



6-1-2014

The Prophet: The Latter-day Saint Experience in the East, 1844–1845

Susan E. Black

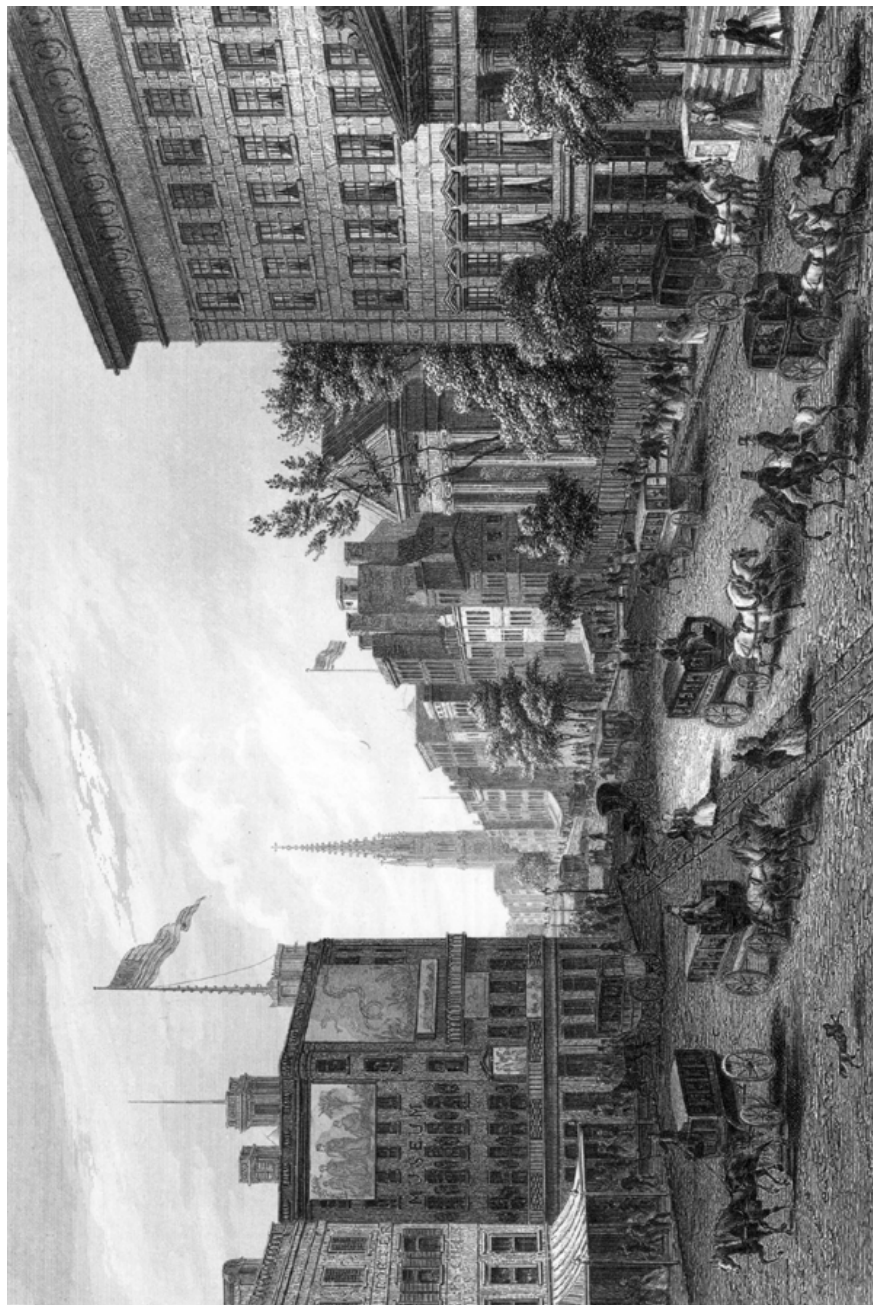
Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>

Recommended Citation

Black, Susan E. (2014) "The Prophet: The Latter-day Saint Experience in the East, 1844–1845," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 53 : Iss. 2 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol53/iss2/13>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



“Broadway,” fine steel engraving by Ahrens for Bibliographische Institut in Hildburghausen, ca. 1845. *The Prophet’s* office at No. 7 Spruce Street was a short distance from Broadway. Courtesy Philographikon—Galerie Rauhut.

The Prophet

The Latter-day Saint Experience in the East, 1844–1845

Susan Easton Black

The Prophet is the key to understanding the Latter-day Saint experience in the eastern United States from 1844 to 1845. Although only one volume of newsprint, the newspaper contains fifty-two issues, spanning four pages in length, with each page divided into five columns. This translates into approximately twenty-five hundred single-spaced pages on 8½" x 11" paper. The masthead of the first weekly issue¹ on Saturday, May 18, 1844, proudly proclaimed, "We Contend for the Truth." From the eighth issue on Saturday, July 6, 1844, to the final issue on Saturday, May 24, 1845, the proclamation was revised to include "Devoted to the Dissemination of Truth, Moral, Religious, Political, and Scientific."² *The Best of The Prophet* and the accompanying searchable DVD-ROM of all fifty-two issues are filled with news of Mormonism and the spread of the Latter-day Saint faith in New York, Pennsylvania, and other eastern states in the mid-1840s. Local news of interest to Latter-day Saint historians is presented against a backdrop of historical events, such as the United States presidential election of 1844, the martyrdom of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum, and the ongoing wrestle between Sidney Rigdon and Latter-day Saint leadership as they vied for converts in the East.

Editors of *The Prophet* printed an unrelenting defense of Mormonism to counteract exaggerated reports and slanderous claims stemming from Hancock County, Illinois, and printed in eastern newspapers. Editors George T. Leach, William Smith, Samuel Brannan, and Parley P. Pratt confronted politicians, newspaper columnists, and even the governor of Illinois on statements that misrepresented Mormon faith and vilified discipleship. In contrast, they wrote in glowing terms of Joseph

Smith and thousands of Mormons gathered on the banks of the Mississippi in the Zion-like society of Nauvoo. They wrote words of encouragement to fellow believers in the East who were planning to migrate to the Illinois capital of Mormonism.

Editors of *The Prophet*

George T. Leach and William Smith. William Smith³ had an interest in the print business that can be traced to a proposed weekly newspaper titled the *Nauvoo Ensign and Zarahemla Standard*. Although the *Ensign and Standard* never became newsprint due to the untimely death in August 1841 of Smith's brother Don Carlos, proposed editor of the publication, the decision to halt the paper before it commenced was fraught with complications. The largest issue was what to do about subscribers who had prepaid for copies of the *Ensign and Zarahemla*. The strong solicitation of subscribers or friends, as William Smith called them, "induced [him] to publish" a new paper in Nauvoo.⁴ *The Wasp*, first printed on April 16, 1842, was begun to appease disgruntled subscribers of the *Ensign and Zarahemla*.

From the first issue to the last, the masthead of *The Wasp* proudly displayed the saying of William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878), editor of the *New York Evening Post*, "Truth Crushed to Earth Will Rise Again." Smith envisioned the *Wasp* as a journal that published news of local and general interest. He did not see the *Wasp* as a vehicle for disseminating truths on religious matters, contending that such matters were the domain of the *Times and Seasons*, the official Latter-day Saint newspaper in Nauvoo.⁵ As editor in chief, Smith saw his role as directing the editorial staff to write with a "spirit of boldness and determination that shall become our station and be worthy of our cause" and to report "local and general news of the day."⁶ In December 1842, Smith resigned as editor in chief to serve in the Illinois state legislature, a position he had been elected to on the Democratic ticket.⁷ John Taylor succeeded Smith as editor in chief for issues thirty-two through fifty-two (December 10, 1842, to April 26, 1843).

William Smith's next foray in newsprint was *The Prophet*, a newspaper that had been first published in May 1844 under the direction of Elder George T. Leach, president of the Board of Controls of the Society for the Diffusion of Truth in New York City.⁸ In the first issue of *The Prophet*, Leach informed readers that the newspaper would advocate "the faith of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints [and] . . . be devoted to Agriculture, Commerce and Manufactures, as well as to the

Foreign and Domestic News of the Day.” Leach promised readers that *The Prophet* would also defend the Constitution of the United States and not neglect “Arts and Sciences—Sketches, Narratives, Biographies, Moral Essays, and Poems.”⁹

In the very month that *The Prophet* made its inauspicious appearance in New York City, William Smith wrote to Leach on June 3, 1844, “I mentioned to them [Church leaders in Nauvoo] concerning your publishing a paper in New York, and the Prophet bid it God speed: the council also sanctioned it by a loud and general vote, so ‘go ahead’ and do the best you can—which I have no doubt you will do—and the rest I will tell you when I get there. Remember what I said in conference:—Hang out the banner for Gen. Joseph Smith, and let the world know that we are not afraid to advocate his claims to the Presidential Chair.” Upon reading Smith’s letter, Leach assumed that *The Prophet* was considered by Church leaders an official Latter-day Saint newspaper and on equal footing with the *Times and Seasons*.¹⁰

Convinced that his assumption was correct, Leach and the Board of Controls rented office space on the second floor of No. 7 Spruce Street in New York City. Leach sent notice to subscribers and merchants that all business letters, news, and communications were to be addressed to *The Prophet* at the Spruce Street address.¹¹ As to the cost of a single copy of *The Prophet*, Leach and the Board of Controls set the rate at three cents. For a year’s subscription, the rate was one dollar per annum, to be paid in advance. It was anticipated that sales of newsprint would cover expenses, such as renting space on Spruce Street, paper and ink, and staff needed to run the printing press.

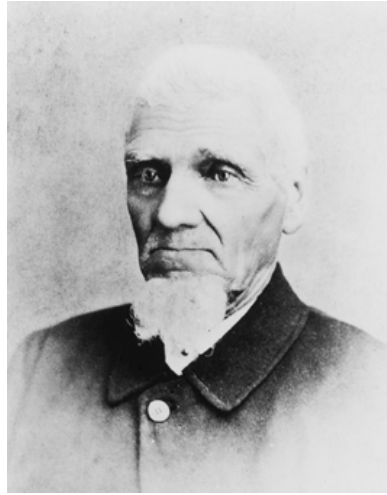
What Leach and the Board of Controls did not fathom was that Church leaders in Nauvoo were planning to remove Leach from his “hands-on” association with *The Prophet*. With John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff engaged in publishing the *Times and Seasons*, Church leaders believed that a man equal to their apostolic status was needed to fill the editorship of *The Prophet*. Since William Smith was already serving a mission in the East, having been called on April 19, 1843, the choice seemed obvious. Church leaders met with Smith in May 1844 to ascertain his interest in being named editor in chief of *The Prophet*.¹² With the approbation of his brother Joseph and fellow members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Smith agreed to take the helm of *The Prophet* and assume leadership of the Board of Controls.

Smith left Nauvoo on May 12, 1844, for the eastern states. Three days later, the *Nauvoo Neighbor* printed, “Elder Smith (late representative)

wishes to say to the friends and voters of Hancock county, that in consequence of the sickness of his family, now in the hands of a doctor in the city of Philadelphia, he relinquishes the idea of offering himself as a candidate for a seat in the next Legislature of Illinois.”¹³ When Smith reached New York City, he summarily told Leach to step down as editor of *The Prophet* and president of the Board of Controls. Leach relinquished his role with the newspaper and the board. He then hurried to Nauvoo, hoping to understand the motives behind his dismissal.

Curiously, Leach was never mentioned directly as editor in *The Prophet* before a notice buried on page two of the June 29, 1844, issue announced his resignation: “Elder G. T. Leach has resigned the editorship of the *Prophet*. Any communications for him to be addressed to 187 Twentieth street.” Notice was then given that “Elder Wm. Smith, of the ‘Quorum of the Twelve’ having accepted of the Editorship of the *Prophet* all letters or communications appertaining to the business of said paper must be addressed to him (post paid).”¹⁴

Beginning with issue eight of *The Prophet*, Smith is listed in the newsprint as editor in chief. Under his editorship, the purpose of *The Prophet* was to promote “the cause of truth” and to advance “the kingdom of God upon the earth; . . . to be the comfort of the Saints in the East, and to bear an occasional Olive Branch to the far-distant West.”¹⁵ During his tenure with the newspaper, Smith visited LDS branches in the East and reported in *The Prophet*, “Boston contains a noble, and a beautiful branch of the church” and the Saints in New Bedford are “strong in the faith of the new and everlasting covenant; they contributed liberally for the temple and other purposes.”¹⁶ He rejoiced that the Saints in Brooklyn were “getting along so well.”¹⁷ As part of his visits to LDS branches, Smith solicited subscribers for *The Prophet*. He wrote from Bordertown, New Jersey, “*The Prophet* is still gaining ground in these parts, and is considered a useful paper among the Saints. I can say for my part, I am very much pleased with it.”¹⁸



William Smith, photograph. Courtesy Church History Library.

In the meantime, the editorial staff extended an urgent invitation to W. Waterman Phelps¹⁹ of Nauvoo to accept the post of editor and “come on immediately” to take the place of Smith, who seemed content to be gone for long periods from the Spruce Street office.²⁰ Phelps ignored their invitation and remained in Nauvoo, knowing that Smith had been appointed editor in chief of *The Prophet* by Church leaders. Smith learned of the invitation extended to Phelps but spent little time smarting, for more pressing matters awaited him. News of the assassination of his brothers in Carthage led Smith to abruptly leave the East to console the grieving widows and his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, in Nauvoo.

When Smith returned to New York City in August 1844, he appeared resigned to remain in the East until a September 28, 1844, letter from Brigham Young led him to reevaluate his importance in the Church: “As it regards a Patriarch for the whole Church, there has not been any appointed yet in the place of brother Hyrum, and I do not calculate to do any thing but what is strictly according to the mind and will of God; the right rests upon your head, there is no doubt, and all will remain as it is until we have further communications from you; but if you feel disposed . . . to have it yourself, we wish you to come to Nauvoo as soon as possible, and receive your ordination of Patriarch by the proper authorities so that you may officiate in giving the Saints their patriarchal blessings.”²¹

Samuel Brannan. By November 23, 1844, Smith had made his decision and announced in *The Prophet*, “God has seen fit in his good pleasure to place upon my head in this ‘dispensation of the fulness of times’ the office of Patriarch of the Church.”²² Smith resigned as editor in chief of *The Prophet* and announced Samuel Brannan, a member of the editorial staff, as the new editor in chief. Smith assured subscribers that Brannan was “a worthy man of God, true to his trust in defense of the plan of salvation, and to whose perseverance and untiring exertion we must credit the present existence of the Prophet.”²³ Smith praised Brannan as “not only a man of faith but a man of works” and promised that “if the Saints rally to the support of the Prophet [under the editorship of Elder Brannan] it will yet be the means of breaking down some of the strong holds of the enemy, and become a ‘flashing torch light’ of truth and intelligence to this generation.”²⁴ Smith summarized his work as editor in chief: “[*The Prophet*] has been the means . . . for the success of our cause in the Eastern land . . . to protect the church from devouring wolves, it has stood as a faithful servant upon the watch tower of Zion, and as a flaming torch light to point the way to the tree of life—to the haven of eternal rest.” Smith assured subscribers, “I do not speak thus

for flattery, egotism or boast of its merits undeservingly. Yet with confidence I assert, that no other periodical in the same length of time has done more good for this Church than the Prophet.”²⁵

Having concluded his service with *The Prophet*, Smith departed with his family for Nauvoo, where he gave notice that “as to my presidency over the eastern churches, I am confident that my precept and example have been unexceptionable in the eyes of all good Saints.” He counseled Latter-day Saints to “support and uphold the proper authorities of the church—when I say authorities, I mean the whole, and not a part; the *Twelve*, and not one, two, six, eight, ten, or eleven, but the whole *Twelve*;—follow me as I follow Christ.”²⁶ As for his editorial staff in the East, they printed in *The Prophet*, “We truly feel to regret the departure of Elder Smith—his straight forward course, firmness, and decision of character, (that has ever been so characteristic of his family,) has won the heart of every saint that was engaged in the warfare against apostates.” The staff summarized Smith’s service by printing, “He surely proved himself a servant of God, in reproof and rebuke, in teaching and example.”²⁷

Under the editorial leadership of Samuel Brannan, issues 27 to 50 rolled off the press. Like Smith, Brannan published the newspaper at No. 7 Spruce Street in New York City. Unlike Smith, Brannan added a second office at 386 Washington Street in Boston, placing agent E. Turner in charge of the Boston publication.²⁸ In addition, he doubled the price of the newspaper per annum from one to two dollars and the price of a single copy from three to six cents. In so doing, Brannan assured subscribers that “those who have taken the Prophet from its commencement, will receive their numbers up to the expiration of the year without any further remittance.”²⁹

While acting as editor in chief, Brannan also presided over the LDS branch in New York City, as authorized by William Smith. Without authorization, Brannan interviewed local Church leaders in the state of New York and visited LDS branches in Boston, Lowell, Petersboro, Salem, and New Bedford, Massachusetts. During his visits to these LDS branches and others, Brannan touted himself as the presiding authority in the eastern states and referred to his visits as “missions.” Because Brannan was often away from the Spruce Street office on mission affairs, he asked subscribers for their prayers in his behalf. After months of fulfilling unauthorized administrative duties in LDS branches throughout the eastern states, Brannan learned that “charges have been preferred against me [in Nauvoo], and the testimony has been deemed sufficient by the Presidency of the church, for my excommunication.”³⁰

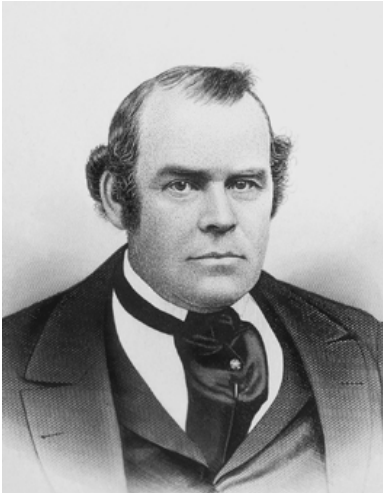
Over the signatures of Brigham Young and Willard Richards, Brannan was “disfellowshipped and cut off” for conduct that was a disgrace “in the eyes of justice and virtue.” The charges against Brannan went beyond overreaching his stewardship. As Young and Richards saw the situation, Brannan, “under the sacred garb of religion, [had] been practising the most disgraceful and diabolical conduct.”³¹



Samuel Brannan. Courtesy Church History Library.

A clue to Brannan’s misconduct is contained in a July 18, 1844, Orson Hyde letter: “Strange doctrines have been taught and practised in Boston and elsewhere by men claiming higher authority than the Twelve.”³² One such “strange doctrine” was “spiritual wifery.” Parley P. Pratt denounced this doctrine “as foreign from the real principles of the church as the devil is from God, or as sectarianism is from christianity. . . . It is but another name for whoredom, wicked and unlawful connection, and every kind of confusion, corruption, and abomination.”³³ Reacting to the charge of “conduct that was a disgrace,” Brannan printed in *The Prophet*, “The blow is truly a severe one, but I feel to bear it patiently, and even more if it is required. If I have deviated from the path of rectitude—violated the commandments of God, or been the means of bringing a reproach upon his cause, I look upon myself as being bound to make restitution for the same.” He confessed, “It has ever been during my ministry in the church, my desire to do the will of my God, and heavenly Father. . . . On to-morrow I shall start for Nauvoo, there to meet my accusers face to face, and abide the decision of the council of God.”³⁴ The confession of Brannan was more of an expression than a fact, for he tarried in the East.³⁵

Parley P. Pratt. Meanwhile, on November 30, 1844, Parley P. Pratt³⁶ was “appointed by the spirit of the living God through his brethren of the quorum of the Twelve to take charge and presidency of all the churches in the eastern cities.” In a letter addressed to Latter-day Saints residing in the East, Brigham Young announced Pratt’s appointment to preside over “matters in temporal and spiritual things to take charge of the printing and



Parley P. Pratt, engraving. Courtesy Church History Library.

emigrating business in the city of New York, to advise, to counsel and direct the labours of all the officers of the church, and in fine to set all things in proper order in the eastern countries pertaining to the church.”³⁷

Although subscribers anticipated *The Prophet* would be “more interesting, being fed occasionally with valuable productions” from the pen of Parley P. Pratt, not all were willing to accept his appointment as editor in chief or the sanctions pronounced against Brannan.³⁸ When a protest was held in Newark, New Jersey, Pratt declared the protest as “uncalled for, and entirely out of order.”³⁹ To appease protestors,

however, Pratt met with Brannan to discuss his presumption of administrative duties and the issue of misconduct. After their meeting, Pratt informed Church leaders in Nauvoo that Brannan has “aimed to do right of late, and has manifested a humble and willing obedience to my advice and council. . . . He is about to repair to the west, on this and other business, and we feel confident that full satisfaction will be given, and confidence will be restored, in which case we hope he will speedily return to this place and assist us in the office [of *The Prophet*].”⁴⁰

During Brannan’s absence, Pratt spent the winter of 1845 visiting LDS branches in Boston, Philadelphia, and Long Island and preaching true doctrines of the kingdom, for he “found that Elders William Smith, G. J. Adams, S. Brannan and others, had been corrupting the Saints by introducing among them all manner of false doctrine and immoral practices, by which many of them had stumbled and been seduced from virtue and truth.”⁴¹ As for his editorship of *The Prophet*, Pratt wrote on January 1, 1845, “We have now three departments, duly appointed by the presidency of the church, viz., the Nauvoo office, under the management of Mr. J. Taylor, the English department, under Br. W. Woodruff, and the New York publishing department now committed to my charge. . . . The church, therefore, is hereby instructed not to patronize, purchase, or support any publication pertaining to our cause, except they emanate from one of these three offices.”⁴²

Subscription Woes

No matter who acted as editor in chief—George T. Leach, William Smith, Samuel Brannan, or Parley P. Pratt—each issue of *The Prophet* informed readers “of the progress of the great work of God in this last dispensation.”⁴³ Although the message was clear that the work of God was moving forward, the newspaper did not attract many Latter-day Saint subscribers. Editor Brannan wrote, “If the Saints would only resolve in their hearts before God, that the Prophet shall live, and pursue [*sic*] that course necessary to sustain it that is needful, there will be no danger of us being called to mourn for the death of the New York Prophet.”⁴⁴ Brannan encouraged all interested parties to “send in their names, whether they are able to remit now the price of subscription or not, and we will send them the paper—and we would request the Elders throughout the country to send us in the names of all who wish our paper.”⁴⁵ As subscriptions trickled in to the Spruce Street office, names of subscribers and the LDS branches they attended were printed in the paper, followed by such comments as “we would say if every branch of the church would lay hold of the cause of the Prophet, as the Waynesville branch has done, there would be no difficulty in sustaining a paper in the city of New York.”⁴⁶

With the hope of increasing subscriptions, the editors requested traveling elders, canvassers, and postmasters “to act as Agents” for *The Prophet*.⁴⁷ Traveling elders were promised that editors would “fully reward them for their labor and toil.”⁴⁸ Canvassers and postmasters were assured that “a liberal arrangement will be made” for each subscription forwarded to the Spruce Street office.⁴⁹ Due to the solicitations of elders, canvassers, and postmasters, the editors wrote on November 9, 1844, “Our subscription list is daily increasing in numbers, which is truly encouraging [*sic*] and we still hope before the expiration of the first vol. that our income will be sufficiently large to pay our expenses in publication.”⁵⁰ The editorial staff not only hoped to pay publication expenses but to forego advertising, which cost “50 cts. per square of six lines for one insertion, and 25 cts. for every subsequent insertion.”⁵¹ In place of advertisements, editors planned to “devote the whole of our paper to interesting subjects.”⁵² When William D. Pratt wrote to *The Prophet* that he “expected to get us from fifty to one hundred subscribers, and Elder Brown, twice that amount, besides what Elder Appleby and others will get,” the editorial staff foresaw the day when advertisements would not appear in the second volume.⁵³ When their expectations failed to materialize, the imminent demise of *The Prophet* was all too apparent.

Other issues contributed to the death knell of *The Prophet*. Newspapers were lost in the mail, necessary paper for printing weekly editions was delayed, correspondents failed to forward news, and subscribers refused to make payments. The most grievous of these issues to the editors was backsliding subscribers. “We have many names on our list that have not paid in their subscription,” wrote the editorial staff. “We hope they will not forget us; it requires paper, ink, and labor to publish a paper. They only have to hand it to the Post Master, with their name and residence, and it reaches us without any expense on their part or ours either.”⁵⁴ In frustration, the staff printed on February 8, 1845, “We shall discontinue all papers that were subscribed for when the paper was first published after this number, that have not paid in their subscriptions.”⁵⁵ The staff reported, “We still have on our books a hundred or two of names that have not paid up their subscription. What a great help a couple of hundred dollars would be to us at this time. Brethren, do not forget us.”⁵⁶ A bigger frustration for the staff was knowing “the saints are at the present time numerous enough to circulate five thousand copies of the Prophet every week, if they would only clip those strings of covetousness.” Editors pled with Latter-day Saints to subscribe to “the cheapest publication ever issued in this society, and if it is now suffered to go down for the want of support, the good that it would have done, will certainly be required of every one that can pay two cents per week for to sustain it.”⁵⁷

Subscriber G. B. Wallace wrote, “Me thinks I hear you say, what! is the Prophet going down? No! no! not yet for if it should go down it will be very hard to start another here in the East, and, as you are aware, it is very difficult to get a paper from the West.” Wallace suggested, “Every one can use his influence and secure one subscriber for six months or one year, and that would relieve the Prophet at once and support it hereafter—and be sure to send in the money immediately.”⁵⁸ Editor Brannan was more direct in his solicitation: “Wanted—Some person that feels an interest for the cause of God, in the building up of His kingdom, that has five or six hundred dollars to invest, to take an interest in the publication of the Prophet.”⁵⁹ Yet sustaining funds were not forthcoming. *The Prophet* operated in the red for several months until Brannan stepped forward and covered publication expenses with personal funds. On June 22, 1844, the Board of Controls for the Society for the Diffusion of Truth met on “business of importance, at the ‘Prophet’ office” to discuss ways to save *The Prophet* and Brannan from financial ruin.⁶⁰ The Board of Controls concluded to sell capital stock in *The Prophet* for five dollars a share, which would entitle each shareholder

to “a dividend of the profits of the concern in proportion to the amount invested.” Shareholders were promised “a matter of pecuniary benefit to those who invest in stock.”⁶¹ Unfortunately, the “pecuniary benefit” was never realized.

Joseph Smith’s Presidential Campaign and Martyrdom

The Prophet promoted Joseph Smith’s run for the United States presidency more than any other newspaper in the East. Until editors received word of his martyrdom, they trumpeted the virtues of “General Joseph Smith” as the most able man for the highest office in the land. In so doing, editors followed the lead of the *Nauvoo Neighbor* editorial staff, who encouraged the faithful to promote the Prophet’s presidential bid. “It becomes us, as Latter Day Saints, to be wise, prudent, and energetic, in the cause that we pursue,” wrote editors of the *Neighbor*. After all, to editors and faithful Latter-day Saints alike, Joseph was “the most competent, the best qualified, and would fill the Presidential Chair with greater dignity to the nation” than other presidential hopefuls.⁶² Editors of *The Prophet* pledged “to use [their] utmost endeavors to ensure his election, being satisfied that he will administer the laws of his country without reference to party, sect or local prejudice.” Unabashedly, editors touted “Gen. Joseph Smith, of Nauvoo, Illinois” as “a Western man, with American principles.”⁶³

In hopes of furthering Joseph’s candidacy, *The Prophet* presented lengthy summaries of Jeffersonian Democratic meetings held under the direction of William Smith. At the meetings held in New York City and Philadelphia, discussions centered on securing General Joseph Smith’s “election to the highest office.”⁶⁴ These meetings adjourned with “nine cheers for Gen. Smith and Sidney Rigdon.”⁶⁵ One subscriber, who attended a rousing Jeffersonian meeting, wrote to *The Prophet*, “It is now a matter of considerable doubt who stands the best chance of being elected, Joe Smith, the Mormon prophet or Martin Van Buren.”⁶⁶ His words and those of other supporters of General Joseph Smith led the editorial staff to conclude, “We feel confident that if the intelligence of the American people prevail over their prejudices, [General Joseph Smith] will be elected by a large majority.”⁶⁷

But there was one hurdle to his election that seemed impossible for editors to set aside—rumors about Joseph Smith and Mormonism that appeared in New York papers under the captions “Mormon Troubles,” “The Mormon War,” “Latest from Nauvoo,” and “Joe. Smith in a Fix!”⁶⁸ Editors of *The Prophet* contended, “If the Mormons have no one to speak

for them, they must speak out for themselves and tell the tale of their outraged rights.”⁶⁹ Editors requested that Church leaders in Nauvoo send “all the information respecting the persecutions of the Saints and forward such papers as notice them, so that we may be enabled to collate matter for the ‘History of the Persecution of the People of God in the 19th Century.’”⁷⁰ In this way, editors hoped to stem the tide of unfounded rumors and secure the presidential election for Joseph.

Although all was in readiness to further Joseph’s bid for the presidency, a June 29, 1844, letter of Lyman O. Littlefield of Nauvoo changed everything. Littlefield wrote, “I hasten to inform your readers of the blackest crime that has ever darkened the pages of the history of the world. Gen. Joseph and Hiram Smith have been massacred, by ruthless, damnable, hellish hands!!” Littlefield gave a descriptive account of the martyrdom, concluding, “Alas! how can the vacuum ever be filled! O America, put on thy garb of mourning, the blood of these martyred saints cries to Omnipotence for redress and a restoration of trampled rights. We are determined that this matter shall not rest here, we will look to the law, to the arm of the judiciary of the American jurisprudence for redress.”⁷¹ When news of Littlefield’s letter reached LDS branches in the East, branch members “voted unanimously that the Brethren wear a crape on their left arm for thirty days, and the Sisters use such mourning as they deem suitable, as a token of their respect for the departed Prophet and Patriarch of the church.”⁷²

What the editors wanted more than wearing crape on their left arm was detailed information about the Martyrdom. Any news of the Martyrdom was given full coverage in *The Prophet*, no matter the source. Editors printed details about the *Expositor* affair and the text of Joseph’s executive order to halt the publication of the newspaper. Editors gave full-column space to testimonials that decried the brutality and illegality of events that led to the Martyrdom. Editors didn’t hesitate to print, “The floor of Carthage Jail is still stained with the blood of the martyred Prophets. There are yet seven balls in the floor where the head of Hiram lay when he fell.”⁷³ Editors also printed details of a grand jury proceeding held “against ten of those engaged in the murder of the Prophet & Patriarch,” in hopes of soon announcing the indicted were convicted of murder in the first degree.⁷⁴

Sidney Rigdon and Succession in Church Leadership

When a conviction was not forthcoming, editors denounced the legal system in Hancock County, Illinois, before turning their attention to discrediting Sidney Rigdon’s claim to Church leadership. The turn proved

essential to the future of the Church in the eastern states, for Rigdon had set up his headquarters in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and had sent disciples throughout the eastern states to convert Latter-day Saints to Rigdonism. Editors warned subscribers, “We hear of several Rigdonians about the country: as they pretend to hold the keys of Conquest, it may be well to look out for fires.”⁷⁵ The fires were not mere “drossy sparks flying from under the refiner’s hammer, and can only shine for a moment,” but flames that threatened to undermine the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the eastern states.⁷⁶ Editors expressed concern that in LDS branches in New Jersey “some of the apostates [Rigdonites]” had entered branch meetings “where they [we]re not known and palm[ed] themselves off as Latter Day Saints, and den[ied] their Rigdon origin.” Editors advised, “We give this notice that the Saints may be aware who they receive, for many of them hold licances [*sic*] which they will not deliver up, and some of the more corrupt may make use of them to deceive the churches.”⁷⁷ In gratitude, editors reported that in Boston, “Rigdonism is treated with silent contempt, just what it deserves!”⁷⁸

Details of Rigdon’s follies and criticism of the premise on which he based his leadership soon became regular features in *The Prophet*. A reprinted Orson Hyde letter of September 24, 1844, was the most conclusive evidence subscribers had of Rigdon’s excommunication: “I have to communicate to you the sad intelligence of Brother Rigdon’s excommunication from the Church. It was no pleasant thing to us to sever this branch from the vine; but duty to the Church required us to raise our hands and our voices against him for privately and secretly sowing the seeds of division and strife among the Saints, when openly and publicly he disavowed every such thing.” Hyde concluded his letter by penning, “When a man gets so high that he cannot take counsel or reproof, rest assured that his downfall is near, and the Devil will always tell him that it is not he that is fallen, but somebody else has done wrong.”⁷⁹ Hyde’s letter was followed by an October 11, 1844, Wilford Woodruff letter: “I heard the said Joseph Smith declare that Elder Rigdon had become like a millstone upon his back—a dead weight—and he had carried him long enough, and must throw him off. . . . Elder Rigdon attended some of the councils that president Smith held with the Twelve and others, before his death, while giving them instructions; but I heard President Smith say, that he came in without his wish or invitation, as he had no confidence in him.”⁸⁰

These apostolic remembrances of Rigdon’s disfavor with the Prophet Joseph Smith were followed by accusations that “while in Missouri,

[Rigdon] stood up and cursed God to his face, and pronounced Mormonism to be a delusion.”⁸¹ The editorial staff could not be restrained from presenting and musing over such antics or Rigdon’s belief that “Joseph Smith is the servant Christ spoken of in the parable of the ten talents in the 25th Chap. of Matthew. Joseph having but one talent it was to be taken from him and given to Sidney Rigdon who has ten, and he (Joseph) cast ‘into utter darkness’ as an ‘unprofitable servant.’”⁸² But there was no musing by editor Parley P. Pratt, who printed on March 29, 1845, “We frequently hear of debates, and conversations between the saints and apostates on the subject of who should lead the church, whether the Apostles who still survive the massacre, or Mr. Sidney Rigdon who is not a member of the church at all; having been regularly excommunicated by its highest authorities, for falsehood, deception, and hipocrisy [*sic*] of the grocest [*sic*] kind. Who would have thought that a question would ever have arisen among the saints, whether a man who was not a member of the church at all, should be their leader and head, or whether they would be led by some of their own members.”⁸³

Sidney Rigdon countered accusations made against him by sending letters to the office of *The Prophet*. In one letter, Rigdon professed his innocence and decried the editorial staff’s depiction of his followers “as mobocrats, as murderers, conspirators: and many other epithets of like character.”⁸⁴ In the same letter, Rigdon concluded, “As to any attack they [LDS leaders] can make upon my character, I fear them not.”⁸⁵ The impasse between Rigdon and Latter-day Saint leadership in the East was real, and Rigdonism was an ongoing threat to Mormons who were faithful to the Apostles.

Other Content in *The Prophet*

Like other Latter-day Saint newspapers of the 1840s, *The Prophet* was a composite of newsworthy entries with deference given to articles that favored Mormonism. In addition to coverage of major events in the expanding world of Mormonism, *The Prophet* included a variety of other newsworthy items, including

- an epistle from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles informing the Latter-day Saints about the martyrdom of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum;
- news, proceedings, and minutes of local Church conferences held in the eastern states;
- local Church news, including dates, times, and locations of specific prayer meetings;

- exchanges, clippings, and telegraph dispatches, often reprinted with editorial comments if the sentiments expressed in the clipping did not match those of the editors;
- poetry, usually expressions of doctrinal significance to Latter-day Saints;
- marriage and death announcements;
- pithy sayings such as were common in nineteenth-century newspapers;
- humorous anecdotes and adages; and
- advertisements, which were printed on the last page of each issue.

Conclusion

Although subscribers were notified as early as January 25, 1845, that arrangements were being made “for the publication of the second [volume]” of *The Prophet*,⁸⁶ by issue fifty-two, editors announced a lapse in printing for lack of subscribers, concluding, “[*The Prophet*] will now be discontinued a few weeks, to wait for subscriptions sufficient to warrant its further publication.” Weeks turned into months, for subscriptions were not forthcoming. Even though the second volume was to be published under the direct sanction and supervision of the twelve Apostles, it never materialized. However, the office at No. 7 Spruce Street in New York City remained open with a clerk ready to “attend to all business, communications and calls connected with the office, or publishing department.”⁸⁷ The second office, on Washington Street in Boston, closed its doors.

Pratt lamented the demise of *The Prophet*, and after struggling “through one year, notwithstanding its many disadvantages”⁸⁸ and misfortunes, Pratt permanently closed the Spruce Street office in the summer of 1845.

Susan Easton Black is an emeritus Professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. She is currently serving a mission with her husband at the Nauvoo Temple. She has authored, edited, or compiled over a hundred books during her career. This article is excerpted and adapted from *The Best of The Prophet*, published by BYU Studies with an accompanying DVD containing a searchable library of all fifty-two issues of *The Prophet*.

1. Two weekly printings of *The Prophet* were missed—October 26, 1844, and May 17, 1845. [^]

2. “Masthead,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 1 (May 18, 1844): p. 1, col. 1. Editors William Smith and Samuel Brannan added a scriptural caveat to the masthead: “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the

Prophets” (Amos 3:7). See “Surely the Lord God . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 8 (July 6, 1844): p. 1, col. 1. [^]

3. William Smith, son of Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack, was born on March 13, 1811, in Royalton, Windsor County, Vermont. William was baptized on June 9, 1830, in Seneca Lake by David Whitmer. William labored as a missionary in New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. In 1835, he was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and on May 24, 1845, the day on which the last issue of *The Prophet* appeared, he was ordained to the office of patriarch. He asserted that his ordination to patriarch entitled him to be President of the Church. On October 5, 1845, the apostolic calling of William was revoked. One week later, on October 12, 1845, William was excommunicated. See *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 4 vols. (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1903), 4:212. William died on November 13, 1893, in Osterdock, Clayton County, Iowa. [^]

4. William Smith, “Proposals for Publishing the Wasp,” *The Wasp* 1, no. 1 (April 16, 1842): p. 4, col. 3. [^]

5. Smith, “Proposals for Publishing the Wasp,” *The Wasp* 1, no. 1 (April 16, 1842): p. 4, col. 3. [^]

6. “Introductory,” *The Wasp* 1, no. 1 (April 16, 1842): p. 2, cols. 2–3. [^]

7. William was serving in the state legislature of Illinois when bills were introduced to repeal the Nauvoo Charter. On December 9, 1842, William argued for the Nauvoo Charter before the Illinois House of Representatives, claiming that “it granted privileges no different from those of five other cities in the state and that Nauvoo’s charter was singled out because of religious intolerance.” Kyle Walker, *United by Faith* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2005), 268. [^]

8. Little is known of George T. Leach except that he was mentioned on the Continuing Church Record at Nauvoo and that he participated in baptisms for the dead in Nauvoo. See Susan Easton Black and Harvey Bischoff Black, *Annotated Record of Baptisms for the Dead, 1840–1845, Nauvoo, Hancock County, Illinois*, 7 vols. (Provo, Utah: BYU Center for Family History and Genealogy, 2002), 4:2163. [^]

9. “Prospectus of a Weekly Newspaper. To be Entitled The Prophet,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 1 (May 18, 1844): p. 1, col. 1. [^]

10. William Smith, “We would apologize for our omission of Eld. Wm Smith’s letter . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 6 (June 22, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. [^]

11. “To prevent mistakes, all letters on business . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 8 (July 6, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. [^]

12. William Smith to Joseph Smith, October 28, 1843, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. [^]

13. William Smith suggested his brother Hyrum as a “suitable and capable person” to serve in the Illinois state legislature. See “For the Neighbor,” *Nauvoo Neighbor* 2, no. 3 (May 15, 1844): p. 2, col. 6. [^]

14. “The ‘Prophet’ for next week will be issued on Thursday . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 7 (June 29, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. [^]

15. William Smith, "The following is the substance of a letter which was written by Elder Wm. Smith to Elder Miles . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 25 (November 9, 1844): p. 1, col. 5. [^]

16. William Smith, "The following is the substance of a letter which was written by Elder Wm. Smith to Elder Miles . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 25 (November 9, 1844): p. 1, col. 4. [^]

17. William Smith, "The following is the substance of a letter which was written by Elder Wm. Smith to Elder Miles . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 25 (November 9, 1844): p. 1, col. 5. [^]

18. William Smith, "Elder Brannan. I have perused your several notes with pleasure, and I hope your promised visit, to this place this winter will not be forgotten . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 30 (December 14, 1844): p. 3, col. 5. [^]

19. W. Waterman Phelps was the son of William Wines Phelps and Sally Waterman, born in 1823. [^]

20. "W. Waterman Phelps of Nauvoo, is solicited to accept of a situation in the Prophet Office . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 15 (August 24, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. [^]

21. Brigham Young, "Beloved Br. William. I embrace the present opportunity . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 25 (November 9, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. [^]

22. Wm. Smith, "To Our Patrons," *The Prophet* 1, no. 27 (November 23, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. [^]

23. Samuel Brannan was born on March 2, 1819, in Saco, Maine. In his biographical remembrances dictated in his 63rd year, Brannan said of his newspaper career, "In company with his sister arrived in Lake County Ohio in the spring of 1833. There he undertook to learn the printing trade. . . . The knowledge he had acquired of the printing business proved a great lever for his advancement and enabled him to travel as an independent man only can. . . . His fondness for his business led him to New York City," where he edited *The Prophet* and from there traveled aboard the ship *Brooklyn* to California. "What seemed to him the most important article was that he brought with him [aboard the *Brooklyn*] an improved printing press, paper, type and all that was needed to start a newspaper on the shores of the Western World. . . . He set up his printing press and issued the 'California Star.'" See A Biographical Sketch Based on a Dictation, by Samuel Brannan, written by one of Hubert H. Bancroft's assistants, dated 1882, ms., C-D 805, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California. [^]

24. Wm. Smith, "To Our Patrons," *The Prophet* 1, no. 27 (November 23, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. [^]

25. Wm. Smith, "Three Days in New York," *The Prophet* 1, no. 30 (December 14, 1844): p. 3, col. 3. [^]

26. Wm. Smith, "Patriarchal," *Times and Seasons* 6, no. 9 (May 15, 1845): 904. William Smith and his family temporarily stayed with Emma Smith until the brick home on Water Street, formerly occupied by William Marks, became available. Unfortunately, in that home Caroline's health worsened. She died on May 22, 1845. See "Funeral of Mrs. Caroline Smith," *Times and Seasons* 6, no. 10 (June 1, 1845): 918-20. [^]

27. "Elder Smith," *The Prophet* 1, no. 49 (April 26, 1845): p. 2, col. 2. [^]

28. "New Arrangement," *The Prophet* 1, no. 48 (April 19, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. [^]

29. "Our Future Course," *The Prophet* 1, no. 35 (January 18, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
30. S. Brannan, "Brethren and Friends," *The Prophet* 1, no. 51 (May 10, 1845): p. 2, cols. 1–2. [^]
31. Brigham Young and Willard Richards, "Notice to the Churches Abroad," *The Prophet* 1, no. 51 (May 10, 1845): p. 2, col. 1. [^]
32. Orson Hyde, "Mr. Editor.—I am requested to say to the Saints . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 11 (July 27, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
33. P. P. Pratt, "This number closes the first volume of the 'Prophet,'" *The Prophet* 1, no. 52 (May 24, 1845): p. 2, cols. 1–2. [^]
34. S. Brannan, "Brethren and Friends," *The Prophet* 1, no. 51 (May 10, 1845): p. 2, col. 2. [^]
35. Pratt urged Samuel Brannan to "repair immediately" to Nauvoo and "acknowledge and frankly repent of his faults" before Church leaders. Pratt was confident that if Brannan humbled himself in this manner, he would receive a "restoration to his standing." Parley P. Pratt Jr., ed., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 422. [^]
36. Parley P. Pratt, son of Jared Pratt and Charity Dickinson, was born on April 12, 1807, in Burlington, Otsego County, New York. After gaining a testimony of the Book of Mormon, Pratt was baptized in early September 1830 by Oliver Cowdery and ordained an elder shortly thereafter. After being ordained an Apostle on February 21, 1835, he served successive missions to Pennsylvania, New York, New England, and Canada before settling in Missouri in 1838. In the 1840s Pratt served as editor and publisher of the *Millennial Star*. On his final mission, Pratt was murdered in May 1857 near Van Buren, Arkansas. See Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*. [^]
37. Orson Hyde and Brigham Young, "Elder P. P. Pratt, has arrived in this city . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 32 (December 28, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. [^]
38. "As Elder Pratt has arrived in this city . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 32 (December 28, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. [^]
39. "In our thirty-third number we published an epistle . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 35 (January 18, 1845): p. 2, col. 4. [^]
40. Brigham Young and Willard Richards, "Notice to the Churches Abroad," *The Prophet* 1, no. 51 (May 10, 1845): p. 2, col. 1. [^]
41. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 421. [^]
42. P. P. Pratt, "Regulations. For the Publishing Department of the Latter Day Saints in the East," *The Prophet* 1, no. 33 (January 4, 1845): p. 2, col. 5. [^]
43. "To the Saints Scattered Abroad," *The Prophet* 1, no. 22 (October 12, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. [^]
44. "A Zeal according to Knowledge," *The Prophet* 1, no. 30 (December 14, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. [^]
45. "To the Saints Scattered Abroad," *The Prophet* 1, no. 21 (October 5, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. [^]
46. "Welcome," *The Prophet* 1, no. 32 (December 28, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. [^]
47. "Terms of the Prophet," *The Prophet* 1, no. 6 (June 22, 1844): p. 1, col. 1. [^]
48. "To the Elders," *The Prophet* 1, no. 34 (January 11, 1845): p. 2, col. 5. [^]

49. "Canvassers Wanted," *The Prophet* 1, no. 2 (May 25, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. [^]
50. "Our Cause," *The Prophet* 1, no. 25 (November 9, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. [^]
51. "Terms of the Prophet," *The Prophet* 1, no. 36 (January 25, 1845): p. 1, col. 1. [^]
52. "To the Saints Scattered Abroad," *The Prophet* 1, no. 22 (October 12, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. [^]
53. P. P. Pratt, "Appointments, Etc.," *The Prophet* 1, no. 51 (May 10, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
54. "To Patrons," *The Prophet* 1, no. 35 (January 18, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
55. "We shall discontinue all papers . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 38 (February 8, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
56. "We still have on our books a hundred or two of names . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 42 (March 8, 1845): p. 2, col. 2. [^]
57. "To the Saints," *The Prophet* 1, no. 26 (November 16, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. [^]
58. G. B. Wallace, "Brother Brannan, Permit a subscriber to appeal to the saints . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 32 (December 28, 1844): p. 1, col. 4. [^]
59. "Wanted," *The Prophet* 1, no. 29 (December 7, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
60. "A special meeting of Share holders will be held . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 6 (June 22, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. [^]
61. "To the Brethren," *The Prophet* 1, no. 8 (July 6, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
62. "Having now raised the name of our General and Prophet . . ." *Nauvoo Neighbor* 1, no. 44 (February 28, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
63. "For President, Gen. Joseph Smith, of Nauvoo, Illinois," *The Prophet* 1, no. 2 (May 25, 1844): p. 2, col. 4; "For President, Gen. Joseph Smith, of Nauvoo, Illinois," *The Prophet* 1, no. 2 (May 25, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. [^]
64. "Jeffersonians Attend!!" *The Prophet* 1, no. 4 (June 8, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
65. Wm. Smith and Wm. H. Miles, "Great Jeffersonian Meeting," *The Prophet* 1, no. 6 (June 22, 1844): p. 3, col. 5. [^]
66. "A Curiosity," *The Prophet* 1, no. 7 (June 29, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. [^]
67. "For President, Gen. Joseph Smith, of Nauvoo, Illinois," *The Prophet* 1, no. 2 (May 25, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. [^]
68. "Our Situation," *The Prophet* 1, no. 8 (July 6, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
69. "We have delayed our paper, with the expectation . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 9 (July 13, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. [^]
70. "The Brethren are requested to send us through mail . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 10 (July 20, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. [^]
71. L. O. Littlefield, "Communications. Mr. Editor.—I hasten to inform your readers of the blackest crime . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 11 (July 27, 1844): p. 1, col. 5. [^]
72. "Token of Respect," *The Prophet* 1, no. 10 (July 20, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. [^]
73. "The floor of Carthage Jail is still stained . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 29 (December 7, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
74. "Justice," *The Prophet* 1, no. 29 (December 7, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. [^]
75. "Look out!" *The Prophet* 1, no. 52 (May 24, 1845): p. 3, col. 5. [^]
76. Fred Von Holstein, "Since the fire has whispered so close about Sidney Rigdon . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 52 (May 24, 1845): p. 1, col. 4. [^]
77. "To the Saints," *The Prophet* 1, no. 36 (January 25, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. [^]

78. “Boston,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 27 (November 23, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. [^]
79. Orson Hyde, “Epistle to the Saints,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 21 (October 5, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. [^]
80. W. Woodruff, “To the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Greeting . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 23 (October 19, 1844): p. 3, col. 1. [^]
81. “What Does It Mean,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 26 (November 16, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. [^]
82. “The Man of Eleven Talents,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 27 (November 23, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. [^]
83. P. P. Pratt, “Strange Inconsistancy,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 45 (March 29, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. [^]
84. Sidney Rigdon, “Letter of Sidney Rigdon, Esq.,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 24 (November 2, 1844): p. 1, cols. 4–5. [^]
85. Sidney Rigdon, “Letter of Sidney Rigdon, Esq.,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 24 (November 2, 1844): p. 1, cols. 4–5. [^]
86. “We are now drawing to the close of our first volume . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 36 (January 25, 1845): p. 2, col. 2. [^]
87. P. P. Pratt, “This number closes the first volume of the ‘Prophet,’” *The Prophet* 1, no. 52 (May 24, 1845): p. 2, col. 1. [^]
88. P. P. Pratt, “Shall the Prophet be sustained another year, or not?” *The Prophet* 1, no. 49 (April 26, 1845): p. 3, col. 4. [^]