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Notes and Comments

LYMAN SHERMAN—MAN OF GOD, WOULD-BE APOSTLE

Lyndon W. Cook

Anomalies in Church history are interesting and generally merit some attention. The story of Lyman Sherman seems to be a case in point. Sherman was chosen to fill a vacancy in the Quorum of Twelve Apostles but was never notified of his calling or ordained.

Lyman Royal Sherman, son of Elkanah Sherman and Asenath Hulbert, was born 22 May 1804, in Monkton, Addison County, Vermont. As early as 1829 he moved to Pomfret, Chautauqua County, New York, where he married Delcena Didamia Johnson, 16 January 1829. Sherman, as well as others of his wife's family, was converted to the Church in Pomfret by Elders Joseph B. Brackenbury and Edmund Durfee in January 1832. The Shermans moved to Kirtland, Ohio, probably in June 1833, with Mrs. Julia Johnson and family,

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"Family Group Sheet," microfilm, Brigham Young University Library. See also Dean C. Jessee, "The Kirtland Diary of Wilford Woodruff," BYU Studies 12 (Summer 1972):382. Joseph Fielding Smith's Essentials in Church History (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), p. 587, has Sherman's birthplace as Salem, Massachusetts. Vital records of Salem do not contain any record of Sherman's birth there. (See Vital Records of Salem, Massachusetts to the End of the Year 1849, vol. II—Births [Salem: The Essex Institute, 1918].) Correspondence with the town clerk of Monkton, Vermont, also failed to establish Sherman's birthplace but did verify the marriage of his parents on 7 December 1802. (Mrs. C. Burritt, town clerk of Monkton, to Lyndon W. Cook, 8 March 1977.)

"Marriage date is found on "Family Group Sheet." The couple had six children. Delcena, who reportedly was a plural wife of the Prophet Joseph Smith, later married Almon W. Babbitt on 24 January 1846, and was sealed to Sherman the same day. She died in Utah on 21 October 1854. Sherman is listed as a head of family on the 1850 New York Census. The county clerk's office did not have any record of Sherman's owning land in Pumfret. (Chautauqua County clerk to Lyndon W. Cook, 17 November 1977.)

Sherman and his mother-in-law, Julia Hills Johnson, were apparently baptized first. (See Benjamin F. Johnson, My Life's Review [Independence, Mo.: Zion's Printing & Publishing Co., 1947], p. 12. See also Journal of Joel H. Johnson, typescript, BYU Library, p. 12.) Sherman's parents as well as others of his family were baptized in May of 1832 by Sylvester Smith and Gideon Carter. (See Journal of Gideon Carter, Church Archives, Church Historical Department, Salt Lake City, Utah.) Interestingly enough, both of Lyman Sherman's proselyting benefactors met untimely deaths. Brackenbury died in Pumfret in 1832 (shortly after baptizing members of the Johnson family), ostensibly from the "effects of poison secretly administered to him" by opposers. (See Joseph Smith, Jr., History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 7 vols., ed. B. H. Roberts [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970], 7:524; hereafter cited as HC.) Joel H. Johnson credited Brackenbury's death to "bilious cholic" (see Johnson Journal, p. 12). Durfee was murdered by a mob at Green Plains, Illinois, 15 November 1845. (See HC, 7:523-25.) A branch of the Church was organized in Pumfret. (See Journal of Zebedee Coltrin, May 1833 [p. 4], Church Archives.)

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where they resided until 1838.4

In 1834, Sherman joined Zion’s Camp, and upon his return from Missouri was ordained a president of the original Quorum of Seventy, 28 February 1835.5 He was released from this position in April 1837.6

Apparently an intimate friend of Joseph Smith, Sherman was one of the first to learn of the principle of plural marriage. Benjamin F. Johnson, his brother-in-law, noted: “Sherman, who was close to the Prophet, [learned in 1835] that the ancient order of Plural Marriage was again to be practiced by the Church.”7

In April 1835, in a meeting called at Sherman’s home in Kirtland, Ohio, for the purpose of giving patriarchal blessings to the members of the family, Church Patriarch Joseph Smith, Sr., told Lyman that he would help gather Israel and that since his father had passed away, “and thou hast no father, God shall be thy father and he shall comfort thee.”8

The day after Christmas, 1835, Sherman approached the Prophet Joseph Smith in Kirtland and said, “I have been wrought upon to make known to you my feelings and desires, and was promised that I should have a revelation which should make known my duty.”9 The Lord’s promise was fulfilled to Sherman, for Joseph received a revelation for him that very hour.10 The revelation said in part:

Verily thus saith the Lord unto you, my servant Lyman: Your sins are forgiven you, because you have obeyed my voice in coming up hither this morning to receive counsel of him whom I have appointed.

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4See Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 15. Sherman owned land in Kirtland as early as 1835. (See "Deed Records, Geauga County, Ohio," Book 929, p. 366, microfilm copy in BYU Library.)

5See Joseph Young, Organization of the Seventy (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Steam Printing Establishment, 1878), p. 4. See also HC 2:203. Benjamin F. Johnson remembered Sherman’s assisting in the laying of the cornersstones of the Kirtland Temple in July 1833. (Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 16.) Sherman is not included, however, on George A. Smith’s list. (See Journal History, 25 July 1833.)

6HC 2:476. Sometime after the Quorum of Seventy was organized, members of both the high priest’s and seventy’s quorums began arguing as to who held the greater office. When the discussion turned into jealous debate, the Prophet called the Seventy together for council. “After it was assembled he asked the newly-organized quorum if any of their number had been ordained to the High Priest’s office, previous to their ordination as Seventies. . . . [Since five out of the seven presidents had previously been ordained high priests, Lyman Sherman being one,] the Prophet invited them to take their places in the High Priest’s quorum again. . . . He thought that this was the best way to settle the difficulty and remove all feelings, without deciding the question as to which was the greater.” (Young, Organization of the Seventy, p. 5.) Joseph Young places the date of this change in November 1835, not April 1837. (Ibid.) The latter date is correct. (See Seventy’s Book A, p. 18, Church Archives.)


8Mention of the April 1835 meeting as well as the patriarchal blessing to Lyman Sherman is found in the Journal of George W. Johnson, typescript, pp. 16–17, BYU Library. See also Patriarchal Blessing File in Church Archives.

9HC 2:345.

10Doctrine and Covenants, Section 108.

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Therefore, let your soul be at rest concerning your spiritual standing. . . . And arise up and be more careful henceforth in observing your vows, which you have made and do make, and you shall be blessed with exceeding great blessings. . . . Therefore, strengthen thy brethren in all your conversation, in all your prayers, in all your exhortations, and in all your doings. And behold, and lo, I am with you to bless you and deliver you forever. Amen. 11

Shortly after receiving this revelation, Sherman participated with those of his quorum in several meetings in the Kirtland Temple in early 1836 wherein anointings and blessings were given to the brethren. 12 On 8 January 1837, he met with others in the Kirtland Temple to worship. After the sacrament had been administered, "Elder Sherman sung in the gift of tongues & proclaimed great & marvelous things while clothed upon by the power & spirit of God." 13

On 1 October 1837, Lyman Sherman was called to replace Jared Carter as a member of the high council in Kirtland, 14 where he served until at least mid-November of that year. 15 He was also included as a charter member of the Kirtland Safety Society, 16 but there is no record of his ever holding any stock in that institution. 17

After the Prophet's flight to Missouri in early 1838, dissenters in Kirtland sought to use the printing office and materials to "bolster up a church organization opposed to the Prophet." 18 In an attempt to curtail such action, the printing office was set fire and destroyed. 19 While Church leaders in Missouri presumed this act of arson to have been perpetrated by the "Parrish party," 20 it was Lyman Sherman who started the fire to thwart Joseph's enemies. 21 He then moved to Missouri sometime prior to October 1838 22 and was made a tempo-

11 The revelation was first published in the Deseret News on 10 July 1852.
12 HC 2:352-428.
14 "Kirtland Council Minute Book," p. 247, Church Archives (hereafter cited as KCMB). The KCMB records Sherman's being "Ordained a high priest and Councillor" on 2 October 1837 (ibid.). That he was ordained a high priest on this date must be an error.
15 Ibid., p. 259.
16 "Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate 3 (March 1837):467.
19 Ibid.
20 HC 3:11.
22 Benjamin F. Johnson, who arrived in Far West, Missouri, in October 1838, indicated that Sherman was already there. (See Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 35.) Sherman's fifth child was born in Far West, Missouri, 21 October 1838. See "Family Group Sheet." Available land records for Caldwell County do not reveal Sherman's owning any land in that county.
Lyman Sherman’s crowning call to become an apostle came while the Prophet and others were prisoners in Liberty Jail. On 16 January 1839, Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Hyrum Smith wrote a letter to Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young instructing them to “get the Twelve together, [and] ordain such as have not been ordained.”

George A. Smith was chosen to replace Thomas B. Marsh, and Sherman was to replace Orson Hyde.

Elder Smith learned of his call in late January 1839 from Don Carlos Smith, the Prophet’s brother. Lyman Sherman, however, was never notified. While both Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young knew of Sherman’s appointment well before his death, they chose not to tell him. Although no clear explanation was given for not disclosing this highly important information, it appears to be related to the fact that Sherman was suffering from his final illness when Brigham and Heber learned of his call.

While he is not included with the Quorum of Twelve Apostles in any official listing of General Authorities of the Church, Lyman Royal Sherman is remembered for his faithfulness and testimony of the restored gospel. Benjamin F. Johnson said of Sherman: “He was a man of great integrity, a powerful preacher and by revelation was called to the Apostleship but died before receiving his ordination.”

Lyman Sherman died in Far West, Missouri, in February 1839.

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23"Far West Record," p. 175, Church Archives. It is not known when Sherman left Kirtland. He was planning on being absent from Kirtland during the winter of 1837-38. (See KCMB, p. 249.)
25Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 23 October 1859, Church Archives.
27Heber C. Kimball records in his journal: “On February 7th (1839) I accompanied Brother Brigham to Liberty to visit Joseph and the brethren in prison. We . . . stayed at Liberty over night. Next morning we were permitted to visit the prisoners . . . and returned during the day [February 8] to Far West. When we left there [Far West] Lyman Sherman was somewhat unwell. In a few days after our return he died. We did not notify him of his appointment” (Journal of Heber C. Kimball, microfilm of typescript). Wilford Woodruff, recording the substance of a meeting in February 1859, wrote: “Brother Heber C] Kimball said . . . Joseph named G. A. Smith to take the place of Thomas B. Marsh and Lyman Sherman was appointed to take the place of Orson Hyde but Brother Sherman was taken very sick & died in 3 days shortly after. Brother G. A. said when he heard of Brother Sherman’s death he thought his time would come soon. Brother Kimball said it was not the will of God for a man to take Brother Hyde’s place” (Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 23 October 1859). Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith were ordained apostles on 26 April 1839. Orson Hyde, whom Sherman was to have replaced, was restored to his priesthood office in June 1839. (See Reed Durham, Jr., and Steve H. Heath, Succession in the Church [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970], p. 43.)
28Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 53.
29Sherman’s death date in Smith, Essentials, p. 587, is in error. Sherman’s death probably occurred around 15 February 1839. Benjamin F. Johnson, who was absent from Far West, learned of Sherman’s death by 1 March 1839. (See Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 55.)