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Introduction to Historic Nauvoo

Elder Loren C. Dunn

Commerce was a near-wilderness when Joseph Smith brought his followers there in 1839. They had been driven from their prosperous settlements in Missouri by violent frontier mobs suspicious of the Saints' religion and New England antislavery background and fearful of their sympathy for the Indians, their rapid growth, and their unified voting power. Appeals by the Saints to the Missouri governor had brought an order to leave the state or face extermination.

Here they hoped to find peace. Joseph named the land they had purchased "Nauvoo," which he said was from the Hebrew meaning "a beautiful place, connoting rest." In spite of poverty and recurring bouts of malaria, they drained the swampy land, planted crops, and began to build a city. In six years, Nauvoo became one of the two largest cities in Illinois, a close rival of Chicago.

The state legislature granted the Saints a city charter. (A young legislator named Abraham Lincoln voted for it.) It gave Nauvoo the right to have a university, an independent judiciary, and a unit of the state militia. Soon it had all three, and the people felt safe in their rapidly growing city. Converts came from the East and the South, from England and Canada. No one thought about the comment Heber C. Kimball had made when he first saw the town site: "It's a very pretty place, but not long abiding home for the saints" (quoted in Helen Mar Whitney, "Life Incidents," *Woman's Exponent* 9 [July 1, 1880]: 18).

Heber C. Kimball was right. Rivalry among frontier towns was strong, and neighboring towns, dwarfed by the growing giant and fearful of its political power, became hostile. (Nauvoo's population was around 12,000; the other towns had only a few hundred each.) Jailed on a charge of treason, Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were killed by a mob in 1844. Mobs began burning and plundering the Saints' farms around Nauvoo. Advised by their leaders not to precipitate a civil war

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by retaliating, the Latter-day Saints agreed to leave in the spring of 1846, to build again in the West. Governor Thomas Ford estimated that 20,000 left. As their wagons moved west, they left behind some 2,000 homes, a theater and concert hall, many businesses, and a barely completed temple. In less than a decade, the Temple was destroyed. Most of the City of Joseph decayed and disappeared.

Joseph Smith's widow, Emma, stayed with her family. Fourteen years later, her son became president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which now maintains the graves of Joseph, Hyrum, and Emma, as well as the original homestead, the Mansion House, and Joseph Smith's reconstructed Red Brick Store.

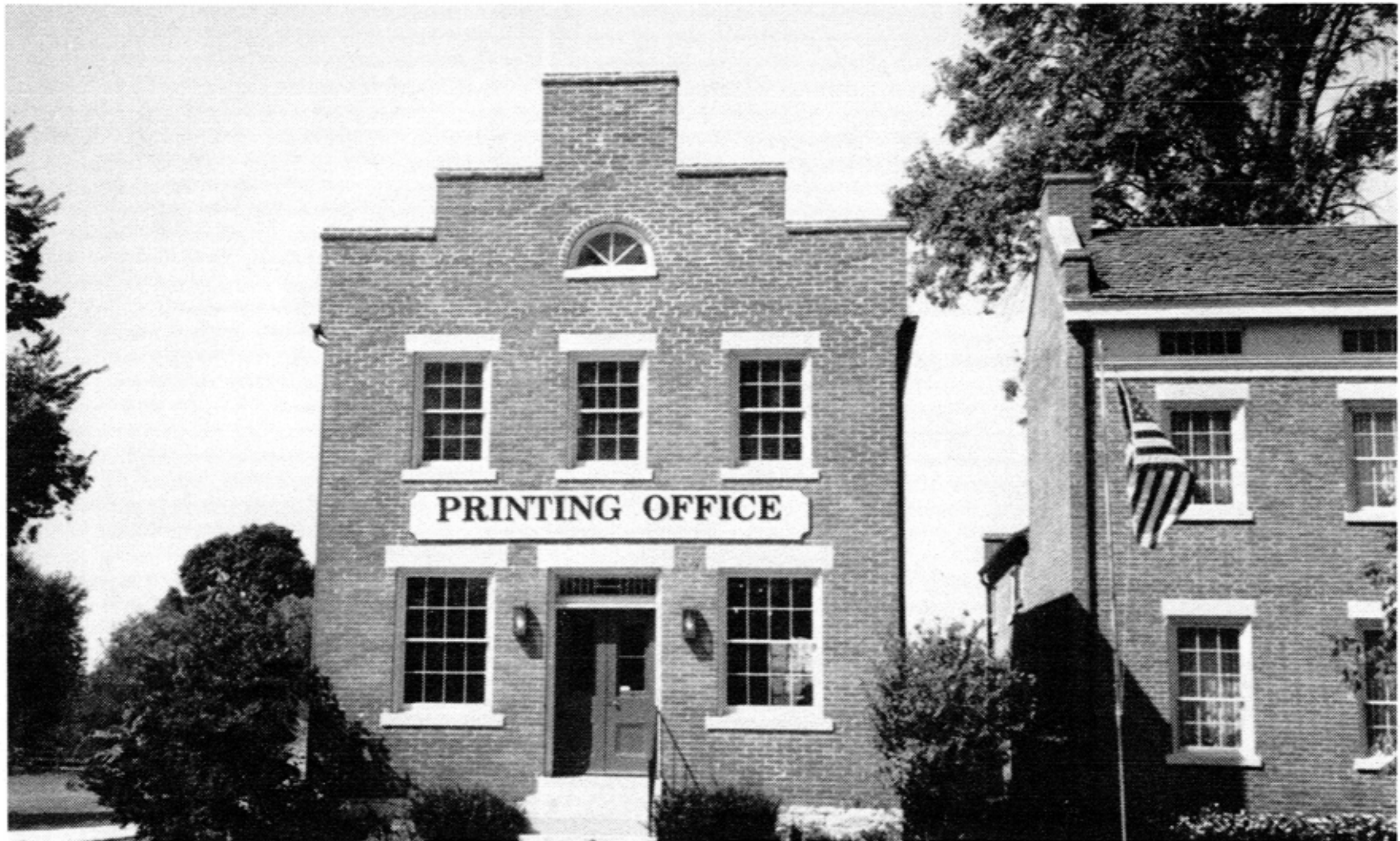
The small town attracted new immigrants. A French Icarian commune came and went; a few of the some three hundred members stayed. Germans and Swiss came. For a while, Nauvoo was a German-speaking town, known for its grape industry.

Meanwhile, most of the Latter-day Saints who had founded Nauvoo were successfully building their new Zion in the West. To their twentieth-century descendants, Nauvoo is an important way station in their ancestors' saga. Since 1937 some of those descendants have been buying back their ancestors' properties. Among these were Wilford Wood from Bountiful, Utah, and Dr. J. LeRoy Kimball, a Salt Lake City physician. Wood bought the first pieces of the temple site and several buildings on the Flat. Dr. Kimball bought the home built by his great-grandfather Heber C. Kimball.

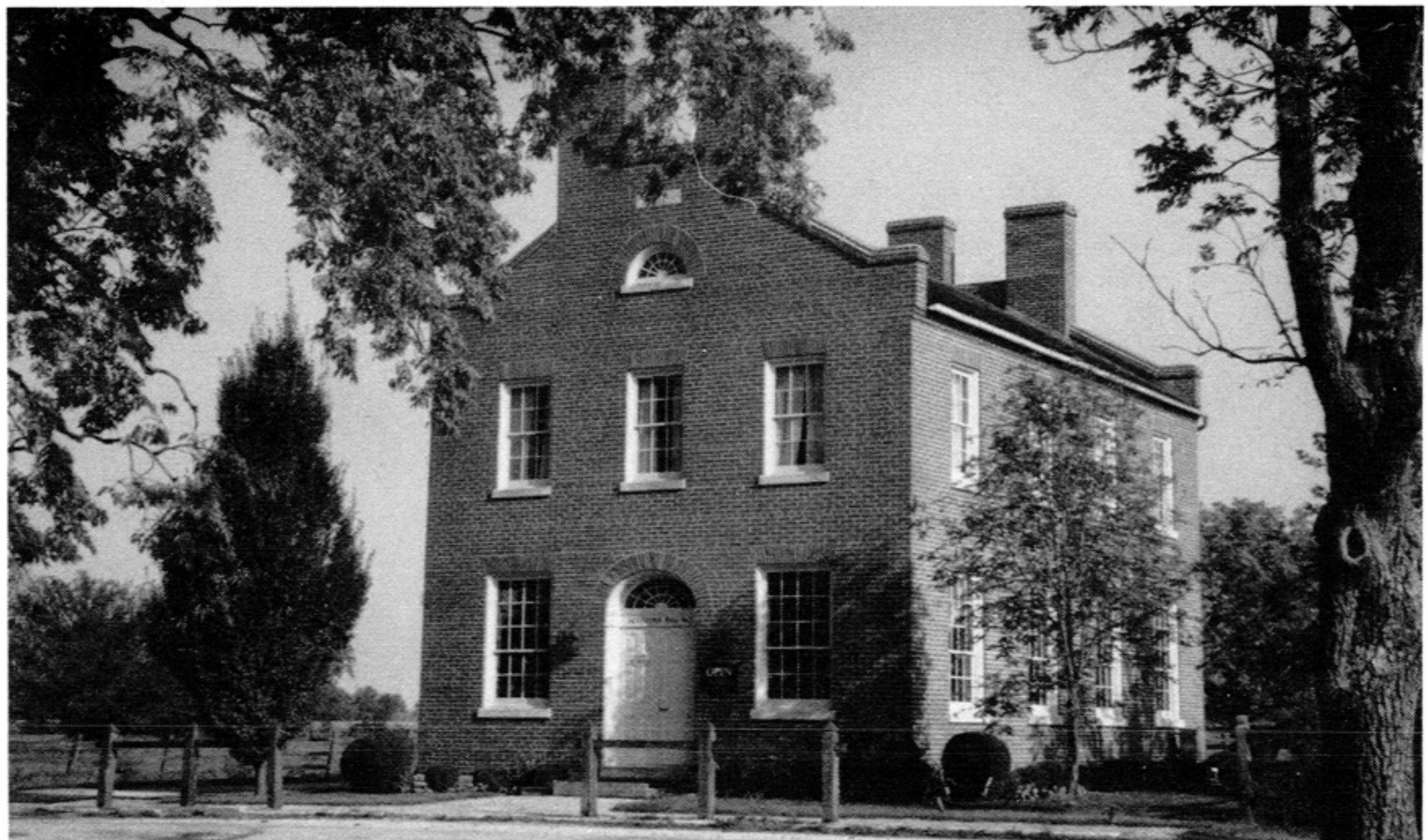
The Church organized Nauvoo Restoration Inc. in 1962, and J. LeRoy Kimball was named its first president. Since 1962 Nauvoo Restoration Inc. has acquired about one thousand acres of land and restored or reconstructed seventeen buildings. Historical research and careful archaeological exploration precede each restoration, much of it contributed by volunteers. Volunteer missionary guides in each showplace give their services and pay their own living expenses. At present, volunteers run the farm.

In Carthage, a town closely related to the history of Nauvoo, Nauvoo Restoration Inc. has restored the jail as much as possible to 1844 standards. A statue of Joseph and Hyrum Smith by Dee Jay Bawden was placed in the center of the block, and the block itself landscaped. The renovated Carthage block was dedicated during the Nauvoo Sesquicentennial.

On the following pages are recent (1991) photographs and brief descriptions of some of the restored public buildings, business buildings, and homes in Nauvoo. (For the location of these buildings, see the map of Nauvoo on p. 274.



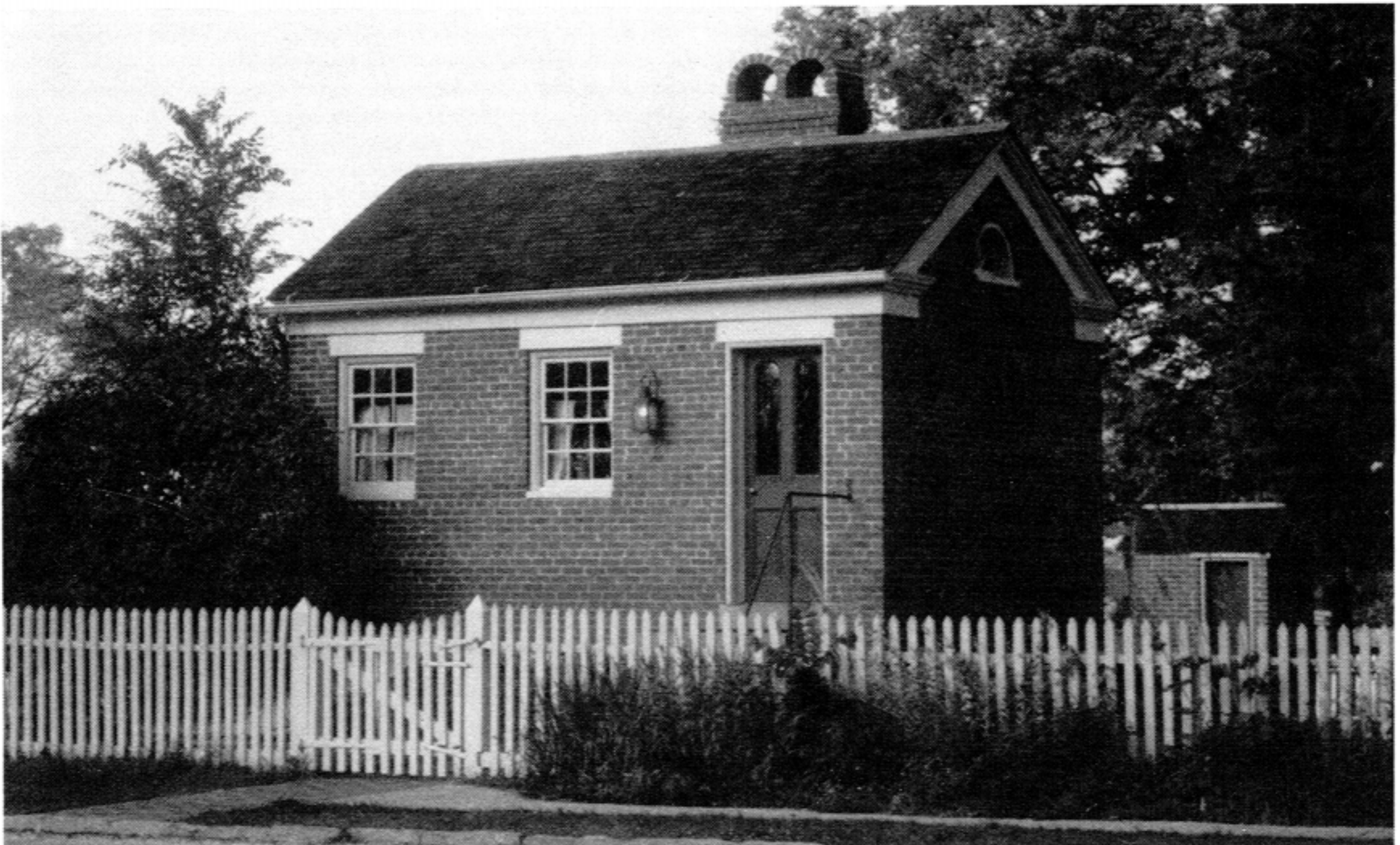
One of the most significant buildings in Nauvoo is the Printing Office, where books and newspapers were printed. Equipment left here by the departing Mormons was used to print the post-Mormon *Hancock Eagle*, the *Nauvoo New Citizen*, and the *Hancock Patriot*. In the Printing Office as they watch a printer at work, visitors can see how the early editions of the Book of Mormon were printed.



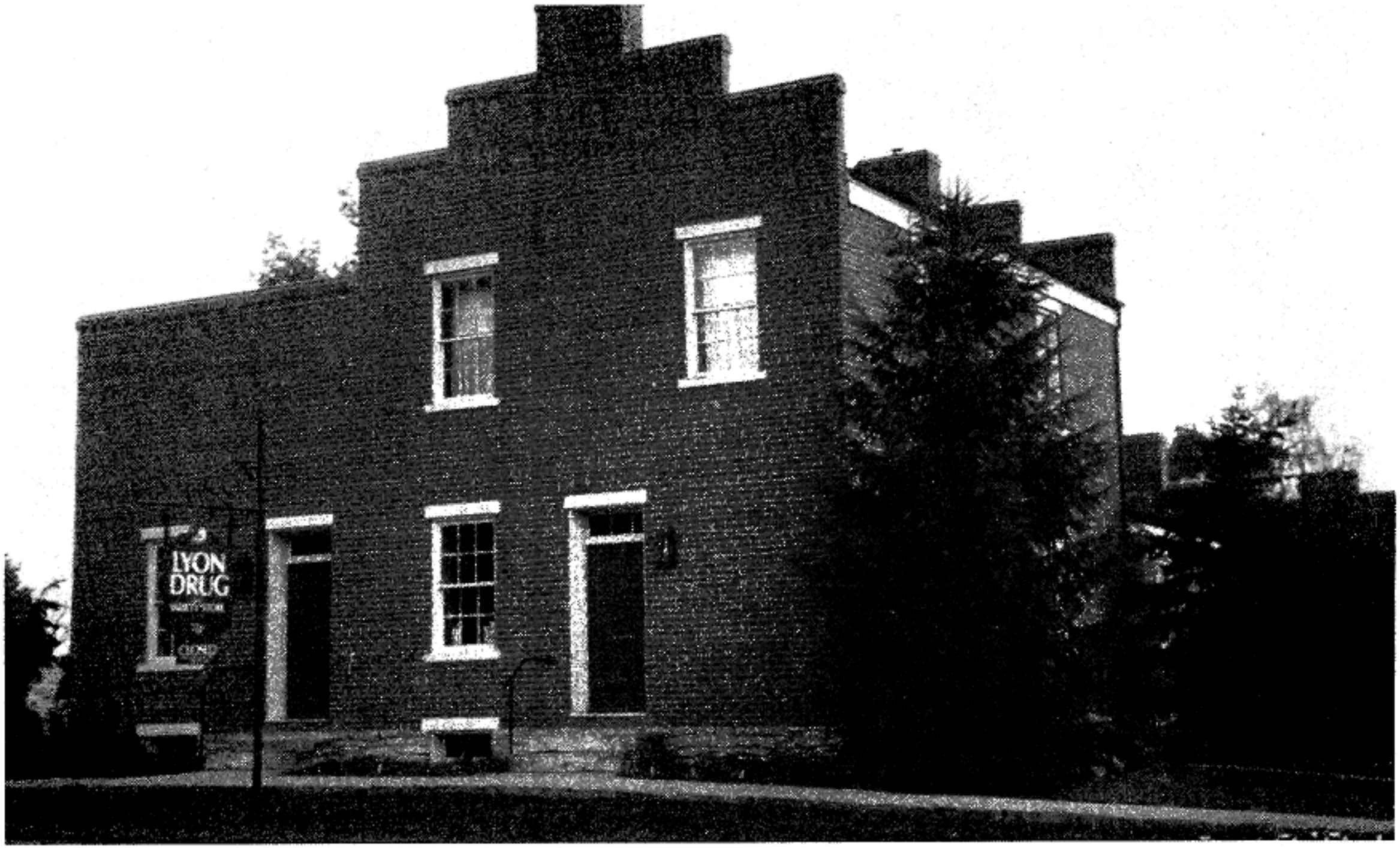
The Seventies Hall is where visitors learn about the missionary system of the Church and the important part it played in building Nauvoo. As it stands today, the hall is as similar to its predecessor as it is possible to make it with the information presently available. (Cf. the photograph on p. 32 showing the Seventies Hall before it was restored.)



On Main Street is the three-story Cultural Hall. It was a center of social activity in the fast-growing town and had some twenty-six different uses, from court sessions and funerals to grain storage and meetings of the Masonic lodge.



Next door to the Cultural Hall is the Scovil Bakery, which was operated by Lucius Scovil and his wife Lucy. The Scovils also catered for socials in the Cultural Hall, which Lucius helped to build.



One block east of the bakery is the Lyon Drugstore. Windsor Lyon lived there with his family while he operated the store. He had a good knowledge of botanical medicine for that day and grew his own herbs. He sold a variety of goods in his store, and later, due to the increase in trade and accompanying expansion in his business, he renamed his establishment the Lyon Variety Store.



Also on Main Street is the restored home and reconstructed gun shop of Jonathan Browning, the man who invented the repeating rifle. Jonathan joined the Church in Quincy, moved to Nauvoo in 1843, and started west in 1846. The first room of the north extension has the original brick walls, and the kitchen and gunsmith-forge workshop are all reconstructed on the original foundations.



Sylvester B. Stoddard and his family joined the Church during the Kirtland period and moved to Nauvoo at an early date. There he plied his trade as a tinsmith, finally locating his home and shop on Main Street in this building. Although the shop was plain, the house section was well constructed. It had decorative tooled limestone at the top and bottom of the structure and fine woodwork inside and around the front entry.



Although the original shop perished long ago, diligent research has enabled reconstruction of the Riser Boot and Shoemaker Shop on its original site. George C. Riser and his wife learned of Mormonism from an employee in George's shoe shop in Ohio. Struck by what they heard, the young couple immediately sold their business and came to Nauvoo to investigate the Prophet in December 1842. They were baptized the next May.



Brigham Young's home is a good example of his skill as a builder and carpenter. He built this house in 1843 and added the two wings in 1844. After the death of Joseph Smith, the presiding councils of the Church often met in the east wing office. There, in 1845, they planned the great migration to the West.



Joseph Coolidge built this house in 1843. It is one of the few frame buildings that has survived from that period. Coolidge was a trusted friend of Joseph and Emma Smith's and became the administrator of their estate after Joseph's death. When the Coolidges left Nauvoo, a German immigrant bought this house and turned it into a hotel. Today it features demonstrations of the early frontier crafts of making candles, pottery, and barrels.



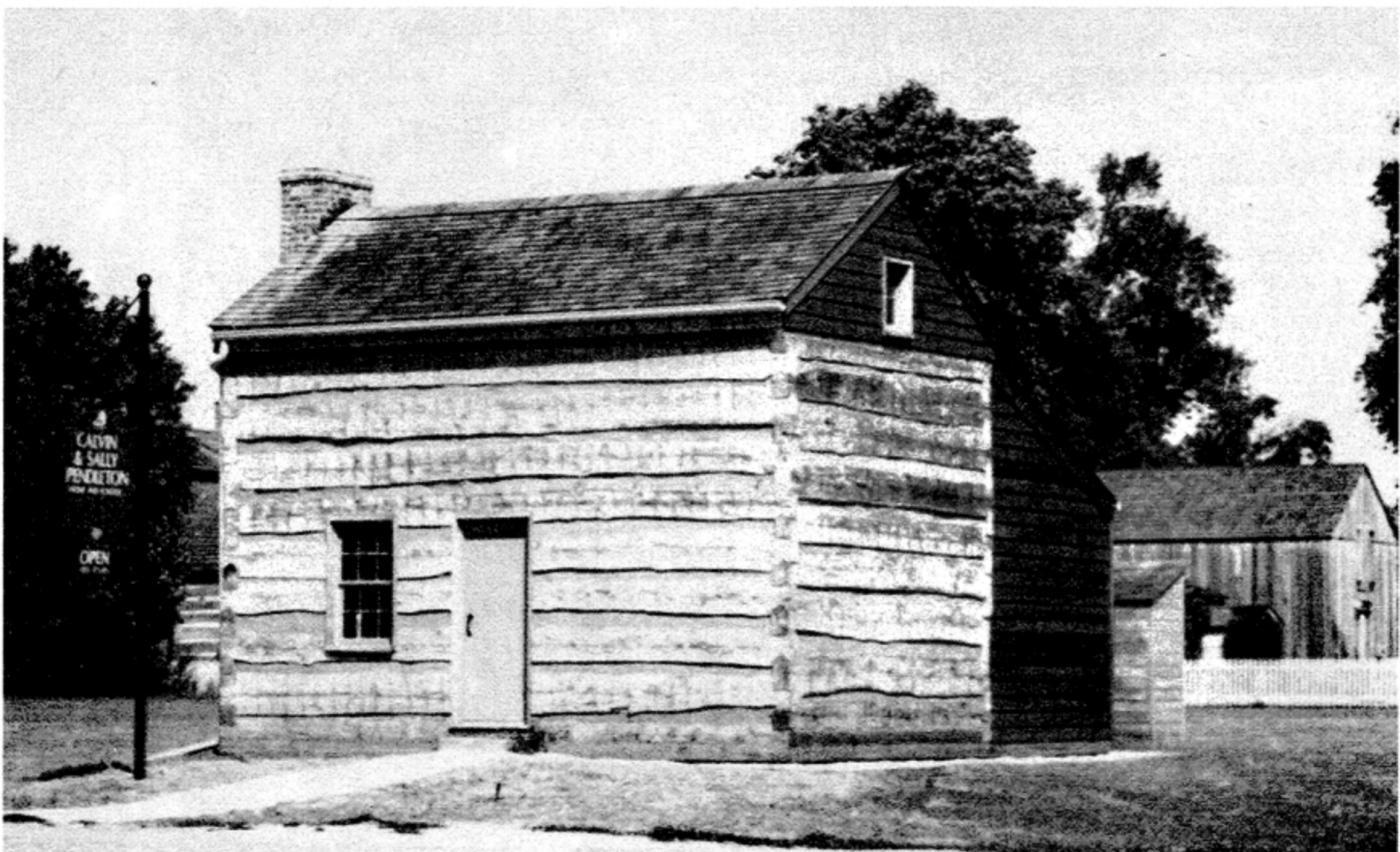
North of the Coolidge House is the brick house built by Joseph Noble in 1843. He was converted by Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball and went west with them in 1846. Brigham Young and other Church leaders bought his house for Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, whose age and poor health kept her from going with them. A carriage also provided for Mother Smith was probably kept in the brick building behind the house.



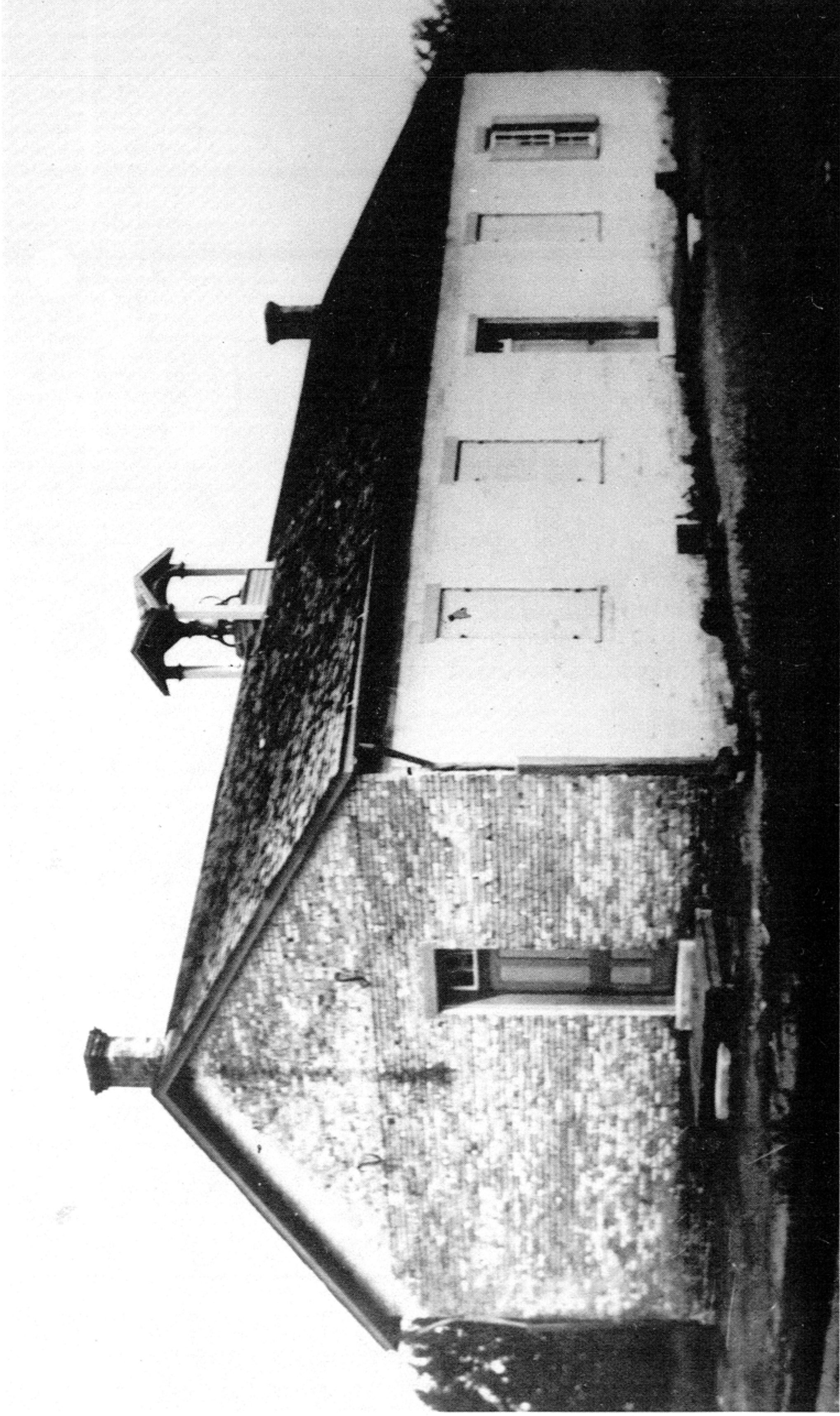
The home of Wilford Woodruff was the first Old Nauvoo building to be given an authentic architectural restoration (completed in 1969). Wilford Woodruff did much of the original work himself, in between absences on missions for the Church. He took pride in his work and recorded that he sorted through his entire supply of bricks—14,574 of them—to find the best ones for the front wall. Every room has a working fireplace.



Another house that survived in fair condition is the Heber C. Kimball home, just a block from Wilford Woodruff's. It was completed in 1845, but Heber and his wife Vilate enjoyed it for only five months before they went west in 1846. The east wing and porches were likely added by John Heinrich Lienhard, a Swiss immigrant who lived in Nauvoo for sixty years.



Built in 1843, this log cabin served as the home of Dr. Calvin Pendleton and his wife Sally Ann. Dr. Pendleton was an herbal doctor and was skillful in setting broken bones. He was also a gunsmith and a schoolteacher. In this home, the doctor taught reading, writing, and arithmetic to youth and penmanship to adults. (Of the approximately twenty-five hundred homes in Nauvoo, more than fourteen hundred were log structures.)



The Seventies Hall when it was being used as a schoolhouse after the second story was removed. This 1885 scene is printed from one of B. H. Roberts's glass negatives (Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). Compare this scene with the restored Seventies Hall pictured on p. 25.