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# Property in Kirtland

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## D&C 48

The call to gather to Ohio was not a call to gather to a sparsely settled area (D&C 37:3; 38:32; 39:15). It was a call to gather to Kirtland, Ohio.

Beginning in 1811, settlers began arriving in what became the Kirtland Township. Christopher Gore Crary, of Massachusetts, came to the area in May 1811 and wrote, “The forest-trees were of endless variety and of the tallest kinds.” He also wrote of the “thick growth of underbrush beneath the trees with flowers of rare beauty.” The word Crary used to describe the area was *celestial*.<sup>1</sup> A year after the Crary family arrived, Isaac Morley and his family moved to the area. By 1822 there was a local government in town, including three trustees, of which Isaac Morley was one. By the next year, the township had a justice of the peace and a thousand residents.

The mushrooming population changed the wilderness into a thriving community with homes, shops, and prosperous farms. Newel K. Whitney ran the general store, and Peter French was the proprietor of the hotel across the street from the Whitney store. The center of the industrial and merchandizing area of town was the Kirtland Flats near the Chagrin River. Factories, an ashery, a saw mill, and a grist mill operated on the river banks. To attend to the religious yearnings of the residents, worship services were held weekly at four main churches—Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists and Reformed Baptists. Thus, when the Lord commanded the New York Saints to gather to Ohio, Kirtland was already a well-established community.

Anticipating that dozens of families would soon be arriving in Kirtland from New York, the Prophet Joseph Smith was concerned about housing the newcomers, many of whom were impoverished, having sold their property in New York for less than market value. The Prophet anticipated that the Colesville Saints would settle in Thompson, Ohio, on

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Geauga and Lake County, Ohio* (Philadelphia: 1878), 246.

property owned by Brother Leman Copley, and the rest of the New York Saints would reside temporarily on Isaac Morley's farm.

In March 1831 the Prophet asked the Lord how to acquire land for the housing and farming needs of the migrating Saints. The answer received was that those with property in the Kirtland Township were to impart freely of their lands and monies were to be consecrated to buy more land (see D&C 48:2–3).

The New York Saints began arriving in Kirtland in large family groupings in May and June 1831. A contemporary wrote,

They came, men, women, and children, in every conceivable manner, some with horses, oxen, and vehicles rough and rude, while others had walked all or part of the distance. The future "City of the Saints" appeared like one besieged. Every available house, shop, hut, or barn was filled to its utmost capacity. Even boxes were roughly extemporized and used for shelter until something more permanent could be secured.<sup>2</sup>

The sudden influx of Saints to Kirtland had a major impact upon the agrarian community. The average Saint was poorer than the typical resident of Kirtland. In addition, the New York Saints made visible changes to the landscape by constructing small log cabins. Although log and small frame houses had characterized the township for two decades, by the 1830s Kirtland was known for its larger, more permanent frame and brick structures. The smaller cabins did not bespeak prosperity.

The need of the New York Saints to purchase property was real, but old-time Kirtland residents inflated land values. The Saints couldn't afford to pay the purchase price for land needed to support their families. What had been touted as a "land of milk and honey" did not prove so for the Saints. Conflicts arose immediately and the Prophet Joseph was asked to solve the problem. The answer for the larger part of the first wave of Latter-day Saint settlers from New York was to move on to Independence, Missouri, before the end of 1831.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *History of Geauga and Lake County, Ohio*, 248.

<sup>3</sup> See Milton V. Backman Jr., *Heaven's Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 33–51.