



Hyrum and Jerusha Smith's home in Kirtland, Ohio, ca. 1900. This nonextant home is traditionally identified as the site of the Newel Knight and Lydia Bailey wedding. Courtesy Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri (reference #D765.4).

Newel and Lydia Bailey Knight's Kirtland Love Story and Historic Wedding

William G. Hartley

In October 1835, Newel Knight and Lydia Bailey, two spouseless adults still in the prime of life, found themselves living in the same boardinghouse and eating at the same dining table. As lodgers with Hyrum and Jerusha Smith in Kirtland, Ohio, they had good reason to notice each other. Lydia's husband had deserted her more than three years earlier, and Newel's wife had died a year before. Romance developed quickly, and in a couple of months, Lydia accepted Newel's marriage proposal. Their pending wedding led Joseph Smith, who had personally converted both Lydia and Newel, to declare his right to perform marriages. Being a leader in a church that had published its beliefs concerning marriage, he could legally do so, and he also believed he had authority from God by virtue of the priesthood he held. Nevertheless, the wedding has given rise in recent times to historical controversy.

Newel Knight

Before Joseph Smith received the gold plates, he worked for a time for Joseph Knight Sr. in Colesville, New York, and became acquainted with the large Knight family, including married son Newel. Those in the Knight family network were among the first people to know about and believe in Joseph Smith's prophetic work.¹

Newel Knight was born September 13, 1800, in Marlborough, Vermont, and moved with his parents to New York when he was nine. In 1825, he married Sally Colburn, and they settled in Colesville, New York, near his parents. The next year, Joseph Smith came to work for the Knights, and when he knew he could trust them, he told some of the family about his visits from Moroni. After Joseph obtained the gold plates, the Knights provided him with paper and supplies while he translated. Newel was the recipient of the Church's first miraculous healing, when Joseph Smith cast a devil out of him. Newel was baptized soon after. Newel and Sally were with Joseph and Emma Smith in August 1830 when Joseph received a revelation regarding the sacrament.²

So many Knight relatives converted that Colesville became the Church's first organized branch. Hyrum Smith served briefly as its president, and Newel worked closely with him. When Hyrum left, Newel

became the Colesville Branch President. Newel helped direct the Colesville Saints' move from New York to the Kirtland area early in 1831 and their move later that summer to Jackson County, Missouri. He was present at the dedication of the temple site in Independence and continued to preside over the Colesville Branch in Missouri. Joseph Smith blessed Newel and Sally's infant son, Samuel, who was born on October 4, 1831.³

Newel, Sally, and Samuel were among the Saints forced from Jackson County in 1833. In 1834, when the Church's first stakes were created, one in Missouri and another in Ohio, Newel was called to the high council in Missouri.⁴ He was chosen to be one of the Missouri elders to go to Kirtland to help build the temple and there receive "a great endowment and blessing."⁵ While preparing to go, he and Sally became ill, probably with malaria. She was pregnant at the time and gave birth to a son in September 1834, but both she and the baby died soon afterward. After burying them, Newel, not fully healthy, left young Samuel with relatives and headed for Kirtland.

When Newel reached Kirtland, his good friends Hyrum and Jerusha Smith welcomed him and offered him board and room at their home. "Both he and his ever kind and amiable wife Jerusha," Newel said, "did all they could to make me comfortable."⁶

Newel visited the temple construction site, volunteered his labor, and was put to work. Records are silent regarding specific tasks this miller-by-trade performed. Newel considered this labor on the temple to be of "the greatest importance" because "it is a long time since the Lord had a house on the Earth."⁷ For ten months his workdays revolved around lumber, plaster, glass, shingles, moldings, the sounds of hammers and saws, and the smell of wet plaster and new paint. Late in 1835, Newel noted in his journal, "The summer has passed very pleasantly with me, and I rejoice in my labors on the House of the Lord."⁸

Lacking a wife, Newel paid close attention to the slender, fair-haired, soft-spoken, light-blue-eyed Lydia Bailey when she moved into Hyrum and Jerusha's boardinghouse. The two saw each other at meals and while coming and going in the house but rarely spoke to each other. Gradually, as Newel learned about this attractive boarder, her sorrow-filled past, and her remarkable conversion story, he fell in love with her.⁹

Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey

A daughter of Jesse and Sally Burt Goldthwaite, Lydia was born in Sutton, Massachusetts, on June 9, 1812.¹⁰ Her Goldthwaite grandparents and their parents were Salem, Massachusetts, people. Her mother's parents, David and Silence Jones Burt, were from Norton, Bristol County, Massachusetts. Lydia's parents, Newel said, "were respectable, but not rich."¹¹ Lydia's mother was Presbyterian. Her father belonged to no denomination

“but was a moral & temperate man.”¹² Lydia was the third of the twelve children born to Jesse and Sally in Massachusetts and New York. When Lydia was eight, Jesse moved the family to Villenova in western New York, some fifteen miles from Lake Erie and thirty miles southwest of Buffalo. Jesse was a farmer, one of the early settlers of the township. The family lived in a large, comfortable cabin in a wooded area. Lydia received a common-school education. When she was fifteen, her parents sent her to a local boarding school, because she was “studiously inclined” and had “a mind that was never satisfied.” Likely she attended the Fredonia Academy in nearby Pomfret. This Presbyterian-affiliated school was the main boarding school in Chautauqua County and drew students from western New York.¹³ She attended one year, returned home for the summer, and then, according to her history, went back to the school. Just how many terms she attended is not known.

At school, Lydia met a popular young man named Calvin Bailey.¹⁴ They married in the fall of 1828, when she was sixteen.¹⁵ For Lydia, the marriage turned tragic. Her own history, published for young readers, skims past her troubles with Calvin. But Newel recorded details based on what Lydia told him of some of the serious difficulties. For about three months, Newel wrote in his journal, all went well for new bride Lydia. But then she found that Calvin was a heavy drinker and an abusive man.

In 1830, Lydia and Calvin were living in Lodi, New York. At this point, Lydia’s life details become confusing. There is a Lodi, now called Gowanda, not twelve miles northeast of Villenova, which would seem to be the Lodi where Calvin and Lydia moved. But, there is another Lodi more than one hundred miles away—about twenty miles northwest of Ithaca in the Finger Lakes region—overlooking Seneca Lake. Apparently this distant Lodi was where Lydia and Calvin lived. The couple’s first child, Rosanna Bailey, was born there on November 3, 1830.¹⁶ Lydia loved her infant but felt sorrow, knowing the child would suffer “shame and wretchedness” from an intemperate father. Calvin, through heavy drinking and poor management, disposed of his farm and made his family destitute. He rented a small, uncomfortable home in Lodi and moved Lydia and Rosanna there.

In these dire circumstances, Lydia gave birth to a son, Edwin Bailey, on February 12, 1832. The baby lived but a day, and Lydia nearly died, too. Calvin sold the family’s furniture to pay for his drinking habit, and he often threatened Lydia, Newel wrote, and was cruel to the little daughter. About two weeks after newborn Edwin’s death, Calvin told Lydia they were to move about one hundred miles to New Albion, which is only about fifteen miles southeast of Villenova, where her parents lived.¹⁷ Lydia pleaded that she was too ill to move that far—she could not sit up for even a half hour at a time. “If you are so independan[t] you may Stay where you are,” Calvin

said harshly, “but I shall go where you will never see me again.”¹⁸ He deserted the family. Soon afterward, a man came and took away the family’s milk cow because Calvin had sold it to get money to move away.¹⁹

Alone and almost friendless, Lydia returned to her parents’ home in Villanova, but when is not known. Newel records that Calvin, after being gone a “considerable time,” returned once, tried to take the child, and threatened Lydia’s life.²⁰ Friends rescued Lydia and the little girl. Then, in January 1833, two-year-old Rosanna died.²¹ After recounting this history, Newel penned his own harsh judgments of Calvin Bailey:

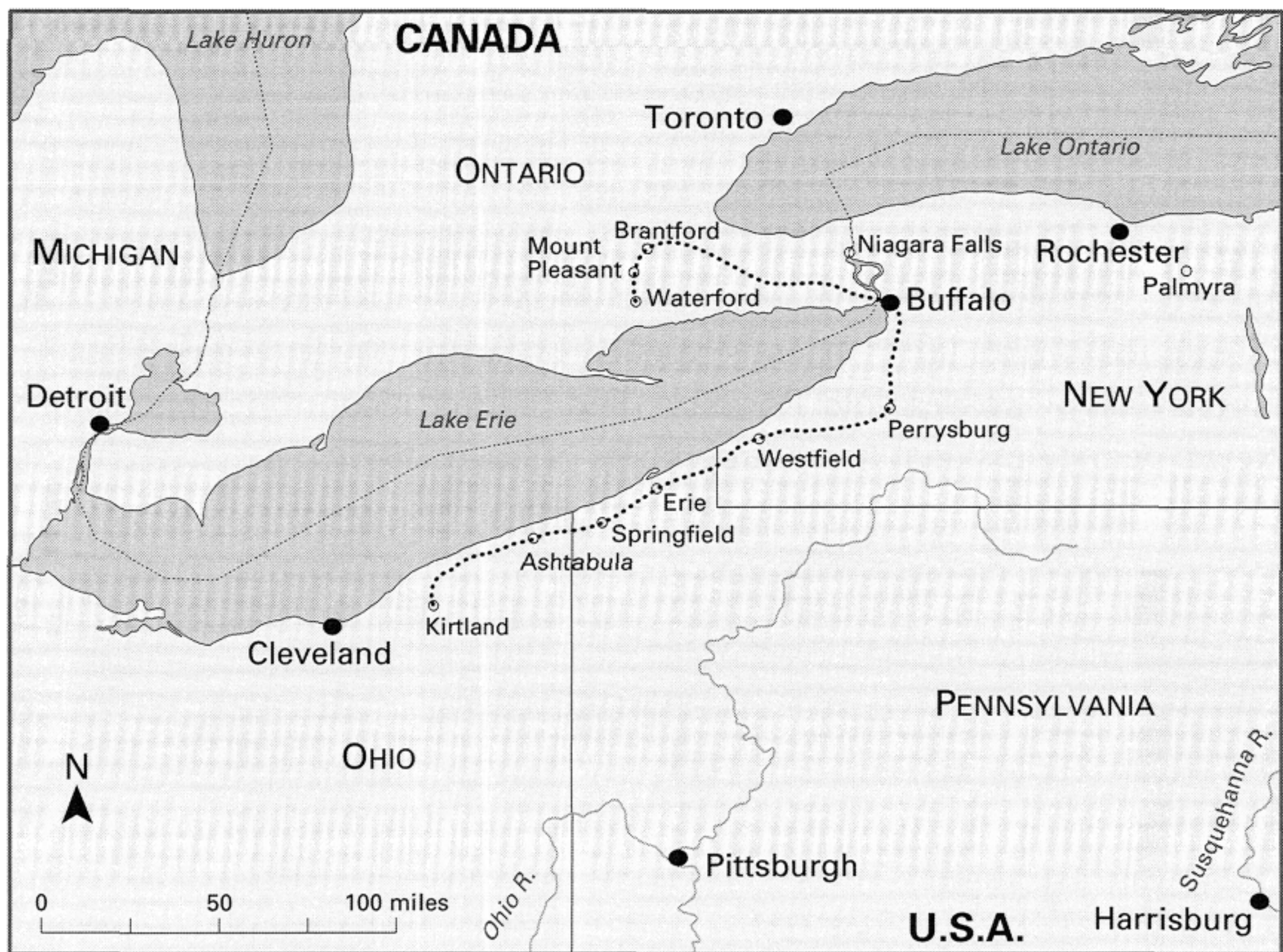
Bail[e]y turned out to be a drunkard unworthy of a wife: letting her suffer and pine in sorrow, while he was carousing and spending even the avails of the last Cow. The trials of a Woman that has a drunken husband, are registered where such fiends never go; and the hellish deeds of the toper, with all his folly “thick upon him,” are reserved among the tr[e]asures of the dam[n]ed.²²

Deserted by her husband and suffering from the loss of two children, Lydia was distraught. “Tears were often in her eyes, and a constant aching was at her heart,” her biographer said.²³ To help Lydia mend, her parents agreed to let her move away from the scenes of her misfortunes. In February 1833, a family friend named Eleazer Freeman Nickerson²⁴ took her to Canada by sled. They navigated a shortcut by leaving from a shoreline point below Buffalo and sledding about twenty miles across frozen Lake Erie to the Ontario side—breaking through the ice once. Ashore, they glided on to Mount Pleasant in Upper Canada, about sixty miles west of Niagara Falls. There, Nickerson and his wife made Lydia feel at home.²⁵

Lydia spent a pleasant spring, summer, and fall in Mount Pleasant and attended the local Methodist meetings. She wrote to her parents that she was glad to be where “I can feel safe from a wretch in humane [*sic*] shape.” She regretted that she could not be home to “enjoy the society of kind Parents Brothers and Sisters” and felt to return “if [only] I could and not be disturbed [by him] that I have reason to believe seeks [for] revenge on me.”²⁶ Her 1833 letters home reveal her to be a believing Christian. Among bits of big-sister advice she sent to her younger brothers are these: “Be good Boys to read your Bibles and pray”; “Don’t forget Sunday S[c]hool, learn you[r] lessons well”; and “Rest when Sunday comes and go to me[e]ting.”²⁷

Conversion by Joseph Smith

In October 1833, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon left Kirtland, Ohio, and traveled with Freeman Nickerson on a proselyting mission to visit Nickerson’s sons, Eleazer Freeman Nickerson and Moses Nickerson, in Upper Canada. These two sons were prosperous merchants and men of



Outbound Route of Joseph Smith's 1833 Mission to Canada

standing in Mount Pleasant. Perhaps this is the only time in LDS Church history when a Church President has served a standard proselyting mission while holding that high office.²⁸

The missionaries left Kirtland on October 5, 1833, and preached along the way. On October 14, the Prophet's party passed through the neighborhood of Lydia's parents, stopping in the township of Perrysburg, where Father Nickerson lived, and preaching in Lodi. While en route to Canada, Joseph and Sidney became concerned about their families and prayed for them. In response, Joseph received a revelation, now Doctrine and Covenants 100, which said that their families would be fine and that the two men must preach what the Lord would inspire them to say because he had "much people" in the area where they were going (D&C 100:3). Lydia was one of them. The Lord charged Joseph and Sidney to "lift up your voices unto this people" (D&C 100:5). In return, they were given a promise: "Inasmuch as ye do this the Holy Ghost shall be shed forth in bearing record unto all things whatsoever ye shall say" (D&C 100:8). Lydia would witness that outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The missionary party reached Eleazer Nickerson's home on Friday, October 18. That evening or the next, the host asked Smith and Rigdon to explain their religion. Joseph Smith told about Moroni's visits, the gold

plates, and the glorious message of the Book of Mormon. Lydia, “who was listening and watching him intently, saw his face become white and a shining glow seemed to beam from every feature.” Although Lydia had been a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church for nearly seven years, this witness of the Spirit converted her to the restored gospel.²⁹ Joseph Smith bore testimony of the restoration of the priesthood and the need for baptism by proper authority. Elder Rigdon spoke next. When both men finished, those present asked many questions.

Notice was circulated that there would be a public preaching in the Nickerson brothers’ new store. On Sunday, October 20, a “very large” and attentive congregation heard the two Mormon leaders preach. “With power,” Lydia said, Joseph Smith exhorted those in attendance to seek for the truth of what he had preached. After preaching elsewhere, Joseph and Sidney returned to Mount Pleasant on Thursday, October 24, and “held meeting at candle lighting to a large congregation.” There, Eleazer Nickerson and his wife declared their full belief.³⁰ Another meeting was held at Mount Pleasant on Saturday. The next day, Sunday, October 27th, “twelve came forward and was baptized,” including Eleazer Nickerson, his household, and “Lidia Baeley”—as Joseph Smith recorded her name in his diary.³¹ Perhaps employing poetic license, Lydia’s biographer wrote that Lydia was so thrilled when baptized that she cried out while standing in the cold water, “Glory to God in the highest! Thanks be to His holy name that I have lived to see this day.”³²

The Saints met together the day Lydia was baptized. “Had a good meeting,” Joseph Smith recorded. “One of the sisters got the gift of toungues which made the saints rejoice may God increse the gifts among them for his sons sake.”³³ That sister was Lydia. Her biography says of that meeting that the Nickerson family were seated around “the wide, old-fashioned fire-place in the parlor” listening to Joseph Smith teach. Moses Nickerson said he would feel glad if someone who had been baptized “could receive the gift of tongues as the ancient Saints did and speak to us,” to which Joseph responded, “If one of you will rise up and open your mouth it shall be filled, and you shall speak in tongues.”³⁴ Everyone turned to Lydia and urged her to be the one. Then, according to her history,

she was enveloped as with a flame, and, unable longer to retain her seat, she arose and her mouth was filled with the praises of God and His glory. The spirit of tongues was upon her, and she was clothed in a shining light, so bright that all present saw it with great distinctness above the light of the fire and the candles.³⁵

Two more converts were baptized and confirmed at the water’s edge. The missionaries ordained Eleazer Nickerson an elder and put him in charge of the new congregation.³⁶

The next day, Monday, October 28, the believers met at candlelight, “broke bread,” and the missionaries confirmed those who had been baptized the previous day. “The spirit was given in great power to some and the rest had great peace,” Joseph Smith’s journal records.³⁷

On October 29, the missionaries headed back to Kirtland. While their team was being hitched, Joseph Smith paced back and forth in the sitting room, deep in thought. Then, according to Lydia, he said to her and others present:

“I have been pondering on Sister Lydia’s lonely condition, and wondering why it is that she has passed through so much sorrow and affliction and is thus separated from all her relatives. I now understand it. The Lord has suffered it even as He allowed Joseph of old to be afflicted, who was sold by his brethren as a slave into a far country, and through that became a savior to his father’s house and country. Even so shall it be with her, the hand of the Lord will overrule it for good to her and her father’s family.”³⁸

Speaking directly to Lydia, he pronounced a blessing that sounds very much like a patriarchal blessing. This was before formal patriarchal blessings were given in the Church.³⁹

“Sister Lydia, great are your blessings. The Lord, your Savior, loves you, and will overrule all your past sorrows and afflictions for good unto you. Let your heart be comforted. You are of the blood of Israel descended through the loins of Ephraim. You shall yet be a savior to your father’s house. Therefore be comforted, and let your heart rejoice, for the Lord has a great work for you to do. Be faithful and endure unto the end and all will be well.”⁴⁰

Lydia added another detail missing from Joseph’s diary account. Freeman Nickerson gave the Kirtland party money for them to return to Kirtland by crossing Lake Erie and thereby save some two hundred miles of land travel. Apparently, however, they instead went overland via Buffalo, New York, and reached Kirtland on November 4, 1833.⁴¹ Almost a year and a half would pass before Lydia would see Joseph Smith again.

Lydia stayed with the Nickersons until the next summer. She hitched a ride with someone heading towards New York and got as far as St. Catherine, Ontario, about eighty miles from her home. She stayed there for two months, then went by stagecoach to her family’s home in Villanova in September 1834. When she attempted to interest her parents in Mormonism, they “tried every method [to] turn her from what they termed delusion.”⁴² When persuasion failed, they offered her property and money. “Her anxiety to be with the Saints increased [with] their Coldness,” Newel related, so, “notwithstanding She dearly loved her friends She loved the cause of righteousness still better [and] bade her Fathers house farewell.” About May 20, 1835, she started for Kirtland. Despite her parents’ objections to her going to the Mormon center, they gave her “ample means” to reach her destination and to start out “comfortable and respectable.”⁴³

In Kirtland, Lydia found lodging with the Vincent Knight family (no relation to Newel). Before she had even unpacked, Vincent asked her to help Joseph Smith pay off a debt. She emptied her purse, giving him, she estimated, fifty dollars. This meant she lacked means to buy even one meal. That evening, when Brother Knight told her that her money had kept Joseph from prison, she felt pleased she was able to help the prophet. Lydia lived with the Vincent Knight family until the fall.⁴⁴

Newel and Lydia's Courtship

About October 1835, Lydia accepted Hyrum Smith's offer to move into his household and assist his wife, Jerusha, with running the boarding-house. Lydia described Hyrum as being "tall, well-framed, with a fine, handsome countenance, and blue eyes, and his face was full of intelligence and spirit. His manner was dignified, but he was amiable and vivacious, and withal exceedingly courteous and fascinating" in all his interactions.⁴⁵ In the Hyrum Smith home, Lydia met Newel Knight, who was one of the boarders. Newel described how he fell in love with her:

She had not been long in the family, when I found there was a growing attachment in my bosom to wards her, which I, in vain, strove to over come. She was very reserved in her manners, while prudence and wisdom seemd to mark her course in all her move ments; seldom did I hear her speak, unless it was to Sister Smith concerning the affairs she was engaged in; yet [I] Could now and then see the Crimson faint upon her Cheek; she would occasionally, as she supposed unperceive[ably] cast her eyes towards me, that [showed] Cupid's dart had found its way to her heart: yet it appears she did not intend to let any one perceive it.⁴⁶

Lydia's history says Newel was "tall, had light brown hair, a keen blue eye and a very energetic and determined manner." She learned Newel was a widower and had a three-year-old son in Missouri. Lydia "ached with sympathy for the desolate young man" because she knew all too well what sorrow was.⁴⁷ Newel said he doubted he and she had exchanged a dozen words up to November 18, when he "came to the determination to make my feelings known to her." That evening he found her alone in an upper room. "I took her by the hand and after a few words with her I told her I thought her situation, as well as mine was rather lonely, and if it was agreeable to her perhaps we might be some company for each other."⁴⁸ She didn't answer. Tears streamed from her eyes. Newel noted that when she was able to suppress her tears, she said:

The true feelings of my heart are known [by] none save the Lord. I suppose you are aware of [my] situation. I would rather sacrifice every feel[ing] of my own and even life rather than [st]ep aside from virtue, or offend my heavenly [fathe]r, or violate the law of God.⁴⁹

By that she meant that however much she might like Newel, she believed it was improper for her to be courted while she was still legally married, even though her husband had deserted her more than three years before. Lydia's history claims that Newel "endeavor[ed] to show her that according to the law she was a free woman, having been deserted for three years with nothing provided for her support," an argument she did not accept.⁵⁰ Newel's version is different. "Bailey, of course, mean as he was, was not divorced from her," he said, but he believed that the Lord nevertheless wanted them to marry. "I doubt not [the in]tegrity of your heart," he told tearful Lydia, then suggested that "when you fully un[derstand] the law of God you will know that you are free, [and I] would ask nothing at your hand Contrary [to tha]t law."⁵¹ Lydia, overcome with emotion, could not reply. "She broke from my embrace & left the room." Having put his heart on the line, Newel pondered what to do next. He had "half supposed" she would utterly reject his proposition, which would have ended his pursuit, "but in this to my great satisfaction," he said, "I was wholly disappointed."⁵²

He determined to find out God's will in the matter, so for three days he pondered and prayed and fasted. Monday morning, November 22, 1835, he concluded he should talk over the matter with friend and landlord Hyrum Smith. Hyrum replied that "he knew it was all right, that the Lord never designed [that] a virtuous intelligent female as she was, should spend all her life single & in her present lonely situation, for God requires all, both male and female, to fill the measure of their Creation, & to multiply upon the earth as he hath Commanded." Newel agreed, but he did not want to court Lydia if it caused people to speak evil of their relationship, so he told Hyrum he wished Joseph Smith would decide the matter, "for if the Lord gives her to me no man can say why do ye so?" Hyrum agreed to seek his brother's approval for Newel and Lydia to court. Newel thanked Hyrum, then lifted his heart to God in a prayer of thanksgiving and supplication.⁵³

Newel spent that Monday morning working on the Kirtland Temple. Shortly after noon, Hyrum came to him and said he had explained the situation to Joseph Smith and now had an answer. As reported by Newel, Joseph Smith's instructions read today much like some of the personal counsel recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, although this information was only privately and verbally conveyed:

Bro[ther] Hiram Came to me, said he had laid the affair before Bro[ther] Joseph, who at the time was with his Council. Broth[er] Joseph after p[ray]or & reflecting a little or in other words enquiring [of the] Lord Said it is all right, She is his & the sooner they [are] married the better. Tell them no law shall hurt [them]. They need not fear either the law of God or man for [it] shall not touch them; & the Lord bless them. This [is the] will of the Lord concerning that matter.⁵⁴

As soon as he could, Newel went to the boardinghouse, found Lydia in the room where he had told her his feelings, and related to her what Joseph Smith had instructed. “We lifted our hearts with gratitude to our heavenly Father for his goodness to wards us & that we live in this momentous age, & as did the ancients so we have the privilege of enquireing through the prophet, & receiveing the word of the Lord concerning us.”⁵⁵ When she heard the prophet’s answer, Lydia fell to her knees and poured out her soul in thanksgiving to God. Then she agreed to marry Newel.⁵⁶ Newel then went to the dining room and ate: “I had fasted & prayed three days & knights [*sic*], & did not desire food until after I had learned the will of the Lord, & Lydia & myself had made a Covenant to be for each other.”⁵⁷

This was Monday afternoon, November 23. Because of Joseph Smith’s instructions, Newel and Lydia decided to marry as soon as possible. Hyrum and Jerusha Smith offered to provide the wedding feast and advised that it be the next evening, “to which,” Newel confessed, “we readily Consented.” To “fulfil the gentile law,” Newel rode on horseback nine miles and obtained a marriage license from the county clerk, and was back by 3 P.M.⁵⁸

But who should perform the ceremony? Of the Saints, only Seymour Brunson had a license to legally perform marriages in Ohio—a judge in Geauga County had refused to let Mormon ministers obtain licenses to marry people. That evening, Newel and Lydia discussed how they both wished that Joseph Smith might “seal the bond of matrimony for us,” but had told only the Lord of their desire.⁵⁹ Because Hyrum Smith was inviting the wedding guests, Newel requested that he ask Brother Brunson to perform the wedding. But while Hyrum was inviting Joseph and Emma Smith to be guests at the wedding, Hyrum mentioned to his brother his intent to invite Brunson to do the ceremony. Joseph objected. “Stop I will marry them my self,” he announced. This was good news to Newel and Lydia: “It seemed that the Lord had granted unto us the desires of our hearts.”⁶⁰

Historic Wedding

Tuesday evening, November 24, 1835,⁶¹ Newel and Lydia and about a dozen wedding guests and Joseph Smith gathered in the Hyrum Smith home for the wedding and the dinner. This event proved to be a milestone in the history of the early days of the LDS Church and has sparked recent legal controversy among some historians.

The newly published Doctrine and Covenants contained an “Article on Marriage,” which had been approved by a Church conference in August 1835, just a few months before the Knight wedding. The article, written by Oliver Cowdery, expressed the belief the Saints then held regarding marriage. It read, in part:

We believe that all marriages in this Church of Christ of Latter-day Saints should be solemnized in a public meeting or feast prepared for that purpose,

and that the solemnization should be performed by a Presiding High Priest, High Priest, Bishop, Elder or Priest.⁶²

When he learned Newel and Lydia wanted to marry, Joseph Smith felt inspired that the time had come to assert his rights as a church leader, even if the local court refused to grant Mormon ministers a license to perform marriages. From then on, he decided, Saints could—and should—be married by priesthood authority.⁶³ According to Lydia's memory years later, Joseph complained:

Our Elders have been wronged and prosecuted for marrying without a license. The Lord God of Israel has given me authority to unite the people in the holy bonds of matrimony. And from this time forth I shall use that privilege and marry whomsoever I see fit. And the enemies of the Church shall never have power to use the law against me.⁶⁴

Despite the snowy, freezing-cold evening, guests filled the room. Emma Smith accompanied Joseph, and they found that “the feast was prepared, the guests were ready.”⁶⁵ When Newel and Lydia sat down, the ceremony began. After singing and a prayer, Joseph asked the couple to stand and join hands. Joseph then made some remarks upon the subject of marriage, indicating “that it was an institution of heaven first solemnized in the garden of Eden by God himself, by the authority of everlasting priesthood.” Using a ceremony original to him but one closely following the Church's newly published marriage regulations, Joseph called Newel and Lydia by name and asked the couple to “covenant to be each others companions during [their] lives, and discharge the duties of husband & wife in all respects.” They agreed. Joseph pronounced them husband and wife and blessed them that like Adam and Eve they would multiply and replenish the earth. He promised them a long life and prosperity.⁶⁶ The groom was thirty-five; the bride, twenty-three.

Because some of the company asked Joseph questions, he continued to speak on the principle of marriage, revealing “much that was entirely new.” While Joseph spoke, Lydia again saw “that strange, brilliant light shine though his features.”⁶⁷ For Newel, the evening was more than just a wedding ceremony and social occasion; it was a rich, spiritual experience:

The Prophet & his Council were there; we received much Instruction from the Prophet Concerning matrimony, & what the ancient order of God was, & what it must be again Concerning marriage. In the name of the Lord, & by the authority of the preisthood [*sic*] which he held, he joined us in the bond of matrimony. . . . The evening passed off well & all felt edefied & glad of opportunity of enjoying instruction from the Lord through the beloved Prophet. Long, long has the world been shrowded in gentile ignorance & superstition, but the shackles are beginning to be blown away lik[e] the Summer threshing floor & light & intelligence to be given the Children of the kingdom.

Legal Controversies

Newel and Lydia's wedding has sparked some controversy among historians.⁶⁸ Did Joseph Smith break the law by performing a wedding he lacked a license to perform? And was Lydia legally eligible to remarry, or was she committing bigamy? Recent research summarized below shows that, according to Ohio statutes then in force, Joseph Smith was entitled to perform the wedding, even without a license.⁶⁹ Ohio's 1824 "Act Regulating Marriages" provided that a religious society (such as the Quakers, who had no ministers) could perform marriages without a license so long as the ceremony was done "agreeable to the rules and regulations of their respective churches." With its "marriage" article published that September in the Doctrine and Covenants as section 101, the Church met the requirements of that law. Therefore, when Joseph Smith married Newel and Lydia, he performed a marriage that was legal, even though he lacked a court-issued license. (See the county clerk's record of the marriage: fig. 1 in M. Scott Bradshaw's article, this issue.)

But was Lydia legally entitled to remarry? Apparently Newel had heard that according to Ohio law, a person deserted by a spouse for three years could remarry.⁷⁰ However, he must not have known that Ohio had changed the law just that year, requiring the desertion be for five years instead of three. No matter how many years were required, the law did specify that the person had to be an Ohio resident for two years, which disqualified Lydia, and the person had to apply to the Ohio Supreme Court for a divorce, which Lydia did not do.⁷¹ In that regard, Lydia technically broke the law. Conscientious, good person that she was, she agreed to marry only because Joseph Smith affirmed that the Lord approved of the union. Years later, trying to show the prophetic correctness of the decision, Lydia asserted that "a few days" after she agreed to marry Newel, news of her husband's death reached her. Serious genealogy research has failed to locate Calvin's death date or place, but he is missing from the 1840 census. Lydia wrote to her family and told them about marrying Newel. They wondered how she had managed to obtain a divorce but were extremely pleased she was free of and safe from Calvin.⁷²

Postscript

Newlyweds Newel and Lydia stayed in Kirtland until the Kirtland Temple was dedicated in April 1836. Before leaving Kirtland, Lydia received her patriarchal blessing from Joseph Smith Sr. Having lost both of her children, she took great comfort in his promise that she would have many children, teach them righteousness, and have power to "keep them from the power of the destroyer."⁷³ The couple reached Newel's home in Clay County, Missouri, in mid-May 1836. During the next decade, Newel and

Lydia had six children while experiencing the Saints' fortunes and misfortunes in Missouri and Nauvoo. The family participated in the exodus from Nauvoo, crossed the Missouri, and were part of George Miller's advance company, which wintered at the Ponca Camp north of Winter Quarters. There, Newel was the senior high councilman until he died, apparently of pneumonia, in that isolated outpost on January 11, 1847. Lydia gave birth to the couple's last child after Newel's death. With her seven children, she managed to move west in 1850. As promised in her patriarchal blessing, all her children lived to adulthood. She later remarried and lived in Salt Lake City, Provo, Payson, and southern Utah. She spent her last years doing ordinance work in the St. George Temple and died on April 3, 1884.



Courtesy Darrell V. Knight

Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey Knight during her Utah years

Joseph Smith performed many more marriages in Kirtland after Newel and Lydia's, and during the rest of the time he was subject to Ohio state law, no one challenged his right to do so.

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1. William G. Hartley, *"They Are My Friends": A History of the Joseph Knight Family, 1825–1850* (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book, 1986). This article draws from my extensive revisions of that book's chapter twelve, "Newel and Lydia in Kirtland." The spellings of Newel's and Lydia's names vary. Newel's name should be spelled with one *l*, not two. A few records do spell it with *ll*, but most early LDS records listing his name have but one *l*. See his own Missouri petition for redress, for example. When referring to Newel in histories and genealogical records, Knight descendants use the one *l* spelling. Likewise, Lydia's maiden name, "Goldthwaite," is sometimes spelled without an *e*. Following family convention, I have chosen to include the *e*.

2. Hartley, *History of the Joseph Knight Family*, 11–37; "Newel Knight," in Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History, 1901–36), 2:773–75; Doctrine and Covenants 27.

3. Larry C. Porter has written extensively about the Colesville Branch. See Larry C. Porter, "A Study of the Origins of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816–1831" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1971); and two articles: Larry C. Porter, "'Ye Shall Go to the Ohio': Exodus of the

New York Saints to Ohio, 1831,” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint History: Ohio*, ed. Milton V. Backman (Provo, Utah: BYU Department of Church History and Doctrine, 1990), 1–25; and Larry C. Porter, “The Colesville Branch in Kaw Township, Jackson County, Missouri, 1831 to 1833,” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Missouri*, ed. Arnold K. Garr and Clark V. Johnson (Provo, Utah: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1994), 281–311.

4. Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 70 (July 3, 1834).

5. 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), 2:113 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).

6. Newel Knight, Journal, Allen Version, 1983 typescript, 47. Newel kept a journal with entries starting as early as 1830. The surviving holograph diary appears to have been written between 1839 and 1845 and contains copied entries from an earlier record. See Newel Knight, Autobiography and Journal, Church Archives, Family and Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives). Folder one contains the earliest version, and folders two and three contain rewrites of it, evidently by someone preparing the diary for publication. A typescript copy of Newel’s diary, with additional material and some rewordings of the holograph, is in possession of the Allen family, descendants of Newel. A condensed version of the holograph was published in the 1880s as “Newel Knight’s Journal,” in *Scraps of Biography: Tenth Book of the Faith-Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), 46–104, and was reprinted in *Classic Experiences and Adventures* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969). All of the quotations and information in this article attributed to Newel are from his holograph journal entries covering the years 1835–36, unless otherwise indicated, and are denoted by folder and page number.

7. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder three, 4.

8. Knight, Journal, Allen Version, 47.

9. Lydia’s description was written by Susa Young Gates under the pseudonym Homespun and published as *Lydia Knight’s History: The First Book of the Noble Women’s Lives Series* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), 7–9, 26–29.

10. The biographical details for this section can be found in *Lydia Knight’s History*; Jan Jansak Williams and LaRea Gibbons Strebe, “Lydia Knight: ‘God Rules’ Was Her Motto,” *Ensign* 7 (August 1977): 50–52; and Jenson, *Biographical Encyclopedia*, 2:775–76. Sources vary on the spelling of Lydia’s maiden name. Some say “Goldthwait,” others “Goldthwaite.” Following family tradition, I have spelled the name “Goldthwaite.”

11. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder three, 5.

12. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [45].

13. Pomfret was within twenty miles of Lydia’s home. Built of stone, Fredonia Private Academy housed the school on the lower floor, and the building’s upper floor served as the town’s Presbyterian chapel. See Andrew W. Young, *History of Chautauqua County, New York* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Matthews and Warren, 1875), 475; John P. Downs and Fenwick Y. Hedley, eds., *History of Chautauqua County, New York, and Its People* (Boston: American Historical Society, 1921), 322; and Obed Edson, *History of Chautauqua County, New York* (Boston: W. A. Fergusson, 1894), 466.

14. A lengthy list of Fredonia students has no Lydia Goldthwaite or Calvin Bailey, but the compiler termed it a “hit and miss” list. See Jo Ann Kaufman, comp., *Directory of Students Who Attended the Fredonia Academy during the Years 1826–1867* (Fredonia, N.Y.: Chautauqua Genealogical Society, 1989). A Harlin T. Bailey from nearby Stockton, who attended 1830–33, is perhaps related to Calvin.

15. *Lydia Knight’s History*, 10. Newel’s journal says she was seventeen, which would make 1829 the year of her marriage.

16. Because New York had two towns named Lodi, some of Lydia's genealogy records say Lodi is in Seneca County, others say Erie County.
17. The Lodi by Seneca Lake is 116 miles on a direct line from New Albion.
18. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [49].
19. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [49]; folder three, 5.
20. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [50].
21. *Lydia Knight's History*, 12. This history says Lydia had returned home to her parents six months before her son was born, or about September 1831. But family genealogy records have the son born in Lodi. Her history says she was living with her parents when her daughter died. Newel's account, written about forty years before Lydia's, is relied on here.
22. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, 5.
23. *Lydia Knight's History*, 12.
24. Eleazer Freeman Nickerson was born April 12, 1806, to Freeman Nickerson and Huldah Chapman in Windsor County, Vermont. In 1833 his parents' home was in Perrysburg, less than a dozen miles from the Goldthwaites' home in Villanova. Newel said that Eleazer Freeman Nickerson was a gentleman and respectable merchant who had moved from the neighborhood of Lydia's parents in New York into Upper Canada.
25. *Lydia Knight's History*, 13–15.
26. Lydia Goldthwaite to Dear Papa and Mama, June 22, 1833, in "Letters and Papers of Lydia Knight and Newel Knight," typescript, 1–2, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
27. Lydia Goldthwaite to Dear Brothers Moses, Jessie, and Amos, May 19, 1833, and Lydia to Dear Papa and Mama, June 22, 1833, in "Letters and Papers of Lydia Knight and Newel Knight," 1–2.
28. *Lydia Knight's History*, 16–17. Joseph Smith, with Sidney Rigdon's help, kept a diary of this unusual mission, which is found in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–92), 2:6–10 (October 5, 1833–November 1, 1833).
29. *Lydia Knight's History*, 18.
30. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:8–9 (October 20, 1833).
31. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:13–14 (November 19, 1833).
32. *Lydia Knight's History*, 21.
33. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:10 (October 28, 1833).
34. As quoted in *Lydia Knight's History*, 21.
35. *Lydia Knight's History*, 22.
36. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:10 (October 28, 1833).
37. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:9–10 (October 28, 1833).
38. *Lydia Knight's History*, 22–23.
39. *Lydia Knight's History*, 22–23. Joseph Smith Sr. was ordained as Church Patriarch on December 18, 1833. Apparently, the first patriarchal-type blessings were bestowed February 19, 1834, by Joseph Smith Sr. on his sons Joseph Jr. and Samuel. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:123 n. 3; Irene M. Bates and E. Gary Smith, *Lost Legacy: The Mormon Office of Presiding Patriarch* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 37; *History of the Church*, 2:32; D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1994), 46–49 and 303 n. 40.
40. *Lydia Knight's History*, 23.
41. *Lydia Knight's History*, 22–23; Jessee, *Joseph Smith Papers*, 2:10 (November 1, 1833). Perhaps the lake became uncrossable by boat.
42. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [51].
43. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [51–52]; *Lydia Knight's History*, 25.
44. *Lydia Knight's History*, 25–26. Joseph Smith's history materials make no mention of this debt and potential arrest.

45. *Lydia Knight's History*, 35.
46. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [43].
47. *Lydia Knight's History*, 27.
48. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [43].
49. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [43]. Bracketed letters replace missing portions of this brittle manuscript.
50. *Lydia Knight's History*, 28.
51. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [43–44]. Bracketed letters replace missing portions of the manuscript.
52. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [44].
53. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [44].
54. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [44].
55. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [45].
56. *Lydia Knight's History*, 29.
57. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [45].
58. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [45].
59. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [45].
60. Knight, Autobiography and Journal, folder one, [46].
61. Lydia Knight's history says the wedding took place on November 23, but Joseph Smith's history puts it on November 24. Family genealogy records, as compiled by different relatives, contain both dates. Joseph Smith's history was written closer to the event, so I rely on it here.
62. As quoted in *History of the Church*, 2:246–47.
63. M. Guy Bishop, "Eternal Marriage in Early Mormon Marital Beliefs," *Historian* 52 (autumn 1990): 83–84.
64. As quoted in *Lydia Knight's History*, 31.
65. Knight, Journal, Allen Version, 50.
66. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:145–46 (November 24, 1835).
67. *History of the Church*, 2:320; *Lydia Knight's History*, 31.
68. In his *Mormon Hierarchy*, 88 and 326 n. 32, Quinn contends that Joseph Smith exercised "theocratic ethics" to commit two wrongs: perform a bigamous marriage and perform marriages without an Ohio license. John L. Brooke, in *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 212, agrees and adds that "over the next two months Joseph Smith performed five more illegal marriages."
69. Ohio legalities are fully explored and documented in M. Scott Bradshaw's important study, "Joseph Smith's Performance of Marriages in Ohio," written from a lawyer's viewpoint, in this issue of *BYU Studies*.
70. "Newel continued to make every endeavor to persuade Lydia to relinquish her own feelings, and accept the freedom that the law offered." *Lydia Knight's History*, 28.
71. Cited by Bradshaw, "Joseph Smith's Performance of Marriages in Ohio," are *Acts of a General Nature, Enacted, Revised and Ordered to Be Reprinted, at the First Session of the Twenty-Ninth General Assembly of the State of Ohio* (Columbus: Olmsted and Bailhache, 1831), section 7, p. 136; *Statutes of the State of Ohio of a General Nature in Force 7 December 1840; also, the Statutes of a General Nature, Passed by the General Assembly at Their Thirty-Ninth Session, Commencing December 7, 1840* (Columbus: Samuel Medary, 1841), 230, 239.
72. *Lydia Knight's History*, 29. Sally Goldthwaite to Dear Lydia, January 10, 1836, in "Letters and Papers of Lydia Knight and Newel Knight," 3–4. Four separate genealogy searches in a dozen states have not found local records of Lydia and Calvin's marriage and of Calvin's death.
73. *Lydia Knight's History*, 36.