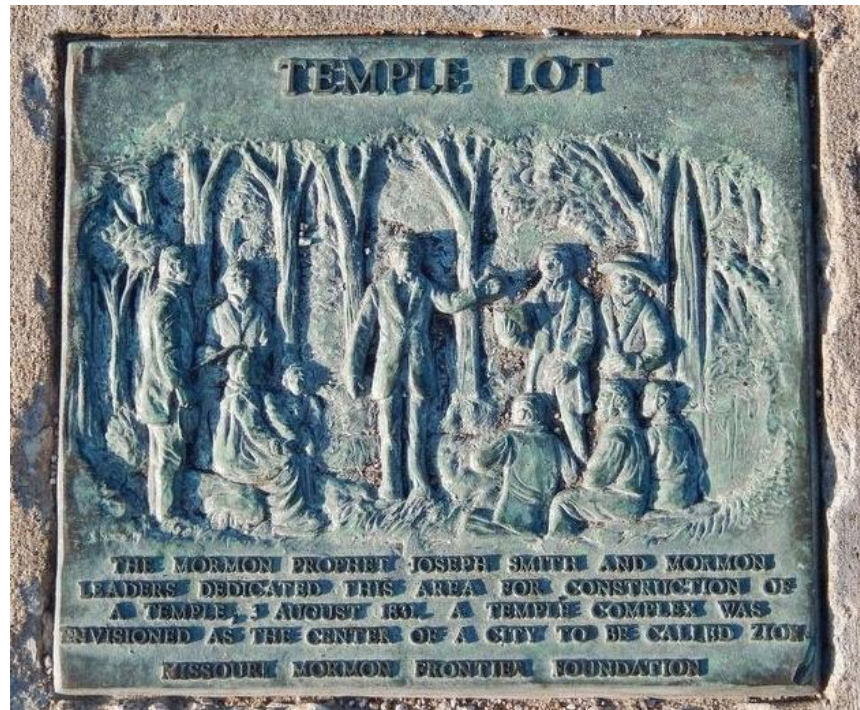


Doctrine and Covenants Section 58



This is one of several markers on the Temple Lot and Temple site in Independence, Missouri. The inscription reads: The Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith and Mormon leaders dedicated this area for construction of a temple, 3 August 1831. A temple complex was envisioned as the center of a city to be called Zion. Missouri Mormon Frontier Foundation. Photo by Cosmos Mariner

The Knight Family Helped “Lay the Foundation of Zion” in Three Events

The Colesville Branch arrived in Independence, Missouri on July 26, 1831 and were warmly welcomed by Joseph Smith. He directed them to settle in Kaw Township.¹ Undoubtedly part of the greeting given the Knights was the exciting news that revelation had been received earlier that week that the city of Independence was the center place for Zion, and the place for the temple.

In 1831, the population of Independence was about 300 people and land sold for \$1.25 an acre.² In Section 57 the Saints were instructed that

“It is wisdom that the land should be purchased by the saints, and also every tract lying westward even unto the line running directly between

¹ This area is now part of Kansas City.

² Conkling, *A Chronology of Joseph Smith*, p. 25

Jew and Gentile [the border between Missouri and Indian Territory.]
And also, every tract bordering by the prairies, inasmuch as my disciples
are enabled to buy lands. Behold, this is wisdom that they may obtain it for an
everlasting inheritance.”³

**Tuesday, August 2, 1831 – Kaw Township, Jackson County, Missouri – the land dedicated for
the building of Zion**

On August 2, 1831 Joseph Smith, in company with several others, visited the Knights’ settlement
in Kaw Township and held a ceremony to dedicate the land.

Newel Knight wrote about that day:

*“Being no longer at a loss to know where the exact spot for the building of a
temple and the city of Zion was, we immediately prepared for our labors.
On the second day of August, Brother Joseph Smith, Jr. the prophet of God
assisted the Colesville Branch to lay the first log as a foundation for Zion in Kaw
Township, 12 miles West of Independence. The log as carried by 12 men, in
honor of the twelve tribes of Israel. At the same time through prayer, Sidney Rigdon
consecrated and dedicated the land of Zion for the gathering of the Saints.
This was truly a season of joy and rejoicing to all the Saints who took part in or
witnessed the proceedings.”⁴*

John Whitmer wrote in his History of the Church this description of the ceremony for the laying
of the foundation of Zion. The description was copied in the footnotes of the annotated version
of Joseph Smith’s History of the Church, including the introductory paragraph:

*Speaking of this second of August meeting, in addition to what the Prophet relates in his
narrative, John Whitmer in his History of the Church (ch ix) gives the following interesting
details from a statement of Oliver Cowdery’s, who must have been present.*

*On the second day of August, 1831 Rigdon stood up asking,
“Do you receive this land for the land of your inheritance with thankful hearts from the
Lord?”
Answer from all: “We do.”
“Do you pledge yourselves to keep the law of God in this land which you never have kept
in your own lands?”
Answer from all, “We do.”
“Do you pledge yourselves to see that others of your brethren who shall come hither do
keep the laws of God?”
“We do.”*

³ Doctrine and Covenants 57:4-5.

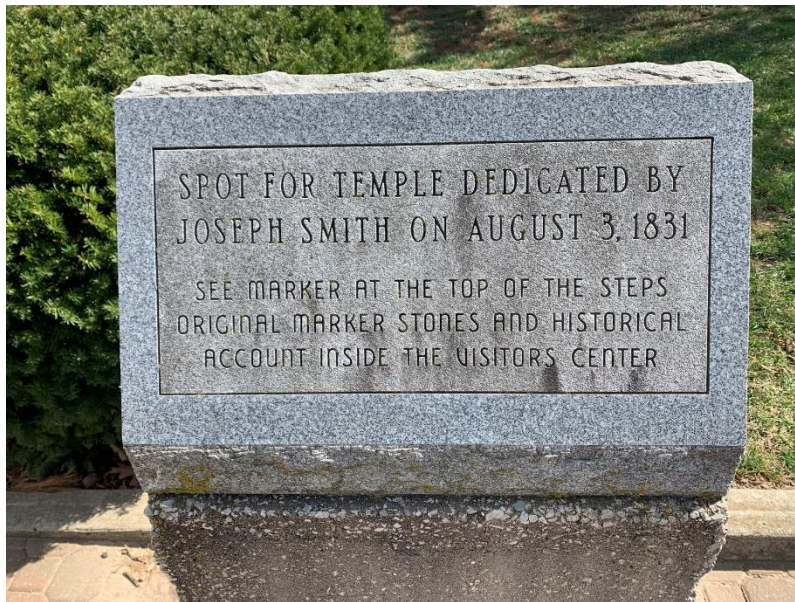
⁴ Newel Knight Journal, Allen typescript, p. 14.

*"After prayer he arose and said: "I now pronounce this land consecrated and dedicated unto the Lord for a possession and inheritance for the Saints, and for all the faithful servants of the Lord to the remotest ages of time. In the name of Jesus Christ, having authority from Him, Amen."*⁵

Of the 12 men who helped carry the log in this symbolic ceremony, six were Knight family members.⁶ They included Newel Knight; Joseph Knight, Sr.; Aaron Culver; Hezekiah Peck; Ezekial Peck; Freeborn DeMille; and William Stringham.⁷ That first log probably became part of a home for Joseph Knight, Sr., or a meetinghouse. There was already one household of members of the Church in Kaw Township, that of Joshua and Margaret Lewis. But this log was the first symbolic step toward a foundation for Zion.

It is thought that the location of the original log home was 100 yards northeast of a spring located where Troost and 31st Streets in Kansas City intersect. A bronze plaque was placed in Troost Park in 1963 to commemorate the event, but the marker has since disappeared.⁸

Wednesday, August 3, 1831 – Independence, Missouri – Temple Site dedicated



Announcements about new temples are commonplace in our time, but on July 20, 1831, when Joseph Smith shared the revelation announcing that a temple would be built in Independence,

⁵ Joseph Smith, *History of the Church, Volume 1*, Deseret News Press 1951, in footnote added by B.H. Roberts found on page 196.

⁶ Aaron Culver was married to Esther Peck, a sister of Polly Peck Knight, Hezekiah and Ezekial Peck were brothers of Polly Peck Knight, Freeborn DeMille married Anna Knight, and William Stringham was married to Elizabeth Knight. These names are given by William Hartley, quoting Lucy Mack Smith's history of her son.

⁷ William G. Hartley, *Stand By My Servant Joseph*, Deseret Book, 2003, p 131.

⁸ Ibid.

Missouri, it was the first time in this dispensation that there was a plan to build a temple. This was a momentous day. The revelation was very specific that it was to be a short distance west of the courthouse on a hill just outside of Independence.⁹

Exactly three weeks later on Wednesday, August 3rd, Joseph Smith and seven other men gathered to dedicate the land for the building of a temple in Independence, Missouri, and Joseph Smith laid corner marking stones. Joseph Smith recorded that as part of the dedication, the 87th Psalm was read. The first two lines of that psalm read, "His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob."¹⁰

Newel Knight had the privilege to be one of the few who were invited to be there. He wrote in his journal just a brief note about it.

*"On the third of August the spot for the temple, a little west of Independence, was dedicated in the presence of Joseph Smith, Jr., Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, Edward Partridge, Martin Harris, W. W. Phelps, Joseph Coe, and myself."*¹¹

At the time of the temple site dedication, the church did not yet own the property there. The land surrounding and including the temple site was purchased by Jones Flournoy on December 12, 1831. Bishop Edward Partridge purchased 63 acres of the Flournoy land, including the temple site for \$130 on December 19, 1831.¹² Joseph Smith's plat for the city of Zion had the temple lot in the center.¹³

Thursday, August 4, 1831 – Kaw Township – First Conference of the Church in Missouri

About 31 elders and members of the church squeezed into the home of Joshua Lewis in Kaw Township for the first conference of the church held in Zion.¹⁴

Joshua Lewis and his wife Margaret were the first members of the church to reside in Kaw Township. They had moved to Missouri in 1828 from Kentucky, and when missionaries came through the area in early 1831, the Lewises were baptized, and sometime before July 17, 1831 Joshua was ordained an elder.¹⁵

From Newel's Journal:

⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 57:3.

¹⁰ Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Vo. 1, p.199.

¹¹ Newel Knight Journal, Allen typescript, p. 14.

¹² <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/place/temple-lot-blue-township-missouri> accessed April 26, 2025.

¹³ Ibid. A revelation in 1841 released the Saints from the commandment to build a temple in Jackson County due to persecution. The Saints were driven from the county in November of 1833. The land was sold in 1848 with the approval of Brigham Young.

¹⁴ Hartley, *Stand By My Servant*, p.133.

¹⁵ The Joseph Smith Papers. / <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/joshua-lewis?highlight=joshua%20lewis>

"On the fourth [of August] the first conference held in the land of Zion was held at the house of brother Joshua Lewis in Kaw Township. The Colesville Branch was present and much good instruction was given, and we felt to give thanks to that God who had brought us out of the lands of our nativity and planted us in the land of Zion."¹⁶

The conference brought spiritual strength to the Colesville Branch as they faced the challenges of making homes, planting crops, and finding a way to earn money in an unbroken land.

Diane Mangum, April 2025

¹⁶ Newel Knight journal, p. 14.