

# REFLECTIONS OF HISTORY: THE FOUR JOSEPHS

PREFACE BY DARRELL V. KNIGHT

There is an on-going and intensive quest by Latter-day Saints to search for any published first- or second-person account of the early events in Church history. Because the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is known as the “Restored Church”, it is needful that new truths be revealed and corroborated by eyewitnesses, especially events in the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.

The search for books, dissertations, articles, and scraps of historical summaries is constant among religious scholars and truth seekers. Some accounts are found in institutional publications taken from researchers and scholars as findings, quotes, and even a sprinkling of some opinions. Those discoveries that are accepted as authentic are repeated, and quoted over and over again. Repetition tends to produce authenticity, and acceptance in itself.

Somewhere in the beginning, where the facts exist, there are witnesses who know from actual experience the nature of history—“pure” and without any interpretation by commentators, teachers or secondary writers. To find “pure” witnesses is a refreshing and enlightening experience, and the essence of validating Gospel truths.

Such is the case with the accounts of the early history of the Church. The standard account of the contributions of the Knight family in the translation and printing of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ is an example. To understand their part in the formation of establishing the Church, we must rely on what the Smiths and Knights recorded in their own words as true to their experience and testimony. The early Knight family contributed as witnesses to historical truth in four important sources:

1. *“The Rise of the Early Latter-day Saints: The Journals and Histories of Newel Knight.”* (BYU Religious Studies Center & Deseret Book Company, 2019).
2. *“Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Church History”, (Appendix A, They Are My Friends,* by William G. Hartley, 1986)
3. *“Joseph Knight, Jr.’s Incidents of History”, (Appendix B, Ibid)*
4. *“Lydia Knight’s History”, (Noble Women’s Lives Series,* written by Susa Young Gates, 1856-1933, from interviews with Lydia Knight.)

Note: In each of these four sources is penned from interviews and documented journal entries one if not two personal witnesses. The center of our focus for original Knight histories is concentrated on four men all named Joseph:

Joseph Smith, Sr.  
Joseph Smith, Jr.  
Joseph Knight Sr.  
Joseph Knight, Jr.

Each shared a bond and respect for one other and their common names. Especially true were the feelings of the Knight family expressed for the Prophet as noted in the book, *"They Are My Friends,"* (p 196), by author William G. Hartley:

*"If Joseph were a charlatan or disreputable money grubber as his enemies charged, the large Knight clan would have known it and not felt such trust in him. Their devotion to him based on firsthand knowledge stands today as a solid witness that his character, from age nineteen to his death at thirty-eight was righteous and good."*

The Prophet's regard for Father Knight and sons is described in an entry in the *Book of the Law of the Lord*:

"While I contemplate the virtues and the good qualifications and characteristics of the faithful few, which I am now recording in the *Book of the Law of the Lord*, of such as have stood by me in every hour of peril for these fifteen long year past; say for instance my aged and beloved brother Joseph Knight Sr., who was among the number of the first to administer to my necessities while I was laboring, in the commencement of the bringing forth of the work of the Lord, and of laying the foundations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; for fifteen years he has been faithful and true, and even handed, and exemplary, and virtuous and kind, never deviate to the right hand nor to the left. Behold, he is a righteous man...There are his sons Newel Knight, and Joseph Knight (Jr) whose names I record in the *Book of the Law of the Lord* with unspeakable delight for they are my friends." (*Ibid pp 344-355*)

The first meeting of the four Josephs is not completely clear. Newel Knight recorded in his journal that the Smith and Knight sons knew each other even in "their boyhood". Mother Lucy Mack Smith reported in her history that Father Knight came to their home to negotiate an agreement to purchase grain from the Smith's for his milling operation, in 1825. Most scholars claim it was not until 1826 that they met when the Prophet came to work for the Knights for a few months while he would go to Harmony to court Emma Hale. They were married in 1827, and it is doubtful the Prophet would have gone to strangers if he wanted to be near Emma (27 miles).

It was during this stay with the Knights that he converted Father Knight and Joseph, Jr. first, to the cause of restoration, and then that he was told by an angel he could obtain buried gold plates containing a record of an ancient people in September 1827. With this information, Father Knight arranged to be at the Smith home and witness personally what would take place with finding and returning the plates.

Joseph Knight, Jr. recorded, *"Joseph and I worked and slept together: my father said Joseph was the best hand he ever hired, we found him a boy of truth, and he was about 21 years of age."* (Larry Porter, Ensign-October 1978). The Prophet requested \$50 from the Knights. Father Knight could not furnish it, so his son, Joseph, Jr. sold a lot he was going to use for his home, and donated \$50 to Joseph Smith, Jr. (Joseph Knight, Jr., *"Incidents of History from 1827 to 1844"*, BYU Studies 1970 p 1)

A list of services Joseph Knight, Sr. and Jr., provided Joseph Smith, Jr. is outlined in the family book, *"Stand by My Servant Joseph"*, (authored by William G. Hartley and contributions by Darrell Knight) and would include the following:

- 1. Father Knight supplied necessities for the Prophet and scribes during the translation of the Book of Mormon.*
- 2. The two Joseph Knights furnished wagons and a sleigh for transportation on several occasions.*
- 3. Father Knight hired Joseph Smith, Jr. when he needed employment within a reasonable distance with Harmony, PA, his parent's home, and Josiah Stowell, during his courtship of Emma Hale.*
- 4. Father Knight contracted for the Smith's grain which payment they intended to retire their mortgage. Two wicked men blocked this from happening.*
- 5. Father Knight posted a bond on his land to allow the Prophet to remain free after his arrest.*
- 6. Father Knight's horse and wagon transported the plates from the Hill Cumorah.*
- 7. Father Knight searched for enemies who might be tracking the Prophet home with the plates.*
- 8. Father Knight furnished the paper for the translation of the Book of Mormon.*
- 9. Multiple barrels and bushels of food were furnished.*
- 10. Two men trained in the law were hired to defend the Prophet by Joseph Knight, Sr. at two trials.*
- 11. Joseph Knight Jr.'s \$50 sleigh and horse were used to escape to Ohio for Joseph Smith, Jr. and Joseph Knight, Sr. as persecutions mounted in Colesville, NY.*
- 12. Joseph Knight, Jr. sold his property to give the Prophet \$50 he needed, and a one-horse sleigh.*
- 13. Sixty-seven Knight Relatives moved to Ohio at the request of the prophet, leaving their property in questionable statuses.*
- 14. Newel and Joseph, Jr. built some five mills during the trail of persecution through Missouri and Illinois.*
- 15. Joseph Knight Jr. was the last to leave dangerous locations to furnish milled food for the Saints to live on until they became established in safer locations.*
- 16. Newel Knight served as branch president and high council member five times: Joseph Knight, Jr., was ordained bishop to take care of refugees needing temporal survival along the trail. Church authorities commended him for his work.*

As the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. in 1842 looked into the future, he prophesied the following:

*"It shall be said of him by the sons of Zion, while there is one of them remaining", the prophet said of Father Knight, "that this man, was a faithful man in Israel...his name shall never be*

*forgotten.*" (*Stand by My Servant Joseph*, p 497) Those of us in this generation are trying to respond to this prophetic statement.

Also, as a response to this promise, historian William Hartley, wrote "(for) his numerous posterity now living, the histories written by Father Knight, Newel, Lydia, and Joseph Knight Jr., and books and articles by historians, including this book\*, help fulfill that promise one friend made to another so many years ago." (*\*Stand by My Servant Joseph*, p 497) Truth will come after the testimony of two or more witnesses, say the scriptures. From the beginning, we have the combined witness of four Josephs, Newel Knight, and the Colesville Branch membership of approximately 85 credited and recorded by the Knight family.

To the Reader:

With this brief preface highlighting the relationship between four men named Joseph, and the love and loyalty they shared, one can read and appreciate what they witnessed in their association with each other in assisting in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and laying the foundation to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this last dispensation.

We invite you to read and ponder their word and witness.

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