

Joseph Smith – History 1:1-26



Map from <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/history-maps/map-3?lang=eng>

How Joseph Knight and his Family Got to Know Joseph Smith

Joseph Smith's home in the Manchester/Palmyra area of New York is about 140 miles northwest of Colesville Township, New York where the Knights lived. It was at least a three-day ride by horse to get from the Knight home to the Smith home. It's not likely that the Smiths and the Knights would be acquainted by happenstance.

The first recorded connection between the Knights and the Joseph Smith family came in the fall of 1825 when Joseph Knight took a trip to Palmyra with his friend Josiah Stowell. The purpose of the trip was to buy the Smith family wheat crop, to mill into flour. The Knight mill was in Colesville and the Stowell mill was in South Bainbridge a few miles away. It is possible the two men had already purchased wheat from the Smith's before.¹

"The Knights and neighbor Josiah Stowell were millers and contracted with area farmers for their grain to mill, sack, and ship down the Susquehanna River for marketing in the east and were acquainted with the Smith family as early as possibly 1823,"² wrote Darrell Knight in his article found on the josephknightfamily.org website.

While at the Smith home in 1825, Joseph Knight and Josiah Stowell learned that Joseph Smith, Sr. was in financial difficulty. Looming financial deadlines were probably the motivation for both

¹ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, Borzoi Book published by Alfred Knopf, 2005, p.47

² Darrell Knight, "Some thoughts on Joseph Smith, Sr." published on the josephknightfamily.org

Joseph Smith, Sr., and his namesake son to agree to work digging for treasure for Stowell in October of 1825 for several weeks down in Harmony, Pennsylvania.

The Smith's financial problems arose from the untimely decision to build a new home to replace the small log cabin they first built when they arrived in Palmyra/Manchester.³ Joseph Smith, Sr., hired Rusell Stoddard, a carpenter, to build them a house in February 1825. Several factors contributed to their missed payments, but nine months later they were close to foreclosure because they were too far behind.

While at the Smith home during that late November 1825, Joseph Knight and Josiah Stowell agreed to lend the Smiths money with the Smith's next year wheat crop as collateral.⁴ The deadline for payment was December, 25, 1825.

While Father Smith was traveling to the Colesville area to get the money, the money was demanded a little earlier than expected. In Richard Bushman's account it tells that the Stoddard told the land agent that the Smith men were running away from their debt, not that they were going to pick up the money.⁵ It's unclear in reading Lucy Smith's account if the two men made the payment and Father Smith turned it over or not. It is clear that Lucy felt they were unfairly dealt with as they lost their farm and were renters the rest of their lives.

The struggle with their land and home went on for some time. Almost two years later In November 1827, when Joseph Knight Sr. visited the Smith home, he mentioned in his writings that he wanted to find out the state of affairs between the Smiths and Mr. Stoddard.⁶ That remark suggests he did give the money to the family, and that it was probably paid, but not in time.

Diane L. Mangum, October 2024

³ The Smith home was boundary of Manchester, and neighboring community of Palmyra. They were on the Manchester side.

⁴ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, p.47

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Joseph Knight, Sr., *Incidents in Early Church History*, handwritten manuscript found in LDS Church History library, manuscript MS 3470.