
Symonds Ryder

1792–1870

D&C 52:37

After working for six years for Elijah Mason in Hartford, Vermont, at age twenty-two, Symonds took his savings and headed to the farming community of Hiram, Ohio. After purchasing 115 acres, he returned to Vermont to gather his father's family and bring them to Ohio. The Ryder family prospered in every respect in Ohio but especially in acquiring land and farming. Symonds gained prominence in the community as a member of the board of trustees of the Western Reserve Eclectic Institute, as treasurer of Hiram College, and as an elder in the Nelson-Hiram branch of the Campbellites.

His leadership in the Campbellites ended briefly in the summer of 1831. The breach began when Symonds listened to the testimony of Ezra Booth about the Prophet Joseph Smith. After meeting the Prophet Joseph in Kirtland, Symonds entered baptismal waters in early June 1831. He was ordained an elder on June 6 and two days later was called to take the place of seventeen-year-old Heman Basset as a missionary (D&C 52:37). His official call was signed by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. According to historian James B. Holm, "Both in the letter he received and in the official commission to preach ... his name was spelled R-i-d-e-r, instead of R-y-d-e-r. He thought if the 'Spirit' through which he had been called to preach could err in the matter of spelling his name, it might have erred in calling him to the ministry as well."¹

His later anger against Joseph Smith and the Restoration was more than the misspelling of his name. He misunderstood the law of consecration:

When [Church leaders] went to Missouri to lay the foundation of the splendid city of Zion, and also of the temple, they left their papers

¹ James B. Holm, ed., *Portage Heritage* (Portage, OH: Portage County Historical Society, 1957), 171.

behind. This gave their new converts an opportunity to become acquainted with the internal arrangement of their church, which revealed to them the horrid fact that a plot was laid to take their property from them and place it under the control of Joseph Smith the prophet.²

Symonds not only left the Church within days of his baptism and ordination, he leagued himself with Ezra Booth in planting seeds of hatred against the Prophet at the very time his neighbor John Johnson was extending an invitation to Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and others to stay in his farmhouse.

From the day that Church leaders arrived at the John Johnson farmhouse in Hiram, the animosity of Symonds was evident. He wrote of Sidney Rigdon as having an “irascible temper, loquacious extravagance, impaired state of mind, and want of due respect to his superiors.”³ Sidney Rigdon reacted to the indictments, claiming in the *Ohio Star* that Symonds

presented himself before the public as an accuser, he has been called upon before the same public, to support his accusations; and does he come forward and do it? Nay, but seeks to hide himself behind a battery of reproach, and abuse, and low insinuations. ... He could blow like a porpoise when there was no person to oppose him.⁴

The name-calling sparked mob rule in the otherwise quiet town of Hiram. On March 24, 1832, the Prophet Joseph was tarred and feathered and left for dead by an angry mob. Joseph Smith said that Symonds was in the mob. He heard

One [say], “Simonds, Simonds,” (meaning, I supposed, Simonds Ryder,) “pull up his drawers, pull up his drawers, he will take cold.” Another replied: “Ain’t ye going to kill ‘im? Ain’t ye going to kill ‘im?” when a group of mobbers collected a little way off, and said: “Simonds, Simonds, come here;” and “Simonds” charged those who had hold of me to keep me from touching the ground (as they had done all the time),

² Symonds Ryder letter to A. S. Hayden, as cited in Max H. Parkin, *Conflict at Kirtland: A Study of the Nature and Causes of External and Internal Conflict of the Mormons in Ohio Between 1830 and 1838* (Salt Lake City: Max Parkin, 1966), 91.

³ *Ohio Star*, December 29, 1831.

⁴ *Ohio Star*, January 12, 1832.

lest I should get a spring upon them. ... One cried, "Simonds, Simonds, where's the tar bucket?"⁵

By September 1831, Symonds had returned to the Campbellite faith and was again appointed an elder over the congregation in Hiram. From 1829 to 1852, except for his brief fling with the Restoration, Symonds was the only elder of the Campbellite Church in Hiram. He died on August 1, 1870, in Hiram at age seventy-seven. At his funeral, B. A. Hinsdale said, "God grant that we may do our work as well as he did his, then we may go to our graves in equal peace."⁶

⁵ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], 206. Joseph Smith Papers.

⁶ B. A. Hinsdale quote, in "A History of Simonds Ryder," 2