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JULIA HILLS JOHNSON, 1783-1853:

MY SOUL REJOICED

BY

LINDA J. THAYNE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTERS OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

AUGUST 2008

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ABSTRACT

JULIA HILLS JOHNSON, 1783-1853

MY SOUL REJOICED

Linda J. Thayne

History Department

Masters of Arts

Julia Hills Johnson, the 48-year-old wife of Ezekiel Johnson and mother of sixteen children, found spiritual fulfillment in the doctrines of a new religion called Mormonism. Her baptism in 1831 was a simple act that ultimately led her halfway across the American continent, and strained her marital relationship, yet filled her with a sense of spiritual contentment. Julia's commitment to her faith, her tenacity, self-determination and willingness to take risks to participate in this new religious movement sets her apart from other nineteenth-century farm women in New England and New York.

Julia's religiosity was self-determined and tenacious. She chose to break with the religious and social conventions of her time to embrace ideas that were outside the social and religious norms of her society because she found spiritual fulfillment in a religious movement with doctrines and an organizational structure that to her was logical, intellectually appealing and consistent with her pre-existing concept of true Christianity.

As a dominant influence in her children's lives she was determined to adhere to and inculcate her children in the Church's doctrines and organization. Throughout her twenty-two-year sojourn in Mormonism she remained dedicated to the success of what for her was the restoration of God's kingdom on earth. Her participation in that movement at times placed her and her family at personal and financial risk to adhere to the doctrines of their faith and remain in company with other converts.

Julia experienced Mormonism from its earliest days to their exodus west. Because she was among the first to join her life affords us an opportunity to examine the role of women in the early church and to test historical theories intended to explain women's conversion, and women's doctrinal attitudes. From Julia's conversion and post conversion experiences, historians of nineteenth-century America, religion, women's, and Mormon history will gain greater insight into the role women played in the early history of the Church. Julia shaped the religiosity of her children, influenced the religiosity of others, and thereby influenced the development of the Church.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For graciously and generously sharing their time and talents in the preparation of this thesis I would like to express my gratitude to the members of my thesis committee. My deepest appreciation goes to Susan S. Rugh, for sharing her remarkable knowledge, and talent for writing with me. Her tireless persistence gave me the scholarly direction necessary to develop a focused and coherent thesis and give voice to Julia's life and legacy. Thank you for pressing me to do my best. My gratitude to Mary Richards, for her example of exceptional scholarship, cheerful encouragement, insightful recommendations and her focus on detail that lent direction and helped me fine tune the paper. Kathryn M. Daynes, for her knowledge and research into plural marriage that enabled me to bring greater depth and understanding as it related to Julia's experiences. Thomas G. Alexander for his encouragement during those first frustrating efforts that helped keep me on track. Together their scholarship, professionalism, kindness, support and demanding expectations have stimulated and enhanced my scholarly ability and enabled me to create a viable contribution to the historiography of Mormon Women's Studies. Remarkably, they never seemed to doubt my ability to write a scholarly paper. My heartfelt appreciation to the magnificent family and friends who bless my life, for their love and complete confidence in my ability to attain my goal and for their help and support at critical times, and in more ways than I have room here to enumerate. Lastly,

Julia Ellis Hills Johnson, for being the extraordinary woman she was and living a life worth writing about.

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GENEALOGY

Julia Ellis Hills Johnson (1783-1853)	Ezekiel Johnson (1773-1848)
Joel Hills Johnson	(1802-1882)
Nancy Maria	(1803-1836)
Seth Guernsey	(1805-1835)
Delcina Diademia	(1806-1854)
Julia Ann	(1808-1856)
David	(1810-1833)
Almera Woodward	(1812-1896)
Susan	(1814-1836)
Joseph Ellis	(1817-1882)
Benjamin Franklin	(1818-1905)
Mary Ellen	(1820-1845)
Elmer Wood	(1822-1823)
George Washington	(1823-1900)
William Derby	(1824-1896)
Esther Melita	(1827-1876)
Amos Partridge	(1829-1842)

INTRODUCTION

As 1831 drew to a close, a plump, diminutive woman with high cheekbones and dark graying hair entered the chilly winter waters of northeastern New York to begin a new year and a new life.¹ It was a transcendent, life altering moment as Julia Ellis Hills Johnson, the 48-year-old wife of Ezekiel Johnson and mother of sixteen children, found spiritual fulfillment in the doctrines of a new religion called Mormonism.² Her baptism was a simple act that ultimately led her halfway across the American continent and strained her marital relationship, yet filled her with a sense of spiritual contentment.

Julia's life, like that of many other farm women in New England and New York, revolved around her husband and children. Her days were often filled with long hours of hard labor to provide for her own and her family's needs.³ Yet, it is Julia's commitment to her faith, her tenacity, self-determination and willingness to take risks to participate in this new religious movement that sets her apart. Born at the end of the eighteenth century, Julia experienced Mormonism from its earliest days to its exodus west. Because

¹ Julia was baptized into the Church of Christ, which changed its name to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1838.

² Julia was a generation older than most early converts. Half of all early converts were young, their mean age being twenty-nine, with 50 percent under the age of thirty. Mark R. Grandstaff and Milton V. Backman, Jr., "The Social Origins of the Kirtland Mormons," *Brigham Young University Studies* 30 no. 2 (Spring 1990): 47-66. The terms, the Church and Mormon, will be used throughout the paper to denote The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its adherents. For an insightful analysis of the early church, see Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1984); Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007). For two contrasting interpretations on the Mormon experience, see Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989) and Kenneth H. Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

³ For a broader analysis of a New England farm woman's life, see Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism, Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

she was among the first to join the church, her life affords us an opportunity to examine the role of women in the early church and allows us to test historical theories intended to explain women's conversion and women's doctrinal attitudes.

Some historians have characterized early Latter-day Saint women as oppressed by a patriarchal system. These models contend that Mormon women were reluctant converts, denied the free exercise of conscience, admission to church meetings, and baptism.⁴ Such historiographies of Mormon women present distorted caricatures that deny women the ability to make choices for their own lives and obscure the ways ordinary people functioned in family relationships.

Closer grained histories of Mormonism have emphasized its patriarchal nature without seeing Mormon women as passive victims.⁵ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton contend that Latter-day Saint women attended church meetings, voted in general church assemblies, contributed their time and means, and exercised spiritual gifts along with men.⁶ Richard A. Bartlett argued that what differentiated Mormon women was the specific recognition they received for their contributions and the sense of value and respect they felt as a consequence.⁷ Barbara Welter contended that Mormonism

⁴ Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 216-225; Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 132-134; Susan Juster, "The Spirit and the Flesh: Gender, Language, and Sexuality in American Protestantism," in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry S. Stout and D.G. Hart, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 334-36; Paul E. Johnson, "Democracy, Patriarchy, and American Revivals, 1780-1830," *Journal of Social History* 24 (Summer 1991): 846; Paul E. Johnson, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁵ B. Carmon Hardy, "Lords of Creation: Polygamy, the Abrahamic Household, and Mormon Patriarchy," *Journal of Mormon History* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 119-152; Carol Berkin and Mary Beth Norton, *Women of America: A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1979), 115-136; Barbara Welter, "The Feminization of American Religion: 1800-1860," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary S. Harman and Lois Banner (New York: Octagon Books, 1976), 137-194. For a more extensive review of works on Mormonism, see James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker, *Studies in Mormon History, 1830-1997: An Indexed Bibliography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

⁶ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1992), esp. chap. 12.

⁷ Richard A. Bartlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier, 1776-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 378-379.

recognized women's importance more than any other religion.⁸ Lawrence Foster argued that the doctrinal emphasis on the eternal nature of the family gave new status and dignity to the role of women in the family.⁹

Historical studies of Mormon women by female Mormon historians contend that early female converts played a vital role in the establishment of distinct and exclusive economic and social institutions with the church. Early Mormon women established social and economic networks that transformed and coalesced into a unique Latter-day Saint culture. Latter-day Saint women considered sharing their religious conversion a serious matter and actively proselytized among family, friends, neighbors, and strangers. This strengthened and sanctified the bonds between them and was a means for reaffirming their common commitment to the restored gospel.¹⁰ Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson asserted that most Mormon women were dedicated to the success of Mormonism, not personal independence.¹¹ According to Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward Mormon women derived a sense of personal identity from their religious conviction.¹²

The issue of polygamy is complex and contradictory in histories of Mormon women. Historian Paul Johnson argued that women revolted against the male-dominated

⁸ Welter, "Feminization" 150.

⁹ Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 204-205.

¹⁰ Jill Mulvay Derr, Kenneth Godfrey, and Audrey M. Godfrey, eds., *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982); Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward, *Four Zinas. A Story of Mothers and Daughters on the Mormon Frontier* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000); Donna Toland Smart, ed., *Mormon Midwife, The 1846-1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997); Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake: Signature Books, 2001), esp. 2-65; Jill Mulvay Derr, "Strength in Our Union": The Making of Mormon Sisterhood," in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 153-207.

¹¹ Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit*, ix.

¹² Bradley and Woodward, *Four Zinas*, xv.

Church because they abhorred polygamy.¹³ Some early converts, male and female, did revolt. The idea of plural marriage was contrary to the social and religious customs of that period and, consequently, often resulted in an initial aversive reaction from both male and female members. However, this does not indicate that such sentiments remained resolute. Jill Mulvay Derr, Kenneth W. Godfrey, and Audrey M. Godfrey argued that only 15 to 20 percent of Latter-day Saints ever practiced the doctrine of the plurality of wives and of those many women found their participation in the system beneficial. “Sister Wives” often developed close loving relationships and aided each other in fulfilling their childcare and housekeeping responsibilities.¹⁴ It is unknown what Julia’s initial response was to polygamy as a doctrine, but at some point she accepted and entered into a plural marriage. Some of her daughters also entered into plural marriages, suggesting that she approved. The lives and experiences of some Mormon women shows that despite any initial adverse response they may have felt, they accepted the doctrine on the plurality of wives and willingly participated in the various forms of plural marriage to fulfill their own spiritual and temporal objectives.¹⁵

Julia’s actions and experiences as an early female convert do not support the assertions of historians who contend that Mormon women were merely passive victims in their own lives.¹⁶ Many other early female converts from New England of Julia’s generation were like her, stable, long-term, contributing members of their communities.

¹³ Paul E. Johnson, “Democracy, Patriarchy,” 846; Johnson, *Kingdom of Matthias*.

¹⁴ Derr, Godfrey and Godfrey, *Women’s Voices*, 16.

¹⁵ For an illuminating analysis of the doctrine on the plurality of wives, see Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

¹⁶ For an revealing look into the experiences of just a few of the thousands of women who converted to Mormonism during the period and how they perceived themselves and each other, see Carol Cornwall Madsen, *In Their Own Words* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1994); Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

They were middle-aged women who had been married for decades, with numerous children ranging widely in age. They were familiar with fluctuating financial conditions both before and after their conversion. They yearned for spiritual fulfillment in an organized religion with doctrines and an organizational structure that harmonized with their vision of true Christianity. When they found fulfillment in Mormonism they exhibited steadfastness and ingenuity in conforming to doctrinal ideals despite familial and social conflicts. Like Julia, they attended church meetings, voted in Church general assemblies, engaged in temple rituals, and contributed their time and means to the building of the Kirtland and Nauvoo Temples.¹⁷ They were committed to living among their fellow converts and participating in the establishment of what to them was the restoration of Christ's Church, even at the cost of marital discord and separation. Julia and other early female converts, like her, were independent-minded women who sought answers to their spiritual yearnings.

Like Julia, some experienced familial conflict as a result of their choice to convert to Mormonism yet remained undeterred from their pursuit for piety. They were resourceful in devising ways to achieve their religious objectives while remaining married to their non-member husbands. When Hannah Knight Libby Carter embraced Mormonism she did so without her husband. Born October 9, 1786, in Scarborough, Maine, Hannah Knight Libby was the fourth of eleven children born to Captain Zebulon Libby and Lydia Andrews. At age nineteen she married John Carter and together they had nine children, Dominicus, Almira, Hannah, William, Phillip, John Jr., Elizabeth, Richard, and Mary. Hannah was forty-eight-years-old in 1834, and living in Newry,

¹⁷ Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Mormon Women and the Temple: Toward a New Understanding," in Beecher and Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit*, 80-110.

Maine, when she converted to Mormonism. At the time Hannah's children ranged in ages from eleven to twenty-eight. Three of her children were still minors; nine were adults; Almira, Hannah, and William were married, and all were living in Newry. Hannah's husband John, and son Phillip, did not convert, but Almira, Hannah, and William, along with their spouses, joined the church. Hannah and those of her children who had converted wanted to be part of the gathering of church members in Kirtland, Ohio. So, despite the fact that John had not converted, he and the rest of the family left behind family and friends to move to Kirtland in 1836. At the time Hannah and John were among Newry's longest, most stable residents, who for thirty-one years had been part of building their small farming community. In 1838, two years after arriving in Kirtland, Hannah's daughter Elizabeth married fellow convert James Snow. That same year Hannah and John left Kirtland as part of Kirtland Camp along with their eldest son Dominicus, daughter Hannah and their families for Far West. In 1839, they fled Far West, making a 200-mile journey west to resettle in Lima, Illinois, twenty-nine miles south of Nauvoo. Religion became an increasingly divisive issue in Hannah's marriage and family that ultimately divided her family. Her son, Phillip, rejected the church and returned to New England. Then, while living in Nauvoo, Hannah and John separated, but never divorced.

Hannah entered into a plural marriage in 1846, when she went to the Nauvoo Temple and was sealed in marriage to Isaac Morley. The marriage, like that of Julia's to John Smith, was in name only. When the Saints evacuated Nauvoo, Hannah's daughter Almira, and her family remained in Lima, Illinois, while Hannah and the rest of her family joined the exodus from Nauvoo to Council Bluffs. Following the death of

Hannah's daughter-in-law, John's wife, Hannah, on April 12, 1852, Hannah and the rest of her family made the trek west. Hannah's husband John had remained in Illinois where he died August 13, 1852, and was buried in Lima. Almira and her family never made the journey west to Utah, but spent the remainder of their lives in Lima. Upon their arrival in Utah, Hannah and her family settled in Provo, and there Hannah remained until her death on November 17, 1867, at the age of eighty-one. From the time of her conversion to her death, Hannah remained a devoted member of the church as did her children Dominic, Hannah, William, John, and Elizabeth, who lived out the remainder of their lives with their families in Provo.¹⁸

Also from Newry, Maine, came one of the most significant women in early Mormon history. Patty Bartlett Sessions's legacy is three-fold: her posterity, her priceless diaries that provide an insightful look into the daily life of a Mormon woman, from 1846 to her last entry in 1888, and her invaluable skills as a midwife that were crucial to the well-being of the multitude of mothers and newborns she attended. Born February 4, 1795, to Enoch Bartlett and Martha Anna Hall, Patty's epoch sojourn in Mormonism spanned 58 years, from her conversion in 1834 until her death December 14, 1892, in Salt Lake City, Utah.¹⁹

At age seventeen, over the strong objections of her parents, Patty married David Sessions and went to live in Ketcham, Maine, near David's parents.²⁰ She bore eight

¹⁸ Hannah Knight Libby Carter, comp. "Hanna Knight Libby Carter," Women's History Project, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

¹⁹ Chris Rigby Arrington, "Pioneer Midwives," in *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*, ed. Claudia L. Bushman, (Cambridge: Emmeline Press, 1976), 43-65.

²⁰ Donna Toland Smart, ed., *Mormon Midwife: The 1846-1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 6.

children, only three of whom survived into adulthood; Perrigrine, Sylvia, and David.²¹ Patty yearned for spiritual awareness and studied the Bible in search of answers. While David did not share her spiritual yearnings, he was not hostile to them. In 1816, in the course of her Biblical study she became convinced of the need for baptism and was baptized into the Methodist Church. Four years later her husband David followed her example. She remained a Methodist until 1833 when she encountered Mormon missionaries. Converted by their message of a restoration of Christ's church, she was prepared to be baptized into membership, but to appease her husband, and give him time to reflect more on this new religion, she waited until July of the following year before being baptized. Again, David followed Patty's lead and was also baptized a year later.²² Patty's children also converted and within two years Patty and her family left their home, family, and friends and headed west to join with the gathering Saints in Kirtland, Ohio, where for the first time they met their prophet Joseph Smith. After seven weeks in Kirtland, the family made their way to the Mormon settlement of Far West, Missouri, arriving there in November of 1837, where within days Patty gave birth to her youngest child, Amanda.

In Missouri they met often with Joseph Smith, but their stay in Missouri would be nearly as brief as that in Kirtland. By 1838 the Saints were driven out of the state and in the process, Patty and her family lost all they possessed. They made their way to Illinois, staying briefly in Carthage, Illinois, and then moved on to Nauvoo, arriving there in May of 1839. In June of 1839, Perrigrine left his wife Julia and the rest of the family for a

²¹ Susan S. Rugh, "Patty Bartlett Sessions: More than a Midwife," in *Sister Saints*, ed. Vicky Burgess-Olson (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 306.

²² Rugh, "Patty Bartlett Sessions," 306.

year to serve a mission in Maine. During their time in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith officiated at the marriage of their daughter Sylvia to Windsor P. Lyon.²³

On March 9, 1842, with her daughter Sylvia as witness, Patty was sealed in marriage for time and all eternity to Joseph Smith by Willard Richards.²⁴ Her husband David's knowledge of or response to this event is unknown. During their time in Nauvoo David accepted and began to practice the doctrine of the plurality of wives as did her son Perrigrine. In 1846, Patty and David went to the Nauvoo Temple and received their endowments before joining the exodus of Saints from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters. She made the trek west, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley on September 26, 1847, heartbroken that her son David and daughter Sylvia along with her husband had chosen to go to Iowa City instead. David's first plural wife, Rosilla, had also remained in Illinois. David married his second plural wife, Harriet Wixom, in the spring of 1849. The marriage was short-lived. On August 11, 1850, David died leaving Patty to care for then pregnant Harriet and her son from a previous marriage. In 1851, Patty married John Parry. In 1854 John took Harriet Parry as a plural wife. In 1868 John died. It is interesting that both David and John died at Patty's home, each having turned to Patty for care during their final days.

From her earliest days in Mormonism Patty was a prominent participant in the church, and she enjoyed her standing as a central figure among a circle of elite early Mormon women who met frequently to encourage and strengthen each other through exercising of their spiritual gifts, testifying in tongues, blessing and healing one another.²⁵

²³ Smart, *Mormon Midwife*, 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁵ Arrington, "Pioneer Midwives," 50-51.

In her journals Patty expressed her belief in and dedication to women exerting their spiritual gifts and powers. She gave young women instruction in how to speak in tongues and encouraged them to share in other manifestations of the spirit. Her leadership as one of the most prominent of early Mormon women ebbed away gradually as her life came to a close on December 14, 1892, just shy of her ninety-eighth birthday.²⁶

Like Julia, these early female converts accepted the doctrine on the plurality of wives, participated in it, and used the various forms in which it was manifested to fulfill their own spiritual objectives.²⁷ The extent to which these women remained attached to their husbands even after separation is striking. It is likewise noteworthy to observe the degree to which their non-member husbands were willing to sacrifice to live within a Mormon community to remain close to their member family members. Like Ezekiel, John remained near his family despite the conflict and separation from his wife.

Not all early female converts experienced marital conflict as a result of their conversion. Zina Baker Huntington and her husband William Huntington Jr. were united in their pursuit for piety. Yet, like Julia, Hannah, and Patty, Zina was a student of the Bible, who had formed her own concept of true Christian doctrine and was searching for an organized religion that subscribed to that ideal. Although her tenure in Mormonism was brief (only four years), Zina Baker Huntington had a lasting effect on the development of the early church and on the history of Mormonism during its formative years. Her letters provide a fascinating look into a woman's spiritual journey.²⁸

²⁶ Smart, *Mormon Midwife*, x.

²⁷ For insights into the various ways women used the doctrine on the plurality of wives to achieve their own spiritual objectives, see Daynes, *More Wives than One*.

²⁸ Bradley and Woodward, *Four Zinas*.

Just three years younger than Julia, Zina Baker Huntington was born May 2, 1786, in Plainfield, New Hampshire. On November 28, 1805, at age nineteen, she married William Huntington, Jr. and went to live in Watertown, New York, 200 miles from her family in Plainfield. Zina spent the next thirty years of her life in Watertown, living with or near her husband's family in a tightly knit corporate family structure and within traveling distance of her own parents and other family members. Her primary responsibilities were those of wife, mother, cook, housekeeper, and domestic producer. Like Julia, Zina's labors provided goods for her and her family's needs and for market to contribute to the family economy. From an early age her children learned to work. Zina trained her daughters in the arts of housewifery and motherhood, educating and socializing her children through involvement in the community and religious activities.²⁹

Raised a Christian, Zina always held a belief in God and was preoccupied with the concept of salvation and damnation. She preceded William in a quest for piety, but he soon came to share her religious concerns. In 1816, both joined the Presbyterians and remained associated with that sect until 1830. During their fourteen years as Presbyterians, they attended revivals, studied the Bible, and read literature from various sects, becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the doctrines of all of these sects. United in and by their religious beliefs, Zina and William became convinced that a restoration of the ancient Christian church was needed and began to pray and seek for such a restoration. Like Julia, both William and Zina shared their religiosity with family, friends, and neighbors. At one point Zina's religious fervor and her desire to see those

²⁹ Bradley and Woodward, *Four Zinas*, xix-xx, 6-9.

she loved saved created friction with her mother and siblings who were less interested in matters of faith.³⁰

Although initially introduced to the church and its doctrines when they met Mormon missionaries in 1833, Zina and William were not baptized until the spring of 1835. Zina was then forty-nine years old. Their son Dimick and his wife Fanny were also baptized that summer. Zina's daughter Presendia and her husband Norman Buell initially felt that Zina's and William's conversion was a mistake and, for a short time, withdrew from the family. In the fall of 1835, both Presendia and Norman were baptized. Like Julia, Hannah, and Patty, Zina and William came to see themselves as disciples of Christ whose work was to help re-establish his kingdom on earth. Mormonism quickly became the central focus of their lives.³¹

During their three decades in Watertown, Zina's and William's roots in Waterford ran deep. As stalwart members of the farming community they had helped build, their financial condition had fluctuated over the years between poverty and prosperity. They had also suffered the personal tragedies of losing three children, who died and were buried in Watertown. They were at the most prosperous position they had ever been when they decided to leave their farm in Watertown for their new faith and relocate in Kirtland, Ohio, with their fellow converts. Zina and William left Watertown for Kirtland October 1, 1836. Zina was fifty years-old, William fifty-two. With them were their children William, 18, Zina, 15, Oliver 13, and John 9. Presendia and Norman, with their children, had left four months earlier along with Dimick, Fanny and their son. Zina's son

³⁰ Bradley and Woodward, *Four Zinas*, 27-32, 36.

³¹ Bradley and Woodward, *Four Zinas*, 45-47, 53-54.

Chancy and his wife Clarissa Bull, however, had not converted and remained in Watertown. Zina never saw Chancy and his family again.³²

Only for a brief time in Kirtland would Zina and William experience a measure of prosperity. They left Kirtland destitute, as part of Kirtland Camp. Zina and William, along with their children, made the long trek to Far West, Missouri, where along with Dimick, Presendia, and their families they attempted to reestablish themselves. It was to Zina's home that Julia's son Benjamin went when he returned to Far West in the spring of 1839. A close friend of Zina's son William, Benjamin spent much of that summer with Zina and her family. Both of Zina's and Julia's sons were involved in Danite raids. By 1839 Norman apostatized. That same year, William Jr., was briefly imprisoned in Richmond, Missouri, until his escape. Finally driven out of Missouri, Zina and her family relocated to Nauvoo, Illinois, where on July 8, 1839, Zina died of malaria.³³

Zina's writings have provided an invaluable resource for historians of Latter-day Saint history and women's history. For Zina, like Julia, Mormonism became the center of their life. Yet, for Julia it occurred without her companion of thirty-two years. For Julia, conversion was an affirmation of her own religious devotion.

These women were dedicated to the success of what for them was the restoration of God's kingdom on earth. They were devout Christians and Biblical scribes who were driven by their own desire for spiritual fulfillment and guided by their own concept of true Christianity.³⁴ They were not oppressed by male family members or church

³² Bradley and Woodward, *Four Zinas*, 51-53.

³³ Bradley and Woodward, *Four Zinas*, viii, 87-88, 97, 104.

³⁴ Derr, Godfrey, Godfrey, *Women's Voices*, esp. chapters 1-2.

leaders, but valued and respected, and in Julia's case, accepted as the head of the family.³⁵ They were eager, steadfast participants who freely sacrificed their time and material possessions to aid and strengthen the Church. They gave up their well-established homes, familiar surroundings, and accepted conflict and separation with family and friends to pursue their desire for spiritual fulfillment. The depth of their commitment to their faith can, in part, be measured by the extent to which these women strove to maintain their decade's long marital relationships with non-member spouses. For years they struggled to preserve their most intimate relationship with companions who did not share their most deeply held beliefs. At the same time they strove to incorporate into their lives doctrines and practices that were the fulfillment of all their spiritual yearnings and were increasingly encompassing every aspect of their lives. They resisted pressure brought by fellow converts and/or children who had converted to reject their non-member husbands. Even when they were ultimately unable to continue living together, they chose to separate from, but not divorce, their husbands. Although these women chose, for doctrinal purposes, to be joined in temple marriages to other men the emotional intricacies of their continued affection for their non-member spouses is conspicuous and perplexing.

A study such as this owes much to the emergence of the New Mormon History for its focus on Mormon women's history, which embraced the concept that women played an indispensable role in the Church.³⁶ Works produced by many early Mormon women's scholars provided valuable insights into the lives of Mormon women and

³⁵ Beecher and Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit*, viii.

³⁶ Leonard J. Arrington, "The Search for Truth and Meaning in Mormon History," *Dialogue* 3 Summer 1968): 56-66; Todd Compton, "The New Mormon Women's History," in *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2004), 273, 279.

brought a greater awareness of the important roles women played in the church. Criterion for the selection of many of the histories published by Mormon women's scholars in the 1970's and 1980's, however, was often motivated by a desire to address twentieth-century political and social issues raised by the feminist movement. This often limited the scope of works produced to those nineteenth-century women whose lives reflected attitudes, behaviors and/or experiences useful to the scholars in meeting this objective. Despite this, the works they produced inspired a more serious and thoughtful analysis of the lives of Mormon women within the historical community. Although much of the work on Mormon women focuses on women of a later generation, my interpretation of Julia's life owes much to the works of historians of early Mormon women who have shed light on the critical role women played in the family and community in addition to the economic, political, doctrinal and institutional development of the church.³⁷ Historians Barbara Welter, Karen V. Hansen, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Lawrence Foster, Carol Berkin and Mary Beth Norton have helped me put Julia's life in the larger context of nineteenth-century women in American society.³⁸

Much more work needs to be done in the area of Mormon women's history, which has waned since the early 1990's and is in need of a resurgence that will extend beyond the initial feminist focus to examine the lives of as many early female converts as the availability of records will allow. Most of the historiography on nineteenth-century Mormon women has, to date, centered on the post Nauvoo through early Utah history.

³⁷For relevant publications not mentioned elsewhere in this introduction, see Leonard Arrington, "The Legacy of Early Latter-day Saint Women," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1990): 3-17.

³⁸ For insightful looks at the social networks created through women's formal and informal gatherings, see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966):151-174; Welter, "Feminization of American Religion;" Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29; Karen V. Hansen, *A Very Social Time: Crafting Community in Antebellum New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*; Carol Berkin and Mary Beth Norton, *Women of America: A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1979).

Far too little is yet known and understood about the lives of the earliest female converts to the church. One objective of this study is to make a meaningful contribution to the historical literature on Mormon women that will be a useful aid in addressing this shortfall.

Unfortunately, records on the lives of the earliest converts are limited, with primary source materials fragmented and dispersed. It is even more difficult to find sources regarding the particular experiences of female converts prior to the Nauvoo period (1839-1846). This study endeavors to contribute to the works on early Mormon women by examining Julia's actions in relation to her conversion and membership, her sphere of influence, and her attitude toward and role in supporting the implementation of Church doctrine. Although sources are few, this study has tried to compare and contrast Julia, so far as possible, with other Mormon women of her generation. This was done because life experiences and perspectives can alter from one generation to another and because the meaning of Mormonism, its doctrines and practices, also changed over time.

Julia did not leave a diary. Letters from Julia to her children are the only known source materials she left. Her correspondence reveals Julia's feelings toward her faith and her family. For much of her history, I have relied on the life writings of her children. Fortunately, some of Julia's children were prolific writers whose journals, diaries, memoirs, letters, poetry, and books were carefully preserved. Most of the history of Julia's life comes from a compilation of information garnered from these sources.

While these records are a useful resource, they are limited because they are not always clear, are frequently incomplete, and are often based on memory of past events. Potential distortions stemming from familial love, mother-son gender issues, and parent-

child generational issues must also be considered in the use of family records. Thus, much of her life is seen through the filter of her children's perceptions and memories that, at times, tend toward idealizing a beloved mother. However, their writings also candidly acknowledge the failings of individual family members and difficulties experienced by and between family members. Moreover, the records left by the Johnsons have proven to be highly reliable sources for events as public and church records corroborate the accuracy of the publicly documented information contained in their writings. Indeed, their histories have been a valuable resource to historians of the early history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.³⁹

It must be acknowledged that demonstrating the actual cause or depth of an individual's religious conversion is problematic, especially for scholars who must rely on limited physical data that is inadequate for deciphering and interpreting metaphysical experiences. This, along with a void in the historical record, may account for some of the historical misperception and misrepresentation of early female converts. I am indebted to Rodney Stark, William S. Bainbridge and Roger Finke for their insightful analysis of religion and the human need to believe.⁴⁰

In some respects early female converts to Mormonism were much like other women of their generation. Jill Mulvay Derr and Janiece Lyn Johnson have asserted that long before their conversions early female converts embodied three characteristics: they were committed to living a Christian life, were diligent scribes, and believed the

³⁹ Milton V., Backman, Jr., *A Profile of Latter-day Saints of Kirtland, Ohio and Members of Zion's Camp 1830-1839: Vital Statistics and Sources* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1982); Mark R. Grandstaff and Milton V. Backman, Jr., "The Social Origins of the Kirtland Mormons," *Brigham Young University Studies* 30 no. 2 (Spring 1990): 47-66.

⁴⁰ Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996; originally published, New York: Lang, 1987, in series: Toronto studies in Religions, vol. 2); Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000), who theorized that people embrace religion on a cost-benefit ratio, and that a religion's viability stems from its ability to extract costs from its adherents that are weighty enough to elicit dedication without being so onerous that they outweigh any perceived rewards, whether immediate or eternal.

Bible contained the word of God.⁴¹ Julia shared these qualities with many other nineteenth-century New England women. She was a devout Christian and Biblical scriptorian who believed the Bible contained the word of God and shared her religiosity with family, friends, and neighbors. Yet unlike most of them, Julia chose to convert to Mormonism. A key question addressed in this study is why Julia converted to Mormonism when so many other nineteenth-century women of her generation, who shared her commitment to a Christian life, were diligent scriptorians, and believed the Bible to be the word of God, did not.

It is the contention of this study that Julia was a strong-willed woman who in her youth challenged the patriarchy of her stepfather to pursue her own ambition. As a mature woman she challenged the patriarchy of her husband to follow the dictates of her own conscience. Julia believed the Bible to be the word of God and the foundation upon which all moral decisions were based. An ardent scriptorian who formed her own concept of true Christianity and whose religiosity was self-determined and tenacious, Julia chose to break with the religious and social conventions of her time to embrace ideas that were outside the social and religious norms of her society. She found spiritual fulfillment in a religious movement with doctrines and an organizational structure that to her was logical, intellectually appealing and consistent with her pre-existing concept of true Christianity. Julia shared the process of her investigation into and subsequent conversion to the faith with her family and friends. Her decision to convert was a monumental turning point in her life and in the lives of other family members. Religion became the central focus of her existence. In the ensuing conflict between religiosity and

⁴¹ Janiece Lyn Johnson, "Give Up All and Follow Your Lord: Testimony and Exhortation in Early Mormon Women's Letters, 1831-1839," *Brigham Young University Studies* 41: 1 (2002): 77-107; Derr, Godfrey, and Godfrey, *Women's Voices*, introduction.

marital harmony, her religiosity took precedence, resulting in the alienation and marginalization of her husband as head of the family. Yet, she remained emotionally attached to Ezekiel and found ingenious ways to fulfill her own religious yearnings without him, while remaining his wife.

Julia was a dominant influence in her children's lives. Despite the fact that Ezekiel never joined the church, all of their children embraced the church and its doctrines and remained loyal members throughout their lives. Julia was determined to adhere to and inculcate in her children the Church's doctrines and organization. Consequently, the Church and its doctrines also became the focal point of their existence. She supported Church leaders and believed them to be divinely appointed. She believed the doctrines of the Church to be divinely inspired and sustained them throughout the remainder of her life, even when it strained her marriage and disrupted their family life. Julia was a willing and tenacious participant regardless of the financial, emotional or physical toll. Her choice came with a heavy price that at times challenged her and her family members' personal safety and their ability to sustain family unity. Even as the risks to herself and her family increased, she remained resolute in her objective. Throughout her twenty-two-year sojourn in Mormonism Julia chose to place herself and her family at personal and financial risk to adhere to the doctrines of her faith, sustain Church leaders, and remain in company with other converts.⁴² She shaped the religiosity of her children, influenced the religiosity of others, and, thereby influenced the development of the Church.

⁴² Carol Cornwall Madsen, *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Desert Book Company, 1994).

This thesis is organized around stages and turning points in Julia's life and the relocations involved with some of those events. Chapter One lays out the formative experiences of her early years in New England and the influence of her family on the development of her personality and character. Chapter Two explores Julia's role as wife and mother on the frontier in New York, including her conversion and the conversion of her children. Chapter Three recounts the family's move to Kirtland, Ohio, where her husband's failure to convert to Mormonism created a dilemma for Julia, between her desire to maintain family unity and her commitment to her new faith. Chapter Four contends that Julia chose to make the sacrifices necessary to remain among her fellow converts, regroup and reestablish her family and to pursue her desire to see her children assume leadership roles within the church's hierarchy. The fifth and final chapter assesses Julia's legacy and the changing relationship with her husband to argue that her influence affected him and the lives of their children and thus the church.

From Julia's conversion and post conversion experiences historians of nineteenth-century America, religion, women's, and Mormon history, will gain greater insight into the role women played in the early history of the Church from key aspects of Julia's life and experiences. Julia and other early female converts like her shaped the religiosity of family members and others, and thus exerted a strong influence on the development of the Church during its formative years.

CHAPTER 1

BELOVED DAUGHTER JULIA

MASSACHUSETTS TO NEW YORK, 1783-1831

Families, like societies, develop and pass customs, traditions, and beliefs from one generation to another. Within Julia's family there appears to have been a tradition of independent thinking and religious nonconformance. Julia's ancestors broke with religious and social conventions when they believed those practices did not conform to their own sense of right and took risks to adhere to their own beliefs. Julia's Puritan ancestors immigrated to New England in the early seventeenth century to escape religious persecution in England. Many were among New England's earliest settlers and lived for generations within the small radius of communities they helped found in the Norfolk and Worcester counties of Massachusetts. From the first of Julia's ancestors to arrive in the colonies to her parents, Joseph Hills and Esther Ellis, Julia's ancestors appear to have been deeply religious, steadfast people who on occasion jeopardized their standing in the community, their personal wealth, and their lives to hold fast to their beliefs.

This familial heritage appears to have been a major influence on Julia's perception of herself, her role as a wife and mother, and the formation of her religious beliefs. Julia's actions indicate that she possessed a strong-willed nature and an inclination toward the familial tradition of independent thinking and religious nonconformance. Julia likewise took risks to hold true to her beliefs and find ways to

chart her own course even when her objectives were at odds with social and religious convention or led to family discord. Evidence of her self-determination is first revealed when, at age seventeen, she thwarted her stepfather's authority. Her successful challenge to his paternal authority was a watershed experience for Julia and a precursor to future events. It would not be the only time she would triumph over patriarchal authority to follow her conscience.

Born on September 26, 1783, Julia was the second of three children born in the home her father built for his family in Upton, Massachusetts. Her older brother, Joel, had been born two years earlier on September 1, 1781. Her younger sister, Nancy, was born two years later on July 16, 1785. This seventh-generation New Englander was born into a large extended family formed by a complex web of intermarriage among several prominent families. The Metcalf, Ware, Fairbanks, Partridge, Fisher, Whitney, Colburn, Bullard, Herring, Hills, and Ellis families were clerics, selectmen, community leaders, merchants, tradesmen, soldiers and teachers. They were people of property and social status. Both Julia's father and mother were descendents of Michael Metcalf and Sarah Elwyn, who immigrated to Plymouth on April 15, 1637. When Michael and Sarah joined the Puritan movement in England, Michael became embroiled in a religious conflict with Bishop Matthew Wren of Norwich and his Chancellor Clement Corbet that resulted in Michael's being charged with treason. When the authorities came for him, Sarah hid her husband under the straw in the roof of their home. After evading capture they made their way to New England where Michael resumed his occupation as a dornix weaver. They settled in Dedham where Michael became a townsman on July 14, 1637.¹

¹ Marjorie Waterfield, *"Meet My Metcalfs": Descendants of Michael & Sarah Metcalf* (Bowling Green, Ohio: n.d.), 20-22; J.J. McDonald, *Metcalf & Allied Families* (Seattle, n.d.), 352-354.

Another ancestor, Jonathan Fairbanks, was among the first signatories of the Dedham Covenant, which formed a compact among the signatories on the regulation of their new town. Over the years Jonathan acquired or was granted numerous parcels of land in the Dedham area. Like other ancestors of Julia, Jonathan became known for his determination to form and maintain his own religious concepts. Records of the First Church of Dedham, dated June 14, 1646, refer to Jonathan Fairebanke as having “long stood off fro’ ye church upon some scruples about publike p’fession of faith and ye covenant.”² Julia came to exemplify these same character traits and instill them in her own children. Yet, religious nonconformance was not the only familial attribute Julia would embrace.

From her parents Julia learned to think and act independently within the context of family unity. She learned to be governed by Christian principles and her own conscience. Joseph Hills and Esther Ellis were married on December 17, 1780, in Upton, Massachusetts, where Joseph earned a living as a farmer and blacksmith.³ Joseph Hills’ farm sat on the southwest side of Upton, west of Hungry Hill, Andrews Brook and the West River, bound on the southwest by Northbridge, with Zachary’s pond to the north and Moses Hill to the northwest. Formed in 1735 from sections of land set off from Hopkinton, Mendon, Sutton and Uxbridge, Upton was located in central Worcester County, along the western edge of the Blackstone River Valley. Several waterways supported small-scale milling enterprises in this largely agricultural community. Shoe

² Lorenzo Sayles Fairbanks, *Genealogy of the Fairbanks Family in America, 1633-1897* (Boston, Massachusetts: American Printing and Engraving Company, 1897), 9-12, 18, 32-33.

³ Church of Christ, Upton, Worcester, Massachusetts, Church Records, 1752-1858, Vital Records, 1736-1854 (microfilm of manuscript records), Family History Library (hereafter FHL) microfilm 758484.

manufacturing had grown into a prominent industry in the area by the early nineteenth century.⁴

Tragedy struck the family when Julia was only four years of age with the death of her twenty-nine-year-old father.⁵ On April 17, 1787, after a prolonged unidentified illness described as “a week and low condition of body,” Joseph Hills wrote his will, which gave his wife control over the estate. He left his “well beloved wife Esther, the Income & profit of all my Estate both real and personal for her comfort and support and to enable her to bring up and take care of my children.” An inventory of his estate on March 4, 1788, valued his real property at £160.15, and his personal property at £168.8.4, placing him in the median wealth range. His wife, Esther Hills, and Elkanah Ingallis were appointed his executors. Sons usually received any land, while daughters received a smaller portion in portable goods or money. Joseph left his son, Joel, half of his real and personal estate, and his “beloved Daughter Julia . . . half as much of my real and personal Estate as I have heretofore willed to my son Joel which she shall come into possession of . . . together with one third part of all my household furniture.” He thus bequeathed a quarter of his real property to each of his daughters and evenly divided his household goods among all three of his children.⁶

During Julia’s early childhood, she lived with her two siblings and a seemingly independent-minded mother. For six years following the death of her husband, Esther Hills chose not to remarry. Instead, she continued to live with her three small children in

⁴ Carol Blomquist and John Morrel, *Upton, Massachusetts, Bay Colony 1735* (Upton, Massachusetts: Upton Historical Society, 1983); Donald B. Johnson, *Upton’s Heritage: the History of a Massachusetts Town* (Canaan, New Hampshire: Phoenix Publishers, 1984).

⁵ Joseph Hills died October 21, 1787, recorded from the headstone in Grafton’s Old Cemetery. Town Clerk, Grafton, Worcester, Massachusetts, Births and Deaths, 1789-1859, Vital Records, 1735-1885 (microfilm of manuscript record 751411).

⁶ Will of Joseph Hills, Probate Court, Worcester, Massachusetts, Probate Records, 1731-1916, vol. 21, 1785-1788, docket 29151, 193-194, FHL microfilm 856285; Alice Hanson Jones, “Wealth Estimates for the New England colonies about 1770,” *Journal of Economic History* 32 (March 1972): 98-127.

their Upton home. Most young widows of the period remarried quickly to secure financial support for themselves and, if they had any, their children.⁷ Esther apparently had no desire to remarry and had the financial means necessary to make any decision on remarriage optional. To what extent Esther's control over her husband's estate and/or support from her extended family may have made remarriage discretionary is uncertain. For whatever reason, Esther quite likely established a model of female independence for her daughter Julia, who would have spent those early years learning from her mother's example that a woman had the ability to manage her own affairs.

Julia was nine years old when her mother decided to remarry. Esther chose a widower, Enoch Forbush, the father of two young sons, eleven-year-old Enoch Jr. and twelve-year-old Stephen.⁸ Enoch was also part of a large, well-to-do family, and a descendant of early New England settlers. In conformance with the terms of Joseph Hill's will, Esther gave up control of her first husband's estate prior to her remarriage. So on March 28, 1793, Benjamin Goddard was appointed the guardian of Joseph Hill's estate on behalf of Julia and her siblings.⁹ He remained guardian until Julia, Joel, and Nancy reached adulthood and married, at which time he distributed their inheritances to them. After Enoch and Esther married, Julia and her siblings went to live in Enoch's home in Grafton. She remained for the next eight years. During that time Enoch and

⁷ Toby L. Ditz, *Property and Kinship: Inheritance in Early Connecticut, 1750-1826* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 61-75, 144-146; Alexander Keyssar, "Widowhood in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts: A Problem in the History of the Family," *Perspectives in American History* 8 (1974): 83-119.

⁸ Town Clerk, Upton, Worcester, Massachusetts, Births, Deaths, Marriages and Intentions, 1738-1854, Vital Records, 1736-1854 (microfilm of manuscript records), Family History Library (hereafter FHL) microfilm 758483.

⁹ Probate Court, Worcester County, Massachusetts, Probate Records, 1731-1916, docket 29433, 1731-1881, FHL microfilm 859178. Appointing a guardian for the children's share of the estate was not unusual (Ditz, *Property and Kinship*, 148-51).

Esther had three children together: Joseph, Seneca, and Diademia.¹⁰ It is unknown what kind of relationship Julia had with her half siblings, but from family correspondence she appears to have maintained a relationship with Diademia.

The move to Grafton placed Julia about thirty miles east of Boston along the north-northwest border of Upton. Grafton was the third of the original praying towns established to convert the Indians to Christianity. It was less prosperous than Upton because it lacked a significant source of water to generate the power necessary to support the kind of industrial development that was occurring in the region during that period. Yet the move would have generated little, if any social or economic change for Julia and her family since Upton, Grafton, and neighboring towns were largely agrarian communities.

The average farm was between 50 and 150 acres. Part of the land was usually preserved as forest to provide wood for fuel and other necessities with any rocky areas kept for pasture. About a fifth of the farm would be used for growing hay for winter feed, along with buckwheat, rye, barley and corn. A team of oxen, like that owned by Julia's family, was kept for tilling and other heavy farm labor. Cows, pigs, chickens, and sheep were kept to provide the family with butter, cheese, milk, eggs, meat, and wool. In addition to working their farms, most men also worked as shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths or at some other form of labor to supplement their farm production just as Julia's father had. With help from their children, farmwives like Esther tilled about half an acre of land near the house from which the raised and preserved garden-produce for

¹⁰ Town Clerk, Grafton, Worcester, Massachusetts, Births, Marriages and Deaths, 1716-1851, Vital Records, 1735-1885 (microfilm of manuscript records), Family History Library (hereafter FHL) microfilm 751414.

their family. Women carded and spun wool, wove fiber into cloth, milked cows, made cheese and butter, cured and smoked meats, and made candles and soap.¹¹

Julia, like other girls of her generation, was likely instructed in these arts of housewifery from an early age. In time she would, in turn, pass these skills on to her daughters and granddaughters. There is no record of Julia's education, but growing up in post-revolutionary America means that she may have benefited from her society's new emphasis on female education. Female academies sprang up in small towns throughout New England with encouragement from social and political activists who advocated a new system of girls' education, one geared toward advancing republican motherhood. While a girl's education still focused on producing good wives, mothers, and household mistresses, new academic subjects, like math, history, geography, and composition were added to the curriculum. Julia most likely received the level of education and instruction generally given to girls of her family's social and economic status.¹²

At the age of seventeen, Julia married Ezekiel Johnson, a man ten years her senior. It is unknown how they met, but at the time Ezekiel was living and working in the neighboring community of Uxbridge. Ezekiel was the illegitimate child of Bethiah Garnzey of Uxbridge, Massachusetts, and Ezekiel Johnson of Bellingham, Norfolk,

¹¹ Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Karen V. Hansen, *A Very Social Time: Crafting Community in Antebellum New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 17, 93, 106-109, 112, 159, 166-169; Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: the Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 1-2; Joan M. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Linda V. Troost, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Women: Studies in Their Lives, Work, and Culture*, vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2001).

¹² James Axtell, *The School Upon a Hill: Education and Society in Colonial New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughter: the Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980); Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

Massachusetts.¹³ Bethiah was born on February 12, 1754, the daughter of Seth and Bethiah Lee Garnzey, in Rehoboth, Bristol, Massachusetts. Bethiah's father died a month before her birth. Her mother then married Ebenezer Smith in Rehoboth.¹⁴ Following Ezekiel's birth Bethiah was fined for bearing an illegitimate child. At the time the court listed Bethiah's residence with her mother and stepfather in Uxbridge.¹⁵ Illegitimacy commonly led to putting out or abandonment by one or both parents.¹⁶ In Ezekiel's case his father abandoned him and his mother before his birth and his relationship with his mother appears to have been distant. When he was three, his mother married a land speculator, Jonathan King, of Douglas, Massachusetts. Three years later King took Ezekiel and his mother to live in Ashford, Connecticut.¹⁷ King may have been a prosperous man since one of the routine chores assigned Ezekiel was that of collecting debts owed his stepfather. On only one occasion, when questioned by his grandson Nephi, was Ezekiel known to have spoken of his childhood and parentage. He told Nephi that King had treated him with such brutality that it created within him a deep hatred for his stepfather. When Ezekiel was eleven or twelve years old he decided to take

¹³ Ezekiel was born January 12, 1773. Ezekiel Johnson –Julia Ellis Hills family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=28835> [accessed 2 October 2003].

¹⁴ Papers of Joseph Ellis Johnson, 1817-1882, box 8, folder 4, Western Americana Manuscripts, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter, Johnson Papers).

¹⁵ Johnson Papers, box 8, folder 4; Massachusetts Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Worcester County, Massachusetts, Records of the Court of General Sessions of the Peace from the County of Worcester, Massachusetts, 1731-1862, FHL microfilm 859240.

¹⁶ Steven Mintz, "Regulating the American Family," in *Family and Society in American History*, ed. Joseph M. Hawes and Elizabeth I. Nybakken (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 9-36.

¹⁷ Johnson Papers, box 8, folder 4.

advantage of his position as his stepfather's bill collector to keep the monies he had collected and leave. He never returned to King's household.¹⁸

Since it was commonplace for children to routinely work and contribute to the household economy by age six or seven, it is unlikely Ezekiel would have seen this as mistreatment. Genuine physical abuse presents the more plausible explanation for why so young a boy would have taken such drastic action and why Ezekiel would have carried so much resentment with him throughout his life. The fact that Ezekiel's grandson had to elicit the information from him is indicative of a curiosity felt by his posterity born out of their lack of knowledge about his parentage and childhood. It is apparent, however, that in terms of piety and familial affection, Ezekiel's birth, parentage and childhood stand in sharp contrast to that of Julia's.¹⁹

We do not know where Ezekiel went, or what he did during this period of his life. He does not appear in the public record again until his marriage to Julia, where he is identified as a resident of Uxbridge. Since Ezekiel was living in the same town as his maternal grandmother, Bethiah, and her husband, Ebenezer Smith, he may have returned to live with them after leaving his mother and King. It is unknown if Ezekiel ever met with his mother again. Bethiah lived until 1842, and the traveling distance necessary for Ezekiel and his family to see her would have been minimal since she lived in Massachusetts, then later in Connecticut during the time they were in Massachusetts,

¹⁸ Nephi was the son of Ezekiel's eldest son, Joel. Their conversation took place in Nauvoo, Illinois, just before Joel and his family joined the exodus west. Ezekiel was killed shortly thereafter. "Ezekiel Johnson, 1776-1848," Johnson Papers, box 8, folder 4.

¹⁹ Joel H. Johnson, *Voice from the Mountain From the Mountains: Being a Testimony of the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as Revealed by the Lord to Joseph Smith, Jr.* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881), 13; Johnson Papers, box 8, folder 4.

Vermont, and New York.²⁰ Yet, none of Ezekiel and Julia's children remember, or make any mention of her.

A conflicting desire to conform to tradition and rebel against authority appear present in the personalities of both Julia and Ezekiel. Before their marriage, Julia and Ezekiel published their betrothal on the door of the local meetinghouse in Uxbridge.²¹ In doing so they were conforming to an old social custom that was by this time quickly falling out of favor. Their apparent desire to conform to tradition seems at odds with the fact that Julia was marrying a man without family connections, illegitimate, landless, of inferior social and economic status and perhaps in defiance of her mother and stepfather's wishes. There is nothing odd about Julia's attraction to Ezekiel who was described as handsome and charming "full middle stature, about 5' 10" in height, of solid build, fine light brown hair, a mild but piercing blue eye, with light smooth skin, and of natural personal attractions."²² It is curious though that Julia's mother would have allowed her young daughter to marry a man with Ezekiel's background, social and economic status.

Nevertheless, the settlement of her property at the time of marriage seems to have followed custom. On January 1, 1801, just prior to her marriage to Ezekiel, Enoch Forbush, Julia's stepfather, had to pay her guardian the sum of £3. 12s, plus 6s interest, for his use of her share of her father's estate's improved land. At the time he paid her guardian that sum he also charged her estate £3.12, plus 6 shillings interest for "Nursing

²⁰ Bethiah died in New London, New London, Connecticut on May 7, 1842. Ezekiel Johnson -Bethia Garnzey family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=28840> [accessed 23 December 2000].

²¹ December 18, 1800, Town Clerk, Grafton, Worcester, Massachusetts, Intentions of Marriage, 1735-1857, Vital Records, 1735-1885 (microfilm of manuscript records), FHL microfilm 903642.

²² Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review: Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Johnson* (Independence, Missouri: Zions Printing and Publishing Co., 1947), 15.

and taking care of Julia When sicke four years” from January 1795 to 1799.²³ Enoch’s desire to withhold from Julia the exact amount of income he had received from the use of her estate may also have been an indication that he was displeased by Julia’s decision and frustrated to prevent her from marrying a man he found unacceptable, but we cannot be sure. Ezekiel, not Enoch, negotiated with her guardian the settlement terms for Julia’s portion of her father’s estate, which came to \$44.94.²⁴

If Julia’s relationship with Enoch was strained, then apart from being in love, Julia may have found in Ezekiel’s personality a man who would support her. Ezekiel’s willingness to defy parental authority was demonstrated at an early age. His troubled relationship with King and his mother, and, perhaps, a lack of parental guidance after leaving them, may have resulted in a deep-seated resentment of authority and a willingness to confront those in authority.

Julia and Ezekiel were married on Ezekiel’s twenty-eighth birthday, January 12, 1801, in Grafton’s Church of Christ.²⁵ While Julia was not without family ties, by marrying a man without family ties or inheritance, she and Ezekiel began married life largely reliant upon their own resources. Her first years of marriage were unsettled as the landless couple worked to provide for their needs within the constrained environment of the settled communities of Worcester County, Massachusetts. Job work at his carpentry trade and tenant farming, on properties that could be sold out from under tenants at any time, were among the few options available to them. Although they remained in

²³ Probate Court, Worcester County, Massachusetts, Probate Records, 1731-1916, docket 29433, 1731-1881, FHL microfilm 859178.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Record of Marriage, January 12, 1801, Church of Christ, Grafton, Massachusetts, Church of Christ in Grafton, Grafton, Worcester, Massachusetts, Church Records, 1774-1877 (microfilm of manuscript records), FHL microfilm 855369.

proximity to her mother and extended family, theirs was a transient existence as they moved four times in as many years.

During their first year together Julia and Ezekiel remained in Grafton. Following the birth of their first child, Joel Hills, on March 23, 1802, they moved to the nearby community of Northborough, formerly Uxbridge, where their second child, Nancy, was born on August 1, 1803. Joel was named for Julia's brother Joel, while Nancy was named after Julia's sister. Their stay in Northborough was equally brief, and soon they were living in Royalton where their third child, Seth, was born on February 14, 1805. Seth may have been named in honor of Ezekiel's grandfather. On May 27 of that year Julia's mother died at the age of forty-six.²⁶ The cause of her death was not recorded, and she left no will. This was typical for women of this period and since their estates had already been separated, neither Julia nor her siblings received a bequest from their mother.

Julia's brother Joel left the farm he had inherited from his father in Upton for the Canadian frontier in search of a better future, while Julia and Ezekiel decided to seek their fortune along the western frontier in Vermont.²⁷ Acquiring good farm land within the boundaries of the older more populous settlements in which they were living was difficult. Population growth, by natural increase and immigration, increased land values in this geographically limited region. Many were compelled to move away in search of new, more affordable lands to farm.²⁸ Julia may or may not have realized at the time that

²⁶ Ezekiel Johnson –Julia Ellis Hills family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=28835> [accessed 2 October 2003]; Town Clerk, Grafton, Worcester, Massachusetts, Births and Deaths, 1789-1859, Vital Records, 1735-1885 (microfilm of manuscript records), Family History Library (hereafter FHL) microfilm 751411.

²⁷ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13.

²⁸ Hansen, *Very Social Time*, 110.

their decision to move west meant that she would never again live near her siblings or other family members. If she did realize it, it did not prevent her from going, for migrating west held the promise of economic advancement and stability for her and her family.

One of the most important benefits of having an extended family was the aid they frequently gave each other in finding homes and employment. This was particularly helpful for newlywed couples who had few or no personal resources. Julia's aunt, Meletiah Metcalf Ellis, with her husband, Amos Partridge, also a distant cousin, had settled in Westford, Chittenden County, Vermont, in 1788. After serving as a lieutenant in the Revolutionary army, Amos became a prosperous land speculator with numerous land holdings throughout the county.²⁹ In Westford, Julia and her family lived along a branch of the Lamoille River, near the east shore of Lake Champlain. Ezekiel cleared the land for farming, built a home for his family and earned income through carpentry.

During the seven years they lived in Vermont, Julia bore four more children: Delcina Diademia on November 19, 1806; Julia Ann on November 9, 1808; David Partridge on September 10, 1810; and Almera on October 12, 1812.³⁰ Julia was then twenty-nine-years old and mother of seven children, newborn to age ten. Her children were probably too young to remember much of their time in Vermont. Only their eldest

²⁹ George Homer Partridge, *Partridge Genealogy: Descendants of John Partridge of Medfield, Mass.* (Boston, Massachusetts: David Clapp & Son, 1904), 33; Joseph Ellis -Meletiah Metcalf family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=1857289> [accessed 23 December 2000]; Eleazer Partridge – Elizabeth Smith family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=1857332> [accessed 23 December 2000].

³⁰ Ezekiel Johnson –Julia Ellis Hills family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=28835> [accessed 2 October 2003].

son Joel, who was eleven when they left, recalled memories of their time there in his memoir.³¹

Julia and her siblings remained in contact with each other over the years despite the geographic distance between them. In the fall of 1813, Julia's elder brother, Joel Hills, and his family stopped to visit after leaving Canada for a new home in Kentucky. When they left, Julia and Ezekiel allowed their son Joel to accompany them on their five hundred-mile journey southwest.³² The Hills were not alone in their hope of finding greater economic prosperity for themselves and their children. In the economic depression that followed America's second war with Britain, many Americans were opting to pursue their dreams of a better life by migrating to the less populated regions of the country where land was more abundant and less expensive.³³ Julia's younger sister Nancy had also left the East, migrating west with her husband, Samuel Taft, to settle along the frontier of southern Ohio.³⁴

Julia and Ezekiel also held out hope for a better future for themselves and their children along the frontier. Yet, rather than go southwest Julia and Ezekiel decided to migrate to the highly promoted regions of western New York that promised more fertile farmland and greater economic opportunity. Why Julia and Ezekiel allowed their son to leave at a time when they would need the additional help he could provide for their move to New York is unclear. Perhaps their decision to move did not come until after Joel left. Regardless of when their resolution was made, in the spring of 1814 Ezekiel, Julia and

³¹ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Hansen, *Very Social Time*, 110; John Mack Faragher, "Open-Country Community: Sugar Creek, Illinois, 1820-1850," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America*, ed. Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 233-58; John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 4, 250-60.

³⁴ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13; Johnson Papers, Box 9, folder 5 and box 3, folder 3, pg. 5.

the rest of the family set out for western New York. Ezekiel had just turned forty-one, and Julia was now thirty years old and pregnant with her eighth child. They most likely traveled along the northern edge of the Adirondacks from Vermont on one of three main overland passageways from New England to New York. There is no record of their selling any land prior to leaving, which may further indicate that Ezekiel may have made some form of arrangement with for his family to live on or rent land from Amos.³⁵

Once in New York they selected a place along the east side of Canadaway Creek, twelve miles from Dunkirk Port, south of Lake Erie, in the frontier town of Pomfret in Chautauqua County. Created only three years before Julia and her family arrived, Chautauqua County sits in the southwest corner of New York State, along the south shore of Lake Erie. Settlers first arrived in the area in 1799. Eight years later they formed the town of Pomfret. The northern portion around the lake's shore was flat land timbered in butternut, black walnut, elm, ash and basswood that changed into rolling uplands further south. The upland ridge was covered in oak, white-wood, chestnut, hickory, sassafras, wormwood and cucumber trees. The major waterway, Canadaway Creek, ran along a north-northwest course to empty into Lake Erie. Several smaller streams flowed out from Canadaway to provide abundant sources of water power for the areas various grist, flour, carding, cotton, and paper mill operations. Sandstone quarries provided stone for building homes and other buildings.

Throughout the time Julia and her family lived there the area remained predominately agrarian. Corn was the major crop produced in Pomfret's clay loam soil, while cattle provided one of the few other sources of cash revenue. Their primary export

³⁵ George Washington Johnson, *Diary of George W. Johnson, 1823-1893* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1940), 1-2; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 7-9.

came from pot and pearl ashes, which were sold at market in Montreal for the manufacturing of soap, glass and potassium salts.³⁶

Initially, Ezekiel rented a small farm and house for his wife and six children, then two to twelve years of age. Their daughter Susan Ellen was born that winter on December 16, 1814. In the early spring of 1815 Ezekiel made the one-thousand-mile round trip trek to Newport, Kentucky, to retrieve Joel. Ezekiel also used the trip as a scouting expedition to see if the Ohio-Kentucky region might be an even better place to relocate. Having determined Pomfret was still more to his liking, Ezekiel and Joel returned to New York. Ezekiel and Julia may have reconsidered their choice the following year, which became known throughout the region as the “cold season.” The winter of 1815-1816 was unusually mild and warm. Then in the spring of 1816 it was as though the seasons had reversed, as severe cold and heavy winter snow storms began in March and continued throughout the summer. As a result farmers were unable to raise any kind of crops. Food prices soared, and people began to hoard their few provisions. Flour sold for eighteen dollars a barrel, while corn went for \$1.50 a bushel. At the time the average laborer earned 60 to 75 cents per day, making the payment for food at such prices out of the reach of most families. Many people survived on milk, wild onions and leeks, supplemented by hunting and fishing. A break in the winter weather did not come until the April of 1817 and several more months before another harvest. It is unknown exactly what resources in cash, livestock and material goods Ezekiel and Julia brought with them from Vermont or had accumulated during their first growing season in Pomfret. It is apparent they had sufficient resources to keep their family of ten warm and

³⁶ John P. Downs and Fenwick Y. Hedley, *History of Chautauqua County and its People*, vol. 1 (New York: American Historical Society, 1921), 215-216, 218; Andrew W. Young, *History of Chautauqua County, New York* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Matthews & Warren, 1875), 466, 473-474; Wayne E. Morrison, *A History of Chautauqua County, New York, 1808-1874* (Ovid, New York: W.E. Morrison, 1969).

fed for some twenty-two months until the crisis passed. In July 1817 construction on the canal from the Hudson River to Lake Erie began. In the years that followed the canal provided local producers access to distant markets, enabling Chautauqua to become one of the most prosperous counties in New York.³⁷

Julia and Ezekiel's economic and social status also improved as they transitioned from landless and transient to settled landowners. For years their landless status meant an unsettled existence. Now they began to prosper and establish themselves within the economic and social fabric of the community. Ezekiel purchased farm land from the Holland Land Company in the north-northeast section of Pomfret three miles from the town center.³⁸ Here in the hills of Chautauqua he built a new home for Julia and their growing family. It would be their home for the next nineteen years. During that time eight more children joined the family: Joseph, Benjamin, Mary, Elmer, George, William, Esther, and Amos.³⁹ By the time she bore her sixteenth, and last, child she was forty-five years old, and Ezekiel was fifty-six. Twenty-seven years separated their youngest from their eldest children.

Julia's children remembered days filled with the sounds of chickens clucking and crowing in the yard, the low jingle of cow bells from the pasture, and a house filled with the boisterous sounds of a large family, the "household band that was her hearts delight."

³⁷ Young, *History of Chautauqua County*, vol. 2 (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, 1990); Morrison, *A History of Chautauqua County*.

³⁸ Joseph Ellis Johnson, "Autobiographical Sketch" box 1, folder 6; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 14; George Washington Johnson, *Jottings by the Way: A Collection of Rustic Rhyme with a Brief Autobiography and selections from the writings of other members of the family*, (St. George, Utah: C.E. Johnson, 1882), xviii-xix. The Johnson farm was located in Township 5, Range 12, Lot 21, see Downs and Hedley, *History of Chautauqua County and Its People*, 216; Record of Marriage, January 12, 1801, Church of Christ, Grafton, Massachusetts, Church of Christ in Grafton, Grafton, Worcester, Massachusetts, Church Records, 1774-1877 (microfilm of manuscript records), FHL microfilm 855369; Virginia W. Barden, *Earliest Holland Land Company Sales in Chautauqua County, New York* (Fredonia, New York: Chautauqua County Genealogical Society, 1990), 21; Karen E. Livsey, ed., *Holland Land Company Records, Western New York Land Transactions, 1804-1835*: extracted from the archives of the Holland Land Company vol. 1 (Baltimore, MA: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1991).

³⁹ Ezekiel Johnson - Julia Ellis Hills family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=28835> [accessed 2 October 2003].

Julia's home was surrounded by streams, fields, meadows of grass and wildflowers, and heavy primeval forest. A "cross-legg'd" table stood in the kitchen near the cupboard. Pictures were set on the mantelpiece near Julia's old arm chair, and the family Bible rested on a stand in the "square room," where an old Dutch clock kept time. A well stood just outside the door; a barn, corn house, and brick yard were a little farther out, near a spring that watered a large orchard and garden from which Julia grew, harvested, and preserved food for her family. She prepared their meals before a broad, high, open hearth using a crane and hooks to move the hot pots and kettle. When meals were ready she summoned her family to dinner by blowing on an "old dinner horn."⁴⁰

As with most rural farm children, Julia's children learned to work from any early age. Although an overall cultural division of labor based on gender existed, men and women were united by the very nature of the agricultural economy of the family farm that required both coordination and flexibility.⁴¹ In Julia's family chores were generally, although not strictly, divided along gender lines. With so much work to be done in so large a family, age and ability were more often the criteria. To ensure the family's survival, and with so many to sustain, they could ill afford to be too particular about who did what. Julia and her family lived in an interdependent existence in which every member's contribution, large or small, was essential. Her son Benjamin recalled that "no one then old enough to become in any way a help was left to be idle."⁴²

⁴⁰ The description of the farm and farm life in Pomfret is derived from a compilation of the descriptions given in Johnson, *Diary*, 37-38, 42-43, 50-51,77; Johnson, *Jottings by the Way*, x-xii, 11-12; Johnson Papers, box 9 folder 5.

⁴¹ David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 88-90; Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: Women's Sphere in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: the Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990); Jensen, *Loosening the Bands*; Osterud, *Bonds of Community*.

⁴² Johnson, *Life's Review*, 7-12; Johnson, *Diary*, 37-38; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13-14; Joel Hills Johnson, Excerpts from A Journal or Sketch of the Life of Joel Hills Johnson, Americana Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections and Manuscripts, HBLL, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, (hereafter, Johnson, Excerpts), 1-2; Johnson Papers, box 1, folder 6.

Julia, like other farm women, was responsible for the production of the family food stuffs, fruits, vegetables, cheese, butter, and eggs, as well as processing and distilling cider and beer. Throughout the year and in rhythm with the seasons, Julia shared with her daughters her knowledge and skills in cooking, sewing, doing intricate needle work, braiding hats, churning butter, and making cheese, candles, soap and cloth, to prepare them to manage homes of their own. For Julia this would have presented something of a challenge since twenty-four years separated her eldest daughter from her youngest. She probably spent more time instructing her eldest daughters, then as the family grew delegated a portion of the younger girls' training to their older sisters. This changed over time as events altered their living arrangements. But, during their years in Pomfret Julia needed her daughters help to make enough cheese and butter from milk; drain and boil the sap from the maple trees each spring for sugar and make soap and candles along with other food stuffs and commodities sufficient to meet the family's needs.⁴³ Benjamin recalled that:

All our support and home comforts were produced by our home industry; from the wool all our winter clothing was made . . . from the flax all the summer clothing . . . also all the bed and table linen and toweling. At this period young women were not thought qualified for marriage, who could not, through their own industry provide all these things. Our cheese, butter and honey were home products, as also sugar, thousands of pounds of which we made from maple forests; while soap and candle making, with beer brewing were common, homelike events.⁴⁴

As soon as the weather permitted, Ezekiel and their sons began to clear land for farming by piling and burning brush from the forests and fields. In the spring Ezekiel and his sons plowed their fields and planted their crops. Throughout the summer and fall

⁴³ For more on the nurturing, domestic and social tasks typically engaged in by rural New England farm women, see, Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism*; Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds*; Troost, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Women*; Nancy Woloch, *Early American Women: A Documentary History, 1600-1900* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992).

⁴⁴ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 8-9.

Ezekiel shared with them his knowledge and skills in carpentry, taught them how to make fishing nets, and took them to lake Casadaga to harvest fish. They corded wood and cared for their livestock. Ezekiel would have faced a similar challenge in training his sons, who were twenty-seven years apart in age. He seems to have spent more time teaching his older sons than the younger boys, who came of age during a period of dramatic change in the family's circumstances after leaving New York that severely impacted Ezekiel's role in the lives of their younger children. During their time in Pomfret their sons may also have been on their own much of the time, since Ezekiel often worked away from home as a carpenter and miller at Elijah Risley's gristmill to acquire cash for the family.⁴⁵

Work on the farm was often risky, and Julia's children were not immune from its inherent hazards. On one occasion her then thirteen-year-old son, Benjamin, cut his ankle open with an axe. The wound became inflamed and for a time they feared he would lose his leg. To their great relief he eventually made a full recovery. The demands of labor were unrelenting. Even on their way to school in the early morning hours, the children herded the family's cows down the path ahead of them to the "gulf lot" to pasture during the day, then herded them back home again at the end of the day.⁴⁶

In the fall they harvested the hay and other crops from their fields, took their grain to the mill to be ground into flour and other cereals, gathered fruit from the orchard and opened the swaths of hay for drying. With wool Ezekiel and their sons sheared from the sheep, Julia and her daughters wove winter cloth from which they made clothing. Lighter weight cloth for summer clothing, bed and table linens, and towels were made from the

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Jottings*, xviii-xix; Young, *History of Chautauqua County*, 474.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Jottings*, xviii-xix.

flax they harvested. The surrounding woodlands were a valuable resource. The entire family would go there to gather chestnuts, black walnuts, hickory nuts and the nuts from beech and butternut trees. They gathered wild fruits, cherries, mandrakes, plums, and grapes, along with strawberries, blackberries, and gooseberries. Along the way they collected lilies and other wildflowers to decorate their home. Together they collected sap from the maple forests, and honey from wild beehives. Their lives moved in rhythm with the seasons, regulated by the weather, filled with routine, hard physical labor, a scarcity of cash, and slow tedious means of transportation for people, goods and information. Yet, life was not all work for Julia and her family, and their lives were not without pleasures.⁴⁷

Julia loved poetry, and she passed this love onto her children, who in adulthood turned to poetry as a favorite form of correspondence between each other. For them poetry was a means for expressing their joys and sorrows, for entertaining themselves and each other, for witnessing and recording their personal and family history. An engaging sense of humor emerges from their writings to often reveal a sense of confidence and optimism. Much of our knowledge about their time in Pomfret and the description of the farm and farm life come from a compilation of poems written by Julia's children. Julia's sons, George and Joseph, remembered their home in Pomfret in almost lyrical terms as they shared memories of the beauties of the area and of their family relationships and activities.

Joseph recalled that while their home in the gulf was too far from Lake Erie to hear the sound of the lake tide, they could see the "white sails dotting o'er the lake's clear blue." Julia would take her children to the lakes to swim and play along the shore. Her

⁴⁷ Ibid.

children recalled spending “many bright and happy hours” “on blue Erie’s beaten shore.”⁴⁸ They attended plays, parties and balls at the school house where a harp organ and violin provided music for singing and dancing, along with the sounds of Morse’s fiddle and the flute of Gaylord the cobbler, who doubled as the old singing master. At home they enjoyed “evening games and kissing plays.”⁴⁹

Religion also played a pivotal role in their family life. Julia was a diligent scriptorian who shared her devotion to the Bible with her children. When her family was small, Julia spent her winter evenings teaching them to read and write using the Bible for their primer. Joel cherished the small New Testament that Julia rewarded him with once he had learned to read. He remembered when she gave it to him, how she had encouraged him to read it often, and memorize verses from it so he could quote from it fluently as she did. Julia believed in personal prayer and instructed her children to pray and prayed with them.⁵⁰

Julia directed both the religious and secular education of her children, often melding the two together. As her family grew, Julia’s methods for educating her children altered. Even with help from her older daughters in caring for their younger siblings, Julia had less time to devote to personally tutoring her younger children. While her eldest son Joel recalled being taught to read by his mother, her younger sons, Benjamin and George, remembered being schooled at the Presbyterian Sunday School and the community’s district school in nearby Laona, two miles south of the Laona mill and one mile from their home. That was until the “old dingy” red school house, with “benches

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Johnson, *Diary*, 9-10, 37; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13-14; Johnson, Excerpts, 1-2; Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 7-12.

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 3; Johnson, *Jottings*, 11-12.

and desks all defaced with the knife” was completed in Pomfret. It was also one mile from the Johnson’s home, only in the opposite direction.⁵¹

Education in early nineteenth-century America was not mandatory and generally sporadic in nature, as family circumstances changed from day to day, and season to season.⁵² To educate their children, Julia and Ezekiel, like most early nineteenth-century parents, could either home-school, have their children attend a community school, hire tutors, pay their tuition to an academy, or employ a combination thereof. In New York and New England taxes were collected to pay for public school facilities and teachers so in these areas the education for most children consisted of home-schooling, coupled with periodic attendance at a district school.⁵³ This was true for Julia’s children as well. Their attendance at the community school was like that of most farm children, somewhat irregular and optional. Perhaps because Ezekiel was a landowner and in good health with several older children capable of performing labors on the farm, his sons were able to attend the summer sessions a little longer than the sons of those who were not landowners. Yet, because of the need to provide for so many, the boys stopped attending summer sessions earlier than the sons of some other landowners. From about age nine, greater demands for their labor on the farm made school attendance during the summer months more erratic. In later life some of Julia’s children bemoaned the lax attitude they had had toward attending school, believing it had left them far less educated than they might otherwise have been.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Johnson, *Diary*, 6; Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 9-10; Johnson, *Diary*, 50-51; Johnson, *Jottings*, xviii-xx.

⁵² Axtell, *The School Upon a Hill*; Norton, *Liberty’s Daughter*; Kerber, *Women of the Republic*.

⁵³ Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 9-10.

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 3; Johnson Papers, box 1, folder 6; Johnson, *Diary*, 50-51.

One of Julia's principal goals as a mother was to instill in her children a devotion to family unity, affection and obligation. She encouraged them to help each other fulfill their obligations on the farm so they could engage in other activities, resolve their problems and support each other in achieving their goals. Consequently, siblings frequently substituted for each other in doing each other's chores. Her son Benjamin recalled:

My brother, Joseph E., . . . possessed all the facilities for acquiring education that I lacked . . . being capable of taking the first prizes in our school, my pride and anxiety all followed with him, so that if duties at home were likely to interfere with his success, I assumed them, even in staying from school, through fear that he would not obtain the highest prize or honors of our school and class.⁵⁵

Joseph recalled an incident from his childhood that is illustrative of the cooperative, interdependent family relationships Julia strove to instill in her children. As Joseph was entering adolescence, he developed a persistent cough, which Julia believed suggested a "weakness" in his lungs, signaling the onset of consumption. Fearing that his life would be short, Julia shared her concerns with her other children and encouraged them to do all they could to spare Joseph from the more strenuous chores, so his remaining days could be as comfortable and carefree as possible. Joseph, overhearing the conversation, was appalled and resolved that he would not be a burden on his family. He began to study all of the available medical literature he could find and to experiment with herbal remedies to find a cure for his ailment. Joseph did not develop tuberculosis, but did develop a love for herbal medicine, which he continued to practice throughout his life.⁵⁶ Through their efforts to aid Joseph in this endeavor, the entire family became proficient in the development and use of herbal remedies. This type of unified action in

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 10.

⁵⁶ Joseph Ellis Johnson, *Diary*, n.p., n.d., Manuscript Collection, MSS 960, L. Tom Perry Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

dealing with individual personal challenges facing family members was characteristic of the way Julia's children chose to deal with problems and support each other's ambition.

After nineteen years living along Canadaway Creek the Johnsons were among the community's longest residing residents.⁵⁷ They were not social or political elites, but certainly not rootless social outsiders. The New York state census for 1825 listed Ezekiel's assets as 55 acres of improved land, 18 cattle, 56 sheep, 5 hogs, 40 yards of linen, cotton or other thin cloths, 25 yards of fulled cloth (linen) manufactured in the "domestic way," and 125 yards of flannel.⁵⁸ Now, at age 57, Ezekiel's ownership of 55 acres of improved land placed him among the upper 6.5 percent of the wealthiest landowners in Pomfret.⁵⁹ Yet, the family's monetary resources remained tight as they struggled to provide for so large a family. Julia, Ezekiel and their children worked hard to establish themselves in Pomfret. Although the stability and success of the Johnson family depended on the labor of the whole family, landownership and social stability were likely especially important to Ezekiel considering his illegitimacy, poverty, and prior landless status. It had taken him so long and required so much work for him to become a landowner with some measure of prosperity that the idea of relinquishing it would have been very difficult.

Leaving Pomfret and all they had built there over the years would not have been easy for Julia either. In Pomfret she had regained the stability and social status she had given up to marry Ezekiel. All of that would soon change abruptly as Julia once again set

⁵⁷ From 1825 to 1835 persistence in the Pomfret area hovered around 18.6 percent. Eighty-one percent of Pomfret's population migrated out of the area during this ten-year period, and of those who stayed, 81.6 percent were among the wealthiest settlers, see, Mark R. Grandstaff and Milton V. Backman, Jr., "The Social Origins of the Kirtland Mormons," *Brigham Young University Studies* 30, no 2 (Spring 1990): 59.

⁵⁸ Secretary of State, New York, Census Records of Chautauqua County, New York, Census Record, 1825.

⁵⁹ Mark R. Grandstaff and Milton V. Backman, Jr., "The Social Origins of the Kirtland Mormons," 53-59, 60.

stability and social status aside to pursue her ambitions for herself and her children. Her choices would dramatically alter the course of her life and that of her family, with repercussions that lasted long beyond her own life. Yet, her choices were consistent with the independent-minded heritage of her New England girlhood.

CHAPTER 2

MY SOUL REJOICED

POMFRET TO KIRLAND, 1814-1831

As she reared her children, one of Julia's greatest concerns was for her children's religiosity. Although Julia was not a member of the Presbyterian Church, she raised her children by a strict moral code based on a Presbyterian ethos. She continually and consistently reinforced Bible principles, insisting that their children conform to those precepts and severely reprimanded them when they did not. As part of Julia's commitment to instilling in her children her religiosity and self-determination, she encouraged them to think and act independently, governed by Christian principles and their own sense of right. Ezekiel seems to have been her ally in these efforts. Working at home on the farm meant that Ezekiel often had considerable influence upon their children's lives as a teacher, companion, and confidante.

Yet the Johnsons experienced turning points in their family that broke established patterns and set in motion great changes for them all. Their oldest children matured, married and moved out of the household. The tragic death of a son drove Ezekiel to find solace in drinking, and a terrible accident maimed a daughter. The oldest son's conversion to the Mormon Church led Julia to embrace the faith, but Ezekiel's reluctance divided them. Hostility to their choice in the local community caused them to follow their son west, to gather with the Mormons in Kirtland.

Among the other events, Julia's conversion transformed her family dynamics, as religion became her core concern in life. Once Julia decided to convert, she did not wait to follow her husband or anyone else. Nor did she allow her husband's rejection of her faith to deter her from practicing its doctrines and participating in its activities. Julia was committed to living among her fellow converts and contributing to the establishment of what to her was the restoration of Christ's church. In the ensuing conflict between religiosity and marital harmony, her religiosity took precedence, resulting in the alienation and marginalization of her husband as head of household.¹

Julia and Ezekiel used positive reinforcement to encourage their children's independence and individualism. In a home filled with so many children of such varying ages, maintaining absolute control over them through any means of physical coercion was likely impractical, if not impossible. Nor were such tactics compatible with either Julia's or Ezekiel's desires. When either Julia or Ezekiel meted out punishment, a stern reprimand was the severest form. From what we know, neither employed corporal punishment, although it was an accepted practice of the period. Ezekiel may have been abused as a child, but he apparently chose not to replicate that behavior in the way he treated his own children. In referring to this aspect of his father's temperament, Benjamin stated, "for with no other blow than words was he ever known to strike anything living."²

¹ Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Janiece Lyn Johnson, "Give Up All and Follow Your Lord: Testimony and Exhortation in Early Mormon Women's Letters, 1831-1839" *Brigham Young University Studies* 41 no. 1 (2002): 77-107; Vicky Burgess-Olson, ed. *Sister Saints* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978).

² Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review: Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Johnson* (Independence, Missouri: Zions Printing and Publishing Co., 1947), 15.

For Julia and Ezekiel, parenting involved spending time with their children and treating them with kindness, tenderness, and patience, terms that were used repeatedly by their children when describing the way their parents interacted with them.³ Julia and Ezekiel took time to engage their children in conversations that elicited their thoughts and feelings. They enjoyed their children's company in both work and amusements. Ezekiel often took his children with him into the woods or to clear fields, even when they were too young to be of any real assistance to him.

Because they forged powerful bonds of affection with their children, Julia's and Ezekiel's praises carried profound emotional and psychological importance for their children, as did their disapproval. Their eldest son, Joel, recounted the power Julia and Ezekiel had over their children:

I well recollect a time when my parents both gave me a scolding upon some trifling occasion. I thought I had not a friend in heaven, earth or hell, and went out by myself and wept. And thought unto the brook I'd go, And drown myself and end my woe for if I drowned myself, thought I my soul will under water die. So I started and went to a small brook not far distant, and selected a place for that purpose, but while reflecting upon the subject a thought occurred to me that it was a temptation from the Devil, and so I desisted from my purpose and returned home.⁴

His younger brother Benjamin expressed similar sentiments: "no influence was so potent as the love of my parents and my home, to restrain me to obedience and to the love of truth."⁵

Although Julia married in the Church of Christ, and found the doctrines of Presbyterianism to be more agreeable with her religious beliefs than those of any other

³ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 7-10, 15; George Washington Johnson, *Autobiography*), ii.

⁴ Joel H. Johnson, *Voice from the Mountain From the Mountains: Being a Testimony of the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as Revealed by the Lord to Joseph Smith, Jr.* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881), 13-14; Joel Hills Johnson, Excerpts from A Journal or Sketch of the Life of Joel Hills Johnson, Americana Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections and Manuscripts, HBLL, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter, Johnson, Journal), 1.

⁵ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 10.

religion, neither religion was sufficiently appealing to draw her into membership. Not until she encountered the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints did she find a religion whose doctrines corresponded with her own vision of true Christianity.

Julia was more concerned with establishing the Bible and its precepts as the cornerstone of her children's religiosity than in persuading them to become members of any particular denomination.⁶ Attendance at religious services was a Sunday ritual for Julia and her children as were Bible readings at home. She reinforced the concept of a woman's role as moral guardian within the family as she and her daughters led the family in scripture readings and religious instruction.⁷ Benjamin recalled, "in no degree was my mother or my elder sisters remiss in their Sunday readings, and teaching us from the Bible, or at other times when opportunity would permit."⁸ Julia's apparent perception of herself as her family's moral guardian may, in part, explain the determination with which she challenged any opposition to her religiosity and that of her children. The depths of Ezekiel's religiosity or lack thereof, are unknown, since he left no written record. We may assume Ezekiel was not hostile to religion, since he supported Julia in her religious instruction within their home and in having their children attend religious services with her, even though he did not attend with them.

The strength of her influence can be seen in the writings of her eldest son, Joel, who recalled how Julia frequently instructed him on matters of religion.

When I was a very small child, my mother being a very strict Presbyterian, would often converse with me and tell me about heaven and hell. God, Jesus Christ, the Devil, etc., and when but eight years of age I had quite a correct idea of those

⁶ Johnson, *Autobiography*, 1; Johnson Papers, box 1, folder 6; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 7-12; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13-14.

⁷ Barbara Welter, "The Feminization of American Religion: 1800-1860," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner (New York: Octagon Books, 1976), 137.

⁸ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 9-10.

things according to the precepts of men in those days and sometimes when meditating upon them I would weep bitterly, considering myself a sinner in the sight of God. I sought every opportunity to attend religious meetings of every denomination with no other motive than to obtain a knowledge of the religion of Jesus Christ.⁹

As he entered young adulthood, Joel explored the doctrines of Free Will Baptists, Universalists, and Presbyterians. Eventually he persuaded a Free Will Baptist preacher to baptize him, not because he wished to join the Baptist church, but because he felt there was a tremendous significance to performing the ordinance for its own sake. In his journal he recorded how often he reflected on the nature of God and would weep bitterly because he believed himself to be a sinner in the eyes of God.¹⁰

Although Joel read the Bible often, he “did not make prayer a regular part of life.” “When fifteen and sixteen years of age, my mind was greatly wrought up in reference to this subject. I would sit up all night to read religious tracts and papers by fire light . . . I also read the Bible with much attention, and a joy would often spring up in my heart with a testimony that the time would come when I should come in possession of that which I most desired; namely, the faith that was once delivered to the Saints.”¹¹

From an early age Julia exposed her children to the doctrines of the various denominations prevalent throughout the Northeast. Her son Benjamin recalled, “Before I was ten years of age I was greatly exercised with anxiety and fear upon this subject [religion], and until I was past 13 years of age, and had received the gospel, I did not cease to attend all their religious meetings and revivals, hoping I might obtain that forgiveness of sins that would release me from the fears of that awful burning pit so

⁹ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13-14.

¹⁰ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13, 15, 17; Johnson, Excerpts, 1, 2.

¹¹ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 14; For a discussion of youth and religion during the nineteenth century, see Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977).

powerfully portrayed.”¹² Religious revivalism did not affect all of her children in the same way. George considered “old Lawson, the preacher,” and his “hell and damnation” preaching as having no other objective in life “than to spoil all of our joys.”¹³

On the subject and practice of religion, Julia was an independent thinker. She believed deeply in Christianity as she perceived it through her own understanding of Biblical teachings and held firm to her own concept of true Christianity and to the idea that religious belief was a matter of individual conscience. Julia instilled in her children this same reliance on the Bible, immersing them in her ideal of pure and undefiled religion, while encouraging them to think seriously about Christian doctrines, and develop their own religiosity.

The year 1823 was a pivotal one for Julia and her family. That year her oldest son, twenty-one-year-old Joel, became the first of her children to establish his own home and occupation. Joel went into the sawmill business by buying a yoke of oxen on credit and a sawmill on a piece of land along the river in Pomfret.¹⁴ Within two years, Joel had built a home on the property and paid off his debts. It is unlikely he could have achieved so much, so quickly without the support he received from his family. After Joel moved into his new home, his sisters, Nancy, Delcina and Julia Ann, took turns keeping house

¹² Johnson, *Life's Review*, 6, 9, 15.

¹³ George Washington Johnson, *Diary of George W. Johnson, 1823-1893* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1940), 9.

¹⁴ Joel purchased Township 5, Range 12, Lot 5. Downs, John P. and Fenwick Y. Hedley, eds., *History of Chautauqua County and Its People*, vol. 1 (New York: American Historical Society, 1921), 21, 216; Virginia W. Barden, *Earliest Holland Land Company Sales in Chautauqua County, New York* (Fredonia, New York: Chautauqua County Genealogical Society, 1990), 21; Karen E. Livsey, ed., *Holland Land Company Records, Western New York land transactions, 1804-1835*: extracted from the archives of the Holland Land Company vol. 1 (Baltimore, MA: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1991).

for him.¹⁵ A woman's labor in food production, processing and making cloth was so essential that a single man found it practically impossible to operate a household without their help. Joel was no exception.

That fall Julia's youngest child, sixteen-month-old Elmer, died.¹⁶ His loss was a devastating blow to the family. Their son Benjamin recalled that it was at this point that Ezekiel began to consume large quantities of "ardent spirits."¹⁷ Ezekiel may have turned to alcohol to numb the pain he felt at the loss of his son, since it was a socially acceptable way for a man to respond. Alcoholism was pervasive in the early nineteenth century. Drinking was a major aspect of society, and even heavy drinking was simply taken for granted. Before 1820 the vast majority of Americans viewed the consumption of alcohol as beneficial for mind and body. Most households made their own hard cider or beer for use by the entire family, and like many rural New York farm families, the Johnsons brewed their own beer. Alcohol would have been an inexpensive and readily accessible product for his use.¹⁸

Ezekiel's drinking drove a wedge into the family. His children remembered that Ezekiel was never violent with his family, but when drinking he became morose and distant. Benjamin wrote that "[a]s a husband and parent, he was by nature the most tender and affectionate." Following Elmer's death, Ezekiel's withdrawal of affection began to create a wedge in his marriage and in his relationship with his children. They

¹⁵ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13.

¹⁶ Elmer died September 14, 1823, of unknown causes; see Johnson, *Life's Review*, 8-9; Ezekiel Johnson –Julia Ellis Hills family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=28835> [accessed 2 October 2003].

¹⁷ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 8-9; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 2.

¹⁸ Oram R. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979); Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 284-286.

were deeply affected by his decreasing participation in their lives and yearned for a return to the intimacy of their former relationship with him.¹⁹ Later in life, Benjamin attached great importance to his father's use of "ardent spirits." Benjamin wrote that although his father "had developed habits, yet he was a man of the highest organization."²⁰

Neither his labors nor his love for his family seemed to diminish, yet the fiend of unhappiness had entered our home to break the bonds of union between our parents and to destroy the happiness of their children . . . for such was my love for both of my parents that because of the troubles and unhappiness my heart at times would seem almost to burst with sorrow and grief.²¹

Julia's family continued to work together in spite of the strain Ezekiel's drinking now put on their family relationships. Joel's hard work, coupled with his sisters' help, enabled him to attain a measure of prosperity. New York state census records for 1825 listed Joel Johnson's assets as ten acres of improved land, a sawmill, five cows, seven sheep, one hog, and twelve yards of woven cloth.²²

As the rest of Julia's children reached maturity, they worked to establish their own farms and occupations. They married, began their own families, started businesses, and strove to profit from the emerging capitalist system. For Ezekiel and Julia this would have meant the loss, in whole or part, of the income-producing labors of their eldest children, even as those children remained, to varying degrees, dependent upon them for support. Over twenty-six years separated Julia and Ezekiel's children, so that even as their youngest child was being born their oldest children were adults, marrying and establishing their own homes and families.

¹⁹ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 15.

²⁰ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 8, 15.

²¹ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 8, 15. Grandstaff's contention that Ezekiel's drinking "interfered with his daily work habits" cannot be corroborated by these family records, see Mark R. Grandstaff and Milton V. Backman, Jr., "The Social Origins of the Kirtland Mormons" *Brigham Young University Studies* 30, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 59-60.

²² Secretary of State, New York, Census Records of Chautauqua County, New York, Census Record, 1825.

The older children's marriages marked another milestone in the family story. A local newspaper, the *Fredonia Censor*, for November 8, 1826, contained an announcement that Joel Johnson and Miss Annie Pixley Johnson had wed on November 2, 1826.²³ Joel was twenty-four years old and "anxious to obtain this world's goods," and had purchased an adjacent farm that put the young couple several hundred dollars in debt.²⁴ Three years after Joel's marriage, at the age of forty-four, Julia bore her youngest child, Amos. The next day, January 16, 1829, her twenty-three year old daughter, Delcina, married Lyman Royal Sherman of Addison, Vermont.²⁵

Joel's marriage was followed by his migration west. By 1829, Joel and Annie were facing serious financial hardships after the sawmill he had contracted to construct was demolished in a flood. Joel contended that at the same time he was cheated out of most of the profits earned from a shingle cutting machine he had invented.²⁶ In the fall of 1830 Joel and Annie sold their possessions to clear their debts and Annie and their two children, Julia Ann, age two, and infant son, Sixtus, went to live with Julia and Ezekiel while Joel went in search of employment. He traveled west until he reached Amherst, Ohio, near the shores of Lake Erie. Here Joel encountered a childhood friend, John Clay, who invited Joel to join him in a sawmill business. Joel agreed and sent for Annie and

²³ Joel, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13; Joel Hills Johnson –Annie Pixley Johnson family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=51877> [accessed 2 October 2003].

²⁴ Johnson, Excerpts, 2.

²⁵ Lyman Royal Sherman –Delcina Diademia Johnson family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=49508> [accessed 2 October 2003].

²⁶ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 15.

the children to join him. Julia's 22-year-old son, David, accompanied them to Amherst and went to work for his brother.²⁷

Joel had unknowingly located near the gathering of adherents to a religion born amidst the enthusiasm of the Second Great Awakening. In the spring of 1831, a "considerable excitement" arose throughout New York and the Western Reserve as Mormons began gathering at Kirtland, approximately fifty-six miles northeast of Amherst. Joel recalled that while he spent much of his youth "filled with anxiety about finding the . . . faith that was once delivered to the [ancient] saints," by adulthood the intensity of his religiosity had subsided. Joel was, however, curious about this new religion as were Annie and his brother, David. Annie appears to have been the driving force behind the trio's investigation into the church. Joel acquired a copy of the *Book of Mormon*, which they began to read.²⁸

Elders Harvey Whitlock and Edson Fuller were proselytizing in the area and holding daily meetings at the local school house when Joel, Annie, and David went to hear them preach. Elders Whitlock and Fuller were soon joined by Elders Lyman Wight, Samuel H. Smith, Jared Carter, and Sylvester Smith. Their teachings astonished Joel, "it being the first discourse that [I] had ever heard that corresponded with the New Testament." Still he rejected outright their assertions that the *Book of Mormon* was scripture equal to the Bible. As he later recalled, "my prejudice was so great against the book, that I would not receive their testimony. I heard them twice and concluded to stay

²⁷ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 15-16; Johnson, Excerpts, 2-3.

²⁸ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 16. Copies of the Book of Mormon went on sale to the public, March 26, 1830, at E.B. Grandin's Palmyra Bookstore; see Larry C. Porter, "The Church in New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-1831," in *The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History*, ed. F. Mark McKiernan, Alma R. Blair and Paul M. Edwards (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1973), 44-45.

at home.” Swayed by the “many evil reports” in circulation, Joel soon decided to stop reading the *Book of Mormon* as well.²⁹

Annie, on the other hand, had a very different reaction. She continued to attend their meetings every day. Joel noted Annie’s interest in this new sect with a good deal of surprise, since she had always been a devout Methodist. Still, he made no objection to her attending, having been taught from childhood to respect others’ freedom in thought and their right to “liberty in religious matters.” After attending several more meetings, Annie “began to believe in the work.”³⁰ Annie’s conversion and devotion to the new faith proved a compelling stimulus for her husband and brother-in-law as she continued to share the elders’ teachings and her belief in the doctrines they espoused. Annie’s influence on Joel concerning the church may have been intensified by Joel’s experience of growing up in a home where women took the lead in religious matters.

Annie’s conversion experience demonstrates that early female converts could be instrumental in bringing husbands and other family members into membership. Early female converts could and did initiate religious inquiry into the Church and its doctrines, showing that in this regard female conversion may have been similar to female conversion in other religious movements of the period.³¹ Annie’s conversion experience makes it evident that women were allowed to attend and participate in Church meetings, whether alone or in company with others, and were baptized and admitted into membership without the necessity of being married or related to a male member.

²⁹ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 16-17. The callings of Harvey Whitlock and Edson Fuller to proselytize for the church are recorded in *The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), (hereafter D&C), Section 52, verses 25, 28.

³⁰ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 16-17.

³¹ Karen V. Hansen, *A Very Social Time: Crafting Community in Antebellum New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 93-94, 159-160.

Julia's teachings in his childhood influenced Joel in his choice of religion. Julia had taught her son that the Bible was the standard by which he should judge all matters of religion and morality. In moments of doubt or confusion, he needed to turn to the Bible and to prayer, and there he would find direction. Joel recalled turning to his Bible for guidance, searching it every day and praying for inspiration. He reasoned that for the teachings of the Mormon elders to be true, they would have to conform to those principles contained in the Bible. After searching the Bible each day at home and contemplating upon the matter, he began to think "that the work might possibly be true." Finally, Bible in hand, Joel accompanied Annie again to the Mormon meetings. This time he was prepared to investigate every doctrine they preached and compare their doctrines with those contained in the Bible.

Annie was baptized on May 20, 1831, the first among her family and friends to become a Mormon.³² Joel was baptized soon afterwards, on June 31, 1831.³³ Journal records indicate that David was also baptized around this same time. Although Joel had previously been baptized by a Freewill Baptist preacher, Richard M. Cary, the Church did not recognize the religious ordinations performed by the ministers of other religions. Baptism and other religious ordinances were legitimate only when performed by those possessing the priesthood authority restored as part of the restoration of Christ's church.³⁴ This claim to the exclusive divine authority to act in God's name distinguished the

³² Johnson, *Autobiography*, 3-4.

³³ David also converted; unfortunately the exact date was not given and no public record is available. Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 15-17, Johnson Papers, box 6 folder 18; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 3-4.

³⁴ D&C 22.

Church from Protestant religions and was one of the primary doctrines upon which Joel, and perhaps other family members, based their conversion.³⁵

Once persuaded they had found the restored gospel of Christ, Joel, Annie and David began a letter writing campaign to the family in Pomfret. They witnessed to them that the Church of Christ embodied the restored gospel, that the *Book of Mormon* was holy writ, and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. They also sent the family a copy of the *Book of Mormon* to read. Julia and other family members received the news of their becoming “Mormonites” with a mixture of “horror and a disgrace.” Julia and her family had been hearing about a new sect called “Campbellism,” and even more gossip about the “Mormonites,” “Joe Smith” the “money-digger,” and his “Golden Bible.” “Mormonite” or “Mormon” was a derisive epithet applied to early converts to the Church of Christ for their belief that the *Book of Mormon* was sacred scripture. “Mormon” eventually became the most commonly known name for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Julia’s son, Joseph, recalled reading in the newspaper about the discovery of a “Gold Bible.” Benjamin recalled that in 1829 the “village paper” published an article about a young man claiming to have seen an angel, and that he had gold plates engraved in a strange language that he was translating into a new Bible.³⁶

Letters in response to Joel reflects the mixture of emotions being experienced by the family. One unsigned letter, dated September 3, 1831, states: “Mother and all would write but can not. They send their love and say they fear for you but if you enjoy your religion go on. Forgive my harshness if I have been too harsh, and my brevity if I have been too short. Farewell.” In a separate note Julia wrote, “My dear children, I want to

³⁵ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 16-17.

³⁶ Johnson Papers, box 1, folder 6; Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 9.

address you but know not how for it is impossible to describe my feelings . . . for I understood you had embraced new doctrine I feared lest you'r deceived but hope you will all strive for the truth. Do write or come quick."³⁷

For Julia, the Bible was the source of truth. She repeatedly encouraged her children to pray and study the Bible for spiritual guidance because she believed that individuals could receive some form of direction or inspiration from a spiritual source. To this end Julia resolved to discover for herself if the new doctrines to which her children subscribed were true or not. If not, she was prepared to do all in her power to recover them from the deception. Her request that they write or come quickly reflects this sentiment. Apparently she felt that further communication with them or seeing them personally would enable her to better determine if their conversion were having an adverse influence, and if it was, would give her a better chance of rescuing them.

In preparation for dealing with the situation, Julia formed a study group composed of family and friends who were "all devoted to religion." Among them were her elder children, Seth, Nancy, Delcina, and Delcina's husband, Lyman. Her group met privately in her home to read the *Book of Mormon* and discuss its contents in contrast with the Bible. Julia must have feared that if it were a hoax, her younger children would be more susceptible to its deceptions because she barred them from participating, much to their disappointment at being excluding from this great secret and the upheaval it was stirring.

Initially, Julia and the rest thought that Annie, Joel, and David had fallen under some deplorable delusion. Her son Joseph recalled the group's doubts regarding the

³⁷ Julia Johnson to Joel, Annie and David Johnson, 1831, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 22; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 11; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 2.

validity of the *Book of Mormon* and this new religious sect.³⁸ In one of his letters to Amherst, Seth expressed his sentiments regarding the *Book of Mormon*: “I have read the book a little and find no evidence of its being a revelation from heaven of this nature. The manner of your being convinced of this doctrine and book I am not prepared to condemn but since Satan will if possible deceive the very elect I fear that you might have been deceived.”³⁹

Although Julia had been more concerned that her children embrace and conform their lives to a Christian ethos than that they adhere to any particular denomination, she remained open to the possibility that the doctrines espoused by the Church of Christ could be true. Despite her trepidations, she did not tell them their beliefs were wrong nor offer any arguments against them, or demand they renounce their beliefs. Julia believed they had the ability to discern truth for themselves and to follow the dictates of their own conscience in adopting their own belief system.

As the group continued to read and study, Julia became persuaded that the *Book of Mormon* was sacred scripture and that the new sect was the restoration of Christ’s ancient church. She and the rest began to hope that “there really was a living prophet on the earth.” At this point Julia allowed her younger children to attend the gatherings.⁴⁰ In a letter to Joel, Annie and David she wrote, “My soul rejoiced for I long to see all my children enjoy pure and undefiled religion.”⁴¹

Despite her misgivings, Julia was a likely candidate for conversion. She embodied three characteristics typical of early female converts to the Church of Jesus

³⁸ Julia Johnson to Joel, and Joseph Johnson; n.d., box 4, folder 22, Johnson Papers.

³⁹ Johnson Papers, box 1, folder 6, 2.

⁴⁰ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 17-19; Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 11-12; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 2.

⁴¹ Julia Johnson to Joel, and Joseph Johnson; n.d., box 4, folder 22, Johnson Papers.

Christ of Latter-day Saints. She believed that the Bible contained the word of God; she was a diligent scribe; and she had committed herself to living a Christian life long before her conversion to the Church of Christ.⁴² Julia believed that the Christian churches of her time were flawed and that Christ's ancient church had been lost. She believed that a restoration of the powers and authority of Christ's ancient church would occur at some future time, preparatory to Christ's second coming and that the time of Christ's coming was soon approaching.⁴³ In 1828 Julia's sons saw "a large ball of light, like fire, which passed from the east to the western horizon" while they were out one night hunting raccoons. According to her son Benjamin, when they returned home they asked their mother what this sign in the heavens meant. Julia told them that it was one of the signs that Christ's coming was near.⁴⁴

Joel and David left Kirtland, Ohio, for Pomfret on December 19, 1831, in company with their new friend and fellow convert, Almon Babbitt.⁴⁵ By the time they arrived, Julia's study sessions had already prepared her for baptism. Mormon Elders Joseph Brackenbury and Edmund Durfee arrived soon afterwards, and Julia invited them to stay in the Johnson home.⁴⁶ Once converted, Julia was determined to be baptized, as were her older children. Julia and son-in-law Lyman were baptized first, followed by all

⁴² Johnson, "Give Up All and Follow Your Lord."

⁴³ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 9-10.

⁴⁴ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 9-10; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 1; Johnson Papers, box 1, folder 6.

⁴⁵ Office of Church Historian, Missionary Record, 1830-1859: Missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, (microfilm of manuscript records), FHL microfilm 250236.

⁴⁶ Johnson Papers, box 1 folder 6, 2.

of her adult children, several neighbors, and friends.⁴⁷ The exact date of Julia's baptism is unknown, but it must have occurred sometime in the last week of December 1831.⁴⁸

Ezekiel was not persuaded to the new faith and refused permission for his younger children to be baptized, contending that they should choose for themselves after they attained their majority. This was a major disappointment to Joseph and Benjamin, then fifteen and thirteen years of age. Hoping that Ezekiel might eventually convert, Julia did not press the issue. Only Joseph and Benjamin, and daughter Mary, were affected by Ezekiel's decision, since George, William, Esther, and Amos were all under the age of eight and, according to the doctrine of their new faith, too young for baptism. Ezekiel did allow Susan Ellen and Almera to be baptized even though they were only seventeen and nineteen years old. Shortly after their baptisms, Joel, David, and Almon returned to Ohio.⁴⁹

Despite the fact that some friends and neighbors had joined the church, Julia's son, Benjamin, recalled that following their baptism, other members of their rural New York community began to ostracize Julia and her fellow converts, scoffing at or assailing them publicly. Attacks from local ministers were particularly hostile as they confronted Julia with demands that she explain why, if her new faith were true, had the Mormon elders not healed her daughter, Nancy, when they baptized her. They argued that, "when

⁴⁷ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 13-14.

⁴⁸ Julia's baptism occurred sometime between the time her sons left Kirtland, Ohio and the death of Brackenbury. According to her son Benjamin, it took one week to travel from Pomfret to Amherst, Ohio. Assuming it took her sons less than a week to travel from Kirtland to Pomfret, the distance being fifty-six miles shorter, they might have arrived in Pomfret by December 25, 1831. Brackenbury became grievously ill about the first of January, and remained ill for a week before succumbing to his illness or poisoning on January 7, 1832. See Johnson, *Life's Review*, 12-13; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 19.

⁴⁹ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 19; Johnson Papers, box 1, folder 6; Johnson, *Autobiography*, ii; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 2; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 12.

Nancy is healed and throws away her crutches we will believe.”⁵⁰ Shortly after Joel and Annie had moved to Amherst, Nancy had been thrown from a horse, breaking her hip “so near the joint that all the doctors nearby decided it could not be set, and told her she would never have the use of that limb again or be able to walk without crutches.”⁵¹ Julia and her family were distressed by the hostility their conversion engendered, with the taunting of Nancy being especially hurtful.

Local Protestant ministers may have perceived the doctrines of the Church as unorthodox, heretical, and therefore, threatening. Within days of their arrival, the elder who baptized Julia, Joseph Brackenbury, suddenly became ill. Julia cared for him as best she could, but during the week preceding his death on January 7, 1832, Brackenbury “remained in great distress.” Word spread that he had been poisoned. Julia’s son, Benjamin also speculated that Brackenbury’s death was the result of poisoning.⁵² Her son Joel later attributed it to “billeous colic.”⁵³

Julia and her family provided for Brackenbury’s funeral and burial in the Laona cemetery. It is likely that his mission companion and perhaps, Joel, David and Almon, prepared his body for burial. Coffins were often hastily prepared and the body interred as soon as possible. Since Ezekiel was a carpenter, either he or his elder sons would most likely have constructed the coffin rather than pay another carpenter for the work.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 12-13; Johnson, *Autobiography*, ii.

⁵¹ Johnson, *Diary*, 2; Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 10-11; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 2.

⁵² Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 12-13. The November 15, 1845 entry in the *Journal History* cites the cause of Brackenbury’s death as poisoning, *Journal History* 1831: 55. See also Office of Church Historian, *Missionary Record, 1830-1859: Missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, December 31, 1831, (microfilm of manuscript record), FHL microfilm 250236.

⁵³ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 19.

⁵⁴ Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life*, 98-100.

After the funeral the new converts gathered at Julia's home for a prayer service. Grave robbers tried to disinter Brackenbury's body during the night after his burial. When Julia's sons went to check the grave, they prevented them from removing the body and captured one of the grave robbers, who was later brought to trial and convicted. Those opposed to the new faith felt emboldened by Brackenbury's death and intensified their ridicule. Benjamin recalled, "Our enemies now felt they had a great triumph; for where now were the gifts of the gospel when our strongest man could die."⁵⁵ Antagonists now demanded that Julia and the others explain why God had not healed Brackenbury, contending that, unless the Mormons could perform miracles, their new faith could not be the true restoration.⁵⁶

Julia and her family must have been aware of the religious animosity and rivalry common throughout New York during the early nineteenth century. Yet the level of hostility directed at them because of their conversion, particularly the attacks from the community's religious leaders, did come as a surprise. Julia knew these ministers. Although no public record lists Julia as a member of any organized denomination in the region prior to her decision to join the Church; she had for nineteen years been a devoted churchgoer who had attended their religious services and, according to her son Benjamin, "had always been esteemed among the most eminent in religious society." While their taunting served to reinforce her and her family's commitment to their new faith, it did not come without a few pangs. Benjamin wrote that "[t]hese things seemed at the time a

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 12-13.

⁵⁶ Johnson, *Autobiography*, ii; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 12-13, Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 19.

great trial, yet in no degree did it dampen the faith of any, and while listening to the ravings of our enemies, the truth, with the love of it, became the more deeply planted.”⁵⁷

Following their conversions, Julia and her children wanted to know more about Joseph Smith and the gathering of saints in Kirtland. Harassment from hostile neighbors made living in Pomfret an increasingly unpleasant experience and heightened their desire to relocate somewhere free of antagonistic neighbors. The largest congregation of early converts was in the Western Reserve in northeastern Ohio, along the northern edge of the Allegheny Plateau, primarily in Kirtland and nearby Hiram. Here Julia, her family, and friends hoped they could live amidst others who shared their faith. Still, leaving Pomfret behind meant they would be parting with their long-time friends and neighbors, severing social and economic ties with people whose lives had often intertwined with their own.⁵⁸ For Julia and Ezekiel, it also meant leaving behind the grave of Elmer, the child they had lost in death eight years earlier.

By the time of Julia’s conversion, the economic burden on Ezekiel and Julia was lighter than it had ever been. Two of their adult children were married and out of the house. Seth and Nancy were bringing income into the home from their teaching positions. Seth taught school during the winter and worked the farm with his father from spring to fall, while Nancy taught school. Seven adult children were contributors to the household economy, although Nancy’s situation would have been curtailed following her accident. Of the seven minor children, ranging in age from four to fifteen years, at least three would have been able to significantly contribute to the household economy. Only the youngest would have been entirely dependent or of only insignificant help. Perhaps

⁵⁷ Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 12-13.

⁵⁸ Joseph maintained friendships with former acquaintances in Pomfret via correspondence and exchanges of seeds and plants, etc. See Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 10.

because there were so many hands available to do the farm labor, Ezekiel was able to take employment as a carpenter in Fredonia during the winter months. Correspondence from Seth to Joel during this period indicates that Ezekiel was dividing his time between home and the nearby community of Fredonia, staying for a few days in each location. His stays in Fredonia may have been precipitated by work demands, but road and weather conditions would also have been factors in his ability to travel.⁵⁹

After months of discussion and urging by his family, Ezekiel finally agreed to consider the possibility of moving to Kirtland. The idea of leaving all he had worked to acquire in the way of land and status was difficult for Ezekiel. He and Julia do not appear to have considered moving to follow Joel, Annie, and David when they relocated to Ohio eighteen months earlier, so it seems doubtful that this was what compelled Ezekiel to consider selling out. Delcina and her husband, Lyman, lived nearby and their eleven other children lived with them as minors or still dependent young adults. Delcina and Lyman wanted to move to Kirtland, but seem to have lacked either the means or ability to do so, because they appear to have been dependent on Ezekiel's agreeing to relocate. In fact, Delcina and Lyman did not move on their own in the spring of 1832, as they might have; instead, they remained in New York with the rest of the family awaiting Ezekiel's decision. For Julia and Ezekiel the issue of migration arose only after the emergence of community rancor following the conversion of Julia and the children.

The fact that Kirtland was set upon as the point for relocation indicates the strength of Julia's influence in the decision. Kirtland's economic, social or political environment was not exceptional enough to spur Ezekiel to relinquish all he had built in Pomfret, especially when it appears there were no circumstances pressing him to leave.

⁵⁹ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 12; Johnson, Journal, 2; Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 22.

For his family, Kirtland's primary appeal was as the gathering point for the church.

Julia's desire to relocate to Kirtland, coupled with the urgings of his children and son-in-law, seems the most likely explanation for Ezekiel's eventual willingness to consider giving up all he had acquired in Pomfret to move to Kirtland.

Even though Ezekiel did not share in their new beliefs, the welfare and comfort of his family seems to have been of greater concern to him than the farms, status and possessions he had acquired. Ezekiel apparently wanted his family to live in a place where they thought they would be happier, a place more amenable to them where they could practice their new faith in peace. Were Julia ambivalent or against the idea of moving to Kirtland, it is doubtful Ezekiel would have considered giving up all he had to placate what to him might have seemed the whims of his children and son-in-law. Julia wanted to be where she could immerse herself and her children in their new religion, in the fellowship of other new converts. In Kirtland they would have the opportunity to be participants in that restoration of Christ's ancient church to which she now belonged and escape the antagonism of hostile neighbors.

Julia found the religious fulfillment she had long sought in the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which compelled her into membership. She wanted Ezekiel and her children to share in that conversion. Ezekiel was not interested in baptism, yet she would now ask him to relinquish what they had worked a lifetime to acquire to help her and their children follow their new-found hope.

CHAPTER 3

GATHERING TO ZION

KIRTLAND, 1832-1837

For I long to see all my children enjoy pure and undefiled religion.

Julia Hills Johnson

After her conversion, religion became the central focus of Julia's existence.

Because she was a dominant influence on her children, the Church and its doctrines also became the focal point of their lives. Julia was tenacious about being a participant in what to her was the restoration of Christ's church and was determined that she and her children participate in the Church's organization. When Ezekiel resisted her commitment to the church, she challenged the patriarchy of her husband. In the ensuing conflict between religiosity and marital harmony Julia's religiosity took precedence, resulting in the alienation and marginalization of her husband as head of the family. Julia's actions and experiences model those of other early female converts who committed their lives to their new faith, even when their husbands did not share their commitment.¹

In the spring of 1832, thirteen-year-old Benjamin returned to Ohio with Joel and David. That summer Ezekiel set off with his son, Seth, and daughter, Susan, along with other new converts from Pomfret on the 130-mile scouting trip to Kirtland. Ezekiel

¹ Jill Mulvay Derr, Kenneth Godfrey, and Audrey M. Godfrey, eds., *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1982); Janiece Lyn Johnson, "Give Up All and Follow Your Lord: Testimony and Exhortation in Early Mormon Women's Letters, 1831-1839," *Brigham Young University Studies* 41 no. 1 (2001): 99-107.

apparently wanted to assess conditions in Kirtland first, before committing himself to moving there. Julia and the rest of the family remained at home to care for their farm.² In Kirtland, they met with Joseph Smith in the midst of a bustling, energized community. According to their son Benjamin, at first Ezekiel “appeared favorably impressed” by his contact with Joseph Smith and with Kirtland in general and was by “all appearance . . . becoming confirmed in the faith and truth of the gospel.”³

Ezekiel and his children then made the fifty-six-mile trek further southwest along the Great Lakes to Joel’s home in Amherst. Benjamin recalled that friction developed between Ezekiel and his older son Seth. As Seth’s religious fervor reached a fevered pitch. “[A] mania seemed to come over Seth . . . because of his extreme anxiety to see his father converted to the truth and redeemed from intemperance.” At the height of this mania, the family arose one morning to find that Seth had disappeared during the night. They immediately began an unsuccessful search to find him. Not until midmorning of the next day did Seth finally return, on his own, with “his mind in a wild deranged condition.” Under these trying circumstances Ezekiel and Susan took Seth back home to Pomfret. From that time on, Ezekiel was hostile toward moving the family to Kirtland. Seth was composed enough later that fall to make the 180-mile return trip to Amherst to retrieve Benjamin on his own and was “to all appearance perfectly sound in mind” by that time.⁴ But, by then two of Julia’s deepest-held desires, instilling religiosity in her children and maintaining family unity, were in conflict.

² George Washington Johnson, *Diary of George W. Johnson, 1823-1893* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1940), 2; Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life’s Review: Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Johnson* (Independence, Missouri: Zions Printing and Publishing Co., 1947), 13-15.

³ Johnson, *My Life’s Review*, 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Julia's hope that Ezekiel "would embrace the gospel" seemed lost, for as Benjamin recalled, their hope was "blighted, for all the light that had been reflected upon his understanding seem turned to darkness." Ezekiel was still willing to relocate, but not to Kirtland. In choosing another location Ezekiel reverted to the migration pattern with which he was most familiar and comfortable. Without any advance surveying he decided to bypass Kirtland and move the family to another small, but expanding, frontier settlement, Fort Dearborn, Illinois, now Chicago. Located at the mouth of the Chicago River, Fort Dearborn was strategically placed at the crossroads of several major east-west, north-south trails, where the river routes intersected. By 1832, state legislators were transforming the decades' old military outpost by commissioning the sale of land within the newly platted township. Their objective was to finance the construction of the canal connecting the town to the Mississippi River. Legislators hoped the canal would bring prosperity to their state by making Chicago a hub for agricultural and commercial trade.⁵

Joseph later recalled that when his father proposed the move to Chicago, Julia and the rest reluctantly assented.⁶ For now Julia's desire for family unity seemed her foremost concern. Perhaps she was still hoping that in time Ezekiel would convert and be willing to move the family to Kirtland. Ezekiel sold his farms in the fall of 1832 while Seth was in Ohio retrieving Benjamin.⁷ Then in the early spring of 1833 Ezekiel "sailed up the lakes with the understanding that" Julia would turn over possession of their home

⁵ Milo M. Quaife, *Chicago and the Old Northwest, 1673-1835* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Robin L. Einhorn, *Property Rules: Political Economy in Chicago, 1833-1872* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁶ Papers of Joseph Ellis Johnson, 1817-1882, Western Americana Manuscripts, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah box 1, folder 6.

⁷ Benjamin states his father sold two farms (Johnson, *Life's Review*, 14).

and farms “before the first of June.”⁸ Once Ezekiel had a place for the family to live, he would write Julia with instruction on where to join him.

As June approached, with still no word from Ezekiel, Julia became deeply troubled over what might have happened to her husband. Ezekiel would never have abandoned them, yet, there was always the possibility that illness, violence, or an accident might have taken his life. Regardless of whatever fears or grief she felt over what might have befallen Ezekiel, Julia still had to relinquish possession and move her family elsewhere. With Ezekiel’s fate unknown, traveling all the way to Chicago was pointless. Once the choice of where to relocate was at her discretion, Julia chose Kirtland.

As Ezekiel’s presumed widow, Julia was now in possession of all their household finances and goods. Along with her large family she now set out to set up a new home in Kirtland. In a caravan of wagons loaded with all their earthly possessions, Julia left Pomfret with seven minor children, ages four to fifteen, and five adult children. Julia’s eldest, Nancy, twenty-nine years old, was crippled from her riding accident, Seth (twenty-seven years), was still dependent on his mother’s resources. In addition, Julia Ann (twenty-four), Almera (twenty) and Susan (eighteen), all able-bodied, were along on the journey. Daughter Delcina (four months pregnant), her husband, Lyman Sherman, and their two small children accompanied them. Julia and her family probably took the most common route, from Pomfret to Dunkirk Port, just to the north, then by steamer to Fairport, Ohio, and overland to Kirtland.⁹

⁸ Joseph Ellis Johnson Papers, “Autobiographical Sketch,” box 1, folder 6; Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 14-15.

⁹ Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 15; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 14-15.

Julia's decision may not have stemmed solely from her commitment to her new faith. She was now forty-eight years old with seven minor children to provide for, and she could not remain on the family farm. Her married children and grandchildren would all be in Kirtland, and there would have been the natural desire to be with them. She may also have given thought to the possibility that in her later years she would need their care and assistance. At this point in her life, however, she was not dependent on any of her adult children. Her single adult children were still living with her and were just as, if not more, dependent upon their mother emotionally and financially. They had little more than their few personal possessions and their ability to work, while Julia held the greater portion of financial and material resources. It is unclear how much of the proceeds from the sale of the farms in Pomfret may have been left with Julia in order to finance the family's move to Chicago, but whatever amount of money left after their debts were paid was Julia's, not her children's. With Ezekiel presumed dead, Julia owned all of the livestock, wagons, teams, household possessions, and provisions necessary for the family to start over again. It was her money and material possessions that would make it possible to purchase a home and set up a household.¹⁰

Julia was a strong woman with sufficient control over her own life to make her own choices. Her son Joseph recalled that Julia set upon relocating to Kirtland with great determination.¹¹ She was committed to instilling in her children the new faith that brought her religious fulfillment. Now that the conflict over going to Kirtland or keeping the family unified appeared to be over, she was determined to immerse herself and her

¹⁰ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 14.

¹¹ Johnson Papers, Diaries & Journal, box 1, folder 6, 2-3.

children in their new religion and give them the opportunity to participate in that restoration of Christ's gospel and church to which she had committed herself.

By the time she joined her fellow converts at Kirtland, in the early part of June 1832, the city had emerged as the Church's spiritual and financial center. Julia promptly traded some of her teams and wagons for a home on Kirtland Flat, near the schoolhouse, and began to integrate herself and her family into church activity. Situated as it was on the eastern edge of Kirtland, adjacent the east branch of the Chagrin River, Julia's choice of location placed her and her family at the heart of Kirtland's religious, social and economic activities. Julia enrolled her younger children in the district school. Later they would attend church-sponsored classes in the School of the Prophets and Hebrew school.¹² Along with her older children, she began to donate labor and resources to church projects. It is unknown when Julia and her family first met Joseph Smith, but both church and personal family records indicate that a close relationship between them developed after their arrival in Kirtland.¹³

Shortly after her arrival, Joseph Smith called for the building of a temple, a place of worship where converts could conduct their most solemn religious rites.¹⁴ The temple would stand as a symbol of their devotion to God and His centrality in their lives.

Although her resources were limited, Julia offered her labor and resources to the effort. Along with her daughters she fashioned elegant needlework for furnishing the temple's

¹² Julia's home is still standing and is part of the historical exhibition in Kirtland. For more description of Kirtland Flats and the importance of its location, see, Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830-1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1983), 37, 72-73; Johnson, *Diary*, 2; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 15.

¹³ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 15-23; Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 2, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 189-190, Friday, March 18, 1836; Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, vol. 112 (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), Friday, March 18, 1836; Johnson, *Diary*, 2.

¹⁴ The cornerstone was laid on July 23, 1833. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 1: 133-35; *History of the Church*, 1:400; See "Kirtland Temple," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 798, <http://www.lib.byu.edu/Macmillan/> accessed April 2, 2008.

interior.¹⁵ Joseph Smith asked for her sons to “make and burn the brick to build the temple, and in digging the basement a ledge of building stone.” After church leaders decided to build the temple of stone, the brick “was sold to buy nails, glass and other furnishings.” Once the temple was completed, Julia sent her children to the Hebrew School held there.¹⁶

In addition to supporting her new faith, Julia still had a sizeable family to provide for, so she rented rooms in her home. Along with her daughters Nancy, Almera, and Susan, she began a business supplying local merchants with men’s fine neckwear and palm leaf hats.¹⁷ Susan also took a job teaching school. This was not unusual for early female converts in Kirtland during this period.¹⁸ Julia’s adolescent sons, Joseph and Benjamin, recalled doing all they could to contribute to the family’s support “by clearing land, making maple sugar, hauling saw logs, running sawmills, and sometimes working” at odd jobs for neighbors. In this way, according to Joseph and Benjamin, Julia and her family enjoyed a “comfortable livelihood.”¹⁹

When Julia resettled in Kirtland, she entered a community increasingly composed of gathering strangers, fellow converts drawn together to craft their vision of a Zion community and a Zion people. Over 75 percent of Julia’s fellow converts were from New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut or Maine, with New Yorkers comprising the largest percentage. Only 22 percent were from Canada, Ohio,

¹⁵ Carol Cornwall Madsen, “Mormon Women and the Temple: Toward a new Understanding” in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 80-110.

¹⁶ Johnson, *Autobiography*, 3-4; Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 15-16.

¹⁷ Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 20; for more on home-based economies of the period, see Laurel Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

¹⁸ Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 405-408.

¹⁹ Johnson, *Autobiography*, 3; Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 17.

Pennsylvania, England, or other regions. On average, most of these early converts had been lifelong residents of their communities prior to their conversion and move to Kirtland. Fifty-one percent had never lived outside the region of their birth. Julia was among only 5 percent who had moved three or more times.²⁰ Although Julia and her family had moved further and more often than most early converts, they were not transient. Julia had been both a short-term and long-time stable resident of the communities in which she had lived.

The first ambition of these early converts was to gather believers into membership by spreading the word of God and his restoration. Their second aspiration was to create a physical gathering of converts into large congregations with sufficient manpower and the material resources to erect a temple. The gathering would generate an atmosphere where converts could forge a religiously-based support network that could fortify them, spiritually and physically, as they pursued their exaltation. A steady influx of new converts into Kirtland, coupled with the continual movement of members leaving for or returning from proselytizing missions, kept the population of Kirtland in a continual state of transition. This presented unique challenges to these early converts as they worked to achieve their goal of creating a Zion community and a Zion people. Their common religiosity, mutual goals, and shared cultural background facilitated their formation of the formal and informal social and economic institutions that ultimately enabled them to unite as a people.²¹

²⁰ Mark R. Grandstaff and Milton V. Backman, Jr., "The Social Origins of the Kirtland Mormons," *Brigham Young University Studies* 30, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 47-66; Milton V. Backman, Jr., *A Profile of Latter-day Saints of Kirtland Ohio and Members of Zions Camp, 1830-1839: Vital Statistics and Sources* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1982); Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 140.

²¹ Grandstaff and Backman, "Social Origins," 47-66.

Ezekiel caught up with his family sometime after their arrival in Kirtland, in either late summer or early fall of 1833.²² Apparently he had written them, but when the family never joined him he made the return trip to Pomfret searching for them. In Pomfret, Ezekiel learned that Julia had never received his letter, and the family had gone to Kirtland. Benjamin recalled that after Ezekiel rejoined them he tried to persuade Julia to return with him to Fort Dearborn. She refused. She was where she wanted to be, where she wanted her children to be, and doing what was important to her, participating in the restoration of Christ's gospel and church. Her faith had now become more valuable to her than acquiescing to her husband's entreaties.²³

Julia's determination to remain in Kirtland against his wishes must have filled Ezekiel with anger and frustration. For Ezekiel to begin again in another frontier town was one thing. Living in Kirtland, engulfed by a religious movement he did not believe in and wanted no part of, was another. Under the circumstances, as family patriarch he held the power within the marriage and family. Under the coverture and property laws of the time, Ezekiel could have prevented Julia from legally holding real property in her own name, as Julia did, or retaining any of the wages she earned. He could also have kept Julia from contributing resources to the church and forbidden his minor children from participation. He might even have sued for divorce and taken sole custody of their minor children.²⁴

²² No specific date for Ezekiel's arrival in Kirtland is recorded; however, from its placement in Benjamin's journal it appears have occurred sometime in the late summer or early fall of 1833 (Johnson, *Life's Review*, 15).

²³ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 15; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 3.

²⁴ Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Susanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984); Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

Ezekiel did none of these things. He remained in Kirtland only “under protest,” embittered and disappointed by his failure to persuade Julia to move to Fort Dearborn.²⁵ Their son Joseph described his father as “disappointed” and “indignant.” Apparently the depth of his love for his family compelled Ezekiel to remain in Kirtland and prevented him from taking actions against Julia. Ezekiel’s single adult sons were in no position to impose their will on Ezekiel. Although Seth was twenty-eight years of age and David twenty-three, neither owned property nor held any financial worth. Legally Ezekiel owned the family’s land, home, and possessions. Without money or property, his adult sons were powerless, while Ezekiel could at anytime have put them out of the house or sold the property and left. Instead, Ezekiel took a carpentry job in company with Brigham Young and begrudgingly accepted living in an increasingly Church-centered social sphere of which he was not a part.²⁶

That Julia remained in Kirtland against Ezekiel’s wishes demonstrates that her conversion was a free will expression of her own desires. Her presence there and her contributions of time and labor to the church were by her choice and stemmed from her own religious devotion. She was so determined to instill her religiosity in her children that she was willing to jeopardize her marital relationship. Again, just as she had thwarted the power of patriarchy at age seventeen to marry Ezekiel, Julia’s determination to adhere to her own aspiration triumphed.

As membership grew, so too did the complexity of administering the church’s economic affairs, leading Joseph Smith and other church leaders to create the United Order. This organization oversaw the communally-based economic system articulated in

²⁵ Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 15; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 3.

²⁶ Johnson Papers, Diaries & Journal, box 1, folder 6, page 3.

the doctrine called the Law of Consecration. Under this law members consecrated all their lands, possessions, and businesses except what was necessary for the maintenance of their families to the Church. Underlying the law was the principle that all excess goods should be held in common, for common use and benefit. The bishop, a lay religious leader within the church's hierarchy, was responsible for administering the law, under the Church's direction. Bishops were responsible for managing the storehouses that were established in Kirtland, Ohio, and the Mormon settlements around Independence, Missouri, where consecrated goods were stored and distributed to the needy. The storehouses were also operated as general mercantiles where excess consecrated goods were sold and the profits spent to cover church expenditures, including assistance to the poor, the personal living expenses of church leaders, the purchase of more land, and the construction of church buildings. The dual nature of the storehouses enhanced the complexity of the church's economic dealings.²⁷

For Ezekiel, owning land had been a means of independence: personal, political, and economic. Now nearly sixty, he found the notion of communal living contradictory to his concepts of freedom and individualism. He had no desire to turn all he had worked hard to earn over to a religious organization to which he did not belong. Ezekiel's refusal to join the church and submit himself to the governance of its leaders may have stemmed more from his refusal to give up his property than to disputes over doctrine. Julia, on the other hand, supported the Church's leaders, ardently embraced the new doctrines, practices, and policies of the church, and was determined to participate in effectuating them. Her desire to follow a man she believed to be a prophet and live the doctrines of

²⁷ James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1989), 87, 103, 169; Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 65-66, 70-71, 73, 75-77, 80-81, 93.

the church clashed with Ezekiel's equally strong determination to remain autonomous and placed a tremendous strain on their marriage. Julia was supported by her children and other church members on the matter, "owing" as Benjamin recalled, to Ezekiel's "continued unbelief, opposition to the truth, and intemperance."²⁸

Apparently Julia's experience in migrating to Kirtland and establishing a home for her family made her, Ezekiel and their children cognizant that she did not need to rely on Ezekiel to provide a living for her. Julia had been able to acquire a home and land. With the aid of her single adult daughters and adolescent sons she had sufficient employment to sustain the family without Ezekiel's help or consent. His four older sons may have lacked the power to control Ezekiel, but Julia, along with her single adult daughters and adolescent sons, had shown that together they could function without Ezekiel's aid. Ezekiel, Julia, and their children apparently recognized that regardless of any action Ezekiel might take they could and would remain in Kirtland.

Ezekiel's influence as the head of household was threatened by the new religion his wife and children had embraced. The more entrenched his family became in their new religion, the more marginalized he became as a patriarch within the family. It is unlikely that Ezekiel would have recognized this diminution of his status within the family without experiencing feelings of frustration, anger and resentment. He may have directed those frustrations at Julia and her new faith as the cause of his loss of power within the family. Perhaps in part because of the steady support of her children, Julia had demonstrated that in the conflict between her faith and marriage, her religiosity would take precedence.

²⁸ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 20, 99.

Just as Ezekiel's influence was diminishing within the family, Julia's power appears to have been on the rise. During the five years she lived in Kirtland, Julia heard and embraced doctrines she believed were revelations from God to Joseph Smith. Among them was a health code called the Word of Wisdom. Announced in February of 1833, the Word of Wisdom prohibited the use of tobacco and the use of "strong drinks." Considering the determination with which Julia had embraced her new faith, this particular doctrine may have sharpened the dynamics within Julia and Ezekiel's marriage. In an era of temperance movements, Ezekiel's heavy drinking had long been a point of contention within their marriage. The new religious prohibition of the intemperate use of strong drink may have now transformed, in Julia's mind, a distasteful habit into a matter of eternal salvation, driving the wedge in their relationship even deeper.²⁹ However, enforcement of the Word of Wisdom was erratic until the early twentieth century, and the degree of importance individual members placed on conforming to the doctrine varied.³⁰ Julia's son, Joel, wrote that he himself had been a heavy user of both tobacco and alcohol, but following Joseph Smith's declaration of the Word of Wisdom he had given them up entirely.³¹

Julia's strained relationship with Ezekiel was not the only heartache she would have to cope with during her years in Kirtland. As with most women of her day, caring for her children and grandchildren during periods of illness proved to be among the most agonizing experiences in Julia's life. David, her tall (6 feet 3 inch) son, twenty-three

²⁹ The Word of Wisdom is found in *D&C* 89. See "Word of Wisdom," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1584-85, <http://www.lib.byu.edu/Macmillan/> accessed April 2, 2008.

³⁰ Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 258-259.

³¹ Joel Hills Johnson, "A Sketch of the life of Joel Hills Johnson," Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

years old, became ill while burning brick for the construction of the temple. Her son Benjamin recalled, “Through his ambition in labors upon the yard, and in procuring wood with which to burn the brick, [he] overtaxed his strength, took severe cold, and commenced bleeding at the lungs. He lingered for a few weeks in quick consumption, and died” on October 30, 1833. Julia was heartbroken by the loss of David. She took comfort in the devotion he had shown to their new faith and his self-sacrificing contribution to building the temple, which gave a special poignant significance to each phase of its construction. Along with other family members, Julia watched as Joel, Seth, and son-in-law Lyman Sherman helped lay the cornerstones for the temple the following spring.³²

Antipathy between Mormon newcomers and “Old Settler” Missourians, sometimes referred to as the Missouri War, began in 1831 with sporadic acts of violence that were now escalating into widespread conflict.³³ Julia and her family’s commitment to the church placed them in danger. In May of 1834, word came that a group of Saints in Jackson County, Missouri, were being driven from their homes by armed mobs. An estimated 250 men and 10 women from Ohio volunteered to march westward to rescue their fellow members. Julia’s son, Seth, Delcina’s husband, Lyman Sherman, and Julia Ann’s husband, Almon Babbitt, were part of what became known as Zion’s Camp. In April of 1834 when the call for Zion’s Camp came, Lyman was in the Presidency of the Seventy Elders; Almon was one of the First Seventy Elders; and Joel was one of the Second Seventy Elders, within the leadership of the Church’s governing hierarchy.

³² Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 16.

³³ For greater insight into the Missouri conflict, see Alexander L. Baugh, “A Rare Account of the Haun’s Mill Massacre: the Reminiscence of Willard Gilbert Smith,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 7, no. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 2006): 165-171; Alexander L. Baugh, “Not Every Missourian was a Bad Guy: Hiram G. Parks’ 1839 Letter to James Sloan in Quincy, Illinois,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 163-172; Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989).

Benjamin, then fifteen, also wanted to go on the march to Missouri. Joseph Smith, however, would not allow him to join knowing that Ezekiel opposed Benjamin's participation in an action that could result in armed conflict.³⁴

While they were gone, Elder Jared Carter and several other elders of the church visited Julia's home. There they administered to Nancy, finally healing her of the effects of her broken hip joint. In family lore, from that time on Nancy was able to walk without the use of crutches. For Julia, Nancy's miraculous healing was an occasion of overwhelming joy and an attestation of the truthfulness of the gospel she had embraced. During that same summer, her son Joseph was baptized by Orson Hyde.³⁵

Zion's Camp failed to achieve its original objectives and on June 30, 1834, Joseph Smith disbanded the Camp when Missouri Governor Daniel Dunklin's promise for military support to reclaim their lands was broken. A few months later, Seth returned from his 1800-mile journey with Zion's Camp having barely survived a bout with cholera. Cholera strikes suddenly, violently, unpredictably, in epidemic proportions causing severe diarrhea, vomiting and muscle cramps. About seventy Camp members were afflicted, of whom twelve succumbed. Once Seth arrived home, on August 4, 1834, Julia cared for him until he had recovered enough to begin teaching again. Although still weak from his illness, Seth took a teaching position at a large school in Willoughby, a few miles outside Kirtland. In less than a year, Seth's failing health forced him to quit his teaching post and return home, where Julia cared for him until, as Benjamin

³⁴ Johnson, *Diary*, 2; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 17-20.

³⁵ Johnson, *Diary*, 2; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 17-20.

recounted, “after all our anxieties, prayers and tears, in the midst of his testimonies to us and blessings upon us he died February 19, 1835.”³⁶

Julia responded to her grief by turning to God for comfort and assurance. Years earlier in the midst of her grief over the loss of her infant son, Elmer, she had counseled her other young son, Benjamin, to turn to God in faith and prayer. Prayer, she assured him, was a necessity, for it was through prayer that God gave comfort to the human soul. As Benjamin recalled, “[m]y mother . . . early taught me faith in God and the necessity of prayer.” Now, with the passing of Seth, Julia gathered all of her children together at Delcina’s home to receive blessings from Patriarch Joseph Smith, Sr. Soon afterwards, seventeen-year-old Benjamin disregarded Ezekiel’s earlier objection and was baptized by Elder Lyman Johnson. In the summer of 1835, Almon Babbitt invited Benjamin, or “Bennie,” to join him on a return mission to New York to proselytize among their former neighbors in Pomfret. They started east that October.³⁷

Religion does not appear to have been a divisive issue in their marital relationships prior to Julia’s conversion. Both Julia and Ezekiel embraced the general doctrines of Christianity as ethical and just, without subscribing to the particular tenets of any one denomination. Julia’s attendance at various religious services on Sundays and holding Sabbath scripture readings in their home provided her a means for expressing her spiritual yearnings. They also met the couple’s mutual desire to inculcate in their children a shared moral philosophy, without imposing religiosity on Ezekiel. It was not just Julia’s conversion to a particular denomination, however, that fostered division between them. It was Mormonism’s increasingly all-encompassing reach into every

³⁶ Johnson, *Diary*, 2; Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 17-18; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 2-3.

³⁷ Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 7, 18-21; See “Patriarch,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1061-67, <http://www.lib.byu.edu/Macmillan/> accessed April 5, 2008.

aspect of life, including moving to be with the body of the church that made Ezekiel the odd man out within his own family.

Conversion to the church placed heavy demands on converts, in the form of both personal and financial sacrifices. Julia's devotion to her new faith and Ezekiel's disbelief and intemperance became irreconcilable sources of conflict within the marriage and combined to make life together seem unbearable. As Julia's efforts to inculcate the doctrines and practices of her new faith in her children were increasingly successful, their commitment to the church and its doctrines deepened, and so, too, did the divide between Ezekiel and his family. Julia's children held their father, not their mother, responsible for their marital conflict and separation. For them it was not Julia's conversion, but Ezekiel's refusal to convert that was the source of family conflict.³⁸

After thirty-four years of marriage the decision to separate was an agonizing one for Julia and Ezekiel. Their son Joseph remembered the anguish that the thought of separation gave his parents.³⁹ Julia was fifty-two and Ezekiel sixty-three years old. An emotional bond still apparently existed between them, but Julia's resolve to conform her life and the lives of her children to the doctrines and practices of Mormonism ultimately made living with Ezekiel seem untenable. Julia and Ezekiel were no longer unified in their life's goals or in raising their children. By the summer of 1835, Julia came to the difficult and painful decision that it would be best to separate. Ezekiel consented to her request and purchased a home in Mentor, three miles to the northeast.⁴⁰

³⁸ Johnson, *Diary*, 3; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 15, 20.

³⁹ Johnson Papers, Diaries & Journal, box 1, folder 6, page 3.

⁴⁰ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 20; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 3.

It is unknown to what extent Ezekiel continued to provide support for Julia and the children, but he remained close to his family, never living very far from them. His daughters took turns keeping house for him, and his younger children frequently stayed with him. Until his death in 1847, Ezekiel continued to live within the Church's strong sphere of influence. In Mentor, Ezekiel became privy to the plans laid by those opposed to the church, who intended to inflict harm on the church institutionally and on individual Latter-day Saints. Ezekiel passed this information on to his son, Benjamin. Ezekiel's actions may have been motivated more by a desire to protect his family than to protect the church as an institution or its leaders. Despite Ezekiel's removal to Mentor, Joseph Smith was well-acquainted with Ezekiel and on occasion turned to him for financial assistance.⁴¹

Family troubles persisted. In rather graphic detail Benjamin recorded that within a few months of Julia's separation from Ezekiel their twenty-two-year-old daughter, Susan, was "suddenly taken ill, vomiting blood." Physicians were called in and every possible treatment used, "but to no avail. She lingered but a few days and died." Before dying Susan "called each of us to her bed, bore to us her testimony of the truth of the gospel, told us to be faithful to its trusts, bade us farewell, and fell asleep March 16, 1836." Susan's funeral was held at the schoolhouse amidst a large gathering that included Joseph Smith and his counselor, Sidney Rigdon, who gave the eulogy.⁴² For many early converts separated from family and former friends and neighbors, funerals and mourning together may have had greater significance as a means of providing communal support. This may explain, in part, the more elaborate communal nature of the

⁴¹ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 26; Johnson Papers, Lorenzo Snow to Joseph Ellis Johnson, n.d., box 4, folder 22.

⁴² Johnson, *Life's Review*, 17-18, 22, 26; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 2, 189-190.

funeral services being held as a public event at the schoolhouse, instead of in Julia's home.⁴³

Caring for the sick was not only physically challenging and emotionally draining, but it also brought economic hardships. Julia's economic resources were strained by the loss of Susan and the medical expenses incurred in treating her. To supplement her income Julia decided to rent the lower story of her home to Brother M.C. Davis. Julia allowed Davis, a gunsmith, to operate a gunsmith shop out of her home "for the manufacture of defensive weapons for the use of the people."⁴⁴

One incident that illustrates the gulf that separated Ezekiel and Julia occurred in the spring of 1836, when an epidemic of measles and whooping cough spread through Kirtland. When their youngest child, Amos, then eight, became ill, Ezekiel sent for two professors from Willoughby Medical College to examine him. Julia sent for the church elders. As Benjamin later recalled, after the doctors left, Julia explained to the elders and family members present that the doctors "had given no hope but had left [a] vial of medicine." Julia handed the vial to Elder Bosley, "who threw it out of the window." Then he and the other elders with him administered to Amos, "commanding him to be made whole." Later, when the physicians returned "they looked with surprise to see so great a change, and were taking great credit to themselves, but when told their medicine was thrown out of the window, and that [Amos] had been healed by the power of God they were greatly chagrined, but made no attempt to deny it."⁴⁵

⁴³ Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life 1790-1840* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 98-104.

⁴⁴ Johnson, Excerpts, 5; Joel H. Johnson, *Voice from the Mountain From the Mountains: Being a Testimony of the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as Revealed by the Lord to Joseph Smith, Jr.* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881), 22; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 24.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 23-24.

Julia's joy over Amos's recovery was short-lived. By that fall her eldest daughter Nancy was ailing. Nancy died of consumption on October 30, 1836, exactly three years to the day following David's death. Joseph recalled his sister being buried alongside her three siblings in "the little orchard on the hill" above Julia's home.⁴⁶ One month later, Julia's infant grandson, whom Julia Ann had named after her brother David, died. During the five years she lived in Kirtland, Julia had buried four of her children and one grandchild.⁴⁷ These were devastating blows for a family as close-knit as the Johnsons. Benjamin wrote how a "wave of sorrow and bereavement . . . burst upon us . . . as a family [were we] all to die of the same disease — consumption."

Julia's children expressed their continuing sense of loss by naming their children after their deceased siblings. Eventually seven of Julia's grandsons were named after David; two for Seth, four granddaughters were named after Susan, and five for Nancy. For decades after, their siblings continued to visit their grave sites and write poems in their honor. Julia's son Joseph memorialized his siblings in one such poem, "The Graves of My Kindred," written fifteen years later when he returned to Kirtland to visit their graves.⁴⁸

It is not difficult to explain this cluster of deaths in the family. Diseases that would have burned themselves out in smaller farm communities often reached epidemic proportions in densely-populated towns such as Kirtland, where those who lived and often did sedentary work in the same crowded, poorly-ventilated living quarters were more likely to become ill. These were exactly the kinds of conditions Julia and her

⁴⁶ Johnson Papers, Diaries & Journal, box 1, folder 6, page 3; Johnson, *Diary*, 165.

⁴⁷ Johnson, *Autobiography*, 3; Almon Whiting Babbitt –Julia Ann Johnson family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=9231> [accessed 2 October 2003].

⁴⁸ Johnson, *Jottings*, xv-xvi.

family found themselves living in after leaving their farm in Pomfret for the populous environment of Kirtland. During Julia's years in Kirtland the church expanded from its original six members to over three thousand, 7 percent of whom lived in Kirtland. At the time Julia first arrived, Mormons comprised less than one-third the population, but by 1837-1838 they had attained parity with non-Mormons when the population peaked at 3,230, of whom 2,000 were early converts.⁴⁹

For Julia, the loss of her children was heart-wrenching. Once again, she responded to her heartaches by clinging to the doctrines of her new faith and the sustaining support of her surviving children. A week after Susan's death, Julia, along with her family, attended the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, on Sunday, March 27, 1836. Two weeks later, on April 9, 1836, Julia arranged for her minor sons, George and William, to be baptized by Samuel Bent and confirmed by Patriarch Joseph Smith, Sr.⁵⁰ Patriarch Smith then gave them patriarchal blessings, a source of comfort and direction for Julia. The following spring, Julia again gathered her family together at her daughter Delcina's home to receive blessings from that same Patriarch.⁵¹

With the deaths of Susan and Nancy, Julia was no longer able to maintain her manufacturing business. She had to find another way to help support her family, which consisted of her single adult sons, Joseph and Benjamin, and her younger children, Mary, George, William, Esther and Amos, from six to thirteen years of age. Julia sold her home in town and moved to a farm about a mile outside Kirtland. In the summer of 1837, she purchased two adjoining parcels of land in Kirtland. Seven months later she sold the two

⁴⁹ Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 140; Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 73; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 22; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 27-31.

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Diary*, 2.

⁵¹ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 26; Johnson, *Diary*, 16-20, 165.

as one unit for a 25 percent profit.⁵² In the midst of all this, Julia's son Benjamin returned to Julia's home in the summer of 1837, in failing health and fully persuaded that he was about to die of consumption.⁵³ Not long after, Julia left Kirtland with the body of the Church. The move would splinter the family.

⁵² Johnson, *Life's Review*, 27; Backman, *Profile*, 40, 126, 148.

⁵³ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 21, 27-31.

CHAPTER 4

ROYAL FAMILY

ILLINOIS, 1838-1846

When Joseph heard of this *honor* conferred upon us by our neighbors, he said the name was and should be a reality; that we were a royal family.

Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review*

Julia's ambition to forge a bond between herself and her children with their new religion challenged her family's personal safety and their ability to sustain their family unity. The risks to herself and her family's security would increase, yet Julia would remain resolute in her objective despite the cost to herself and her family. She was determined to adhere to the Church's doctrines and to continue living among her fellow converts wherever that might be and regardless of the emotional or physical cost.

Prejudice and nativism were commonplace in nineteenth-century society in the United States. Kirtland was only one of many communities to experience factional strife as religious, ethnic, and political animosity and violence sharply divided many communities. Social and factional conflict was especially commonplace along the frontier as people came together from various regions of the country. And, while most early converts and non-Mormons who settled in Kirtland before 1839 shared common

social origins, they did not mix easily with the other settlers of the Ohio city in the 1830s.¹

With the increasing size of the congregations of converts in Ohio and Missouri, a religiously based society began to emerge as Latter-day Saints nurtured their own social, educational, and charitable organizations.² The growth and cohesion of Latter-day Saints were not the only factors that kindled the hostility of anti-Mormons. As early as 1833, Mormons had to guard Joseph Smith and their temple against attack. In a depressed economy, bank failures divided church members and led to apostasy and failure in Kirtland during the later part of the 1830s. As the nation experienced serious problems due to its boom and bust economy, church leaders sought to stimulate the local economy and liquefy church assets by organizing the Kirtland Safety Society, of which Julia's son Joel and son-in-law Lyman were members. When the state government rejected their application for a bank charter, they transformed the organization into an anti-banking society. The Society's operations led to a brief economic boom that went bust within a few weeks as the national financial panic of 1837 closed hundreds of banks throughout the United States.³

When the economic crash came, many church members lost money and property, including the organizers of the Society who were among those to suffer most. Those members who believed a prophet should be infallible in temporal as well as spiritual matters came to see the failure of the Society as a sign that Joseph Smith was a fallen

¹ Mark R. Grandstaff and Milton V. Backman, Jr., "The Social Origins of the Kirtland Mormons," *BYU Studies* 30, no. 2 (1990): 49-50.

² Jill Mulvay Derr, Kenneth Godfrey, and Audrey M. Godfrey, *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900*, (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1982), 24, 43.

³ Marvin A. Hill, C. Keith Rooker and Larry T. Wimmer, *Kirtland Economy Revisited: A Market Critique of Sectarian Economics* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1977).

prophet. Internal strife and apostasy were rampant in Kirtland as an estimated 10 to 15 percent of converts withdrew their membership. Many members bemoaned the internal dissension, particularly among prominent members within the church leadership. In their anger, apostates united with anti-Mormons in abusing and threatening church leaders and their supporters. In an effort to avert mob violence, several church leaders, including Joseph Smith, left Kirtland for the Latter-day Saint communities in Missouri. In an atmosphere of intensifying persecution and apostasy, those members who remained devoted to Joseph Smith and the church reluctantly prepared to leave Kirtland.⁴

In the spring of 1838, Julia joined with other Latter-day Saints in what became known as Kirtland Camp as they made preparations for their departure from Kirtland.⁵ On March 6, 1838, they wrote a constitution, or set of bylaws, outlining the rules and organizational structure by which Kirtland Camp would function. Known as the Kirtland Constitution, its signatories accepted responsibility for the enforcement of the Camp's rules within their respective families. They further consented to pay their share of the expenses for the journey, which were divided proportionately. As the head of an eight-member family, Julia was one of only three women, out of a total of 177 heads of households, to sign the Kirtland Camp Constitution.

At this point Julia's greatest concern was to obtain "an outfit, for the journey." In addition to the money she obtained from the sale of her property, Julia decided to ship much of her valuable furniture and other goods up the Missouri River to Richmond, Missouri, for sale. Nothing is mentioned in family records of Ezekiel contributing

⁴ Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review: Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Johnson* (Independence, Missouri: Zions Printing and Publishing Co., 1947), 27-31; James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1989), 69.

⁵ Milton V. Backman, Jr., *A Profile of Latter-day Saints of Kirtland, Ohio and Members of Zion's Camp 1830-1839: Vital Statistics and Sources* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1982), 40, 126, 148.

financial or material aid. By July 4, 1838, she had the teams and wagons and supplies necessary to transport her and her family to Missouri. On July 6, with their livestock driven alongside, Julia and her children joined the other members of Kirtland Camp as they set out on their journey south with “2 tents, 59 wagons, 97 horses, 22 oxen, 69 cows, and 1 bull.”⁶ Before leaving Kirtland, Julia’s son-in-law Lyman, now a member of the High Council, set fire to the church’s printing office, destroying it to prevent their enemies from using it to publish more incendiary propaganda against the church and its members.⁷ Ezekiel and daughter Almera remained in Mentor where Almera was experiencing marital problems with a man whom Benjamin described as being unworthy of her.⁸

Poor road conditions and a lack of money delayed the camp’s progress as they made their way across Ohio in what Julia’s son George, then age 15, described as a “very hard and tedious” journey. Many Camp members suffered for the want of food and medicine. When the Camp finally reached Dayton, Ohio, camp members decided to stop for a few weeks to give the ailing an opportunity to recuperate. Over the next few weeks some of the men found jobs working on the construction of the National Turnpike, while other members obtained work elsewhere to earn desperately needed funds to finance the remainder of their trip. Julia dispatched her twenty-year-old son Benjamin to pay a visit to his aunt and uncle. Julia’s younger sister, Nancy Hills Taft, was living with her family in nearby Cincinnati, Ohio, and her older brother Joel was living across the river with his

⁶ Joseph Ellis Johnson, “Autobiographical Sketch” MS 110, box 1, folder 6 ; Joel H. Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains: Being a Testimony of the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as Revealed by the Lord to Joseph Smith, Jr.* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881), 23; George Washington Johnson, *Diary of George W. Johnson, 1823-1893* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1940) 2; Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 29-35, 72.

⁷ While Benjamin states that Lyman burned the church printing office before leaving Kirtland, other Latter-day Saints believed the fire was set by enemies of the church who had committed arson at other church sites (Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 29-30).

⁸ Benjamin does not give the name of the man to whom Almera was married nor any other information regarding the marriage. No other family members make reference to Almera being married at this time (Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 32, 72).

family in Newport, Kentucky. Julia's brother Joel then traveled to Dayton to see Julia and the family. He brought with him additional supplies to assist her. Julia returned with Joel to spend time visiting family members in Cincinnati and Newport. Then she and Benjamin rejoined the camp in Dayton.⁹

George recalled that when Julia and the family finally left Dayton they received word that a number of people living in the nearby town of Mansfield were threatening to attack the camp, declaring that the Mormons would not "pass through Mansfield alive." As the camp approached Mansfield, they formed a close procession with Julia and the other women driving the teams. The men, armed with rifles and handguns, walked alongside. Two horsemen from Mansfield rode down the length of their columns to assess the camp's strength, and believing them too strong to confront, allowed them to pass unmolested.¹⁰

Discouragement, illness, and death took their toll on camp members. By the time they reached Springfield, Illinois, their numbers had been reduced by half, from an original 515 to 260. A majority of camp members decided to remain in Springfield because they were either too ill to go on or to provide care for those who were sick. Julia remained in Springfield with her older sons in order to care for those who were too ill to travel.¹¹

A small number of camp members, including Julia's son Benjamin, made the final leg of the 866-mile trek to Far West, Missouri, where they were met by Joseph Smith on October 2, 1838. In Far West, Benjamin joined his sisters Delcina and Julia Ann, who

⁹ Johnson, *Autobiography*, iii; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 33; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13, 23; Johnson, *Diary*, 3.

¹⁰ Johnson, *Diary*, 3.

¹¹ Johnson, *Autobiography*, 3; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 33-34; Johnson, *Diary*, 3-4; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 23-25.

were living in a wooded area between Diahman and Far West. Delcina, Lyman, and their children, as well as Julia Ann and Almon, had gone to Far West ahead of Julia and the rest of the family. Joseph Smith then asked Benjamin and other Camp members to go to Diahman, Missouri, to reinforce the church members who were living there and facing the threat of an attack from anti-Mormons.¹² When Benjamin arrived he found himself in the midst of even greater conflict than that experienced in Ohio. For months a civil war had been raging in the region between Mormons and local settlers that would later result in the departure of the Mormon for Illinois.¹³

Meanwhile, back in Springfield, Julia was caring for the sick while her son Joseph took a job as a carpenter and as the “Yankee School Master.”¹⁴ Church leaders called on Julia’s son Joel to preside over what was referred to as the Springfield Detachment.¹⁵ Only three months later, on January 8, 1839, Joel and his family left Springfield and went to Carthage, Hancock County, Illinois, on a proselytizing mission. Once Joel reached the area around Carthage, he began to baptize new converts. Three months later, on April 17, 1839, he organized the Crooked Creek branch. A year later, Joel and his family moved north from Carthage to Crooked Creek.¹⁶

Among those Julia was caring for in Springfield were Samuel Hale and his wife. When they died Julia took their ten-year old-daughter, Mary Ann, into her care and raised

¹² Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 35-36; Diahman, Missouri, is located along the Grand River in Davies County. Diahman, or Di-Ahman, was the vernacular name used for the settlement of Adam-Ondi-Ahman designated by Joseph Smith for settlement in May of 1838 (Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 32-58). For more in-depth analysis of this episode, see Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830-1838* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1983).

¹³ Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 42-47.

¹⁴ Papers of Joseph Ellis Johnson, 1817-1882, box 1, folder 6, Western Americana Manuscripts, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁵ Johnson, *Diary*, 2-4; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 23-25; Johnson, *Journal*, 6-7.

¹⁶ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 23-25; Johnson, *Journal*, 6-7.

her with great love and kindness. She incorporated Mary Ann fully into the family unit. Julia openly embraced new individuals into her family whether through marriage or adoption. From the time Julia had left Massachusetts for Vermont, until her daughters reached adulthood, she had lacked the kind of intimate adult female family relationships that existed in the extended family support system she had known as a child. She had no mother, mother-in-law, sisters or sisters-in-law from whom she could learn, share labors and child care with, socialize with, or turn to for aid and support. By lovingly receiving Mary Ann and her children's spouses into her family Julia began to establish this kind of extended kinship network within her own family.¹⁷

It is unknown whether Julia was aware of it at the time or not, but from November of 1838 through January of 1839 Benjamin was being held captive by anti-Mormon forces under brutal conditions as a suspected Danite. The origins of the Danites are uncertain. They were, however, the most militant defenders of the Missouri Latter-day Saints. Danites frequently conducted counter raids against anti-Mormons, uncovering weapons caches, destroying property, driving their "opposers" from their farms, and taking provisions, which they then distributed among Mormons around Far West. Benjamin escaped his captors with the assistance of General Wilson and made his way back to his sisters Julia Ann and Delcina, who were caring for Arthur Millikan, the husband of Joseph Smith's sister, Lucy. Arthur had been wounded in the Crooked River

¹⁷ Johnson, *Autobiography*, 3; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 33-34, 62-63; Johnson, *Diary*, 3-4; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 23-25. Mary Ann's adoption was not legally formalized.

fight.¹⁸ By the time Benjamin arrived Arthur had recovered enough to travel together so they made their way back to Far West.¹⁹

Delcina's husband Lyman had gone to Richmond, Missouri, to see Joseph Smith and other church leaders held in the Richmond jail.²⁰ Shortly after Benjamin and Arthur's departure, Lyman returned home ill; within days Delcina was left a widow with six children ages three months to eight years of age.²¹ With help from Benjamin, Almon, and Julia Ann, Delcina took her children across the river to Quincy, Illinois.²² In Quincy Delcina met with kindness from the locals and decided to remain there until another gathering place was designated. Delcina and the rest would not have long to wait. After seeing Delcina and her family safely settled, Benjamin rejoined Julia in Springfield where he soon found work with a local wholesaler and banker. Julia Ann and Almon left for another mission to the East.²³

Within a month word came that Joseph Smith had designated a new gathering place in Commerce, Illinois. Julia's son, Joseph, overtaken with excitement, took a team

¹⁸ A Methodist minister in charge of a company of Caldwell County militia, Captain Samuel Bogarty began an attack on Latter-day Saint settlers in their homes, on October 24, 1838, ordering them to leave Missouri and in the process took three men prisoner. When Captain David W. Patten, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve and head of another detachment of state militia, heard what was happening he marched on Bogarty's camp at Crooked River to rescue the prisoners. A battle ensued, and Bogarty's men were routed with one killed and at least five wounded. The Mormons lost two men and their non-Mormon guide. Four days later a peace treaty was made with militia leaders. Two days later 250 militia men attacked a small Mormon settlement on Shoal Creek hacking to death or shooting young and old alike, see Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 136-138; Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 366; Alexander L. Baugh, "The Battle Between Mormons and Missouri Militia at Crooked River," *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Missouri* (Provo, Utah: Dept. of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1994): 85-103.

¹⁹ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 52-53.

²⁰ Joseph Smith and several other church leaders were taken by the state militia in Far West then transported to Richmond, Missouri, where they were turned over to civil authority to await trial on charges of treason, murder, arson, burglary, larceny, theft and stealing. Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 135, 140-142.

²¹ It is unclear exactly what day Lyman died, but it was sometime around the end of January or early February, 1839. For more on Lyman R. Sherman, see Lyndon W. Cook, "Lyman Sherman — Man of God, Would-Be Apostle," *Brigham Young University Studies* 19:1 (Fall 1978), 121-124.

²² March 1839 (Johnson, *Life's Review*, 57).

²³ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 66.

of horses and traveled to Commerce.²⁴ When Benjamin heard the news, he also left to visit the new gathering place in the swampy lands along the Mississippi. Once there Benjamin found many members suffering from a malaria epidemic. Soon after his arrival Joseph fell ill, although not with malaria. Joel went to Commerce to get Joseph and took him to his home in nearby Carthage, Illinois to recuperate.²⁵ Benjamin remained in Commerce to help care for the sick and soon found himself infected with the disease.²⁶

Back in Springfield, Julia's daughter, Mary, became ill, and then Julia contracted typhoid fever along with her son George. George later recalled that with little means to sustain themselves and obtain medicine, they "had a very hard time."²⁷ Julia wrote to Benjamin, asking him to return to Springfield to help them. Still suffering from the effects of malaria, Benjamin returned only to find that Julia and his siblings were recovering. All of them were still very weak, but Benjamin, now exhausted by his journey, required care from them.²⁸ When Joseph was well enough to travel, Joel accompanied his homesick brother back to Julia in Springfield where she and Joseph embraced in a tearful reunion after their first separation.²⁹ This round of illness strained Julia's remaining resources, constraining her to keep the family in Springfield working until they had sufficient means to make the journey to Commerce, which by then had

²⁴ In light of the events in Kirtland, Julia's son Joseph found the idea of establishing a new Zion in a place called "Commerce" ironic (Johnson, *Autobiography*, 4).

²⁵ Joel moved with his family to Carthage in January 1839 and remained there until February 1840 when he settled at Crooked Creek, Illinois (Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 23-24).

²⁶ Benjamin left Springfield for Commerce at the end of July 1839 (Johnson, *Life's Review*, 60-63).

²⁷ Johnson, *Diary*, 3-4.

²⁸ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 59-60, 63.

²⁹ Back in Springfield, Joseph began making medicines again and returned to teaching. His return to teaching was less than enthusiastic because it was not his favorite means of earning of living (Johnson, *Autobiography*, 4).

been renamed Nauvoo. It would take another year before the family was ready to travel to Nauvoo.

In the spring of 1840, when Julia started her family westward again, the resettlement of Nauvoo was well underway and a new temple was under construction. Julia was now accompanied by her children Joseph, Mary, George, William, Amos, and Mary Ann Hale. By February of 1840, Benjamin had recovered enough from his bout with malaria to embark on another mission, this time to the eastern states and Canada. Esther had returned to Kirtland with Julia Ann and Almon to see her father. Julia Ann and Almon had decided to settle in Kirtland near Almon's parents following their mission to the East and Canada.³⁰

Julia stopped twenty miles southeast of Nauvoo in a place called Perkins Settlement, an area along Crooked Creek. Joel had purchased a sawmill and piece of land along the west branch of Crooked Creek, eight miles outside Perkins Settlement, in February of 1840.³¹ The Perkinses were Southern converts to the Church, and a small branch of the church had already been established in the area. Julia decided to settle her family here in the fertile prairie well inland from the mosquito-infested lowlands of Nauvoo. Here she found readily available land in beautiful surroundings with timber for building, fertile soil for farming, and several nearby creeks supplying water and energy for several saw and grist mill operations. Within five years of Julia's arrival, it had

³⁰ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 66, 72.

³¹ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 24; Johnson, *Autobiography*, 4-6; Johnson, *Diary*, 4.

become the third largest town in Hancock County with a population around six hundred residents.³²

Julia stayed with Joel and Annie while her son Joseph built a home for her and the family. Settling along Crooked Creek rather than in Nauvoo offered Julia and her family two distinct advantages. Her family had been scattered throughout the Midwest and eastern states following their departure from Kirtland. In Perkins settlement, now renamed Ramus, Julia found a place where she could begin gathering her family together again, while simultaneously helping to establish an outlying stronghold for the Church.³³ Crooked Creek offered land and economic opportunity for her large and growing family and a better opportunity for them to participate in the local politics of a smaller community. A smaller subdivision of the Church would also afford them greater opportunities to participate in their religion's hierarchy of leadership.

As Julia had hoped, the various paths taken by her family following their exodus from Kirtland began to merge again in the Crooked Creek-Nauvoo region. Delcina moved her family from Quincy to Nauvoo. On his way back from a mission in Canada and Pennsylvania, Benjamin had stopped in Kirtland where he had met and married Melissa Bloomfield LeBaron.³⁴ Almon and Julia Ann sold their property in Kirtland, as

³² For more on Perkins settlement, a detailed history of the region, and the role of the Johnson family in Macedonia, see Susan Sessions Rugh, *Our Common Country: Family Farming, Culture and Community in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), chap. 2.

³³ Rugh, *Our Common Country*, 35.

³⁴ Melissa was the adopted daughter of David and Lydia Batchelor LeBaron. Benjamin and Melissa married on Christmas Day at Joseph Smith's former Kirtland residence with Almon officiating. Almon had been set apart as president of the Kirtland stake, but soon came under condemnation from church authorities for trying to reestablish Kirtland as a place of gathering in competition with Nauvoo. Almon was deeply hurt by the rebuke. Trying to alleviate the strain, Benjamin and Melissa invited Almon and Julia Ann to accompany them to Rochester where Melissa was to collect her inheritance. They arrived to find that much of her inheritance had been squandered; taking what was left, they returned to Kirtland. By the summer of 1842 it was apparent that Kirtland was in decline, and they began preparing to leave for Illinois (Johnson, *Life's Review*, 70-73, 85-93). David and Lydia LeBaron's son David later married Julia's daughter Esther.

did Benjamin and Melissa, and together they moved to Ramus accompanied by Ezekiel, Esther, and Almera (who had divorced her husband), and the LeBarons.³⁵

The anticipated joy of having her family settled again was dampened that fall when Annie suddenly fell ill with what Joel described as a nervous fever and chills. Joel and Annie's children also became ill, exhibiting the same symptoms. Their children recovered, but after five weeks of suffering Annie died on September 11, 1840, leaving Joel with six young children. Annie's death was another heartbreaking loss for Julia and her family.³⁶ Joel recalled that during her final days Annie's "mind was at rest about her future state but said that she should not live. Her greatest anxiety was about her friends that had not received the Gospel, for which she almost constantly prayed." As he did throughout his life, Joel turned to poetry to express his emotions, writing several poems honoring Annie and conveying his grief at losing her.³⁷

Julia's family began to regroup in the Nauvoo-Crooked Creek area and quickly established themselves prominently within the community and Church. Julia's sons, Joel, Joseph and Benjamin, maintained lands and businesses, and held influential political positions.³⁸ Joseph became the town's school master and postmaster and operated a brick making business and a cooper shop. Benjamin and his brother-in-law, Almon, went into the mercantile business. In 1843 Almon completed law school and was elected to the Illinois legislature. Julia's son-in-law, David LeBaron, was appointed assessor and tax

³⁵ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 91-92. Once in Ramus, Benjamin went straight to Joseph Smith and successfully initiated a reconciliation between Almon and Joseph Smith.

³⁶ Guy Bishop, Vincent Lacey and Richard Nixon, "Death at Mormon Nauvoo, 1843-1845," *Western Illinois Regional Studies* 9:2 (Fall 1986): 70-83.

³⁷ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 25-26.

³⁸ In March 1843 Illinois issued a charter renaming Ramus as Macedonia (Rugh, *Our Common Country*, 155).

collector. Joseph became the town treasurer, and both he and Benjamin served as town trustees.³⁹

Julia's determination to forge a bond between her, her children, and their faith was succeeding as all of her children became increasingly involved in their religion. In the seven years she spent in Illinois (1840-1847), Julia watched her grown children become established in positions of influence in the Church.⁴⁰ Julia's sons and son-in-law also quickly attained leading positions within the Church hierarchy. Joel was called to be the stake president for the Crooked Creek branch. Joseph was called as stake clerk and private secretary to Patriarch John Smith. Joseph Smith assigned Benjamin the responsibility for handling the Church's properties in town. Almon gave Benjamin a power of attorney to act for him in all business matters, since he was gone much of the time on assignments for church leaders.⁴¹

Julia's family expanded as her children married and twenty-three more grandchildren were born. As her younger children matured they had assumed much of the work load, placing less of a demand on Julia's time and resources, and enabling her to spend time in both Nauvoo and Macedonia. By the mid-1840s the Johnsons were so numerous and influential that locals dubbed them the "Royal Family."⁴²

During the years in Illinois, Julia and her family struggled to grasp the full meaning of and the implications associated with new doctrinal concepts. The most

³⁹ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 24-25, 27-30; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 92-93; Johnson, *Autobiography*, box 1, folder 6, 4-6; Johnson, *Diary*, 4-5; Rugh, *Our Common Country*, 215n36.

⁴⁰ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 88-95; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 26-27; Johnson, *Diary*, 4-5.

⁴¹ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 24-25, 27-30; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 92-93; Johnson, *Autobiography*, box 1, folder 6, 4-6; Johnson, *Diary*, 4-5; Rugh, *Our Common Country*, 215n36.

⁴² Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review: Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Johnson* (Independence, Missouri: Zions Printing and Publishing Co., 1947), 93. The Johnson and Perkins families comprised 10 percent of the branch population and were "the backbone" of the community (Rugh, *Our Common Country*, 34-35, 214n26).

complex and provocative of these doctrines was the plurality of wives.⁴³ The first known experience with this doctrine for the Johnson family came with Joseph Smith's proposal to marry Almera. In April of 1843, Joseph Smith and several church apostles held a meeting in Macedonia. Early that Sunday morning Joseph Smith, who was staying in Benjamin's home, invited Benjamin to join him for a walk to a wooded area nearby. While they were seated on a log, Joseph Smith told Benjamin of the revelation on plural or patriarchal marriage. Joseph told Benjamin that the Lord required him to take other wives, and he wanted Almera to be one of those wives. He then asked Benjamin to speak with her on the matter. Benjamin recalled that, "if a thunderbolt had fallen at my feet I could hardly have been more shocked or amazed." Benjamin found himself deeply torn between his belief in Joseph Smith as a prophet and his request for Benjamin to accept and persuade his sister to embrace a doctrine that ran counter to all his social and religious training. Benjamin recalled thinking, "How dark it all looks to me. But I must do it." Yet, before he went to Almera he told Joseph Smith that, "if ever I know you do this to degrade my sister I will kill you, as the Lord lives."⁴⁴

This episode gives a glimpse into the loyalty of Julia's children to the church. Benjamin loved Joseph Smith, the man he revered as a prophet of God. Benjamin had shown his willingness to sacrifice everything, even his life if necessary, for Joseph Smith and for the Church. Yet he vowed to kill the man he loved as a prophet to defend the sister he loved even more. Her love and respect were so valuable to him that he trembled before her, his knees shaking in dread that by taking this action he might forfeit her affection. Almera's faith was also tested. She accepted the new doctrine as true, but did

⁴³ For more on the plural marriage system, see Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

⁴⁴ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 94-95.

not readily accede to Joseph Smith's proposal. Only after months of inner contemplation and visits with Louisa Beaman, a plural wife of Joseph Smith, did Almera decide to accept his proposal. On August 1, 1843, Julia and her family gathered in Delcina's home in Nauvoo where Hyrum Smith officiated in the marriage of Almera and Joseph Smith.⁴⁵

Ezekiel divided his time between Nauvoo (where he worked as a carpenter), and in Ramus, renamed Macedonia in 1843. His daughters continued to take turns keeping house for him and for a time Julia enjoyed a peaceful, happy, stable existence. Those sentiments are reflected in a poem George presented Julia one year when the family gathered to celebrate her birthday. It was simply titled, "Mother's Birthday."

Dear Mother we are happy to meet here again
Neath the old cottage roof where so oft we have been
In pleasure and joy may the time pass away
And may it be to you a happy birthday

We have thrown away care a few moments to come
Our kindred to meet in the old cottage home
Then let us have joy while together we stay
May happiness reign on our Mothers birthday

May pleasure and happiness fill every heart
And each in the joy of the evening take part
In the years that may come tho- we've wandered away
May each one remember our Mother's birthday.⁴⁶

Circumstances began to change by the mid-1840s as fears and tensions between church members and anti-Mormons mounted.⁴⁷ Yet, despite the increasing tensions

⁴⁵ For more on the marriage of Louisa Beaman and Joseph Smith, see, Leonard, 345. Todd Compton erroneously stated *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1996) that Delcina entered into a plural marriage with Joseph Smith sometime around 1840, perhaps because Louisa and Delcina shared a home and financial support provided them by the church. Following the death of Joseph Smith, Almera taught school in Nauvoo where she met and married widower Reuben Barton on November 16, 1845; Reuben Barton—Almera Woodward Johnson family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>. <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=1857363> [accessed 2 October 2003; See also Johnson Family (Arizona Branch), comp., *Descendants of Benjamin Franklin Johnson* (Mesa, Arizona: Lofgren Printing Co., 1980), 83-85; and Johnson, *Life's Review*, 94.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Diary*, 47, Poem is undated, but appears to have been written around 1842-1843.

Julia's children remained committed to their faith as they matured and established families of their own in Illinois. On April 14, 1844, George married Marie Jane Johnston, a convert from Tennessee.⁴⁸ Then on the night of June 16, 1844, Julia's sons, in company with other men from Macedonia, made their way to Nauvoo to defend the city after hearing that it was going to be attacked.⁴⁹ When they felt Nauvoo was secure, they returned to Macedonia to protect it from any potential assault. On June 25, 1844, Joseph traveled to Carthage, Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and other church leaders were held in the jail on charges related to the destruction of a printing press in Nauvoo. He later recalled that as he was returning home to Macedonia a mob of armed men took him prisoner for a few days, releasing him with the warning to leave Illinois immediately or be killed.⁵⁰

When word came of the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Julia and her family were heartbroken. Almera, wed to Joseph Smith for only ten months, was now widowed. Benjamin later wrote, "To attempt to delineate the feelings of woe and unutterable sorrow that swelled every heart too full for tears, I need not attempt. I stood up, dazed with grief, could groan but could not weep. The fountain of tears was dry!" His only thought was, "Oh God! what will thy orphan church and people now do!"⁵¹ The Mormons in Macedonia in Nauvoo feared for the safety, but year-long lull in the conflict followed the assassinations.

⁴⁷ John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995); Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise*, (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2002); For a more extensive analysis with bibliographical references on Mormon-Anti-Mormon conflict see Newell G. Bringhurst and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2004).

⁴⁸ George Washington Johnson –Maria Jane Johnston family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=73380> [accessed 2 October 2003].

⁴⁹ Johnson, *Diary*, 4; Johnson, *Life's Review*, 101-102.

⁵⁰ Joseph had previously been confronted by a mob and warned to leave Macedonia. Following this encounter he moved his family to Nauvoo, where he sold medicine and confections and ran the post office (Johnson, *Autobiography*, 6).

⁵¹ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 102, 103-109, 115.

The following autumn, Anti-Mormons (by now a formal political organization) carried out sporadic raids against Latter-day Saints living in the more vulnerable outlying settlements around Nauvoo. Joel recalled that “In September 1845 they commenced burning houses and other buildings and destroying property and driving the Saints from their homes with a full determination to drive the whole society, which they succeeded to accomplish in the spring of 1846.”⁵² External persecution and internal strife once again became a source of disruption for Julia and her family as they responded to the threats of violence against them. Benjamin’s property in Macedonia was ransacked in a search for cached weapons, and when none were found, authorities issued a writ for Benjamin’s arrest as a fugitive from Missouri. Believing their real intent was to kill him, Benjamin went into hiding in the woods to avoid capture. Family and friends gave him food and other provisions until the immediate threat subsided. Then Benjamin returned to his home and prepared to move his family to Nauvoo.⁵³

By October of 1845, Church leaders recognized that civil authorities could not protect them from the attacks, and publicly announced their plans for departure the following spring. The Church Presidency assigned the Council of Fifty, of which Benjamin was a member, the responsibility to organize and direct the hegira of some 15,000 members from Illinois to a new home in the West. Completion of the Nauvoo temple remained the priority for the Saints as they worked feverishly to finish it while simultaneously preparing to evacuate their homes. In the turmoil created by mob violence and the sporadic migration of individual members and their families, Mormons

⁵² Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 32. Population numbers dropped precipitously with the departure of the saints in the spring of 1846 as Macedonia, along with the other rural Mormon settlements surrounding Nauvoo, became a casualty of anti-Mormon violence (Rugh, *Our Common Country*, 51-53).

⁵³ The date Benjamin’s property was ransacked is not given, but it would have been in the summer or fall prior to his subsequent departure from Nauvoo in February of 1846 (Johnson, *Life’s Review*, 103-109).

were simultaneously migrating to and exiting from Nauvoo in preparation for their journey to a new gathering place farther west. This time they hoped to be far enough away from other communities to secure a peaceful existence where they could practice their religion without fear or injury.⁵⁴

In February of 1846, Julia's family received word that a posse was coming from Carthage with a warrant for Benjamin's arrest and to search the manure piles around the Mansion House for dead bodies, supposedly Mormon murder victims. Before crossing the Mississippi on February 15, 1846, Brigham Young had directed Benjamin to take over operation of the Nauvoo Mansion house.⁵⁵ Benjamin was forced to flee across the river to Sugar Creek, Iowa, where Brigham Young and other members of the Church presidency were camped. Later, with help from family and friends, Melissa and the children crossed the river with the wagons, teams, and goods they had gathered for their move west. Julia, Ezekiel, Joseph, and Esther later re-crossed the river to check on Benjamin and his family.⁵⁶ Among the Mormons beginning their exodus into Iowa were Saints from Macedonia.⁵⁷

Julia's family was splintering again as family members moved to protect themselves from the threats of violence they continued to receive from anti-Mormons. Joel recalled that in March of 1846 a mob of some twenty-five horsemen arrived at Joel's home where his four-year-old son, Seth, and seven-year-old daughter, Susan, were alone. When informed that their father was not at home, the men told Susan to warn her father

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 104; Allen and Leonard, *Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 214-215, 224; Rex Eugene Cooper, *Promises Made to the Fathers: Mormon Covenant Organization* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 148, 154-155, 160-162.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 104.

⁵⁶ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 110.

⁵⁷ The Saints in Macedonia left en masse during the exodus across Iowa, retaining their branch organization while in Winter Quarters, Nebraska (Rugh, *Our Common Country*, 168).

that “if their father and family did not leave the country immediately that they would take their lives and destroy their property.” It would not be long before an even larger mob returned to deliver the message to Joel personally.⁵⁸ On May 1, 1846, another mob of armed men awakened Joel. He recalled:

. . . About 2 o’clock in the morning I was awakened by the tramping of horses and heard a voice calling me to the door. I arose and went to the door and discovered that my house was surrounded by a mob of about one hundred men with guns, swords, pistols, and dirks who asked me if I was prepared to leave. I told them that I was. They then told me that if I did not leave the country by the first of June my life would be taken and property destroyed and after warning and threatening me very sharply, they left.”⁵⁹

Joel moved his family to Ezekiel’s home in Macedonia for safety until he was able to trade for another parcel of land to establish a home for his family in time to begin spring planting. He was finally able to trade for an 80-acre parcel of land in French Creek, Knox County, Illinois. At the end of May, Joel took his family to French Creek, taking a loss of nearly five thousand dollars worth of property. Ezekiel later joined the family to help Joel build a home and put in crops.⁶⁰

After being confronted and threatened by a mob of men in Nauvoo, Joseph also left, taking his family by river boat to Montrose then on to Bonaparte, Lee County, Iowa. Here along the Des Moines River, Joseph opened a drugstore. Then, at Joseph’s encouragement, Benjamin and his family joined them in Bonaparte.⁶¹ With the exodus from Macedonia and then Nauvoo, Julia and her family were once again scattered. From this point in time, until Julia’s death, the family would remain divided geographically.

⁵⁸ Johnson, Excerpts, 11; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 32.

⁵⁹ Johnson, Excerpts, 11-12.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Johnson, *Autobiography*, 6.

Julia and her family began writing letters to each other in an effort to keep the family connected and current on each others plans and activities.

Julia was fortified by her religiosity, including her belief in the doctrine of eternal families. The marriages of her children and the births of grandchildren brought Julia great joy, just as the illness and deaths of those she loved had brought her great sorrow. Julia lost twelve more children and grandchildren during her years in Illinois. She found comfort in the Church's doctrine of celestial marriage and eternal families and in her belief that if she complied with the temple ordinances associated with these doctrines a time would come when she would be reunited with those she loved.⁶²

Julia's dilemma was that she wanted Ezekiel to be part of that eternal family. During one of his frequent visits to their home in Macedonia, Julia discussed with Joseph Smith her fears for Ezekiel. He gave Julia a special blessing assuring her that Ezekiel was at heart a good man and that he would not be lost to her or the family. She also shared with Joseph her concern that under the pressure of mounting persecution some of her family might apostatize. He assured her that her children's resolve would never weaken and that they would remain steadfast members of the Church. Her conversation with Joseph Smith and his blessing gave Julia the comfort and reassurance she sought. Evidently, Julia still cared for Ezekiel even though they had been separated now for nearly a decade. She was still so anxious about his welfare and her eternal relationship with him that she sought counsel on the matter from the man she considered to be God's

⁶² Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 25-28; D&C, 128, 132.

prophet. Her salvation and that of her children, as well as Ezekiel's welfare remained her foremost interests.⁶³

As a result of her concerns, Julia's first priority was to accomplish as much of her temple work as possible during the brief window of opportunity they would have once the Nauvoo temple was ready. Julia was among the first to attend the Temple after it opened, taking out her endowments on December 23, 1845, followed by Joel and his wife Susan on December 31.⁶⁴ On January 24, 1846, Julia and her family gathered again at the Nauvoo Temple. The conflict between her desire to comply with the doctrine on celestial marriage and her inability to enter into such a marriage with Ezekiel had left Julia with a difficult decision. Although Ezekiel may have still been dear to Julia, she had apparently given up hope that he would convert and that she might then be joined with him in an eternal marriage. Again, her salvation was paramount. Julia decided to be sealed in marriage to Patriarch John Smith.

Benjamin recalled his own feelings on that occasion when he "felt not a little sorrow, for I loved my father and knew him to be naturally a kind and loving parent, a just and noble spirited man. But he had not obeyed the Gospel, had fought it with his words . . . so I consoled myself, assured by the prophet's words that a better day would come to my father."⁶⁵ Perhaps, Julia, likewise, took consolation in the assurances she had received from Joseph Smith that Ezekiel would not be lost to her or the family.

⁶³ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 93-94; Johnson, *Excerpts*, 112; Johnson Papers, box 6, folder 18; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Nauvoo Temple, Nauvoo Temple Endowment Register: 10 December 1845 to 8 February 1846, Endowments of the Living, 1845-1846, Endowment Register, 1845-1846, (microfilm of manuscript records), FHL microfilm 1033997.

⁶⁴ In February 1846, Joel had Annie sealed in marriage to him for eternity. Church leaders called Joel to preside over the Pleasant Vale Branch (Johnson, *Life's Review*, 103-104; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 30-35).

⁶⁵ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 98-99.

That same day, with Almon acting as proxy, Delcina was sealed to her late husband Lyman for time and eternity.⁶⁶ Then Delcina and Almon were sealed for time only. Julia's marriage to Patriarch John Smith, and her daughter Almera's marriage to Joseph Smith, and her daughter Delcina's marriage to Almon are of particular note because they highlight the different forms in which the emerging Latter-day Saint doctrine known as the plurality of wives was practiced during this period.

The doctrine proclaiming the eternity of marital and familial relationships was integral to Latter-day Saint theology. According to this precept, marriages performed by a priesthood authority could seal a man and woman together for time and all eternity or for time only.⁶⁷ Plural marriages in Nauvoo, such as that between Julia and John Smith, were not intended to be marriages in the typical sense. Julia, now in her late sixties, never lived with John in a conjugal relationship, nor did John provide temporal support for her. Some marriages for time only carried no associated marital rights (such as sexual relations) or responsibilities. Delcina's marriage obligated Almon to maintain temporal support and protection, with no sexual or other rights. Delcina remained sealed to her first husband, Lyman. Marriages for time carried no eternal component; thus, those married for time to one individual were free to enter into a marriage for time and eternity with someone else, as in the case of Delcina's sealing for time and eternity to Lyman.⁶⁸ Julia embraced the doctrine on the plurality of wives, as she had the other doctrines of the Church, and freely and fully participated in the ceremonial rites required by her religion, using them to meet her own personal desires and objectives. Temple operations ended

⁶⁶ Julia Ann and Almon had just returned from Cincinnati, Ohio, where Almon had completed law school. Almon now began handling the Church's legal and business affairs in Nauvoo as the Latter-day Saints began existing Illinois. See Johnson, *Life's Review*, 110; Jay Donald Ridd, "Almon Whiting Babbitt: Mormon Emissary" (MS thesis, University of Utah, 1953).

⁶⁷ Daynes refers to the irregular nature of the Nauvoo period marriages as "protopolygamy" (*More Wives than One*, 31).

⁶⁸ Johnson, *Excerpts*, 112; Johnson Papers, box 6, folder 18.

February 8, 1846. Seven days later Brigham Young, accompanied by other church members, crossed the Mississippi.⁶⁹

Julia fulfilled a strong matriarchal role in her family. Her ability to shape the religiosity of family members and others exerted a strong influence on the development of the Church during its formative years. Julia's experiences in Ohio and Illinois demonstrate that at least some early female converts repeatedly and willingly made personal sacrifices for their faith. Her exodus from Kirtland and migration west to Illinois confirms that female converts could and did act as heads of household in the Church's organized migration effort. Although Julia had three adult sons, all of whom were members and were part of the Kirtland Camp movement, and two of whom lived with her, Church leaders acknowledged Julia as the head of household.⁷⁰ Julia's financial and material resources provided the means for her migration west along with her four minor and three still dependent single adult age children.

The migration of the Johnsons reveals the splintered, individualistic nature of the exodus from Kirtland and resettlement in Illinois as different members of the family group moved often, at different times, taking different routes and settling in different locations. Their movements were influenced largely by availability of means, opportunity, circumstances, and the fulfillment of Church assignments. Once in Illinois, Julia's decision to settle along Crooked Creek indicates that where individual members settled was at their discretion. Julia could have chosen to settle in either Nauvoo or

⁶⁹ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 95. For more information on the Nauvoo Temple, See "Nauvoo Temple," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: MacMillan, 1982), 1001-1003, <http://www.lib.byu.edu/Macmillan/> accessed April 5, 2008.

⁷⁰ Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 383-391.

Crooked Creek, since she had children in both communities. Her choice to have her son Joseph build a new home for her and her children in Macedonia near Joel rather than in Nauvoo near Delcina proved to be socially, politically, and economically advantageous. In Macedonia her family was able to regroup and become a royal family, growing stronger and more influential within the Church and community both individually and as a family.

Julia and her children were united not only by familial ties, but by their mutual commitment to their faith. Loyalty to both appears to have been of primary importance to the Johnsons. Because they were often separated by circumstances and physical distance, they relied on each other to advance and protect each other's interests, as well as the interests of the Church.

CHAPTER 5

RECONCILIATION

ILLINOIS TO IOWA, 1847-1853

But with this great grief there was much consolation.

Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review*

Julia's role as matriarch demonstrates the pivotal role women could play in meeting their family's needs and preserving family ties amidst chaos. Since Julia's was one of the largest extended family groups caught up in the westward migration, her experiences help reveal the emotional turmoil the Mormon hegira created for families. It was challenging for Julia and her family as they struggled to maintain family ties and render aid and support for each other over considerable distances, but they found ways to overcome those difficulties. Julia continued to travel to and from Nauvoo caring for her family. Albeit under hostile circumstances, Julia and her family continued to carry out assignments from Church leaders, visit, court and marry, care for their ailing, and experience the heartache sickness and death brought to their increasingly isolated and diminishing band of Saints in Nauvoo. Despite the mayhem around her, Julia's resolve to maintain her family's religiosity remained.

Julia was acutely aware of the familial separation the forthcoming exodus would bring, having experienced similar circumstances following their departure from Kirtland. Perhaps in the belief that it would sustain her through the coming upheavals, on October

21, 1845, Julia turned to Patriarch John Smith for a patriarchal blessing. Julia exposed herself and her family to physical, financial, and emotional hardships to stay connected to her adopted faith. Driven from Ohio, she and her family remained separated and transient as they waited for a new place to settle. Reestablished again in Illinois, her family grew and prospered. Driven out again, Julia and her family lost their homes, businesses, and properties. They endured the disruption created by internal and external strife, illness, death, and intensifying persecution. Threats made against their lives were frightening and the separation of family members unsettling. None of this deterred her or diminished her resolve. She and her family remained devoted to their religion, loyal to its leaders, and allied with their fellow converts. Julia and her family accepted all of this as part of the price they were willing to pay to preserve their right to follow the dictates of their own conscience and to subscribe to their chosen religious beliefs. Julia's ultimate objective continued to be keeping her and her family focused on their religion and integrally connected to the Church.

Julia's experience gives us insight into the complexities that arose between a couple and within a family when only one spouse joined the church. In 1846, with the exodus from Nauvoo underway, Julia found her family divided with some family members living in Iowa, while she and other family members remained in Nauvoo. During the winter of 1847-1848, Joseph, Benjamin and Melissa made the roughly 35-mile trek from Bonaparte to Nauvoo for a brief visit. Ezekiel had renounced his use of alcohol a year earlier. Benjamin recalled with great delight how, during their visit, Ezekiel expressed his desire to be baptized. Ezekiel's estrangement from Julia, originally

created by his intemperance and exacerbated by their religious differences, was undergoing a transformation.

It is unknown to what extent Ezekiel and Julia may have anticipated a reconciliation or what expectations their children may have had for such a reunion since no mention is made in any of the family's writings. This void may indicate that no reunion between Julia and Ezekiel was expected as a result of his joining the church. Considering Julia's decision to follow Joseph Smith's recommendation and be sealed to John Smith, it would appear that Julia had relinquished any idea of reviving her marriage with Ezekiel.¹ Yet, neither Julia nor Ezekiel ever sought a divorce. Julia's questioning of Joseph Smith regarding Ezekiel's eternal salvation and her comfort at his assurance that Ezekiel would not be lost to her or the family prior to her agreeing to a sealing to John Smith, would indicate that Julia still felt affection for Ezekiel.

In spite of the impasse that had occurred between them, Julia and Ezekiel appear to have remained united in their determination to preserve as much familial affection as possible. Although it is unknown to what extent Ezekiel continued to provide for Julia and/or their minor children, there is no evidence that Ezekiel never used any of the legal means at his disposal to punish or harm Julia, or to compel her to conform to his wishes even when he could have legally taken from Julia the income she earned, the land she owned, or the proceeds from its sale.

Julia's and Ezekiel's separation never led to a division among their children. Instead, all of their children preserved loving relationships with both parents and with each other. To spend time with their parents, the younger children had to divide their

¹ Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review: Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Johnson* (Independence, Missouri: Zions Printing and Publishing Co., 1947), 98-99.

time living in separate homes miles apart. Over the years their daughters took turns keeping house for Ezekiel. While such arrangements helped maintain the children's relationship with Ezekiel, they must also have been a painful manifestation of the division between their parents and conflicting emotions must have run high at times as love, loyalties, and sympathies were strained and fluctuated. Julia and Ezekiel's children remained united, not only by the love their parents fostered between them, but by their common faith.

A short time after Benjamin and the other family members returned to Bonaparte, Ezekiel was on his way to Esther's home when he was attacked by a group of anti-Mormons and severely beaten. He died a few days later on his 75th birthday and was buried the next day, January 13, 1848, in the Nauvoo cemetery.² It is of particular note that no comment is made in the family's writings regarding Julia's reaction to Ezekiel's death. Thus, it remains difficult to define the type of relationship that had developed between Julia and Ezekiel during their years of separation. It does seem apparent that Julia and her children struggled with mixed emotions over Ezekiel's rejection of their faith and the division created within the marriage and family as a result. As Benjamin later lamented, "But with this great grief there was much consolation."³

When Almon took the distressing news of Ezekiel's murder to the family in Bonaparte, he became aware of how Benjamin's recurring bouts of malaria had left the family poorly prepared to make the trip west. Almon informed the rest of the family of their plight upon his return to Nauvoo. By July 4, when President Willard Richards' company was set to leave, Benjamin and his family were well situated to make their four-

² Johnson, *Life's Review*, 117-120; Papers of Joseph Ellis Johnson, 1817-1882, box 8, folder 8, Western Americana Manuscripts, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

³ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 120.

month trek west.⁴ Joel had arrived with Joseph, Julia Ann, and Almon's gift of an ox-drawn wagon loaded with foods and other provisions provided by Julia, Esther, Almera and Delcina. Joel and his family had their own ox teams, wagons, provisions, cows and sheep. Together the brothers and their families made the journey west.⁵

Julia and her family's commitment to their fellow converts and to fulfilling their Church assignments took them in various directions. Yet, even as their membership in the Church separated them geographically, they were unified by their mutual devotion to their faith. At the heart of the family was its matriarch, Julia. As the family gathered to celebrate Julia's birthday, George's birthday poem to his mother expressed the family's feelings regarding their changing circumstances as one by one Julia's children journeyed west to be at the center of the Church and the reestablishment of a new Zion.

Tis your birthday again how the time flies away
How swiftly the years come and go
How short seems the time since that bright happy time
When we met here just one year ago
But the day has arrived not so fair as before
For the children have wandered away
And the few that remain have but little to spare
To make cheerful and brighten that day
But our thoughts linger with you we hope it may be
Our lot when another shall come
To all be together and pass of the day
With joy in our old cottage home
Then may there be many bright birthdays to come
With children and friends ever near
To cheer up and brighten the old cottage home
Your spirits to comfort and cheer.⁶

⁴ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 121.

⁵ Joel H. Johnson, *Voice from the Mountain From the Mountains: Being a Testimony of the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as Revealed by the Lord to Joseph Smith, Jr.* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881), (hereafter Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*), 35-36, Johnson, *Life's Review*, 119-121.

⁶ Poem undated, but appears to have been written around September 1847 or 1848, see, Joseph Ellis Johnson, "Autobiographical Sketch," box 1, folder 6, Western Americana Manuscripts, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

In the midst of the tumult Julia endeavored to maintain contact with her children. From 1847 to 1850 Julia continued to reside in Nauvoo as did several of her children. From 1847 to 1851 she traveled frequently, dividing her time between her children in Kanesville, Iowa, and those still in Nauvoo. Her son, George, and daughter, Esther, remained in Nauvoo with their families because George and Esther's husband, David LeBaron, had been assigned by Church leaders to give tours of the Nauvoo Temple. George and David did so until the night of October 9, 1848, when George and Marie watched from their window as the work of arsonists sent the Temple up in flames. George and Marie then decided to leave Nauvoo to make a brief visit with family members in Kanesville, Iowa, before setting off for Salt Lake. A month later Julia's son, William, married Jane Cadwallader Brown, of Birmingham, Erie County, Ohio, in Nauvoo. The following year Delcina's twelve-year-old son Daniel became ill, died and was buried in Nauvoo.⁷

Then in the spring of 1850, Julia accompanied her children Delcina, Almera, William and their families on the trek to Kanesville, leaving only her daughter Esther and her family in Nauvoo. Joseph had opened an emporium in Kanesville, renamed Council Bluffs, to supply immigrants going west. Joseph had also organized America's first Wild West show featuring a group of Omaha Indians and was taking the show on an eastern states tour intended to build public support for Joseph's petition to the government in

⁷ George Washington Johnson, *Diary of George W. Johnson, 1823-1893* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1940), 4-8; Lyman Royal Sherman –Delcina Diademia Johnson family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=49508> [accessed 2 October 2003].

Washington, D.C., to aid the Omaha people.⁸ William managed Joseph's business ventures for him during his absence.

The following spring Julia Ann and her family left Nauvoo to spend time with Julia in Council Bluffs before making their journey to the Great Salt Lake. Almon and Julia Ann had returned to Nauvoo from Springfield, Illinois, where Almon had unsuccessfully petitioned the Illinois state legislature for justice and redress for church leaders and members physically and financially damaged by their forced evacuation and to preserve the Nauvoo Charter.⁹

Despite encouragement from her children to join them in the Salt Lake Valley, Julia chose to remain in the Midwest where she may have felt she was needed most. Delcina was struggling with the deaths of three of her children, her eldest daughter Mary in August of 1850, then both Elvira and Seth that November.¹⁰ Esther was still living in the harsh environs of Nauvoo. Almera was again experiencing marital problems, this time with her third husband, Reuben Barton.¹¹

⁸ Joseph Ellis Johnson –Harriet Eloise Snider family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=25343> [accessed 2 October 2003]; Joseph Ellis Johnson – Hannah Maria Goddard family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=204050> [accessed 2 October 2003]; Joseph's idea originated from his desire to bring the harsh condition of local Omaha Indians to the attention of the public and provoke federal government action to help the Omaha people. See Jack A. Nelson, "The Pioneer Press of the Great Basin," (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1971), 186.

⁹ After failing to achieve his goal, Almon and Julia Ann returned to Nauvoo where Julia Ann gave birth to a daughter, Julia Ann, on December 27, 1849. Once back in Nauvoo Almon helped exiting church members to dispose of their property and deal with legal issues for the Church and various church members. Jay Donald Ridd, "Almon Whiting Babbitt: Mormon Emissary" (MS thesis, University of Utah, 1953), 16-30. Julia Ann and their children usually traveled with Almon. On one of the few occasions when they did not, Almon was attacked and killed by Cheyenne Indians on the plains of Nebraska outside Fort Kearney in October of 1856. One year later, Julia Ann died in Crescent City, Iowa. After her burial, next to her mother, Joel took her four children with him back to Salt Lake. Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 60-62.

¹⁰ Only two of Delcina's seven children, Susan and Albey, lived into late adulthood, Lyman Royal Sherman –Delcina Diademia Johnson family group record, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File™, FamilySearch® Internet Genealogy Service, <http://www.familysearch.org>, <http://familysearch.org/Eng/Search/AF/family_group-record.asp?familyid=49508> [accessed 2 October 2003].

¹¹ Harriet Johnson, to Joseph Johnson, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 22, and 25.

Although Julia was now in her late sixties she continued to make her own decisions, work hard, and nurse her family through bouts of illness.¹² Julia returned to Nauvoo later in 1851 to care for Esther's family for several weeks when they contracted smallpox. Once Esther's family had recovered, Julia returned to Council Bluffs. Julia later wrote to her son Joseph, telling him that the family members still living in the area were "about the same as when you left." She mentioned the smallpox epidemic that had swept through the area that fall and the illnesses of Esther and her family, and that she had spent several weeks in Nauvoo caring for them.¹³ Joseph's wife Harriet also wrote to tell him that Julia was just as self-willed and working as hard as ever.¹⁴ It appears the struggles and sorrows of the preceding years had not dampened her spirit.

By 1852, with David's work for the church in Nauvoo complete, he and Esther traveled to Council Bluffs to visit with Julia before starting their trip west to the Great Salt Lake. In a letter to Joseph, dated February 22, 1852, Julia inquired if Joseph was also planning to move his family to Salt Lake, and informed him that everyone seemed prepared to leave.¹⁵ From the actions of her children it seems apparent that Julia was the dominant influence upon her children and that she had succeeded in inculcating in them a devotion to the Church and its doctrines. Despite the fact that their father had never been baptized, all of her children were baptized and maintained their church membership throughout their lives. Julia remained tenacious in encouraging and supporting her

¹² Julia Johnson, to Joseph Johnson, November 23, 1851, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 22; Harriet Johnson, to Joseph Johnson, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 22, and 25; William Johnson to Joseph Johnson, November 1851, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 20; William Johnson to Joseph Johnson, January 1852, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 23; Esther Johnson to Joseph Johnson, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 25.

¹³ An epidemic of smallpox swept through the area during the fall of 1851. Julia Johnson to Joseph Johnson from Kaneshville, November 23, 1851, and William Johnson to Joseph Johnson, October 13, 1851, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 22.

¹⁴ Harriet Johnson to Joseph Johnson, December 14, 1851, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 22.

¹⁵ Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 22.

children's participation in the Church even though it meant the physical breakup of the family.

Julia also wrote to Joseph to assure him that she was well and that he was thought of and missed. She expressed her desire that he "be blessed with health and prosperity" and that he would return home safely. Julia added that she had "attended to all that you requested of me I kissed the babes they were sweet as ever" and "told Mary [his daughter] what you wished her to do" to which she added that "the girls I think they behave themselves very well without my interference I think they got along very well."¹⁶ Julia's letters to Joseph offer a glimpse into the extent to which her life centered on her family. She clearly took delight in writing to him. Her letter reveals an affectionate mother and grandmother. She refers to herself only in passing and briefly mentions those who have been to visit her. Her comments focus primarily on the various family members, their well-being and activities, and assuring him that they are all thinking of him and will write to him. Her concern is to reassure him that he is still an integral part of the family despite their separation in time and distance.

Now nearly seventy years old and with her health failing, Julia moved into the home of William and Jane in Council Bluffs.¹⁷ In a letter to Joseph, Julia told him of her move and assured him that she was getting along very well. It is unclear, but from the letter it appears that Julia had, up to this time, been living in a home of her own. There was no complaining, no elaboration about her needs, wants, or circumstances. Her primary focus continued to be the welfare of her children and grandchildren. Julia expressed her joy in hearing from Joseph, her distress and concern over his problems, and

¹⁶ Julia Johnson to Joseph Johnson, November 1851, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 22.

¹⁷ Julia Ann Johnson Babbitt to Benjamin Johnson, October 28, 1853, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 25.

her wishes for his success. She updated him on the condition of other family members and expressed her disquiet over Almera and Reuben's strained relationship. Her time and energy were directed at keeping her far-flung children emotionally connected and informed about each other's activities and experiences.¹⁸

In the late spring of 1853 Julia became ill with some unidentified malady. In a letter to her brother Benjamin, Esther told him that Julia "often spoke of [him] during her sickness." Benjamin was then serving a proselytizing mission for the Church in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). According to Esther, on May 29, 1853, Julia received a letter from Benjamin and when told of his letter Julia "could scarcely wait a moment to hear it read."¹⁹ In Esther's letter to Benjamin, she wrote that Julia "suffered greatly the last few weeks of her life and was perfectly willing to go," then added that while Julia was prepared to die, she was still most anxious that her grandson David be taken to his father, David LeBaron, who was then in the Great Salt Lake Valley.

Julia died at William's home on May 30, 1853. On hearing of Julia's death, sons George and Joel wrote poems to express their feelings about their mother. On the one-year anniversary of his mother's death, Benjamin remembered her as "such a God-fearing, patient and loving mother."²⁰ Throughout her life Julia was concerned about the religiosity and unity of her family. Ironically, only after her death was her family reunited, when family members who had remained in Council Bluffs to care for her made the trek to Utah.

¹⁸ Julia Johnson to Joseph Johnson, November 1851, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 22.

¹⁹ Esther Johnson LeBaron to Benjamin Franklin Johnson, November 10, 1853, Johnson Papers, box 4, folder 25.

²⁰ Johnson, *Life's Review*, 169.

Julia Hills Johnson was the influential matriarch of one of the largest families in the early church. Her experiences as an early female convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints illustrate the strength, tenacity, and self determination of many early female converts. Spiritual fulfillment was a powerful force in her life, and she wholeheartedly and eagerly embraced the religious movement of Mormonism. Julia was a knowledgeable, serious, thoughtful woman who initiated religious inquiry into the doctrines of the Church and shared her religiosity with family, friends, and neighbors. Her conversion came as a result of her own scriptural inquiry. She was committed to her new faith and wanted to be part of the creation of a “Zion Community.” To achieve that goal she willingly contributed her time and means and repeatedly sacrificed her material wealth to live among her fellow converts in “Zion.” Julia and Ezekiel’s resources provided the means for her family to move from Pomfret to Ohio, from Ohio to Springfield, Illinois, and finally to Macedonia near Nauvoo. Far from being dismissed, subordinated or oppressed by Church leaders, Julia was respected and recognized by them as her family’s head of household and matriarch of a remarkable family.

The willingness of Julia and Ezekiel to allow their children intellectual autonomy meant that their minds were open and receptive to new and novel ideas, including new religious precepts. In time that open mindedness to new religious teachings tested their familial unity, drove them from New York State to the territories of the West, and set in motion their family’s transformation into steadfast Mormon converts.

Julia’s conversion experience provides historians an illuminating look into early female conversion and exposes the fallacies contained in the historical mythology surrounding the lives of these women. No issue of polygamy existed at the time Julia

converted and thus, could play no part in her decision to be baptized, nor would it later adversely affect her membership when it did become controversial inside and outside of Church membership. Like other early female converts, and women of other Christian denominations, Julia actively engaged family, friends, and neighbors in religious discussions. Julia, like many other Christian women of her generation, was a diligent scriptorian who believed the Bible contained the word of God and was committed to living a Christian life. Julia chose to join the Church because she came to believe in its doctrines based on her own scrutiny of its precepts, which conformed to her understanding of the Bible and concept of true Christianity. Her thoughts and actions were a potent influence on her children. Her baptism and her desire to have her children baptized led to marital conflict and disappointment for her minor age children who wished to follow her lead. Julia was not an oppressed victim of patriarchy, but an independent minded woman making choices for her life and fulfilling her spiritual needs within the complexities of marital and familial relationships.

Julia left a legacy in her children. By encouraging their children to think and act independently within a secure, loving environment, Julia and Ezekiel nurtured their creativity and autonomy. Joel patented a machine for striking shingles from a block with one blow while still in his twenties.²¹ Joseph wrote, edited, and published numerous journal articles and several newspapers and was a renowned herbalist. Joel and George were recognized poets, and Joel composed texts to hymns still in the LDS hymnbook, including the well-known anthem, “High On A Mountain Top.” He also published a

²¹ Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 13-14; Johnson, Excerpts, 1.

book of hymns for young people.²² Her sons and daughters served their church as missionaries and as leaders. Julia Ann served several missions for the Church with her husband Almon, indicating that Julia Ann had inherited Julia's tenacity and independence.²³ Although Almon had been counseled by Church leaders not to take his wife with him, from the time they married until just before Almon's last trip East, Julia Ann remained his missionary companion. Her children were also political leaders. Joel, Benjamin and William were involved in early Utah politics. Benjamin became a prominent political leader and the founder of numerous communities throughout the West. William became a prominent religious and community leader in Colonia Diaz, Chihuahua, Mexico.²⁴

Julia was a woman who made choices for her life and sought to fulfill her spiritual needs within the complexities of marital and familial relationships. From her mother's example, Julia had learned early that a woman had the ability to act in her own interests, as she saw them. As a young woman she saw that interest in a man socially and economically beneath her and thwarted the paternal influence of her stepfather to marry him. As a mature woman and mother she saw that interest in a Church and its doctrines and in inculcating her devotion to them in her children. In her choice to either pursue this goal or maintain marital harmony, Julia chose to undermine her husband's paternal influence within the family. Her thoughts and actions were a potent influence on her

²² Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1985), 5, 283,333; Joel Hills Johnson, *Hymns of Praise for the Young: Selected from the Songs of Joel Hills Johnson* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Company, 1882).

²³ Ridd, "Almon Whiting Babbitt," 2-3.

²⁴ George Johnson, *Jottings by the Way: A Collection of Rustic Rhyme, a Brief Autobiography, Selection from the Writings of Other Family Members* (St. George, Utah: C.E. Johnson, 1882); Johnson, "Autobiography, 1893," 5-10, 17-20, 22-25; Johnson, *Voice from the Mountains*, 15.

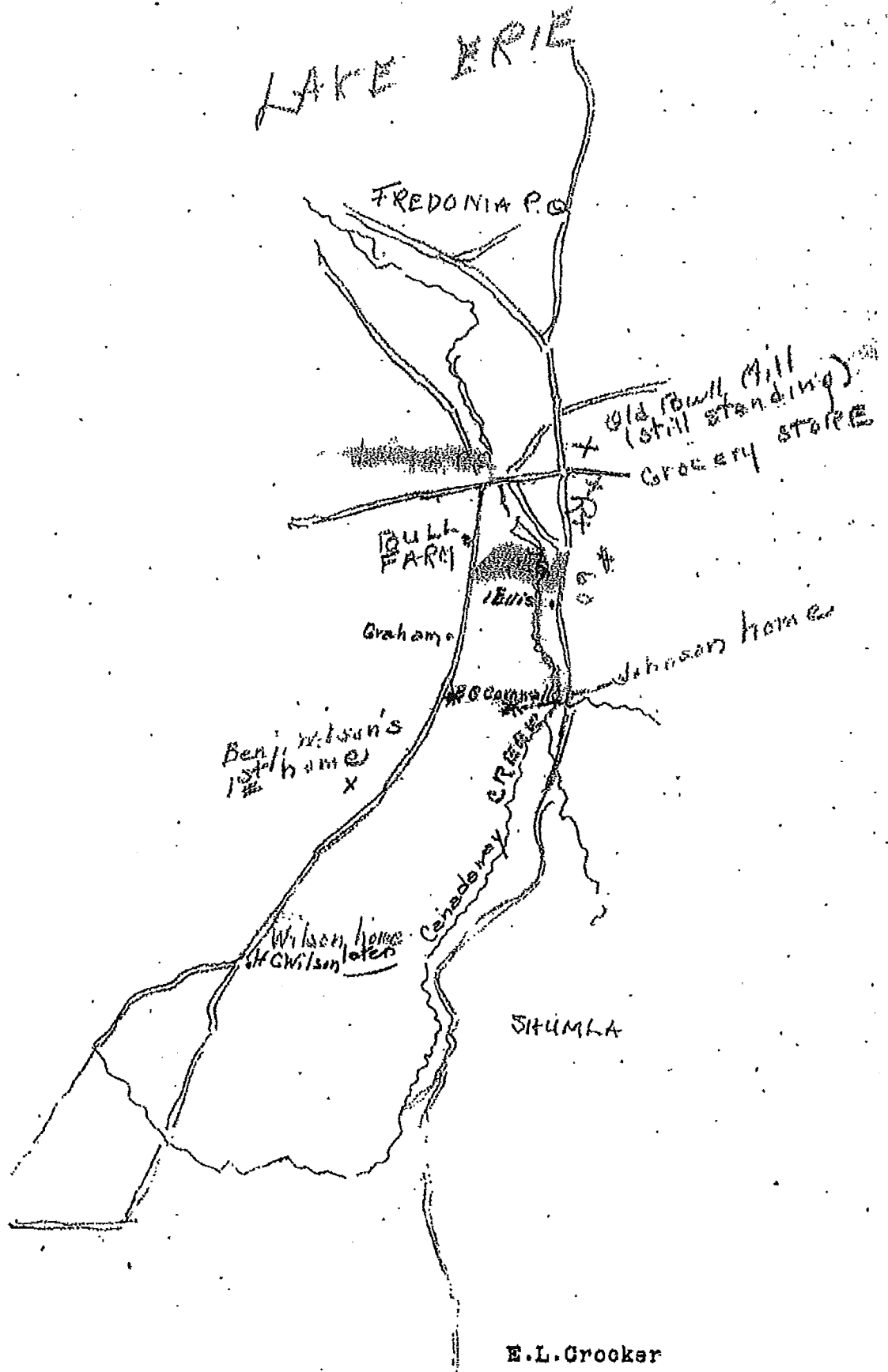
children. That Church leaders considered her the head of her family attests to the level of influence she exerted within and outside her family.

Julia was tenacious about being a participant in what to her was the restoration of Christ's church and was determined to adhere to and entrench her children in the Church's doctrines and organization. From the time Julia took the initiative to take the family to Kirtland to gather with the Saints, she assumed leadership of the family. She was determined to adhere to the Church's doctrines and to continue living among her fellow converts wherever that might be and regardless of the emotional or physical cost. Julia's choices show that she willingly sacrificed for her faith. Despite the upheavals around her, Julia remained resolved to maintain her family's religiosity. The migration of the Johnsons from Kirtland and later Nauvoo reveals how families faced separation, physical and financial hardships, emotional stress, and fear to sustain their religiosity.

Julia's conversion transformed the family dynamics, as religion became her and her children's core purpose in life and made her husband an outsider within his family. During her twenty-two year sojourn in Mormonism, Julia's determination to be a part of that religious movement came at a price. From the time Julia converted she and her children were alienated and rebuffed by former associates and the larger society. Her willingness to place her religiosity before her relationship with her husband created turmoil and estrangement within the family. At times it also placed their lives at risk. Julia and her family endured hostility, threats, and repeated separations as she left behind three homes and journeyed some nine hundred miles across the Northeast and Midwest. Along the way Julia buried six children, eighteen grandchildren, a daughter-in-law, son-in-law, and husband. Yet the religion that seems to have engendered such turmoil also

appears to have been a powerful unifying force within the family. Julia successfully instilled in her children her religiosity, self-determination and sense of familial affection and obligation. Because of her choices and the legacy she left in her children, Julia profoundly influenced the development of the Church during its formative years.

JOHNSON FAMILY FARM, POMFRET, NEW YORK



from the Joseph Ellis Johnson Collection,
Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

APPENDIX II

POEMS

To My Mother

Yes Mother I've come back again
To this one sacred place
I've traveled over hill and plain
Since last I saw Thy face

And many weary years I've past
On fickle fortunes track
But here I am again at last
Yes Mother I've come back

T'was here I left you Mother dear
And weeping sisters too
My brothers too I left thou here
And friends both tried and true

Oh where are all those loved ones gone
My heart is fit to break
For here I am alone alone
Yes Mother I've come back

But Mother lies on yonders hill
A sister by her side
And friends of yore I loved so well
Have sickened too and died

And some have gone to distant lands
To follow fortunes track
And here I am alone alone
Yes Mother I've come back.

I'm solitary and alone
In this much crowded street
Among the thousands that I see
Not one known face I meet

Old memories crowd upon my brain
Old times are coming back
In fancy I am young again
Yes Mother I've come back.¹

My Mother

How oft fond memory paints the scenes
Of times long past away
When with thee Mother I did dwell
In lands far far away
But now Thine eye is closed by death
And unto Thee is given
Immortal sights to gaze upon
The brightness e'en of Heaven

Now neath the shades that Thou did'st love
At Eve I love to sit
While memories of other lives
Around my fancy flitt
I think upon the Household band
That was Thy hearts delight
The kind the fair the loved the lost
Oh where are they tonight

Ah Mother Thou did'st sorely weep
One lovely summer day
When I went from the humble roof
To dwell in lands away
Thy tears did mingle then with mine
We said the sad adieu
Ah little did I then believe
I'd meet no more with you

Yes Mother when a stripling boy
I thought I loved Thee well
But oh I never knew thy worth

¹ George Washington Johnson, "Autobiography, 1893," Manuscript Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 4.

Till forced to say farewell
The years sped on and one by one
The links fell from our chain
The clasp was gone when Mother died
T'will ne'er be linked again
But since with us Thou couldn't not stay
Thy spirit would be free
We'll strive to imitate thy work
Ere long to meet with Thee.²

Backward Turn Backward

Backward turn backward oh time in your flight
Make me a child again just for tonight
Place me again on my dear Mother's breast
Free from the cares of this life let me rest
Let me again see the smile on her face
While she with rapture my form will embrace
In her dear arms for a time let me rest
Forgetting the sorrows that now fill my breast

Take me again to the land of my birth
With friends and with kindred around the old hearth
There let me wander o'er meadows and hills
Over the wildwood and murmuring rills
Now riding Dolly to plow out the corn
Till I hear the sweet sound of the old dinner horn
And then to the kitchen where Mother presides
With appetite craving the food she provides

The sweetest and best of all dainties on earth
Prepared by our Mother in the land of our birth
There in the corner the brick oven stands
Brimfull of dainties prepared by her hand
There are puddings and cakes and bread made of rye
And dearest of all is the old pumpkin pie
Then backward turn backward oh time in your flight
Make me a child again just for tonight.³

² Johnson, *Autobiography*, 2.

³ Johnson, *Autobiography*, 165.

My Mother's Love

O how my heart yearns for a mother's caresses,
As when in childhood by sickness laid low,
When she swept my wan face with her dark silver tresses,
And printed a kiss on my feverish brow.

How firm and untiring she watched by my pillow,
'Till the long weary night with its shadows had flown,
And the day god arose over mountain and billow,
And relieved her night vigils so patiently borne.

How kind were her accents, how gentle her chiding,
How sweet was her smile and how fervent her prayer;
Her love was unselfish, so pure and abiding,
How patient her toiling, how watchful her care.

The love of a mother abideth forever,
It clings to the heart when all others have flown;
In all of earth's trials *forget it*, no never!
No love like a mother's love ever was known! ⁴

The Old School House

The school-house! ah! the red one on the hill,
Full two miles South, Laona's noisy mill;
Midway between the two we met our birth,
Our boyhood thought the brightest spot on earth.

How oft we've met, with laughing girls and boys;
The happiest those who made the greatest noise;
Till Master came, with rule in hand, to bring
Order again, as beaten clapboards ring.

To books and study then with earnest will—
We learned to spell, to read, and wield the quill;
And once a week, through wint'ry frost or sleet,
At spelling-school each playmate we did greet.
In Autumn, when the mellow fruit was red,
To "paring-bees" with lightened step we tread;
Where hopeful lads in home-spun hues were dressed,
In gaudy prints the lasses looked their best.

⁴ George Washington Johnson, *Jottings by the Way: A Collection of Rustic Rhyme with a Brief Autobiography and selections from the writings of other members of the family*, (St. George, Utah: C.E. Johnson, 1882), 32.

We peeled the fruit, told yarns, and joked and laughed,
We kissed the girls—new cider then we quaffed,
Then mince and pumpkin-pies, and cakes were spread,
And then we played and laughed till night had sped.
Then homeward we with blushing fair ones go,
And little else but happiness did know.⁵

Our Boyhood's Home

Our Christmas fires! how bright they glowed,
Within the fire-place broad and high,
Where crane and hooks swung dinner pot
And kettle for the nut-cake fry:
And porringer and trencher clean,
In every rural home were seen.

In spring we boiled the maple's sap,
And gathered wild flowers blooming fair,
And merry boys and girls would meet,
To "sugar off" in wildwood there;
And when the spring-time glories fade,
We hunted berries in the glade.

In meadows verdant, waving, green,
We searched for strawberries, sweet and red,
The Gulf-farm grew sweet wintergreens,
Whose berries there were thickly spread;
For birch bark, gum, and slippery elm,
We traversed oft our boyhood's realm.

And when the cherries, smiling red,
Were gleaming in the summer breeze,
How we enjoyed the dainty feast,
The while, we pluck them from the trees;
Of gooseberries, and currants rare,
We seldom failed to get our share.

In summer's heat, the hay we stirred,
To pasture drove the lowing cows,
And from the orchard gathered fruit,
And ate it 'neath the shady boughs;
In autumn, through the leafy grove,

⁵ Johnson, *Jottings*, xviii-xx.

For mandrakes, plums, and grapes we'd rove.
In Casadaga's lake we fished
And gathered lilies—fragrant flowers;
And on blue Erie's beaten shore,
Spent many bright and happy hours;
And later, to Fredonia's Square,
We ne'er missed "General Training" there.

When frost had nipp'd the leafy trees
That Chestnuts from the burs might fall,
And nuts from Beech and But'nut trees,
Black Walnuts, Hickory-nuts and all,
When winds were high we took a run
For nuts, for winter eves to come.

The dear old School house near the wood,
The teachers, scholars, books and plays,
All vanished! from the dear old spot,
Gone! Disappeared in various ways,
And scarce a vestige now is seen,
Of what our boy-time home had been.

The Mother dear! that watched our youth,
The Father kind, the Sisters loved,
The Brothers brave, the playmates fond,
With whom in youth's bright time we moved,
Gone! to a sunnier, happier home,
Or in far distant lands they roam.⁶

A Dream Of Home

I dreamed I was a boy again,
And on my mother's knee,
I listened to the fervent prayer,
She offered up for me.

Again I saw my childhood home—
The place that gave me birth,
And friends and kindred grouped around
The old, familiar hearth.

⁶ Johnson, *Jottings*, xi-xii.

The bible lay upon the stand,
Just as it used to do,
When I was in my childhood home,
Just fifty years ago.

The old dutch clock hung on the wall,
The cupboard too, was there,
The pictures on the mantelpiece,
And Mother's old arm chair.

Again I wandered through the wood,
Where oft in childhood's hours
I sauntered forth to gather nuts,
Or cull the fragrant flowers.

I rambled o'er the meadow, too,
Where berries used to grow,
'Twas just the same as when a boy,
Just fifty years ago.

The orchard, too, where oft I've sat,
And watched the busy bee,
Was just the same—the bees were there,
As they were wont to be.

The barn, the cornhouse, and the spring
Where oft, in summer's day,
I've knelt beside to get a drink,
When tired of boyish play;
The Gulf-lot, where I drove the cows,
As I to school did go,
To learn to read, and write, and spell,
Just fifty years ago.

Ah me! that was a happy dream,
My dream of childhood's hours,
When all the thorns of life had gone,
And left the brightest flowers.⁷

⁷ Johnson, *Jottings*, 11-12

The Graves of My Kindred

I stood by the graves of my kindred, so dear,
Where the greensward had closely o'erspread,
My eyes were bedimmed with memory's sad tear,
As I gazed on the tombs of the dead.

Two brothers were sleeping in death's cold domain,
How dear doth their memory cling;
Though lost to sad friends, free from sorrow and pain,
In the haven where death cannot sting.

How kindly they watched o'er my once tender years,
Such kindness one ne'er can forget;
How oft in my dreams I embrace them, with tears,
Their images dwell with me yet.

Two, dear, lovely sisters, were laid in the ground,
By the side of the brothers they loved;
In sacred affection their lives here were bound,
Nor wavered in bright realms above.

Those kind, gentle sisters! How patient and meek,
When affliction and pain was severe;
How often in sweet, gentle tones they would speak,
Our childhoods deep heart-griefs to cheer.
Long, long years estranged from the land where they sleep,
Once again on the sad spot I've gazed;
In sorrow I ponder, --o'er their graves let me weep,
To the mem'ry of life's happier days.

O'er the hill where they lie we have oft roamed for pleasure,
On the fruit of the orchard have often regaled,
The sweet, blooming, gardens perfume was a treasure,
As daily, it's fragrance at eve, we inhaled.

The garden, the orchard, and the place where they rest,
And the once happy circle's loved home
In Kirtland, is now by rude strangers possessed,
Alas! how much changed 'tis become.

From a bough that grew o'er them, memento I have,
A relic both sacred and dear;
Oh may we prove guiltless when called from the grave,
And with them, and the righteous, appear.⁸

⁸ Johnson, *Jottings*, xv-xvi.

The Old School House

How sweet the lingering dreams of olden time
Of childhood's spring in far-off native clime,
'Mid wild Chataqua's hills we used to stray,
Where wood-nymph fairies held a magic sway.

Our cot was high away from Erie's shore,
Too far to hear the storm tossed waters' roar;
Yet white sails dotting o'er the lake's clear blue,
Were often ready to our wondering view.

How oft in dreams we lightly trip, at dawn,
Where sparkling dews illumine the grassy lawn.
For dandelions, cowslips, daisies gay,
Or to cull berries midst the growing hay.

How oft, we've marked the hills with boyish feet,
For fragrant wintergreens, with berries sweet;
And by the fields for blackberries we've roved,
With red-cheeked schoolmates that we fondly loved,

The village bell, though full three miles away,
We heard distinctly on each new-born day;
It's peal, more solemn on the Sabbath air,
Marked time for school, for service and for prayer.⁹

To My Mother

Thy home is in heaven, thy cares are all o'er
Thy spirit is now with the blest;
The sorrows of earth shall torment thee no more
For now thou hast gone to thy rest.

Thy children in sorrow are weeping around
The grave where thy ashes now lie;
Thy life with sweet virtue and meekness was crowned
In death thou didst fear not to die.

Thy spirit hath triumphed o'er death and the tomb
And mingled with spirits that pure
In yonder bright mansion, thy kindred's sweet home
Who left thee and went there before.

⁹ Johnson, *Jottings*, xviii-xix.

Softly round her lone grave ye strangers now tread
Her kindness to all did extend
Come ye poor, halt and blind, your tears come and shed
For her who was always your friend.

Sleep on sweetest mother, thou lovely and dear
Till Michael shall wake thee again.
Thy virtues remembered, thy children's lone tear
Shall cease not while love shall remain.

Farewell dearest mother, thy rest is secure
With those who have conquered through love
We hope soon to meet thee with those that are pure
And crowned with the righteous above.¹⁰

My Mother's Love

Now in my old age with no ray
Of childhood's sunshine on my way,
While filled with sorrow, toil and care
With few who feel my grief to share

If there is still in memory's chain
One like to draw me back again
One thought of sacred things past by
One ray of joy for which I sigh

One pleasure that is ne'er forgot
One dream of love that changes not
One hoarded rapture in my muse
One thought that's sweet in past review
One pleasing thrill, my heart to move,
'Tis memory of my mother's love.¹¹

¹⁰ Joel H. Johnson, *Voice from the Mountain From the Mountains: Being a Testimony of the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as Revealed by the Lord to Joseph Smith, Jr.* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881), 222.

¹¹ Johnson, *Voice*, 222.

Joel wrote several poems honoring Annie following her death. In his journal Joel

wrote:

O lovely one, and hast thou gone,
While in life's early bloom,
And left me here to weep a lone,
My loved one in the tomb?
Must I in life ne'er see thee more,
Thou lovely one so dear;
Has death thee from my bosom tore,
No more my heart to cheer?

Yes, death has chilled thy loving heart,
And thou are from me torn!
Yet we shall meet, no more to part,
Where noe are left to mourn.

Then I shall cease my grief and woe,
Nor let my heart repine;
The loving gem I've lost below
Shall soon again be mine.

Shine on, thou lovely gem so dear;
In you sweet world of light;
I soon shall come to meet thee there
And claim thee as my right.¹²

¹² Johnson, *Voice*, 26.

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