



10-1-1975

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Recommended Citation

Kimball, Stanley B. (1975) "Heber C. Kimball and Family, The Nauvoo Years," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 15 : Iss. 4 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol15/iss4/7>

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Heber C. Kimball and Family, The Nauvoo Years*

Stanley B. Kimball**

As one of the triumvirs of early Mormon history, Heber C. Kimball led an adventuresome, if not heroic life. By the time he settled in Nauvoo during May of 1839, he had been a blacksmith and a potter, had married, and had five children—two of whom had died. He had lived in Vermont, New York, Ohio, and Missouri and had left or been driven out of homes in each state. He had served fourteen years in a horse company of the New York Militia, had joined and left the Close Communion Baptist Church, accepted Mormonism, had gone on four missions (including one to England), had become an apostle, had helped build the temple at Kirtland, had dedicated the temple site at Far West, Missouri, had been a member of Zion's Camp, and had participated in the defense of the Church in Missouri.

Before he would leave Nauvoo, nearly seven years later in February 1846, he would go on four more missions, for a total of eight (including a second one to England), build three homes, become a chaplain in the Nauvoo Legion, serve on the Nauvoo City Council, receive a phrenological reading, help organize five Masonic lodges, enter into polygamy (having at least thirty-seven wives), help build and officiate in the Nauvoo Temple, contribute to the official history of the Church, and aid in the preparation of the Saints for the exodus west.

The four new missions took Kimball away from Nauvoo more than half (55%) of this period and would make a purely

*This article is based on a forthcoming biography, *Heber C. Kimball, Mormon Apostle and Puritanical Polygamist: An Affectionate and Candid View*.

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chronological narrative of his life from 1839 to 1846 more a comment about his missionary life elsewhere than his living in Illinois. This study concentrates rather on several important developments during his Nauvoo sojourn—family affairs, Masonry, polygamy, and temple work. Since Kimball was away from Nauvoo so much of the time, this article also capitalizes on the fact that his wife and daughter who stayed in Nauvoo left many letters and other writings which add significantly to our knowledge of this period in Church history.

ARRIVAL AT NAUVOO

Before Kimball ever saw Nauvoo (it was called Commerce when he arrived there on 12 May 1839), he knew his first stay there would not be long. He had been expecting to return to England for nearly a year. Unsettled conditions in Ohio and Missouri, however, had prevented this. Now, in peaceful Illinois, he would have about four months to resettle his family before leaving again.

Not only did he realize his first stay would be of short duration, but he seemed to have some special insight that the whole Nauvoo period would not last long. He was in Nauvoo that May with Joseph Smith and others of the Twelve trying to find a place to relocate the Church which had just been expelled from Missouri. On 25 May, during deliberations with Isaac Galland, a land speculator who had quasi-title to much land in the area on both sides of the Mississippi River, the party crossed the river to Montrose, Lee County, Iowa—just opposite Nauvoo. At this time Kimball uttered one of the first of many prophecies for which he would eventually become famous in Mormondom. He noted in his journal, "While crossing the Mississippi, I was standing by the railing of the boat, looking at the beautiful site of Nauvoo and remarked, 'It is a very pretty place, but not a long abiding place for the Saints'." ¹

Soon thereafter Kimball moved his wife, Vilate, and their three children, William, Helen Mar, and Heber Parley, from Quincy, Illinois, where they had been living since the Missouri expulsion, and the family took up residence in a log shack which Kimball had thrown together out of an old stable be-

¹*President Heber C. Kimball's Journal*, Faith-promoting series #7 (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), p. 77.

longing to a "Brother Bozier," who lived about a mile from Commerce.

It is difficult to imagine Kimball's state of mind during his first few months in Nauvoo. The Iowa and Missouri trials had cost him his property and wealth and he was starting all over again, his wife was advanced in pregnancy, his family was living in a miserable hut, the swampy river bottoms were causing much sickness, and he was supposed to be getting ready to leave on a second mission to England, over 6,000 miles away.

As quickly as possible he tried to provide better housing. He acquired five acres of land about a mile from the river (just east of present-day Nauvoo State Park), and erected a 14 by 16 foot log cabin. He did not finish it in time for Vilate, however, so she gave birth to a new son on 23 August in the Bozier shack. They named the infant David Patten after their great friend who had fallen during the Battle of Crooked River in Missouri.

Less than two weeks after the birth of David, Kimball moved his family into their new home and prepared to leave for England. On 14 September, Brigham Young, who was then living in the abandoned (since 1837) Fort Des Moines across the river in Montrose, left his sick wife with a ten day old infant to join Kimball for England. Young was so sick himself that he collapsed at the Kimball's. Kimball, who was also ill, now had Young, in addition to his own sick wife and children, to care for. On the 17th Mary Ann Young came over to try to be of some help. Four adults and several children, all sick in a small log cabin—that was the immediate background of Kimball's second mission to England. On the next day, 18 September 1839, Heber and Brigham left.

DEPARTURE FOR ENGLAND

Of these appalling circumstances Kimball later recorded that of the Young family "not one soul of them was able to go to the well for a pail of water, and they were without a single change of clothes, for the mob in Missouri had taken nearly all he had. . . ." Of his own farewell he wrote:

I went to my bed and shook hands with my wife, who was then shaking with the ague, and had two of our children [probably William and Helen Mar] lying sick by her side.

I embraced her and my children, and bade them farewell. The only child well was little [four year old] Heber Parley, and it was with difficulty that he could carry a couple of quarts of water at a time, to assist in quenching their thirst.

With some difficulty we got into the wagon and started down the hill about ten rods. It seemed to me as though my very inmost parts would melt within me at the thought of leaving my family in such a condition, as it were almost in the arms of death. I felt as though I could scarcely endure it. I said to the teamster "hold up!" then turning to Brother Brigham I added, "This is pretty tough, but let's rise, and give them a cheer." We arose, and swinging our hats three times over our heads, we cried, "Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah for Israel!"

My wife, hearing the noise, arose from her bed and came to the door to see what was up. She had a smile on her face. She and Sister Young then cried out to us, "Good bye; God bless you!" We returned the compliment and were pleased to see that they were so cheerful. We then told the driver to go ahead.

After this I felt a spirit of joy and gratitude at having the satisfaction of seeing my wife standing upon her feet, instead of leaving her in bed, knowing well that I should not see her again for two or three years.²

Only totally dedicated men can do such things and only even more dedicated women can endure such things.

This second mission to England was a remarkable success. According to Young they "baptized between seven and eight thousand and established branches in almost every noted town and city, printed 5,000 copies of the Book of Mormon, 3,000 hymnals, 50,000 tracts, 2,500 copies of the *Millennial Star*, established a permanent shipping agency, and had emigrated about 1,000 saints to Zion."³

The story of these successes, recounted extensively in Mormon history, should be supplemented with the story of the hardships of the wives and children left behind. Fortunately the letters of Vilate and Helen Mar to Kimball help us to know something of the life back home.

²Ibid., pp. 84-85.

³Elden Jay Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801-1844* (Salt Lake City: Elden Jay Watson, 1968), p. 97. Later, in Utah, Kimball said: "The Elders now have to labor a great deal harder to bring people into the Church than they did in the first rise of it. There is not now one man brought to the knowledge of the truth by receiving the Gospel to where there was a hundred thirty years ago." Heber C. Kimball in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1856), 10:240. Hereafter cited as *JD*.

FAMILY LETTERS FROM NAUVOO

In Vilate's first letter after Heber left, dated 21 September, she writes that she is reconciled to his going, that all the family are still sick, and that, "All I can ask of you is to pray that I may have patience to endure to the end whether it is long or short."⁴ From another source we learn that Helen had no shoes when her father left and that all the money he could leave with Vilate was nine dollars which was demanded of her the next day as payment on an account.⁵

In Vilate's letter of 6 June 1840 we learn a bit more about the wives who were left back home to fend for themselves. She is rather outspoken. She hopes Joseph Young will get her the cow he promised; she has a pig, and plenty of potatoes, turnips, and other garden produce.

I hope I shall not have to call on the Bishop again while you are gone. They find some fault with Brother [John] Talor, say if he could send means to N. Y. to bare the expenses of his family over the sea; he could as well send it there to support them. I am glad Brother Brigham has sent some assistance to his family for they were needy. Their house could hardly be called a shelter. They will soon have it fixed nice. Elisabeth and Vilate [Young] are both sick with the chills, however, the rest of the families of brethren are well as far as I know.⁶

In an undated entry (about 13 August 1840), there is a cryptic reference in Kimball's journal to receiving a letter from Vilate which contained "much other business that was necessary for me to be there to see to."⁷ This is undoubtedly a reference to economic matters awaiting his attention back home.

In Vilate's letter of 11 October 1840, we learn that baptism for the dead has been introduced in Nauvoo and that she intends to be baptized for her mother, that David has been weaned, and that clothes are very expensive.⁸

⁴Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, 21 September 1839, Heber C. Kimball papers, Church Historical Department.

⁵Vilate Kimball's obituary, *Deseret News*, 25 December 1867.

⁶Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, 6 June 1840, original letter in possession of J. Leroy Kimball. Used by permission. The only concession I have made to "modernizing" the spelling and punctuation in the documents is to begin all sentences with capitals, capitalize all proper names, and to end all sentences with periods.

⁷Heber C. Kimball, Journal, no. 90, p. 23, Church Historical Department.

⁸Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, 11 October 1840. Original letter in possession of J. Leroy Kimball. Used by permission.

Vilate started her 8 December letter out cheerfully and sympathetically enough, reporting that she has enjoyed visiting with the “dear sisters from England”—some recent converts who had just arrived in Nauvoo. She was disturbed over his letter of 19 September, “which pains my heart to hear that you have been thus afflicted; in a land of strangers, and no one to administer comfort to you. O that I could fly to your relief. . . .” At this point, however, her courage fails and she has to reveal her own burdens, adding,

I have just received the heartrendering intelligence that my dear Father is no more . . . the last news that I had from father before, he was well, and calculated to set out his journey for this place the first of October, and had for some time daily been anticipating his arrival here, but alas! how are my fond anticipations blasted? and my joy is turned to mourning.

She then added a little poem she had written—a sort of lament through which to express, share, and purge her grief. While it may not be very good poetry, it does express her state of mind.⁹

She then reported on the financial situation:

It cost a great deal to support your family, we are continually on expence, and not earning a cent. There was rising of thirty dollars due this fall on our land, but I pled off for the present by paying fifteen dollars; I told [Hiram] Kimball I would pay him the rest in the spring, or before if I could.

Near the close of the letter she added,

The children are all impatient to have you come; you are losing all the most interesting part of David's life, a child is never so pretty as when they first begin to walk and talk.

⁹My husband's gone, my Father's dead
 But my ever living head;
 Always hears my souls complaint
 And ever comforts me when faint.
 If I could fly to you I would,
 But the Lord is very good;
 He will care for him that's dead
 And you who from your family's fled.
 I, here with four children dear,
 But I know I need not fear;
 For the Lord is always nigh,
 And will all my wants supply.
 O Lord it is my souls desire
 That thou would my heart inspire
 With a fore knowledge of thy will,
 That I may all thy laws fulfill.

He goes prattling about the house, and you may be assured that we think he is cunning. Elizabeth [Young?] calls him Heber altogether, and every one that sees him says that ought to be his name, he looks so much like you.¹⁰

From Helen we learn additional facts. She recorded that several families held Sabbath meetings in the Kimball home "it being one of the most convenient in the neighborhood," that sisters Laura and Abigail Pitkin came from Quincy to live with Vilate, and that Helen and William attended school during the winter.¹¹ Helen also tells us of some gifts she received from England. Brigham Young had sent her and William, and Kimball sent Young's daughters copies of the new British edition of the Book of Mormon with their names printed thereon in gold letters. Helen also received other gifts from her father—handkerchiefs, little china dishes, and dolls. Helen also tells us that once when Joseph Smith called by their home (to read a letter which Vilate had received from Heber) he accidentally broke one of these dolls. According to Helen all the Prophet said by way of excusing himself was, "As that has fallen, so shall the heathen gods fall." Helen thought this a "rather weak apology for breaking my doll's head off."¹²

From Helen we learn more of the less pleasant things back home. There had been, for example, much sickness, especially cholera, which was fought with tea and coffee to keep the Saints from drinking unboiled water. She noted also that this was one reason why the Saints thereafter began to backslide and no longer kept the Word of Wisdom as strictly as before.

Kimball, of course, wrote letters home which are extant, but not a part of this study. He and six others of the Twelve left England on 29 April with a company of immigrants and were back in Nauvoo 1 July 1841, having been gone a little more than twenty-one months.

HEBER'S RETURN TO NAUVOO

Heber's homecoming after that absence was vividly related many years later by Helen. She wrote,

¹⁰Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, 8 December 1840. Original letter in possession of J. Leroy Kimball. Used by permission. Hiram Kimball, a pre-Mormon settler in Nauvoo, was a distant cousin to Heber.

¹¹Helen Mar Whitney, "Scenes in Nauvoo," *Woman's Exponent* 10 (15 July 1881):26.

¹²*Ibid.*, 10 (1 August 1881):34.

My brother, who was still living at the landing [as the Kimball place was too crowded] was the first to meet and embrace my father. The Prophet and many more were there ready to greet and welcome them home again, Joseph would have them go home with him to dinner and William hastened home to tell us the same; we thought this almost an unkindness for it seemed so long a time to us who were waiting and watching with impatience to see him, but soon we discovered a company of horsemen coming with all speed and when my mother saw them she made a hasty retreat behind the door to hide her confusion, where in a moment after father found her overwhelmed in tears. . . . My mother felt the presence of others at such a time almost an intrusion, but Brother Joseph seemed unwilling to part with my father; and from that time kept the Twelve in council early and late, and she sometimes felt nearly jealous of him. . . .¹³

Nauvoo had grown considerably in the interim and Kimball was much impressed. He later wrote back to England, "You know there were not more than thirty buildings in the city when we left about two years ago; but at this time, there are about 1,200; and hundreds of others in progress. . . ." He rejoiced in the many converts coming to Nauvoo:

They are coming in from all parts of this continent daily and hourly, and the work is spreading in all of this land. . . . You will all recollect when we built our houses in the woods, there was not a house within half a mile of us, now the place, wild as it was at that time, is covered into a thickly populated village.¹⁴

One of the first things Heber did was build his family a better home. According to Helen,

The Prophet Joseph, being anxious to have my father nearer to himself and his brethren, our place was exchanged for one on the flat, where father built us a more commodious house of hewn logs containing three lower rooms and an [upstairs?] chamber, which we moved into the fall after his return from Europe.¹⁵

This was the third dwelling Kimball had built in Nauvoo. After his return from England he purchased Lot Five in Block 106 (where his brick home stands today). To the log portion mentioned by Helen he later added one brick room and still

¹³Ibid., 10 (15 August 1881):42.

¹⁴Ibid., 10 (1 September 1881):50.

¹⁵Ibid., 10 (15 September 1881):58.

later removed the log part and replaced it with the two story brick structure which is still standing.

The main reason Joseph kept the Twelve in council early and late was to turn over to them many of the temporal affairs of the building up of Nauvoo and the whole kingdom, to stand in their place next to the First Presidency; and to attend to the settling of emigrants and the business of the Church and the stakes. Among other assignments, one of Heber's biggest was helping to settle emigrants, especially those from England, and selling Church lands. He also became a chaplain with the rank of Colonel of Infantry in the Nauvoo Legion, and a member of the City Council. In this latter position, in order to lower taxes, he refused any remuneration.

Very conscious of history and record keeping, Heber spent some time writing letters and reports about his mission.¹⁶ The rest of the winter passed away quietly with Heber tending to many of the temporal affairs of kingdom building.

The spring of 1842, however, was full of strange and wonderful things. Heber received a phrenological reading, helped organize several Masonic lodges, and was introduced to two profound doctrines: temple work and polygamy.

HEBER AND PHRENOLOGY

Kimball appears to have submitted to phrenological readings three times. The word "submitted" is specifically used for it is hard to believe a person as pragmatic as Kimball could have believed in such readings. Though Kimball never recorded anything one way or another on phrenology, Brigham Young did. In reference to one phrenologist he said, "He is just as nigh being an idiot as a man can be, and have any sense left to pass through the world decently."¹⁷ It was customary then for phrenologists to seek out special individuals and give them readings. Certainly by 1842 Mormon leaders in Nauvoo had become so prominent that phrenologists sought them out. It would seem that Kimball submitted out of curiosity and

¹⁶See *Times and Seasons*, 4 and 26 August 1841, for example. His now famous *Journal of Heber C. Kimball* (Nauvoo: Robinson and Smith, 1840), was printed and offered for sale while Kimball was still on his second mission to England. The publication, which Kimball dictated from memory to his publisher, R. B. Thompson, is basically an account of his first mission to England and has nothing to do with the Nauvoo period.

¹⁷Watson, *Manuscript History*, p. 150.

politeness much as one might today allow some petitioner to read his palm.

Kimball's first reading was apparently by A. Crane, M. S., "professor of Phrenology" and happened sometime in April 1842; a second reading was done in Boston in 1843 by one Orson Fowler; a "Professor" Lyon talked Kimball into a third reading on 13 March 1853 in Salt Lake City.

Crane's "Phrenological Chart of Elder Heber C. Kimball" has been reproduced in most printings of Whitney's *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, because "this chart is not only worth preserving as a curiosity, but it is, in many respects, an excellent index of Heber's character and idiosyncracies."¹⁸

HEBER AND MASONRY

While we can dismiss the charlatanism of phrenology rather quickly, the real and imagined connections between Mormonism and Masonry which have fascinated many for years require more careful consideration.

Kimball, a serious and devoted Mason, became a member of the Victor Lodge, No. 303 at Victor, Ontario County, New York in 1823. In due time he advanced through the first three degrees—Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason—and, along with others, petitioned for several more degrees up to the Royal Arch, the equivalent of a seventh degree. In his own words,

In 1824, myself and 5 others sent a petition to the Chapter at Canandaigua, the county seat of Ontario, to receive the degrees up to the Royal Arch Masons: our petition was accepted; but just previous to the time we were to receive those degrees, the Anti-masons burnt the Chapter building in Canandaigua.¹⁹

Kimball was not the only "pre-Mormon" Mason in the Church. Joseph Smith's brother, Hyrum, had become a member of the Mount Moriah Lodge No. 112 at Palmyra, Ontario County, New York sometime in the 1820s.²⁰ Others were Newel K. Whitney, George Miller, and John C. Bennett.

¹⁸Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1945), p. 320.

¹⁹Kimball Journal, no. 94b, part 2, p. 8.

²⁰Mervin B. Hogan, "Utah's Memorial to Freemasonry," *The Royal Arch Mason: Missouri Edition* 11, no. 7 (Fall 1974):201.

Even though some of the bitterest anti-Mormons were Masons, Kimball remained loyal to Masonry all his life and on occasion publicly praised the organization and its members. Of his original activities as a Mason he later wrote,

No man was admitted into a lodge in those days accept he bore a good moral character and was a man of steady habits; and a member would be suspended for getting drunk or any other immoral conduct. I wish that all men were masons and would live up to their profession, then the world would be in a much better state than it is now.²¹

On another occasion when he was trying to free Joseph Smith from prison in Liberty, Missouri, he wrote,

There were several men in Liberty who were friendly to the brethren; I called on them when I went there, and they treated me with great civility, Generals Doniphan and Atchison and the tavern keeper where I put up, and several of the foremost men, who belonged to the Masonic fraternity.²²

As late as 1861 in Utah he publicly announced that he was still true to his Masonic brethren.²³ He did not, however, join the Masonic lodges established in Utah by the United States troop at Camp Floyd (The Rocky Mountain Lodge, No. 205) or in Salt Lake City in the 1860s (the Mount Moriah and Wasatch lodges, for example). In fact the bylaws of these later lodges exclude Mormons from joining.²⁴

We assume that his favorable view likely had some influence on Joseph Smith's embracing of Masonry and setting up a lodge in Nauvoo in 1842. Actually Mormon Masons had been holding lodge meetings in Nauvoo as early as October 1841. It was not until 15 March 1842, however, that they were permitted to add new members.²⁵

Among apparent reasons for Smith's acceptance of Masonry in addition to any influence of men like his brother, Hyrum, and Kimball, were the desire for some acceptance and protection in the larger community, and the recognition of certain similarities between the two systems. Edward Tullidge wrote that Joseph Smith understood the relationship be-

²¹Kimball Journal, no. 94c, part 2, p. 5.

²²Ibid., p. 67.

²³JD 9:182.

²⁴For a sketch of Masonry in early Utah, see E. Cecil McGavin, *Mormonism and Masonry*, 4th enl. ed. (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1956), pp. 183-91.

²⁵John C. Reynolds, *History of the M. W. Grand Lodge of Illinois. . .*, Springfield, Ill.: Masonic Trowel Office, 1869), p. 184.

tween Masonry and the priesthood,²⁶ Reed Durham has recently argued such,²⁷ and Kimball offers contemporary insight into these two factions in a letter to Parley P. Pratt dated 17 June 1842:

We have received some pressious things through the Prophet on the preasthood that would caus your Soul to rejoice. I can not give them to you on paper fore they are not to be riten. So you must come and get them for your Self. We have organized a Lodge here of Masons since we obtained a Charter. That was in March. Since that there has been near two hundred made masons. Bro. Joseph and Sidny was the first that was Received into the Lodge. All of the twelve have become members Except Orson P [ratt]. He hangs back. He will wake up soon, thare is a similarity of preast Hood in Masonry. Br. Joseph Ses Masonry was taken from preasthood but has become degenerated. But meneny things are perfect. We have a prosession on the 24 of June which is cold [called] by Masons St. Johns day in this country. I think it will result in good.²⁸

Later at a special conference in Salt Lake City on 9 November 1858, Kimball said the following: "We have the true Masonry. The Masonry of today is received from the apostasy which took place in the days of Solomon, and David. They have now and then a thing that is correct, but we have the real thing."²⁹

MASONRY IN NAUVOO

On 15 and 16 March 1842, Abraham Jonas, a Jewish Grand Master of the Grand Lodge, F & A. M. (Free and Accepted Masons) of the State of Illinois, organized the Nauvoo Lodge. Of this event (which Kimball attended) he later recorded, the "Lodge was organized on the 15 day of March

²⁶Edward W. Tullidge, *Life of Joseph the Prophet* (New York: n. p., 1878), p. 391.

²⁷Reed Durham, "Is There No Help for the Widow's Son?" Paper presented at the Mormon History Association Annual Meeting, Nauvoo, Illinois, April 1974. Of the three older standard studies of Mormonism and Masonry, S. H. Goodwin, *Mormonism and Masonry* (Washington D.C.: The Masonic Service Association of the United States, 1924); Anthony W. Ivins, *The Relationship of "Mormonism" and Freemasonry* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1934); and McGavin's *Mormonism and Masonry*, the latter is the least vacuous and discursive. Ivins and McGavin knew almost nothing about Masonry and Goodwin knew even less about Mormonism.

²⁸Heber C. Kimball to Parley P. Pratt, 17 June 1842, Parley P. Pratt Papers, Church Historical Department.

²⁹Manuscript History of Brigham Young, unpublished, 13 November 1858, p. 1085.

1842 with forty members. Joseph was made a Mason on the same Eve. Abraham Jonas was present and acted as Master. First night took the 1 and 2 degree. The next night took the 3 degree.”³⁰ Kimball served in the Nauvoo Lodge as a Junior Deacon,³¹ an officer who, by checking certain passwords and grips, was responsible that no “cowans and eavesdroppers” or non-Masons were admitted to lodge meetings. He also carried messages from the Worshipful Master in the East to the Senior Warden in the West and elsewhere about the lodge as required.

Eventually the Nauvoo lodges had 1,492 members³²—which included the First Presidency, most of the Twelve Apostles, and the four men who succeeded Joseph Smith as President of the Church: Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow.

Five Mormon Masonic lodges were established in the area: The Nauvoo, the Nye (named after Jonathan Nye, past Grand Master of Vermont), the Helm (named after a Grand Master) lodges in Nauvoo proper; the Rising Sun Lodge, no. 12, in Montrose, Iowa, and the Eagle Lodge in Keokuk, Iowa.³³

Kimball’s daughter, Helen, adds a bit to our understanding of Masonry in Nauvoo. She once wrote:

The Prophet Joseph after becoming a Mason said that Masonry had been taken from the priesthood. In Nauvoo I was acquainted with the widow and daughter of [William] Morgan who exposed Masonry. I remember once when but a young girl, of getting a glimpse of the outside of the Morgan’s book, exposing Masonry, but which my father always kept locked up.³⁴

ENDOWMENTS AND PLURAL MARRIAGE

Kimball had participated fully in the limited, preparatory ordinances of washings and anointings which had been ad-

³⁰Kimball Journal, no. 92, 10 April 1845.

³¹Reynolds, *History of the M. W. Grand Lodge*, p. 155.

³²Hogan, “Utah’s Memorial,” p. 203. In 1843 there were only 414 Masons in all the rest of the Illinois lodges put together. Reynolds, *History of the M. W. Grand Lodge*, pp. 202-203. Once again the numbers game made the Mormons appear to be a threat to their neighbors.

³³Reynolds, *History of the M. W. Grand Lodge*, pp. 192, 202.

³⁴Helen Mar Whitney, “Scenes and Incidents in Nauvoo,” *Woman’s Exponent* 11 (15 July 1882):26. Morgan’s widow became one of Joseph Smith’s plural wives. William Morgan, a Royal Arch Mason, disappeared in 1826 after it became known that he was writing a book to expose Masonry. Charges that he was murdered to prevent publication of the book were strongly denied by Masons. His book, *Illustrations of Masonry* (1826), is frequently republished as *Morgan’s Freemasonry Exposed and Explained*.

ministered in the Kirtland Temple in 1836. On 4 May 1842, however, Joseph introduced the full endowment ceremony and eight Church leaders, including Heber C. Kimball, Brigham Young, Willard Richards, George Miller, and Newell K. Whitney participated. This presentation was not done in the uncompleted temple, but in the upper rooms of Joseph's brick store on Water Street. While some few others received their endowments before the top story of the temple was completed during December 1845, most of the Saints in Nauvoo received their endowments from then until the general exodus west in 1846.

In about 1842, Kimball was introduced to the doctrine of plural marriage. This troublesome doctrine was revealed to Joseph Smith as early as 1831 in Kirtland, but was not practiced (save for one or two probable instances in Ohio) until 1841 when Joseph and a few other married brethren secretly married additional wives. The revelation concerning plural marriage was set down in writing and read before the Nauvoo High Council in July 1843, but was not openly taught until 1852 in Utah, and not officially published until 1876.³⁵

Although Kimball was sealed to forty-five wives before he died in 1868, he did not act hastily nor out of romantic inclination. Vilate, his first wife, was as much a prime mover in his practicing the doctrine as he. He did not take any other wives for two years after marrying his first plural wife, Sarah Perry Peak Noon, in 1842. Then in September 1844, he married Ann Alice Gheen, grandmother of President Spencer W. Kimball, Frances Jessie Swan, Sylvia Porter Sessions, Charlotte Chase, Nancy Maria Winchester, Mary Ellen Harris Able, and Ellen Sanders. In 1845 he married at least five more wives—the sisters Clarissa and Emilie Cutler, Amanda Gheen, Sarah Ann Whitney, and Lucy Walker. Then, just prior to the February 1846 exodus from Nauvoo, Kimball was sealed to at least twenty-eight women during January and February. He married nine widows of Joseph Smith, and it is clear that some of these and others to whom he was sealed were not connubial wives,

³⁵See Orson Pratt, "Discourse on Celestial Marriage," in *The Bible and Polygamy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Steam Printing Establishments, 1877), p. 81; Joseph F. Smith, Jr. and Richard C. Evans, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1905), pp. 81-83; *Times and Seasons* 3(1 October 1842):939-40; and William Clayton's statement in Andrew Jenson, ed., *Historical Record* 6(May 1887):224-26.

but the sealings expressed his willingness to protect and care for these women while heading into the western wilderness. He had a total of sixty-five children by sixteen women, the extent of his connubial plurality.³⁶

Kimball has told us little of his initial reaction to the doctrine of polygamy. From two other sources, however, we learn something of it. The better account comes from his daughter, Helen Mar, as she wrote in the *Woman's Exponent* in 1882:

When first hearing the principle taught, believing that he would be called upon to enter into it, he thought of the two Sisters Pitkin, who, as they were both elderly ladies and great friends of mothers', he believed would cause her little if any unhappiness. The woman he was commanded to take, however, was an English lady [Sarah Noon], nearer my mother's age, who came over with her husband and two little girls in the same ship in which President Brigham Young and my father were returning from their second mission to Europe.³⁷

Her husband was a drunkard and soon returned to England, abandoning his wife and daughters. According to Helen, "This, no doubt, was the cause of father's being told by the Prophet to take her and the children, to provide them with a home." She further records how her father agonized over the commandment and says that "the Prophet told him the third time before he obeyed the command."³⁸

Helen is also the source of the following now famous incident in the life of Vilate which reveals how she came to understand and accept the doctrine of polygamy:

My mother had noticed a change in his looks and appearance, and when she enquired the cause, he tried to evade her question, saying it was only her imagination, or that he was

³⁶One of the aims of my biography of Kimball is to try to solve some of the problems relating to the exact number of his wives and children, the dates of marriages, births, and deaths in his immediate family, and how many divorces and separations there were. Findings to date indicate that he married forty-five wives between 1822 and 1857, sired sixty-five children between 1823 and 1868, that he married five sets of sisters, that eighteen of his wives were widows or divorcees (nine of whom were widows of Joseph Smith), that at least nine of his wives left him, that another nine preceeded him in death, and that he buried twenty-two children. (It is of passing interest to note that of the nine widows of Joseph Smith which Kimball married, five of them were sealed to the Prophet after he died and had not previously been married to him. On the same day they were sealed to Joseph for eternity, they were married to Heber for time.)

³⁷H. M. Whitney, "Life Incidents" 11(15 July 1882):26.

³⁸*Ibid.*

not feeling well, etc. But it so worked upon his mind that his anxious and haggard looks betrayed him daily and hourly, and finally his misery became so unbearable that it was impossible to control his feelings. He became sick in body, but his mental wretchedness was too great to allow of his retiring at night, and instead of going to bed he would walk the floor; and the agony of his mind was so terrible that he would wring his hands and weep, beseeching the Lord with his whole soul to be merciful and reveal to his wife the cause of his great sorrow, for he himself could not break his vow of secrecy. His anguish and my mother's, were indescribable and when unable to endure it longer, she retired to her room, where with a broken and contrite heart, she poured out her grief to [God]. . . .

My father's heart was raised at the same time in supplication, and while pleading as one would plead for life, the vision of her mind was opened, and she saw the principle of Celestial Marriage illustrated in all its beauty and glory, together with the great exaltation and honor it would confer upon her in that immortal and celestial sphere if she would but accept it and stand in her place by her husband's side. She was also shown the woman he had taken to wife, and contemplated with joy the vast and boundless love and union which this order would bring about, as well as the increase of kingdoms, power, and glory extending throughout the eternities, worlds without end.

Her soul was satisfied and filled with the Spirit of God. With a countenance beaming with joy she returned to my father, saying, "Heber, what you have kept from me the Lord has shown me."

She related the scene to me and to many others, and told me she never saw so happy a man as father was, when she described the vision and told him she was satisfied and knew that it was from God. She covenanted to stand by him and honor the principle, which covenant she faithfully kept, and though her trials were often heavy and grievous to bear, her integrity was unflinching to the end.³⁹

Few other Mormon wives were rewarded with such a vision of the celestial order. Vilate, however, stated that at least one other woman claimed to have received a divine sanction of polygamy. On 27 June 1843, Vilate wrote to Heber, who was on a mission in Philadelphia:

I have had a visit from brother Parley [Pratt] and his wife, they are truly converted it appears that J...h has taught him some principles and told him his privilege, and even ap-

³⁹Ibid.

pointed one for him. I dare not tell you who it is, you would be astonished and I guess some tried. She has been to me for council. I told her I did not wish to advise in such matters. Sister Pratt has been rageing against these things. She told me herself that the devil had been in her until within a few days past. She said the Lord had shown her it was all right. She wants Parley to go ahead, says she will do all in her power to help him; they are so ingagued I feer they will run to fast.

They asked me many questions on principle. I told them I did not know much and I rather they would go to those that had authority to teach.⁴⁰

The wife who came to Vilate for council and who had been "rageing against these things" was Mary Ann Pratt who, after her husband had been sealed to several wives, became alienated and divorced him in 1852 in Utah. The woman to whom Vilate referred when she wrote, "I dare not tell you who it is, you would be astonished and I guess some tried," was Elizabeth Brotherton. Elizabeth was the sister of Martha Brotherton, who left Nauvoo in 1842 and went to St. Louis where she published her unfavorable view of plural marriage in the *St. Louis Bulletin* of 15 July. Among other things she claimed that Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young had tried to pressure her into polygamy. This may be why Vilate felt Heber would be "astonished." In any event, Pratt married Elizabeth.

The second account of Kimball's introduction to polygamy comes from his son-in-law, James Lawson, who married a daughter of Kimball's first plural wife, Sarah Noon. This story was printed in Whitney's *Life of Heber C. Kimball* in 1888. As Lawson and others who could have commented on its truthfulness were still alive in 1888, there seems to be no good reason to discount it. The story is rather unusual and is best told by Lawson himself:

In 1855, Heber C. Kimball sent for me (I had just been married thirteen days) and said "Brother James, I want you to give your wife Betsy a divorce." I said, "Brother Kimball, what is the matter? There is nothing wrong with us, and we think everything of each other." He said, "Nothing is the matter, but here is the divorce and I want you to sign it." I signed it and he told me to send her home to her mother which I did. At the same time I asked her if she had been

⁴⁰Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, 27 June 1843. Original letter formerly in the possession of President Spencer W. Kimball, now in the Church Historical Department. Used by permission.

making any complaints to Brother Kimball about me. She said, "Never, to anybody." I did not sleep a wink that night, and no one knows what I suffered in my feelings. I prayed frequently to the Lord and inquired of Him what all this meant. Towards morning I received an answer to my prayers. The Spirit came unto me, "Be comforted, my servant James, all will come out right." Soon after this Brother Kimball went to the Legislature, which was held at Fillmore, and was absent from home about two months. When he returned he gave me a mission to Carson Valley and told me to get Betsy and bring her to the Endowment House with me. I did so and he sealed us for time and all eternity. After this took place I said, "Brother Kimball what did you do that for?" He said, "Brother James, I did it to try you as I was tried. I will tell you. After I had returned from my second mission to England in 1841, the Prophet Joseph came to me one evening and said, Brother Heber, I want you to give Vilate to me to be my wife, saying that the Lord desired this at my hands." Heber said that in all his life before he had never had anything take hold of him like that. He was dumb-founded. He went home, and did not eat a mouthful of anything, nor even touch a drop of water to his lips, nor sleep, for three days and nights. He was almost continually offering up his prayers to God and asking Him for comfort. On the evening of the third day he said, "Vilate, let's go down to the Prophet's" and they went down and met him in a private room. Heber said, "Brother Joseph, here is Vilate." The Prophet wept like a child, said Heber, and after he had cleared the tears away, he took us and sealed us for time and all eternity, and said, "Brother Heber, take her, and the Lord will give you a hundredfold."⁴¹

Apparently Lawson accepted this all very meekly, even the fact that he was left both wifeless and explanationless for more than two months while Kimball was in Fillmore.

Kimball's reference to his having been tried or tested by the Prophet is not the only account of Joseph Smith's requesting other men's wives in marriage. Orson Pratt was excommunicated for his stand against polygamy (see the T. Edgar Lyon article in this issue), and William Law apostatized and became a bitter enemy of the Prophet.

That all these happenings came about shortly after the Twelve returned from their mission to England lends credence to the idea that the Prophet was testing them all. Those with solid faith remained. Those who lost what faith they had

⁴¹O. F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, pp. 439-40.

spoke out against the Prophet on this very matter like William Law.

Helen informs us of her own initial shock upon learning of the doctrine of plurality and her difficulty in accepting it. She was only thirteen in 1842 when her father took his second wife, Sarah Noon, and was not fully aware even when Sarah had a child that winter. She later wrote,

I had no knowledge then of the plural order, and therefore remained ignorant of our relationship to each other until after his [the infant's] death, as he only lived a few months. It's true I had noticed the great interest taken by my parents in behalf of Sister Noon, but . . . I thought nothing strange of this.⁴²

During the summer of 1843, Heber tried to explain plural marriage to Helen, who was then nearly fifteen. Of this experience she later wrote, "I remember how I felt, but which would be a difficult matter to describe—the various thoughts, fears and temptations that flashed through my mind when the principle was first introduced to me by my father . . . in the summer of 1843. . . ."⁴³ Helen was very disturbed and skeptical. "The next day, the Prophet called at our house, and I sat with my father and mother and heard him teach the principle and explain it more fully, and I believed it. . . ." Shortly after this, Heber went on a mission and, apparently, in a further effort to ease Helen's mind, he wrote to her on 10 July from Pittsburgh:

My Dear Helen . . . You have been on my mind much since I left home, and also your dear mother, who has the first place in my heart, then my dear children and brethren and sisters who have passed through much sorrow and pain for the cause of Christ.

My dear daughter, what shall I say to you? I will tell you, learn to be meek and gentle, and let your heart seek after wisdom. . . .⁴⁴

Apparently Helen did just that for she herself later became a plural wife of Joseph Smith and after his death of Horace

⁴²H. M. Whitney, "Scenes and Incidents" 11(15 July 1882):26. Sarah Noon's child, Adelbert, may have been the first issue of the Mormon practice of plural marriage.

⁴³Ibid, p. 39.

⁴⁴Ibid.

Whitney. That Helen did become a wife of the Prophet is hardly a contestable fact. Her own son recorded, "A golden link was forged whereby the houses of Heber and Joseph were indissolubly and forever joined. Helen Mar, the eldest daughter of Heber Chase and Vilate Murray Kimball was given to the Prophet in the holy bonds of celestial marriage."⁴⁵ There is no evidence, however, that Helen ever lived with Joseph. Helen, herself, seems to have been reticent on the subject. Although she later published a 108-part series of "Life Incidents," in the *Woman's Exponent* (1880-86), and wrote two booklets, *Plural Marriage as Taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith* (1882), and *Why We Practice Plural Marriage* (1884), she never alluded to her marriage to Joseph.⁴⁶

There is little indication that Heber ever considered polygamy as more than a religious responsibility for raising up a large family and providing for widows. In his letters, journals, and discourses, there are frequent references to Vilate and her children, but seldom a mention of others in his actual and adopted family which eventually totalled about 110 persons. It is as if he never loved anyone but Vilate and his letters to her throughout the rest of his life show that he frequently felt the necessity of trying to comfort her, to assure her time and again that she was the first in his life, the love of his youth, and that no one could or would ever take her place. On 12 February 1849, in Utah, for example, he wrote,

No one can supercede you. . . . It is true you are cold [called] to make a great sacrifice, but your glory will be equal to it. . . . Every son and daughter that is brought forth by the wives that are given to me will add to your glory as much as it will to them. They are given to me for this purpus and for no other. . . . What I have done has been done by stolen moments for the purpus to save your feelins and that alone on the account of the love I have for You. I

⁴⁵O. F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, p. 328.

⁴⁶Helen did, however, refer on at least two occasions to the fact that she was a plural wife. Once she said, "I have encouraged and sustained my husband in the celestial order of marriage because I knew it was right." See Augusta Joyce Crocheron, *Representative Women of Deseret* . . . , (Salt Lake City: J. C. Graham, 1884), p. 114. She also wrote, "I have been a spectator and a participant in this order of matrimony for over thirty years . . . being a first wife. . . ." See her *Plural Marriage as Taught by the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), p. 27. Few of Kimball's sons ever entered into plural marriage. William Henry and Abraham Alonzo each took three wives.

beg of you to consider my case as you cannot do the work that God has required of me. . . .⁴⁷

We learn further of Heber and Vilate's early adjustment to polygamy from a letter she wrote to him on 16 October 1842 while he was on a mission in southern Illinois:

Our good friend S. [arah Noon] . . . is as ever, as we are one. You said I must tell you all my feelings; but if I were to tell you that I sometimes felt tempted and tried and feel as though my burden was greater than I could bear, it would only be a source of sorrow to you, and the Lord knows that I do not wish to add one sorrow to your heart, for be assured, my dear Heber, that I do not love you any the less for what has transpired neither do I believe that you do me. . . .⁴⁸

Sarah added a postscript to this letter and, since it is one of the few extant notes or letters from any of Kimball's other wives, I give it here in full.

My very dear friend: Inasmuch as I have listened to your counsel hitherto I have been prospered, therefore, I hope that I shall ever adhere to it strictly in the future.

Your kind letter was joyfully received. I never read it, but I received some comfort and feel strengthened and I thank you for it. You may depend upon my moving as soon as the house is ready. I feel anxious as I perceive my infirmities increasing daily. Your request with regard to Sister Kimball I will attend to. Nothing gives me more pleasure than to add to the happiness of my friends; I only wish that I had more ability to do so. I am very glad we are likely to see you soon, and pray that nothing may occur to disappoint us. When you request Vilate to meet you, perhaps you forget that I shall then stand in jeopardy every hour, and would not have her absent for worlds. My mind is fixed and I am rather particular, but still, for your comfort, I will submit. I am as ever.⁴⁹

Some of her comments are more meaningful when we realize that both Sarah and Vilate were about seven months pregnant. Sarah shows both spunk and resignation, and for whatever reasons, Vilate did not leave her to join Heber.

⁴⁷Heber C. Kimball to Vilate Kimball, 12 February 1849. Original letter formerly in the possession of President Spencer W. Kimball, and now in the Church Historical Department. Used by permission.

⁴⁸Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, 16 October 1842 as quoted in H. M. Whitney, "Scenes and Incidents" 11(1 June 1882):1-2.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* p. 2.

Among those who sought to make trouble and money out of the question of polygamy was John C. Bennett, onetime counselor to Joseph Smith and mayor of Nauvoo, who had been excommunicated in May 1842 for immorality. That same year he published a book in Boston, *The History of the Saints: Or an Exposé of Joe Smith and the Mormons*—a 344-page melange of all kinds of charges against the Church, including several sections on polygamy. As a result of this book and Bennett's lectures, Kimball, Young, and others were called on the above-mentioned mission to southern Illinois to try to offset the damage done by Bennett. Just how Kimball answered Bennett's charges of polygamy is not known.

Kimball and Young were gone only three months and their mission was more of an extended preaching tour to Lima, Quincy, Payson, Pittsfield, Glasgow, Apple Creek, Jacksonville, Springfield, and Morgan City. Just how Kimball answered Bennett's charges is not known, but with two pregnant wives in Nauvoo, it would have been awkward for him to argue that plural marriage existed only in a spiritual sense. The mission started off well enough on 10 September 1842. They held a conference in Lima where they ordained nineteen elders.⁵⁰ In Quincy, however, they had little success.

Heber and Vilate exchanged at least four letters during this short separation. Heber records little of his mission and activities, but writes at great length about his deepest, innermost feelings for Vilate. "I dream about you most every night, but always feel disappointed for when I awake, behold it is a dream and I could cry if it would do any good. . . . You was speaking about if I had sent a kiss to you. I'll send you several on the top of this page where those round marks are, no less than one dozen. I had the pleasure of receiving those that you sent. . . ." ⁵¹ He arrived back home on 4 November 1842.

NAUVOO, 1842-44

After this southern Illinois mission Kimball was at home in Nauvoo for seven months, Vilate had a new son, Charles Spaulding, born 2 January 1843, and, as noted above, near that time Sarah Noon also had a son who lived only about nine months.

⁵⁰See *Times and Seasons*, 15 September 1842.

⁵¹Heber C. Kimball papers, 627/a, Church Historical Department.

We know little of Heber's life during this time. One thing of importance, however, took place in January 1843—the organization of the Young Gentlemen and Ladies Relief Society in Nauvoo. According to the *Times and Seasons*,

One evening in the latter part of January last, a few young people having assembled at the house of Elder H. C. Kimball; the follies of youth and the temptations to which they are exposed generally, but more especially in our city, became the topic of conversation. The company were lamenting the loose style of the morals, the frivolous manner in which they spent their time, and their too frequent attendance at balls, parties, etc.

Kimball offered to give them some instruction. At the next meeting, "Elder Kimball addressed them for some time upon the duties of children to their parents, to society and to their God." A week later another meeting was held and Kimball

explained the duty which the youth owed to themselves, and the manner in which they might obtain honor and respect, viz: by applying their minds with determined perseverance to all the studies commonly deemed necessary to fit them for active life and polish them for society . . . and acquit yourselves like . . . men of God.⁵²

The next meeting was held at the home of Joseph Smith, and Kimball again addressed the group. A week later the meeting was held above Smith's store, and the Prophet expressed satisfaction with the group and with what Kimball had done, and said he hoped Kimball would continue his meetings and that the young people would follow his teaching. Accordingly a committee was appointed to draft a constitution which was unanimously adopted and officers elected on 21 March.⁵³

At the conference of 6 April 1843, Kimball was appointed to go on a mission to the Eastern states to preach the gospel, collect tithing, and dispose of stock in the Nauvoo House Association. He left Nauvoo on 10 June 1843 on this seventh mission and noted in his journal, "This day I left my home at Nauvoo in company with my wife and fore of my children, Sister Noon and Sister Billing. On the 11th Preached at Lima. On the 12th reached Quincy. I had a preshus time with my

⁵²*Times and Seasons*, 1 April 1843.

⁵³This constitution is printed in *Times and Seasons*, 7 April 1843.

dear wife.”⁵⁴ Apparently the first part of this trip was turned into a small family vacation. He arrived back in Nauvoo four months later on 23 October and turned what monies he had over to Joseph.

Kimball now had another seven months at home before being called on his eighth and last mission. Concerning that period he said, “I remained in Nauvoo all winter enjoying the teachings of the Prophet, attending councils, prayer meetings . . . preaching in Nauvoo and Branches round about, and doing all I could to strengthen the hands of the First Presidency.”⁵⁵

Since January 1844, Joseph and others had been considering whether to support Martin Van Buren or Henry Clay for president of the United States. Both had refused to do anything to help the Mormons. Out of this dilemma came a proposal to establish an independent electoral ticket and nominate Joseph Smith as a candidate for the election of 1844. This was done at the April conference and on 17 May a convention was held in Nauvoo at which Kimball and 343 other elders were appointed to go through the states and present the name of Joseph Smith and his views on the powers and policies of government in the United States.

In May Kimball left with Brigham Young and others to campaign for Joseph Smith for President of the United States and to petition in Washington, D. C. for redress of Missouri’s wrongs. Helen, William, and Vilate accompanied Heber to the steamer, *Osprey*, and it was understood that Vilate would later meet Heber in Philadelphia and that Helen would come too, if possible.⁵⁶

While Kimball was away on this mission Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were assassinated at Carthage on 27 June. Heber first learned of the tragic news on 9 July while in Salem, Massachusetts. His journal records:

9 Tuesday we took cares fore Boston at half past eight. Reached [there] at 10 att night. Left quarter before five fore New York, got there at 7 in the morning of the 10. Elder White left fore Phellidelphia at 9 in the morning and I left at 2 in the after. in company with Br. Wm. Smith. The papers ware full of News of the death of our Prophet. I was

⁵⁴Kimball Journal, no. 91, 10 June 1843.

⁵⁵*Millennial Star*, 26(12 November 1864), p. 727.

⁵⁶H. M. Whitney, “Scenes and Incidents” 11(1 December 1882):98.

not willen to believe it. Fore it was to much to bare. The first news of his death was on Tuesday Morning in Salum, of the 9. It struck me at the heart. We got to Phel . . . at half past 11 at Night.⁵⁷

NAUVOO AFTER THE MARTYRDOM

From that city he, along with Elders Young, Pratt, Woodruff, and Wright, started for Nauvoo, arriving 6 August. There they found Sidney Rigdon, who, with Joseph and Hyrum dead, was the only surviving member of the First Presidency. Rigdon, who had had a falling out with Joseph in 1838, had been living in Pittsburgh for several years. As soon as he learned of Joseph and Hyrum's death, he hurried to Nauvoo to claim leadership and to present himself as a "guardian" of the Church. He wanted to act immediately, before the Quorum of the Twelve could be convened and prevailed upon William Marks, President of the Nauvoo Stake, to call a meeting. This was opposed by the four apostles who were in Nauvoo—John Taylor, George A. Smith, Parley P. Pratt, and Willard Richards. No formal meeting was held until 7 August. On that day, in a special meeting in the Seventies Hall, Rigdon presented his claims before the Quorum of the Twelve, the Nauvoo Stake High Council, the President of the Stake, and the High Priests. No action was taken, and on the following morning a general conference was convened in the grove to give Rigdon the opportunity of laying his claims before the whole Church. Rigdon based his argument on the facts that he was the only living member of the First Presidency and that in 1833 he had been appointed and ordained as spokesman to Joseph Smith.⁵⁸

That afternoon Brigham Young addressed the gathering, answering Rigdon by saying that his spokesmanship ended with the death of Joseph and that all of Joseph's keys and powers at his death devolved upon the Quorum of the Twelve. While he was speaking the famous "transfiguration" took place. Helen's later version is as follows:

⁵⁷Kimball Journal, no. 92, 9 July 1844. Kimball and Young arrived in Nauvoo too late for the funeral of the Prophet, but later they, and others, received walking canes made from the rough oak boxes in which the bodies of the dead brothers were transported from Carthage. Descendents of two of Kimball's sons, Abraham Alonzo and David Patten, claim to have this cane. Abraham Alonzo's descendents have much the stronger claim.

⁵⁸See Doctrine and Covenants 100:9.

I can bear witness, with hundreds of others who stood that day under the sound of Brigham's voice, of the wonderful and startling effect that it had upon us. If Joseph had risen from the dead and stood before them, it could hardly have made a deeper or more lasting impression. It was the very voice of Joseph himself. This was repeatedly spoken of by the Latter-day Saints. And surely it was a most powerful and convincing testimony to them that he was the man, instead of Sidney Rigdon, that was destined to become the "great leader" and upon whose shoulders the mantle of Joseph Smith had fallen.⁵⁹

Most accounts of this "transfiguration" were written long after the event, but there is at least one contemporary account which alludes somewhat to this occurrence. In one letter dated 15 November 1844 we read, "Brigham Young is president of the twelve and stands as prophet, Seer, and revelator to the Church, he is an excellent man, and favors Br. Joseph both in person, and manner of speaking, more than any person ever you saw. . . ."⁶⁰

After both presentations the congregation sustained the Twelve as the presiding authority with Brigham Young as President of the Twelve.

Although Heber did not know it, he had been on his last mission. Thereafter, he became an administrator and colonizer; a new phase in his life commenced. Up to Joseph Smith's death all of the apostles had been equal, and seniority had not been of much import. Thereafter it became increasingly significant. Young, for example, assumed leadership and exercised it from August 1844 until December 1847 solely on the basis of his position as the senior member of the Council of the Twelve. (In December 1847, he became *de jure* president of the Church.) And Kimball, partly because he was next in seniority became and remained until his death twenty-four years later, the second ranking leader in the Church and counselor to Brigham Young.

For nineteen months the new leadership strove mightily to move ahead with Joseph's ideas. Perhaps to symbolize this, at the April conference, 1845, the name of Nauvoo was

⁵⁹Helen Mar Whitney, "Scenes in Nauvoo After the Martyrdom of the Prophet and Patriarch," *Woman's Exponent* 11(1 February 1883):130.

⁶⁰Henry and Catherine Brooke, Lima, Ill., to Leonard and Mary Pickel, Nauvoo, Ill., 15 November 1844, Leonard Pickel Letters, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. (From the microfilm copy at Southern Illinois University.)

changed to the City of Joseph. During this period Kimball was especially busy preaching, administering, building a home, reading and writing history, tending to family affairs, looking after the sick, building the temple, negotiating with the anti-Mormon forces, preparing for an uncertain future, and trying to avoid writs and charges against him and other prominent Mormons—in short, building up Nauvoo and preparing to leave it at the same time. The United States and Canada were divided into ecclesiastical and mission districts presided over by High Priests, the Saints were called to gather to Nauvoo, baptism for the dead was recommenced (in the basement of the temple), and the Seventies Hall was completed.

The sources are obscure regarding how Kimball supported himself in Nauvoo. He had been working full time for the Church almost since his arrival in Kirtland in 1833. We know that his brick home in Nauvoo was built for him by the Church, or at least by its members. We also know, for example, that on 25 January 1845 Brigham Young gave him five pounds sterling (\$25.00)⁶¹ and that he occasionally received money and provisions from the Church. There is evidence that he did some work as a potter in Nauvoo. He records, for example, on 6 February 1845, “I was to work on my wheel with others in the pottery.”⁶² From comments in his correspondence with Vilate, and a few other sources, it is clear that Kimball also bought and sold some building sites in Nauvoo from which he may have derived some income. Apparently he supported himself as best he could and the Church made up the rest of his needs out of its general funds.

Special attention was devoted to the temple, the “Million Dollar Sacrifice.” The site and the cornerstone had been dedicated 6 April 1841, and when it was finished and dedicated five years later, Joseph was dead, the city of Nauvoo partially deserted, and Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball were leading the advance company of exiles across Iowa.

The “History of the Church” which had been appearing seriatim in most of the ninety-five issues of the *Times and*

⁶¹The circulation of the pound sterling in Nauvoo requires some comment. Between the Jackson and Lincoln administrations, there was no national banking system and no national currency. All kinds of private banks (such as the Kirtland Safety Society) issued paper money. At this time foreign currency also circulated freely. The famous “greenbacks” were introduced by Lincoln.

⁶²Kimball Journal, no. 91, 6 February 1845.

Seasons published prior to the death of Joseph Smith, was changed to the "History of Joseph Smith" and written and published more rapidly. At the death of Joseph the history had reached December 1831, but by the time the *Times and Seasons* ceased publication some thirty-five issues later on 15 February 1846, the published history was complete to 11 August 1834.

Mormons have always taken the writing of their own history seriously. For years Joseph Smith kept one or more clerks busy collecting and compiling records, but due to the unsettled conditions of his life little written history had been produced. After Willard Richards was appointed Church Historian in July 1843, however, he tried to bring order out of ten years of chaos and found many records lost or stolen. It was his work that was published in the *Times and Seasons*. After the Prophet's death, Richards, to fill in the gaps in the record, would compile an account of a certain period as well as he could from the records he inherited and then read it aloud to Kimball, Young, and others who would correct errors and add information. This is what Kimball was referring to when he frequently wrote in his journals that he had been "reading history." It was probably at this time that Kimball also compiled and dictated his personal history from his birth through November 1839.⁶³ Kimball's zeal to write his own history may have prompted him in 1845 to study "phonography" (or phonetic shorthand writing) with George D. Watt—the first convert baptized in England. (Other than a few exercises written in his journal, there is no evidence that Kimball ever mastered or used the shorthand technique.)

Contrary to the expectation of the anti-Mormons, the Church did not break up and weaken after the death of Joseph Smith. Indeed, the people rallied around the new leaders and were advised to stay and build up Nauvoo. Economic self-sufficiency was urged and industrial growth fostered by creating a trades' union and organizing light industries to improve the material welfare of the people. At the April 1845 conference, for example, Kimball advised the Saints to cultivate

our own corn, peas, and beans . . . and every other thing that is for our comfort . . . make our own cloth . . . and every other thing we need for our own comfort . . . we want to

⁶³Now known as Heber C. Kimball Journal, no. 94b and c.

see every lot in the city of Joseph fenced up and cultivated, and let every street that is not used, be fenced up, and planted . . . we want to finish the Temple . . . and Nauvoo House . . . every man and woman [is counseled] to stay in this county. . . .⁶⁴

Never impractical or unrealistic, Kimball portentously advised all "to bring their firelocks, and learn to use them, and keep them well cleaned and loaded, and primed, so that they will go off with the first shot. . . ." In June 1845 Kimball wrote the following about building the temple:

God is favoring us day by day; and leading our enemies as a horse is led by the reins. For what purpose? In order that he may carry on his work, and erect that building. I presume that the servants of God, for the sake of having that accomplished, would go into the wilderness in this case and wear sheep skins and goat skins for their apparel and live upon bread and water, for the sake of having that building built. . . . Let us go to work and build this house. Roll out your rusty dollars, and your rusty coppers, and let us rush on this house as fast as possible. When you gent [get] it done you will have joy and gladness, and greater shouting, than we had when the cap stone [of the Kirtland Temple] was laid. We will make this city ring with hosannas to the Most High God. This is only a little way ahead, and shall we not put the best foot foremost? Yes; and when we sleep let us sleep with one leg out of bed, and one eye open. Let us beware of those fellows, that do not like us very well. At this time a few of them do not like to dwell in our midst; they are afraid of the boys. Well, we will have no more whittling at present; let the boys go to school and attend to their own business. You can see how fast that house is going up. You will see an addition to it all the time until the last shingle goes on. We will have our next conference in it. I feel to rejoice; my heart is glad, and I feel to praise the Lord all the time. I do not go out of doors, and look at that house, but the prayer of my heart is "O, Lord save this people, and help them to build thy house."⁶⁵

So successful were the Mormons in carrying out the ideas of their dead Prophet that by September 1845 it was obvious the Church was not going to wither away as some had expected. Anti-Mormon activities therefore recommenced in earnest. Kimball's journal records many attempts at negotiating with the mobs. An agreement was eventually reached with the

⁶⁴*Times and Seasons*, 15 July 1845.

⁶⁵*Ibid.* 1 August 1845.

Anti-Mormon Convention headquartered in Carthage that the Mormons would quit the State of Illinois during the spring and until then peace would be maintained on both sides. Compelled to accept these terms the Mormons made every effort to meet this deadline. Every home including Kimball's became a workshop in preparation for the exodus. Anti-Mormon fanatics, however, did not keep the peace and harassment continued, forcing the leaders—including Kimball—into hiding occasionally.

The theme of the October conference was optimistic, preparatory, explanatory, and, of course, hortatory. Kimball said,

I am glad the time of our Exodus is come . . . and although we leave all our fine houses and farms here, how long do you think it will be before we shall be better off than we are now? . . . I will prophecy in the name of Heber C. Kimball, that in five years, we will be as well again off as we are now.⁶⁶

Following the conference, top priority was given to finishing the temple. On 2 December 1845 Heber records, for example, how he and his son William drove around Nauvoo picking up twenty-five or thirty potted evergreens for the Garden (of Eden) Room.⁶⁷ On 5 December the temple veil was hung and endowments commenced. Thereafter through at least 7 February 1846 thousands received their endowments with as many as 295 going through in a single day. So great were the desires of the people to secure their endowments before the exodus that during this sixty-day period Kimball, Young, and others sometimes worked in the temple all night, consuming what little strength they had left. Kimball seems to have slowly assumed general charge of temple work. One of his journals (no. 93) became an official temple record, his room in the temple became an office, and he, himself, often officiated at the veil and took various parts in the ceremony. (In Utah, he was officially in charge of all temple work until his death in 1868.)

On top of all this public activity, Heber still had the private concerns of his family which continued to grow. Vilate gave birth to Brigham Willard on 29 January 1845. By the time Kimball left Nauvoo he had eight living children (three others

⁶⁶Ibid., 1 November 1845.

⁶⁷Kimball Journal, no. 93, 2 December 1845.

had died) by three wives, and three other wives were pregnant. In 1843 Heber had added a brick addition to his log home on the flats. During the summer and fall of 1845, as noted above, the old log portion was razed and replaced by a two-story brick structure. This renovation was finished 12 November 1845, and was the first adequate home the Kimballs had had in the twelve years since they left Mendon, New York. They were to enjoy the comforts of this home only four months and five days and then spend another six years in tents, wagon boxes, and log cabins before Vilate would have another comfortable home.

Helen later recorded a good description of this Nauvoo home. It contained

a parlor, two bedrooms and a clothes-press to each, with hall. The largest room, with exception of the parlor, was mine, with two large windows, one opened to the south and the other east, towards the Temple. The rooms in the basement were very similar. The hall passed east and west, front door opening towards the river, and over was a large stone on which my father had his name [initials] engraven. This was the first nice house that he had been able to build us, his time having been previously engaged in the Father's vineyard. . . .⁶⁸

She adds a couple of little human interest stories regarding their life at that time. In spite of the pressures and responsibilities placed on Kimball and Young, they took time to worry over piano lessons for their daughters. Helen had no piano at home to practice on, but,

President Brigham Young had a small piano and invited me to come to his house and practice with his daughter Vilate, who though younger than myself, had had previous advantages, but was rather indifferent, and he thought if I practiced with her, she would take a greater interest. Their piano stood in Sister Young's room, and her health being very poor, he proposed to have it brought to our house when the upper part was done. This pleased us both immensely. I never became weary of practicing until after I heard it was decided that we were to be broken up and move to the Rocky Mountains. Though the piano remained there throughout the winter I felt no encouragement to continue taking lessons, though father tried to stimulate me to go, and said, to encourage me, that they should have the necessary materials

⁶⁸H. M. Whitney, "Scenes in Nauvoo" 11(15 March 1883):154.

taken to manufacture pianos and I should have one, but I knew that I would forget it all; and we little thought of its being so long before we got to our destination.⁶⁹

During the short time Vilate was in her new home she tried to do a little socializing, and one evening in October 1845 the Kimballs invited some friends to their home during which time "several pieces were played on the piano by Sister Pitchforth after which we assembled at John Taylor's for prayers."⁷⁰ The Kimballs also sat for portraits by a

Brother Major, from England, who commenced in the summer of 1845 to paint our family group. It was upon a large canvas, tastefully arranged,—my father and mother sitting with baby in the center,—myself at her side and my brother William with his wife and little daughter on the left, and four younger brothers made up the family group . . . one of the same size, with President B. Young and family was begun at the same time. . . .⁷¹

The year 1845 ended with Kimball and Young examining maps and reading various travel accounts of the West in preparation for the western exodus. Among the works they read were John C. Fremont's *Report on the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842 and to Oregon and North California in the Years 1843-44* (1845), and Lansford W. Hastings' *The Emigrant's Guide to Oregon and California* (1845).

The year 1846 commenced badly—leading to a hectic effort to vacate Nauvoo before Kimball, Young, and others were arrested on various charges or before mobs forced them out by fire and sword. Church trustees were appointed to sell Church and private property. Brigham's brother, Joseph Young, was appointed to preside over those who could not leave at that time, and the first crossing of the Mississippi commenced on 1 February. A temporary camp and staging ground was established west of Montrose on Sugar Creek about seven miles from the river.

Kimball crossed the Mississippi on a flatboat on 4 February and joined the temporary camp at Sugar Creek. By the time the camp was moved out on 1 March, Kimball had about

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Kimball Journal, no. 91, October 1845.

⁷¹H. M. Whitney, "Scenes in Nauvoo, And Incidents from H. C. Kimball's Journal," *Woman's Exponent*, 12(15 October 1883):74.

twenty-eight members of his large family with him—twelve wives (including Vilate, Sarah Ann Whitney [who was pregnant], Ellen and Harriet Sanders, Sarah Lawrence, and Christeen Golden), four young sons (Heber, David, Charles, and Brigham), six adopted sons, as well as Helen Mar and her husband, and William with his wife and child. Among his wives temporarily left behind were Sarah Noon with a seven-month old infant, Lucy Walker with a one-month old baby, the sisters Clarissa and Emilie Cutler, and Francis G. Swan, who were all pregnant, and Amanda Gheen and Presendia Huntington. Kimball and his family were starting a new adventure.

Kimball's devotion to the Restoration during the Nauvoo period is typical of his dedication from his acceptance of the gospel in 1833 through his death in 1868. It is hard to argue with what one of his fathers-in-law once said of him: "I believe that there is no man in the whole circle of my acquaintance, that intends to do better and work righteousness more than Bro. Kimball, nor one that comes nearer to the point in so doing."⁷²

⁷²Bishop Newel K. Whitney, 14 February 1847, Winter Quarters, as quoted in H. M. Whitney, "Scenes and Incidents at Winter Quarters," *Woman's Exponent*, 14(1 July 1885):18.