
“Go to the Ohio”

D&C 38:32

The Prophet Joseph Smith said of the third conference of the Church held at the Peter Whitmer Sr. Log Home,

The year 1831 opened with a prospect great and glorious for the welfare of the kingdom; for on the 2nd of January, 1831, a conference was held in the town of Fayette, New York, at which the ordinary business of the Church was transacted; and in addition, the following revelation was received (D&C 38).¹

Although minutes of the conference are missing, scribe John Whitmer wrote of the Prophet Joseph receiving the revelation: “The Seer enquired of the Lord in the presence of the whole congregation, and thus came the word of the Lord.”² This was the first recorded revelation in 1831—a year in which more recorded revelations were received than in previous or following years (D&C 1, 38–72, 133). The revelation included the command, “Go to the Ohio; and there I will give unto you my law; and there you shall be endowed with power from on high” (D&C 38:32).

Although Joseph Smith left almost immediately for Ohio and arrived in Kirtland with his wife, Emma, on or about February 1, 1831, most of the New York Saints waited until the spring thaw and opening of the New York waterways to migrate. By April 1831 the Saints from the respective branches of the Church in New York and some from Pennsylvania were preparing to depart for Ohio. Most journeyed in groups rather than as individual families.

¹ History, 1838–1856, volume Ai-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], 88. Joseph Smith Papers.

² John Whitmer History, 1831–circa 1847, 6. Joseph Smith Papers.

The Saints who had resided in Colesville, New York, rendezvoused at Ithaca, New York, and began their journey via the port at Cayuga Lake, embarking on April 25, 1831. The Colesville Branch voyaged along the Cayuga-Seneca Canal and Erie Canal to reach Buffalo, New York, on May 1, only to find the busy Lake Erie harbor jammed with ice and boats stuck.

Close behind the Colesville Saints was Lucy Mack Smith with the Fayette Branch of the Church. The Smith contingency left Seneca County by boat at the Kingdom (a small unincorporated community between Waterloo and Seneca Falls) on the Cayuga-Seneca Canal about May 2 and arrived at Buffalo on May 6, 1831. There they found the Colesville Saints still trapped in the harbor by the ice.

While in discussion with members of the Colesville Branch, a third canal boat with thirty more of their fellow Saints from the Palmyra/Manchester area led by Thomas B. Marsh arrived at Buffalo. Lucy Mack Smith made arrangements with Captain Blake, skipper of the steamboat *Niagara*, for the Fayette Saints to take deck passage on his vessel that same day. Because of chilling rain on May 7, Lucy found an overnight room on shore for the women and children.

The next day Mother Smith returned to the steamboat and was told to keep her group on board for instant departure the moment the ice cleared. That same day as the Fayette Branch on board the *Niagara* were praying for the ice-choked harbor to open, there was a crackling sound and a passage way opened. The *Niagara* slipped through the blockage and voyaged onto the Fairport Harbor in Ohio.

It is estimated that the Saints with Lucy Mack Smith reached Kirtland about May 9. Those in the Colesville Branch took passage aboard the *Enterprise* at Buffalo and arrived at the Fairport Harbor on May 14, 1831. It is assumed that the group with Thomas B. Marsh soon followed.

During the week of May 15–21, about fifty Saints under the direction of Martin Harris left Palmyra. The editor of the *Wayne Sentinel*, Egbert B. Grandin, wrote of their exodus on May 27, 1831:

Several families, numbering about fifty souls, took up their line of march from this town last week for the "promised land," among whom was *Martin Harris*, one of the original believers in the "Book of Mormon." Mr. Harris was among the early settlers of this town, and has ever borne the character of an honorable and upright man, and an obliging and benevolent neighbor. He had secured to himself by honest

industry a respectable fortune—and he has left a large circle of acquaintances to pity his delusion.³

Within days, the Martin Harris contingency from Palmyra were in Kirtland with the other New York Saints.

³ “Mormonism and Martin Harris,” *Wayne Sentinel*, May 27, 1831, 3.