Has the Lord Turned Bankrupt? The Attempted Sale of the Nauvoo Temple, 1846-1850

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If Joseph Smith had lived we should not have been here at this time. We should have been in some other country. We can't stay in this house but a little while. We have got to build another house. It will be a larger house than this, and a more glorious one. And we shall build a great many houses, we shall come back here and we shall go to Kirtland, and build houses all over the continent of North America.¹

On 4 April 1999 Gordon B. Hinckley, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, electrified millions of his faithful followers worldwide when he announced, quite unexpectedly, the decision to rebuild the Nauvoo Temple.² His announcement amounted to a statement on resurrection, to raise from the dead, as it were, the short-lived Mormon jewel that once so proudly overlooked the Mississippi River. Five years in the building, the Nauvoo Temple was the very symbol of their developing faith, a monument to the teachings of their revered prophet-leader, Joseph Smith, Jr. Unfortunately, the storied building was abandoned as the Mormons were forced to leave their City of Joseph at the point of gun and cannon and headed west in 1846. Soon afterward, the structure fell victim to fire and tornado. Today, with the new temple recently completed and dedicated, it may be timely and appropriate to review the temple's short-lived history.³

The purpose of this article is to examine the fascinating history of the Nauvoo Temple from late 1845, as it neared completion, until its eventual destruction three years later, and to focus on those efforts to sell it to interested buyers. This study will attempt to answer the following specific questions: 1) Why did Mormons leaders consider selling the temple? 2) Who were the most interested buyers? 3) What was the nature of the negotiations? 4) What factors prevented the sale from occurring? 5) Did the Latter-day Saints ever consider coming back? And finally, 6) Is there any truth to the accusation that Brigham Young ordered its eventual destruction? The fact is, had the Latter-day Saints been successful in their intentions to sell the temple to the Roman Catholic Church or other serious buyers, the Latter-day Saints would not be now enjoying their new temple edifice in the quiet river town of Nauvoo, Illinois.
“Holiness to the Lord”—The Nauvoo Temple

Nothing spoke to the expected permanency of Nauvoo as headquarters for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as did the construction of the Nauvoo Temple. Joseph Smith, revered as prophet, seer and revelator by his people, had declared in January 1841 that it was the Lord’s intent for those thousands then assembling in Nauvoo “to build a house unto me,” not for Sunday worship but for such uniquely Mormon practices as baptisms for the dead, eternal marriage, and other sacred temple ordinances. Even the site for the temple met heaven’s approval. Thus the Latter-day Saints, who had built a similar, though smaller, edifice in Kirtland, Ohio, some few years before, looked upon the building of the Nauvoo Temple as divine directive, a benediction upon their past performances, a statement that they were yet Zion’s people.

Although some construction had begun on the temple in the fall of 1840, the cornerstone were not laid until 6 April 1841. Made possible from the sacrifices of men, women, and even children of time, talent and tithes in the form of china, glassware, clocks and watches, clothing, furniture, household goods, and donated as well as enlisted labor, this remarkable structure, 128 feet by 88 feet and with a tower and spire rising 158-1/2 feet into the air, gradually towered above the city. Built of native gray limestone, the temple showed several distinct features including large decorative moonstones at the base of each of its 30 pilasters (or buttresses) and unusual sun and star stones further up the sides of each column. The tower featured a belfry and observatory, topped with a cupola and a golden statue of an angel flying in a horizontal position. As one of the workers boasted: “The temple is a stone building. The quality of stone [is] of a superior quality, viz., limestone and polished in the nicest manner by some of the best English workman. . . . Not the sound of any tool was heard on the walls. Every stone was fitted to its place previous to its ascent up on the building.”

The appearance of the temple was as commanding as the city was ordinary. E. V. Carter, a visitor to Nauvoo in later 1845 and a major in the United States Army, gave the following description. “Spent three hours on a visit to . . . Nauvoo, which is not built compact and has a dilapidated appearance,” he confided to his journal. He continued,

There is a want of sprightliness or a dull heavy expression in their physiognomy with a lackluster eye but the most prominent curiosity is the temple which is certainly an imposing edifice which is for the most part completed. The body of the building is composed of stone and
is 128' by 80' and three stories high. On each [end] are six pilasters and nine on each side with a crescent carved in the stone base of each and surmounted with carved work in the midst of which is carved a human face representing the sun. The inside of the temple is unfinished, but about 150 men are constantly employed in the work. The inscription in front is carved in relief and [reads] “Commenced 1841 by the Latter-day Saints. Holiness to the Lord.” It is said that the Mormons intend to remove next spring but they are prosecuting the work of completing their temple and have commenced the construction of a strong stone wall around the same all [of] which does not look much like emigrating en masse to California or anywhere else.

For reasons well-documented elsewhere, the Latter-day Saints, now bereft of their prophet-leader who had been killed the year before, understood that for their survival and that of their religion, the only solution was to leave, to seek asylum somewhere in the West “where none would come to hurt or make afraid.” Brigham Young, president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and generally accepted interim Mormon leader, recognized more clearly than most the inevitability of exodus and bent his efforts to prepare his people to that end. Consequently, even before the temple was finished, he began to dedicate various parts of the building and to conduct special “endowment” sessions for his people.

Such endowments, considered the crowning blessing of the temple, occupied the attention of Church leaders from mid-December 1845 until 8 February 1846 and constituted the major reason for delaying their departure. “The main and only cause of our tarrying so long,” he later wrote, “was to give the brethren those blessings in the temple for which they had labored so diligently and faithfully to build, and as soon as it was prepared we labored incessantly almost night and day to wait on them until a few days previous to our departure. During the short space in which we had the privilege of working in the temple we gave the endowments to about 8,000 of the Saints.”

“The Catholics Should Get This Temple”

Brigham Young recognized that deteriorating economics were a major impediment to their leaving Nauvoo. Despite every good intention and promise of those better off to help on the poor and the widowed, the question remained: Just where would the money come from to transport thousands of people into the wilderness? While many clung to the hope that
they would be able to sell their properties and improvements, would not potential buyers, aware that the Saints were abandoning the city, bide their time until a city, wasted and deserted, would be sold off at bargain prices?

And what of the temple itself? Built at an estimated cost of $800,000, the Nauvoo Temple was the most expensive building the Church had ever erected. However, Church leaders knew well that they could only expect to recover a fraction of its cost in any proposed sale. Nevertheless, their hope was that, although properties were declining in value in direct relation to their talk and travel west, the temple, because of its size, imposing appearance, and quality craftsmanship, should realize a sum of at least $200,000.13 In fact, Brigham Young’s directive was not only to sell the Nauvoo Temple but also the smaller Kirtland Temple (completed in 1836) back in Ohio; the proceeds from such a double sale would serve the following purposes: 1) Fund the cost of exodus. This included the construction by the Church of thousands of wagons and the outfitting of teams to be loaned out to those families unable to provide for themselves. 2) Charter steamboats in the spring “to convey a freight of the [sick] and poor to the highest navigable point on the Missouri River if it can be, to Council Bluffs.” 3) Pay off the debt owed to hundreds of temple laborers, estimated at $2,500.15 4) Pay off various legal expenses incurred by Joseph Smith, Orrin Porter Rockwell, and others over the past few years. 5) Pay off legitimate land and mortgage debts owed to Nauvoo property landowners.16

The first serious overtures to sell the temple were directed at the Roman Catholic Church. Many Quincy Catholics had shown kindness and humanitarian goodwill toward the Latter-day Saints during the Mormon refuge in Quincy, Illinois just six years before. History will record that it was not the Catholics that drove the Saints out of Missouri in the winter of 1838-39. It will also show that it was the citizens of Quincy, many of whom were of the Catholic faith, who saved the Saints from starvation and the Church from desolation during one of its most difficult hours.17 Willard Richards, a prominent Mormon apostle in Nauvoo, spoke highly of his fellow religionists during Joseph Smith’s 1844 campaign for the presidency of the United States:

The Mormons and the Catholics . . . are the only two who have not persecuted each other and others in these United States, and the only two who have suffered from the cruel hand of mobocracy for their religion under the name of foreigners—and to stay this growing evil and establish Jeffersonian Democracy! . . . Help us to elect this man [Joseph Smith] and we will help you to secure those privileges which belong to you, and break every yoke.18
At the suggestion of Catholic Judge James H. Ralston of Quincy, proffered sometime in October 1845, Brigham Young dispatched his lawyer, Almon W. Babbitt, to Cincinnati with a letter for Bishop John Purcell of that city and “all other Authorities of the Catholic Church” extending a formal invitation to come and visit Nauvoo. Bishop Purcell referred Babbitt to his counterpart, Bishop William Quarter of Chicago, who recorded in his journal:

Towards the close of this month, the Bishop was waited on by a gentleman of the name of Babbitt from Nauvoo who represented himself as the agent of the Mormons to [this] city and authorized to make sale of their property to the Catholics. The Bishop wrote to Rev. Misters Hamilton of Springfield and Tucker of Quincy to go to Nauvoo and see what arrangements could be made regarding the leasing, if not purchasing, of the Mormon Temple.

Reverend Hilary Tucker, a native of Perryville, Missouri, had become Quincy’s first English-speaking priest back in 1839. He and his close friend, Reverend George Hamilton, had raised over $2,000 to build the first English-speaking Roman Catholic Church in Quincy, a brick edifice that they christened St. Lawrence, later St. Peter’s. Hamilton then left Quincy for Upper Alton and eventually moved to Springfield in 1845. Bishop Quarter could not have sent a pair of Catholic priests who knew the territory—and the Mormons—any better than these two men did.

Tucker and Hamilton left Quincy, traveled upriver and stopped at Warsaw before their arrival in the Mormon capital on Tuesday, 9 December 1845. They immediately met with Brigham Young and other Church leaders in the home of Willard Richards. That evening in the temple, Brigham Young and the Twelve “finished a letter to the Catholics giving our proposal to sell.” The following morning, at 11:15, the two priests were given a private tour of the building before being “admitted into the upper room of the temple accompanied by Joseph L. Heywood who gave the gentlemen an introduction to those present.” The fact that Brigham Young invited them into the temple and interrupted his busy last-minute preparations for the next day’s beginning of endowment work in the temple is ample evidence to show their lively intent to sell. Orson Hyde then read aloud their proposal after which Brigham Young said, “we wished to realize from the sale of our property sufficient to take all our poor with us in a comfortable manner.”

Reverend Tucker then replied that they had been sent by the Bishop
of Chicago and that they were interested in whatever prospects the temple might hold as a Catholic college. Young replied that there were forty-eight rooms in the temple, all of which could serve either as classrooms or administrative space. While doubting that the two main rooms, with their very high ceilings, would suit as lecture halls, Tucker seemed very impressed with the building over all. Hamilton also expressed an interest in other Nauvoo properties, “one for a school and one for a church,” since many Catholics were “coming from Europe and Nauvoo might be a fine gathering spot.” However, they might prefer a lease to a sale, to which Young replied that he would much rather sell than lease their properties. “Our objective is to get means to assist away the poor—there are hundreds of families who are poor [and are] looking to us and we want to get means to sustain the poor, who have been robbed of their all.”

Reverend Tucker thought it best to publish the Mormon offer in various Catholic newspapers. He also deemed it “advisable” for his superiors to send “a competent committee to ascertain the value” of the properties in Nauvoo, not only the temple. Although they thought the sum, (presumably $200,000) to be raised “was large and the time very short” to conclude an agreement, both felt cautiously optimistic that a deal could be struck and that they would have “a decided answer” by Christmas. Just before the meeting closed, Young, perhaps sensing how difficult a task it might be to raise that kind of money, surprised everyone by amending his offer saying that if the Catholics “agreed to our propositions we will lease them the temple for . . . from five to thirty-five years at a reasonable price, the rent to be paid in finishing the unfinished parts of the temple, the wall around the temple block, the block west of the temple, and keeping the temple in repair.” Clearly he was almost as concerned with keeping the temple from falling into enemy hands as he was with an immediate infusion of cash. And perhaps there was a hint in his tone that someday, God willing, the Saints might return. At any rate, at the end of their seventy-five minute meeting, Reverend Tucker gave “much encouragement that an arrangement would speedily be entered into. Both gentlemen seem highly pleased with the temple and the City and appear to feel sanguine that the Catholics should get this temple and vicinity.”

To the bitter disappointment of Mormon leaders, however, almost a month later on 7 January 1846, they received a letter from Reverend Tucker “informing us that the bishop could not raise enough money to purchase our property, but would either purchase or rent one of our public buildings. . . . A council was taken into consideration, the result of the deliberation was that they would not answer the letter and that the Catholics might go to hell their own way.”

His hopes dashed, Young persisted in the business at hand: to bless
his people, prepare them for exodus, and continue to explore other options for raising money. Faced with enemy resolutions that demanded the complete surrender of the Mormon people and/or their total departure from the state by 1 May 1846 on pain of mob violence, and aware that Governor Thomas Ford was himself convinced that the only real solution to the Mormon problem was for them to leave, Young instructed his people to prepare for exodus. Nauvoo soon was transformed into a bustling wagon-making factory with as many as 2,000 wagons under construction.33

To salvage the most out of a rapidly deteriorating situation, he enlisted the services of three very talented individuals—Almon W. Babbitt, Joseph L. Heywood, and John S. Fullmer—to act as land sale commissioners, or “trustees,” for the Church with power of attorney to sell off both Church and private properties at the very best possible price. “The last day we were in Nauvoo,” Young later confided, “Awe went into the temple, clothed ourselves, and handed it over to the Lord. I appointed the Trustees myself—Babbitt for lawyer, Fullmer for bulldog, and growl, and Heywood to settle debts—a perfect wall between us and the mobs.”31

No more important task devolved upon their shoulders than to continue to make every reasonable effort to sell at any decent rate the very structure the Saints back in Nauvoo were working so hard to complete. “For myself, I am chosen together with two of the Brethren as ‘Trustee-in-Trust’ to dispose of all Church property and to use it in assisting the poor to go the West,” Fullmer confided in an April 1846 letter. “We shall about finish the temple by the first of May, when it will be dedicated to the Most High God, after which we think we will sell it. We expect to get $200,000 for it (about one quarter of its cost).”32

This decision to sell the temple was not publicly made known until the building was finally completed and formally dedicated on 1 May 1846. Prudence seemed to dictate this course. Not known was precisely how the Saints, who had sacrificed so much to build the structure, would respond to leadership attempts to sell it. However, such fears evaporated during conference deliberations during the time the temple was dedicated. “All things are not known at once,” Orson Hyde of the Twelve remarked to the Saints, hundreds of whom had been working on the temple for months, if not years.

This Temple was built for a certain purpose. That is gained. Will we now sell? A vote was taken last fall not to sell it, but a key that will not open a door and shut it again is not a good one. So if we have to sell the Temple to remove the poor, the people that make us do it must pay the bill and meet the consequences. All who are in favor of selling this
House if it meets with the Council of the Twelve manifest it by raising the right hand. It was a unanimous vote, save one.  

Although some 2,500 Latter-day Saints had already left the city by this time, the great majority of Nauvoo’s citizens, still numbering over 10,000, were waiting for the spring and promoting whatever sales they could realize from their personal properties and improvements. At the dedication, Lorenzo Young, Brigham Young’s younger brother, corroborated the above account when he “spoke of the selling of the temple. Said it was his feeling to sell it and appropriate the avails to the removal of the poor. A vote was taken to know if the Church here was willing it should be sold, provided it should be sanctioned by the brethren in the West.” The motion was “carried with one dissenting voice.”  

“For the Salvation of the City”  

A careful study of the early backroom discussions of the Twelve that led to Babbitt’s mission to Bishop Quarter and the appointment of the Trustees suggests that there were considerations at play other than merely financial ones. Rationalizing with the very profane notion of selling off what faithful Latter-day Saints truly believed was God’s modern tabernacle, many only resignedly agreed to the proposition, perhaps in the hope that they would someday return. Wrote Apostle John Taylor in September 1845 of the plan:  

[W]e considered that we had a perfect right so to do, that we had been driven from and despoiled of our property long enough, and that we should be justified in taking a course of that kind, that the City and temple would be more likely to be preserved in safety by wealthy and influential men purchasing property and settling here, than by apostates and half-hearted Mormons having charge of affairs during our absence, and that if we should return we should again inherit our places, and if we do not inherit them in Time, we and our children will inherit them hereafter.  

The “apostates and half-hearted Mormons” Taylor was referring to surely included the colorful and charismatic James J. Strang. Strang had converted to Mormonism just months before Joseph Smith’s death and then proclaimed a secret letter of his prophetic appointment, allegedly signed by
Joseph himself. Dubbed the "Voree Prophet," Strang was by late 1845 well into his newly chosen career of persuading many Latter-day Saints that he was Joseph Smith's only legitimate successor. Expert with pen and press, he lost little time publishing revelations and laying claim to church leadership from his home base in Spring Prairie, Wisconsin, which he renamed "Voree." Strang sensed not merely a vacuum of leadership but also an intense longing among many for a new prophet-leader. As one of his followers stated: "A Church without a Prophet, is not the Church for me; It has no head to lead it, in it I would not be."36

Acting quickly to fill that void just as the Church was heading west, Strang formally claimed total authority, criticized Young's plan of exodus, excommunicated Brigham Young, established a new ruling First Presidency, found new scripture, and initiated a very ambitious, far-reaching missionary campaign among scattered Mormon branches. Although his movement eventually faltered in his later Beaver Island settlement in northern Lake Michigan, as of early 1846, with the temple nearing completion, his claim to leadership was attracting a couple thousand followers including Joseph Smith's brother and Church Patriarch, William Smith, Apostle John E. Page, and William Marks, former Nauvoo stake president.37 If not "worth the skin of a flea," as Brigham Young once described him, Strang, at least for a very brief moment, was proving himself to be a formidable contender. As one notable historian put it, "by the summer [of 1846] Strang was in a position to carry the fight for control of the Church to the eastern branches. . . . Had Brigham Young's western migration come to grief, Strang might have succeeded."38

Nothing would have validated more his claim to succession than possessing, if not owning, the Nauvoo Temple. And nothing more intensified Brigham Young's efforts to sell it than Strang's maneuvering for it. As early as February 1846, Strang was making overtures and exploring possibilities. At a meeting in the temple on 1 February, just days before the Twelve left Nauvoo, Moses Smith, an erstwhile emissary of Strang's, "set forth the doctrine and claims of James J. Strang." As one observer described the day, it was quite the showdown.

Moses then arose and read some of Strang's productions and warned the people to flee to Voree, Strang's new city in Wisconsin where he promised them peace and safety. . . . After he had done, Brother Brigham said he would make no comment but simply ask the people if they had heard the voice of the Good Shepherd in what had been advanced and when "No" resounded all over the house it was proposed that Moses Smith be cut off from the Church.
which was carried unanimously. Strang and Aaron Smith [were] also cut off. Many have been deluded by Strangism and one of them a president of the Seventies. 9

All the way west, the Twelve kept a wary eye on Strang’s movements, and with good reason, for Strang did have ambitions for Nauvoo. “Should it please God to forgive the iniquity of the people and save Nauvoo from impending ruin,” he wrote in a letter to Emma Smith, Joseph Smith’s widow, in February 1846,

... possibly I might make it my residence at some future day. In such an event I should be greatly pleased to have you for a neighbor and think you would not have reason to complain of quite such a state of things as has existed there since the death of your husband....

Now sister, I do not know your intentions, nor feel disposed to be inquisition in your affairs, but if you intend to remain in Nauvoo, you cannot well imagine how much I should rejoice in your full and hearty cooperation in my efforts for the regulation and salvation of the city.... I am led to believe that from your influence and inclination you would be able to accomplish much. 10

Part of his plans for the “salvation of the city” included the temple. To what extent he believed Emma would be his ally in seizing the building is an intriguing historical question. The record shows that Emma did indeed visit with Strang on several occasions but that she was never enamored with his teachings. 11

However, certainly one of Strang’s newest lieutenants, former Mormon apostle and unpredictable disciple, William Smith, did try to seize the temple. By mid-March, word had it “that an agent of William Smith’s had demanded the keys of the temple... [that] the guards expected an attack on the temple from the Strangites and Smithites, [that] William Smith had stated that he would be giving endowments in the temple within two weeks.” 42

There is no question that many of the Voree Prophet’s followers looked upon the efforts to sell the temple as ample evidence to show that Brigham Young was leading the Church astray. “Now I ask who could obtain a revelation or commandment to the Church to abandon the temple, the Nauvoo House, and the Holy City which God had appointed for a place of refuge and for the deliverance of his people,” one of Strang’s new Philadelphia converts asked in July 1846. “Was not the Lord able to protect
them from the mob and to fulfill his part of the covenant?"

To what extent Strang himself led the charge to capture the Nauvoo Temple when he had already decided on relocating to Wisconsin and had already proclaimed a revelation to build a temple there, is an important query. Nevertheless, William Smith continued his efforts to discredit the attempted sale of both temples. "I still notice that the apostates in Nauvoo are trying every act and tact possible to sell the Church property," he wrote his file leader in August 1846. "In the last [copy of the Hancock] Eagle the notice is repeated 'Nauvoo Temple for sale; Kirtland Temple for sale.' How it looks to barter the Lord's property. Perhaps you had best notice a little of this in the [Voree] Herald and in your Kirtland conference . . . and make some remarks." As if on cue, the very next issue of the Herald ran a very pointed article explaining Strang's claim to the property.

As James J. Strang is the successor in the Presidency and nobody else holds that office or pretends to hold it, there can be no difficulty as to the title, whatever there may be as to the possession. The Trustees are not a presidency and therefore cannot set up any pretense to title to the temple, or any other Church property. All we ask of the Brighamites is that they will not burn the temple down and lay it to the mob. We will risk the legal right.

William Smith never succeeded in his designs, due in part to Strang's ambitions northward on the one hand and on the other, to the work of the Nauvoo Trustees. Nonetheless for as long as this particular threat existed, and certainly until a new First Presidency was reinstated to bolster legal claim to Church properties, the Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints was vigilant in countering legal arguments and in ensuring that the temple end up in the legal custody of those who, if not necessarily friendly to the interests of the Church, were not antagonistic to it.

"Let the Owls and the Bats Revel"

Meanwhile, as the vanguard companies of Latter-day Saints trudged their way west across Iowa, the Trustees continued to do all in their power to find new buyers. In April 1846 Orson Hyde, the Mormon apostle charged with remaining back in Nauvoo, wrote of "a conditional offer for the temple, and it is believed that we can get $200,000 from a rich old bachelor, a Catholic. . . . He will not buy other property unless he can buy the temple." The individual referred to was likely a Mr. Paulding of New York.
Orleans who, along with his nephew, Charles Mulliken of St. Louis, was indeed interested in the site. Upon hearing this news, a buoyant Young replied from Garden Grove, Iowa:

We have previously written you counseling to sell the temple for $200,000. When this is accomplished we want a voice in the disposition of the funds and we don't want any of it disposed of till we are consulted on the subject. . . . We shall want in our camp $25,000 at least and we expect you will consider us very benevolent if we claim no more than 1/8.48

To what extent the Paulding/Mulliken interest can be traced to the Tucker/Hamilton negotiations is not yet known. However, Joseph Heywood, one of the Trustees, traveled to St. Louis in October 1846 to pursue further the fragile negotiations. "They have not given up the idea of purchasing," he noted. However, by this time the so-called "Nauvoo War" had broken out with local Hancock County militia, or mobs as the Latter-day Saints described them, forcing out what few Mormons were still in the city. Such despicable action, which claimed several lives, transformed the city into an armed occupation zone, drove down real estate values even further than before, and gave temporary possession of the temple to the mobs. It was all enough for the Trustees to sound the alarm: "If we could effect a sale of the temple at a price which would meet with the approbation of the Council and thus be enabled to wind up the affairs of Nauvoo, we should be very happy. For Nauvoo seems, to a Saint, like the Abomination of Desolation."49

Yet even after the conflict, chances boded well for a sale. "We feel confident that we shall soon be able to sell the temple," Heywood and Fullmer both confided in October, "as the mob with McAuley in command who has held it as their barracks with cannon in the porch talk of vacating it next week as we believe they are of the opinion that an armed force will be no longer needed to regulate affairs in and about the city."50

The Paulding/Mulliken negotiation apparently came close to succeeding. As late as November, Mulliken had written yet another letter asking for a list of all Nauvoo properties and the lowest possible prices and indicated that "they would give a decided answer whether they would buy or not and make propositions."51 The major impediment to this latest attempt at selling may not have been the Battle of Nauvoo so much as an attachment placed on the sale of the temple which some chose to view as a defect in the title.52

Responding to the deteriorating Nauvoo conditions, Brigham
Young directed his Trustees to reduce their asking price yet again, “to sell
the Church property at Nauvoo without delay . . . at wholesale, and get
$125,000 and do as [they] pleased with the property of the Church at
Kirtland, Ohio.” And so the matter dragged on throughout the winter of
1846-47 with a nub of interest here and a nibble there, but without any firm
offer from anyone. By March 1847 the Trustees were reduced to praying
for a miracle. “We still entertain a hope that when the spring shall advance,”
a weary Heywood wrote, “the Lord will put it into the heart of some one to
purchase the temple that we may get through with our mission here.”

Another opportunity to sell occurred during the winter, though at
the greatly reduced price of $100,000, less undisclosed encumbrances. More
likely out of desperation than desire, Babbitt made a secret visit to the East
Coast to meet with Mr. Horace Hotchkiss and partners, and his agent, Isaac
Galland who were the original owners of several hundred acres in the
Nauvoo lowlands west of the temple. Back in 1839, as the Mormon need for
land dramatically increased, Joseph Smith bought nearly 500 acres in
Nauvoo from Hotchkiss. The cost of the land, however, was high enough
that the Church could barely pay the interest charges. Unfortunately,
Galland proved himself untrustworthy in conveying interest payments
from the Church to Hotchkiss. Furthermore, Galland had sold a great deal
of property of his own to unsuspecting Latter-day Saints for which he
actually held an invalid claim. Hundreds of families lost everything because
of his deception. Whether it was on account of such crooked land deals
and exorbitant prices, or because of other reasons, Joseph Smith was forced
to declare bankruptcy in 1842. To recover their interests, Hotchkiss was now
attempting to foreclose on what he believed were unpaid debts. Galland
had even sworn out an attachment which he tried to levy upon the sale of
the temple for the sum of $25,000, not because they had any ownership
interests in the temple but because they sought payment from the sale of the
temple. In their negotiations with Babbitt, Hotchkiss offered to buy the
temple and other unnamed Nauvoo properties for $100,000 less the
undisclosed cost of lost revenues.

Apparently disgusted at what he felt had been Galland’s dishonor-
able, if not illegal, actions in the past, as well as Hotchkiss’s present audac-
ity to interfere with a possible temple sale, Babbitt echoed Brigham Young’s
distrust and disdain for the whole matter. In the end, he would not sell a
crown jewel for bad debts. Totally exasperated, Young remarked: “I believe
that Nauvoo will have a longer tail to wind up than Kirtland had, which had
no end.” When Heywood and Fullmer heard of Babbitt’s failure to close
the deal, they responded incredulously. “You can judge of our feelings when
it seemed as if there was a reasonable prospect of a sale, and those prospects
were blighted by the inattention and darkness of mind of one in whom we

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had right to confide.” However, when Babbitt later made a full disclosure of the matter to the Twelve, they were not disappointed. “His explanations of the same were accepted,” and commendations extended.

Emma Smith’s actions proved yet another complication and obstacle to the Trustees. Motivated to collect as much of the Smith estate as possible for reasons that included paying off family bills and overdue property taxes, she and her new husband, Lewis Bidamon (who had more than a passing interest in such things), made out a quit claim deed to her lawyers of other properties Joseph Smith had owned in Nauvoo. In October 1841, on the advice of several other church leaders, Joseph Smith had transferred some 230 city lots in Nauvoo, amounting to almost 300 acres, from himself and Emma to himself as trustee-in-trust for the Church. Such action, so they believed, would protect the interests of the Church and absolve the Smith family of legal responsibility for payment defaults and other related problems. They believed Church business should be kept separate from family and personal interests. However, the state of Illinois had passed a little-known law in 1835 that prevented religious organizations from holding more than ten acres of property, a law, evidence suggests, the Church was not aware of in 1841.

Destined to be tied up in the courts for years as to which of Joseph Smith’s properties belonged to the Church and which were owned by the family, the whole matter became a legal roadblock to any further attempted sales. “This conveyance operates as a complete estoppel of our selling lands in the city,” lawyer Babbitt complained. While it is certain that Hotchkiss had no claim whatsoever to the temple block, to what extent Emma and her lawyers tried to put an attachment on the attempted sale of the temple is difficult to determine; however, they did prevent the Trustees from selling other properties. Never an admirer of Emma, Babbitt, whom Emma equally detested, noted that she “has joined the Methodist Church” and that the Methodists, “are laying plans to get in possession of the temple and other properties of the Church through Emma… The effect of Emma’s operation will operate strongly against the Trustees closing out the business.”

Finally, an exasperated Brigham Young, in reducing the asking price yet again, this time to $100,000, could no longer hide his utter disappointment and frustration. “Has the Lord turned bankrupt,” he asked in an April 1847 letter to his Trustees.

Or are his children so needy that they are obliged to sell their father’s house for a morsel of bread? And if they should sell how much bread would they get after they had paid some millions of unjust debts, mortgages, canceled
claims, demands, attachments, fines, forfeitures, stripes, imprisonments, massacres, lawsuits, judgements and the whole etceteras that united mobocracy could bring against you, before you could get one dollar removed from the vault to a place of safety. We leave you to answer this question and advise you according to your request to repair forthwith to this place [Winter Quarters, at Council Bluffs] with all your surplus funds . . . and tools, records, papers, and movable effects belonging to the Church and let nothing be lost . . . and you will learn that it will be much more for the content of the Saints to build two temples than to sell one. . . . And if we get no other reward for past labors, we have left monuments which will memorialize the diligence of the Saints forever, and greater glory than safes of gold.

In his final letter to the Trustees in late 1847, six months after the discovery of the Salt Lake Valley as a new mountain home for the Saints, Brigham Young directed them to abandon the city, “let the dead bury their dead,” and “gather to this place in season to start with the spring emigration, leaving the temple of the Lord in the care of the Lord into whose hands we committed it before we left, and let the owls and the bats revel in the habitation of the Saints in Nauvoo until the times of the Gentiles [are] fulfilled.” Joining the main body of the Church assembling at the Missouri River near Council Bluffs, a very happy and relieved Heywood, Fullmer, and Babbitt received the blessings and approbations of their leaders, for it should be noted that although the temple was never sold to serious buyers for anything near a decent price, many other Nauvoo properties did sell. These included the Seventy’s Hall and Parley P. Pratt’s home, both of which the Roman Catholic Church eventually purchased, the Masonic Hall, the Arsenal, and many private properties, albeit at less than desired prices. At a meeting of 22 January 1848, “it was resolved unanimously that we have the utmost confidence in the faithful discharge of their duties as Trustees-in-Trust in Nauvoo and we tender to them our thanks, and pray our Father in Heaven to bless them and prosper them in all things pertaining to the building up of His Kingdom on the earth.”

In retrospect, any real attempt at selling the temple was the product of wishful thinking. Finding serious buyers for a building trapped in a sea of rapidly declining real estate values proved an impossible task. An asking price of $200,000, or even $100,000, was simply too much money, even if conditions had not deteriorated. Reverend Tucker had barely been able to raise $2,000 for his Quincy church house just a few years prior; what made anyone think that a figure 100 times that amount was feasible? More to the
point, the temple took its value from its place as the center of Mormon community and worship. Destroy this context and who really would want to come to a deserted city miles removed from any large Illinois community? That the temple did not sell for anything near its value was not the fault of potential buyers or frustrated trustees; rather, it fell victim to the regrettable circumstances that led to persecution and to the Mormon decision to abandon what they had constructed.  

"The Glory of Mormonism is Gone"

With the Trustees now gone and their work accepted, one might suppose that the temple would have fallen into disuse and disrepair. Though vacant, it was found to be in good condition by the summer of 1848. "I visited the Temple and went over it from the bottom to the top," a visiting Wilford Woodruff, one of the authorities who had helped in dedicating it two years before, recorded. "[It] was in a much better state of preservation than I expected to find it." Starting in October of that same year, the Methodist Home Mission Society was to have begun renting out the building for the sum of $400 per year, in an arrangement that unfortunately never came to pass.  

Early in the morning of 9 October, citizens of Nauvoo were alarmed to discover the temple in flames. "It was a sight too full of mournful sublimity," as one reporter described the awful scene.

The mass of material which had been gathered there by the labor of many years afforded a rare opportunity for this element to play off some of its wildest sports. Although the morning was tolerably dark, still when the flames shot upwards, the spire, the streets and the houses for nearly a mile distant were lighted up, so as to render even the smallest object discernible. The glare of the vast torch, pointing skyward indescribably contrasted with the universal gloom and darkness around it.

Luvera Ellen Preece was living across the Mississippi River in Montrose, Iowa during time of the fire. She witnessed the burning of the temple first. She confided in her journal that the light in the sky from the fire was so great, she could see to pick a common pin from the floor in her bedroom.

Quickly condemning it as the work of a crazed arson, the Warsaw Signal, a long-time bitter critic of the Mormons, said that it was "no doubt the work of some nefarious incendiary. This edifice was the wonder of
Illinois. . . . As a work of art and a memorial of Mormon delusions, it should have stood for ages. . . . None but the most depraved heart could have applied the torch to effect its destruction." The Iowa Sentinel followed in the same regretful tone: "However much the religion of the Mormons may be condemned, every good citizen will condemn this act of the incendiary as one of the greatest barbarian." And reported the Methodists: "You have heard that the great Mormon temple is burned. The glory of Mormonism is gone."

The man long thought to be responsible for torching the temple was Joseph B. Agnew of Pontoosuc, Illinois, who, along with Thomas C. Sharp of Carthage and Squire McCauley of Appanoose, feared that so long as the temple stood, it would, magnet-like, attract the Mormons back to Nauvoo. "The reason for our burning it," he admitted years after the fact was that there was continual reports in circulation that the Mormons were coming back to Nauvoo and we were afraid that they might take it into their hearts to do so and as we had had all the trouble with them we wanted . . . we determined the destruction of their temple and by so doing they would not be able to ever again try to come back. . . . We pledged ourselves to destroy the temple if it cost our lives."

While the historical evidence is reasonably convincing that Agnew was the guilty party, it would be historically inaccurate to conclude that he was definitely guilty of the crime. The evidence is simply inconclusive. An argument has once more been made that he was merely acting as a secret agent of Brigham Young. Frustrated by the inability to affect a sale, and increasingly uneasy with the possibility of others obtaining the Temple, Young, so the argument goes, simply ordered the deed himself. However, compelling evidence has not yet been produced to back up such an accusation. Was Young disappointed that the temple never sold? Certainly. Was he worried that it would fall into others' hands? Not if it was sold or leased to responsible parties. And was he disappointed that it was destroyed? Without question, but in his mind God allowed it because of what had happened to it. "The temple at Nauvoo passed into the hands of the enemy," he said in 1853 "who polluted it to that extent the Lord not only ceased to occupy it, but he loathed to have it called by his name, and permitted the wrath of its possessors to purify it by fire, as a token of what will speedily fall on them and their habitations, unless they repent." Young had been interested in its preservation in hopes that the Latter-day Saints might yet return, as John Taylor also indicated (see above).
In 1848 Young related to his colleagues a dream he had of repairing the temple and then said, "We want it preserved. The Lord can preserve it in the hands of our enemies as well as in our hands. . . . We shall never go back to possess [it] until the laws of right take place. The Sheriff will sell it to some religious body who will preserve it." "Rent it," he said, and let them "keep it in repairs." In fact, Brigham Young did not want to destroy it for the very reason that the Saints might somehow, some day, return to it.

The following spring, a group of French Icarians, a communist society under the leadership of Etienne Cabet, arrived in Nauvoo in March 1849 following a failed settlement attempt in northeast Texas two years before. They purchased the temple lot and the burned-out stone walls (they still stood some 60 feet high) from Darwin Chase for $4,000. Intent on maintaining the original walls, Cabet and some 300 of his somewhat less enthusiastic followers went to work to build a "monster boarding house," or community center. "The basement story was to be laid off into kitchens, the first floor to be converted into a dining room large enough to seat 1,000 people, and the remainder of the building to be fitted up for school rooms, offices, and sleeping apartments for 500 people." It was a doomed effort from the start, considering the weakened state of the temple walls, and one which Cabet's own disgruntled followers knew was foolhardy; their reconstruction efforts soon met with disaster. "The 27th of June [1850] eleven men were at work on the interior of the building," remembered Emile Vallet, himself one of the workers.

At 3 o'clock p.m. a distant report of thunder announced the approach of a storm. . . . We continued to work. . . . Suddenly a furious wind began to blow; four of the masons fearing the non-solidity of the walls, left to seek shelter elsewhere. Seven of us remained, taking refuge in the tool room on the south side. If there is a Providence it was on our side, for hardly had we taken our position that the tornado began to tear small rocks from the top of the walls and flew in every direction. . . . Before we had decided whether we should stay or run, one of us that was watching explained: "Friends, we are lost, the north wall is caving in. . . ." The fall of that wall was heard three miles away. We looked at one another. All alive, but as white as sheets. The wind was terrific, the rain was blinding us. The cloud was touching the ground. The most severe storm I ever witnessed in Nauvoo. . . . The storm lasted three hours. . . . The fall of that wall ended the rebuilding of the temple."
Before their settlement failed in 1859, the Icarians hauled away many stones from the temple ruins and erected several small buildings on the temple lot, including a schoolhouse which later became a hotel, later still a sanitarium and eventually a Catholic parochial school and priest residence. As the years passed, the Nauvoo Temple Block was occupied by saloons and pool halls, slaughter houses and hotels, grocery and drug stores, private homes and telephone exchanges. What few temple stones remained became easy prey for treasure hunters and visitors. According to one account, some of them eventually became part of Nauvoo's St. Peter and Paul's Roman Catholic Church—an almost fitting end considering how close the two churches once came to concluding an agreement.

Bringing the story full circle, in 1937 Wilford C. Wood, representing a somewhat reluctant Heber J. Grant, president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during the hard days of the Depression, reacquired the original property from the Bank of Nauvoo (that had earlier foreclosed on the property from an embarrassed estate) for the grand sum of $900. Had the Nauvoo Temple been sold for a decent price, the Mormon exodus would unquestionably have been greatly facilitated. Many would have had to suffer far less than they did. Some lives may have been saved. One even wonders if the enlistment of the Mormon Battalion that served in the Mexican War, a pursuit Church leaders tried so hard to arrange because of its payment to the soldiers, would have been necessary. And since it was soldiers of the Mormon Battalion that discovered gold at Sutter's Fort, what might have happened to American history? And had the temple been sold to the Roman Catholic Church or to another buyer, would the original structure now stand?

These are but idle speculations on what might have been. One can only wonder on these things as a new chapter in modern Mormon and Illinois history now rises once again on the banks of the Mississippi River.

Notes

1 Journal of Heber C. Kimball, 2 January 1846. Typescript copy at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Hereafter referred to as “Special Collections.”
3 The new Nauvoo Temple was dedicated 27 June 2002 by Gordon B. Hinckley, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Funding for the temple came from both Church tithing funds and from private donations.
4 Doctrine & Covenants 124:31-40.
5 “And ye shall build it on the place where you have contemplated building it, for that is the spot which I have chosen for you to build it.” The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981 edition.) Section 124:43. Latter-day Saints accept the Doctrine and Covenants as a book of scripture, one of their standard works.
8 Journal of Nelson Bates, 21. Church Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 50 North East Temple St., Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereafter referred to as “Church Archives.” The Bates journal goes on to provide one of the finest contemporary descriptions of the Temple available anywhere.
9 Journal of E. V. Carter, 13 November 1845. Special Collections.
10 For more on the exodus, see B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 volumes. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930) 2: 464-540. See also Richard E. Bennett, Mormons at the Missouri, 1846-1852: “We'll Find the Place.” (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).
11 Wrote William Huntington on 30 November 1845: “The temple or theater story in the temple is now in readiness for giving the Saints their endowments. That part of the house which is in readiness will be dedicated tomorrow or on the first day of December.” Journal of William Huntington, 30 November 1845. Typescript copy in Special Collections. The well-known limestone font, resting on the backs and shoulders of twelve life-sized stone oxen, and placed in the basement to accommodate the practice of baptisms for the dead, was completed fairly early on and was in use in 1841. See Colvin, “Nauvoo Temple,” Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 3: 1002.
12 Brigham Young to James Emmett and company, 26 March 1846. Church Archives. Mormons view the temple endowment as a sacred ordinance consisting of covenants, promises, and blessings that are as essential a sacrament as baptism. Reserved only for temple worship, the endowment was first presented in Nauvoo and continues to occupy a central place in modern Mormon temple worship. Several modern researchers believe the total numbers of those who received their endowments in Nauvoo was considerably less, perhaps 5,500. See Susan Easton Black, “Nauvoo on the Eve of the Exodus,” in The Iowa Mormon Trail: Legacy of Faith and Courage. Edited by Susan Easton Black and William G. Hartley. (Orem, Utah: Helix Publishing, 1997), 39.
13 Wrote Brigham Young: “We counsel that the Nauvoo Temple be not sold short of $200,000.” Brigham Young to the Nauvoo Trustees, 25 August 1846. Journal History of the Church. Church Archives. Though some Nauvoo residents estimated the temple to be worth two million dollars, those closer to the matter saw the figure of $800,000 to be more realistic. See the Journal of Wandle Mace, 208. Special Collections. See especially John S. Fullmer letter to H. H. Blackwell, 24 April 1846. John S. Fullmer Letter Book, 1836-1881. Church Archives. As one reputable Nauvoo historian has written: “The cost of the Nauvoo Temple is impossible to reckon in
terms of money with any accuracy though various estimates were made. Travelers to Nauvoo in 1847 and 1848 reported the cost at $750,000 and $800,000, figures quoted to them that included estimates of materials and labor consumed.” Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 207-8.

14 Brigham Young to the Nauvoo Trustees, 25 August 1846. Brigham Young Papers. Church Archives.

15 James Whitehead to Brigham Young, 13 April 1846. Brigham Young Papers. Church Archives.


17 For the best review of Quincy’s role in saving the Latter-day Saints after their expulsion from Missouri in the winter of 1838/39, see Susan Easton Black and Richard E. Bennett, eds., *Quincy, Illinois: A City of Refuge* (Salt Lake City: Millennial Press, 2000).


19 James H. Ralston was a prominent attorney and judge in Quincy as early as 1837. He served on the Adams Circuit Court. He and his wife, June S. had eight children. Later, Judge Ralston served as an Assistant Quartermaster in the United States Army during the U.S./Mexican War. My thanks to Carolynne Koetters of the Quincy and Adams County Historical Society, Quincy, Illinois, for the above information.


21 Diary of Bishop William Quarter, 26 November 1845. Located at the Archives of the Archdiocese of Chicago. I am indebted to Reverend Martin Zielinski of Mundelein Seminary, Mundelein, Illinois, for providing me a copy of this journal entry. Rev. Zielinski is preparing a publication of Bishop William Quarter’s diary.

22 A. Zurbonsen, *Clerical Bead Roll of the Diocese of Alton, Illinois* (1918), 49, 142. Available at the Roman Catholic Pastoral Center, Springfield, Illinois. Both Tucker and Hamilton had studied in Rome in 1839 at Bishop Joseph Rosati’s request, before returning to St. Louis for their priesthood ordinations. Reverend Tucker remained in Quincy until 1846 before relocating to Chicago and later to Boston. Reverend Hamilton likewise eventually moved to a Boston diocese where he eventually rejoined his long friend, Reverend Tucker. See also *Diamond Jubilee History of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois*. Compiled and edited by Joseph J. Thompson (Springfield: Hartman Printing Co., 1927), 106, 109, 132-3. From 1788 the area now included in the Diocese of Springfield [Ill.] was part of several jurisdictions as the nation developed. It was first in the Diocese of Baltimore. Later, it came under the dioceses of Bardstown, Kentucky; Cincinnati, Ohio; Vincennes, Indiana; and St. Louis, Missouri. In 1844, the whole state of Illinois was formed into a single diocese with the see city in Chicago. Nine years later, the Diocese of Quincy was created to include the lower 56 counties of the state of Illinois. See *Diamond Jubilee History of the Diocese in Springfield in Illinois*, 1, and <http://www.dio.org/history/history.htm>
23 Journal of Heber C. Kimball, 10 December 1845.
24 Of their visit, the Warsaw Signal reported: "Two Catholic priests passed through this place on Monday last on their way to Nauvoo. Their object was to ascertain the nature and amount of property which the Mormons wish to dispose of to their church, and on what terms it can be bought." As reprinted in the New York Messenger, 15 December 1845; Journal of Heber C. Kimball, 9 December 1845.
25 Minutes of the Trustees, 9 December 1845. Brigham Young Papers.
26 Minutes of the Trustees, 9 December 1845. Brigham Young Papers.
27 Journal of Heber C. Kimball, 10 December 1845, Special Collections.
28 Journal of Heber C. Kimball, 10 December 1845, Special Collections. See also Roberts, Comprehensive History of the Church, 7:539-40.
29 Journal of Heber C. Kimball, 7 January 1846, Special Collections.
31 Meeting of the Trustees and the Twelve, 22 January 1847. Brigham Young Papers. See also General Church Minutes, 22 January 1847. Church Archives. John S. Fullmer (1807-1883) lived as a farmer after his arrival in Utah Territory in 1848. Joseph L. Heywood (1815-1910) lived in Quincy for a time before converting to Mormonism in 1842. A kindly man, he was a merchant for most of his life. Upon arriving in Salt Lake City he was appointed postmaster of the city and later Marshall of Utah Territory. Almon W. Babbitt (1812-1855) was a trial lawyer by profession. After coming west, he served briefly as Secretary of Utah Territory before being killed by Cheyenne Indians during one of his many journeys across the Plains. The best work, yet unpublished, of Babbitt is "Neither Saint Nor Scoundrel B The Life of Almon Whiting Babbitt, Utah's Secretary of State." By Omer W. Whitman and James L. Varner. Copy in author's possession.
33 Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 3 May 1846, Church Archives.
34 Journal of James Allen Scott, 1 May 1846. Church Archives. See also Isaac Rogers Letters, 4 May 1846, Church Archives. "It was also voted to sell the Temple at Nauvoo and also the one at Kirtland." One has to wonder if the workers, many of whom had given their all to the construction of the temple, were taken back by the news of the proposed sale and perhaps abstained from voting. They likely concluded that the Temple would be of little benefit to them in their new home in the West. At that same meeting, Babbitt remarked that the Saints would move to the West and there build yet another temple.
35 The decision to sell the Kirtland temple, along with the Nauvoo temple, had been made by the Twelve in their deliberations of 29 April 1846. "A vote was taken whether the Temple at Nauvoo and Kirtland with public lands should be sold-reasons was advanced: the poverty of the Church, the probability of our enemies getting it, or destroying it, if not sold-vote unanimous in favor of selling." Diary of William C. Staines, 29 April 1846. Church Archives.

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35 John Taylor’s Nauvoo Journal, edited by Dean C. Jessee. (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1996) 14 September 1845, 109. Not all church leaders were in favor of the plan. Apostle George A. Smith never took kindly to the idea of a sale. “We have felt much anxiety on that subject,” he confided in a letter to his Quorum leader. “But if you in your wisdom should think it best to sell the same for to help the poor in the present emergency we frankly concur notwithstanding we feel opposed to a Methodist congregation ever listening to a mob priest in that holy place.” George A. Smith to Brigham Young and Council, 26 April 1846. Brigham Young Papers.
36 Samuel M. Reese to James J. Strang, 12 July 1846. James Strang Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
37 The best biography yet written of James Strang is that of Milo Quaife, The Kingdom of Saint James: A Narrative of the Mormons (Newham, Connecticut: Yale University, 1930). For more on Strang’s threat to Brigham Young’s leadership, see Richard E. Bennett, “We’ll Find the Place”: The Mormon Exodus, 1846-1848 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997), 11-8.
39 Journal of Norton Jacob, 1 February 1846. Church Archives.
40 James J. Strang to Emma Smith, 22 February 1846. Mormon Manuscript Collection, Special Collections.
41 Though William Smith wanted Emma and his aging mother, Lucy Mack Smith (who Emma cared for), to move to Voree and to support his conversion to Strang, Emma was ever cool towards Strang’s fledgling movements. Nor was she in favor of Strang’s invitation to her son, Joseph Smith III, to join him. In the winter of 1846-47, while Strang was in the city, “she did not go out to hear him and that although [he] had sent her papers, she would not read them.” Trustees to Brigham Young, 19 February 1847. Brigham Young Papers. See also Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1984), 231-323.
42 John D. Lee Journals, 18 March 1846. Church Archives.
45 Voree Herald, 1 (September 1846), 2. This same argument, that the Twelve Apostles had no authority to dispose of the properties on the grounds that they were not legally empowered to represent the President of the Church, was pursued further in a later conference of Strang’s followers. “Resolutions were passed unanimously protesting against the sale of the Temples at Nauvoo and Kirtland and expressing the opinion that the men who profess to be trustees-in-trust at Nauvoo are not legally in office and have no right to convey title to any property of the Church. We caution all men against purchasing church property of them.” See handwritten manuscript entitled “The Temples,” no date. Strang Papers. See also Voree Herald (April 1846), 20 and (June 1846), 27. For a very spirited “Strangite” interpretation of this alleged defect in the temple, see John J. Hajicek, “The Sale and Burning of the Nauvoo Temple,” an unpublished paper given at the 25th annual meeting of the John Whitmer Historical Association, Kirtland, Ohio.
46 Strang's forces, while they may not have had a direct bearing on the sale of the Nauvoo Temple, posed a more serious barrier to the sale of the Kirtland Temple. Wrote Babbitt in December 1846: "I sold the farm once since I came here for $1500, but the Strangites got round the man and frightened him, they have got the whole community under fear of the Title of Property here and I have come to the conclusion we shall not get much relief from this place. . . . The Strangites are determined that we shall have nothing from Kirtland." Joseph L. Heywood to Brigham Young, 31 December 1846 in which he quotes from the above letter from Almon W. Babbitt, dated 14 December 1846. Brigham Young Papers. The Trustees were right in concluding that the Church would not have much success in selling the Kirtland temple. Ownership was to become a contentious issue for many years. For a thorough discussion of the history of the Kirtland Temple and of the various claims of ownership that eventuated in its 1862 takeover by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now called The Community of Christ), see Roger D. Launius, The Kirtland Temple: A Historical Narrative. (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1986), 75-99. Launius dismisses the Strang claim to the Kirtland Temple as just one of several would-be owners. Court hearings finally ruled that the temple belonged to the Smith family and that Joseph Smith III, as son of the deceased prophet, had the legal right to cede the temple over to the Reorganized Church.

47 Orson Hyde to Brigham Young, et al., 22 April 1846. Brigham Young Papers.
48 Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve to Orson Hyde and Wilford Woodruff, 30 April 1846. Brigham Young Papers.
49 Joseph L. Heywood to Brigham Young, 2 October 1846. Brigham Young Papers. There is some evidence to suggest that the mob forces that drove out the Mormons in September 1846 thought briefly of trying to sell the temple for their own purposes. Robert L. Campbell, a trusted Mormon, reported on the following dialogue. "Went to Nauvoo for some vegetables. . . . Went to the Post Office and found Squire [John?] McAuley there. Lawyer [George J.] Edmunds, came in, and after salutation Edmunds asked what was the good word? McAuley answered 'Got possession of that damned Temple, and found a barrel of powder and some castings buried there.' McAuley: 'When did you come here?' Edmunds: 'Just now.' McAuley: 'Well, I don't know as to your staying here, Jack Mormons must leave (swearing). What about your selling the Temple? Edmunds told him about some who were inquiring after it. McAuley said, send the men to us (meaning the men who were inquiring after the temple to buy it.)'" See Journal of Robert Lang Campbell. 23 Sept. 1846. Special Collections. The fact that title still legally remained in the hands of the Latter-day Saints barred the mob from making such a sale.
50 Joseph L. Heywood and John S. Fullmer to Brigham Young, 1 October 1846. Brigham Young Papers.
51 Nauvoo Trustees to Brigham Young, 6 November 1846. Journal History. The Journal History is a massive, day-by-day scrap-book-like collection, a vertical file from 1830 to 1967 consisting of a wide array of assorted historical manuscripts compiled by the staff of the Church Archives over several decades. An article appearing in the Missouri Republican newspaper the following summer indicated that the Catholic Church bought the Temple for $75,000 "to be appropriated to educational purposes connected with the Church." (Missouri Republican, 16 June 1847). However,
the paper clarified the situation soon afterward. "The sale of the Mormon temple at Nauvoo to the Catholics has failed in consequence of some defects in the title. The Catholics have purchased Parley Pratt's house with the intention of converting it into a church." (Missouri Republican, 28 July 1847). The Trustees make no mention whatsoever of such a sale.

52 In June 1847, newspapers were reporting that the Roman Catholic Church had finally purchased the Temple for $75,000. See Warsaw Signal, 12 June 1847 and the Iowa Sentinel, 26 June 1847. The report may have been faulty, however, for within weeks, other newspapers were reporting that the supposed sale had failed due to a defect in the title. See Keokuk Register, 24 July 1847 and the Daily Missouri Republican, 28 July 1847. This latest attempt at a sale is not yet corroborated in either Latter-day Saint or Roman Catholic archival sources.

53 Journal History, 7 October 1846.

54 One other possible buyer was identified as a W. Brunson, a "lecturer on the human system" who lectured in the temple for a short period of time and "seemed to have a desire to purchase and establish a literary institution." Nothing came of his intent. See James Whitehead to Brigham Young, 18 August 1846, Brigham Young Papers.

55 Journal History, 21 March 1847.

56 Hill, Joseph Smith, The First Mormon, 290-1. For a contrasting, more conciliatory view of Galland, see Lyndon W. Cook, "Isaac Galland B Mormon Benefactor," Brigham Young University Studies 19 (Spring 1979): 261-84. I am persuaded to side more with Hill than with Cook on the Galland controversy, in view of the above information provided on Babbitt and his visit with Hotchkiss. There seems no doubt that even if Galland was not as much as a rogue as Hill argues, the Nauvoo Trustees distrusted him.

57 Harrison Burgess to the Twelve, 20 January 1847. Journal History. The Trustees responded indignantly arguing that "this attachment was without any foundation and is only another of the series of annoyances to which the Church is continually subjected." It is highly doubtful that such an attachment would have held up in court, considering the fact that Hotchkiss held no rights whatsoever to the temple property. The question of land ownership in Nauvoo is a highly complicated matter. Several of the forty or more law suits of one kind or another were eventually settled out of court, but not without a great deal of effort on the part of the Trustees.

58 Journal History, 5 April 1847. See Launius, The Kirtland Temple, 75-116

59 Joseph L. Heywood to Brigham Young, Journal History, 20 April 1847. Whatever the full nature of these negotiations, and however they might have been criticized, when Babbitt made a full disclosure to the Twelve, "his explanations of the same were accepted" and commendations extended. See Journal History of the Church, 22 January 1848.

60 Journal History, 22 January 1848.

61 It is interesting to speculate on what ten acres the Church would have most prized, had the issue ever have come down to this. In all likelihood, the temple lot (4 acres) would most certainly have constituted part of its claim.

62 After Joseph Smith's death in 1844, Emma Smith and the U.S. District Attorney's Office in Springfield, Illinois, argued that the Church did not own, nor ever could
have owned, the 230 lots in Nauvoo, based on the above-mentioned ten-acre statute. The courts finally ruled that all property in excess of ten acres that Joseph Smith held as trustee-in-trust was subject to a lien. As Donna Hill points out, the case was concluded in 1852, with most of the proceeds ($11,000) going to the government as payment in full, to lawyer fees, and the rest to Emma “as dower in interest.” Donna Hill, Joseph Smith, The First Mormon, 318-9.

63 Almon W. Babbitt to Brigham Young, 31 January 1848. Brigham Young Papers.

64 Daniel H. Wells, a sympathetic non-Mormon landowner in Commerce, Illinois before the coming of the Saints, converted in Nauvoo and sold much of his property to homeless Latter-day Saint refugees. Later he became a counselor to Brigham Young in the First Presidency. On 8 February 1843, he deeded several acres of property, including all four, approximately one-acre lots of Block 20 located on the brow of the hill, to the Joseph Smith as Trustee for the building of the Nauvoo Temple. See Book “M,” 398, Hancock County Courthouse, Carthage, Illinois. This transaction was not recorded until 8 July 1844. (I am indebted to Michael Trapp of Nauvoo for sharing this information with me. His book on Nauvoo is forthcoming.) The temple itself was erected on Lot 2. See “Map of the City of Nauvoo, Drawn Principally from the Plats of the Original Surveys,” by Gustavus Hills, Esq. (Nauvoo Restoration Corporation, 1971). For more on Daniel H. Wells, see Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan, eds. Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2000), 1324.

65 A. W. Babbitt to Brigham Young, 31 January 1848. Brigham Young Papers. Church authorities were not surprised at Emma’s legal maneuvers. As early as March 1846, they were well aware of her argument, namely that the so-called Hugh White purchase of many original Nauvoo lands had been deeded over to Emma by Robert B. Thompson, that “Joseph, as trustee in trust, had no title to it, and consequently the title to the whole flats is in Emma Smith. Brother Babbitt says that he will have the records at Carthage more critically and extensively examined, and if it is so, we must all be still as death, and sell for what we can get.” Orson Hyde to Brigham Young, 10 March 1846. Brigham Young Papers. The “flats” mentioned referred to property due west of the temple lot, not the temple itself. Nothing so far discovered would indicate that Emma Smith’s lawyers believed they had a legal chance to seize the temple directly; however, such does not preclude her interests in the possible assets derived from such a sale. For more on the matter of the Emma Smith conveyances of properties, see Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, 258-9.

66 Brigham Young and the Council to the Trustees, Journal History, 13 April 1847.

67 Brigham Young to the Nauvoo Trustees, 4 November 1847. Journal History. See also Minutes of Trustees Meeting, 3 November 1847. Brigham Young Papers.

68 Almon W. Babbitt to Brigham Young, 23 March 1848. Brigham Young Papers. See also Minutes of a Meeting with the Twelve and the Trustees, 3 November 1847. Brigham Young Papers.

69 Journal History of the Church, 22 January 1848.

70 As more of a protective measure than a way to generate funds from sale, on 11 March 1848 the Trustees sold the Temple to David T. LeBaron, Babbitt’s brother-in-law, for $5,000. See Janath Cannon, Nauvoo Panorama (Nauvoo: Nauvoo...
Restoration, Inc., 1991), 52, as quoted in Omer W. Whitman and James L. Varner, "Seeking Glory: The Life of Almon W. Babbitt," unpublished manuscript, 72. See also Hancock County Deed Book V, 93, 408. No doubt this sale constituted little more than a safe transfer of property from the departing trustees to dependable Latter-day Saints still in the Nauvoo area who could be trusted to continue the search to find suitable buyers.

71 Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 30 May 1848. Church Archives. Earlier in the year, however, visitors had noticed that “it [had] been much abused by the mob and on its walls you can frequently discover black guard or smuttie language.” Journal of Jonathan Calkins Wright, 13-17 January 1848. Church Archives. Apparently, from what Woodruff recorded, by the summer efforts were made to remove the graffiti and other blemishes from the building.

72 George A. Smith and Joseph Young to the First Presidency and the Twelve. A “General Report,” dated 2 October 1848. Brigham Young Papers. The Oquawka Spectator reported that a contract had been entered into with a Mr. Brower of New York to convert it into a college for the American Home Mission Society. The contract was to have closed on 1 October 1848. See the Oquawka [Illinois] Spectator, 27 September 1848; also Gospel Herald, 3 (19 October 1848), 160.

73 The Nauvoo Patriot, 9 October 1848 as recorded in The Journal History.

74 Manuscript of Luvera Ellen Ensign Preece (1826-1898), Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, 9 October 1848. It should be noted that this was not the first time that fire had broken out in the temple. On 9 February 1846 fire was detected on the temple roof. That fire lasted for nearly half an hour but was put out by a very active bucket brigade. It was believed to have been started by an overheated stovepipe igniting some clothes that were hanging out to dry in an upper room in the attic. See Joseph Earl Arrington, “Destruction of the Mormon Temple at Nauvoo,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 10 (December 1947): 414-25.

75 The Warsaw Signal, 19 October 1848.

76 The Iowa Sentinel, 20 October 1848.

77 The Home Missionary, 21 (January 1849): 207. For a detailed study of the burning, see Don F. Colvin, “A Historical Study of the Mormon Temple,” 177-80. See also Journal History, 19 April 1919.

78 Taken from an account written by George J. Rudisill who, as a young man, had witnessed the burning of the temple and to whom J. B. Agnew later confessed in detail the full account. “Did you do that?” Rudisill asked. “Yes, I did it with my own hands.” Rudisill’s account of Agnew’s confession is by far the most detailed, most credible document available on the destruction of the temple. Apparently penned in 1894, it is on file in the Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County, Quincy, Illinois. I am indebted to my colleague, Professor Alex Baugh of Brigham Young University, for sharing the entire contents of this manuscript with me. Historian Kenneth W. Godfrey stops short of declaring Agnew was the arsonist since “no one produced enough evidence to bring him to trial.” Godfrey believes the evidence to be “inconclusive.” Likewise, local historian Michael Trapp, puts no credence whatsoever in Agnew’s confession as Rudisill supposedly made other statements that some have felt were not credible. Nevertheless, until more evidence comes along.
one wonders why Agnew would confess to something which he never did and in the process, provide so many compelling details and reasons? See Kenneth W. Godfrey, “The Importance of the Temple in Understanding the Latter-day Saint Experience Then and Now,” The Arrington Lecture Series, 6 (Logan, Utah: Utah State University, 2001), 30-1. See also David R. Crockett “The Nauvoo Temple: A Monument to the Saints.” Nauvo Journal 11 (Fall 1999): 25.

79 Certainly the descendants of Agnew refuse to believe he had anything to do with it. And there are conflicting reports to show that he may not have been responsible. See the unpublished “History of George W. Johnson,” as copied from his journal by his granddaughter, Mildred E. Johnson, typescript copy, 3. Special Collections, Brigham Young University.

80 The old argument that the Mormons destroyed their own temple, Graf-Spee like, was first made in 1850 by the Mormon apostate, William Hall, in his polemic The Abominations of Mormonism Exposed: Containing Many Facts and Doctrines Concerning that Singular People During Seven Years’ Membership With Them From 1840 to 1847 (Cincinnati: I. Hart and Company, 1850), 93. More recently, in an unpublished paper entitled “The Sale and Burning of the Nauvoo Temple,” John Hajicek resurrects this old charge and blames Brigham Young for doing so. [See <www.strangitee.org/temple.htm>] Basing his argument on conjecture and purely circumstantial evidence, Hajicek argues that Young “had the power to hire the deed done if desired;” (9) that “the opportunities were endless for Brigham Young to get the job done;” (13) that William Smith accused Orson Hyde of burning down the temple; (13) that upon hearing the news, Brigham Young and his counselors were apparently “glad of it;” (“I would rather see it burnt than to see it go into the hands of devils,” (13) and that since the Mormon leader later burned down Winter Quarters (the Mormon way station near Omaha, Nebraska) in 1850, and also Fort Laramie and other places during the Utah War of 1858, that it was his pattern to do such things. However, there is no hard evidence to prove such an accusation. Those who likely destroyed it never confessed to receiving any outside orders. The fact that other places were burned down has no bearing whatever on the Nauvoo situation. Winter Quarters was destroyed on government orders as the land belonged to the Indians and had to be cleared. The actions at Fort Laramie were part of a war action, not a peacetime experience. William Smith’s wayward testimonials were seldom accepted, even by his Strangite supporters. Not even the harshest critics of the Church ever placed the temple’s destruction upon the Mormons who were not trying to keep it from the “Gentiles” but were arranging the best of terms to put it in their hands. And there were no squeals of delight among the Latter-day Saints when news of its destruction arrived. It may have solved a dilemma over what to do with the temple but it also represented the destruction of what hundreds had worked years to build. Finally, if Agnew and his associates did burn it down for fear of a Mormon return, it was a concern not without some substantiation, as shown above.

81 Discourse by Brigham Young, 5 April 1853, as recorded in Journal of Discourses by Brigham Young, His Two Counselors, The Twelve Apostles, and Others. Reported by E. D. Watt (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855) 2:32-3.

82 General Church Minutes, 22 January 1848. Brigham Young University Papers.
83 Orson Hyde and George A. Smith to Brigham Young, 7 May 1849. Brigham Young Papers. The previous March, the Trustees had conveyed title of the temple for $5,000 to David T. LeBaron, Babbitt's brother-in-law, more as a means of parking ownership than receiving significant funds. (From a forthcoming article entitled "Nauvoo's Temple Square," by Lisle G. Brown.) Meanwhile, Cabet was only able to pay $3,000 and received from nearby citizens another $1,000 to make up the purchase price that included the Temple and arsenal and about eleven surrounding acres. See the Mormon newspaper, Frontier Guardian [Kanesville, Iowa] 27 June 1849. There remains some discrepancy over whether the Icarians paid $2,000 or $3,000 for the building; however, it is clear that they were short of funds. The Darwin Chase here listed was likely Darwin J. Chase (1816-1863), a native of Ellisburgh, New York. He had converted to Mormonism in 1831, moved to Far West, Missouri, and eventually settled in Nauvoo in 1841. He became a captain in the Nauvoo Legion and was endowed in the Nauvoo Temple in January 1846. After leaving Nauvoo, he joined the U.S. Army and was killed at the Battle of Bear River. Though it is not yet certain, Chase was likely acting on behalf of the Church at the time of the sale to the Icarians. What his relationship to David T. LeBaron, to whom the Trustees had transferred the property upon their departure, is not yet known. See "Membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 1830-1848." Compiled by Susan Easton Black, (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989) 9:364-5.

84 Frontier Guardian [Council Bluffs, Iowa], 27 June 1849. See also "The Icarian Community in Nauvoo," published by the Illinois Humanitarian Council. Although the storm may not have been a tornado in the meteorological sense, some referring to it as a "cyclone," it was, nevertheless, one of the most destructive storms ever witnessed during that time in Nauvoo. Interestingly the temple walls were destroyed on the sixth anniversary of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith.


87 The Keokuk [Iowa] Daily City and Constitution-Democrat, 21 January 1919, 2. Also found in Journal History for the same date.