



Nauvoo, Johann Schroder, oil on tin, 1859.

# The Mormons Are Coming: The LDS Church's Twentieth Century Return to Nauvoo

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Traveling along Illinois' scenic Highway 96, the modern visitor to Nauvoo steps back in time. Horse-drawn carriages pass a bustling blacksmith shop and brick furnace. Tourists stroll through manicured gardens, venturing into open doorways where missionary guides recreate life in a religious city on a bend in the Mississippi River during the mid-1840s. The picture is one of prosperity, presided over by a stately temple monument on a bluff overlooking the community. Within minutes, if they didn't know it already, visitors to the area quickly learn about the Latter-day Saint founding of the City of Joseph.

While portraying an image of peace, students of the history of Nauvoo know a different tale, however. Unlike other historically recreated villages across the country, this one has a dark past. For the most part, the homes, and most important the temple itself, did not peacefully pass from builder to present occupant, patiently awaiting renovation and restoration. Rather, they lay abandoned, persisting only in the memory of a people who left them in search of safety in a high mountain desert more than thirteen hundred miles away. Firmly established in the tops of the mountains, their posterity returned more than a century later to create a monument to their ancestral roots. Much of the present-day religious, political, economic, and social power of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints traces its roots to Nauvoo, Illinois. It is fitting, then, that this place has become one of the faith's chief monuments.

While the modern visitor to Nauvoo is introduced to an 1840s re-creation, little is done to tell the story of how the town was preserved and rebuilt. Most know the story of Brigham Young leading the wagons westward across the

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frozen Mississippi River in 1846; however, why did the Mormons return? How were the homes transformed from ruin to repair? What about those who didn't go west? What role did the family of Joseph Smith, and later the Re-organized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now the Community of Christ), play in preserving the memory of this religious river town?<sup>1</sup> When the western Church returned, what conflicts existed between the two faiths as each vied for the interpretive higher ground? What about those in this rural mid-western town without ties to either religion? How have they shaped and preserved their community's religious heritage? How did Nauvoo go from abandonment to Mecca? What does the Restoration teach us about the faith and its interaction with others as a modern church? In short, what is the twentieth century history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo?

### **Abandoning the City of Joseph**

During the winter of 1845–1846, most Latter-day Saint residents of Nauvoo prepared to leave their city on the Mississippi. Forced to flee following the death of their Prophet leader, the Saints quietly closed their doors and said goodbye to a once bustling city. In early February 1846, their new leader, Brigham Young, summarized the feelings of many regarding the departure: “I met with the Council of the Twelve in the southeast corner room of the attic of the Temple. We knelt around the altar, and dedicated the building to the Most High. We asked his blessing upon our intended move to the west; also asked him to enable us some day to finish the Temple, and dedicate it to him, and we would leave it in his hands to do as he pleased; and to preserve the building as a monument to Joseph Smith. We asked the Lord to accept the labors of his servants in this land.”<sup>2</sup> Fellow Apostle Wilford Woodruff reflected in his journal his feelings as he looked back at the city he loved, “I left Nauvoo for the last time perhaps in this life. I looked upon the Temple & City of Nauvoo as I retired from it & felt to ask the Lord to preserve it as a monument of the sacrifice of his Saints.”<sup>3</sup>

Initially, however, the prayer for preservation went unheeded. Abandoned, the homes and temple fell into other hands or into complete disrepair. In November 1848 an arsonist set fire to the temple. The imposing stone walls were leveled by a tornado two years later. Residents carted off the rubble for use in their own structures, demolishing all remaining portions of the once grand edifice.

With the temple gone from the hill overlooking the city, interest turned back to the waterfront homes themselves. Visiting the region in 1853, British artist Frederick Hawkins Piercy portrayed the scene verbally: “On the banks

of the river lie broken blocks of stone and shattered bricks, and the visitor's first steps are over evidences of ruin and desolation. Foundations of what must once have been substantial buildings are broken up and exposed to the light, and houses, once noted for neatness, cleanliness and order, and surrounded by flower gardens, evincing taste, care, and a love of the beautiful, after being pillaged of all that was valuable and portable, have been abandoned by their ruthless destroyers, and are now monuments of their selfish, jealous and contemptible hate.”<sup>4</sup> A decade later, another LDS visitor to the region characterized the decay:

The outside of the Mansion House looks even more dilapidated & forsaken than the inside. It does not seem that one improvement has been made since the prophet left it. . . . The Nauvoo House . . . still stands as it did when the work on it ceased. It has the appearance of recent work in its masonry. The bricks are as good as the day they were made and the finishing touch of the trowel indicates that it was done but yesterday. . . . The old Masonic Hall still stands, but looks old. Prest. Young's house remains in good repair and Bro. Kimball's as good as the day he left it. . . . I stood upon the spot where once stood the temple of the Lord. “Not one stone is left upon another,” a few fragments only remaining, while the cellar has been filled and a vineyard now luxuriates where the Saints once attended to the ordinances for their dead. The temple rock can be seen all over the city, converted into wine cellars and basements for stores, drinking saloons and residences. . . . I visited the Old Mormon graveyard—now a complete forest of oak and hickory. There is probably fifty tomb-stones standing, among the number I found one to the memory of my sister. The fence around the graveyard is down and exposed. . . . At present it belongs to no one and having a fine forest of timber thereon the probability is that ere long some one will enclose it and forever obliterate its existence as a graveyard.

The visitor summarized his experience in Nauvoo, reflecting his feelings for its demise:

The settlers in this Co. are generally of the opinion that land once occupied by the Mormons, no matter as to the richness of the soil, has never seemed profitable to the owners since the Saints were driven away. They say the curse of God is visibly manifested in the earth's production. I have told some of them that I wished to God it would refuse to produce even white beans, but I realize it would not do for me to judge these matters. The old mob spirit has about died out and a general feeling of regret at the manner of treating the Mormons is very prevalent.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Preserving the Joseph Smith Legacy—Smith Family and RLDS Influence in Nauvoo**

While much of the city lay abandoned, an important connection to the Latter-day Saint past remained in Nauvoo. Emma Smith, widow of the slain Prophet, together with their five children, as well as the Prophet's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, remained behind after the exodus, preserving the memory

of Joseph Smith in the region as well as buildings important to his legacy. As much of the city fell into disrepair, Smith family presence near the waterfront properties formerly belonging to Joseph Smith created the first toe hold for Latter-day Saint presence in the city. These properties nevertheless also created controversy over the varying interpretations of the memory of Joseph Smith.

Following the Prophet's death, property held in his name quickly became a point of contention between Emma Smith and Brigham Young. Concerned for the welfare of her fatherless children, Emma maintained control of the Mansion House, Homestead, Nauvoo House, and the Red Brick Store. Brigham Young, on the other hand, concerned himself with the debts of the Church, many of which were complicated by the overlapping nature of Joseph's roles as husband, citizen, and Church leader. (Ironically, some of these same controversies hounded the Brigham Young estate following his own death more than thirty years later.) Though lawsuits plagued her for years, Emma eventually succeeded in maintaining title to these properties.

With the properties securely in her possession, Emma sought ways to supplement the family income. As early as August 1844, she arranged for former Nauvoo Stake President William Marks to rent the Mansion House, retaining several rooms for her personal use. A year later, she tried to rent out Joseph's Red Brick Store to a friend, Joseph Heywood.<sup>6</sup> In 1847, she married non-Mormon and Nauvoo resident Major Lewis Bidamon, who helped her raise her five children until her death in 1879.

With Emma's passing, the Smith family presence and property in Nauvoo shifted to her posterity. The Homestead, Mansion House, and Red Brick Store properties were deeded to her three surviving sons, Joseph III, Alexander, and David; while the Nauvoo House was given to her late husband, Lewis Bidamon, who passed it on to his son Charles.<sup>7</sup> However, unlike the Bidamons, by the 1880s Emma's children had severed their ties to Nauvoo. Joining with the Reorganization, Joseph Smith III moved the Church headquarters to Plano, Illinois, in 1866 and later, Lamoni, Iowa, in 1881. His brother, Alexander Hale Smith, however, recognized the need to maintain Nauvoo as a historic site. Hearing that the Nauvoo House was up for auction in 1893, Alexander wrote RLDS Bishop E. L. Kelley: "I haven't for years felt a particle of interest in the old place until late. I feel we ought to take advantage of every opportunity to get a foot hold there again."<sup>8</sup>

RLDS interest in the properties heightened in 1905 when the LDS Church constructed a monument at the Prophet's birthplace in Sharon, Vermont, and the same year held a mission conference in Nauvoo. Following the conference, RLDS Church historian and apostle Heman C. Smith wrote RLDS Presiding Bishop E. L. Kelly:



Aerial view of the original Joseph Smith properties currently owned by the Community of Christ, including the Mansion House, Riverside Mansion (formerly the Nauvoo House), Homestead, and the Red Brick Store, ca. 1985. Photograph courtesy LDS Seminaries and Institutes.

The Brighamites have recently been here over fifty strong and held a conference. We are following them with a series of meetings in City Hall. They have made quite an impression on those who want to sell property by giving out the impression that they are coming back to build up the place within two years. The story is out that they have bought the Nauvoo House, but Mr. C. E. Bidamon, in whom the title is, answers me that it is not so.<sup>9</sup>

Slowly, RLDS church leadership acted on their concerns. In 1908, the church obtained the deed to the family cemetery from Frederick M. Smith. A year later, it purchased the Nauvoo House from Charles Bidamon. In 1916, the church officially obtained the Mansion House from the estate of Alexander H. Smith. Finally, three years later, Frederick M. Smith deeded the remaining Smith properties—the Homestead and the Red Brick Store—to the RLDS church. Subsequent land purchases continued until 1963. By this time, the church had acquired all the sixteen blocks that currently comprise the Joseph Smith Historic Site.<sup>10</sup>

Understandably, RLDS officials were not merely interested in property ownership in Nauvoo. Recognizing the historical and religious interest in the property, in 1918 Church leaders assigned John and Ida Layton as the first

caretakers and guides at the Smith family properties. Tours were conducted and limited restoration efforts begun. The Bidamon stable, a structure completed by Lewis Bidamon, was remodeled to serve as a visitors' center. Additionally, formal church presence returned with the organization of the RLDS Nauvoo branch in 1921. One of the most significant events to occur under the direction of the RLDS church during this era was the 1928 discovery and reinterment of the bodies of Joseph, Hyrum, and Emma Smith.<sup>11</sup>

In the 1950s, additional preservation efforts for RLDS properties included placing a new granite slab on the graves of Joseph, Hyrum, and Emma (1951), and installing an improved foundation under the Homestead (1952). In 1958, a youth retreat and recreational property known as "Camp Nauvoo" was founded on property known as "David's Chamber," frequented by Joseph and Emma's son David H. Smith.

### LDS Reinterest in Nauvoo

While the RLDS church was maintaining and expanding an active presence in Nauvoo, LDS interest in the site quietly simmered. In 1882, LDS Apostle John Taylor boldly predicted:

As a people or community, we can abide our time, but I will say to you Latter-day Saints, that there is nothing of which you have been despoiled by oppressive acts or mobocratic rule, but that you will again possess, or your children after you. Your rights in Ohio, your rights in Jackson, Clay, Caldwell and Davis [Daviess] counties in Missouri, will yet be restored to you. Your possessions, of which you have been fraudulently despoiled in Missouri and Illinois, you will again possess, and that without force, or fraud or violence. The Lord has a way of His own in regulating such matters.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1887, B. H. Roberts similarly reflected on the future of Nauvoo: “While the people who once made it the abode of peace are thriving in other lands, made rich and fruitful by their industry,” he editorialized, “this languishing city awaits their return to recover the lost glory that won for her the proud name, ‘Nauvoo the Beautiful.’”<sup>13</sup>

First to return were parties interested in reminiscing. Frequent visitors included Latter-day Saint missionaries, traveling to or from their assigned fields of labor. In 1905, one local Nauvoo paper reported, “It is only within the last few years that the “Mormons” from Utah have been visiting Nauvoo in any considerable numbers. . . . It is true, there has been an occasional ‘Mormon’ visitor, but within the last year it might be said there have been many members of that faith visit us.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in Utah, the *Deseret News* reported the observations of two of those visitors, Elders F. M. Mortensen and George H. Smith, who noted that “many of the buildings erected by the leading brethren are still

standing as monuments to their names and the tragic history of those days.” Regarding those who preceded them, the missionaries indicated that the local hotel proprietors “have quite a bundle of namecards of Elders who have visited the city in the past.”<sup>15</sup> Later the same year, over one hundred visiting elders and members descended on the town for a mission conference, where local residents expressed “a strong desire that our people should come back to Nauvoo and build it up again.” The plea may have stemmed in part from the dilapidated condition of the homes, which conference attendees described as “literally and completely deserted so far as industry is concerned,” standing “empty, sheltering only rats and insects.” In addition to this early conference, one notable LDS Church visitor to Nauvoo during the era was that of LDS Church President Joseph F. Smith in 1906. Returning from the East, he stopped in the town of his youth, visiting his home and recalling “some pathetic reminiscence which brought tears to his eyes.”<sup>16</sup> Visits like these fueled speculation in local Nauvoo papers “that the Utah ‘Mormon’ Church intends purchasing property in Nauvoo, as was done in Carthage, Ill., and Independence, Mo. Looks like the Utah ‘Mormons’ intend returning to the beautiful land.”<sup>17</sup>

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the LDS Church purchased the nearby Carthage Jail, as well as historic property in Independence, Missouri, Palmyra, New York, and Sharon, Vermont. The rumored purchase of property in Nauvoo, however, failed to materialize. Rather, Utah Church leaders contented themselves with assigning missionaries to the Nauvoo area whose major activity centered in organizing weekly Sunday School meetings in the vacant *Times and Seasons* building. Not surprisingly, until the early 1930s, the presence of a Restoration Church in Nauvoo was dominated by the Reorganization.

### **Early LDS and RLDS Interactions in Nauvoo**

The LDS Church’s first foray into a historical presence and interpretation in Nauvoo began with a cooperative effort with the RLDS church. In July 1933, after receiving permission from the RLDS leaders, LDS officials prepared and dedicated a memorial to the Relief Society on the site of its founding—Joseph Smith’s Red Brick Store. Elder George Albert Smith, a Mormon apostle and president of the Utah Pioneer Trails and Landmarks Association, dedicated the marker, accompanied by General Relief Society and Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association officers. Representatives of the Joseph Smith family participated in the service, including Frederick M. Smith, grandson of Joseph Smith and president of the RLDS Church.<sup>18</sup>

While the cooperative endeavor began well, problems emblematic of the relations between the two churches during the era soon developed. The disagreement centered on whose memory of Nauvoo should dominate historical interpretation. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, it became clear that the LDS Church wanted a more active interpretive presence in Nauvoo. By the middle of the century, the Church had its eyes on a much larger prize, the Nauvoo Temple property.

The LDS Church's acquisition of the Nauvoo Temple Square was a process twenty-five years and ten separate transactions in the making. The successful acquisition must be attributed to the efforts of the wealthy Utah businessman Wilford C. Wood, who, acting on his own or as an official representative of the Church, purchased the initial six parcels, the first of which included the actual property for the temple itself. Learning that the prime lot was available, Wood contacted the First Presidency in February 1937. Permission was granted to pursue the property, with a maximum bid set at \$1000. Prospects appeared bleak; the Bank of Nauvoo, which owned the property, had announced that initial bidding would start at \$1000 and had blocked all previous low bids. In fact, bank officials may have contacted Wood in the first place because they thought he would offer a higher price. Outlining his constraints, Wood explained that he would not pay "the price of sentiment" and "pledged for the price to be within reason." He promised that "the Church would put up a Bureau of Information which would be a credit to Nauvoo and that what they might lose in the price of the lot would come back to them many times with the people who would come and pay homage to a desolate city." Bank officials countered that "they could not see how they could sell for less than \$1000 to \$1500." Replying with what he later called "an impression," Wood questioned, "Are you going to try to make us pay exorbitant price for the blood of a martyred Prophet, when you know this property rightfully



Wilford C. Wood, date unknown, ca. 1950s. Photograph courtesy of the Wilford C. Wood family. Wood negotiated the purchase of much of the Nauvoo Temple block. He also purchased a number of other historic Nauvoo homes and properties.

belongs to the Mormon people?" Bank officials acquiesced, and the price was set at \$900, as long as no one else outbid the Church at auction the next day. Providentially, none did.<sup>19</sup>

With public announcement of the Church's acquisition, neighboring properties on the temple block became available. Prices for the parcels varied considerably, ranging from \$1,100 for the next purchase, a large northeast corner lot acquired by Wood only two months later; to \$100,000 for lot three, the expansive southwest corner of the property, purchased from the Catholic Church in 1961.

As the Church pieced together the property, rumors swirled regarding temple reconstruction. In fact, plans to rebuild the Nauvoo Temple—one of the faith's best kept secrets of the late 1990s—was one of its worst kept ones in the 1930s and 1940s. On October 29, 1937, the *Carthage Gazette* reported: "Although from official circles of the Utah branch of the Mormon church comes the word that at least two other large building projects are anticipated before any new building will be done at Nauvoo, the leaders do not deny that they are planning rebuilding the temple at Nauvoo. Last year the church negotiated for the barren site of the temple and also for some adjoining land. This building site is one of the highest points in Nauvoo and it is no secret that the church is planning a shrine that will compare in beauty and size with the great temple built almost a hundred years ago on the same ground."<sup>20</sup> A year later, while encouraging commemoration of the centennial of the founding of Nauvoo, Northern States Mission President Bryant S. Hinckley revealed the grand plan for the property:

The Nauvoo visitor of today lingers: he is interested; there is something about the quiet atmosphere of that dream city that charms and fascinates him: it speaks of the past: he feels reverent. The completion of this extraordinary project will be a matter of far-reaching significance. It will bring into relief one of the most heroic, dramatic, and fascinating pioneer achievements ever enacted upon American soil. It will reveal a record of fortitude and self-reliance; of patriotic and courageous endeavor, that should stimulate faith in the hearts of all men, in a day when the strongest hesitate and falter. The dedication of this Memorial will add attractively to the long list of historically important places of which Illinois is justly proud. Annually thousands of Latter-day Saints will visit it. As these developments go forward, Nauvoo is destined to become one of the most beautiful shrines of America and one of the strong missionary centers of the Church.<sup>21</sup>

Supporting the plan, the First Presidency similarly declared: "We shall be glad to erect in the future such memorial on the Temple Block, if secured by the State of Illinois, as will fittingly carry out your project."<sup>22</sup> Interested citizens of western Illinois picked up on the news. By March 1939, Carthage's *Hancock County Journal* reported that "the Mormon Church is planning to

rebuild the old Mormon temple at Nauvoo at a cost of \$1,000,000, work to start within a short time. . . . It is understood the Mormon church has already appropriated \$100,000 to finance the beginning of the work of reconstructing the old Temple.”<sup>23</sup> The federal government even gave credence to these rumors, publishing in its 1939 *Nauvoo Guide*, written by the Federal Writers’ Project of Illinois, Works Progress Administration: “Both the Utah and the Reorganized branches have acquired portions of the Temple lot in Nauvoo; the Utah Mormons expect some day to build there a copy of the Temple. Nauvoo as Mecca is booming.”<sup>24</sup>

References to the state’s involvement in the project stem from rumors that Illinois government officials were openly planning to convert Nauvoo into a historical state park. In February 1938, Utah’s *Deseret News* reprinted a letter by Robert Kingery, chairman of the Illinois State Planning Commission, outlining his plans for state acquisition and development of the property. The plan included the state offering Church leaders “its cooperation in whatever historical restoration may be undertaken by the Church or jointly by the Church and the state.”<sup>25</sup> Later the same year, a delegation of Illinois State Planning Commission officials, the Illinois Chamber of Commerce, the Chicago Association of Commerce, the Quincy Historical Society, and editors from five major Chicago-area newspapers descended on Nauvoo, where plans were further outlined. Their discussion involved developing an area covering 230 acres of property extending from the Mississippi River to the foot of the Temple site, including: “about 35 of the original homes, . . . many of [which] are still in good condition and would be preserved, while the others would be restored. Buildings of historic import which have been destroyed, such as the shop where the wagons were built for the trek across the plains, would also be restored.”<sup>26</sup> Ironically, this description largely matches the eventual restoration of Nauvoo, without state involvement.

During the late 1930s, talk of an active LDS presence in Nauvoo, highlighted by the projected reconstruction of the Nauvoo Temple, concerned RLDS leaders. Lynn Smith, son of RLDS First Presidency member Elbert A. Smith, was assigned to Nauvoo during the era. Reporting on the LDS centennial celebration of the founding of Nauvoo in 1939, Smith recorded:

This is the day that the ‘Utah’ Mormons are in town. . . . Bill Sinnock from Quincy spent sometime presenting the idea of the park project and temple rebuilding project. His program is this. The series of radio skits that have been given over the Quincy station will be recorded and sent out to the radio stations of Canada and the United States. This will give a national coverage of the proposed plan. The purpose of this radio advertisement is to request donations which will go for purchasing the temple block and donating it to the ‘Utah’ Church so it can rebuild the Nauvoo temple.

Smith countered the plan, wondering “why the property should not be given to the Reorg[anized] Church.” He eventually concluded that project organizers “rather evaded the issue and talked in generalities but left the impression, that the gift would go to ‘Utah’ because they were in a position to and had said they would rebuild the temple.”<sup>27</sup>

Concern centered not merely on reconstructing the building. The issue between the two churches was one of interpretation and access. Outlining his plan, Bryant Hinckley hoped that purchase of the temple block would be done by the state of Illinois. However, he continued:

Who will control it when the Temple Block is transferred to the Church? The Church will own and control it and will erect thereon a suitable memorial. When the land below is dedicated as a park and the homes are restored and the project in its entirety is completed, who will tell the visitor who comes to see it the story of those who lived in the homes—laid out the city—built the temple? That is a fair question and deserves a straight and unequivocal answer. Understanding as I do the motive behind this movement and the character of the men behind it, I do not hesitate to say, in answer to this question, that the wishes of those in whose honor this memorial is established will govern who shall tell the story.<sup>28</sup>

Hinckley’s answer must have concerned RLDS officials. A year later as the two faiths battled to celebrate Nauvoo’s centennial, Lynn Smith noted: “I put this question to [those planning the temple project,] ‘What assurance do you have that, if the property is deeded over to the ‘Utah’ church that they will build it?’ He replied ‘I have statements in writing that they will.’ I also asked him if he had any more assurance that they would not use it for private worship? and he replied that that shouldn’t matter, whether they used it for that purpose or not it would still bring many people to Nauvoo.”<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, some of the same concerns resurfaced as plans were finally made in the 1990s to rebuild the temple.<sup>30</sup>

As tensions simmered over any proposed temple project, the outbreak of World War II postponed projects in the region, including state involvement. However, by the early 1950s, Wood and



Bryant S. Hinckley, date unknown. While serving as president of the Northwestern States Mission in the late 1930s, Hinckley had expectations that the LDS Church would rebuild the Nauvoo Temple. Photograph courtesy LDS Seminaries and Institutes.

other LDS Church officials were on the move again, attempting to purchase the remainder of the temple block. Following LDS purchase of a southern piece of the block in 1952, an internal memo was sent to the RLDS Presiding Bishopric, summarizing their fears: “That Utah Church now has all the land within the block except the corner lot owned by the Catholics and the property we own. The Mormons have been spreading the rumor that they are going to have this land condemned so that they can have the State replace the Temple.”<sup>31</sup>

Competition over historic properties ensued between the two faiths during the early 1950s. Regarding the availability of the portion of the temple lot, Nauvoo resident Charles Kornman wrote the RLDS Presiding Bishopric: “The lady who owns the building on the northwest corner of the temple site has decided to sell come spring. She intended to sell to the Mormon Church but Bro. Lewis heard about it and went and talked to her so I think that we have first chance at it if we want it. I think it would be a nice gesture for us if we could get a hold of it—if nothing more than to keep the Utah folks from getting a toehold (anymore than they have already).”<sup>32</sup> Negotiations ensued with the widow (Mrs. Clara K. Reimbold), but the LDS Church successfully acquired her property on June 8, 1951.<sup>33</sup>

As the RLDS Church lost out on its acquisition attempt of the temple lot, it missed again on a potential purchase of the Masonic Hall during this same time period. In 1950, Clarence A. Skinner wrote the RLDS Presiding Bishopric, informing them of the death of the owner of the Masonic Hall, and asking if they were interested in acquiring the property. Bishop G. Leslie DeLapp raised the question with the RLDS First Presidency, writing: “Do you know of any reason why this property should be purchased? I am not sure what the reaction of our church people would be to buying a Masonic building, even though it has historical value.”<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, it was decided that the building held “no particular value to the church” because it was “pretty well away from [RLDS] property except the local church, and has no historical value so far as the visitors are concerned.”<sup>35</sup> In one of the more controversial acquisitions of the era, Wilford Wood and the LDS Church took advantage of the opportunity, buying the property for \$10,750 in 1954.

Though the LDS Church succeeded in the Masonic Hall purchase, it missed a potential early purchase of a portion of the temple lot during this time period. In 1952, the Benedictine sisters in Nauvoo decided to build a new priory, academy, and dormitory. Aware of Church interest in the temple lot, they offered it to Wilford Wood, explaining:

As you know, our crowded conditions demand that we build as soon as possible. . . . Your beloved Prophet Joseph Smith must surely have stood on the Temple spot when

he named his city Nauvoo, the City Beautiful. We fully understand your love and interest in the spot and your desire to make here a shrine worthy of faith and zeal. . . . If we could construct any type of building to suit our needs without interfering with majestic view from the Temple block, we would do so. But there is no way; hence our suggestion to you that you purchase our entire property here, and we will re-establish ourselves in some other section of Nauvoo.<sup>36</sup>

Unable to accommodate the offer, Wilford Wood nevertheless responded: “I was advised to thank you for your good feelings and good will towards the Mormon people, and as I told you before, the Mormons and the Catholics will always get along in Nauvoo.”<sup>37</sup> The sisters proceeded with building their new academy adjacent to the temple site. Church leaders acquired the temple lot portion nine years later for \$100,000 and, at the end of the decade, the remaining portion of the Catholic school.

While property acquisitions were often private, an aspect of the controversy between the two faiths played itself out publicly during this era over the earlier placement of the Relief Society monument—a joint venture between the LDS and RLDS faiths. Marking the eastern end of the Mormon Pioneer Trail, it told not only the story of the founding of the Relief Society; but on property owned by the RLDS church, it highlighted the westward movement of the LDS faith. Erected in 1933, the monument caused concern for the RLDS church as early as 1939. Developing their own long-term plan for Nauvoo, one RLDS official cautioned:

Please have C.L.O. determine the manner in which permission was given to the Utah people to erect their monument. We should be sure that nothing even inferentially implies ceding of control over the land itself. Furthermore, I look forward to an opportunity to have this statue removed. Our future development of the property will undoubtedly make such removal necessary.<sup>38</sup>

By the 1950s, the placement of the LDS marker on RLDS property seems to have caused increasing concern, especially as LDS activity increased in the region. RLDS Presiding Bishopric member G. L. DeLapp summarized the problem:

In regard to the marker which was placed by the Utah Church, with the permission of our church, on a site at Nauvoo . . . [I] would state that this caused so much controversy and discussion over the years, and so many objections were raised by the guides, that by action of the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric, the Utah Church was requested to remove the marker. Unless you are in a position to have to meet the individual members of the Utah Church day after day regarding such matters, it is difficult to appreciate the need for such action having been taken. However, it was, in our opinion, the best thing for both organizations.<sup>39</sup>

Acting on the concern, Bishop DeLapp wrote the LDS First Presidency in June 1952 regarding the controversial monument:

At intervals during the last few years considerable criticism has come to us regarding the location of a marker placed by your church on property which belongs to the Reorganization at Nauvoo. This marker identifies the site of the founding of the Ladies' Relief Society. When this marker was placed it was mutually agreed that you would remove it upon request. In discussing this matter with our First Presidency it has been concluded that it is now advisable to have this marker removed. We are sure that you will be willing to cooperate.

Handwritten notes on a copy of the letter located in the Community of Christ Library-Archives reflect the tensions between the two movements at the time. Bearing initials of members of the RLDS Church leadership, one note reads: "Hope this is OK. Seemed the thing to do in view of the complaints continuing to come in." A second comment, more emphatic than the first, follows up: "I'll stand with you on this. The Mormons are our enemies at heart and we owe them nothing."<sup>40</sup> Complying with the request, Wilford Wood returned to Nauvoo in August 1952 to personally oversee the removal of the six-ton monument from the Red Brick Store property to the temple site. However, it is clear that relationships were strained as talk of restoration progressed. Just as Nauvoo's founding had divided people during the days of Joseph Smith, its restoration became divisive a century later, this time within the religious posterity of the faith's founder.

Tensions remained strained as the LDS Church sought to complete the final pieces of the temple lot acquisition. The purchase of the St. Peter and Paul School and the Nauvoo Parish Hall property from the Catholic Church on July 22, 1961, left only a small lot on the west of the temple lot un-owned by the LDS Church. This piece, however, was owned by the RLDS church. Reporting to the RLDS First Presidency and Presiding Bishopric regarding the transaction, Donald V. Lents wrote:

The Mormons are stepping up their program for the purchase of property in the area and seem, too, to be increasing the number of personnel in responsibility here in the town.

I am informed that they have a full-time couple at the Heber Kimball home to tell the story. Of course at their Information Center they also have a full-time couple to answer questions and direct folk on tours of the town. They have two more full-time people at the home they call the John Taylor house. They have just purchased the Brigham Young home and report is they will renovate it and provide caretakers and guides. Within the past thirty days or so they have purchased the remainder of the old Temple lot (the area where the Catholic School and Parish Hall now stand). This gives them the complete old Temple lot . . . with the exception of the lot we own in the area.

It would appear to me that careful consideration needs to be given to us as to our purpose and our plans for the future here in Nauvoo.<sup>41</sup>

Ultimately, RLDS leaders decided at the time to focus their efforts on acquiring property near their headquarters in Independence, Missouri. In 1962, negotiations progressed between the two Churches to trade three LDS-owned properties near the RLDS Auditorium in Independence for the remaining lot on the Nauvoo Temple site, with the RLDS Church paying the difference between appraised values. Negotiations stipulated that property be independently appraised “based on the commercial value of the property concerned” rather than any sentimental value.<sup>42</sup> This was done with some assurance that the temple in Nauvoo would not be immediately rebuilt. Summarizing the deal, Mark Siegfried wrote RLDS Presiding Bishop G. Leslie DeLapp: “I had a letter from a friend of mine who recently had word from Joseph Fielding Smith, President of the Council of Twelve in Utah. In this letter J. F. S. states that they have no intention of rebuilding the Temple in Nauvoo. Just to level off the lot and make it look nice.” While the deal evidenced cooperation between the faiths, tensions were apparently still high. Siegfried continued: “I understand you have made a trade with the Mormons of our lot in Nauvoo for three or four tracks [tracts] they own here [in Independence] which are worth more to us than the little spot they are getting. [Preston] Kimball told this friend of mine the Mormons paid \$25,000 for our lot. I hope they did. All we can get out of them the better it suits me.”<sup>43</sup> Bishop DeLapp responded: “I don’t know just how Preston Kimball arrived at the figure of \$25,000. I will be able to tell you a little bit more about this transaction at some later date. I hope that the information you received regarding the intent of the Utah Church at Nauvoo is correct. We will be interested in watching developments.”<sup>44</sup>

Divisions between the two faiths were aggravated by efforts of the state of Illinois to increase tourism following World War II. Resurrecting rumors regarding the reconstruction of the Nauvoo Temple, the Illinois House of Representatives passed a resolution on April 27, 1949, encouraging both the LDS and RLDS faiths to collaborate on the reconstruction of the Nauvoo Temple, a project they claimed “would serve as a fitting memorial to the courageous band of pilgrims who here acquired the heroic determination to found a new state in the West.” Additionally, State officials hoped the building “would add immeasurably to the attractiveness of historic Nauvoo and would create on the part of many Illinois citizens a new interest in the great movements which have played so prominent a role in the history of our State.”<sup>45</sup> The proposal only added fuel to the fire, as it inadvertently gave preferential position to the LDS stance on controversial Nauvoo issues by championing both the temple and the westward exodus.<sup>46</sup> Ironically, the federal government gave the same

preferential treatment to the LDS position in 1959 when the National Parks Service lauded Nauvoo and the exodus as “one of the most significant mass movements in advance of white settlement to the Pacific” and “one of the most dramatic events in the history of American westward expansion.”<sup>47</sup>

### The LDS Takeover of Nauvoo’s Restoration

While attention focused on the temple property, other land transactions quietly shaped the present picture of restored Nauvoo. On February 23, 1938, the *Deseret News* reported Wilford Wood’s purchase of the John Taylor residence and printing office of the *Nauvoo Neighbor* and the *Times and Seasons*. At the time, Wood noted that “the purchase . . . was made privately and possession of the property remains with him.”<sup>48</sup> Fifteen years later, Wood deeded the property to the Church, which housed a missionary couple in the Taylor home and conducted tours in the *Times and Seasons* office beginning in 1953. In 1960, the building became the home of the Nauvoo branch of the Church, organized four years earlier on March 17, 1956. During the same time, Salt Lake City physician J. Leroy Kimball likewise became interested in Nauvoo property. Visiting the area as a medical student at Northwestern University during the 1930s, he embarked on a twenty-year effort to acquire and restore his great-grandfather Heber C. Kimball’s home in Nauvoo. The property was finally purchased by Dr. Kimball in 1954, and restored by 1960. His later purchases included the homes of Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, Orson Spencer, Orson Hyde, Lorin Farr, and David Yearsley.

These purchases paved the way for significant expansion of the LDS Church presence in Nauvoo during the 1960s. The actions were highlighted by a decision



Dr. J. LeRoy Kimball, date unknown. In 1962, Kimball founded Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated (NRI) and served as president from 1962–1987. Photograph courtesy NRI.

made in 1962 that reversed the Church's 1846 exodus, forever changing the historic community. In May 1962, Presidents Henry D. Moyle and Hugh B. Brown of the Church's First Presidency, together with officials from the United States National Parks Service, the Colonial Williamsburg renovation, and interested LDS entrepreneurs, toured Nauvoo on a fact-finding mission "to discover the possibilities for the restoring of the historic significance of Nauvoo as one of the major bases of overland migration from the Mississippi into the American West."<sup>49</sup> A month later, Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated, a non-profit Church-sponsored organization was formed. Explaining its mission, President David O. McKay outlined a two-fold purpose: "to restor[e] the residences in historic Nauvoo as they were left when the Mormons evacuated the city in 1846," and "to perpetuate in history the part played by the Mormon Pioneers in the building of the West."<sup>50</sup> For the next four decades, NRI, as it came to be known, embarked on this ambitious endeavor, transforming Nauvoo into its current state.

Initial emphasis was on property acquisition and historical accuracy. As early as its first summer in existence, Nauvoo Restoration also began a multi-year project to excavate the Nauvoo Temple site. Shortly thereafter, restoration work began on the Brigham Young, Snow-Ashby, Lucy Mack Smith, Winslow Farr, Wilford Woodruff, and Joseph W. Coolidge properties. The Webb blacksmith shop and the Browning gun shop soon followed. In all of these early endeavors, historical accuracy was paramount. For example, to match the mortar used in the brick homes of Brigham Young and Wilford Woodruff, "43 different samples of various mixes using a variety of local aggregates and proportions together with preslacked hydrated lime or lime putty slacked on the site, with and without cement, were prepared and analyzed under normal observation and microscopic scrutiny with the original mortar."<sup>51</sup> Wood samples from the Brigham Young house mantel were taken to a Harvard chemical laboratory for a microscopic analysis of paint layers and primers where it was determined that "there seems to be no doubt the black is sandwiched between a priming coat and the graining ground color."<sup>52</sup> Discussion even ensued regarding the re-creation of the Brigham Young and Wilford Woodruff orchards, aligning the trees on a straight line because they "reasoned that everything else being laid out as carefully as it was that most surely a line would have been used to carefully line up trees in an orchard."<sup>53</sup>

Balancing authentic restoration with the missionary potential of Nauvoo soon became an issue for the young organization. NRI secretary Rowena Miller sensed the dilemma the organization faced. "It will take the wisdom of a Solomon," Miller cautioned, "to walk the tight-rope of historic interpretation proselyting you people . . . have confronting you."<sup>54</sup> Initially, the focus centered on historical re-creation. In 1969, a Burlington, Iowa, newspaper

reported the philosophy of NRI manager J. Byron Ravsten: “Nauvoo is a historical and not a religious project.”<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, early NRI work in Nauvoo focused not just on historical re-creation but centered the story on the westward movement of the faith. In fact, early publications by Nauvoo Restoration almost always emphasized the city’s place in the westward growth of the United States. The official Articles of Incorporation for NRI stress that the foundation’s purpose is “for awakening a public interest in, and an understanding and appreciation of, the story of Nauvoo and the mass migration of its people to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake in the area which has now become the State of Utah; to interpret and dramatize that story, not only as a great example of pioneering determination and courage, but also as one of the vital forces in the expansion of America westward from the Mississippi River.”<sup>56</sup> Early NRI publications frequently cite the National Parks Service Report:

The movement of the Mormons to the valley of the Great Salt Lake was one of the most dramatic events in the history of American westward expansion. With the Mormon migrations, not only the motivation of westward movement shifted, but the character of the emigrant also changed. No longer were the migrations composed solely of an agrarian people, but shopkeepers, artisans, mechanics, and skilled persons of all types made the trek. The economic motive, so dominant among the earlier emigrants, gave way to the desire to worship in peace and to live in isolation from those who would deny this right.<sup>57</sup>

While initial work focused on the properties themselves, NRI officials envisioned an expansive Nauvoo experience, frequently referred to as the *Williamsburg of the Midwest*. Corporate records from the era reveal plans for hotels, restaurants, a golf course, shopping center, marina, riverboat cruises, and family recreational property. The expansive nature of the project was emphasized by the very makeup of the early board of trustees and its supporters, which included Harold P. Fabian (chairman of the National Parks Service advisory board), A. Edwin Kendrew (senior vice president of Colonial Williamsburg), J. C. “Pinky” Harrington (famed historical archaeologist), David M. Kennedy (U.S. treasury secretary), and J. Willard Marriott (LDS businessman). Local residents noted the powerful makeup of the body, with the *Nauvoo Independent* even reporting that “Treasury Secretary David M. Kennedy and HUD Secretary George W. Romney ‘starred’” at the visitors’ center groundbreaking in 1969.<sup>58</sup>

As the restoration of Nauvoo unfolded, temple rumors dominated discussion. In December 1961, before the formation of NRI, one newspaper reported that the Church had “plans call[ing] for rebuilding the Nauvoo Temple and possibly acquiring considerable land below the hill on what is commonly



George W. and Lenore L. Romney, Mary B. Firmage, Dr. J. LeRoy Kimball, J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott, Rowena J. Miller, David M. and Lenora Kennedy at the groundbreaking ceremonies for the Nauvoo LDS Visitors' Center, May 24, 1969, Nauvoo, Illinois.  
Photograph courtesy NRI.

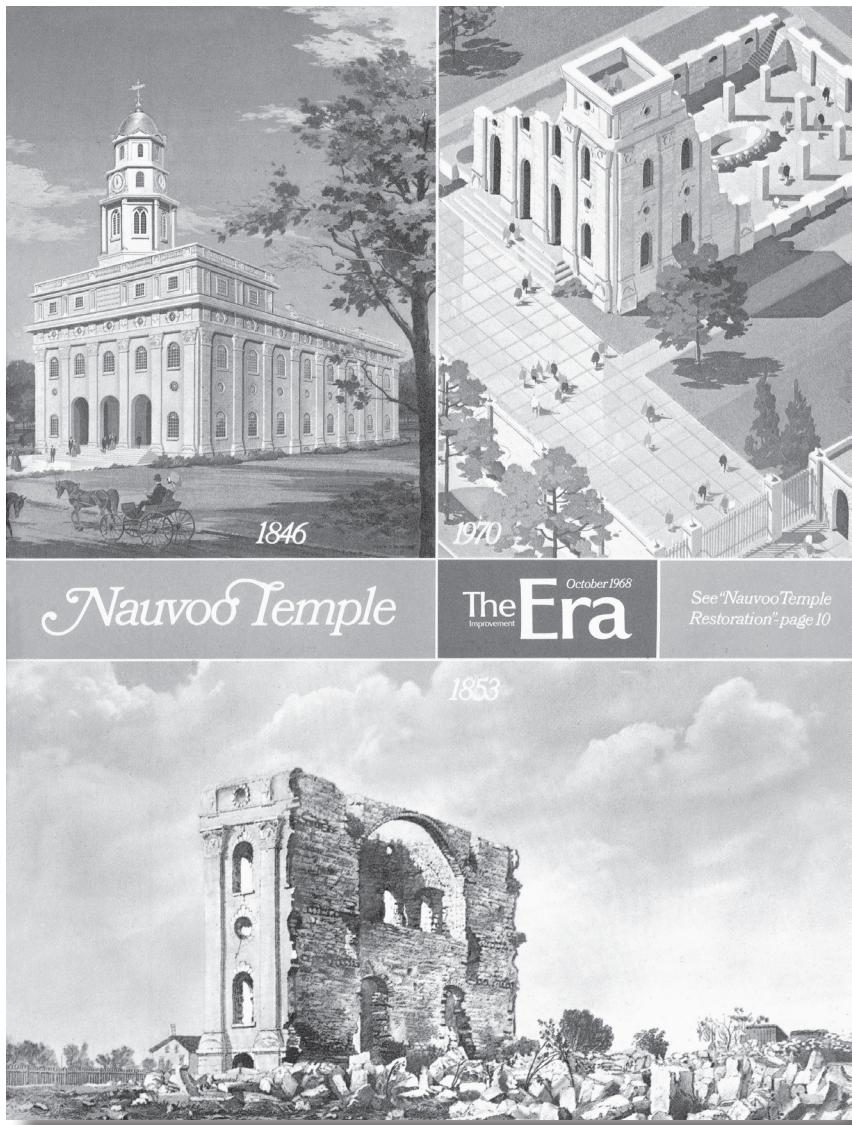


Groundbreaking ceremonies for the Nauvoo LDS Visitors' Center, May 24, 1969, Nauvoo, Illinois. Left to right: Steven T. Baird, Harold B. Lee, Hugh B. Brown, A. Edwin Kendrew, A. Hamer Reiser, George B. Hartzog, and David M. Kennedy. Photograph courtesy NRI.

referred to as the ‘flat.’”<sup>59</sup> Church leaders quickly clarified. The following May, the *Quincy Herald Whig* reported on the visit of LDS First Presidency members Henry D. Moyle and Hugh B. Brown to the Nauvoo Temple site, noting: “The church leaders said that although a final decision has not been made, the temple will probably not be rebuilt on the old foundation. A sunken garden or other development may be fashioned within the old stone walls, which extend six feet below ground level, and eventually a replica of the original temple may be built on another section of the square.”<sup>60</sup>

As archaeological excavations of the site progressed through the 1960s, the rumors persisted. In 1969, NRI manager J. Byron Ravsten answered a local newspaper about the possibility that the temple would be reconstructed: “The LDS has pledged itself to beautifying the Temple site. Whether there will be sufficient money actually to rebuild the Temple is conjectural. It would take millions.”<sup>61</sup> Possibly because of cost, rumors circulated about a partial reconstruction. Later that same year, the local *Nauvoo Independent* reported that “a partial restoration of the Nauvoo Temple . . . is planned for the near future.”<sup>62</sup> Elaborating further on the so-called plans, J. LeRoy Kimball wrote an article in the Church’s *Improvement Era*, indicating: “This has not been decided yet. One suggestion is to partially restore it, perhaps rebuilding only a corner of the building to the tower base. This will allow people to get an idea of the temple’s grandeur, and permit them to climb to the top and see the beautiful view of the Mississippi River and the countryside about which so many visitors as well as the Saints wrote. The temple story is part of our historic presentation.”<sup>63</sup> In the October 1968 issue, the *Improvement Era* even ran a cover story on the proposal, including an artist’s rendering of the restored temple corner and the announcement that: “construction on the partial restoration of the Nauvoo Temple is expected to begin in 1970. A two-year construction period is anticipated.”<sup>64</sup>

Talk of partially restoring the temple led to a unique proposal. In April 1970, the NRI architect’s office received a letter from a young man asking for all architectural information on the original Nauvoo Temple, including estimated reconstruction costs and plans. Trying to “formulate this project in such a manner as to meet the approval of the Prophet and the Council of the Twelve,” the young man proposed combining “the joint efforts of the M.I.A. and the L.D.S.S.A. worldwide” in producing a “total and accurate restoration of the Temple.” In doing so, he hoped to “1) give the teen and college age youth a significant, meaningful goal for which to work, 2) to erect a living tribute to our martyred Prophet and Patriarch (one which was the hope and joy of their hearts), 3) to demonstrate to the world at large that as young Latter-day Saints we honor our past, love our Church, and possess courage and hope to face our future.”<sup>65</sup> While praising the young man for his “very worthwhile



October 1968 cover of the *Improvement Era*. The upper right image shows an artist's rendition of the proposed partial reconstruction of the Nauvoo Temple. Construction was expected to have begun in 1970, but the plans were never carried out.



Aerial view of the Nauvoo Temple site, ca. 1970. Photograph courtesy NRI.

aspirations to restore the Nauvoo Temple,” NRI’s architectural department declined the request.<sup>66</sup>

Philosophies changed dramatically for Nauvoo’s restoration before any temple project could be completed. Following the death of President McKay in 1970, Nauvoo took on a decidedly different focus, shifting from the historical re-creation of a mid-west Williamsburg, to one that reflected a missionary emphasis. NRI secretary Rowena Miller summarized the change: “After the death of President David O. McKay, who had supported the corporation in all of its activities, there were some in the officialdom of the Church who did not believe in the historical approach of the restoration.”<sup>67</sup> Corporation records for the era reflect the outreach of the LDS Church’s Missionary Department during the 1970s and 1980s in standardizing presentations, modernizing visitor center displays, and directing the organization’s message. Non-LDS board members were replaced with General Authority representatives, and a separate Nauvoo Mission was formed. Tour scripts were revamped to emphasize the spirit of the people and their sacrifice, downplaying the role Nauvoo played in shaping the American West. Dr. J. LeRoy Kimball, the lone surviving member of the original advisory board, summarized the philosophy of the era: “If you put it all in a historical setting and yet tell it as history but tell it also as the principles of the Gospel, you will get the idea over to the people and they will understand it. It will not be like throwing ‘preaching’ at them, but at the same

time they will understand the message. . . . In this respect, you are still telling the story in terms of history, but at the same time you are satisfying the desire of the brethren to preach the Gospel.”<sup>68</sup>

An effort at goodwill and outreach eventually emerged, characterized by the message delivered by Elder Loren C. Dunn at the 1989 rededication of the Carthage Jail complex: “The message of the renovated Carthage complex is, we feel, one of healing and reconciliation. . . . Carthage has become more than a place of martyrdom.”<sup>69</sup> Brochures from the era emphasize the same theme: “Historic Nauvoo celebrates the accomplishments of the Latter-day Saints in establishing ‘Nauvoo, the beautiful,’ a place of prosperity, sacrifice, and religious refuge. It also speaks of the harmony and peace in which today’s Latter-day Saints live with their neighbors.”<sup>70</sup>

Ultimately, an entire change in philosophy emerged regarding Nauvoo restoration as the feelings between faiths improved. Again, Elder Loren C. Dunn, North America Central Area President, heralded the change: “With the completion of the Carthage complex and four smaller projects, no further restoration is planned in the Nauvoo area. . . . With the homes and shops the Church has restored over the years, plus the visitors’ center at Nauvoo and Carthage, there is enough of a flavor of the old city there now to give people a good idea of how it was. . . . After this year, Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., will continue to function, but in an operations and maintenance mode, rather than one of construction.”<sup>71</sup> This remained the case until President Hinckley’s announcement a decade later regarding the reconstruction of the Nauvoo Temple.

While President Hinckley’s announcement caught many by surprise, the temple site itself was actually a decade-long issue of focus for those leading NRI in the 1990s. Early in the decade, negotiations ensued between the LDS Church and the state of Illinois to transfer the Nauvoo Temple sunstone from the Nauvoo State Park to a safer, climate-controlled location on the temple grounds. Later, significant revision was made to Nauvoo site presentations, including the temple, to “bring the physical settings and their interpretation up to the spiritual level of the central message.”<sup>72</sup> Philosophically, restoration leaders rationalized:

In all the structures, sites and holdings of NRI, we have nothing that was owned, or lived in by the Prophet. All of those sites belong to the RLDS. However, the real focus and purpose of Nauvoo is found in the Temple thru the fullness of the gospel and the ordinances as provided in the Temple. It would seem to us that the Temple Site should in reality be the main focal point of all the restored work in Nauvoo, for it represents the greatest degree of sacrifice by the saints and was certainly the central purpose of Nauvoo. Every thing done in Nauvoo was to build the Temple in order to restore these sacred ordinances of salvation and exaltation. Currently the Temple Site is probably in the poorest condition of any of our sites in Nauvoo. . . . The site needs to be totally renovated and restored so that it becomes

a fitting memorial to the prophet and the principles and ordinances that were restored thru him.<sup>73</sup>

Of course, in 1999 President Hinckley took this plan one step further, authorizing much more than a renewal of the Nauvoo Temple site.

### **Responses to the LDS Restoration of Nauvoo**

As the historical restoration projects of NRI shaped LDS Church presence in Nauvoo, they also affected RLDS plans. “Anything you can do, I can do better” seems to have characterized LDS and RLDS relations during the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s. Erecting a new visitors’ center led the other to do the same. Recreating Joseph Smith’s Red Brick Store paved the way for the other to recreate the temple. Building by building, the glory of Nauvoo returned, though at an enormous expense to both organizations. By the 1980s, NRI boasted owning more than a thousand acres of Nauvoo land, purchased in 126 separate transactions, leading to the restoration or reconstruction of more than twenty-five historic sites. Visitors averaged over 600,000 people a year.

Though benefiting from this boom, RLDS leaders also expressed increasing concern about the more visible LDS presence in the area. On October 4, 1961, Donald L. Vents wrote their First Presidency and Presiding Bishopric:

We need to be very careful when we consider these couples to represent us [at Nauvoo] in this ministry. It is a real public-relation contact and one where our people need to be very kind yet firm and stable. I am not suggesting that we should begin some large “splashy” push in Nauvoo, but should just protect that which we have available. In my estimation, we are recognized as the key contact now with the historical set-up, but we certainly need to be alert to some of the moves in the town. The couples the Mormons have sent in are cultured, well-appearing people that make a fine appearance.<sup>74</sup>

Two months later, Vents followed up with RLDS Church President W. Wallace Smith: “Brother Hulmes was not implying we should attempt to run a competitive spending program, etc., but he was re-emphasizing the need of careful planning and the need for some very competent personnel for assignment in the area for representation of our philosophy.”<sup>75</sup>

Though they worked not to engage in a competitive spending program, LDS growth in Nauvoo caused the RLDS church to respond in kind. A Nauvoo Planning Commission for the RLDS church noted: “Although the development of Nauvoo has been taken over by ‘Nauvoo Restoration, Inc.,’ the Joseph Smith Historical Center with its properties, features, and narrative can be developed to be a superior specialty in the total effort for the restoring of

Nauvoo.”<sup>76</sup> Focusing on historical preservation and interpretation became the RLDS “superior specialty.”

Following the massive temple reconstruction project by the LDS Church at the turn of the century, renovation by both the LDS Church and the Community of Christ have halted in the City of Joseph. The proliferation of LDS temples across the world, and a focus on historic Kirtland properties, seem to have diverted renovation budgets away from Nauvoo. In a personal interview with the author, one Community of Christ official doubted that further RLDS expansion might occur; he hoped instead for a modernized visitors’ center in Nauvoo as well as a more historically accurate restoration of the Joseph Smith Homestead. Frustrated by the reactionary stance taken in the past by Church members and donors, he longed for a proactive rather than reactive approach to historical site preservation. From the LDS perspective, one similarly wonders what remains for Nauvoo. With the temple complete and most significant buildings restored, focus seems to be shifting from renovation to maintenance and public relations.

Indeed, public relations may be the greatest area for growth in Nauvoo moving forward. Scattered throughout the history of the Church’s return to Nauvoo are repeated cries from non-LDS residents for a voice in remembering their town’s history and shaping its future. As early as 1970, Nauvoo residents lamented the secrecy associated with Nauvoo’s restoration. Following a master planning effort for the city, a committee observed: “One significant problem that plagued the planning program from its inception was the reluctance of Nauvoo Restoration, Inc. to freely discuss its plans for the Mormon holdings (the area comprising one-half of the corporate limits). Officers of the corporation and its staff did discuss their tentative plans with the planning firm, but evidently only under the condition that the consultant not disclose what he was told. Reports in nationally circulated publications, however, have stated that Nauvoo Restoration planned to develop motels, restaurants and other facilities for tourists.”<sup>77</sup> Threatened by the rumors, Elmer Kraus, local businessman and president of the Nauvoo Chamber of Commerce, echoed the frustration. “We are not part of the big plan. Never was the community invited to share in their plans. They told the people what a wonderful thing they were doing for Nauvoo. But with all this building and with all the publicity, we can’t interest businesses in moving here.” Looking for the positive, Kraus noted, “I am happy to see the restoration of these old homes, and the Midwest is fortunate that it is being done on a quality basis. They are doing a splendid job.” However, he concluded, “I think we should try to help and still keep our identity. But no one likes to be pushed around, or ignored.”<sup>78</sup> Continuing his position, Kraus reiterated his comments in a *New York Times* article on Nauvoo:

We are well aware of Nauvoo's role in the history of the Mormons. But after they left, Nauvoo had an interesting history of its own, including the reorganized Mormons, and we have managed to maintain a modest prosperity here since the Utah Mormons left. . . . There is definitely a big change around here already. We know the village will never be like it was,<sup>79</sup> but we think we'll all manage to live together, hopefully to everybody's advantage.

Nauvoo "never being like it was" now seems like an accurate assessment as visitors have multiplied and construction boomed, leading ultimately to the temple's reconstruction. During that construction, a series of more than twenty-five interviews with long-time Nauvoo residents revealed the divide caused by the restoration. Summarizing what some in town feel, one resident noted:

I would say the majority of the population of Nauvoo wished that this never happened. . . . They'd just as soon not have the Mormon influx and keep the town the way it was. It's changing their town. They lived here because they liked this quiet little community, and also it's a natural thing to have a fear of the unknown. Here's this large influx come in, and they're afraid of it.<sup>80</sup>

A second resident observed:

The city is split right now. There's a handful of people that are against any kind of growth. Those are the ones you hear: the loudest ones. They're not really anti-Mormon as much as they don't want to change their way of life. It could be the largest Jewish group you've ever seen, and move into Nauvoo and take over and build some massive synagogue, and have two hundred thousand Jews coming in here, and that would bother them. It's just the impact of the people. It's not as much the Mormon Church as it is the change of life.<sup>81</sup>

A third commented:

It seems to me that for whatever reason, the Church has an abundance of money, and what it really wants to do, it has the money to do it. Mormons are well organized, well schooled. The plans were put in place, and maybe the plans have been in place for years that they would return to Nauvoo, rebuild the temple, and restructure the flats the way it was back in 1839 to 1847. At any rate, there is a lot of animosity.<sup>82</sup>

While the sample size for these interviews is small, so too is the town of Nauvoo, where it appears that the return of the Mormon Church has been met with mixed feelings. Within the adherents to the mission of Joseph Smith, restoration has, at times, caused division, contention, and competition. For some residents, it has brought economic prosperity, but also unwelcome change. It is ironic that the twentieth century renovation of the City of Joseph would not

only restore the town to its 1840s character, but also bring back some of the 1840s animosities. Moving forward with a message of inclusion, transforming Nauvoo into a place of intersection rather than division may be Nauvoo restoration's next and greatest hurdle.

## Conclusion

In 1847, J. H. Buckingham, a newspaper reporter from Boston, visited Nauvoo and toured the then vacant temple. Entering what he called “the grand hall” on the building’s lower floor, he found a message left by one of the building’s previous occupants. Inscribed in gilded capital letters over the windows at the end of the room, the visitor found the phrase, “THE LORD HAS BEHELD OUR SACRIFICE: COME AFTER US.”<sup>83</sup> While intended as a message for those who would follow the Saints west across the plains, the message may also summarize the twentieth century Latter-day Saint return to Nauvoo. Recognizing the sacrifice of their ancestors in leaving Nauvoo, their posterity has come back to the city after them, fulfilling John Taylor’s prophecy regarding their return.

While regulating these returns, perhaps the counsel given in a revelation to Joseph Smith in 1834 on how the Saints should gather to Missouri provides a pattern for Nauvoo’s restoration. “Talk not of judgments, neither boast of faith nor of mighty works,” the revelation reads, “but carefully gather together, as much in one region as can be, consistently with the feelings of the people” (D&C 105:24). By doing so, the Saints were promised: “And behold, I will give unto you favor and grace in their eyes, that you may rest in peace and safety. . . . In this way you may find favor in the eyes of the people. . . . And I will soften the hearts of the people” (D&C 105:25–27). Finding a place for a Latter-day Saint return to Nauvoo requires similar wisdom.

## Notes

1. Since 2001, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has been known as the Community of Christ. The earlier name, together with the acronym RLDS, are used throughout the paper to refer to the name of the church.

2. 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), 7:580.

3. Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript*, Scott G. Kenney, ed., (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983–1984), 3:49.

4. Frederick Hawkins Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley*, Fawn M. Brodie, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 94.

5. J. C. Rich to Edward Hunter, December 25, 1869, Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated Historical Files, Nauvoo, Illinois (hereafter cited as NRI Historical Files).

6. See Ronald E. Romig, ed., *Emma’s Nauvoo* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer

Books, 2007), 8–10.

7. See Joyce A. Shireman, “The Mormon Prophet’s Illinois Legacy as Revealed in the Community of Christ’s Historic Restoration in Nauvoo,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 25 (2005): 145–48.

8. Alexander Hale Smith to E. L. Kelley, May 31, 1893, Community of Christ Library-Archives, as cited in Shireman, “The Mormon Prophet’s Illinois Legacy as Revealed in the Community of Christ’s Historic Restoration in Nauvoo,” 145.

9. Heman C. Smith to E. L. Kelley, October 17, 1905, cited in Richard P. Howard, “The Nauvoo Heritage of the Reorganized Church,” *Journal of Mormon History* 16 (1990), 49.

10. See Shireman, “The Mormon Prophet’s Illinois Legacy as Revealed in the Community of Christ’s Historic Restoration in Nauvoo,” 148–55.

11. For additional details see Barbara Hands Bernauer, *Still “Side by Side:” The Final Burial of Joseph and Hyrum Smith*, 2d ed., (n. p.: 2001).

12. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–1886), 23:61–62.

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