



Full-size clay model depicting John the Baptist restoring the authority and keys of the Aaronic priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, Avard T. Fairbanks, sculptor, in Eugene F. Fairbanks, *A Sculptor's Testimony in Bronze and Stone: The Sacred Sculpture of Avard T. Fairbanks*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Publisher's Press, 1994), 51. The model was sculpted in 1957.

Where was the Aaronic Priesthood Restored?: Identifying the Location of John the Baptist's Appearance, May 15, 1829

Mark Lyman Staker

Joseph Smith “at the Susquehanna”

A prominent claim of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that religious authority to act in God's name includes the restoration of ancient priesthood authority from individuals who held the authority in previous generations. Both Joseph Smith and his scribe Oliver Cowdery consistently recounted the details of a miraculous event in which John the Baptist appeared to them and restored ancient authority to baptize, which they said happened within a short distance from their residence in Harmony, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, on May 15, 1829, while they worked on the translation of the Book of Mormon.¹ Seeking to understand the setting for this event, historians have focused on Joseph's description of the visit by John as occurring “at the Susquehannah river when I retired in the woods.”² His use of the phrase “at the Susquehanna river” and its companion “on the Susquehanna river” (D&C 128:20), used to describe a later visit from additional heavenly messengers, led historians almost a century later to assume this initial visit of John the Baptist took place near the water's edge on the banks of the river. Because Joseph and Oliver also described going to “the woods” or “the bush” to pray when this event happened, this setting of John the Baptist's appearance was usually placed in a grove of trees along the

MARK LYMAN STAKER (stakerm1@ldschurch.org) is a lead curator of historic sites in the LDS Church History Department. He received his BS in cultural anthropology from Brigham Young University, his MA in international studies from Brigham Young University, and his PhD in cultural anthropology from the University of Florida.



Full-size bronze sculpture depicting John the Baptist restoring the authority and keys of the Aaronic priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, Avar T. Fairbanks, sculptor. The sculpture is located on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah. Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh, 2011.

banks of the river. The evidence, however, suggests Joseph did not intend for his statement to be understood in this way.

When discussing northeastern Pennsylvania, Joseph's contemporaries used the idiomatic phrases "at the river" and "on the river" to describe the Susquehanna Valley, the larger Susquehanna River valley drainage region, or villages scattered along the river instead of to describe a specific location

along the river's edge.³ If they wanted to indicate a location by the water, they used the more precise phrase "on the banks of the river."⁴ This is the same phrase Joseph used in his own writings when he wrote a letter from Nauvoo, Illinois, that mentioned an event that occurred in the Susquehanna Valley of hearing the voice of Michael the Archangel "on the banks of the Susquehanna," detecting the devil (D&C 128:20). Nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints never assumed this location was the same one connected with the visit of John, however; they focused on the word "woods" in Joseph's account when discussing this event.

The experience of Joseph and Oliver in the Pennsylvanian woods receiving the Aaronic priesthood from John the Baptist was viewed as so significant that Latter-day Saint children in 1875 memorized a catechism emphasizing it. "What did Joseph and Oliver Cowdery then do?" the catechism asked; to which the children responded in unison: "They went to the woods to pray."⁵ It was one of several key founding events of the Restoration depicted on the ceiling of the Salt Lake City Assembly Hall at Temple Square. After Church President John Taylor related the events of priesthood restoration during an 1886 conference in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, he encouraged those in attendance to stop by the Assembly Hall after the meeting and look at the mural.⁶



Left: C. C. A. Christensen painting of John the Baptist ordaining Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to the Aaronic priesthood, date unknown, oil on paper. Right: Lithograph of John the Baptist ordaining Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to the Aaronic priesthood by C. C. A. Christensen, printed by F. E. Bording, Copenhagen, Denmark, Image courtesy LDS Church History Museum, Salt Lake City, Utah. 1887. Both images depict the visitation of John the Baptist taking place in the woods..

What visitors to the building saw was a collection of historical scenes depicted on the ceiling including a painting of two men kneeling in a wooded area on a hillside. The ceiling murals were likely painted by Danish-born artist C.C.A. Christiansen, who, a few years later, made a lithograph of the same event with two figures kneeling in the woods on a hillside.⁷

“Banks of the Susquehanna”—a Twentieth-Century Innovation

In 1905 John Henry Evans, drawing from original sources, summarized much of what was understood about Church history in his *One Hundred Years of Mormonism*. He noted in his history that Joseph and Oliver “went into the woods to pray” before John the Baptist appeared and restored the Aaronic Priesthood.⁸ Shortly after the book was published, George Edward Anderson traveled to Church historic sites and photographed significant locations. He was the first Latter-day Saint to photograph the Susquehanna Valley in 1907. Anderson took a series of photographs of the area in several locations, including a picture of the Susquehanna River at a spot past Hickory Grove and approaching Red Rock about two-and-a-half miles downriver from the Smith



George Edward Anderson photograph of the Susquehanna River near Oakland (formerly Harmony), Pennsylvania, 1907. Photograph courtesy LDS Church History Library.

farm. Anderson's photograph of the river depicted a wooded location on fallow property that made the trees a dominant theme. When he published his pictures in 1909, John Henry Evans wrote the text for the small book, while Anderson or an editor wrote the captions, including the one for the river photograph which read, "Susquehanna River, on the banks of which the Aaronic Priesthood was conferred."⁹ This caption and the well-crafted photograph of the river's edge seemed to imply an exact location for the event.

When Evans published his monumental 1933 biography of Joseph Smith for a national audience, he included the new perspective of the Anderson caption and wrote: "In May, 1829, we are told, John the Baptist appeared to these two, in resurrected form, on the banks of the Susquehanna river."¹⁰ Shortly after this, in 1936, William E. Berrett first published his widely read *The Restored Church*, which went through sixteen editions. Berrett blended the new perspective with traditional language and described in his history how Joseph and Oliver "retired to a small grove of trees on the bank of the Susquehanna River."¹¹ His account solidified the geographic understanding of priesthood restoration for a generation.¹²

Joseph and Oliver's "Woods"

George Edward Anderson's groundbreaking work preserved important images of the early Susquehanna Valley and helped celebrate one of the most important events of the restoration. He worked under difficult circumstances, however, since he had no access to the participants in priesthood restoration and very little access to historical information about it. In the century since Anderson first published his photograph of the Susquehanna River, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has acquired the Joseph and Emma Smith farm, making the land itself available for study. Significantly, enough sources have surfaced that we can now examine the question of location for Aaronic Priesthood restoration more directly.

Joseph Smith's approximately thirteen-and-a-half-acre farm in Harmony, Pennsylvania, was a narrow strip of land beginning at the Susquehanna River on the south end, and running north into the foothills of Oquago mountain.¹³ The Smith farm was adjacent to Isaac Hale's land, which bordered it on the west and north. When these farms were described in the December 27, 1828, Susquehanna County tax records, the tax collector indicated that Isaac had sixty-three acres of unimproved land where the Oquago Mountain stands on the north end of his property. He also had twenty-eight acres of improved land broken down into two acres of first-rate land (which would have included his home and a kitchen garden), sixteen acres of second-rate land, and ten acres of third-rate land.¹⁴ Joseph Smith was taxed for thirteen acres. His one



Aerial view of Oakland (formerly Harmony), Pennsylvania, circa 1880. Image courtesy LDS Seminaries and Institutes.

acre of first-rate land included his home, garden area, and land surrounding outbuildings. He was taxed for six acres of second-rate land that would have been cleared, fairly level, and easily plowed. He was also taxed for six acres of third-rate land that would have been the rocky, uneven, steep property on the north end of the farm good only for growing grains like buckwheat or fostering a grove of sugar maples for early spring sugar production.

A small landowner like Joseph Smith would use every part of his property possible for productive means. His brother-in-law, Michael B. Morse, was even hired to plow a small mid-river island after spring flooding so it could be planted in grain.¹⁵ The tax records confirm that Joseph's farm was productive and had no unimproved, fallow woods on the property. This suggests we should look closely at what Joseph Smith meant by "woods," since the evidence indicates he likely remained on his property when he and Oliver Cowdery engaged in prayer.

In the late 1820s, land in the Susquehanna Valley was virtually all privately owned. Trespassing on someone else's property without permission would have given Joseph's neighbors cause to accuse him of unethical if not illegal activity. He would have sought permission to use someone else's woods if he went off the property to pray, and local opposition to him was at its height. He later recounted being "forced" to keep secret both his baptism and "the

circumstances” surrounding receiving priesthood authority because of this opposition (JS–History 1:74). It is unlikely in that setting that Joseph would have sought permission to use someone else’s woods and there was no reason for him to trespass on someone else’s land, since he had plenty of secluded land on his own property where he could seek divine guidance.

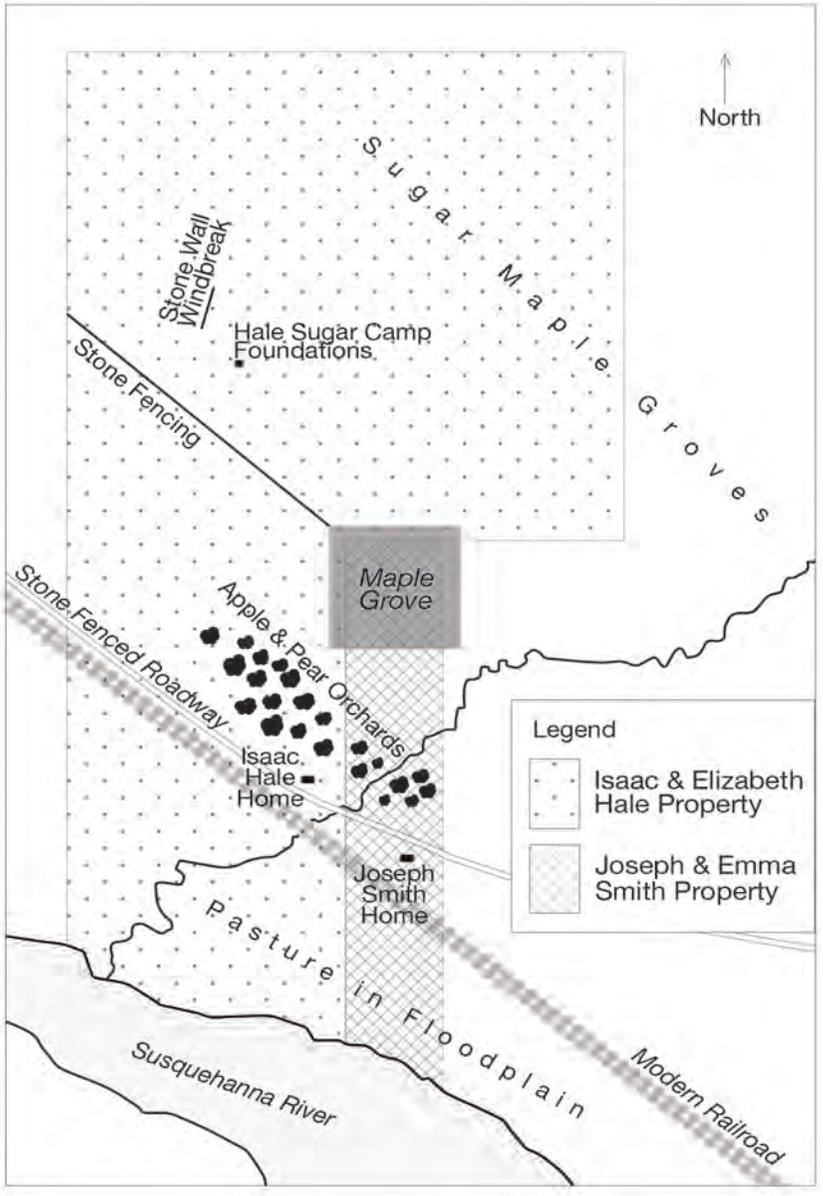
Sources confirm a sugar maple grove on the north end of the Smith farm. Margaret Hawes Lillie remembered “a large maple grove with a brook near it” (Flat Brook), located “east of the cow barn and quite a ways back” north of the road. She “enjoyed watching [her] grandfather [Nathan Skinner] tap the trees and cook the sap into syrup” in that area.¹⁶ Some of the sugar trees still in the grove are as much as two hundred years old today.¹⁷

During the 1820s, when Joseph Smith worked his farm, “bush” was frequently used to refer to groves of trees in general,¹⁸ and to groves of sugar maples in particular.¹⁹ These groves were typically known as a “sugar bush.” In 1822, when Jesse Hale (Emma’s brother) was establishing the farm later sold to Joseph and Emma, his family made upwards of 360 pounds of maple sugar to sell.²⁰ This amount of sugar would require the sap from about six to seven hundred mature maple trees. The sugar bush would have been a ready source of income for the cash-poor Joseph.

Joseph Smith’s “third-rate” land north of the road was not entirely covered in sugar bush. A photograph of the area taken by George Edward Anderson in 1907 from a location on the McKune property looking south includes mature apple and pear trees in an orchard south of Flat Brook. The orchard continues onto the Hale property as a vestige of an earlier time when the property was all under one owner. On the north side of Flat Brook is a fenced agricultural area. Aerial photographs taken in 1930 of the Joseph Smith farm confirm long-lasting changes in the soil due to regular plowing on the south side of an early fence line.²¹ This is the area addressed in Joseph Smith’s July 1830 revelation which commanded him to sow and secure his fields (D&C 24:3). Buckwheat was the only crop planted in the valley in early July and would grow particularly well in the rocky, uneven soil north of the road.²²

Joseph’s sugar bush would have been north of the fence line surrounding his buckwheat field. The thickest, most secluded portion of the sugar bush was the north end of this field next to Isaac Hale’s unimproved lands in the area depicted by shading in the accompanying map.

Joseph Smith was already using this region to hide the golden plates from curious neighbors while working on the translation of the Book of Mormon. Eliza Ann Winters, a stepdaughter of Joseph McKune Sr., who owned the property just east of Joseph’s farm, recalled that Emma told her about keeping the golden plates “in a barrel of beans” as they traveled to Harmony, and then Joseph “hid it [the record] in a pit he made in the woods on the side-hill



Map of the Isaac and Elizabeth Hale and Joseph and Emma Smith properties, Harmony, Pennsylvania. The gray area marks the possible site of the Aaronic Priesthood restoration. Map courtesy Mark Lyman Staker, LDS Church History Department, and Andrew R. Anderson, Brigham Young University.

above the house.”²³ Joseph Knight, Sr. related how “People Began to tease him to see the Book and to offer him money and property and they Crouded so harde that he had to hide it in the Mount[a]in.”²⁴ Isaac Hale suggests that this area afforded some privacy and would not have been visible from Joseph and Emma’s house, which overlooked the river. He recalled Martin Harris telling him Joseph Smith “would go into the woods where the book of plates was, and that after he came back, Harris should follow his track in the snow, and find the book, and examine it for himself. Harris informed me afterward that he followed Smith’s directions, and could not find the plates.”²⁵ Joseph’s mother related Lucy Harris’s experience in looking for the plates. After ransacking the house trying to find the record, Harris looked outdoors. When she came back inside she told of “walking round in the woods to look at the situation of your place.” When she thought she found the place in the woods where the plates were buried, she stooped down “to scrape away the snow and leaves,” and a big, black snake frightened her away.²⁶ This was likely a black rat snake or timber rattlesnake (black phase) that thrive in the woods of Oquago mountain. It had been an unusually warm period, described as “the warmest Christmas ever,” and by February peach trees were in full blossom because of continued uncommonly mild temperatures. Some snakes may have come out of hibernation early despite there still being snow on the ground in wooded areas.²⁷

The Case for Joseph’s Woods along the Susquehanna River’s Edge

Although on the north end of Joseph Smith’s property there was a sugar bush where he kept the golden plates, this does not by itself exclude the possibility of a second wooded area along the riverbanks. Could the “second-rate” land along the river support another grove of sugar maples? The lower six acres of the Smith farm lies in the floodplain along the Susquehanna River. This floodplain is fairly flat, rising a distance of only about twenty-five feet from the river’s edge to where a wall of earth creates a sharp incline on the property, a distance of a little more than one hundred feet from the river. At this point the land rises sharply more than forty feet to a higher elevation along the road. This floodplain had running water from a spring and fairly rock free, sandy soil that would make an ideal pasturage for farm animals.

A study of the property confirms that sugar maples will not grow well in the floodplain because the ground is too wet.²⁸ Although the floodplain was an abandoned pasture when Wilford Wood purchased part of the historic farm in 1948, during the past sixty years a grove of silver maples has replaced the pasture.²⁹ These trees are often called “creek maples” or “water maples” because, unlike sugar maples, they survive in a wet environment. They are

susceptible to disease, are brittle, and they die quickly. Silver maples regularly drop branches and are dangerous to livestock and a large grove of these trees would keep the ground muddy, which is not good for raising animals.

When Isaac Hale initially owned and settled the Smith farm, he and his neighbors first planted their crops in the floodplain after the spring floods because it was fertile and fairly flat, and could be easily cleared as trees were cut and floated down to the lumber market in Pennsylvania and Baltimore. In August 1794, heavy rains brought an unexpected late season flood known as the “pumpkin freshet,” which swept corn, pumpkins, and even potatoes downstream and left the settlers without food from the harvest.³⁰ After nearly starving, families moved their crops to higher ground and used the floodplain for pasture.³¹ The steep rise in ground level between the floodplain and the farmers’ “first-rate” lands would have provided natural fencing for livestock, and Isaac Hale would have kept his large flock of sheep in the floodplain.³²

Joseph and Emma Smith were taxed in Harmony for two cows over four years old. These would have produced enough milk and cheese for several families. To keep the cows producing milk, Joseph would need to feed them abundantly and produce occasional calves. He also bought a team of oxen and a horse from Josiah Stowell that added to the size of his herd and required regular feed.³³ On January 22, 1828, a few weeks after Joseph arrived in Harmony, he purchased enough hay for his cows to last a few months.³⁴ Joseph Knight Sr. recalled the Smiths had a barn on their property.³⁵ At the time, barns were used to store feed rather than animals. But Joseph’s poverty and the lack of additional entries for feed in the local store ledger suggest he could not keep purchasing feed for his animals. As he purchased additional animals from Stowell, and his cows ate the hay he bought, Joseph would need more feed. Local residents from the late nineteenth century recalled that as long as they could remember the Smith farm along the river was a pasture.³⁶ The floodplain was also a pasture in the 1870s when the earliest photographs of the property were taken.³⁷ The available evidence suggests that Joseph’s land in the floodplain was likely a pasture in 1829 and would not have had a “woods” where he could go with Oliver to pray.

The Floodplain Covered in Water in May 1829

Not only did the riverbank not have a “woods” on Joseph’s property when the Aaronic Priesthood was restored, but the entire floodplain, including the section on Joseph Smith’s property, was covered in water in May 1829. Before flood control measures in the twentieth-century, the river annually rose from fifteen to twenty-five feet in the spring, completely flooding the rich and fertile soil along the river banks.³⁸ When the water subsided, lush clover fields

would be available for the livestock. Even with today's flood-control measures, Joseph Smith's property near the river is frequently covered in water during early spring. In 1829 the flooding was more severe.

April 1829 had been cold and wet. The usual spring floods began as rising water broke the ice on the river. Local residents recalled that the Susquehanna "was literally filled with fleets, rafts, and arks at every freshet" heading down the river at high-water time.³⁹ Records of river traffic note that between April 6–19, 1829, 1,099 rafts and 236 arks navigated by 3,023 men went down the Susquehanna River for an average of one vessel approximately every seven minutes of daylight hours.⁴⁰ Although records do not survive for the weeks immediately following this period, the newspapers note that water levels continued to rise until April 27, when the river broke a ten-foot-high dam at a shipping transfer point down river. Heavy river traffic continued through mid-May as water levels remained high.⁴¹ An advertisement looking to hire men to repair the broken dam ran until the waters subsided in early June.⁴² While high waters meant the floodplain was not a good location to pray, since the river was typically less than two feet deep, its flooding water was a perfect location to baptize by immersion. Even Joseph's pasture in the floodplain would have been underneath water deep enough to perform the ordinance.

Joseph and Oliver "Repaired" to the River

Understanding that the floodplain was under water in May 1829, and that Joseph and Oliver likely went to the sugar bush in the Oquago mountain foothills on the north end of the farm, helps ground additional phrases Joseph and Oliver used when discussing their experiences. Oliver Cowdery mentioned that after John the Baptist ordained them to the priesthood, he and Joseph "repaired to the water" to perform the ordinance.⁴³ The word "repair" in this archaic sense meant to "make one's way" or go from one location to another, such as from one region to another and not move about within the same area.⁴⁴ Joseph also used language that implied traveling a distance to their baptism site when he wrote of John's instructions, as "he commanded us to go and be baptized. . . . Accordingly we went and were baptized" (JS–History 1:68–70).⁴⁵

In addition, Oliver Cowdery described the location where he and Joseph went to pray about baptism as "aside from the abodes of men."⁴⁶ On the day of Joseph's and Oliver's baptism, the banks of the river were hardly secluded. Joseph's property was part of a long stretch of the river visible for some distance from upstream and downstream. In mid-May 1829, two to three rafts with boatmen were likely visible at any time of day from Joseph's property.⁴⁷

The riverbank was also visible to Joseph's neighbors who lived along the river. In fact, Emma's uncle, Methodist minister Nathaniel Lewis, Joseph's greatest opponent in Harmony, lived across the river within view of Joseph's property. Two of Emma's brothers and a sister also lived with their families across the river in view of Joseph's property. If Joseph sought to keep the priesthood restoration from his most ardent persecutors, it would not have been carried out within full view of the farms where they were working that day.

The significant level of traffic on "America's highway" actually helps explain George Q. Cannon's 1866 account when, after describing the visit of John the Baptist, he wrote: "The same day they went and were baptized,"⁴⁸ since their baptism may have happened later in the day. River traffic was thick during the spring floods, and there would have been an ark or raft within view of Joseph and Emma Smith's property from early morning until late evening. But the boatmen always docked their craft in the evenings and found a home somewhere near the river where they could eat and sleep.

In the evening of May 15, 1829, boatmen would have scrambled for a place to sleep. Although Oliver mentions that the sun was shining when John the Baptist appeared, at least for part of the day it had been cloudy and cold, and it promised a cold night.⁴⁹ The busy river traffic suggests that they likely waited until evening to perform the baptisms after the men docked and prepared to bed down for the night. After baptizing each other, the restoration of priesthood continued as the two men followed the angel's instructions and laid hands on each others' head to ordain each other to the Aaronic Priesthood.⁵⁰



Bronze relief monument of Avard T. Fairbanks's original sculpture depicting John the Baptist restoring the Aaronic priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, Oakland (formerly Harmony), Pennsylvania, 2002. The monument was dedicated on June 18, 1960, by the presiding bishopric of the LDS Church—Joseph L. Wirthlin, Thorpe B. Isaacson, and Carl W. Buehner. Photograph courtesy Alexander L. Baugh.

Conclusions

When Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery “retired” in the “woods” away from the “abodes of men” to pray, and then “repaired” to the river to perform baptisms as commanded by an angel, the evidence suggests they elected to go in the sugar bush on the north end of Joseph’s property where he kept the golden plates hidden from his neighbors. While there they heard the voice of Jesus Christ, saw John the Baptist and heard his instructions, and knelt as John restored priesthood to them. John the Baptist’s ordination marked the beginning of the process. Baptism in the river, confirmation, and ordination to priesthood afterward, and restoration of additional priesthood authority and keys at other times and in other locations, continued the process.

Appreciating the geography of the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood helps us understand more completely the beginnings of this process, inspiring faith as we recognize that Joseph and Oliver both consistently referred to a specific location years later. It also fosters a greater understanding of the scriptures as we recognize more fully the instructions of John the Baptist to “go and be baptized” and Joseph Smith’s announcement of the fulfillment of that command: “accordingly we went and were baptized” (JS—History 1:70–71).

Notes

1. In addition to Joseph Smith—History 1:68, see also, Joseph Smith, Sermon, March 10, 1844, Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1980), 327, 332–33; John W. Welch, ed., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 236, 240–241, 243.

2. Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 332.

3. For example, see “Biography. Life of the Rev. David Brainerd,” *Missionary Register*, March 1817, 87; John Leeds Bozman, *A Sketch of the History of Maryland* (Baltimore: Edward J. Coale, 1817), 255; Robert Sinclair, “Agricultural Remarks,” *The American Farmer*, August 12, 1825, 163; Solomon Southwick, “On the Use of Lehigh Coal,” *The Plough Boy and Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, April 7, 1821, 355; Miron Winslow, *A Sketch of Missions, or History of the Principal Attempts to Propagate Christianity Among the Heathen* (Andover, MD: Flagg and Gould, 1819), 201; Oscar Jewell Harvey, *A History of Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania* (Wilkes-Barre, PA: Raeder Press, 1909), 1:177.

4. For example, see Mrs. George A. Perkins, *Early Times on the Susquehanna* (Binghamton, NY: Herald Company, 1870), 46, 195, 265–266, 268, 272. Perkins used the phrase “living on the banks of this river” to specifically identify a group of individuals actually living on the edge of the river rather than just “at the river.” *Ibid.*, 195.

5. See “Sunday Lessons for Little Learners,” *Juvenile Instructor* 10, no. 24 (November 27, 1875): 285; also George Q. Cannon, “Joseph Smith, The Prophet,” *Juvenile Instructor* 1, no. 6 (March 15, 1866): 21; Edward Tullidge, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet*

(New York: Tullidge and Crandell, 1878), 42; George Q. Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructors' Office, 1888), 58.

6. John Taylor, "God Operates for the Benefit of All," *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–1886), 26:107.

7. Charles William Carter, stereograph image of the Assembly Hall, ca. 1885, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

8. John Henry Evans, *One Hundred Years of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1905), 105.

9. John Henry Evans, *Birth of Mormonism in Picture: Scenes and Incidents in Early Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1909), 49.

10. John Henry Evans, *Joseph Smith: An American Prophet* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 332. The earliest known reference to a priesthood restoration on the banks of the Susquehanna River came seven years after the Anderson photograph was first published when Anthony W. Ivins wrote: "Desiring greater light he [Joseph] and Oliver went to a secluded spot on the bank of the Susquehanna River, and engaged in prayer." Anthony W. Ivins, "What is a Christian?" *Improvement Era* 29, no. 8 (June 1926): 710.

11. William Berrett, *The Restored Church*, 1st ed., (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1936), 86.

12. A few Mormon authors did not adopt the perspective that the Aaronic Priesthood was restored at the river's edge and continued to rely on Joseph and Oliver's descriptions of the event. In *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, B. H. Roberts skirted the issue entirely and mentioned only that Joseph and Oliver prayed and received a visitation, but did not specify where the event took place. See B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I*, 6 vols. (Provo UT: Corporation of the President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965), 1:177–79. Joseph Fielding Smith's *Essentials in Church History*, first published in 1922, went through twenty-eight editions in English and three in Spanish. Smith continued to note through his last edition, published in 1979 (posthumously), that Joseph and Oliver "retired to the woods" to pray before receiving a visit from John the Baptist, after which the angel commanded the two men to "go down to the water and baptize each other." Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book 1979), 57. In an article by Charles W. Penrose published in 1923, the editors included a photograph of a farm with trees on a hillside taken by George Edward Anderson with a caption that read, "Near the wilderness where the Melchizedek Priesthood was restored," then in the text Penrose notes that Joseph and Oliver "were led to retire to the woods to pray in regard to the ordinance of baptism." See Charles W. Penrose "The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era* 26, no. 11 (September 1923): 955. For additional details about how the Aaronic Priesthood restoration site became associated with taking place on the banks of the Susquehanna River, see Mark Lyman Staker, "The Joseph and Emma Smith Home and Farm in Harmony, Pennsylvania: A Physical and Cultural Profile," unpublished manuscript, 29–34, 2010, Historic Sites Files, Church History Library.

13. Thomas F. Gordon, *A Gazetteer of the State of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: T. Belknap, 1832), 194.

14. Isaac Hale entries in Harmony Township, Susquehanna County, Tax Assessment Records, 1828 and 1829, Susquehanna County Historical Society, Montrose, Pennsylvania.

15. Michael Morse account in David Hale, Daybook, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Although the island is currently part of Joseph Smith's farm, the records do not indicate who hired Morse to plow it. Floods frequently change the landscape in the river to the point that this island

could have been different in location and appearance in 1829.

16. Margaret Hawes Little to Carter Eldredge Grant, August 19, 1962, Carter E. Grant research file, 1955–63, microfilm of holograph, Church History Library.

17. Bryan L. Welton, Lee Foster, Robert Hansen, and Keith Zobell, “Forest Inventory Report: The Aaronic Priesthood Site,” unpublished report, 30, Natural Resource Services, Physical Facilities Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007. When tree experts Patricia M. O’Donnell and Robert F. Parrott walked the site as part of a cultural landscape study, they noted numerous old sugar maples still concentrated in the northernmost parts of the Smith farm. Patricia M. O’Donnell and Robert F. Parrott, personal communication with the author, August 10, 2010.

18. See F. Reed’s statement, “many of them take a deep interest in the welfare of their brethren in the bush,” in “State of Religion in Upper Canada,” *The Methodist Magazine* 4, no. 9 (September 1821):352. One definition of the term “bush” or “bush lot,” is “a large uncleared area thickly covered with mixed plant growth, trees, etc., as a jungle.” *Bush* in the Canadian vernacular is defined as “a small, wooded lot, esp. a farm lot with trees left standing to provide firewood, fence posts, etc.” See “Dictionary.com” (version 1.0.1), at <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/bush>, retrieved September 28, 2006.

19. “Sugar bush” is defined as “A grove of sugar maples used as a source of maple syrup or maple sugar, and is also called a sugar orchard.” *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* 4th ed. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000). It is also defined as “an orchard or grove of sugar maples.” Dictionary.com (version 1.0.1) at [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sugar bush](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sugar+bush), retrieved September 28, 2006.

20. Tax Records, Harmony Township, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, 1822.

21. Welton, et al., “Forest Inventory Report,” 5, 19–23, 30.

22. See Chapman Carr, Journal, 1813–14, Susquehanna County Historical Society, Montrose, Pennsylvania.

23. Ramathus Stoker, *Centennial History: Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: R. T. Peck and Co., 1887), 554–55.

24. Joseph Knight Sr., Manuscript of the History of Joseph Smith, 2, circa. 1835–47, Church History Library.

25. John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* (Philadelphia: Robert Carter, W. J. and J.K. Simon, 1842), 242.

26. Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 405–06.

27. Cary J. Mock, Jan Mojzisek, Michele McWaters, Michael Chenoweth, and David W. Stahle, “The winter of 1827–1828 over eastern North America: a season of extraordinary climatic anomalies, societal impacts, and false spring,” *Climatic Change* 83 (2007), 87–115; and David M. Ludlum, *Early American Winters II 1821–1870* (Boston: American Meteorological Society, 1968), 10.

28. Robert F. Parrott, conversation with the author, 2010. Parrott’s conclusions are supported in Welton, et al., “Forest Inventory Report.”

29. See Wilford Wood to George Albert Smith, J. Reuben Clark, Jr., and David O. McKay, July 1, 1948,” Wilford C. Wood collection, Church History Library. See also the photograph of Wilford Wood standing in the brush in the Wilford C. Wood photograph collection, Church History Library.

30. J. B. Wilkinson, *The Annals of Binghamton of 1840* (Binghamton, NY: Cooke & Davis, Printers, 1840), 114.

31. Peter C. Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity: Economic Culture along the Upper Susquehanna, 1700–1800* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 20, 102–3.

32. Isaac Hale, Will, Susquehanna County Will Books, Susquehanna County Court-

house, Montrose, Pennsylvania, 1:178. Isaac notes the location of his garden in the will where the railroad line currently runs. The placement of orchards on the north side of the road right behind his house and buttressing up against the maple grove only leaves the land in the floodplain available to graze the twenty sheep he also mentions in his will.

33. Tax Records, Harmony Township, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, 1828, 1829, 1830; Newel Knight, "Newel Knight Journals," in *Scraps of Biography. Tenth Book of the Faith-Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor's Office, 1883), 56–57; Mark Ashurst-McGee, "The Josiah Stowell Jr.—John S. Fullmer Correspondence," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999): 113.

34. Joseph Smith accounts in David Hale, Daybook, January 22, 1828.

35. Knight, Manuscript of the History of Joseph Smith, 2.

36. Rex B. Hawes, Statement, Baird Collection, Perry Special Collections. This area would have been part of the "small farm" that Joseph Smith operated. See Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 1:28. The earliest photographs of the property taken in the 1880s depict a treeless area in the floodplain. See photographs included in Staker, *The Joseph and Emma Smith Home in Harmony, Pennsylvania*.

37. Staker, "The Joseph and Emma Smith Home in Harmony, Pennsylvania," 35–36.

38. Wilkinson, *The Annals of Binghamton of 1840*, 3.

39. Ruth Leone Thompson Jacob, *Famines, Fires, & Festivals: A History of Colesville, 1785–1978* (Colesville, NY: Town of Colesville, 1978), 8.

40. *The Bradford Settler* as reported in *The Wayne Sentinel*, July 24, 1829, 1.

41. See Nathaniel Parker Willis, *Rural Letters and other Records of Thought at Leisure* (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849), 126–29.

42. Daniel Sterling placed an advertisement in the local newspaper on April 27, 1829, with the notice that he needed workers to help rebuild the dam "as soon as the water in the river is low enough to engage in the business." "Hands Wanted," *The Susquehanna Register* 4, no. 18 (May 1, 1829): 3. Sterling did not indicate how low the water needed to be to begin construction. However, since advertisements typically ran for three issues before the advertiser needed to pay for an additional running, and since this advertisement ran until June 12 for a total of seven issues, the last time Sterling paid for the advertisement was probably June 1 or June 8, marking roughly the point where he deemed water was again low enough to begin dam construction, or he had enough workmen who had agreed to the project that he no longer needed to advertise.

43. Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 243. Lucy Mack Smith uses this same word in her account. She notes that Joseph received "a commandment from God that he and Oliver should repair to the water." Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 439.

44. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 13 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 8:455–56.

45. Joseph used this same wording of "go" and "went" in his recounting of priesthood restoration in Nauvoo. See Joseph Smith, Sermon, March 10, 1844 as cited in Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 327.

46. "Dear Brother," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1 (October 1834): 14.

47. This number is based on records of river traffic recorded between April 6–19, 1829, as published in the *Bradford Settler* and reprinted in *The Wayne Sentinel*, July 24, 1829, 1.

48. Cannon, "Joseph Smith, The Prophet," 21.

49. In Henderson, south of Susquehanna County, William Brown noted May began with a number of cold and cloudy days with several frosts. Brown indicates that as late as

May 13, the area had frost, followed by a clear day, then a cloudy and cold May 15, followed by a day of rain, thunder, hail, and general cold weather. A few days later temperatures finally turned warm, and May ended with a very warm week. William Brown, *Diary January 1, 1829–December 31, 1830*, microfilm, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. For additional weather details in the Susquehanna County seat of Montrose, see Isaac Post, *Diary*, Susquehanna County Historical Society, Montrose, Pennsylvania.

50. *History of the Church*, 1:39–40.