

Doctrine and Covenants 37-40



Church History map found at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/history-maps/map-3?lang=eng>

Gathering to Ohio had its challenges- Lucy Mack Smith's chastisement of Newel Knight and the Colesville Branch on the banks of Lake Eerie, May 1831

America's waterways, rivers, lakes and canals were the Interstate highway system of the 1830s.

As the Colesville Branch prepared for the journey to Kirtland, they planned to go to the Lake Cayuga docks in Ithaca, and travel north across the lake to the Cayuga-Seneca canals that would take them to Buffalo. They planned to then go by boat again across Lake Eerie to the Kirtland.

A few days into their journey, while on their way to Ithaca, a rider came to find Newel Knight and give him a subpoena to be a witness in court. He had to return to Colesville. He thought it was created as a form of harassment from his enemies, but he went anyway.

The group waited while Newel was gone, and when he returned, he found his Aunt Electa Peck had fallen and broken her shoulder. A local surgeon told Mrs. Peck she could not travel for several weeks. When Newel arrived back with the group, he gave her a blessing that she would be made whole, and the next morning she felt well, dressed herself, and traveled on with the others.

There was a coordinated plan among all the Saints in New York to meet in Buffalo. The Manchester/ Fayette Saints were in two groups - about 50 who chose Lucy Mack Smith, mother

of the prophet as their leader¹, and another 30 were under the leadership of Thomas Marsh. The Colesville Branch was under the leadership of their Branch President, Newel Knight, and they were the first to arrive in Buffalo.

To their dismay, they found the Buffalo harbor on Lake Erie was icebound, even though it was the first of May. They were forced to hunker down, find lodging and meals where they could, and wait for a thaw.

While they were waiting, Aaron Slade, the husband of Molly Knight Slade had a significant change of heart and left for home.² He was done with gathering to Ohio and done with the Church. Aaron returned to their home in New York and Molly went on with her four adult children.

The Colesville Branch was a large group of more than 60 with many children and some older members. Due to their recent experiences with mobs and angry people, Newel Knight felt that it was best that they stay quiet about who they were and where they were going for fear they would be turned out of where they were staying.

A week later Lucy Smith's group arrived in Buffalo and Newel shared with her his advice about keeping quiet. Lucy Smith took umbrage at that.

About 13 years later Lucy Smith wrote about her experience at the docks on Lake Erie:

I asked them if they had confessed to the people that they were "Mormons." "No, indeed," they replied, "neither must you mention a word about your religion, for if you do you will never be able to get a house, or a boat either."

I told them I should tell the people precisely who I was; "and," continued, "if you are ashamed of Christ, you must not expect to be prospered; and I shall wonder if we do not get to Kirtland before you."

While we were talking with the Colesville brethren, another boat landed, having on board about thirty brethren, among whom was Thomas B. Marsh, who immediately joined us, and, like the Colesville brethren, he was decidedly opposed to our attending to prayer, or making known that we were professors of religion. He said that if our company persisted in singing and praying, as we had hitherto done, we should be mobbed before the next morning.

"Mob it is, then," said I, "we shall attend to prayer before sunset, mob or no mob."³

¹ Joseph and Emma Smith arrived in Kirtland in February 1831, Joseph Smith, Sr. and his son Hyrum traveled ahead of others in the family, hoping to arrive by April 1, according to Lucy Smith's history of her son.

² William G. Hartley, *Stand By My Servant Joseph*, Deseret Book, 2003, p 112

³ Lucy Mack Smith, *A History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, Improvement Era, 1902, p. 177.

Mother Smith got her group on board a steamboat, but when a hard rain began to fall, she found the women and children a place to stay for the night. They were all back on board the next day and the captain asked them to stay on board. If the ice conditions changed, he wanted to be ready to leave at a moment's notice, even though one crew member expressed his belief that it would be two weeks before they could get through the ice.

Lucy Smith stood on the deck of the steamboat where her company was gathered and boldly proclaimed her Mormon beliefs to gathered townspeople. Lucy wrote:

I stepped into their midst. "Brethren and sisters," said I, "we call ourselves Saints, and profess to have come out from the world for the purpose of serving God at the expense of all earthly things; . . .

Where is your faith? Where is your confidence in God? Can you not realize that all things were made by him, and that he rules over the works of his own hands? And suppose that all the Saints here should lift their hearts in prayer to God, that the way might be opened before us, how easy it would be for him to cause the ice to break away, so that in a moment we could be on our journey!"

Just then a man on shore cried, 'Is the Book of Mormon true?'

"That book," replied I, 'was brought forth by the power of God, and translated by the gift of the Holy Ghost; and, if I could make my voice sound as loud as the trumpet of Michael, the Archangel, I would declare the truth from land to land, and from sea to sea, and the echo should reach to every isle, until every member of the family of Adam should be left without excuse. . . .⁴

Lucy continued on for some time to bear testimony of the Book of Mormon, and then turned to her company said:

"Now, brethren and sisters, if you will all raise your desires to heaven, that the ice may be broken up, and we be set at liberty, as sure as the Lord lives, it will be done."

At that instant a noise was heard, like bursting thunder. The captain cried, "Every man to his post." The ice parted, leaving barely a passage for the boat, and so narrow, that as the boat passed through, the buckets of the waterwheel were torn off with a crash, which, joined to the word of command from the captain, the hoarse answering of the sailors, the noise of the ice, and the cries and confusion of the spectators, presented a scene truly terrible. We had barely passed through the avenue, when the ice closed together again, and the Colesville' brethren were left in Buffalo, unable to follow us.⁵

⁴ Ibid., p 181.

⁵ Ibid., p 182

Mother Smith called for a miracle and received one.

Jared Carter, a member of the Colesville Branch traveling with the Knights also believed the Colesville leadership showed a lack of faith. He wrote:

If Newel Knight who was an Elder and some others with myself should go to some place of retirement and call upon God earnestly that God would immediately remove the ice so we could go on West. After very plainly having these views, I informed Newel Knight of the same, but he spoke so lightly of my feelings and views that I was some afflicted for his word's sake.⁶

Newel responded by sending a group by foot, including Jared Carter and Joseph Knight, Jr. to Dunkirk, New York to catch a steamer to Fairport, Ohio, and then on 11 miles to Kirtland. The rest of the Colesville Branch finally boarded a sloop on May 11th for their 150-mile journey across Lake Erie; the winds were fierce enough that nearly all were seasick. Three days later they were in Fairport, Ohio, and arrived May 17th in Kirtland.⁷

In Newel's journal he only noted that the ice was so thick in the Buffalo Harbor that they were delayed two weeks and that many got seasick on the boat. There was no comment on the other groups or any discussion with Lucy Mack Smith.

Knowing the history of Newel Knight and his commitment to the Gospel, Joseph Smith and the Restoration, it feels a little harsh that Lucy Smith would suggest he was ashamed of Christ or lacking in confidence in God. After all, Newel spent much of the previous winter with Lucy's son Hyrum Smith knocking on doors in the regions near his home, and preaching the gospel to anyone who would listen. And just two weeks earlier, Newel was instrumental in healing his Aunt Electa from her broken shoulder.

Was Jared Carter right? If Newel had been more bold in speaking and vocal in pleading with heaven would he have brought forth the miracle that Lucy Smith had with the ice parting?

Was Lucy Smith right that Newel showed a lack of confidence in God? Are miracles evidence of faith? Can patience also be an evidence of faith? Was Newel prudent in quietly watching over his flock in Buffalo, or timid?

All three groups of Saints who met on the shores of Lake Erie in May of 1831 were determined to gather and follow the request of the prophet, and all made it to Kirtland.

Diane Mangum – February 2025

⁶ Hartley, *Stand By My Servant Joseph*, p 113

⁷ Ibid.