

Doctrine and Covenants Sections 20 and 21

This is a selection from the handout from a Knight Reunion 2024 Class, “The Knights and the Doctrine and Covenants,” pages 8-19. It discusses why Joseph Knight, Sr.’s *Recollections of Church History* “is part of an academic discussion on where the Church was organized.”

A pdf copy of the full handout by Diane Mangum is found on www.josephknighfamily.org, the page titled “The Knights in Church History.”

Sections 20 & 21 – Organization of the Church and details of Church governance

April 6, 1830, Fayette, New York, but maybe Manchester, New York

Apparently, the location of the organization of the church has been a matter of discussion since 1835, and the “*Reminiscences*” about events in early church history written by Joseph Knight, Sr. is right in the crosshairs of the discussion over the Church possibly being organized in Manchester.

Where was the church organized?

The official history of the church states that the church was organized April 6, 1830 in the Peter Whitmer Sr., home in Fayette, New York. It should be a simple, easily verifiable historical fact. It’s not. No contemporaneously written record of that event was made that historians know of today. Some later documents, records and memories report some different things about several dates and places, as was acknowledged by the editors of the History of the Church in 1951.

The revelations related to the organization of the church, what we know as Section 20 and 21, were indeed written down with care and preserved. It is in the headings above the verses, written by various editors, scribes or clerks over the years, where there is interesting variation in the date and place of those revelations.

If records or minutes were taken during the April 6th meeting, they were lost in the first 40 years. It appears no one was taking roll, or left a contemporaneous record that reported the place, who gave prayers, what hymns were sung, or even who the first six members of the church were. Several more recently published church publications do not give a list of the first six members, perhaps because that list can’t be given with certainty.ⁱ The list of the six first members found in the History of the Church, as reported by B.H. Roberts in a footnote, comes not from Joseph Smith, Jr, but from Joseph Knight, Jr. who wrote about it in 1862!ⁱⁱ

Joseph Smith describes the meeting on April 6, 1830 as being a glorious meeting with the Sacrament being given, elders ordained and much joy. But that was written in 1838.ⁱⁱⁱ It’s

significant to remember that by 1844 when Joseph and Hyrum died, all of the men thought to be the first six, had died or had left the church.

Interestingly, Joseph Knight, Jr. reports he was there at the first organizational meeting of the Church, but his father was not.^{iv} But when I read Joseph Knight, Sr. "Reminiscences" it sounds like he was there, and saw Joseph Smith, Sr. baptized. All accounts seem to confirm that Joseph Smith, Sr. was baptized on April 6th, but there are variations on the place recorded. Historian Richard Bushman writes that "Following the organization of the church, Joseph Smith, Sr. was baptized in a small stream on Hyrum Smith's farm,"^v quoting William Smith, brother of the prophet.

It should be stressed that the variations we find are not in the verses. The controversy over dates and place is written in the Section or chapter headings, that were usually written later by scribes or other helpers.

Note some of the variations in section headings in written copies of the revelations:

Section 20, Church organization and Government,

Verse 1 begins, "The Rise of the Church in These last days":

1830 - an early manuscript version labeled Articles and Covenants, [Section 20] lists the date of the revelation as April 10th, 1830, given in Fayette.^{vi}

1833 - "Articles and Covenants," Chapter XXIV [24 then, now section 20], given June, 1830, Fayette^{vii}

1921 - April 1830, no place

1981 - April 1830, no place

2013 - "Portions of this revelation may have been given as early as summer 1829, at or near Fayette."

Section 21, Articles and Covenants, given at the organization of the Church

Verse 1 begins: "Behold there shall be a record kept among you":

1830 - manuscript copy, Commandment 17, April 6, 1830, Fayette, date of 1829 crossed out and April 6, 1830 written above it. Body of the text says given in Fayette.

1833 - called Chapter XXII [22], April 6, 1830, Manchester, pencil note of "Smith home."

1921 - April 6, 1830, Fayette, New York

1981 - April 6, 1830, Fayette, New York

2013 - April 6, 1830, Fayette, New York

Section 23, revelations given to five men, including Joseph Knight, Sr.

1830 - Manuscript of Commandment 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22, [now Section 23] reports for each of the five the name of the man, lists a date of 1830, and "written in Manchester, Ontario County, state of New York." On Oliver Cowdery's, #18, it adds "soon after his calling to the ministry." Is that referring to his leadership position announced at the April 6, 1830 meeting?^{viii}

1833 - Book of Commandments heading says Manchester, New York, April 6, 1830

1921 – April 1830, Manchester, New York
1981 – April 1830, Manchester, New York
2013 – April 1830, Manchester, New York

All things considered, it was very timely that the first verse of the instructions to the saints on April 6, 1830 was, “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you. . . .”

The Prophet Joseph believed in keeping good records, but there were lots of factors hindering that work, including having more than two dozen different scribes in the 14 years he was president of the Church, and a variety of clerks and historians keeping the records.^{ix}

Why even consider that Manchester was the location of the organization of the Church

1. Joseph Knight, Sr. was a solid, life-long friend of Joseph Smith who stayed loyal to Joseph and the church. Joseph Knight was a trusted source. The Whitmers, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris who kept records or were present at key events in these early years left the church within a short time.
2. Clearly Joseph Knight witnessed the baptisms of Joseph Smith, Sr. and Martin Harris. The day of that baptism has long been recognized as April 6, 1830.^x Joseph Knight seems to place the event in Manchester, not Fayette, which would also suggest the very first meeting where “the church was begun” was the Smith home in Manchester.

There is no mention of traveling 35 miles to Fayette, or a large crowd of people gathering, or the Whitmer home. It’s possible they traveled to the Whitmer farm and held a first meeting of the church, and then returned to Palmyra, but that seems less likely and they didn’t mention it.

There is no sense in reading Joseph Knight’s memories that the first organizational meeting was a long planned-for event, or that others were invited to attend. But in early June there was the first conference of the Church at the Whitmer home in Fayette that many attended and Newel described in detail. If Section 20 was presented at that meeting, would it have been described as the “organization of the Church” where a body of members attended?

3. In the 1833 publication of the Book of Commandments, what is now called Section 21 was titled Chapter XXII, and the chapter heading reads, “A revelation given to Joseph, in Manchester, New York, April 6, 1830.” The copy of the book available digitally from the Church History Library has written next to the heading, “Smith home” in pencil. But that heading was not written by Joseph Smith.
4. The 1833 printed Book of Commandments chapters, 18-21 that also seem to confirm that Joseph Smith and several other key church leaders were in Manchester, not Fayette

on April 6, 1830. Each of the Chapters has a heading stating it was given April 6, 1830 in Manchester, New York.^{xi}

Chapter 17 is to Oliver Cowdery, 2 verses.

Chapter 18 is to Hyrum Smith, 1 verse

Chapter 19 is to Samuel Smith, 1 verse

Chapter 20 is to Joseph, father of Joseph, 1 verse

Chapter 21 is to Joseph K., 2 verses.

These 5 Chapters in the Book of Commandments became Section 23 in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, and has consistently listed in later editions including 1981 and 2013 the location as Manchester, New York, April 1830.

5. Historian Richard Bushman points out that Joseph Smith wrote in his 1838 history that the organization took place in the Whitmer home in Fayette, but in Joseph Smith's letter to John Wentworth in 1842 Joseph said the organization was in Manchester.^{xii}
6. Author Bryan Westover, in an online Millennial Star publication in 2019, cites an 1833 article in the Evening and Morning Star reporting that the Church was organized the 6th of April in Manchester and soon other branches were established in Fayette and Colesville. The newspaper copied what was printed in the Book of Commandments.

Westover also adds that William Smith, the brother of Joseph Smith, Jr., reported that he was present at the first meeting of the church held at the Smith Manchester home, and his brothers and father were baptized at this time. Also, the outline of events in the "Reminiscences" of Joseph Knight lead Westover to conclude that the original organization meeting was held in Manchester, not Fayette.^{xiii}

The reasons why Fayette is believed to be the place the Church was organized

1. There were changes made to the 1833 Book of Commandments when it was reprinted as part of the newer Doctrine and Covenants in 1835.

Only 6 copies still exist of the Book of Commandments of 1833.^{xiv} Copies of the book with 65 chapters were very limited, perhaps a hundred copies were saved, when a mob burned down the print shop. All might have been lost had it not been for the courage of two young girls, Mary Elizabeth Rollins and her sister Caroline, who ran in and snatched out already printed sheets and hid with the pages in the cornfield from the mob.

The revelations were printed in church sponsored newspapers, like the *Evening and Morning Star*, but the Saints wanted a book copy of the revelations. In 1835 in Kirtland the book was reprinted, but with the title, Doctrine and Covenants.

In 1835 an editing committee in Kirtland was selected: Joseph Smith, Jr., Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams. Some grammar, spelling and

typesetting errors were corrected. Some sections had content revisions with the authorization of Joseph Smith. The order of a few sections was rearranged and some new revelations were added, as well as articles called “*Lectures on Faith*.”^{xv}

2. In August 1835 a church general assembly was held to consider the new Doctrine and Covenants with its changes from the 1833 edition. Joseph Smith and Frederick G. Williams were out of town, so Oliver Cowdery and Sidney Rigdon presented the new volume. Several authorities and the general assembly voted unanimously to accept the book as the Church’s third standard work along with the Bible and Book of Mormon.^{xvi}
3. Elder John K. Camack, emeritus member of the Quorum of the Seventy, wrote an article in 2004 that strongly defends Fayette as the location for the founding of the Church. He states that the small changes from the earlier 1833 Book of Commandments such as the section headings were likely corrections made by Joseph Smith, including the places of the 1830 revelations that are sections 20, 21, and 23.^{xvii}

Joseph Smith biographer, Richard Bushman, lists several published works that report the church was organized in Manchester, several that argue for Fayette, and one that says it doesn’t really matter.^{xviii}

Does it matter whether the Church was organized in Manchester or 35 miles away in Fayette?

No, it doesn’t. But it’s interesting for Knight descendants to ponder the experiences of their ancestors who were there and watching the restoration unfold. Joseph Knight Sr.’s experience also illustrates strong reasons for keeping an accurate journal with details.

Diane Mangum, June 2024

ⁱ Richard Lloyd Anderson, “*Who were the six who organized the Church on 6 April 1830? Ensign*, July 1980, p. 44. The books *Saints*, *The Standard of Truth*, *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, and *Joseph Smith’s History of the Church* include mention of the organization of the church but do not list the first six members. Lucy Smith, Joseph’s mother notes only a date or organization, not a place nor the six first members.

ⁱⁱ Smith, *History of the Church*, footnote presumably added by B.H. Roberts, p.76. Roberts cites Joseph Knight Jr., list submitted in 1862 of the names of the first six members that he got from Oliver Cowdery. Those six names are Joseph Smith, Jr., Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, Peter Whitmer, Jr., Samuel H. Smith, and David Whitmer. That same list in the same order appears in Newel Knight’s journal, and Hyrum M. Smith’s *Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*, p. 113.

ⁱⁱⁱ Smith, *History of the Church*, pp.76-79

^{iv} Hartley, *They Are My Friends*, Appendix B, Joseph Knight, Jr.’s “*Incidents of History*,” p. 214

^v Bushman, *Rough Stone*, p. 110

^{vi} *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations*, Robin Jensen, Robert Woodford and Steven Harper, editors, Church Historians Press, 2009, p. 74

^{vii} *Book of Commandments*, edited by W.W. Phelps, published 1833 in Independence, Missouri, digital copy viewed from Church History Library collection, MS 223.1 D637 1833 no. 4

-
- ^{viii} *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations*, Robin Jensen, Robert Woodford and Steven Harper, editors, Church Historians Press, 2009, p.29
- ^{ix} *The Joseph Smith Papers, Journals, Vol. 1, 1832-1839*, Dean Jesse, Ronald Esplin, Richard Bushman, editors, Church Historians Press, 2008, footnote 65 on page xxxvi
- ^x Lyman D. Platt, “*Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Baptized by September 26, 1830*,” Nauvoo Journal – 1989, Vol.1, <http://ensignpeakfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NJ1-Platt4.pdf>. Platt records Joseph Knight Sr. as the 5th member of the church, baptized at Seneca Lake, Fayette, and Lucy Smith the 6th and Martin Harris the 7th, both in Fayette, as well.
- ^{xi} *Book of Commandments*, edited by W.W. Phelps, published 1833 in Independence, Missouri, digital copy viewed from Church History Library collection, MS 223.1 D637 1833 no. 4
- ^{xii} ^{xii} Bushman, *Rough Stone*, p. 109
- ^{xiii} Bryan Westover, “*Original Members of the 1830 Church of Christ*,” millennialstar.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/original-Members-of-the-1830-Church-of-Christ
- ^{xiv} Richard Turley and William Slaughter, *How We Got the Doctrine and Covenants*, Deseret Book, 2019, p. 34
- ^{xv} *Ibid.* p. 56
- ^{xvi} *Ibid.*, p. 55
- ^{xvii} John K. Carmack, “*Fayette: The Place Where the Church was Organized*,” 1286 Sperry Treasury live, 28 July 2004, p.45.
- ^{xviii} Bushman, *Rough Stone*, endnotes for Chapter 5 #2, p.586