
Burr Riggs

1811–1860

D&C 75:17

In 1831 Burr Riggs and his friends Edson Fuller and Heman Bassett visited with Levi Hancock. Hancock reported,

Three good looking young men ... inquired for me. I never had seen them to my knowledge before. They asked how I did and told me they were preachers belonging to the Church of Christ. ...

Those elders ran into all manner of doings, receiving revelations and seeing angels. Falling down frothing at the mouth. One of them who acted the worst was Burr Riggs. I have seen him jump up from the floor, strike his head against the joist in the Baldwins new house and swing some minutes, then fall like he was dead. After an hour or two he would come to. He would prophesy and tell what he had seen. At other times he appeared to be so honest and sincere I was led to believe all he said, but concluded that all could not be blessed and perhaps I was not as pure as those young men. What I had received was enough for me.¹

In spite of experiencing such unusual manifestations, Burr was ordained a high priest on October 25, 1831. At the January 25, 1832, conference held at the home of Gideon Carter in Amherst, Ohio, he was appointed by revelation to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ: “And again, I say unto my servant Major N. Ashley, and my servant Burr Riggs, let them

¹ Autobiography of Levi Ward Hancock, typescript, 27. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

take their journey also into the south country” (D&C 75:17). It does not appear that either brethren fulfilled the missionary journey.

On February 13, 1833, a council of high priests in Kirtland was held to investigate charges presented against Burr Riggs. Thirteen days later, the investigation had ended and on February 26, Burr was excommunicated in Kirtland. He repented of his sins and marched with Zion’s Camp to Missouri in hopes of assisting Latter-day Saints who had fled from their lands of inheritance in Jackson County. On the march, Burr was standing near the Prophet Joseph Smith when Joseph discovered —

stones which presented the appearance of three altars having been erected one above the other, according to the ancient order. ... The brethren procured a shovel and a hoe, and removing the earth to the depth of about one foot, discovered the skeleton of a man, almost entire, and between his ribs the stone point of a Lamanitish arrow.²

Burr was allowed to keep the arrowhead, which the Prophet Joseph learned through revelation, had killed “a white Lamanite, a large, thick-set man, and a man of God. His name was Zelph.”³

After Zion’s Camp was disbanded, Burr returned to Kirtland and married Lovina Williams, the daughter of Frederick G. Williams. He served a mission to New York and Massachusetts with Joseph Young in 1835 before he and Lovina moved to Far West, Missouri. Burr, a botanist and a physician, farmed two hundred acres and owned a “lot on which I erected a dwelling home Stable &c and commenced improving my land” in Far West.⁴ But with the Battle of Crooked River, the Haun’s Mill Massacre, and Governor Lilburn W. Boggs’ extermination order, Burr abandoned his properties and fled from Missouri, seeking safety in Quincy, Illinois.

In Illinois, Burr wrote a Missouri Redress Petition asking to be compensated for the atrocities he suffered: “In the year of 1836 when moving to the State of Missouri ... was met in Ray County in Said State by a Mob of 114 armed men and commanded us not to proceed any further but to return or they would take our lives ... we turned around with our team and the mob followed us about Six miles and Left us.”⁵

² History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], 483.

³ History, 1838–1856, 483.

⁴ Clark V. Johnson, ed., *Mormon Redress Petitions: Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 330.

⁵ Johnson, ed., *Mormon Redress Petitions*, 330.

By March 1839 Burr had lost faith in the Restoration and joined with apostates in defaming Joseph Smith and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He repented and was reinstated and became a member of the Quincy Branch in November 1843. He never moved to Nauvoo or to the West. Burr died in 1860 at age forty-nine and was buried in the Woodland Cemetery in Quincy.