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The Tomb of Joseph

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This FARMS preliminary paper was presented at the symposium "Pioneers of the Restoration" on 8 March 1997. It is being further edited for inclusion in a forthcoming collection of papers in honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson. Although it is not ready for final publication, this paper reflects substantial research and is made available to be critiqued and improved and to stimulate further research.

The Tomb of Joseph

Susan Easton Black

A must reading for scholars of church history are the writings of Richard Lloyd Anderson. Although he will be remembered for authoring *Understanding Paul* (1983) and *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage* (1971), my personal favorite is *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (1981). In this Latter-day Saint classic Anderson leans on his Harvard Law School (1954) background to interrogate the three witnesses as if he were a prosecuting attorney and their testimony were in question. He is a master sleuth in ferreting the truth from alleged statements made by Cowdery, Whitmer, and Harris. As he cross-examines supporting documents "to get the whole story" he reminds the reader of the "courtroom oath: not only 'tell the truth,' but 'the whole truth.'" With dogged determination he examines "original manuscripts and then follows [the Witnesses'] careers in civil records and newspapers of each county where they lived." It is not until he exhausts his sources and completes his interrogation that he concludes, "After years of working with their lives and their words, I am deeply convinced that their printed testimonies must be taken at face value."¹

For the past twenty years Richard Lloyd Anderson has been my colleague, neighbor, and friend. Our association leads me to conclude that his curiosity for discovering truth has not abated. Knowing that even in retirement he can't resist an intriguing issue awaiting a definitive answer, I present this article as my gift. In courtroom style the gift unfolds one layer at a time, beginning with the procession of the martyrs' remains into the city of Nauvoo on 28 June 1844 and the "mock burial" one day later. The mystery unfolds when the bodies are secretly buried in the basement of the Nauvoo House and then exhumed—not once, but three times. Although reburied in different locations in Nauvoo, the bodies have never been interred in the Tomb of Joseph built for that purpose. The question that needs to be answered is "Where is the tomb?" As the case reveals, two sites have been identified and two answers tentatively reached. But the case of the Tomb of Joseph is far from solved.

The Background

Well-plumbed since 1844 are the events following the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. When the first official message reached Nauvoo, men had already gathered at the Mansion House to discuss rumors of the martyrdom stemming from Carthage. A subsequent message from Willard Richards admonished the Saints living in Nauvoo, "Be still, be patient, only let such friends as choose come here to see the bodies." Governor Thomas Ford, believing the Mormons would pillage Carthage, advised citizens of that small community, "All who were present to disperse, as he expected the Mormons would be so exasperated that they would come and burn the town."²

Retaliation was not the issue for most Latter-day Saints on 28 June 1844; however, Allen Stout's journal entry may typify the anguish of some, "I there and then resolved in my mind that I would never let an opportunity slip unimproved of avenging their blood. . . . I knew not how to contain myself. . . . I feel like cutting their throats."³ The issue for the gentler Saint was lamentation and preparation for the return of the cortege to Nauvoo.

About 8:00 A.M. on Friday, 28 June, the remains of Joseph and Hyrum were placed in rough boxes, put into two wagons, and then covered with prairie hay, blankets, and bushes to protect them from the hot sun. A guard of eight soldiers was detached to escort the remains to Nauvoo, led by Samuel H. Smith and accompanied by Willard Richards. Between 2:30 and 3:00 P.M. the pro-cession had reached Nauvoo and was moving along Mulholland Street, where the assembled Nauvoo Legion, the city council, and thousands of mourners vented their sorrow. Mary Rich witnessed the scene. "The inhabitants were all out in the streets, on the housetops and everywhere to see if they could get just a glimpse of him. But he was in a new wagon, which had no cover other than green bushes which had been laid over the top of the box. Hence, they could not see him."⁴

The procession moved slowly into the city, passing by the unfinished Nauvoo Temple, where additional crowds had gathered. Sarah Leavitt observed, "Such mourning and lamentation was seldom ever heard on earth."⁵ George Morris penned, "Such a time of mourning I never

witnessed, neither before nor since.”⁶ Dan Jones descriptively wrote, “Oh, the sorrowful scene to be seen in Nauvoo that day! There has never been nor will there ever be anything like it; everyone sad along the streets, all the shops closed and every business forgotten.”⁷

The procession proceeded down Main Street to the Mansion House, where the bodies were taken into the dining room and the door closed. “As they drove around to the Mansion,” Mary Rich reported, “the people were almost frantic to get one little glimpse of him, but they were driven back by the marshall. The wagon was driven inside of the back gate and the gate was locked. No one was allowed in the yard except the guards and the Prophet’s special friends.”⁸

The eight to ten thousand Saints assembled near the Mansion House heard brief remarks from church leaders. Most remembered were the words of Dr. Richards, who “pledged his honor, and his life for their good conduct.” The people “with one united voice resolved to trust to the law for a remedy of such a high-handed assassination, and when that failed, to call upon God to avenge them of their wrongs.” Richards concluded, “O, Americans, weep, for the glory of freedom has departed!”⁹ Those assembled were admonished to go home quietly and promised that beginning at eight o’clock in the morning of 29 June 1844 the remains of the martyrs could be viewed by all.

In the meanwhile, inside the Mansion House the bodies were washed by Dimick B. Huntington, William Marks, and William D. Huntington in preparation for the private and public viewing. Camphor-soaked cotton was placed in each gunshot wound and the bodies dressed in “fine plain drawers and shirt, white neckerchiefs, white cotton stockings and white shrouds.”¹⁰

Afterward the bodies were first viewed by remaining family members. Their tears were “enough to rend the heart of an adamant,” wrote Vilate Kimball.¹¹ At 7:00 A.M. on Saturday, 29 June, the bodies were placed in white cambric-lined coffins covered with black velvet and fastened with brass nails. Over the face of each corpse was a lid, hung with brass hinges, that held a square of glass. At 8:00 A.M. the public viewing began. Sarah Rich reported, “Thousands came from all quarters to take a last look; and steamboats loaded with strangers came from Burlington, Quincy and many other places, to look upon their dead bodies.”¹² It was estimated

that “over ten thousand persons visited the remains” from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. entering at the west door and exiting at the north door of the Mansion House.¹³ “The [martyrs] heads were placed to the north. As we came in at the door,” penned Mosiah Hancock. “We came to the feet of the Prophet Joseph, then passed up by his left side and around his head, then down by his right side. Next we turned to the right and came to the feet of Hyrum, then up by his left side and around his head and down by his right side, then we filed out of the other door.”¹⁴

“This afternoon the Bod[i]es of the Marters arived in town,” wrote Zina Jacobs, “I saw the lifeless speechless Bod[i]es of the towo [two] Marters for the testimony which they held. Little did my heart ever think that mine eyes should witness this awful seen [scene].”¹⁵ Dan Jones wrote, “Each in his turn the thousands made their way forward, sad and desirous of having the last look at their dear brethren whose solemn counsels and heavenly teaching had been music in their ears, lighting their paths and bringing joy to their hearts on numerous occasions.”¹⁶ At 5 P.M. the Mansion House was cleared of the mourners and the family was invited to make their final farewells.

The coffins were then concealed in a bedroom closet in the northeast corner of the Mansion.¹⁷ Carefully placed into the awaiting hearse were rough pine boxes filled with bags of sand instead of the martyrs’ remains. When the mock funeral procession began, the cortege moved down Main Street, passed by the temple, and stopped at the burial vault. A “mock burial” was conducted inside the vault built just south of the temple. William W. Phelps preached the public funeral sermon near the temple.¹⁸

About midnight on 29 June, long after the mourners had retired, the coffins containing the bodies were taken from the Mansion House by Dimick B. Huntington, Edward Hunter, William D. Huntington, William Marks, Jonathan H. Homes, Gilbert Goldsmith, Alpheus Cutler, Lorenzo D. Wasson, and Philip B. Lewis. These men were guarded by James Emmet. They carried the coffins through the Mansion House garden, around the pump, and to the Nauvoo House.¹⁹ The bodies were interred in the basement story of the uncompleted structure. After the burial the

ground was flattened and covered with chips of wood, stone, and other rubbish to camouflage the site. That evening a violent rainstorm removed any trace of the burial.

Exhumation of the Bodies

The bodies remained in the basement of the north wing of the Nauvoo House until fall 1844, when they were removed at the request of Joseph's wife Emma Smith by Dimick B. Huntington, William D. Huntington, Jonathan H. Homes, and Gilbert Goldsmith. They were next interred near the Mississippi River, where they were "buried side by side."²⁰ The location of this reburial was 38 feet south and 20 feet west of the southwest corner of the Homestead, under the floor of a small shed called a "bee house" or "spring house."²¹ According to Samuel O. Bennion, they were buried deep in unmarked graves.²²

After the death of Emma Smith in 1879 and the demolition of the bee house that had once sheltered the graves, conjecture arose over the exact location of the martyrs' burial site.²³ Family members could not point with confidence to where the bodies were laid. Joseph Smith III stated, "I didn't see the bodies buried. I saw them dig them up. I saw them take a knife and cut a lock of hair off of Joseph and give to Emma, but I didn't follow over and watch them bury them."²⁴ David Hyrum Smith, youngest son of Joseph Smith, Jr., composed "The Unknown Grave:"

There's an unknown grave in a green lowly spot,
The form that it covers will ne'er be forgot.
Where haven trees spread and the wild locusts wave
Their fragrant white blooms over the unknown grave,
Over the unknown grave.

The prophet whose life was destroyed by his foes
Sleeps now where no hand may disturb his repose,
Till trumpets of God drown the notes of the wave
And we see him arise from his unknown grave,
God bless that unknown grave.²⁵

When the waters of Lake Cooper threatened to flood the area where the graves were thought to be, leaders of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints decided to (1) locate the bodies and remove them to higher ground and (2) place an appropriate monument over their graves. W. O. Hands was appointed to direct a small group of surveyors and engineers

to search for the missing graves. They began digging on 9 January 1928, and on 16 January they found them. The remains of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum, as well as those of Emma, were exhumed from their resting place. The remains were arranged in silk-lined wood boxes that were placed side-by-side seventeen feet north of where the bodies of Joseph and Hyrum had been exhumed. Then the bodies were reburied—on Friday, 20 January 1928 and the graves were marked.

On 21 January 1929 Samuel O. Bennion, president of the Central States Mission, wrote to President Heber J. Grant and his counselors about the “exhuming of the bodies of the Prophet and his brother Hyrum.” In his letter he wrote of asking Frederick M. Smith, president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, “Why didn’t you let the bodies of these men rest where they were?” He was answered, “I wanted to find out if the graves of these men were down by what was once called the Spring House.” President Bennion wrote, “It is my impression brethren that he had heard reports that Brigham Young took the bodies of Joseph and Hyrum to Utah and that he wanted to prove it untrue.” Bennion concluded, “I could hardly keep the tears back.”²⁶

In 1991, under the joint direction of leaders from the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, new tombstones marking their remains became the focus of a gardenlike cemetery near the Homestead in Nauvoo. On 4 August 1991 the newly renovated cemetery was dedicated by Wallace B. Smith, great-grandson of Joseph Smith and president of the RLDS Church. Elder M. Russell Ballard, a great-great-grandson of Hyrum Smith, represented the LDS Church.

Joseph’s Tomb

The Tomb of Joseph is not an untold story, but it is one that has been obscured by time. A few years before his tragic death, the Prophet built a limestone burial vault on the south side of the temple block and called it the “Tomb of Joseph.” The first reference to the tomb in the *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* appears on 23 August 1842, in reference to Joseph Smith Sr. The

Prophet said of his deceased father, "Sacred to me is his dust and the spot where he is laid. Sacred to me is the tomb I have made to encircle o'er his head. Let the memory of my father eternally live."²⁷

Joseph Smith Sr. hadn't been buried in the tomb, but it is apparent his son wanted him to be. "I will tell you what I want," said the Prophet. "If tomorrow I shall be called to lie in yonder tomb, in the morning of the resurrection let me strike hands with my father, and cry, 'My father,' and he will say, 'My son, my son,' as soon as the rock rends and before we come out of our graves."²⁸ Joseph Smith also said, "Let my father, Don Carlos, and Alvin, and children that I have buried be brought and laid in the tomb I have built. Let my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters be laid there also; and let it be called the tomb of Joseph, a descendant of Jacob; and when I die, let me be gathered to the tomb of my father."²⁹

John Taylor spoke of the Tomb of Joseph in the Salt Lake Tabernacle in 1870. "I knew a man, whom many of you knew, who built a tomb for himself in the city of Nauvoo. His name was Joseph Smith, and many of you heard him say what I shall now relate. Said he, 'I expect when the time of the resurrection comes to rise up in my tomb there, and strike hands with my brethren, with my father and with my mother, and I'll hail the day when we shall burst from the barriers of the tomb and awake to immortal life.' Have you never heard him talk thus? I have."³⁰

Brigham Young added his confirmation that Joseph Smith wanted to be buried in the tomb that he had built south of the temple. "While Joseph was alive he said, 'if I am slain in battle or fall by the hands of my enemies I want my body brought to Nauvoo and laid in the tomb I have prepared.'"³¹ It was Brigham's desire to carry out the Prophet's wish. He planned to place the remains of the martyrs in the Tomb of Joseph before the Mormon exodus from Nauvoo. At the October Conference of 1845 Brigham Young stated, "Joseph once said, with outstretched arms, 'If I fall in battle in Missouri, I want you to bring my bones back, and deposit them in that sepulchre—I command you to do it in the name of the Lord.'"³² Knowing that the Prophet's wishes to be buried in the Tomb of Joseph had not been fulfilled, Young stated, "We are determined also to use every means in our power to do all that Joseph told us. And we will petition

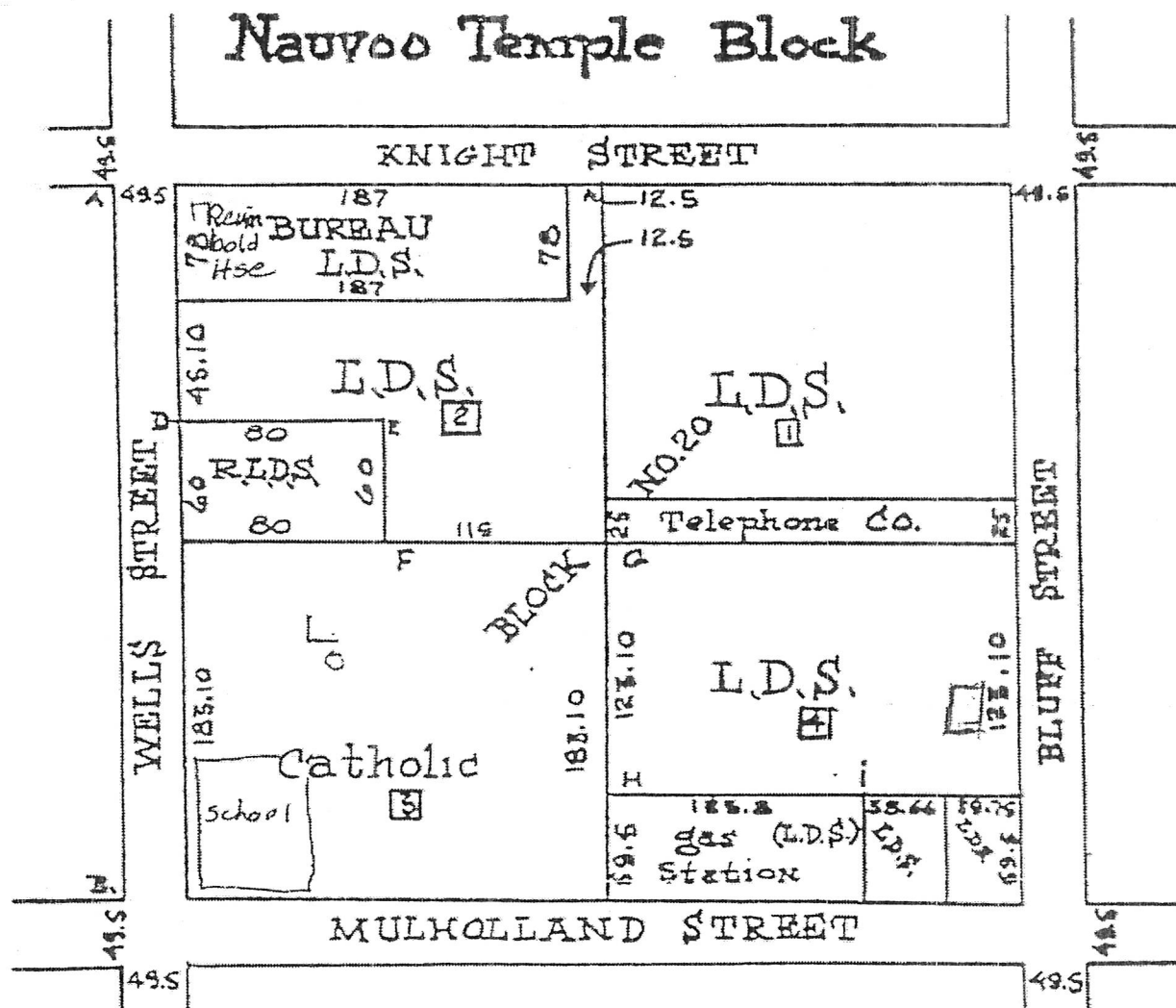
Sister Emma in the name of Israel's God, to let us deposit the remains of Joseph according as he commanded us. And if she will not consent to it, our garments are clear. Then when he awakes in the morning of the resurrection, he shall talk with them, not me; the sin be upon her head, not ours."³³

The remains of the Prophet and Patriarch were never laid in the tomb. "The sepulchre was prepared for them but as yet they are not in there," penned Joseph Hovey.³⁴ The only known remains to be buried in the tomb were those of Caroline, wife of William Smith, on 24 May 1845. Orson Pratt preached a sermon at her funeral to a large assembly, and "her remains were deposited in the tomb of Joseph: she has left two children to mourn her loss."³⁵

Where Is the Tomb of Joseph Smith?

The question is not was there was a tomb, but where was the tomb located? In 1875 the *Deseret News* reported, "When the Mormons began to rear their gorgeous temple, two tombs of hewn stone were built on the west side of the edifice, one for Joseph Smith and the other for Sidney Rigdon. These vaults were both completed."³⁶ Ten years later on 27 June 1885, a letter by church historian Franklin D. Richards to Eliza R. Snow reported his visit to one tomb. "It was within my recollection that the Prophet Joseph had caused the building of a stone burial vault at the south side of the Temple block where were to be interred the bodies of his family. We sought out the spot and found the vault included within a building, where it is used for a wine cellar."³⁷

The newspaper account reported two tombs on the west side of the temple and Elder Richards reported one tomb south of the temple, which is consistent with early historical records. However, the theory of a west tomb was revisited in the summer of 1973. Arlene Robinson of Provo, Utah, visited Nauvoo and contends that the tomb was on the west end of the temple block about six feet from the southwest corner of the temple foundation. She observed the demolition of a house on the southwest corner of the temple site and watched a bulldozer open up a large old wine cellar at the temple foundation. She climbed down into "the cellar, which had been cemented up for many years, and picked up some bits of pottery (post Mormon), until ordered out



by NRI [Nauvoo Restoration, Inc.] officials.” Within minutes the bulldozer broke into the cellar and covered it with dirt. “I didn’t quite know what to think of the find, and its sudden end,” wrote Arlene Robinson.

It was not until Robinson returned to Utah and read *Nauvoo the Beautiful*³⁸ that she learned that Brigham Young was upset with Emma Smith for refusing to let church authorities bury Joseph Smith in his tomb. She then mused, “I began to wonder if this might have been part of the tomb. The walls that I saw were obviously built of temple rubble, which would have made them post Mormon period, and not a possible tomb. However, there was such an accumulation of dirt on the floor, probably two to three feet deep, plus another two to three feet of rusty tin cans, that it was impossible to see what the lower levels of stone or the floor looked like, to see if they

were polished stone, or more temple rubble.” Robinson concludes with a hope “that someday in the future the exact location of the tomb might be located. Until that time we can but wonder. Did [I] really enter the tomb of Joseph?”³⁹

The Process of Discovery

On 24 March 1995 I attended the weekly Religious Education Friday Faculty Forum and listened to Robert J. Matthews present a lecture on the funeral and burial of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. In his presentation he said, “You can walk over very holy ground and not even know it is holy. And you can walk right past sacred buildings and not even know they are sacred if you don’t know some of the history about them.” Near the end of his presentation he reminded his listeners that the “Nauvoo Temple faced west. The Tomb of Joseph would be . . . close to the front but on the south side.”⁴⁰

One month later, in April 1995 I arrived in Nauvoo as a church service missionary for the spring and summer months. The words of Brother Matthews’s informative presentation kept returning to my mind. I began to look for caves, wine cellars, and, yes, even the Tomb of Joseph. From the deacons in the Nauvoo Ward to the local history buff, Michael Trapp, each was asked about caves, dugouts, and wine cellars. Despite an aversion to snakes, which often nestle in such secluded caverns, I began to visit the sites. From the caves in Warsaw that secreted fugitive slaves to the wine cellars built by the Icarians in Nauvoo, I saw them all and discredited each one as being the possible Tomb of Joseph.

However, there was a cave or wine cellar located a block south of the temple site that I returned to again and again throughout the summer. It is near the crest of the bluff, twenty feet off the road that intersects at Bluff and Ripley Street. It is located on lots eight and nine in block three of Kimball’s Addition in Nauvoo.⁴¹ The cave begins where the bluff has a downward slope and faces north. It would have faced the Nauvoo Temple.

The measurements of the cave are not exact, since through the years rock from the roof has fallen on the ground, creating a rubble effect. The arch or entrance to the cave is built against the hillside. The arched entrance is six feet across and nine feet in height. There are sixteen stones

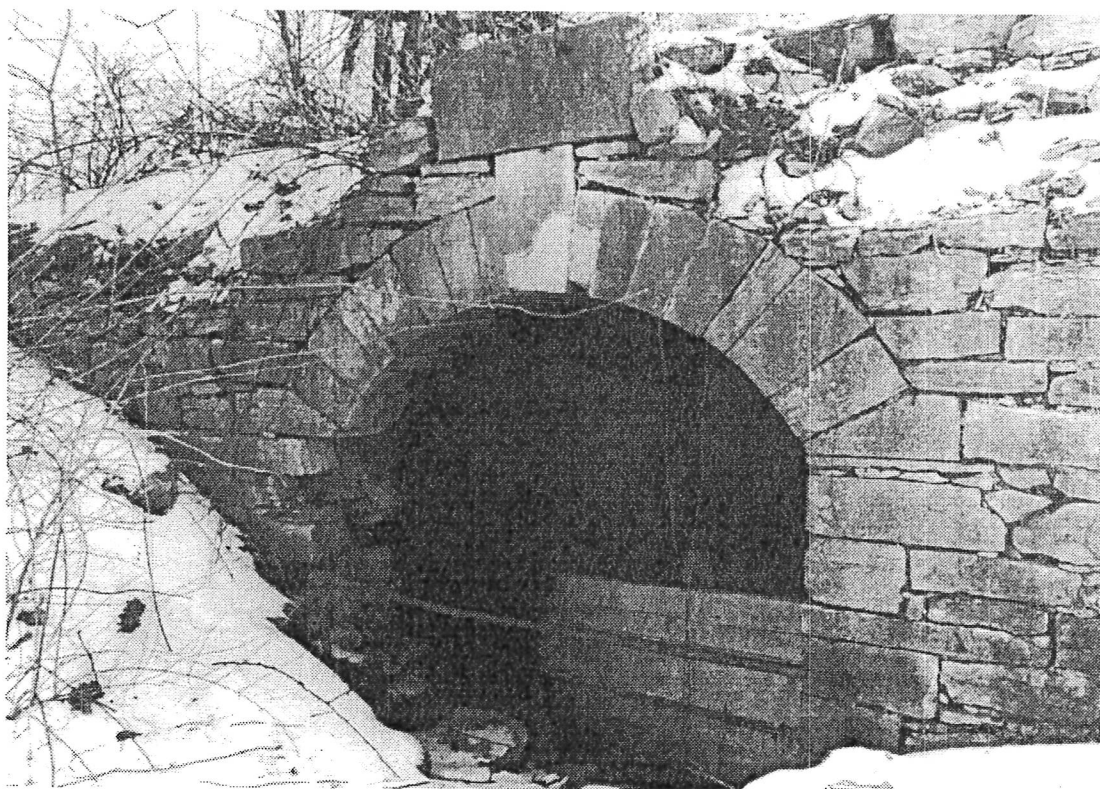


Picture 1. After pulling back the overgrowth near the bluff, I discovered the cavern on 10 June 1995.

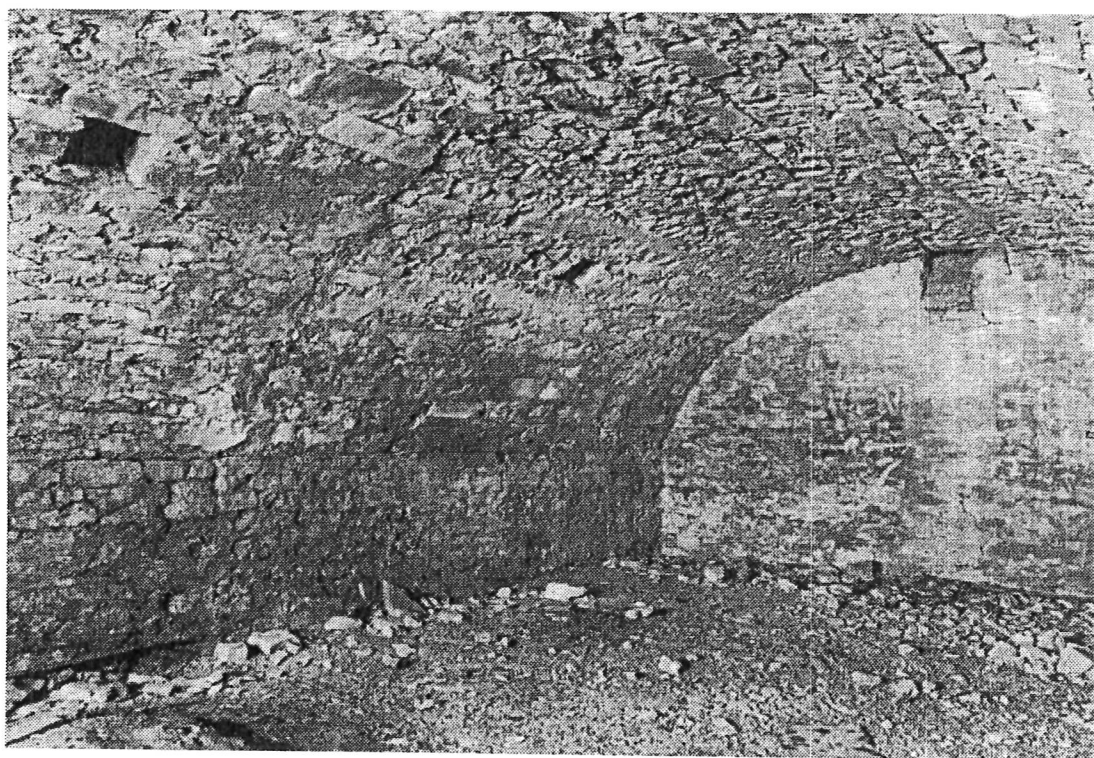
located on either side of the arch, with a keystone in the center. Above the keystone is a large flat stone that appears to have been engraved; however, I was unable to decipher any of the letters on it. Loose stones were placed around the arch. These stones differ from the stones in the arch in that they were not “fine” cut by stonecutters (see picture 2, p. 12).

The dimensions inside the cave are approximately 32 feet in length, 18 feet across and 12 feet high. There are five ventilation holes in the cave, two on each side and one at the far end. The holes give evidence that the vault may have been used as a wine cellar (see picture 3, p. 12).

Before leaving Nauvoo I took Robert L. Christensen, a missionary serving with Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., to the cave. Elder Christensen was called to be a missionary in Nauvoo because of his expertise in stone masonry. He had worked as a stone and brick masonry contractor in northern California for twenty-four years. For eight years he had served as the Licensing Deputy Registrar for the State of California responsible for issuing licenses to those who qualified to be stone and brick masonry contractors. I asked Elder Christensen to analyze the stones in the



Picture 2. Proposed site of Joseph's tomb. Photograph by John Telford.

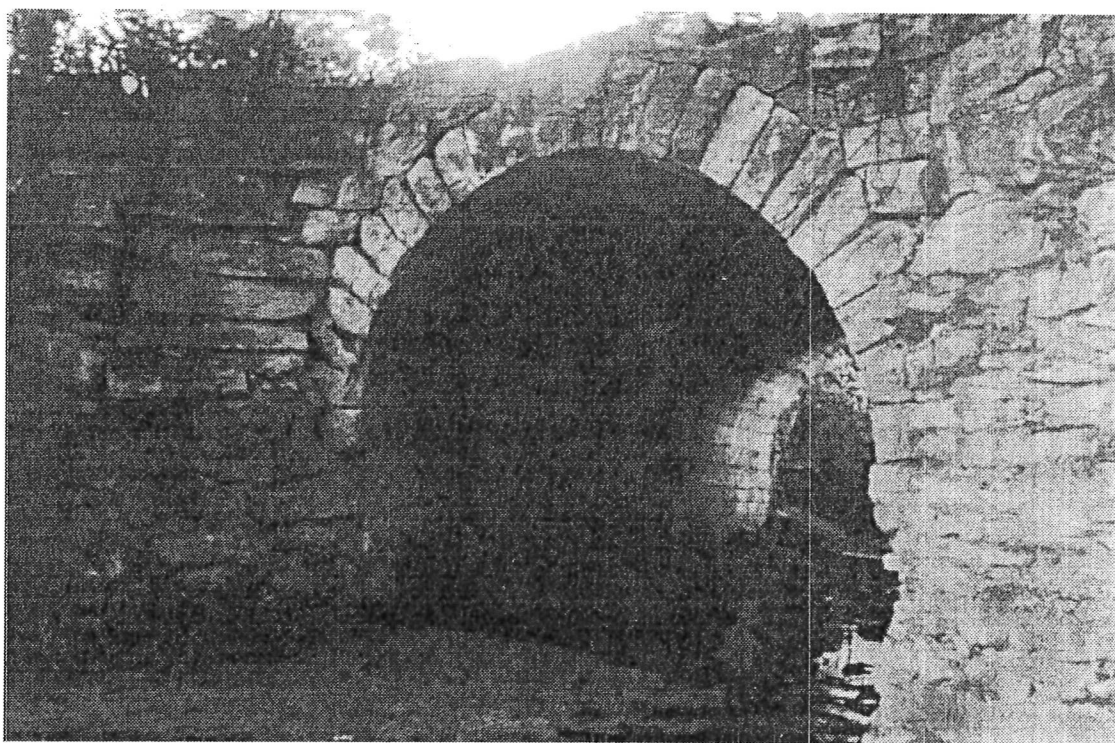


Picture 3. Inside the proposed site of Joseph's tomb. Photograph by John Telford.

alleged tomb by comparing them with other structures in Nauvoo. On 16 September 1995 he responded to my request by letter and photographs.

One of the comparative structures examined by Elder Christensen was the Stone Arch Bridge (see picture 4, below), nearly hidden at Fisher's Point at the south edge of Nauvoo, which was built after the Mormon era to enable wagons to cross the drainage canal dug by the Mormons. Elder Christensen concludes that the limestones in the stone arch bridge were extracted from the local quarry. These stones differ from those used in the arch entrance of the alleged tomb in that they are "rough cut," meaning that they were not finished or polished such as those in the arch of the alleged tomb. "No attempt was made to smooth the surface like the stones placed in the arch of the alleged tomb," wrote Christensen.

The photograph of the wine cellar located on Warsaw Street in Nauvoo (see picture 5, p. 14) was analyzed by Elder Christensen. "Again the stone is salvaged from other stone work or was rubble from older buildings," he wrote. "It's very crude at best. It does not evidence the craftsmanship or artisan efforts at the alleged vault."



Picture 4. Stone Arch Bridge.



Picture 5. Wine cellar on Warsaw Street.

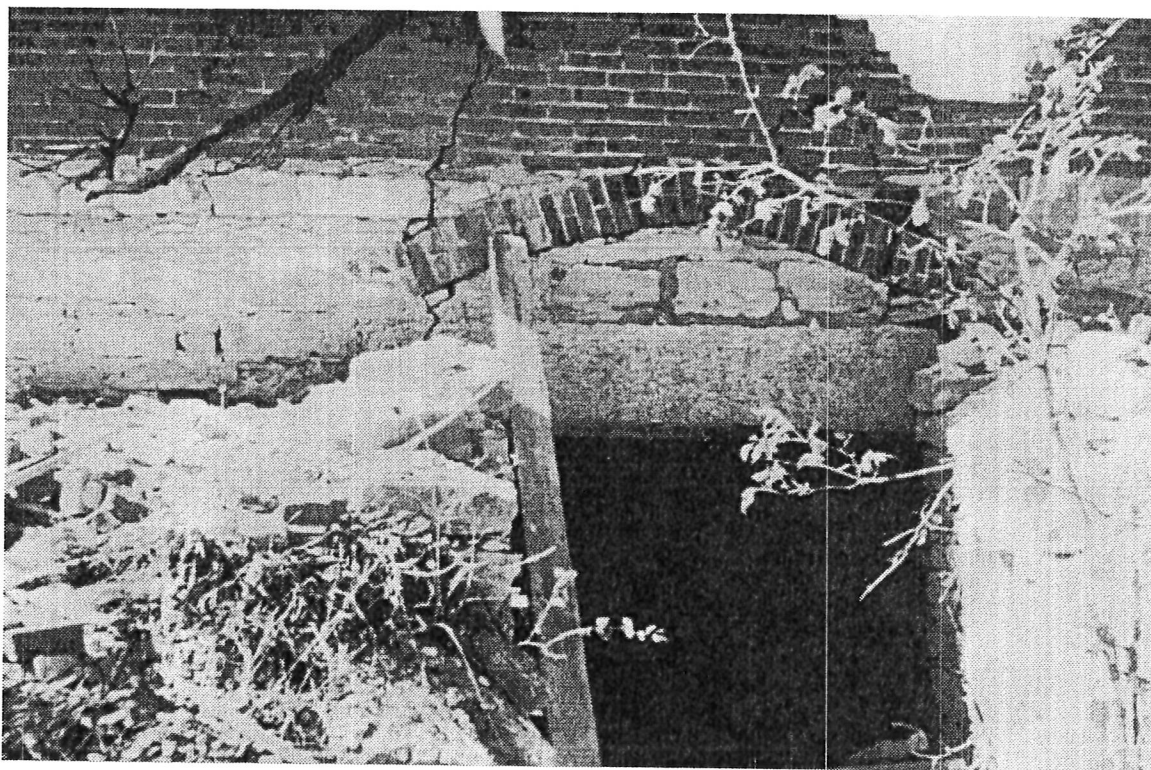
Relative to the old wine cellars located on Fulmer and Winchester streets in Nauvoo (pictures 6–7, p. 15), he said, “The old stone ceilings inside the wine cellars are arched, however the entrances are rough cut. The front on each cellar appears to be added later and is made of concrete,” wrote Elder Christensen. “These are definitely wine cellars.” Then he speaks of the alleged tomb: “It appears that there was a place above the keystone where an identification of some kind could have been etched.”

Elder Christensen concludes his letter, “I now have all the pictures I need to make my argument that the only stone work in any of the caves or cellars that appear to be cut by the same caliber stone masons as the temple is the one we looked at. This stone is cut and finished the same as the temple stones appear to be. It’s cut and fit by stone masons as good as those who worked on the temple” (see Picture 8, p. 16).⁴²

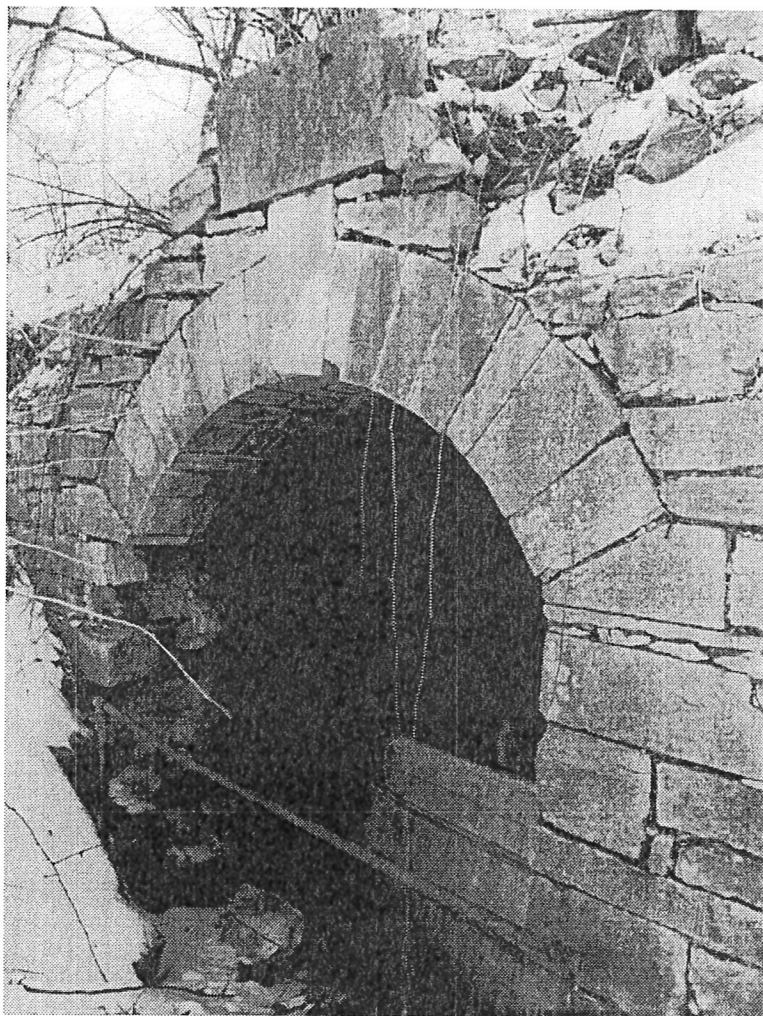
After reading Elder Christensen’s conclusion, I was heartened and began to research the possibility of having discovered the Tomb of Joseph. Journal entries and historical documents were searched. Residents of the brick home (205 Bluff Avenue) across the street from the site



Picture 6. Wine cellar on Fulmer Street.



Picture 7. Wine cellar on Winchester Street.



Picture 8. Picture of porposed site of Joseph's tomb taken in winter. Photograph by John Telford.

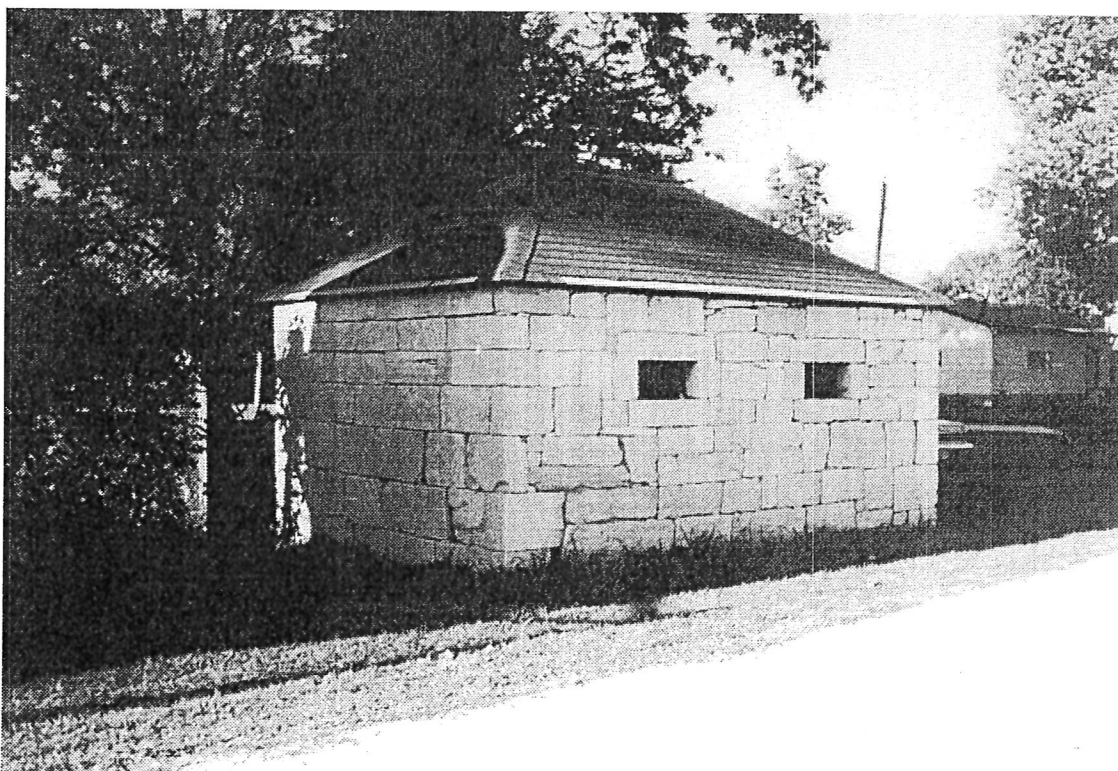
were contacted. Barb Bolton, wife of Rich Bolton and resident of the home, stated, "We have been mowing the lawn in front of the cave for years. In exchange for mowing the lawn we can park our cars on the property [and] have a swing set and picnic table for our family." When asked about the cave and its origin, she said that she was not familiar with its history. However, she did indicate that the cave needed repair, "The cave at the top is beginning to collapse. I worry that someone will go into the cave and get hurt."⁴³

Holly Johnson at the Carthage County clerk's office said the property taxes were being paid by Henry M. Dethlessen, a sixty-seven-year-old California farmer.⁴⁴ When Mr. Dethlessen was asked about the origin of the cave, he said, "I have been back there once and saw the cave. I think it was built by the people that came after the Mormons." He explained that he was one of

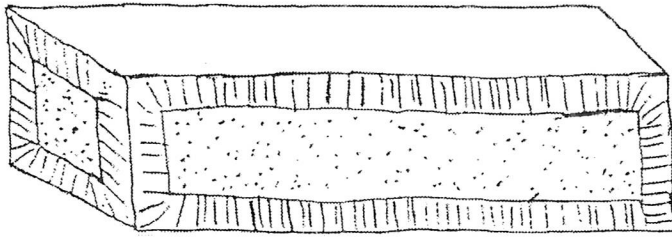
nine heirs who inherited the property after the passing of his uncle Fred Dethlessen. Fred Dethlessen had purchased portions of the site in July 1965, May 1968, and November 1969 under the impression that Nauvoo was being rebuilt and one day his property would be worth a lot of money.⁴⁵

I debated about publishing any of the findings until I received a phone call and a clarifying letter from Elder Robert Christensen on 10 June 1996: “This is the letter I said I’d write to clarify my final understanding of your or our belief in the location of the real tomb. I guess the light wasn’t right before, or it might be that our visitors have asked me to identify for them, other buildings in Nauvoo that contained pieces of temple stone.”

He then explained, “The day I took our daughter Melissa’s in-laws, the Argyle’s [sic], around I clearly identified pieces of temple stone in the old jail [see picture 9, below]. The old Nauvoo Jail is a structure composed of stone salvaged from other buildings, including the Nauvoo Temple. This structure is a post-Mormon Building,” wrote Christensen. “However, the stones that were once part of the Nauvoo Temple have an etching that is similar if not exact to



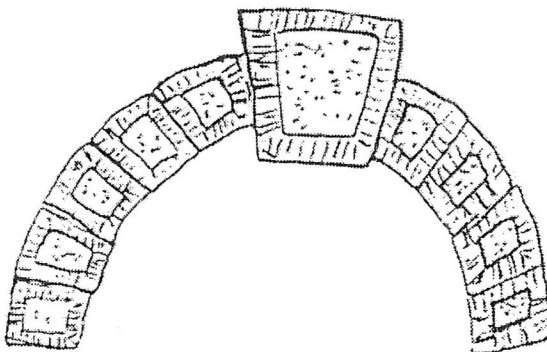
Picture 9. Old Nauvoo Jail.



Sketch 1. Stone etching. Sketch by Robert Christensen.

the stones seen in the arch of the alleged tomb—also the stone building on Young Street and other old buildings” (see sketch 1, above).

“I then went by to see our tomb in the existing light—saw the same design cut into the stone. I don’t think I even mentioned it before. The stones are dressed the same in the old cultural hall. The stone is dressed around the edge with lines or grooves for approximately 1 1/2 inches as a border. Then the center is pocked with sharp chisel teeth [with] a brush chisel. The old jail has pieces scattered around in it with the design on it. The tomb’s arch stones are dressed the same way. Most of it is almost gone. But in good light it can be seen like this . . .” (see sketch 2, below). “This also, for sure means this stone was not temple rubble, recut for a wine cellar. I think you’ll be sure when you see it up close.”⁴⁶



Sketch 1. Stones in arch of proposed tomb. Sketch by Robert Christensen.

Conclusion

"A good frontier yarn should be obvious, but this one continues to be used by people who might know better."⁴⁷ Elder Robert Christensen has been in the business of working with stone for nearly twenty-five years. I have been a professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University for nearly twenty years. We could just call our excitement "the follies of youth," but both of us are too old for that. "Midlife crisis" isn't appropriate either to explain our enthusiasm for the discovery. Perhaps in my case, it is just a historian wanting to find something old, yet new.

The case of the Tomb of Joseph has been presented. Known facts are clearly identified and a cave in Nauvoo awaits inspection. If the hypothesis proves true, does that suggest that the Prophet Joseph Smith and his family members, now numbering seventeen that are buried in the gardenlike cemetery near the Homestead, should be interred again?⁴⁸ That would be presumptuous. But what it does suggest is the need for further discussion about the Tomb of Joseph.

Notes

¹ Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 155, 158, xi–xii.

² Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., 2nd ed. rev., ed. B. H. Roberts. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–51, 6:625. Hereafter cited as *HC*.

³ Journal of Allen Joseph Stout, typescript, BYU-S, 19.

⁴ Mary Rich Autobiography, typescript, BYU-S, 17.

⁵ Sarah Leavitt, History, 1919, 22, as cited in *LDS Collectors Library*, Infobases, 1996

⁶ George Morris Autobiography, typescript, BYU-S, 22.

⁷ "I shall ever remember my feelings," *Church News*, 24 June 1984, 11 (translated from the original Welsh by Dr. Ronald D. Dennis, BYU professor).

⁸ Mary Rich Autobiography, typescript, BYU-S, 17.

⁹ *HC* 6:626.

¹⁰ *HC* 6:627.

¹¹ Letter from Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, 30 June 1844, as cited in Ronald K. Esplin, "Life in Nauvoo, June 1844: Vilate Kimball's Martyrdom Letters," *BYU Studies* 19/2 (1979): 238.

¹² Sarah Rich Autobiography, typescript, BYU-S, 40

¹³ *HC* 6:627.

¹⁴ Mosiah Hancock Autobiography, typescript, BYU-S, 29–30.

¹⁵ Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "'All Things Move in Order in the City': The Nauvoo Diary of Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs," *BYU Studies* 19/3 (1979): 293.

¹⁶ *Church News*, 24 June 1984.

¹⁷ Some historians contend that the bodies were concealed on the main floor of the Mansion House. Transcription of presentation by Robert J. Matthews given on 24 March 1995, at Religious Education Friday Faculty Forum at Brigham Young University. In author's possession. Some of the information shared by Matthews is credited to the research of LaMar C. Berrett.

¹⁸ William Phelps wrote an 1855 recollection of the sermon, which was reproduced in Richard Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, "The Joseph\Hyrum Smith Funeral Sermon," *BYU Studies* 23/1 (1982): 3-7.

¹⁹ The Nauvoo House was designed to be an L-shaped structure, with each wing being about 120 feet long and 40 feet wide. There were to have been 75 rooms in the building. Construction on the house began in 1841. The brick work had been progressing so much by the summer of 1843 that \$12,000 had been spent to purchase the lumber. However, by June 1844 the home was still not completed, and the last effort to do so was in 1845. When the city was abandoned in 1846, all work stopped. Lewis Bidamon was responsible for constructing the Riverside Mansion, the present Nauvoo House, using materials from the uncompleted structure. He began this project in 1869. It was purchased in 1909 by the RLDS Church.

²⁰ *HC* 6:628.

²¹ "They call it a spring house, but that means there is a spring there and they say there's not much evidence of water ever having been there. Some of them call it a root cellar and some of them call it a storage shed. We've got about five different names for it, but Bee House and Spring house are the ones it is called the most." Robert J. Matthews, 24 March 1995.

²² A few of the deceased children of Joseph and Emma Smith were afterward removed and interred near the location. Letter of Samuel O. Bennion, president of the Central States Mission, to President Heber J. Grant and his counselors, written on 21 January 1928 from Independence, Missouri. In author's possession.

²³ Emma Smith's remains were interred in a brick vault, south of the Old Homestead, alongside the concealed grave of her husband.

²⁴ Robert J. Matthews, 24 March 1995; Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III, Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 39.

²⁵ F. Mark McKiernan, "David H. Smith: A Son of the Prophet," *BYU Studies* 28/2 (1978): 238.

²⁶ Samuel O. Bennion, 21 January 1928.

²⁷ Dean Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 535.

²⁸ Joseph Smith Jr., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 295; *HC* 5:361.

²⁹ Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 536.

³⁰ John Taylor, "How to Know the Things of God," address given on 6 May 1870 in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, *Journal of Discourses* 13:230-31; 18:333.

³¹ *HC* 7:256.

³² *Times and Seasons* 6:1014; *HC* 7:472.

³³ *HC* 7:472-73.

³⁴ Joseph Hovey Autobiography, typescript, BYU-S, 22.

³⁵ *HC* 7:418.

³⁶ *Deseret News*, November 27, 1875.

³⁷ Franklin D. Richards, "A Tour of Historic Scenes," *Contributor* 7/8/300 (May 1886).

³⁸ E. Cecil McGavin, *Nauvoo the Beautiful* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1946).

³⁹ Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., Files located in vault of Family Land and Records Center, LDS Visitors' Center, Nauvoo, Ill.

⁴⁰ Robert J. Matthews, 24 March 1995.

⁴¹ The deed for the properties is recorded in Book 309, page 817, in the Carthage County clerk's record book. The parcel numbers for the properties are 01-3-000-760, 01-36-000-742, and 01-36-000-744.

⁴² Letter from Robert Christensen to the author, 16 September 1995.

⁴³ Telephone conversation between Barb Bolton and the author, 10 September 1996.

⁴⁴ Holly Johnson said that the property in question borders one of fifty parcels of property owned by Danny Kraus.

⁴⁵ Telephone conversation between Henry Dethlessen and the author on 13 September 1996. Uncle Fred Dethlessen willed the property to nine heirs: Henry Dethlessen and his wife and three of his children own 5/9ths of the properties, and his cousin, residing in the Bay Area, owns 4/9ths.

⁴⁶ Letter from Robert Christensen to the author, 10 June 1996.

⁴⁷ Anderson, *Investigating*, 160.

⁴⁸ Joseph Smith, Sr., Lucy Mack Smith, Hyrum Smith, Hyrum Smith, Jr., Emma Hale Smith, Frederick G. W. Smith, Don Carlos Smith, stillborn son of Joseph and Emma Smith, Emmeline Griswold Smith, Evelyn Rebecca Smith, Joseph Arthur Smith, Samuel Harrison Smith, Mary Bailey Smith, Lucy B. Smith, Don Carlos Smith,

Sophronia C. Smith, Caroline Grant Smith, and Robert Blashel Thompson. Also buried in the Smith Family Cemetery are Lewis Crum Bidamon, second husband of Emma Hale Smith and the children of James and Sevilla Gifford, close friends of Emma Hale Smith and Joseph III: Wilbur W. Gifford, Celeste Gifford, Edwin James Gifford, and Maude A. Gifford.