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Alexander L. Baugh

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William W. Major’s painting, depicting Joseph Smith meeting with members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. In a similar setting, the Prophet gathered members of the Twelve to give them his last charge. Courtesy Church History Museum.
“I Roll the Burthen and Responsibility of Leading This Church Off from My Shoulders on to Yours”

The 1844/1845 Declaration of the Quorum of the Twelve Regarding Apostolic Succession

Alexander L. Baugh and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel

The document presented and discussed in this paper is one of the most important early Latter-day Saint manuscripts associated with both the final months of Joseph Smith’s life and the postmartyrdom (or apostolic) interregnum period. Written in late 1844 or early 1845, the document appears to have been drafted for possible use as an official statement by the Twelve concerning Joseph Smith’s “last charge” to them, given at a special meeting held in late March 1844, three months before his death. On this occasion, the Prophet conferred upon the Twelve the priesthood keys and authority necessary to lead the Church following his death. The document is a powerful, declarative, united testimony that the Twelve were the authorized legal successors to Joseph Smith. Furthermore, the declaration provides valuable historical information concerning the March meeting—including where the meeting was held, which members of the Twelve were present, and the core of what Joseph Smith said on that occasion.1

1. In later months and years, members of the Twelve present at the time Joseph Smith conferred the priesthood keys and issued his “last charge” wrote or spoke about the experience. See Wilford Woodruff, Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 2:455; Wilford Woodruff, in Times and Seasons 5, no. 20 (November 1, 1844): 698; Wilford Woodruff, in Millennial Star 5, no. 9 (February 1845): 136; Parley P. Pratt, “Proclamation,” Millennial Star 5, no. 10 (March 1845): 151; Orson Hyde, in Journal of Discourses, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F.D. Richards, 1855–1886), 13:180 (October 6, 1869); Wilford Woodruff, in Journal of Discourses 13:164 (December 12, 1869); Wilford Woodruff, in Millennial Star 49, no. 46 (November 14, 1887): 722; Wilford Woodruff, in Millennial Star 54, no. 34 (August 22, 1892): 530; Wilford Woodruff, in Journal History of the Church, March 12, 19, 1897. For an
Introduction to the 1844/1845 Declaration of the Twelve Document

The significance of this document went virtually unknown or unrecognized until 1981. Part of the reason for the document’s obscurity lies in the fact that it was never issued publicly or published by the Twelve, and as time passed it became part of the voluminous Brigham Young papers. We have found no evidence to suggest that the document, in whole or in part, was ever published anywhere before 1981.2

In 1970, simultaneous with the emergence of more professional scholarship among the LDS historical community, the first monograph advocating apostolic succession appeared in print. However, the book did not include any portion of or reference to the 1844/1845 document. Titled *Succession in the Church*, Reed C. Durham Jr. and Steven H. Heath’s work details the leadership role of the Apostles between 1835 and 1844 to demonstrate that the Apostles had the necessary authority and right to lead the Church following the Martyrdom. Unfortunately, in producing their narrative the writers relied almost exclusively on published sources, so it is no wonder that the 1844/1845 document does not appear in their work.3

In the early and mid-1970s, D. Michael Quinn’s studies focusing on 1844 succession authority produced new insights and interpretations. Significantly, however, in his discussions on apostolic authority, Quinn made


no reference to the 1844/1845 document, suggesting he may have been unaware of its existence.  

Credit for the initial discovery of the document should be given to Ronald K. Esplin, past director of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at Brigham Young University and present managing editor of the Joseph Smith Papers project. In the late 1970s, while completing his doctoral studies, Esplin focused on the preparation and development of the Twelve, as well as their expanding role in the Church leadership. Part of that research led him to produce an informative essay in 1980 on the events that led the main body of Latter-day Saints to accept Brigham Young and the Twelve as leaders beginning in August 1844. In the essay, Esplin mentions that “in the spring of 1844 [in] a dramatic meeting . . . Joseph Smith gave the Twelve additional priesthood keys along with a charge to ‘bear off the Kingdom’ to all the world—to build on the foundation he had laid.” Esplin continues, “As he had several times intimated since 1842, Joseph Smith on this occasion in March 1844 told them still again that he would not be long with them.” Such wording, which parallels somewhat the 1844/1845 document, suggests Esplin was aware of the manuscript, and he was no doubt even referring to it, but he gives no source for the material. However, the following year (1981), Esplin published a landmark essay on the 1844 succession question, and on this occasion he included several actual statements from the 1844/1845 document. His use of the document in the essay clearly illustrates that he not only knew of the manuscript’s existence but recognized its significance as well.


Thus, Esplin was the first historian to actually cite and quote from the document and include portions of it in a published interpretive essay. Shortly thereafter, Leonard J. Arrington, relying on Esplin’s work and recognizing the significance of the 1844/1845 document, included several excerpts from the manuscript in his discussion on succession in his monumental 1985 biography of Brigham Young. In 1995, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel began work on a long-term project documenting all known images of Brigham Young, forcing him to wade through the massive Brigham Young Papers. In his searches, he came across the 1844/1845 manuscript and wrote about it in two separate books. With the exception of Holzapfel, during the decade of the 1990s, no other published works by LDS historians or authors on the subject of 1844 apostolic succession referred specifically to the manuscript. Significantly, however, in an April 1995 general conference

7. The same year Esplin published “Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity” (1981), Andrew H. Ehat completed a master’s thesis entitled, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1981). Ehat cited two sentences from the 1844/1845 manuscript, indicating his awareness of the document. The citation he used was intended to indicate to the reader that Joseph Smith predicted his martyrdom three months previous. He did not cite the document as evidence of apostolic priesthood succession. See Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances,” 165. Ehat also attributes the document to Hyde, whereas Hyde may have been merely the recorder. Although Ehat’s thesis was completed the same year Esplin’s article on succession appeared, Esplin should be credited with bringing the document to light.


address, President Boyd K. Packer briefly cited a portion of the document to illustrate the fact that prior to his death Joseph Smith conferred upon the Twelve the priesthood keys necessary to lead the Church.\footnote{See Boyd K. Packer, in \textit{Official Report of the 165th Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints} (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995), 6; also Packer, “‘The Shield of Faith,’” in \textit{Ensign} 25 (May 1995): 7.}

It is only within the last five years that the Twelve’s “last charge” document has become more widely known. In 2005, Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera published a full text of the statement, but the authors provided no historical background or context for the reader.\footnote{See Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, \textit{Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed, 1842–1845: A Documentary History} (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), 72–73.} In addition, in 2007, LDS curriculum included two brief excerpts from the text in the Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society manual \textit{Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith}.\footnote{\textit{Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith} (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 532–34.}

**Dating the Manuscript and Describing the Document**

Although the date of the document transcription is not given, it can be approximated. The text refers to a meeting held in Nauvoo on September 8, 1844 (the meeting was Sidney Rigdon’s excommunication trial). Therefore, the document had to be written sometime after September 8. Furthermore, the text states that the “last charge” meeting was held “the latter part of the month of March last” (italics added), meaning late March 1844. Since reference is made to “March last,” the document had to have been written before March 1845, but after September 8, 1844.

Initially the document was likely drafted to defuse Rigdon’s leadership claims. Immediately following the August 8 meeting in which the Twelve were sustained as the Church’s new leadership, Rigdon began undermining their authority, which resulted in his excommunication exactly one month later. Significantly, the minutes of Rigdon’s September 8 excommunication trial indicate that the March “last charge” meeting was one of the topics of discussion. In a portion of his remarks given at the trial, Orson Hyde emphasized one reason why Rigdon could have no claim on the leadership: he was not even present during the meeting in which the priesthood keys were conferred upon the Twelve. Significantly, Hyde’s

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comments bear a number of striking similarities to the Twelve’s apostolic succession document. Following his excommunication, Rigdon remained for a few days in Nauvoo, where he secured a few followers, but by November he was in Pennsylvania with intentions of garnering the support of LDS branches in Kirtland and in the East. Rigdon’s attempts during fall 1844 to garner support probably prompted the Twelve to make an official statement regarding the events that led to their receiving from Joseph Smith the authority to lead the Church.

Besides Rigdon, the Twelve also had to deal with another detractor, thirty-one-year-old James J. Strang. In August 1844, Strang produced a letter, purported to have been written by Joseph Smith nine days before his death, appointing Strang as his successor and designating a location near Burlington, Wisconsin (later named Voree), as the new place of Mormon gathering. Word of Strang’s claims reached the Twelve in Nauvoo in August, which led to his excommunication on August 26. Thus, while the Twelve apparently hoped their declaration would put to rest Rigdon’s influence, they were probably also targeting Strang’s claims.

14. Orson Hyde’s remarks on this occasion were as follows:

“Before I went east on the 4th of April last, we were in council with Brother Joseph almost every day for weeks, says Brother Joseph in one of those councils there is something going to happen; I dont know what it is, but the Lord bids me to hasten and give you your endowment before the temple is finished. He conducted us through every ordinance of the holy priesthood, and when he had gone through with all the ordinances he rejoiced very much, and says, now if they kill me you have got all the keys, and all the ordinances and you can confer them upon others, and the hosts of Satan will not be able to tear down the kingdom, as fast as you will be able to build it up; and now says he on your shoulders will the responsibility of leading this people rest, for the Lord is going to let me rest a while. Now why did he say to the Twelve on YOUR shoulders will the responsibility rest, why did he not mention Brother Hyrum? The spirit knew that Hyrum would be taken with him, and hence he did not mention his name; Elder Rigdon’s name was not mentioned, although he was here all the time, but he did not attend our councils.” Orson Hyde statement, “Trial of Elder Rigdon,” Times and Seasons 5 (September 15, 1844): 651; see also Wilford Woodruff letter, October 11, 1844, published in Times and Seasons 5 (November 2, 1844): 698.

15. For an examination of Rigdon’s activities during this period, see Richard S. Van Wagoner, Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984), 352–60, 367–81. While Van Wagoner’s examination of the historical events is commendable, he paints a negative and unfavorable image of Joseph Smith and the Twelve.

After examining the historical sources, we conclude the document was drafted sometime during the fall of 1844. However, allowance must be given to extend the dating of the document to as late as March 1845.

If the document is so significant, the question might be asked, Why was the Twelve’s “declaration” never officially published or released? The answer may lie in the fact that those who were invited to attend the private meetings conducted by the Prophet Joseph Smith during the early months of 1844 were instructed to remain silent about the details of the closed meetings. For example, at a meeting held on March 10 (just a little over two weeks prior to the “last charge” meeting), those attending were told that “Joseph required perfect secrecy of them” regarding the things they had learned and were being taught. 17 This possibly explains why William Clayton and Wilford Woodruff, both of whom were thorough and detailed diarists, did not record any of the particulars regarding the “last charge” meeting in their diary records. Given the restriction by the Prophet not to discuss what transpired in the closed-door meetings, the Twelve, at least initially, appear to have been cautious about sharing many of the details associated with the “last charge” meeting.

17. Joseph Smith Diary, March 10, 1844, cited in Scott H. Faulring, ed., An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books 1987), 459; this sentence is lined through in the original. Later, one participant disclosed to a reporter, “For the time being, this was to remain a perfect secret until God should reveal to the contrary,” and Joseph Smith “swore them all to present secrecy, under the penalty of death!” George T. M. Davis, Authentic Account of the Massacre of Joseph Smith (St. Louis: n.p., 1844), 7.
The two-page manuscript is written in Orson Hyde’s handwriting on unlined paper measuring approximately 12 x 8 inches.¹⁸ The fact that the document is in Hyde’s handwriting suggests several possibilities regarding the document’s actual authorship. One possibility implies that perhaps the document was collectively authored by the Twelve and Hyde was chosen as the scribe to write the draft. Or, Hyde may have been assigned by the Twelve to draft the manuscript and then submitted it to the Twelve for their approval and authorization. Finally, Hyde may have independently drafted the document and then submitted it to the Twelve for their approval. Regardless of who actually authored the document, the subject matter and content provide invaluable historical information as well as a collective testimony of the Twelve regarding the “last charge” meeting.

A note that reads “March 1844 Declaration of the 12 Apostles” was added later and is written sideways in the lower right-hand corner of the second page. This note should not be mistaken as the date the document was drafted. The manuscript is part of the Brigham Young Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

¹⁸ As indicated, the document is in the handwriting of Orson Hyde. Hyde left Nauvoo on September 10, 1844, to travel to Kirtland, Ohio, to bring his family to Nauvoo. Hyde was also absent from Nauvoo most of the month of January 1845, spending his time St. Louis. In February he again returned to St. Louis on Church business and was gone for about a month. See Myrtle Stevens Hyde, *Orson Hyde: The Olive Branch of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Agreka Books, 2000), 183–85. Hyde’s absence from Nauvoo during most of the winter of 1845 supports the conclusion that the document was probably drafted in the fall of 1844.
The Document

We, the undersigned,\textsuperscript{19} do hereby solemnly, sincerely, and truly testify before God, angels, and men, unto all people unto whom this certificate may come, that we were present at a Council in the latter part of the month of March last,\textsuperscript{20} held in the City of Nauvoo in the upper part of the brick building situate[d] upon Water Street, commonly known here as “Joseph’s Store,”\textsuperscript{21} in which Council Joseph Smith did preside; and the greater part of the Twelve Apostles were present namely, Brigham Young, Heber C Kimball Orson Hyde, Parley P Pratt, Orson Pratt, John Taylor, Amesa Lyman, Willard Richards, and Wilford Woodruff.\textsuperscript{22} These we

\textsuperscript{19} The fact that the names of the Twelve do not appear at the end of the manuscript suggests that they were preparing the document for newspaper publication and possibly intended that their names would be added by the printer at the end.

\textsuperscript{20} The exact date of the meeting is not known, but several sources refer to late March 1844. Wilford Woodruff, who kept a daily journal during this period, suggests the meeting occurred on Tuesday, March 26. His entry under that date reads: “A rainy [sic] day. I met in council with the brethren.” Woodruff, \textit{Wilford Woodruff’s Journal}, 2:371. No other entry in Woodruff’s journal during the latter half of March suggests any other possible council meeting with the Twelve and others. William Clayton’s diary entry for March 26 reads, “In Council through the day.” William Clayton, Diary, March 26, 1844, Church History Library, as cited in William Clayton, \textit{An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton}, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 128. The Prophet’s own diary states, “Tuesday, March 26 1844 From 9 to 12 in council. From 2 to 5 P.M. in council. Warm, some wet.” Faulring, \textit{An American Prophet's Record}, 461. Joseph Smith’s published history under this date reads: “From nine to twelve, noon, in council; also from two to five p.m.” \textit{History of the Church}, 6:274. As noted in the text, it is probable that Woodruff and Clayton purposely did not include specific details associated with the meeting because they were so instructed by Joseph Smith.

\textsuperscript{21} Joseph Smith’s two-story Red Brick Store, completed in January 1842 and situated on Water Street west of Joseph Smith’s home properties (that is, Homestead and Mansion House), was the center of Joseph Smith’s church, civic, and business operations and activities in Nauvoo. A small room on the second story served as the Prophet’s office. A larger room was used for meetings of the municipal council, Nauvoo Legion, Relief Society, and the leading councils and quorums of the Church. Joseph Smith also administered the temple ordinances to selected initiates there beginning on May 4, 1842. For an examination of the function and significance of the store, see Roger D. Launius and F. Mark McKiernan, \textit{Joseph Smith, Jr.’s Red Brick Store} (Macomb, Ill.: Western Illinois University, 1985).

\textsuperscript{22} In March 1844, the Quorum of the Twelve consisted of thirteen Apostles (listed in seniority)—Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt, William Smith, Orson Pratt, John E. Page, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff,
feel confident were all present on that occasion besides many others who were of the quorum of high Priests to which we our= selves belong.  

George A. Smith, Willard Richards, Lyman Wight, and Amasa M. Lyman. On August 20, 1842, Orson Pratt was excommunicated, leaving a vacancy in the quorum, at which time Amasa M. Lyman was ordained an Apostle to fill the vacancy left by Pratt. Five months later, on January 20, 1843, Pratt was rebaptized and reinstated in the quorum, thereby bringing the number in the quorum to thirteen. To rectify the situation, Joseph Smith made Lyman a counselor to the First Presidency, although he also continued as a member of the Twelve. See Breck England, *The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985), 81, 84–85; also Loretta L. Hefner, “From Apostle to Apostle: The Personal Struggle of Amasa Mason Lyman,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 (Spring 1983): 92. Hefner incorrectly states that after Lyman became a counselor to the First Presidency he was no longer a member of the quorum, when in fact he retained his position in the body.

The four Apostles who were not listed as being present at the March 26 meeting were William Smith, John E. Page, George A. Smith, and Lyman Wight. At the time, the standing of William Smith, John E. Page, and Lyman Wight in the quorum was dubious. (William Smith was subsequently excommunicated by the Twelve on October 19, 1845; and John E. Page was excommunicated on June 27, 1846. Following the martyrdom, as plans were being put into place to leave Nauvoo, Lyman Wight felt compelled to strike out on his own to establish a colony in Texas.) Why were they not there? Were they not invited to the meeting? Was it Joseph Smith’s intent to purposely give the keys only to the more faithful members of the Twelve? Possibly so. The absence of George A. Smith’s name in the document poses some additional questions. Was he possibly present and Hyde inadvertently failed to include his name along with the other members of the Twelve, or was he actually missing? If he was not present, did he receive the keys at a later time? And finally, it is significant to note that both Sidney Rigdon and William Law were conspicuously absent. This is not surprising when considering the fact that Rigdon’s loyalty to Joseph Smith and the Church had been in question for months. See Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 311–25. Law’s case was even more tenuous. In January 1844, he was dropped from the First Presidency, and less than four weeks after the “last charge” meeting he was excommunicated. See Lyndon W. Cook, *William Law* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1994), 18–19.

23. Although the text states that those present consisted of the Twelve and the quorum of high priests, Andrew H. Ehat gives evidence to show that the meeting was actually a meeting of the Council of Fifty, first organized on March 11, 1844, a little more than two weeks previous to the March 26 meeting. Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances,” 162–63. Historian Klaus J. Hansen also writes that the “last charge” meeting was a Council of Fifty meeting but does not give a date. See Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1970), 63–64. Writing nearly sixty years later, Benjamin F. Johnson, a member of the Council of Fifty who was in attendance, recalled the events of the meeting as follows:
In this Council, Joseph Smith seemed somewhat depressed in spirit, and took the liberty to open his heart to us concerning his presentiments of the future. His own language to us on that occasion, as nearly as we can recollect, was as follows.

Brethren, the Lord bids me hasten the work in which we are engaged. He will not suffer that you should wait for your

“And now returning to the council and the ‘Last Charge.’ Let us remember that by revelation he had reorganized the Holy Priesthood, and by command of the Lord (D. & C. 124 and 123) had taken from the First Presidency his brother Hyrum to hold as Patriarch, the sealing power, the first and highest honor due to priesthood; that he had turned the keys of endowments, to the last anointing, and sealing together with keys of Salvation for the dead, with the eternity of the marriage covenant and the power of endless lives. All these keys he held, and under these then existing conditions he stood before that association of his select friends, including all the Twelve, and with great feeling and animation he graphically reviewed his life of persecution, labor and sacrifice for the church and kingdom of God, both of which he declared were now organized upon the earth. The burden of which had become too great for him longer to carry, that he was weary and tired with the weight he so long had borne, and he then said, with great vehemence: ‘And in the name of the Lord, I now shake from my shoulders the responsibilities of bearing off the Kingdom of God to all the world, and here and now I place that responsibility, with all the keys, powers and privileges pertaining thereto, upon the shoulders of you the Twelve Apostles, in connection with this council; and if you will accept this, to do it, God shall bless you mightily and shall open your way; and if you do it I now shake my garments clear and free from the blood of this generation and of all men;’ and shaking his skirt with the great vehemence he raised himself from the floor, while the spirit that accompanied his words thrilled every heart as with a feeling that boded bereavement and sorrow.”


D. Michael Quinn lists Johnson as becoming a member of the Council of Fifty between March 14 and April 11, 1844. See D. Michael Quinn, “The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844 to 1945,” BYU Studies 20, no. 2 (1980): 194. Johnson’s presence at the “last charge” meeting indicates he had been admitted to the council in March.

24. In January 1844, two months previous, William Law, Second Counselor to Joseph Smith, was dropped from the First Presidency primarily because of his opposition to the doctrine of plural marriage. By March, William, his brother Wilson, Robert D. and Charles Foster, Chauncey and Elias Higbee, and a number of others were openly manifesting their opposition against the Prophet. Joseph’s despondency probably stemmed from the growing dissent being mounted against him by Law and the others. On April 18, 1844, about three weeks after the “last charge” meeting, William, his wife Jane, Wilson Law, and Robert D. Foster were officially excommunicated from the Church. See Lyndon W. Cook, William Law (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1994), 28–29; and History of the Church, 6:341.
The 1844/1845 declaration of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles regarding
apostolic succession, written by the hand of Orson Hyde, a member of the quorum.

Courtesy Church History Library
endowment until the Temple is done. Some important scene is near to take place. It may be that my enemies will kill me, and in case they should, and the keys and power which rest on me not be imparted to you, they will be lost from the Earth; but if I can only succeed in placing them upon your heads, then let me fall a victim to murderous hands if God will suffer it, and I can go with all pleasure and satisfaction, knowing that my work is done, and the foundation is laid on which the kingdom of God is to be reared in this dispensation of the fulness of times. Upon the shoulders of the Twelve must the responsibility of leading this church hence forth rest until you shall appoint others to succeed you. Your enemies cannot kill you all at once, and should any of you be killed, you can lay your hands upon others and fill up your quorum. Thus can this power and these keys be perpetuated in the Earth. Brethren, you have many storms to pass through, and many sore trials await you. You will know what it is to be bound with chains and with fetters for this cause sake. God knows I pity you and feel for you; but if you are called to lay down your lives, die like men, and pass immediately beyond your reach of your enemies. After they have killed you, they can harm you no more. Should you have to walk right into danger and the jaws of death, fear no evil; Jesus Christ has died before you.

After this appointment was made, and The Twelve received confirmed by the holy anointing under the hands of Joseph and Hyrum, Joseph continued his speech unto them, saying, while he walked the floor and threw back the collar of his coat upon his shoulders, “I roll the burthen and responsibility of leading this church off from my shoulders on to yours. Now, round up your shoulders and stand under it like men; for the Lord is going to let me rest a while.” Never shall we forget his feelings or his words on this occasion. After he had thus spoken, he continued to walk the floor, saying: “Since I have

25. At the time, eleven of the thirteen members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had already received the endowment from Joseph Smith. The only two Apostles who had not received the endowment were William Smith and John E. Page, both of whom, as noted, were not present at the meeting. Joseph’s expression that it was not expedient that they “should wait for your endowment until the Temple is done” implies he had intentions to administer the endowment to a number of others who were present on that occasion.

26. The wording from the text implies that the Twelve received the priesthood keys by the laying on of hands of both Joseph and Hyrum Smith. At the time, Hyrum held two priesthood offices, patriarch and assistant president of the Church (co-president), the position formerly held by Oliver Cowdery (see D&C 124:91–96). The fact that both Joseph and Hyrum held the keys jointly explains why the Twelve specifically state both participated.
rolled the burden off from my shoulders, I feel as light as a cork. I feel that I am free. I thank my God for this deliverance.”

We gave our testimony on the 8th of September last before a special conference in this city, at which Sidney Rigdon was tried and excommunicated from the church; and altho’ we declared it there in the presence of many thousand people, we now feel it a pleasure in reducing it to writing, and freely give our names to the world in confirmation of the above statements; and further, that Joseph Smith did declare that he had conferred upon the Twelve every key and every power that he ever held himself before God. This [is] our testimony [and] we expect to meet in a coming day when all parties will know that we have told the truth and have not lied, so help us God.

[Side note added on the bottom of page 2] March 1844
Declaration of the 12 Apostles

27. The entire minutes of Rigdon’s excommunication trial were published. See “Trial of Elder Rigdon” Times and Seasons 5 (September 15, 1844): 647–55; and “Continuation of Elder Rigdon’s Trial,” Times and Seasons 5 (October 1, 1844): 660–67.

28. Rigdon’s trial was conducted by the Twelve in a large assembly of the Latter-day Saints. The meeting was likely held in an open-air meeting place, sometimes referred to as the east grove, situated on the southeast corner of Knight and Robinson Streets in Nauvoo. Beginning in April 1844, the east grove became the preferred general meeting place for the Saints. See LaMar C. Berrett, ed., Sacred Places, Volume 3: Ohio and Illinois (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 174–76.

Alexander L. Baugh (alex_baugh@byu.edu) is Professor of Church History and Doctrine and director of research for the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University. He received his BS from Utah State University and his MA and PhD degrees from Brigham Young University.

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel (holzapfel@byu.edu) is Professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University, and is currently serving as president of the Alabama Birmingham Mission. Prior to his mission call, he served as director of publications for BYU’s Religious Studies Center and photographic editor for BYU Studies. He received his BA from Brigham Young University and his MA and PhD degrees from the University of California at Irvine.