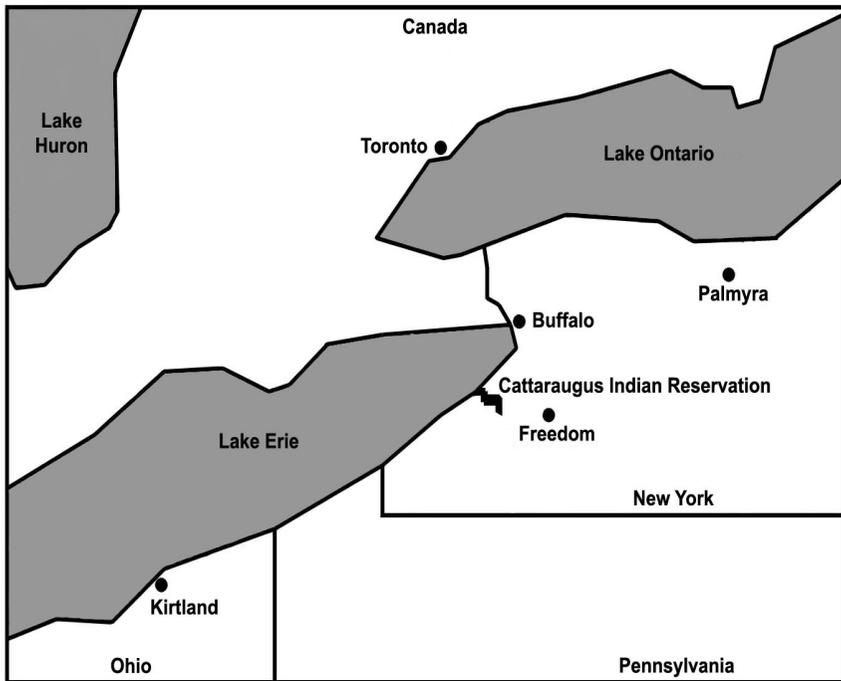

Finding Saints: Mormon Conversions in Freedom, New York

Mark A. Steele

Early Mormon missionary work often occurred according to the pattern stated in Jeremiah, “I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion” (Jeremiah 3:14). However, in special circumstances, entire communities were caught up in the message of Mormonism. Examples include the Colesville, New York, Saints, anchored by the Joseph and Polly Knight family; the Campbellite congregations under Sidney Rigdon in north-eastern Ohio; and members of the United Brethren in Herefordshire, England. In more recent times, we have seen this happen again in nations like Samoa, Ghana, and Nigeria, where significant numbers in a single community or region convert in a short time.

This conversion pattern, albeit on a smaller scale, occurred in 1834-35, in the small township of Freedom, New York, about forty miles southeast of Buffalo. In the space of a few months, over forty people in this rural community were baptized. The stories of their conversions illustrate how a crescendo of conversion can occur and what lasting effects it can have on them and on the community. This paper will examine how these conversions occurred and what factors helped cause them.

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Map showing the location of Freedom, New York. Map by Alexander L. Baugh.

Freedom Township

Freedom Township lies in the northeast corner of Cattaraugus County, in the southwest corner of New York. Much of the land in this county was opened for settlement by whites after a treaty in 1797 with the Seneca Indian nation, which also set aside several areas of land in Cattaraugus and nearby counties as reservations for the Senecas. It also allowed them to hunt and fish throughout the county. The Holland Land Company then purchased thousands of acres for resell and settlement.¹

The first white settlers arrived in this area in 1809. Much of Cattaraugus County consisted of wooded rolling hills with narrow stream valleys. In the center of Freedom Township, a wide valley provided an area where trees could be cleared and farms started. The new settlers took on the backbreaking task of clearing forest, building roads and homes, and laying out farms. Freedom Township was created in 1820, and by its first census in 1825, over nine hundred people lived there.² Two settlements sprang up, the town of Freedom

situated on a plateau in the northeastern section of the valley, and the Fish Lake settlement alongside Fish Lake and the stream that flowed northward from it, about a mile southwest of the town. The town center sported homes and a few small churches. The Fish Lake settlement boasted a mill and a schoolhouse to complement its homes. Leading early settlers and town leaders such as the Metcalfs, Sawyers, and Cheneys, lived near town. Warren A. Cowdery, the older brother of Oliver Cowdery, lived at Fish Lake along with other more recent arrivals such as the Hydes and Miles families. Farming was the primary occupation at the time, but the area also had dairies, gristmills, sawmills, quarries, and a clothing mill.³

Early Exposure to Mormonism

Warren Cowdery, Freedom's physician and postmaster, built the town's first brick home in 1828. He was introduced to Mormonism by Oliver, who kept him abreast of the development of the Church. In turn, Warren shared what he learned with his neighbors. William Hyde, whose family lived next to the Cowderys, wrote that Warren "obtained from his brother, Oliver at an early date some of the proof sheets to the Book of Mormon, some of which we had the privilege of perusing, and we did not peruse any faster than we believed."⁴ Warren would have also shared information about the new faith with his neighbor and brother-in-law, Samuel Miles. Warren's baptism date is not known, but it was before November 1831.⁵

In about 1820, the Ira and Wealtha Hatch family settled in Farmersville, situated south of Freedom. They had many dealings with the Seneca tribe, which led to a connection with the Mormons. Their history reads:

Through Wealtha's friendship with the Indians she was able to borrow one [of the copies of the Book of Mormon] and was the first one of the family to read it and wanted to join the Church immediately. Her husband and near relatives advised waiting a while because of persecution. She decided to take their advice and waited, hoping that more of her immediate family would be converted to the truth, but none of the others, except her husband, were readying themselves to join this unpopular sect. Early in 1832 a hole was cut in the ice on the river, and Wealtha was baptized . . . and confirmed.⁶

It is interesting to note how Wealtha received her copy of the Book of Mormon. In late October 1830, Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer Jr., Ziba (Richard) Peterson, and Parley P. Pratt preached to a group of Seneca Indians living on the Cattaraugus Reservation while passing through western New York en route to Missouri on the Lamanitemission. Parley recorded:

After traveling for some days we called on an Indian nation at or near Buffalo; and spent part of a day with them, instructing them in the knowledge of the record of

their forefathers. We were kindly received, and much interest was manifested by them on hearing this news. We made a present of two copies of the Book of Mormon to certain of them who could read and repaired to Buffalo.⁷

Quite possibly, the Book of Mormon loaned to Weltha Hatch was one of those presented to the Senecas by the missionaries to the Lamanites.

Recruiting for Zion's Camp

In March 1834, conversions to Mormonism increased, ignited by the call-up of volunteers to march to Missouri in Zion's Camp. It was at this time that Joseph Smith and Parley P. Pratt stopped in Freedom to enlist recruits and share the Restored gospel. The pair arrived on March 9. The Prophet's history recounts their activities in the community during their three-day stay:

Sunday, March 9.— . . . stayed at Mr. Warren A. Cowdery's where we were blessed with a full enjoyment of temporal and spiritual blessings even all we needed, or were worthy to receive.

Monday 10.—Met our appointment and preached to a great congregation; and at evening again preached to an overflowing house. After meeting, I proposed if any wished to obey, and would make manifest, we would stay and administer to another meeting. A young man of the Methodist order arose and testified his faith in the fullness of the Gospel and desired to be baptized. We appointed another meeting for the next day.

Tuesday 11.—Fulfilled our appointment and baptized Heman T. Hyde, after which we rode nine miles, and put up at Steward's tavern.⁸

Parley's account of their visit to Freedom reads similar to Joseph Smith's: "We visited Freedom, Catteraugus County, N. Y. . . . and preached several discourses, to which the people listened with great interest; we were kindly and hospitably entertained among them. We baptized a young man name Heman Hyde."⁹ Heman was the older brother of William Hyde. Their parents, Heman Sr. and Polly, had moved to Freedom twelve years earlier. Heman Sr. had set up a clothing mill and helped establish the first Presbyterian church in the community. Polly was upset at Heman's conversion to Mormonism. Parley wrote that "His mother . . . told me afterwards that she would much rather have followed him to an earthly grave than to have seen him baptized."¹⁰ However, within a matter of a few weeks, the entire family joined the Church, including Polly. William reported, "On the 7th of April, 1834, my father and myself were baptized, and soon after all the family were numbered in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."¹¹

Parley and Joseph moved on, but other missionaries took up the slack. John Gould and an Elder Mathews had been commissioned "to prepare and

gather up the companies in the churches in that region.”¹² Just a few weeks later Orson Pratt and his companion John Murdock arrived on their way back to Kirtland and found other missionaries like Leonard Rich fully engaged in preaching to the people. Orson immediately began preaching and holding meetings in the Fish Lake schoolhouse and the Hyde home. Baptisms started coming. April 2 was a typical day: “Preached at Fish Lake schoolhouse upon the 4th Chapt. of Ephesians and read the Articles and covenant and laws, and the 48th chapter of the Book of Commandments. After meeting there were four baptized, viz: Joseph Fountain, Caroline Fountain, Amasa Cheney and Olive Cheney. In the evening we held a confirmation meeting and confirmed those mentioned above.”¹³ Orson stayed in Freedom two weeks and recorded the baptisms and confirmations of twenty-four people, including members of the Calkins, Cheney, Decker, Fountain, Hyde, Lawson, McFerson, Metcalf, Miles, Sawyer, Smith, Sparks, and Wheeler families (see Appendix).¹⁴ Combined with the baptisms from other missionaries, within just three months over forty people joined the Church. A week or so after Orson Pratt and John Murdock left Freedom, Parley came through on his way back to Kirtland. He noted with great satisfaction the branch that had been raised up in a few short weeks. Heman T. Hyde accompanied him to Kirtland and participated in Zion’s Camp that summer. Parley wrote that the Freedom Branch formed a nucleus from which “the light spread and the souls were gathered into the fold in all the regions round.”¹⁵

After seeing many in the community baptized, and hearing countless sermons, Ira Hatch converted and was baptized in June. The schoolteacher, Eunice Sawyer, daughter of a prominent citizen, also joined. Rufus Metcalf, one of the founders of Freedom, joined along with his wife and daughter. Samuel Miles Jr., seven at the time, later wrote of attending a missionary-led meeting at Farmersville in the Ira Hatch home. “After the close of the meeting a few proceeded to a near by stream where the ice was cut, it being midwinter, where baptisms were attended to.”¹⁶

Growth and Dispersal

Missionary work continued in the area. In November, Warren Cowdery was called to be the “presiding high priest . . . in the land of Freedom and the regions round about” (D&C 106:1). At the Freedom conference in January 1835, where representatives from eleven western New York branches attended, Warren reported that the Freedom Branch had seventy-four members in good standing. John Gould was the chair and Heman Hyde the secretary of the gathering.¹⁷

The influence of the converts spread beyond the Freedom area. For example, Prudence Miles's brother, William Marks, visited his sister. He studied the gospel and was also converted, later becoming the Nauvoo stake president. Prudence's parents living in Pawlet, Vermont, apparently were also baptized. Other members of the Calkins, Cheney, and Hatch families subsequently joined the Church.

The branch began to decline as members felt the call to gather with the body of the Church in Kirtland or Missouri. However, Church leaders continued to make visits to the area. Sidney Rigdon and several of the newly called apostles attended a conference later in 1835. In October, Heman T. Hyde and Eunice Sawyer were married, uniting the two young single adults in the branch. The Miles family left in 1835, settling in Far West. The Cowderys removed to Kirtland in 1836. Warren became editor of the *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* in 1837 but within a few months became disaffected from the Church. In 1838, Ira and Wealtha Hatch received their patriarchal blessings from Joseph Smith Sr. in Freedom. But by this time, most of the Saints were moving on. After Ira and Wealtha moved to Nauvoo in 1840, the Freedom chapter of Church history essentially came to an end.

Not everyone left, at least not to Mormon destinations. Rufus Metcalf and his family returned. He died and was buried in Freedom in 1841. Eunice Sawyer Hyde returned in 1846, after the death of her husband and child. Nehemiah Sparks left Freedom but stayed in New York until his death in 1876. But a surprising number stayed with the main body of the Mormons. At least eighteen of the more than forty who were baptized in early 1834 were still active twelve years later, evidenced by their receiving their endowments in the Nauvoo Temple in 1846.¹⁸ At least four of the young men—William Hyde, Meltiar and Orrin Hatch, and Samuel Miles Jr. —served in the Mormon Battalion. Those who remained in the Church became pillars of communities in Utah, Idaho, and Arizona.

Effects on Freedom

The Mormon excitement had a lasting effect on Freedom Township. The Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches all lost members. The Methodists took the hardest hit. The local history reported that “the Mormon excitement . . . split and disrupted the church to such an extent that it has since lived a precarious existence.”¹⁹ The exodus of Mormon converts and their families also contributed, at least to some degree, in the decline of population in the township.²⁰ Significantly, Rufus Metcalk and Nehemiah Sparks, both of whom converted to Mormonism, subsequently drifted from the faith

and returned to Freedom, but they never lost their Mormon label. Both men were noted as being “zealous” Mormons, and Sparks was remembered by his nickname, “the Prophet.”²¹

Freedom’s encounter with Mormonism in the 1830s remained permanently embedded in the community’s history. Note the following from the county’s 1879 published history:

In concluding these historical sketches of the churches in the town of Freedom, it may be proper to add in the same connection some facts in regard to the Mormon excitement of [1834-]1835, and the success attending the labors of the Mormon leaders in their efforts to obtain proselytes.

At the time mentioned, the quiet precincts of Fish Lake neighborhood were invaded by Joe Smith, Sidney Rigdon, John Gould, and Parley Pratt. They made their headquarters at Rufus Metcalf’s and Dr. Warren Cowdery’s. Meetings were held, daily and nightly, in barns and dwelling-houses, and a prodigious excitement pervaded the minds of many people in that immediate vicinity. Among those residents who were conspicuous as believers in the humbug, were Dr. Cowdery, Rufus Metcalf, Nehemiah Sparks, Orrin Cheney, Hurd Cheney, Capt. Heman Hyde, Heman T. Hyde and wife, and Barber Lawson. As a result, 30 men and women were induced to join the Mormons, and emigrated with them to Kirtland, Ohio. Some came back and renounced their faith in Mormonism, while others continued with them to the end of their lives.²²

Freedom Township today has a population of 2,400 with the majority of the population centered in the northwest corner of the township. Schools, businesses, and most churches have moved there too. Woods of elm and maple have reclaimed the Fish Lake settlement, and the quiet precincts of Fish Lake neighborhood are invaded now by Boy Scouts, after the area—which was re-named Crystal Lake—became the Scouthaven Boy Scout Camp in 1919.

Four conditions came together the 1830s in Freedom to create the crescendo of Mormon conversions. First, the gospel message had been percolating for several years. Early converts, like Warren Cowdery and Wealtha Hatch, shared their religious convictions with friends and family, allowing for the gospel message to grow in the community’s consciousness. Second, Freedom was a tight-knit religious community of people who were searching for religious answers, which Mormonism provided, at least for some. Third, the message of Mormonism was actively proselyted by missionaries and newly baptized members. And fourth, those families who converted became committed together. Because of these conditions, the flame of Mormon conversion introduced a new, albeit temporary, Latter-day Saint community in Freedom. More significantly, however, it generated a multi-generational legacy of believing Latter-day Saints.

Notes

1. *History of Cattaraugus County, New York* (Philadelphia, L. H. Everts, 1879), 81.
2. *History of Cattaraugus County, New York*, 80.
3. *History of Cattaraugus County, New York*, 390-91.
4. William Hyde, Private Journal of William Hyde, typescript, 6, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
5. See Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 215.
6. Idella M. Armstrong and Veoma M. Stahle, "Meltiah Hatch, Colonizer," typescript, 13, Family History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
7. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 35.
8. 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), 2:42-43 (hereafter *History of the Church*).
9. Pratt, *Autobiography*, 89.
10. Pratt, *Autobiography*, 89.
11. Hyde, Journal, 6.
12. *History of the Church*, 2:42.
13. Orson Pratt, *The Orson Pratt Journals*, Elden J. Watson, comp. (Salt Lake City: Elden J. Watson, 1975), 38.
14. See Pratt, *Orson Pratt Journals*, 37-47.
15. Pratt, *Autobiography*, 89.
16. Samuel Miles, Biography of Samuel Miles, the son of Samuel Miles and Prudence Marks, 1-2, Family History Library.
17. Warren A. Cowdery, January 28, 1835 letter, in *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 5 (February 1835): 75.
18. See Nauvoo Temple Endowment Register, microfilm, Family History Library.
19. *History of Cattaraugus County, New York*, 397.
20. Freedom Township's population in 1835 was 1,800, but by 1875 it had declined to 1,340, *History of Cattaraugus County, New York*, 80. To what degree the Mormon out-migration affected the population decline would be impossible to measure, but it had to have had some bearing.
21. *History of Cattaraugus County, New York*, 391.
22. *History of Cattaraugus County, New York*, 398. Another county history, published in 1961 included a paragraph on the Mormon "excitement" of 1834-35. See *150 Years of Freedom, 1811-1961* (n.p.: Freedom Sesquicentennial Committee, 1961), 5.

Appendix

Biographical Sketches of Mormon Converts in Freedom Township, New York

Israel and Hannah Calkins

Israel Calkins, born in 1766 in Oblong, New York, married Mary Griggs in 1785. They had ten children. After she died in 1807, Israel married a cousin, Hannah Calkins, born about 1768. They had four more children. They and some of their children moved to Freedom in the 1820s. Samuel Miles refers to sons Luman and Chauncey being part of the Freedom Branch. At least three other children, Martha, Israel, and William, also joined. By 1836, they were living in Westfield, New York. Israel and Hannah received their patriarchal blessings that year from Joseph Smith Sr. in Freedom. By 1840, Israel, Hannah, and their five children's families were in Nauvoo. Israel was called to be one of ten bishops there. In 1846, Israel, his four sons in the Church, and their wives all received their endowments in the Nauvoo Temple.

Israel died in 1848 in Hamburg, Iowa, a small community about thirty miles south of Winter Quarters. His son Chauncey remained there with his family. Luman ended up in Oregon. Israel Jr. and William and their families continued with the Church and settled in Payson, Utah. Martha Calkins Fillmore and her family had moved to the Wisconsin pineries north of Nauvoo. Ten years after her husband's death in 1850, Martha and most of her children immigrated to Utah, also settling in Payson.

Aaron and Mehitable Wells Cheney

Aaron Cheney, born in 1787 in Maine, married Mehitable Wells in 1807. She was born in 1787 in Armenia, New York. They moved to Freedom about 1817, following Aaron's parents, Benjamin and Eunice. Aaron's parents died during the 1820s. He was a trustee of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Sandusky, a village just west of Freedom. Aaron and Mehitable were baptized by Orson Pratt in April 1834, along with their children Amasa (and his wife Hannah), Orrin, and Olive. Hurd Cheney, a brother to Aaron, also joined. The following year, Aaron and Mehitable's three other children, Aaron Jr., Elam, and Ezekiel were baptized. The family moved to Kirtland in 1835 and started for Missouri in 1835 with the Kirtland Camp. Due to illness, the family dropped out of the company and stayed about a year and a half in Decatur,

Illinois. According to family history, Joseph Smith stayed with the family on his trip to Washington D.C. in late 1839.

By 1840 the family settled in Nauvoo. In 1846, Aaron and Mehitable received their endowments in the Nauvoo Temple, and Aaron married a second wife, Sarah Pizzen. Soon afterward, the families left for Winter Quarters. That summer, Aaron's sons Amasa and Aaron left the Mormon migration and settled in Millersburg, Iowa, about sixty miles east of Des Moines, where they lived the rest of their lives. Orrin had remained behind and settled in Pennsylvania, but the rest of the children and their families came west with Aaron and Mehitable. Sarah came in 1849. At some point after their arrival in Utah, Aaron lived exclusively with Sarah in Ogden, and Mehitable lived with their daughter Olive in Grantsville. Aaron died in 1861, and Mehitable died in 1869. Their son Elam pioneered several locations in Utah, finishing out his life in Arizona, while Ezekiel settled in Idaho.

Warren and Patience Simonds Cowdery

Born in Poultney, Vermont, in 1788, Warren married Patience Simonds in 1814. They moved to the Freedom area as early as 1815. He became postmaster in 1824. They received Book of Mormon proof sheets and other communications from Warren's brother Oliver. His baptism occurred before November 1831. Warren hosted many of the missionary meetings in Freedom in 1834, and he was called to be the presiding high priest in the Freedom area in November 1834. The Cowderys moved to Kirtland in early 1836, where he became a secretary for Joseph Smith. In 1837 he served briefly as editor for the *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*. He left the Church in 1838. Warren was a justice of the peace in Kirtland and died there on February 23, 1851. Patience died in 1856 in New York.

Isaac and Harriet Wheeler Decker

Isaac Decker, born in 1799, married Harriet Wheeler in 1820. She was born in 1803 in New York. They moved to Freedom in the 1820s. They participated in the "Mormon excitement" of 1834 but did not join the Church until after they had moved to New Portage, Ohio. They moved to Kirtland, Missouri, and Nauvoo. The Deckers separated in 1843, and Harriet married Lorenzo Dow Young. Two of their daughters, Clara and Lucy, later became wives of Brigham Young. Both Isaac and Harriet were in the 1847 Brigham

Young pioneer company. Isaac was a farmer. Both died in Salt Lake City, Harriet in 1871, and Isaac in 1873.

Ira Stearns and Wealtha Bradford Hatch

Ira S. Hatch was born to Ira and Lucinda Hatch in 1802. He moved with his parents near Farmersville, New York, south of Freedom, when he was in his late teens. At the age of twenty-two he married Wealtha (or Welthea) Bradford and set up household in Farmersville. The Hatch family history reports that Wealtha was given a Book of Mormon presented to the Indians in late 1830 by the Mormon missionaries to the Lamanites. She read it, was convinced of its truth, and was baptized in early 1832. The rest of the family remained aloof until Mormon missionaries began teaching in the area in early 1834.

Ira became convinced of the truth of the gospel and was baptized June 1, 1834, by John Gould. At some point before this, he determined to assist in the construction of the Kirtland Temple and went on his own to donate a sum. According to the Hatch family history, he was greeted by name by Joseph Smith, who said he had been expecting the donation, which would be used to build the pulpit of the temple. In 1836 Ira and Wealtha were given patriarchal blessings by Joseph Smith Sr. in Freedom. They remained in Farmersville until 1840, when they moved to Fountain Green, Illinois, about twenty miles east of Nauvoo. A year later, Wealtha died, having never recovered from the birth of their last child in 1840. She left seven children, ages sixteen to one. In 1842, Ira married again and was made an elder. Over the next few years, each of his children was baptized.

In 1846 the family moved to Winter Quarters, where two sons, Meltiar and Orin, joined the Mormon Battalion. After their return, the family went to Utah in 1849, settling in the Bountiful area. Ira died in 1869.

Heman and Polly Tilton Hyde

Heman Hyde and Polly W. Tilton, were both born in Vermont in 1788 and 1786, respectively. They were married in 1810. Heman served in the War of 1812. The Hydies moved to Freedom in 1822 and cleared a farm and established a woolen mill on the stream that flowed north from Fish Lake. Their farm property joined Warren Cowdery's. According to their son William, they heard about the Church from Warren, who shared Book of Mormon proof sheets he was receiving from his brother Oliver. Heman was on the board of trustees for the First Presbyterian Church of Freedom. Their oldest son, He-

man Tilton, was baptized by Joseph Smith and Parley Pratt, the first of the 1834 baptisms. Heman and Polly were baptized by Orson Pratt a few weeks later, and their sons Rosel and William not much longer afterward. In February 1836 they moved to Kirtland. They tried to move to Missouri in 1838 but were immediately driven out of the state. They first settled in Quincy, then later in Nauvoo.

In 1840 their son William (born 1818) returned to Freedom to preach to friends and family who had remained there, and baptized ten people. The family moved to Winter Quarters in 1846, where William joined the Mormon Battalion. Heman and Polly moved to Salt Lake in 1848, with their sons joining them the next year. Heman served on the Salt Lake high council. Polly died in 1862, Heman in 1869. Their sons helped settle Salt Lake, Lehi, Kaysville, and Cache Valley, William settling (appropriately enough) in Hyde Park.

Heman Tilton and Eunice Sawyer Hyde

Heman Tilton, often called “Tilton,” was about ten when his parents moved to Freedom in 1822. He was the first one in the family to respond to the gospel and was baptized in March 1834 by Joseph Smith and Parley P. Pratt. He participated in Zion’s Camp. In October 1835 he married Eunice Sawyer. Four months later they moved to Kirtland with the Hyde family. They were turned back from Missouri in 1838, settling in Quincy, Illinois. In May of 1842 Tilton died, leaving his pregnant wife with two young children.

Eunice was born about 1814, one of the first children born in Freedom. Her father, Earl Sawyer, had settled in Freedom in 1811. He farmed and manufactured cheese and was the first town clerk. Eunice was a schoolteacher in Freedom and enthusiastically joined the Mormons. Samuel Miles remembered meetings in Freedom “where the gifts of tongues was made manifest and notably the interpretation of tongues by Eunice Sawyer a young woman who had received the gospel the only one of her family. She made strong impressions on my early boyhood, being one of my first school teachers.” After Tilton’s death in 1842, she continued with the Hyde family, receiving her endowment in the Nauvoo Temple in 1846 at the same time as her in-laws (Heman and Polly). In the fall of 1846, her youngest child died. Discouraged, she returned with her two remaining children to her family in Freedom. Sadly, her son Heman later died at the battle of Chancellorsville in 1863 in the Civil War.

Dimon McFerson

William and Miriam McFerson moved to Freedom in 1818 from New Hampshire. William died in 1825 and was buried in Freedom. Miriam belonged to the Baptist church. Her son Dimon, born in 1809, was baptized by Orson Pratt. According to family tradition, Miriam and others in the family also were baptized. Dimon moved to Caldwell County, Missouri, marrying Amilla Savage in 1839. She died in 1841, and he married Mary Ann Nease in 1845 in Nauvoo. They lived at Winter Quarters from 1846 to 1851. When they came west, they settled in Kaysville, Utah. He was a farmer and cooper and served as a city councilman and justice of the peace, dying in 1875.

Rufus and Deliverance Adelia Davis Metcalf

Rufus Metcalf, born in Vermont in 1786, married Deliverance Adelia Davis. They were one of the first settlers in Freedom. Their son Rufus, born in 1812, was the first white child born in the community. Their home was also the site of the first Church meeting in Freedom. They were members of the First Baptist Church. Rufus was a farmer and cheese manufacturer. Orson Pratt mentions baptizing Adelia and their daughter Delia. The 1879 history indicates Rufus was known as a “zealous adherent and believed in that faith” and left Freedom for Kirtland, but the family returned at some point. Rufus died in Freedom in 1841. Metcalf descendants lived in Freedom into the 1900s.

Samuel Sr. and Prudence Miles

Samuel Miles Sr., born in 1795, married Sarah Simonds in 1807, and they settled in Pawlet, Vermont. They had six children. She died in 1824. In 1825, Samuel married Prudence Marks, also of Pawlet, and the couple had four children, in addition to one child she had from a previous marriage. They moved to Attica, New York, then to Freedom in 1830, living next to Warren Cowdery, whose wife, Patience, was Sarah’s sister. Samuel worked as a farmer and a tailor. They became acquainted with Mormonism through Warren and became serious in their investigation in 1834 when missionaries started teaching in Freedom. Their son Samuel recorded going to a meeting at the Hatch home in Farmersville and witnessing several baptisms in the icy stream. The father, Samuel, and an older son, Joel, were baptized in April by Orson Pratt.

Prudence and a daughter followed soon after. The Miles named their newest child, born just a week before Pratt's arrival in Freedom, after Orson.

The Miles family left Freedom in the fall of 1835 and settled in a branch of the Church at New Portage, Ohio, for the winter. After the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, they moved to Far West, Missouri, and were driven out with the rest of the Saints in 1839, moving to Nauvoo. Over time, seven of their eleven children joined the Church: Ira, Eliza, Joel, Samuel, William, Sarah, and Orson. Samuel served in the Mormon Battalion. Some of the married children moved to the Salt Lake Valley as early as 1847. Samuel Sr. died in St. Louis in December 1847 while returning from a trip visiting relatives in Connecticut. Prudence and the rest of the family moved to Salt Lake in 1848, where she died four years later of "lung fever." The children helped colonize Utah and Idaho.

Nehemiah and Lucy Sparkweather Sparks

Nehemiah Sparks, and Lucy Sparkweather were both born in Vermont in 1792 and 1788, respectively. They were married in 1815. They moved to Freedom in 1820. Orson Pratt mentions baptizing Nehemiah and Lucy. An 1879 local history refers to Nehemiah as a "zealous" Mormon, calling him "the Prophet." They did not stay with the Church and died and were buried just a few miles northeast of Freedom, in Eagle, New York. Lucy died in 1858, Nehemiah in 1876.

Benjamin F. and Eliza Osborn Miles Wheeler

Benjamin F. Wheeler was among those baptized by Orson Pratt. We learn from the Samuel Miles journal that Benjamin married Samuel's sister Eliza, who was born in 1811, and that they were both members. The Wheelers accompanied the Miles family when they left Freedom in the fall of 1835 and settled in with a branch of the Church in New Portage, Ohio. When the Miles family moved on to Missouri in 1836, Benjamin and Eliza remained in nearby Akron, Ohio, with a brother of Eliza's, Ira Miles. While Ira later joined the Church in Nauvoo, Benjamin and Eliza drop from the records.