

## Doctrine and Covenants Section 57



**Route of Joseph Smith's journey to Missouri, June 1831**

<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/media/maps>

## The Journey to Missouri and Polly Knight's passing

During the early June conference of the church in Kirtland, Ohio, the Prophet Joseph Smith announced that the next conference of the Church would be in Missouri. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, Joseph Smith (joined by Sidney Rigdon, Martin Harris, Edward Partridge, W. W. Phelps, Joseph Coe, Sidney Gilbert and his wife, Elizabeth,) left to go to “the land of Missouri, which is the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the Saints.”<sup>1</sup> Oliver Cowdery was already in Missouri as a missionary.

The group traveled by canal boat, stagecoach, and the last 250 miles by foot, going through Cincinnati, Ohio; Louisville, Kentucky; and St. Louis, Missouri.<sup>2</sup> Section 57 was the first revelation given in Independence, Missouri on July 20<sup>th</sup>: the newly declared center place for Zion.

The Colesville Branch left Kirtland on July 28<sup>th</sup> for the same journey. Their group was significantly different; they were a group of more than 60 people, families with small children and elderly relatives among them. Also, most of the group with Joseph Smith were planning to

<sup>1</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 57:1

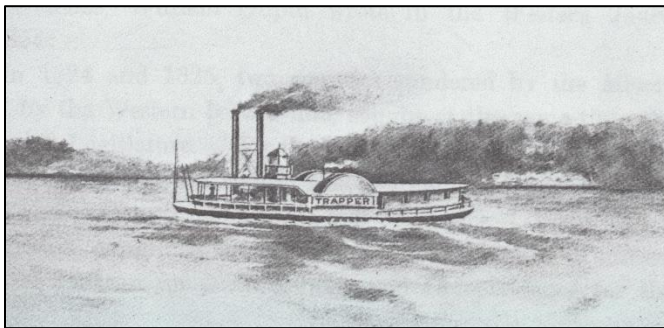
<sup>2</sup> J. Christopher Conkling, *A Joseph Smith Chronology*, Deseret Book Company, 1979, p.24.

visit Missouri. The Colesville Branch were permanently moving, planning to build new homes and lives on borders of the American frontier. They needed to take housewares, tools, books, and bedding. It was a challenging endeavor.

Newel wrote in his journal:

*"This was the first branch of the Church which had immigrated to the land of Zion. I found it required all the wisdom I possessed to lead the company through so long a journey to the midst of the enemies, yet so great were the mercies and blessings of God to us, that no one of us was harmed, we made our journey in safety."*<sup>3</sup>

The Lord apparently had a great deal of confidence in this community and their willingness to sacrifice, especially the women. They left comfortable homes in Colesville and barely had shelter in Thompson, Ohio before they were asked to take their families to the American frontier. It's one thing to be a man who can grab a bedroll and a saddle bag with some jerky and head west. It's quite another matter to be a mother with a nursing baby on your hip, or tired toddlers hanging on your skirts as you try to feed your children from scanty travel provisions and find a spot to make a bed for a child. Earaches, dirty diapers, colic and soiled bedding didn't stop because the family was traveling, even if they were going to Zion.



*An illustration of a river steamer that traveled the Missouri river with pioneers, printed in an 1908 book, "Kansas City, Missouri, Its history and its people 1808-1908."*

There were about two dozen children in the collection of families that left Colesville in April. They traveled south by wagon to the Ohio River, then by river steamer for 10 days before reaching St. Louis, and then headed upstream on the Missouri River for another seven days to reach Independence. Quite likely the Knight family members believed this would be their final move, because where does one go after you've made it to Zion?

Throughout the journey there was much concern about mother Polly Knight's health. Newel wrote:

*"My mother's health was very poor and had been for a considerable time. Yet she would not consent to stop traveling, her only or her greatest desire was to set her feet upon the land of Zion and to have her coffin interred in that land. I went on shore and bought lumber to make a coffin in case she should die before we reached the place of our destination, so fast did she fail. But the Lord gave her the desire of her heart and she lived to stand upon that land, where*

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<sup>3</sup> Newel Knight Journal, Allen typescript, p. 14

*we arrived on the twenty fifth of July.”<sup>4</sup>*

Polly Knight made it to see Independence, Missouri to Zion- just barely.

Joseph Smith asked the Colesville group to settle 12 miles from Independence in Kaw township, Jackson County, on Missouri’s western border, truly the American frontier. Accordingly, they got on flatboats on the Big Blue River and traveled south to a ferry and then overland a couple of miles to Kaw Township. There was only one other resident in the area when they arrived.<sup>5</sup> Newel wrote in his journal that with “cheerful hearts they were determined to do their best.” Joseph Knight, Sr., wrote “we found the Country to be Butiful rich and plesent and we made our selves as Comfortable as we Could.”

On August 7<sup>th</sup>, eleven days after their arrival in Kaw Township, Polly died at the age of 57. Newel wrote, “She quietly fell asleep rejoicing in the New and Everlasting gospel and praising God that she had lived to see the land of Zion and that her body would rest in peace after all the suffering she had endured from the persecutions of the wicked.”

Joseph Smith spoke at her funeral the next day and stated, “I can say a worthy member sleeps in Jesus till the resurrection.” Polly Peck Knight was the first member of the Church of Christ to die in the land newly dedicated as Zion. Her sons made her coffin and her husband built a fence around her grave.

The first four verses of Section 59 were first given at Polly’s funeral:

Behold, blessed, saith the Lord, are they who have come up unto this land with an eye single to my glory, according to my commandments.  
For those that live shall inherit the earth, and those that die shall rest from their labors, and their works shall follow them; and they shall receive a crown in the mansions of my Father, which I have prepared for them.  
Yea, blessed are they whose feet stand upon the land of Zion, who have obeyed my gospel; for they shall receive for their reward the good things of the earth, and it shall bring forth in its strength.  
And they shall be crowned with blessings from above, yea, and commandments, not a few, and with revelations in their time--they that are diligent and faithful before me.

Other instructions received in Section 59 pertained especially to honoring the Sabbath day, which would be pertinent to families anxious to get homes built and fields plowed.

Joseph Knight, Sr. wrote about his beloved wife’s passing:

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The couple in Kaw Township was Joshua and Margaret Lewis, who had been taught and baptized earlier in 1831 by missionaries sent from Ohio. The couple had moved to Missouri from Tennessee in 1829.

*“She was buried in the woods in a spot chosen out by ourselves. I was a long by where she was buried a few days after and I found the hogs had begun to root where she was buried. I being very unwell, but I took my ax the next day and went and built a pen around it. It was the last I done for her.”<sup>6</sup>*

On August 9<sup>th</sup>, two days after Polly’s funeral, Joseph Smith and ten elders left by canoe to return to Kirtland. Sidney Gilbert and his wife Elizabeth were asked to stay in Independence and establish a store and Sidney was to buy land and be a land agent.<sup>7</sup> Edward Partridge was asked to stay and “divide unto the saints their inheritance,” as part of his work as bishop,<sup>8</sup> and W. W. Phelps was to be “planted in this place, and be established as a printer to the Church.”<sup>9</sup>

Before the Prophet Joseph left Missouri, he presided at a ceremony to lay the foundation of Zion in Kaw township, dedicate the temple spot, and held the first conference in Zion. These events are discussed in a separate article, “The Knights helped Lay the Foundation of Zion.”

Diane Mangum, April 2025

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<sup>6</sup> Hartley, Stand by My Servant, p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 57:6 and 8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, verse 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, verse 11.