

# Doctrine and Covenants Section 1

## Where were the Knights in 1831?

In 1831, the headquarters of the Church was in Kirtland, Ohio. Members of the church in Colesville, Fayette and Manchester, New York had just gathered there earlier that spring and were building a community. Work on the Kirtland Temple would not begin for another year and a half. And in November of 1831, church leaders discussed publishing the revelations that Joseph Smith had received since the 1823 visit of Moroni.

By that time there were 69 recorded revelations in addition to the message of Moroni to Joseph Smith in 1823. These revelations guided the establishment of the Church of Christ, as it was known at that time,<sup>1</sup> and outlined several new doctrines.

During that time period many significant instructions to the members of the Church were revealed, including:

- Personal guidance to a handful of men, including Joseph Knight, Sr., and how to support the cause of Zion;
- Instruction on Church organization and baptism;
- Restoration of the priesthood;
- The need to gather in Kirtland, Ohio;
- The principles of the Law of Consecration, and the Colesville Branch participation in the first efforts at communal living and establishing the practice of that law;
- Calls to several men, including Newel Knight to go on missions; and
- Directions to build a New Jerusalem in Zion, which was Jackson County, Missouri.

As all these new directions were revealed, the members of the Colesville Branch, including Joseph and Polly Knight and their children and grandchildren, hearkened to the voice of the Lord with profound diligence.

They enthusiastically responded to the call of the prophet to gather in Ohio. In April of 1831 a line of wagons left Colesville, New York for Kirtland, Ohio. More than 60 members of the Colesville Branch left comfortable homes, farms and businesses.

In Kirtland, at the request of the prophet, they agreed to live the law of consecration and settle on land nearby in Thompson, Ohio. Within a few months they were pushed off that land and then the prophet asked them, as a group, to move to Missouri.

Nothing exemplified hearkening to the Lord more than their move to Kaw Township, Missouri.

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<sup>1</sup> The church founded by Joseph Smith was first organized under the name Church of Christ. It was renamed the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Far West, Missouri, on April 26, 1838.

The far west border of Missouri was mostly raw, unbroken land when the Knights arrived. There were no homes, roads, stores, doctors, or schools, and more than half of the Colesville Branch were children. Mother Polly Knight died within days of their arrival.

Parley Pratt stayed in Kaw Township with members of the Colesville Branch not long after they arrived in Missouri. Parly had been serving as a missionary in the western states, and for the fall and winter season, he stayed in Missouri to get well again. The autobiography of Parley Pratt records his time with the Colesville Branch in Missouri.

In November of 1831, while the church leaders were in Kirtland discussing printing a book of revelations and recording a foreword for that book, Parley Pratt and the Knight family were in Jackson County, Missouri.

Parley Pratt wrote:

I was taken sick with the fever and the ague [probably malaria], owing to the exposures of the climate through which we had traveled. I suffered extremely for several months; being brought very low with fever, and with other afflictions.

I tarried mostly with a branch of the Church commonly called the Colesville branch. They had removed from Colesville in the state of New York, and settled on the borders of a fertile prairie, about twelve miles west of the village of Independence, and near the boundaries which divide the State of Missouri from the Indian Territory. They consisted about 60 souls, and were under the presidency of a faithful and zealous Elder by the name of Newel Knight. . .

The Colesville branch was among the first organized by Joseph Smith, and constituted the first settlers of the members of the Church in Missouri. They had arrived late in the summer [about August 4<sup>th</sup>] and cut some hay for their cattle, sowed a little grain, and prepared some ground for cultivation, and were engaged during the fall and winter in building log cabins, etc. The winter was cold, and for some time about 10 families lived in one log cabin, which was open and unfinished, while the frozen ground served as a floor. Our food consisted of beef and a little bread made of corn, which had been grated into coarse meal by rubbing the ears on a tin grater. This was rather an inconvenient way of living for a sick person, but it was for the gospel's sake, and all were cheerful and happy.

We enjoyed many happy seasons in our prayer and other meetings, and the Spirit of the Lord was poured out upon us, and even on the little children, insomuch that many of eight, ten and twelve years of age spake, and prayed, and prophesied in our meetings and in our family worship. There was a spirit of peace and union, and love and good will manifested in this little church in the wilderness, the memory of which will be ever dear to my heart.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, first edition published 1874. This comes from the reprinted 9<sup>th</sup> Edition, published by Deseret Book, Salt Lake City, 1972, pages 69-72.

Newel Knight wrote briefly in his journal about that winter of 1831-32. He was strong on optimism and sparse on details of daily life.

We passed the winter in a tolerable comfortable manner, although as might be expected, without many of the common conveniences of life to which we had been accustomed. But we did not murmur for we were willing to make every sacrifice which was necessary for the kingdom of heaven's sake.<sup>3</sup>

The Knight family members would have personal interest in seeing the Book of Commandments printed. By November 1831, the Knights and Colesville Branch were mentioned by name eight different chapters.<sup>4</sup>

- Joseph Knight, Sr., is mentioned by name in two of the commandments, 12 and 23. Chapter 12 was directed specifically to him.
- Newel Knight mentioned by name in Chapters 52, 54 and 56.
- Colesville Branch is mentioned in Chapters 24, 26, and 37.

Diane L. Mangum, October 2024

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Hubbard MacKay and William G. Hartley, *The Rise of the Latter-day Saints, The Journals and Histories of Newel Knight*, Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2019, p 41.

<sup>4</sup> In the first edition of the Book of Commandments, that was first planned in 1831 and finally printed in 1833, what we currently call sections were listed as chapters.