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*Administrative Records: Council of Fifty, Minutes,  
March 1844–January 1846*

Edited by Matthew J. Grow, Ronald K. Esplin, Mark  
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The Joseph Smith Papers. Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016

*Reviewed by James B. Allen*

Everything You Could Ever Want to Know about the Council of Fifty in Nauvoo” would be a well-suited subtitle for this highly anticipated volume. As the editors note, Joseph Smith and his closest associates saw the Council of Fifty “as the beginning of the literal kingdom of God on earth” (xxiii). It functioned secretly in Nauvoo from March 1844 to January 1846 and then later for three short periods in Utah. Historians have long been aware of this council, also called the “Kingdom of God,” and some have pieced together from various journals and other reliable sources considerable information about the council’s activities.<sup>1</sup> However, until this publication the details of the council’s discussions and the variety of issues it dealt with were known only sketchily. In this publication, we learn, more fully than ever before, what leading members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were saying and doing about certain political issues, the Saints’ persecution, the future of the Church, the kingdom of God, Church doctrine, exploring and settling in the West, and much more.

This volume is the first and as yet only published volume of the Administrative Records series of the Joseph Smith Papers. The editors begin with an explanation of what this complex series is all about. It includes “records of the organizations in which Joseph Smith was involved as an administrator, records that were housed in his office, and records of meetings and initiatives in which he played a large part, such as church conferences and his 1844 presidential campaign. Among the

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1. See, for example, 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, 1967); and D. Michael Quinn, “The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844 to 1945,” *BYU Studies* 20, no. 2 (1980): 163–97.

records are books of certificates and licenses that he signed or that were signed by others on his behalf and kept under his direction” (xv). Not everything in the series will be published in print editions, but all the records are or will be available on the Joseph Smith Papers website, and relevant excerpts have been and will be incorporated into other published volumes.<sup>2</sup>

Because the Council of the Fifty is largely unknown among most Latter-day Saints, some readers may be surprised at some things they discover in the minutes, such as some aspects of the council’s plan for settlement in the West or Joseph Smith’s interpretation of the kingdom that Daniel prophesied would roll forth and fill the earth (see Dan. 2). These events took place in different times, when many challenges and perceptions were quite unlike those of today. Regardless, these minutes tell a story of dedicated, hardworking men debating important issues and finding solutions to difficult challenges during a most trying time in Church history.

### **History of the Council of Fifty and Its Minutes**

The impetus for organizing this special council came on March 10, 1844, when Joseph Smith received two letters from George Miller and Lyman Wight, Church leaders in Wisconsin, that proposed sending missionaries to Texas (an independent republic at the time) to select a place there for the Saints to gather. Church leaders had already been considering the possibility of moving from Nauvoo, Illinois, to some place outside the borders of the United States, and that evening Joseph called together all the available Apostles as well as a few other Church members for a candid discussion. Setting a precedent for the frankness that would characterize discussions in all subsequent meetings of this council, he urged those in attendance to speak their minds and “to say what was in their hearts, whether good or bad. He did not want to be forever surrounded by a set of ‘dough heads’ and if they did not rise up and shake themselves and exercise themselves in discussing these important matters he should consider them nothing better than ‘dough heads’” (39). The next day the group met again and agreed

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2. For the full collection in the Administrative Records series, see “Administrative Records,” Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 11, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/the-papers/administrative-records>. The Documents series, for instance, includes several excerpts from Joseph Smith’s letterbooks and minute books, which are featured in the Administrative Records series in their entirety.

“to look some place where we can go and establish a Theocracy either in Texas or Oregon or somewhere in California” (40). They then proceeded to organize the council, agreeing to keep their deliberations secret, even from their wives.

Twenty-three men attended the initial organizational meeting, but by the end of the Saints’ time in Nauvoo, the council had admitted fifty-four members. The “standing chairman” was Joseph Smith. William Clayton was designated as clerk, and, except for a few days, he recorded the minutes of the council meetings. On March 14 the council discussed what name it should be known as and, according to the minutes, “the Lord was pleased to give the following Revelation; ‘Verily thus saith the Lord, this is the name by which you shall be called, The Kingdom of God and his Laws, with the keys and power thereof, and judgement in the hands of his servants’” (48). When Clayton began his permanent record book, he titled it “Record of the Council of Fifty or Kingdom of God” (20).

Clayton’s minutes, transcribed in their entirety in this volume, have an interesting history. He initially kept minutes on loose sheets of paper. Secrecy was so important that early in the morning on June 23, 1844, Joseph Smith, knowing that he might soon be imprisoned and killed and that the minutes could fall into wrong hands, told Clayton to burn them, put them in safe hands, or bury them. Clayton put them in a box and buried them in his garden. Joseph was murdered four days later. On July 3, Clayton dug up the minutes and began copying them into a small bound book; the minutes eventually took up three such books (10–11). In April 1847 he gave the books to Brigham Young, who ten years later gave them to Church historians Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith. In 1858, when the U.S. Army arrived in Utah during the “Utah War,” the council minutes, as well as some temple records, were again buried for a short period to protect them, this time on Wilford Woodruff’s property.

In 1862 the minutes were returned to Brigham Young, who later turned them over to George Q. Cannon, who had become the council’s recorder. In 1880, Cannon was in Washington, D.C., so when John Taylor, who had succeeded Brigham Young as leader of the Church, wanted to see the minutes in preparation for reconvening the council, Cannon mailed him the key to the trunk containing them and Taylor, Franklin D. Richards, and Joseph F. Smith soon spent time together reading the first two hundred pages. Portions of the record were read to the reconvened council. In 1882, George F. Gibbs took custody of the records, but by the mid-1880s they were in the custody of the First Presidency. The minutes

were accessed a few times later by certain Church leaders, but apparently no one else was permitted to see them. Then in 2010, the Nauvoo-era Council of Fifty minutes were transferred to the Church History Library to prepare for publishing as part of the Joseph Smith Papers Project.

### Contents of the Volume

The minutes of the Council of Fifty, featured in this fascinating 734-page volume, were recorded in three small books and cover twenty-one meetings before the death of Joseph Smith and forty-two meetings between then and January 1846. In addition, four appendices in the Joseph Smith Papers volume provide the minutes of three council meetings not recorded in Clayton's books, as well as a roll, compiled by Clayton, of attendance at all the meetings from April 1845 to December 1846.

Those who peruse the volume will be deeply impressed with, and grateful for, the outstanding editorial work that went into it. An introduction provides a fine short history of the council. Another introductory article explains the editorial method. An extensive source note then describes the appearance and makeup of the original manuscripts in detail and provides their provenance. The minutes are divided into four chronological parts, and each part begins with a valuable introduction that provides the historical setting as well as a brief comment on what was covered in the meetings of that period. The transcription of the minutes for each meeting is preceded by a historical introduction and brief summary of the meeting itself.

Some of the most important editorial work in the volume is found in the copious and lengthy footnotes, where the editors go far beyond what might be expected as they provide considerable illuminating and important information. The footnotes offer significant historical background, identify people, and explain events. A case in point concerns Joseph Smith's famous "last charge," in which he "laid the responsibility of leading the church on the Twelve" (66 n. 164). This charge was given in a meeting of the Council of Fifty held on March 26, 1844. However, the minutes themselves do not specifically mention the charge or its contents. They say only that "Prest J. Smith continued his instructions on heavenly things and many other important subjects" (66), but the editors do a marvelous job of piecing the story together from other sources (see 62 n. 149; 66 n. 164; and 378–79 nn. 592–96).

The transcriptions and annotation found in the main body of this outstanding volume are supplemented by 135 pages of reference material: a chronology of the period, a geographical directory that describes

most of the places mentioned in the minutes, maps that show nearly every locale and geographic feature appearing in the minutes, a pedigree chart for Joseph Smith, a section of biographical sketches for nearly everyone mentioned in the minutes, photos of many members of the council, a chart listing the members of the council and their dates of tenure, and an organizational chart identifying the members of the various committees established by the council. All this, together with an essay on the sources used in the volume and an extensive list of works cited, certainly supports my initial observation that here is everything you could ever want to know about the Council of Fifty in Nauvoo. Finally, a well-crafted index helps make the large volume highly accessible.

### **Nature of the Council**

Shortly after the council was formed, members discussed whether a constitution for the “kingdom” should be prepared. A committee was appointed to draft one, the matter was briefly discussed at times, but it came to an end on April 25, 1844, when Joseph Smith declared that the matter should be left alone and announced: “Verily thus saith the Lord, yea are my constitution, and I am your God, and ye are my spokesmen. From henceforth do as I shall command you” (137). From then on the council thought of itself as a “living constitution”; as Brigham Young explained to new members on March 1, 1845, “We are the living body to enact laws for the government of this kingdom, we are a living constitution” (254).

The minutes show that members of the council were anything but “dough heads.” They spoke their minds, as Joseph Smith had instructed them to do. Discussions were often lengthy and vigorous, disagreement was frequent but not antagonistic, votes were taken by voice, and a vote had to be unanimous before any resolution could pass. The reader will likely frequently sense the members’ deep feelings of gratitude to be learning from their prophet, their excitement at what they were doing, and their confidence in the future as they saw themselves as part of a great movement that would one day dominate the earth. This enthusiasm is apparent not only in the minutes but also in the journal of the council’s scribe, William Clayton. He reminisced on January 1, 1845, “In this council was also devised the plan of establishing an immigration to Texas and plans laid for the exaltation of a standard and ensign of truths for the nations of the earth. In this council was the plan devised to restore the Ancients [that is, American Indians] to the knowledge of the truth and the restoration of union and peace amongst ourselves.

. . . In this council was the principles of eternal truth rolled forth to the hearers without reserve and the hearts of the servants of God made to rejoice exceedingly.”<sup>3</sup>

Discussions in the council ranged far and wide. They included topics such as Joseph Smith’s presidential campaign; the nature of the council and its relationship to the Church; the U.S. Constitution; the need to evacuate Nauvoo; how to keep law and order and how to conduct other business in Nauvoo after the Nauvoo charter was rescinded; how to respond to legal threats against leaders of the Church; the need to finish the temple and the Nauvoo House; Sidney Rigdon’s expulsion from the council and his activities after the death of Joseph Smith; finding a suitable refuge for the Saints in the West; an analysis of various sources of information about the West; the need to leave the United States and establish an independent kingdom; the possibility of temporarily settling among certain tribes of American Indians; the noble heritage of the Indians and the expectation that they, or many of them, would soon accept the gospel; security measures for Nauvoo, especially in connection with threats of violence around the time of the trial of those accused of killing the prophet; the increasing pressure to evacuate Nauvoo; and planning and participating in the exodus. What follows are brief notes on some of the most important issues taken up by the council.

### **Establishing a Theocracy**

Members of the council saw themselves as establishing a literal kingdom of God, a theocracy that would govern on righteous principles, with God at the helm, and that would continue with Christ after his Second Coming. They believed the kingdom that Daniel prophesied would roll forth and fill the earth was not the Church but, rather, a political theocracy that would establish the kind of peace and justice that not even the U.S. Constitution (which they revered but thought imperfect) could achieve. They believed the center of that theocracy would eventually be located somewhere other than Nauvoo. At the same time, they did not believe that their theocracy would or should deny anyone’s religious or civil rights or that the leaders would be autocratic. Rather, as summarized by the volume’s editors, council members “sought to erect a new standard of liberty in order to establish the freedoms America

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3. As quoted in James B. Allen, *Trials of Discipleship: The Story of William Clayton, a Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 147–48 n. 45.

had failed to safeguard” (xxviii). Further, they “emphasized that leaders in the kingdom of God would govern by fostering free discussion, by respecting the people, and by serving as a conduit for revelation and God’s law” (xxxviii). After all, a prophet was at the kingdom’s head.

During the Nauvoo period, three men who were not Church members were admitted to the council, demonstrating, Joseph Smith suggested, that the kingdom had no religious bias. Their admittance showed “that in the organization of this kingdom men are not consulted as to their religious opinions or notions in any shape or form whatever and that we act upon the broad and liberal principal that all men have equal rights, and ought to be respected, and that every man has a privilege in this organization of choosing for himself voluntarily his God, and what he pleases for his religion, inasmuch as there is no danger but that every man will embrace the greatest light” (97).

The complete confidence the council had in Joseph Smith is suggested by the fact that on April 11, 1844, they voted to “receive from this time henceforth and forever, Joseph Smith, as our Prophet, Priest & King, and uphold him in that capacity in which God has anointed him” (95–96). As the editors explain, “This action dramatically demonstrates the council members’ views of theodemocracy, under which the ecclesiastical leader of the Church (prophet and priest) would be chosen by them as a political leader (king)” (xxxviii). Council members did not believe that this action would have immediate political consequences. It only symbolized their belief that they were planning for the Millennium. After Joseph Smith’s death, Brigham Young took his place as standing chair of the council, and new members were required to sustain him as “successor of Joseph Smith henceforth and forever” and also as “successor of Prest. Joseph Smith and prophet, priest, and king to this kingdom forever after” (256).

There is a persistent myth that Joseph Smith was actually ordained or anointed a king in a meeting of the Council of Fifty. However, the editors effectively refute this by explaining that on February 4, 1885, John Taylor met with members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve in a special meeting where he was anointed and ordained “a King over the House of Israel.” Then he recounted that he had helped anoint and ordain Joseph Smith and later Brigham Young to that same office, and that many others were present at the time. “This indicates,” write the editors, “that such an anointing, if accurately remembered, did not occur in the Council of Fifty” (96 n. 259). It was a religious anointing, done outside of the council, not a political one.



Though rumors of a theocracy antagonized the enemies of the Church who feared it as a political danger, it is clear from the minutes that members of the council had no intention of threatening existing governments. However, establishing the kingdom of God was very much tied to the Saints' plan to find a refuge somewhere in the West. As Sidney Rigdon explained in a meeting on April 11, 1844, "The design was to form a Theocracy according to the will of Heaven, planted without any intention to interfere with any government of the world. We wish to have nothing to do with them. . . . The object is to live so far above their laws that they cannot interfere with us, unless by violence. We will hunt a spot somewhere on the earth where no other government has jurisdiction and cannot interfere with us and there plant our standard" (88).

One interesting question on which there had been conflicting opinions was whether there was a difference between the Church and the kingdom. On April 18, 1844, Joseph Smith put an end to the matter by declaring that there was a distinction between the church of God and the kingdom of God:

The laws of the kingdom are not designed to effect our salvation hereafter. It is an entire, distinct and separate government. The church is a spiritual matter and a spiritual kingdom; but the kingdom which Daniel saw was not a spiritual kingdom, but was designed to be got up for the safety and salvation of the saints by protecting them in their religious rights and worship. . . . The literal kingdom of God, and the church of God are two distinct things. The gifts of prophets, evangelists &c [that is, the Church] never were designed to govern men in civil matters. (128)

## Secrecy

From the beginning, the council's deliberations were shrouded in secrecy. During the organizational meeting on March 11, 1843, Lucien Woodworth said he had long wanted such a group, organized "after the order of God, every member of it to be bound to eternal secrecy as to what passed here, not to have the privilege of telling anything which might be talked of to any person even to our wives, and the man who broke the rule 'should lose his cursed head'" (42, underlining in original).<sup>4</sup> He proposed this as a resolution, which passed and became

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4. A footnote appears at this point and is an example of the volume's fine editorial work. Footnote 75 on page 42 offers a few possible reasons for the language suggesting decapitation as a penalty: Nearly everyone in the council

a permanent law of the council. No specific reason for secrecy is spelled out in the minutes, but the council discussed issues relating to establishing a theocracy, making Joseph Smith a “king,” and transferring the Saints to an area outside the United States; if antagonists had got wind of these discussions, considerable misunderstanding and persecution could have resulted. The concern for secrecy was reemphasized on May 10, 1845, when Brigham Young complained that “there are some vessels in the council which are leaky, some of the members have told their wives what is passing here, and he felt to caution the brethren against it. If there are any here who cannot keep matters to themselves let them keep out of the council” (456). The secrecy surrounding the Council of Fifty persisted throughout the decades, which is perhaps why most Church members today know little about the council.

### Joseph Smith’s Presidential Campaign

The minutes also provide insight into the Council of Fifty’s involvement in Joseph Smith’s campaign for the presidency of the United States, which began before the council was organized but was eventually taken over by the council. From the minutes, one gains the impression that some members had high hopes, even expectations, that despite the overwhelming odds, Joseph would succeed. Others were willing to campaign but did not believe he would win or even wanted to. On April 18, 1844, for example, during a lengthy debate on the nature of the kingdom of God, one member asked how a man could be elected president when he was already a king: “He is perfectly willing to go and electioneer, to blind the eyes of the people, but he wants to see our king upheld in his office here” (125). Another declared outright that “our president dont care to go to Washington” (127). Nevertheless, Joseph acted as if he wanted to win, and on April 25 he called upon the council to appoint delegates in all electoral districts and to hold a national convention in Baltimore. On May 6 it was decided, at Joseph Smith’s request, that Sidney Rigdon should run for vice president (157–59). When it all came to

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belonged to the Nauvoo Masonic Lodge, which included vows of secrecy with associated penalties, including decapitation for breaking an oath. The editors suggest, however, that Woodworth may also have been referring to the traditional English punishment for high treason and notes that the phrase “cursed head” appears in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, referring to traditional punishment for traitors. To support this theory, the editors observe that Sidney Rigdon referred to this oath as a resolution governing “those who might turn traitor.”

an end with the death of Joseph Smith on June 27, most members of the council were on electioneering missions.

Joseph Smith ran for president in part to help his people. He and other members of the council revered the U.S. Constitution, but their experiences of having been driven from their homes, some of them more than once, convinced them that there were weaknesses in it, for it did not seem to protect them in their religious rights. Their pleading for help from the federal government had fallen on deaf ears, for the Constitution prohibited the president of the United States from sending troops into a state, as the Saints had requested, without the specific request of the governor. Significantly, Joseph Smith's campaign tract, *General Smith's Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States*, called for a constitutional amendment that would give the president power to send an army into a state to suppress mobs. In some respects this foreshadowed the Fourteenth Amendment (1868), which, as stated in section 1, prohibited any state from depriving anyone of "life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." By implication, this finally authorized the national government to intervene to enforce these provisions. On April 11, 1844, Joseph Smith commented on the importance of protecting religious freedom. Echoing his presidential platform, he said that the government should be compelled to use its armies to enforce the principles of liberty. "When a man is thus bound by a constitution he cannot refuse to protect his subjects, he dare not do it. And when a Governor or president will not protect his subjects he ought to be put away from his office" (101).

### **Settlement in the West**

Another series of council discussions had to do with possible settlement in the West and, eventually, spearheading the actual move. The issue was highly political since it was entwined with discussions of what the United States should do about Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican territory that now comprises California and the Intermountain West, all of which Church leaders looked at as possible areas for colonization.

In March 1844, the council created a petition for Congress that included the wording of a proposed ordinance designed to protect citizens of the United States migrating to Texas, Oregon, and "other lands." It proposed authorizing Joseph Smith to raise one hundred thousand volunteers for that purpose and making him an officer in the U.S. Army (something Congress actually had no authority to do) (67–70). Orson

Hyde was appointed to deliver the petition, and Joseph Smith instructed him not to let Congress change the wording. If it could not pass in its “pure original State, let them reject it altogether. He did not care whether Congress would grant it or not, it would serve to goad them with” (60). Writing to the council from Washington on April 25, Hyde commented on problems related to the American annexation of Texas, which, he boldly declared, “God designs to give to his Saints” (181). The petition was presented in May, but Congress never acted on it. Hyde opined in a letter to Joseph Smith that Congress would pass no act in relation to either Texas or Oregon for it “is afraid of England, afraid of Mexico, and afraid the presidential election will be twisted by it.” He sarcastically added something that sounds like what critics of Congress might say today: “The members all appear like unskillful players at chequers afraid to move, for they see not which way to move advantageously” (177).

Exploring the West in order to find a place where the kingdom of God could reside in peace became a key project of the council. At one point the council sent an impassioned letter to all state governors, telling of the Saints’ persecution and asking for their “friendly interposition in our favor.” The letter asked, “Will it be too much to ask you to convene a special session of your State Legislature, and furnish us an asylum where we can enjoy our rights of conscience and religion unmolested?” If not, “will you in a special message to that body, when convened, recommend a remonstrance against such unhallowed acts of oppression and expatriation, as this people have continued to receive from the States of Missouri and Illinois? Or will you favor us by your personal influence, and by your official rank?” (316). They also asked the governors for their views “concerning what is called the Great Western Measure, of colonizing the Latter Day Saints in Oregon, the North western Territory, or some location, remote from the states, where the hand of oppression shall not crush every noble principle, and extinguish every patriotic feeling” (316, underlining in original).

Brigham Young saw the move happening in stages. He told the council on March 18, 1845, that if a company went out that spring, it should find a place not far away where they could stay and be safe for a year or two outside the jurisdiction of the United States. But their final goal was to settle in California because, he said, that was where Joseph Smith had wanted them to go. (At the time, the term “California” often referred to a vast western area that included present-day Utah.) Young saw the advantages of navigation and commerce that the western coast offered but also said, “We want to get between some of those mountains where

we can fortify ourselves, and erect the standard of liberty on one of the highest mountains we can find” (328).

Council members were so interested in California that during that meeting John Taylor composed a song, “Upper California,” and asked Erastus Snow to sing it. The song, later revised and expanded by Taylor, was sung also at several subsequent meetings. As sung in this meeting and recorded by Clayton, it went:

The Upper California Oh thats the land for me  
It lays between the mountains & the great pacific sea,  
The Saints could be supported there & enjoy sweet liberty  
With flocks and herds abounding Oh thats the land for me.

We’ll go and lift our Standard, we’ll go there and be free  
We’ll go to California and have our Jubilee  
A land that blooms with endless spring  
A land of joy and liberty,  
In Upper California Oh thats the land for me. (332)

As they continued to study various sources of information, including the maps and report of John C. Fremont, their ideas became more specific. The editors note that in a letter to Addison Pratt on August 28, Church leaders said that they had decided to locate “in the neighborhood of Lake Tampanagos as that is represented as a most delightful district and [there are] no settlement[s] near there” (464). The name “Lake Tampanagos” was based on the designation the early explorer Zebulon Pike had given both Utah Lake and the Great Salt Lake, which he thought were actually the same lake. On September 9, 1845, Parley P. Pratt spoke to the council about the great benefits of the California coast but also bragged about the interior, describing the area as “desert and plains, except here and there a beautiful stream, filled with fish, and surrounded by a flourishing and pleasant valley” (475). During the same meeting Brigham Young reported that he was thinking of sending a group west the following spring, “somewhere near the Great Salt Lake,” and later they could work their way to the bay of San Francisco (472). Clearly, Brigham Young and the council knew where they were going before they left Nauvoo.

### **American Indians**

The American Indians played a role in the council’s consideration of a westward move, and the council considered working with certain tribes in that effort. Indians were frequently discussed in meetings of

the council. Church members identified them as Lamanites, descendants of Book of Mormon people, taking seriously Book of Mormon promises of an important destiny for them. On March 1, 1845, Lewis Dana, a member of the Oneida tribe, was temporarily admitted to the council. Brigham Young, noting that Dana was the first Lamanite to be admitted, declared that the “object of this organization is to find a place where we can dwell in peace and lift up the standard of liberty. It is for the purpose of uniting the Lamanites, and sowing the seeds of the gospel among them. They will receive it en Masse. . . . The gentiles have rejected the gospel and we will carry it to the branch of the house of Israel in the west” (255).

In April 1845, Dana and three others were sent on a western mission. They were hoping to form alliances with Indian tribes that would allow the Saints to temporarily settle among them. On September 9, Daniel Spencer reported to the council on his mission to the Seneca Indians and told of meeting Dana and learning that “the Cherokees had given permission for any number of our people to settle by them, and offered to lend us any assistance they could either to locate or to go West to explore” (468).

### **Increasing Persecution**

In the late Nauvoo era, challenges and persecutions began to take their toll on the Saints. It is understandable that some members of the council felt deep anger, even vindictiveness, against those whom they perceived to be their enemies. In March 1845, Brigham Young reflected the feelings of Lyman Wight as well as himself when he said that his

feelings are that our time is short among the gentiles, and the judgment of God will soon come on them like whirlwind. He dont care about preaching to the gentiles any longer. Some of the brethren say they can convert many of the gentiles and baptise them, but what are they good for when we get them. They are not bold enough to come out in defence of the truth, nor do any thing, and he feels as Lyman Wight said let the damned scoundrels be killed, let them be swept off from the earth, and then we can go and be baptized for them, easier than we can convert them. (299–300)

Orson Spencer was a bit more moderate. On March 22 he said that “the time has come for us to separate from the gentiles. . . . The gentiles are already boiling over in Iowa and Missouri, but we dont care how much they boil over. If God wants us to take another real drubbing we shall

have it, and we cant help ourselves, but if he wants us to give the gentiles a drubbing he will guide us by the spirit what to do as the circumstances require” (348–49).

As the Nauvoo period of Church history drew to an end, one can sense in the minutes the increasing urgency felt by the council but also, at least at one point, a sense of pleasure that at last the thing they had hoped for from the beginning, the move to a new home for the Saints, was about to happen. On October 4, 1845, the council heard a report of a conversation with anti-Mormons in Carthage as well as a series of resolutions by the citizens of Quincy, Illinois, concerning the removal of the Saints. During the reading of these documents, according to the minutes, “the members of the council indulged themselves with quite a season of rejoicing and pleasure” (494).

In a sense, that might be the feeling historians and other readers will have as they make their way through this remarkable volume: a very long read but, because of the information and insight it provides, a pleasurable one.

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James B. Allen was a teacher and administrator in the seminary and institute programs from 1954 to 1963, then joined the faculty of Brigham Young University. He was Assistant Church Historian, 1972–79; chair of the BYU History Department, 1981–87; and the Lemuel Hardison Redd Jr. Chair in Western American History, 1987–92. He retired in 1992. He has authored, coauthored, or coedited fourteen books or monographs and around ninety articles relating to Western American and Latter-day Saint history. He is married to the former Renée Jones, and together they have five children, twenty-one grandchildren, and twenty-one great-grandchildren. They served a full-time Church Educational System mission at the Boston Institute of Religion, 1999–2000, and served as officiators in the Mount Timpanogos Utah Temple, 2004–13.