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From Assassination to Expulsion: Two Years of Distrust, Hostility, and Violence

Marshall Hamilton

The murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith on June 27, 1844, marked the beginning of the end of the presence of the Latter-day Saints in Illinois. Conflict with their neighbors had begun three years before, but even after the murders of the Church leaders, it was by no means a foregone conclusion on all sides that the Smiths' deaths would mean the departure of their followers. As one scholar puts it, "One should avoid viewing the final expulsion of the Mormons from Hancock County as the inexorable effect of the killings," although in some minds no other alternative ever became acceptable.

This article deals with the movements and countermovements undertaken by the Latter-day Saints and by their neighbors from the time of the Smiths' assassination until the day, a little over two years later, when the last party of Church members left Nauvoo, Illinois. Those movements are chronicled in the media and public records of the day—especially in the pro-Mormon newspapers published at Nauvoo and in the anti-Mormon press at Warsaw, Illinois, twelve miles downriver from Nauvoo. One wonders whether the eventual outcome of the conflict between the Latter-day Saints and their neighbors might have been different if the Saints had been more successful at what we now call external communications. Although the Saints might have left Nauvoo eventually of their own choice, could the expulsion of the Church as a body have been avoided? Seeking answers to these questions suggests lessons that members of modern, belief-driven organizations might learn from the experiences of Nauvoo Mormons about dealing with outsiders or opponents.

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Within days after the assassinations of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, both the Mormons and the anti-Mormons had published extra newspaper issues describing the killings and offering opinions on what the future held. In Warsaw, two days after the assassinations, Thomas Sharp's *Warsaw Signal* issued an extra that included the following editorial: "Our opinion is, that either the old citizens or the Mormons must leave. The county cannot be quieted, until the expulsion of one or the other is effected."\(^3\) One day later, a crew at John Taylor's *Nauvoo Neighbor* got out an extra edition, which included the following advice attributed to Willard Richards: "The people of the county are greatly excited and fear the Mormons will come out and take vengeance—I have pledged my word the Mormons will stay at home as soon as they can be informed, and no violence will be on their part, and say to my brethren in Nauvoo, in the name of the Lord—be still—be patient."\(^4\)

In the days just after the Smiths' deaths, non-Mormons in Hancock County expected a "general attack all over the country" in retaliation for the killings.\(^5\) Thomas Ford, the governor of Illinois, had been in Nauvoo at the time of the attack on the jail. Rumors flew that he was besieged in a house in Nauvoo, so a force of over two hundred men set out by steamboat from Quincy to Nauvoo to rescue him. However, Governor Ford, while initially fearful himself—especially since the Mormons had been represented to him as a "lawless, infatuated, and fanatical people, not governed by the ordinary motives which influence the rest of mankind"—soon tried to maintain order. He countermanded the march to Hancock of at least two overly eager state militia units in the neighborhood, and he tried to keep informed about events in Hancock from a listening post in Quincy.\(^6\)

In Nauvoo the Saints' initial reaction was grief. In the extra published three days after the assassinations, along with the plea from Willard Richards, the editorial staff included a reassurance to the governor that intentions were peaceful: "We assure the governor, if he can manage human butchers, he has nothing to fear from armless, timid, and law abiding Latter day Saints."\(^7\) The following day the Nauvoo City Council met and resolved to discourage "private revenge" by Nauvoo residents.\(^8\) Later, in a Sunday church meeting held a week and a half after the killings, W. W. Phelps read with approval to the congregation an angry letter written by Governor Ford to a group of avowed anti-Mormons.\(^9\) Church leaders seemed intent on controlling the anger of individual members
and on ensuring that the Saints’ reaction would not be violent. They tried to assure Church members that state power would protect their interests.

Among the anti-Mormons, however, no effort to control anger or thwart violence was exerted. Calls for expulsion of the Church had been heard before. The Anti-Mormon Party, a political group, had been running candidates for public office since 1841. When Nauvoo’s population grew to the point that the Saints controlled local elections, the Anti-Mormons had begun to call for their expulsion. One of the leaders of the Anti-Mormons was Thomas Sharp, the publisher and editor of the *Warsaw Signal*.

The *Signal* missed its usual publication date the day before the killings, most likely because its editor was busy with the intrigues at Carthage. But a special issue was published on June 29. It includes a useful compilation of documents issued in the days leading up to the assassinations—letters and agreements between Governor Ford and Church leaders. Sharp also provided a chronology of the events of the week. After giving his editorial opinion that the Saints must leave, he recorded that the Nauvoo Legion’s small arms and cannon had been taken from them, thereby pointing out to his readers the vulnerability of Nauvoo.

A public meeting, whose attendees called themselves the “Warsaw Committee of Safety,” was called in Warsaw. Sharp was designated to draft a letter to Governor Ford urging the Mormons’ expulsion. The letter, which was hand-carried to Ford in Quincy, reviews with approval the Mormons’ previous expulsion from Missouri and says that expulsion from Illinois would be not only a “measure of wise expediency but one of absolute necessity.” The Saints in Nauvoo were charged with murder, arson, and theft against non-Mormon neighbors; with abusing the forms of justice in order to free Mormon criminals; with building an unwarranted military force that had no legitimate defensive purpose; and with using Mormon votes to bargain shamelessly for favors from corrupt politicians. These four themes were elaborated by Anti-Mormons over the next two years.

Pervasive accusations against the Latter-day Saints of criminal behavior, particularly theft, characterize the Anti-Mormon press throughout the Illinois period of Church history. Such accusations were a major tool of the Anti-Mormons to justify the repression or expulsion of the Church. In fact, the charges of theft were used explicitly to persuade the public who were at a distance from Hancock
County that expulsion was merely the last resort of a long-suffering group of victims of Mormon thievery.  

The accusations of theft suggest a fertile area for further research into the Nauvoo era—the Church generally either denied the accusations or minimized the presence of thieves among the Saints, while anti-Mormons continue to accept the accusations as true. During the period following the assassinations of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, those accusations were redoubled. The Warsaw Signal included articles headed “Mormon Thieves” in eight of the fourteen issues published from September 18, 1844, until the end of the year. Beginning on Christmas Day 1844 and running for several weeks into 1845, Sharp included a special column heading with the words “Mormon Stealings” rendered in ornate block lettering, followed by a quotation from the “Mormon Book of Doctrine and Covenants,” which purported to justify thefts from non-Mormons.

Accusations of theft by the Mormons were one reason Governor Ford left Carthage for Nauvoo on the day the Prophet and his brother were murdered. The purported thefts were also used to justify a proposed encampment of independent companies of militia near Warsaw to be held on October 26, 1844. This encampment was quickly dubbed a “wolf hunt” by its organizers; it was understood by Mormons and non-Mormons alike that the “wolves” to be sought were alleged Mormon thieves.

Church members were, of course, extremely worried about the “wolf hunt.” For his part, Governor Ford was convinced the only purpose of the proposed encampment was to expel or to murder Mormons. The governor called out the state militia to assist him in suppressing the encampment. The militia then marched with a force under General Hardin to Hancock County. Ford’s posse proved to be too much for the anti-Mormons. Although Ford could round up a force of only about two hundred men, the anti-Mormons thought better of their plans and cancelled the “wolf hunt.”

The validity of the accusations of theft by Church members is open to some doubt, but there is no question that the period from the death of Joseph and Hyrum to the departure of the Latter-day Saints was a time of considerable lawlessness in the environs of Hancock County. Five Church members in an outlying community were arrested for larceny in February 1845, and two men were murdered in Lee County, Iowa, in May 1845. In June the father of the two suspects in the Iowa murders was killed in Nauvoo, and
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on July 4 another murder took place on an island in the Mississippi.\textsuperscript{25} Later, a man was accidentally shot and killed near the Temple, apparently through careless gunfire in the city itself.\textsuperscript{26}

With the increase in lawlessness, the year 1845 was a difficult one for Hancock County sheriffs. In June, Minor Deming, a Church member who was elected to the office in August 1844 just after the Martyrdom, shot and killed Samuel Marshall, an Anti-Mormon county court clerk.\textsuperscript{27} Deming claimed self-defense, but he was indicted for murder, and he resigned the office. Before he could come to trial, Deming died of fever.\textsuperscript{28}

Deming’s replacement as sheriff, Jacob Backenstos, was also involved in a killing. Only weeks after taking office, Backenstos, a non-Mormon who was known as a friend of the Saints, was present at the killing of Frank Worrell, who had commanded the guard on duty at Carthage Jail when Joseph and Hyrum were murdered.\textsuperscript{29} Backenstos was among those indicted for this murder but was acquitted in a trial held at Peoria.\textsuperscript{30} Curiously, even while under indictment, Backenstos continued to act as sheriff. His alleged part in the killing of Worrell earned Backenstos the anti-Mormons’ hatred, which continued even after he left the county to serve in the Mexican War.\textsuperscript{31}

The only topic sure to stir up more heated discussion than lawlessness in Hancock County was local politics. As previously mentioned, non-Mormons were so frustrated with the growing number of Mormon voters that they formed a political party to try to elect non-Mormon county officers. One problem the “old citizens” faced was alien franchise, allowed by the 1818 Illinois Constitution, section 27. The Latter-day Saints were quite successful in encouraging British converts to immigrate to Nauvoo, and the law allowed new residents to vote immediately upon arrival. One scholar, in analyzing the political status of Nauvoo, notes that “the exercise of their franchise brought the Mormons many enemies but few friends.”\textsuperscript{32}

The first local election after the Martyrdom was scheduled for just forty days after the assassination. Initially, the Saints planned not to participate in the election, but eventually a political meeting was held in Nauvoo, and in the election all the Mormon-backed candidates won. As the \textit{Signal} glumly put it, “Though [the winning candidates] are not all Mormons in name [all] are yet so in heart. One of the representatives, Babbit, is a Mormon. The Coroner is a Mormon, but has not the courage to say so, and as for the ballance [sic] we
would sooner trust Mormons than either of them." Other Anti-Mormons were equally disappointed.

Despite the presence of Representative Almon Babbitt in the 1844-45 session of the Illinois State Legislature, the House and Senate took up the repeal of the Nauvoo City Charter. The Anti-Mormons believed that the charter repeal would help to solve two problems: (1) Mormon use of the Nauvoo city court system to defeat writs and warrants issued by courts outside of Nauvoo and (2) the existence of the Nauvoo Legion, a militia force reported to number about three thousand men.

The bill for repeal of the Nauvoo Charter was introduced in early December 1844 by Senator John Henry. As debate proceeded on the repeal motion, Hancock Sheriff Deming committed a serious blunder. One of the senators, Jacob Cunningham Davis, was among those indicted for the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. At the time of the indictment, the defendants and prosecution had made an agreement that no attempt would be made to arrest the defendants prior to the May 1845 term of the circuit court. Notwithstanding that agreement, arrest warrants were issued in November for all nine defendants. Sheriff Deming, acting on one of the warrants, went to Springfield and tried to arrest Davis on the floor of the State Senate. Deming's action, which violated Davis's legislative immunity, infuriated the state assembly and undoubtedly hurt the prospects for retaining the Nauvoo Charter in force. The charter was in fact repealed on January 29, 1845.

The next local election, in August 1845, also saw the Mormon vote carry every office. The Anti-Mormons made little effort to affect the result, and the Nauvoo Neighbor commented, "The people knew how to act, and acted."

By the election of August 1846, the prospect that there would be any Mormon votes at all in Hancock County prompted a near outbreak of civil war. In early June, a meeting of Anti-Mormons was held in Carthage calling for the remaining Church members to leave Nauvoo. By that time, thousands of Saints were on the march in Iowa, and one observer found Nauvoo "desolate, houses empty, and inhabitants gone. Prairies deserted of cattle & people." The Anti-Mormons sent a delegation to Nauvoo, and many of the remaining Saints fled in the face of these threats.

By this time, a new group of people was involved in Nauvoo civic affairs: the "new citizens." These non-Mormons bought property
from the exiled Saints and were living in Nauvoo. The “old citizens” of the Anti-Mormon camp reportedly whipped some new citizens who refused to join in driving the remaining Latter-day Saints out of town.42 The Anti-Mormons gathered nearly six hundred men in an encampment about six miles from Nauvoo,43 Sheriff Backenstos came to Nauvoo to organize the residents for a defense of the city. The Anti-Mormons, not anticipating resistance, lost their taste for attack, and the encampment, with its threat of violence and civil war, dissolved.

Still, the Anti-Mormons did not want any of the Saints to vote in the August election, and they continued to harass those remaining. In July a few Church members were whipped by a group of thirty men for being troublemakers.44 Very few Mormons were left to vote in the election, and the outcome was much more to the Anti-Mormons’ liking.45

It seems clear, however, that despite the non-Mormons’ resentment of what they considered to be crime perpetrated by Church members and despite frustration at the inability to win elective office, some catalyst was required—some call to action—to cause the actual expulsion of the Saints. That call was provided by Thomas Sharp through his newspaper, the Warsaw Signal.

Sharp had provided a similar call to action before. He is perhaps best known among Latter-day Saints for his stirring call to arms after the destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor in June 1844.46 In the immediate aftermath of the assassination of Joseph and Hyrum, Sharp continued his extremist rhetoric, as evidenced by the call for the expulsion of the Saints and his role as spokesman for the Warsaw Committee of Safety.47

During the summer of 1844, it had become increasingly evident that Sharp would himself be indicted for the murder of the Smiths—not because evidence placed him at Carthage Jail, but because he had incited others, in his newspaper and especially in his speeches, to go there. As that prospect loomed, Sharp let up on his claim that the killings were completely justified. That claim was based on a theory of “community self-defense,” which Sharp elaborated at length in the Signal,48 and on his claim that the execution of the Smiths was actually the fulfillment of the verdict of thousands, superior even to the verdict of a panel of only twelve peers.49

Instead of pursuing those claims, Sharp took increased pains to describe the thievery of Church members and the uncertain nature
of the Saints' voting to make the case that the Saints were undesirable neighbors. The level of his vehemence did not change, but the topics of discussion did.\textsuperscript{50}

Although Sharp was the principal catalyst inciting non-Mormons to urge expulsion of the Church, it should be noted that he was not guilty of everything attributed to him by Latter-day Saints then or by some current scholars. For example, the \textit{Nauvoo Neighbor} of November 13, 1844, reprinted a letter that had originally appeared in the \textit{Illinois State Register}, claiming that Sharp had published an anti-Masonic paper in upstate New York, that he had invented the terms \textit{jack-mason} and \textit{jack-Mormon} to describe nonadherents who nevertheless advanced the goals of the organization, and that he was the mouthpiece for a group of Warsaw real-estate speculators. None of these statements about Sharp is true, although they still occasionally find their way into otherwise careful studies.

How did Church leaders react to charges of lawlessness and political chicanery and to Sharp's drumbeat of expulsion? The first order of business for the remaining leaders was to assure succession in the Church to keep the organization alive. Just fifteen days after the Martyrdom, a council was held among Church leaders in Nauvoo—most of the Quorum of Twelve had not yet returned to Nauvoo—to discuss the establishment of a new trustee-in-trust for the Church to replace Joseph Smith.\textsuperscript{51} Such concerns for the very survival of the organization help explain Church leaders' reluctance, mentioned previously, to hold a political meeting that summer.

On August 8, the famous conference on succession was held which finally settled leadership of the Church on the Quorum of the Twelve. The next day, the Twelve met to appoint trustees for the Church.\textsuperscript{52} With those details cleared up, there remained challenges by Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, and James Strang to be dealt with, although time became available to consider how the Church should interact with their neighbors and with civil authorities.

Church leaders decided early on to rely on their own forces, rather than legal authority, to protect the interests of Church members. Reports of the planned "wolf hunt" were received in Nauvoo on Friday, September 13, 1844; on the following Monday, the Church publicly dedicated ground for an arsenal.\textsuperscript{53} When the governor's forces came to Nauvoo seeking volunteers for a posse to visit Warsaw to prevent the "wolf hunt," the Saints declined to participate. At the same time, Church leaders continued to fill vacancies in the organization of the Nauvoo Legion.\textsuperscript{54}
By spring 1845, Church leaders had decided to ignore, as much as possible, the civil court system. Since the repeal of the Nauvoo Charter, there was no police force authorized in Nauvoo. By the April 1845 general conference, the Saints had begun to employ a "whistling and whittling brigade" to unnerve outsiders and discourage non-Mormons from coming to Nauvoo.55

John Taylor, speaking at a Sunday church meeting, announced that the Saints should resist "gentile" [non-Mormon] processes.56 About the same time, the leaders decreed that men for whom writs had been issued should go on missions to avoid service. Church leaders actually wanted to align themselves with the legal government, but they saw the issuance of warrants as an attempt by Anti-Mormons to drive a wedge between the Saints and the state. By not allowing Church leaders to stand trial or be imprisoned, they hoped to avoid the appearance that the state and the Church were on opposite sides of the issue.57 Unfortunately, this policy, intended to promote Church interests, produced the opposite effect—it convinced some uncommitted non-Mormons, including the editor of the State Register in Springfield, that the Church was lawless.58

In May, Church members, except those required to go to court as witnesses or jurors, avoided going to the trial of Joseph Smith's accused assassins. The verdict of innocent, reached after two-and-a-half hours of jury deliberations, was met with a shrug in Nauvoo. John Taylor's Neighbor commented that the Saints would refer the case to God for a righteous judgment.59 Four weeks later, when the trial for Hyrum Smith's murder was dismissed for want of prosecution, the Neighbor ignored the proceedings entirely. As the Saints completed work on their temple, they seemed to ignore earthly institutions; their expected endowment from on high caused them to assume an other-worldly perspective. The last shingles were nailed on the temple roof on August 13, 1845.60

As the year 1845 wore on, the Saints' temporal situation became more and more tenuous. On August 11, with the endorsement of the Nauvoo Neighbor, Jacob Backenstos became county sheriff in a special election. Within a month of his election, the Anti-Mormons met in a schoolhouse near the southern border of the county to discuss problems some had experienced in executing civil judgments against Church members. During the meeting, shots were fired into the school building by persons unknown.61 Although no one was injured, the Anti-Mormons resolved to take revenge on the Saints for the shooting, a move that led to near civil war conditions
Mobbinc Again in Hancock!

Friday morning, 10 o'clock.

We are informed that a meeting of a number of the mob, was held on Tuesday evening last, at a school house, near Baker's, in Green Plains precinct. We have not been apprized of the nature of the proceedings of that meeting, or what their deliberations were, farther than we can judge from their subsequent conduct.

A preconcerted plan, it would seem, had been entered into: several shots were fired, by their own party, through the windows and doors of said school house.

Nothing was known by our people until the next day, when some of the same party commenced firing houses in the Molley Settlement.

We have heard that eleven buildings have been burned by the mob, viz: eight houses and three out-houses.

Nauvoo Neighbor, September 12, 1845.
Courtesy LDS Church Archives
in Hancock County. A small Latter-day Saint settlement called Morley’s Settlement, or Yelrome (from Morley spelled backwards), was nearby at Lima, in Adams County. The day after the shooting incident at the schoolhouse, the anti-Mormons collected en masse at Morley’s and burned houses to the ground, apparently after residents were warned to vacate. Estimates of the number of houses burned vary widely. Sharp admits “two or three houses burned.”62 Thomas Gregg says that “two Mormon cabins” were burned the first night and that within a week “the whole of Morley-Town was in ashes.”63 The Nauvoo Neighbor states eight houses and three outbuildings were destroyed the first day and forty-four buildings within the first three days. The Neighbor also claims that the provocative shots had been a ruse, actually fired by anti-Mormons to provide a pretext for future violence.64

Newly elected Sheriff Backenstos responded by issuing a proclamation reciting the Illinois law against arson and commanding “rioters and other peace-breakers to desist forthwith, disperse, and go to their homes.”65 Opponents dismissed the proclamation as “very exaggerated.”66 Backenstos called all law-abiding citizens to serve as a posse comitatus, but he was unable to stop the burning. It was at this time that Frank Worrell was shot outside of Warsaw, further elevating the almost fever pitch of emotion in the county.

Anti-Mormons turned their attention briefly from Mormons to those they considered jack-Mormons—non-Mormons who advanced the interests of the Saints. Warsaw postmaster E. A. Bedell was threatened by a group outside his home; he left through a back door and paddled across the river to Iowa in a canoe. In Carthage, the county treasurer and county recorder, who had been elected to office with Mormon support, received warnings to leave town.

The next day, September 16, Sheriff Backenstos rode into Carthage with an armed force to remove his family from their home, as they had also been subjected to threats.67 On September 17, the Warsaw Signal featured a call to arms in the wake of Worrell’s killing, including the observation that Worrell had been “one of our best men.”68 The call to arms must have been eerily reminiscent of the similar call in an issue of the Signal fifteen months before, when the call to arms inflamed emotion throughout the county and helped lead to the killing of Joseph and Hyrum Smith.69

After Sharp’s call to fight, the civil war heated up. On Friday, September 19, Backenstos went to Carthage with an armed force and occupied the courthouse. Many of the reported four hundred armed
men accompanying the sheriff were Latter-day Saints. Rumors spread that the Saints had taken four prisoners away to Nauvoo. Backenstos led a search through Carthage for weapons, seizing them from anti-Mormons and requiring passes for anyone trying to enter or leave Carthage.

Naturally, such activity in Hancock County caused consternation throughout the region and the state. On Monday, September 22, a public meeting was held in Quincy at which many of Adams County’s leading citizens gathered to search for an end to the hostilities. The meeting became known as the Quincy Committee and eventually played a leading role in producing a cease-fire. Governor Ford, in Springfield, worked on assembling a force of militiamen to restore order, and he issued a proclamation warning all other outsiders to stay out of Hancock County.

The Quincy Committee wrote the Church asking about its intentions. Brigham Young responded with a conciliatory letter, explaining that the Latter-day Saints wished only for peace and that they planned to leave Nauvoo as soon as proper arrangements could be made.

It took until Sunday, September 28, nine days after Carthage was commandeered by Backenstos’s posse, for Ford’s army under General Hardin to reach Carthage and dismiss the occupying posse. Governor Ford himself and other political leaders, including Congressman Stephen A. Douglas, accompanied the state force.

Although the constitutional forces of law and order were nearby, Brigham Young decided to communicate with the ad hoc Quincy Committee to defuse the situation. The committee asked for a written guarantee the Mormons would leave, which the Apostles provided on October 1, 1845, in a famous letter promising to leave “when grass grows and water runs” the next spring. The Quincy Committee wrote back to the Church the next day accepting the Church’s offer to leave.

Although General Hardin accepted the offer on October 3, placating the Anti-Mormons took a little more time. Hardin wrote them on October 6. One of the terms of the agreement was that General Hardin would designate a force to remain in Hancock County through the winter to enforce the peace.

At regular October general conference sessions, Church leaders apprised the membership of the coming move. At that conference, committees were created to dispose of property left in Nauvoo. An uneasy peace settled over the county, with three
MURDER AND ARSON.

EDMUND DURFEE SHOT—TWO HOUSES BURNED.

As may be seen by the affidavits below, it fails to our painful lot, to chronicle two more outrages upon the lives and property of the Latter Day Saints, since they have been using all diligence to secure their crops, build wagons, and leave next Spring.

Mr. Durfee was one of the most industrious, indefatigable and good men that could be found, and, having his house burnt in September last, moved to Nauvoo and went on Saturday last for a load of grain. Was shot dead in cold blood, at midnight, while striving, with others, to save his own property from the flames, by an armed mob!

As to the destruction of the houses and property, and the treatment on that occasion, let the affidavit speak for itself.

We have nearly two thousand five hundred wagons commenced for our Pacific journey next Spring, but such outrages certainly are not calculated to aid us in getting ready. We have been the Mis-

Part of a story from the Nauvoo Neighbor, November 19, 1845, illustrating how uneasy the negotiated peace was. (Courtesy LDS Church Archives)
groups trying to coexist: an armed force of occupation, a group preparing to move the next spring, and another group unwilling to believe the agreements reached between the other two.

Long before the agreement was reached, the Saints had been investigating the possibility of at least partially leaving. Before his death, Joseph sent Lyman Wight to investigate the possibility of moving members to Texas, then a part of Mexico. In 1844, shortly after the Prophet's death, Wight established a colony in Texas with about 150 Saints. But the rest of the Church never joined this group, and the colony lasted only through 1857.81 As early as January 7, 1845, the Quorum of the Twelve had discussed sending scouts west to California.82 In April 1845, letters were sent to the president of the United States and governors of all the states except Illinois and Missouri asking their advice as to where to relocate the Church.83 There is no evidence any useful advice was received in return. Reports suggest that in September 1845 the Council of Fifty called for fifteen hundred pioneers to go to the Salt Lake Valley.84 So the decision to depart Nauvoo for a location west of the Rockies did not occur in a vacuum.

As the winter of 1845–46 proceeded, the Church began organizing their emigration companies. At the same time, warrants were issued for Brigham Young and other Church leaders on charges of counterfeiting. In December a federal marshal spent over a week in Nauvoo but was unable to find Brigham.85

When reports surfaced in Nauvoo that federal and state agents might try to prevent the exodus, the Church decided to begin the migration ahead of schedule. The first wagons headed west on February 4, 1846. Brigham Young himself left on the fifteenth.86 By February 11, the Warsaw Signal reported that one thousand Mormons had left.

By June 2, Thomas Bullock, secretary to the Twelve, described the country as "desolate," with nothing but empty houses.87 On the second anniversary of the Martyrdom, Bullock lamented that the empty city contained little more than "whorehouses" and "lawyers."88 Notwithstanding the efforts thousands had made to depart Nauvoo, some Latter-day Saints still remained in Nauvoo. As described previously, the Anti-Mormons stepped up their harassment of the remaining Church members in advance of the August election, with civil war being only narrowly averted.

In early July, a group of three or four Church members hired themselves out to work on a farm north of Nauvoo. They behaved
obnoxiously and were accused of petty theft. Anti-Mormons whipped them and sent them back to Nauvoo. Sharp later described this act as “tickling with the hickory.” The Saints and the new citizens raised a posse and arrested two Anti-Mormons who had participated in the vigilantism. The Anti-Mormons responded by taking five Saints hostage. Finally an Anti-Mormon deputy sheriff called out a posse to go to Nauvoo to arrest one figure in the incident, and the crisis seemed destined to escalate out of control.

The citizens of Nauvoo appealed to Governor Ford for military force to restore order. Ford complied but withheld funds; only volunteers were sent to Hancock. Finally, on September 10, 1846, a force of about seven hundred Anti-Mormons faced off against a group of about three hundred Saints, new citizens, and state militia volunteers. There followed a few days of skirmishing, with the Battle of Nauvoo, a seventy-five-minute barrage of rifle and cannon fire, occurring on Saturday, September 12, 1846. As they had done the previous year, the citizens of Quincy, acting once again as the Quincy Committee, agreed to mediate a solution. A treaty was negotiated with seven points. Paragraph five reads, “The Mormon population of the city to leave the State, or disperse, as soon as they can cross the river.”

The anti-Mormons had at last achieved the goal they had set in early June 1844—they had expelled the Mormons. Those Saints who left under the September 1846 treaty were among the poorest residents of Nauvoo. Their suffering as the “poor camp” at Montrose, Iowa, has taken on mythic proportions among their descendants.

In my examination of the records of this two-year period, it seems clear to me that the Saints could not have prevented their forcible expulsion by responding in more favorable ways to the circumstances after the assassination of Joseph and Hyrum.

This is not to say that the Saints were blameless. It is clear that the decision announced in the spring of 1845 not to honor “gentile process” alienated some previously sympathetic non-Mormons. Since one of the principal charges against the Saints during Joseph Smith’s tenure as mayor of Nauvoo was lack of respect for laws and judicial proceedings from outside Nauvoo, it seems particularly naive for the Saints to have announced their intentions not to honor future writs.

It could also be argued that the Apostles should have responded more effectively to the charges of thievery and political chicanery. Because the anti-Mormon charges went unfurled outside of Nauvoo, those charges came to be widely accepted as true, and as
a result, the Saints' claims of persecution were vitiated to a considerable extent in the minds of political leaders and the general public.

There were also some among the Mormons who were widely believed to be guilty of many crimes, whether or not they actually were. The Hodges brothers, for example, who were hanged for a double murder in Lee County, Iowa, in 1845, claimed to be Mormons. Another such Church member was Porter Rockwell, who was widely thought to have pulled the trigger firing the shot that killed Frank Worrell. Although Sheriff Backenstos was present and took the responsibility and political heat, Rockwell's antics were well known in Hancock County, and he was greatly feared.

On the other hand, not everyone seems to have been willing to accept anti-Mormon charges at face value. Governor Ford, for example, mocked the charges of Mormon theft as groundless, at a time when he himself was concerned about his political standing.96

The Saints' responses to the murder of their leaders, to the revocation of their city charter, to the acquittal of the alleged assassins of the Smiths, and to the burnings at Morley's Settlement appear to be exemplary—the sort of "turning the other cheek" that might be expected of a group calling themselves "Saints."

However, no matter how peaceful the Mormons might have been, the Anti-Mormons would not be mollified. Thomas Sharp appears to have been correct in saying that the Anti-Mormons resolved even before the killings to expel the Saints and that nothing changed that determination. No population of Church members would be tolerated in the county, even if it took a military force with cannons to besiege the city and drive out the last thousand poorest Saints.

What can the members of modern organizations who are under attack learn from the expulsion of the Saints from Illinois? It seems clear that simply ignoring charges or addressing refutations only to the organization's members will not be enough to defuse a threat from a determined group of opponents. Such charges must be refuted, and the refutations must be disseminated beyond the organization's boundaries. The Anti-Mormons developed their arguments along four themes: Mormon lawlessness, Mormon disrespect for legal proceedings, Mormon militarism, and corrupt political dealing by Mormons. These themes were repeated again and again but were never effectively challenged.

In addition, the Latter-day Saints did not use established channels to obtain redress of their grievances. The letters of the
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Twelve Apostles to the U.S. president and state governors betray a breathless kind of naiveté—the same naiveté shown time and again by the Saints throughout their early years in dealing with governments. This is not to say that they would have been more successful had they used more orthodox lobbying methods, but a modern organization might conclude from the Nauvoo Saints’ experience that making up new ways of approaching civil authorities has a low probability of success.97

Among modern members of the Church, many believe that the departure from Nauvoo followed immediately upon the assassination of Joseph Smith, when actually more than two years elapsed before the departure was complete. Even in historical studies, there often seems to be confusion over the sequence of events—perhaps because terms are often confusing. For example, several different events are sometimes called the “Battle of Nauvoo,” and a group named the Quincy Committee played a role in settling potential civil wars in two different years. I hope this article will help dispel the confusion and increase our understanding of and interest in those turbulent times.

NOTES

3 Warsaw Signal, June 29, 1844.
4 Nauvoo Neighbor, June 30, 1844.
7 Nauvoo Neighbor, June 30, 1844.
8 Nauvoo Neighbor, July 2, 1844.
9 HC 7:169; for the text of the letter see HC 7:160–62; Nauvoo Neighbor, July 10, 1844; and Warsaw Signal, July 10, 1844.
11 Warsaw Signal, July 10, 1844.
12 See, for example, “Messrs. Kilbourn’s Letter, No. II,” Warsaw Signal, October 27, 1841, and September 18, 1844; and Warsaw Message, September 13, 1843.
13 Nauvoo Neighbor, August 6, 1845; and HC 7:56.
15 William Wise, Massacre at Mountain Meadows (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976), 49; and Clark Rowland, telephone interview by Marshall Hamilton, September 1988. Rowland is a great-grandson of Thomas Sharp. See also Kenneth Godfrey’s article in this issue, which addresses this controversy.
16 Warsaw Signal, September 18; October 16 and 20; November 13, 20, and 27; December 4 and 18, 1844.
17 Warsaw Signal, December 25, 1844; January 1 and 22, 1845.
18 D&C 64:27–28 states: “Behold, it is said in my laws, or forbidden, to get in debt to thine enemies; But behold, it is not said at any time that the Lord should not take when he please, and pay as seemeth him good.”
20 HC 7:270.
21 Ford, History, 365; and Hampshire, Mormonism in Conflict, 231.
22 HC 7:373.
23 Nauvoo Neighbor, May 5, 1845.
24 Nauvoo Neighbor, June 25, 1845.
25 Nauvoo Neighbor, July 16, 1845.
27 Nauvoo Neighbor, June 26, 1845.
28 HC 7:439.
30 Gregg, History of Hancock County, 341.
31 Warsaw Signal, January 16, 1847.
32 Robert Bruce Flanders, Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 221.
33 Warsaw Signal, August 7, 1844.
34 For example, see Frank Worrell to Thomas Gregg, 1884, Thomas C. Sharp and Allied Anti-Mormon Papers, Yale University; reprinted in Hampshire, Mormonism in Conflict.
35 Warsaw Signal, July 17, 1844; and Flanders, Nauvoo, 153, 232, and 324.
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36 Hampshire, Mormonism in Conflict, 235.
37 Gregg, History of Hancock County, 329; and Oaks and Hill, Carthage Conspiracy, 51.
39 Nauvoo Neighbor, August 6, 1845.
40 Warsaw Signal, June 17, 1846.
41 Bullock, “Journal,” 64, June 2, 1846.
43 Warsaw Signal, June 14, 1846.
44 Warsaw Signal, November 14, 1844.
45 Warsaw Signal, August 4 and 11, 1846.
46 Warsaw Signal, June 12, 1844.
47 Warsaw Signal, July 10, 17, and 31, 1844.
48 Warsaw Signal, July 10, 1844.
49 Warsaw Signal, July 17, 1844.
50 Because of Sharp’s importance and his role in defining the debate during this crucial period, I believe there is a need for further research into the evolution of his arguments, but such research is beyond the scope of this paper.
51 HC 7:183.
52 HC 7:247.
53 HC 7:270–71.
54 HC 7:274, 271.
55 Nauvoo Neighbor, April 16, 1845.
56 Nauvoo Neighbor, April 23, 1845.
57 HC 7:380.
58 Hampshire, Mormonism in Conflict, 238.
59 Nauvoo Neighbor, June 4, 1845.
60 Nauvoo Neighbor, August 13, 1845.
61 Sharp, Manuscript History; and Gregg, History of Hancock County, 340.
62 Sharp, Manuscript History.
63 Gregg, History of Hancock County, 340.
64 Nauvoo Neighbor, September 10, 1845. Note that this issue was evidently published several days late; it includes the text of documents dated as late as September 13.
65 Nauvoo Neighbor, September 10, 1845; and Warsaw Signal, September 24, 1845. Note that this and four other proclamations from Backenstos have been gathered and published in B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Church Deseret News Press, 1930), 2:490–503.
66 Sharp, Manuscript History.
67 Sharp, Manuscript History.
68 Warsaw Signal, September 17, 1845.
69 Warsaw Signal, June 12, 1844.
70 Sharp, Manuscript History.
72 Sharp, Manuscript History.
73 Nauvoo Neighbor, September 24, 1845.
74 Nauvoo Neighbor, October 1, 1845.
75 Nauvoo Neighbor, September 24, 1845.
76 Sharp, *Manuscript History.*
77 *Nauvoo Neighbor*, October 1, 1845.
78 *HC* 7:450–51.
79 *Nauvoo Neighbor*, October 29, 1845.
80 *Nauvoo Neighbor*, October 8, 1845.
82 *HC* 7:350.
84 *HC* 7:439.
86 *HC* 7:585; and Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*, 205.
87 Bullock, “Journal,” 64, June 2, 1846.
89 *Warsaw Signal*, July 16, 1846.
90 *Warsaw Signal*, November 14, 1846.
91 *Warsaw Signal*, July 16, 1846.
92 *Warsaw Signal*, November 14, 1846.
93 Gregg, *History of Hancock County*, 350.
94 *Warsaw Signal*, November 14, 1846; and Gregg, *History of Hancock County*, 353.
95 For a recapitulation of the Latter-day Saints’ sufferings in Montrose, see Carol Lynn Pearson, “Nine Children Were Born”: A Historical Problem from the Sugar Creek Episode,” *BYU Studies* 21 (Fall 1981): 441–44.
97 I have already suggested a couple of avenues of further study on the period from the assassination to the expulsion. In addition, much work remains to be done on the topics I have discussed in this essay. For example, numerous extant Mormon journals date back to the last years of Nauvoo; many shed new light on these topics. For this article, I have only glanced at these resources. In addition, there is a need for detective work to locate papers or journals from non-Mormons. For example, no journal has been located for Thomas Sharp, and only a few of his letters have been located. There may also be primary documents still to be found and studied from Jacob Backenstos, members of the Quincy Committee, or other non-Mormons.