analysis of the “free-lance” missionary during the early stages of proselyting see Ellsworth, 94.
21See Minutes of the Kirtland High Council, CHO, which council concerned itself with ordinations, giving and revoking licenses, assigning missionaries, and many specific questions from the scattered branches. The fluidity of Church organization before 1835 is indicated by such phrases as “a conference of Elders,” “a council of High Priests,” “a council of High Priests and Elders,” and “the high council of the church of the Latter-Day Saints.”
Amherst into Kirtland to find out his assignment, viz. where he should go to preach and who would be his companion. During 1833-34 licenses were issued to these traveling elders by either the Missouri or the Kirtland High Council.

In 1835 a momentous reorganization took place at Kirtland when the Twelve Apostles and the Seventy were established. In some ways the respective assignment and authority of the different councils remained confused for a few years, but both the Apostles and the Seventy had a primary obligation to carry the gospel to the world, and improvements in the organization of the missionary effort were quickly apparent. The Twelve visited several conferences in 1835 and carefully defined district boundaries. At these conferences reports from each branch were heard. Those who had taught false doctrine or otherwise disrupted orderly operations were corrected or cut off. Improved licensing procedures with central control were established; it would be much easier than before to identify those elders who were officially authorized to preach, to visit the scattered branches, and officiate in ordinances. Both the Twelve and the presidency of the Seventy, both of which had their "headquarters" at Kirtland, took the responsibility of assigning elders to specific fields of labor. 32

It would be an exaggeration to say that Kirtland housed a complex operations center—a huge room, with files on different areas and a giant map carefully marked with colored pins. But it would be equally absurd to assume that there was no planning at all. Some discussion of areas that were promising or in need of visitations, along with some consideration of which missionaries were available, undoubtedly took place. To the extent that such centralized planning and commissioning existed it was at Kirtland.

2. Kirtland provided training. For the missionaries to be effective and to avoid confusing new members of the Church with conflicting interpretations, they needed some kind of systematic gospel study. Sunday meetings at Kirtland accom-

32DHC, 2, 181, 200, 209, 220ff. An interesting discussion of the Seventy as "a veritable flying column" for missionary work by B. H. Roberts is found in DHC, 2, 203n. One modern historian sees the Seventy, in their original intent at least, as "a permanent calling for well trained and highly competent Mormon 'Jesuits' who must, in time, have become highly effective." (Fielding, 117.) Instructions to missionaries on the care they should exercise in preaching to children or slaves are found in DHC, 2, 262-63. Improvements of procedures for licensing are described on pp. 400, 403-05, 446, 475, 490.
lished this to some extent. There were also quorum meetings during the week and special courses of study. The "Lectures on Faith," delivered in 1835, are a good example of an effort to provide systematic instruction in basic gospel principles. Secular learning was provided in a school that focused mainly on grammar and geography. It was set up not as an elementary school for children but as a kind of "remedial" school for the elders. Ambitions were high, as indicated by the introduction of a course in Hebrew in 1836.

During the "off" season elders living in Kirtland were expected to take advantage of these special "seminars" and "workshops." Some living in other communities were called to participate. It is impossible to estimate how successful these training sessions were, but it seems likely that they did much to enhance the self-confidence and *esprit de corps* of the missionaries. Through these schools and through conferences and quorum meetings Kirtland was the educational headquarters of the church between 1831 and 1837.

3. **Kirtland provided inspiration.** In a way the "inspiration" was the most important thing of all, for without it few missionaries would be able to maintain their fervor in the hostile world. It was to Kirtland that new members came from hundreds of miles away in order to meet and shake hands with the Prophet Joseph Smith. Often they received a patriarchal blessing. Nor does it seem possible to overestimate the inspirational octane provided by the new quorum activities, the sacred ordinances, and the divine power manifested at the Kirtland Temple. In small groups anywhere in the world the saints could and did experience moving testimonies, healings, speaking in tongues, and other gifts of the spirit. But nothing could quite take the

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33 "During the winter of 1836, I attended a high school together with Brothers Joseph and Hyrum and most of the leading men of the Church; it was a fine opportunity for obtaining knowledge. The evenings were mostly spent in meetings for instructions on the principles of our faith and religion. It was then and there that the lectures in the first part of the book of Doctrine and Covenants were given." Harrison Burgess, "Sketch of a Well-Spent Life," in *Labor in the Vineyard* (Salt Lake City, n.d.). Cf. sketch by John A. Widtsoe in N. B. Lundwall comp., *A Compilation Containing the Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City, n.d.).

34 In 1835 an announcement of the opening of school was specifically addressed to the elders. Subjects to be taught in the school were listed as penmanship, arithmetic, grammar, and geography. *Messenger and Advocate*, 1 (February, 1835), 80. Cf. DHC, 2:200, 299. Joseph Smith, according to one modern historian, saw Kirtland as having the potential to become "a great educational headquarters and a spiritual mecca." Fielding, 70-71. Cf. Ellsworth, 176ff.
place of Kirtland. Missionaries would return to Kirtland tired in body, the spirit flickering, and then in a few weeks would be ready to go again, a blazing torch. It was at Kirtland more than anywhere else, it seemed, that the spirit of God like a fire was burning.

4. Kirtland provided information. If there is an inherent threat to a new movement like Mormonism, it is that of schism, fragmentation. Anyone who has read more than a few missionary diaries is acutely aware of the frequency of troubles among the members of the Church. Missionaries spent much of their time in trying to smooth over differences or to remove offending members. But it is surprising that any common faith could be maintained when new members with little or no background could announce their own opinions. Hence the incalculable importance of missionary visits, regular conferences, and above all the Church periodicals. The Evening and Morning Star, the Latter Day Saints Messenger and Advocate, and the Elder’s Journal were the periodicals during the 1830s that did much to give out instruction, pass on decisions, keep the scattered saints informed of developments elsewhere, and give them the assurance of belonging to a living, dynamic Church. Although the Evening and Morning Star was started at Independence, Missouri, even from the beginning it contained important messages from Kirtland, including revelations that had been received there. Then, as a result of the mob fury in Missouri, publication was transferred to Kirtland in 1833. Just as modern news commentators tell us the views of Washington or London, or as a modern Mormon sometimes refers to the policy of Salt Lake, so the saints of the beginning years of the Church must have received expectantly from missionaries, from letters, and from periodicals the latest pronouncements and recommendations of Kirtland.

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35Wilford Woodruff’s journal is a good example of the effect of the spiritual experiences at Kirtland. A short statement by another elder summarizes the effects of the manifestations during the dedication of the Kirtland Temple: “All felt they had a foretaste of heaven . . . ; and we wondered whether the millennium had commenced.” Daniel Tyler, Scraps of Biography (Salt Lake City, n.d.), p. 32.

36The Church periodicals contained occasional private communications to elders, withdrawals of licenses, instructions on specific procedures, and announcements of conferences. Virtually every issue printed letters from missionaries describing their experiences, as the following in 1836: W. Parrish (the South), Brigham Young (New York, New England), Daniel Stephens (Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut), Hazen Aldrich (New York, Vermont), Ebenezer
KIRTLAND’S DECLINE AS CHURCH CENTER

Kirtland’s position as triumphant center was not destined to last for long. It enjoyed remarkable growth up to 1835 and, as we have seen, provided important direction to the intense proselyting carried on by fervent converts. From 1835 to 1837 it was in its heyday. While the poor Missouri saints struggled for survival, Kirtland saw the completion and dedication of its temple, the organization of the Twelve and Seventy, and continuing economic prosperity. Like the sun in the firmament, Kirtland was the center around which other Church activities revolved and from which they derived both light and warmth. Starting in 1837, however, disaster struck Kirtland—economic depression, the failure of the wildcat bank, factional quarrels and apostasy. With the departure of Joseph Smith and the Twelve in 1837 Kirtland’s glow as the center of an expansive, irresistible movement came to an end, and with the departure of Kirtland Camp the following year the city was left a sorrowful shell. For a brief, exciting period it had been the nerve center of Mormonism’s proselyting activity, the center where more than anywhere else the Lord was extending the saints’ understanding. Those who had been part of it—Jared Carter, Lorenzo Barnes, Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, Amasa Lyman, David Patten, and many others—would never forget.

Robinson (Ohio), Wilford Woodruff (the South), Heber C. Kimball (New York, New England), and Erastus Snow (Pennsylvania). (Messenger and Advocate, 3 [1836], 408, 413-15, 431, 439-40, 464-65.)