

Doctrine and Covenants 6-9



The restored Joseph and Polly Knight home in Colesville, New York. Photo taken June 2023 by D. Mangum.

The Knight Family in 1828-29, faithful friends to the Smiths

In 1829, Joseph and Polly Knight had reached a stage of life where “peace, prosperity, and plenty seemed to crown our labors, and indeed we were a happy family, and my father rejoiced in having his children around him,” wrote Newel Knight about his parents in this time period.¹

Newel described his father’s circumstances:

“My father owned a farm, a grist mill and a carding machine. He was not rich, yet he possessed enough of this world’s good to secure to himself and family not only the necessaries, but also the comforts of life.

His family, consisting of my mother, three sons and four daughters, he raised in a genteel and respectable manner and gave his children a good common school education.

¹ Newel Knight, *Newel Knight Journal*, Allen typescript, page 1. Newel probably wrote this several years after the fact, as he looked back on the time of the restoration of the church.

My father was a sober, honest man, generally respected and beloved by his neighbors and acquaintances. He did not belong to any religious sect, but was a believer in the Universalian² doctrine.

The business in which my father was engaged often required him to have hired help, and among the many he from time to time employed was a young man by the name of Joseph Smith, Jr., to whom I was particularly attached. His noble deportment, his faithfulness, and his kind address could not fail to win him the esteem of those who had the pleasure of his acquaintance.³

In his journal Newel was observing that in 1828-29, his parents were reaping the fruits of their decades of hard work. Joseph Knight, Sr. was modestly prosperous, most of their children were married and settled into their own homes and Joseph and Polly were healthy enough to be vigorous and working. In 1829, Joseph turned 56 and Polly turned 54 years old. They had a 140 acre farm with a grist mill, carding machine, orchard, barn and two homes, according to the advertisement he put in the newspaper when he put his home up for sale in 1830.⁴

The four married Knight children were collectively the parents of 12 grandchildren for Joseph and Polly; Nahum and Thankful had 5 children, Esther and William had 4 children, and Anna and Freeborn had 3. Newel and Sally had no children yet, and the other three unmarried Knight children, Joseph Jr., Polly, and Elizabeth still lived at home.

When Joseph Smith worked at the Knight farm in the fall of 1826, there was enough room in the house for him to share a bedroom with Joseph Knight, Jr.

The old Knight home built about 1812 in Colesville was not very big by modern standards, about 1350 square feet of living space plus a cellar. The main floor was about 850 square feet, and had a sitting room, family eating room where Polly cooked over an open fire, and a small preparation kitchen behind it. There was also a bedroom, probably the parents' bedroom, and a steep staircase down to a cellar. Upstairs was about 500 square feet, with a bedroom on each end of the house, and a stair landing area between them. There was probably extra storage under the eaves. They drew their water from a well that had been dug by hand when they built the house.

The Knight family had a friendly relationship with the Smith family, despite the distance of 140 miles between the two households. When Joseph and Emma moved from Manchester, New York where they lived with Joseph's parents, back to Harmony, Pennsylvania near Emma's parents, in December of 1827, the bond between the Knights and the young couple grew closer. The couple moved into a small home in Harmony that Emma's brother had just moved out of,

² A belief that there will be a universal salvation of mankind, and any punishment in the afterlife for misdeeds will only be temporary.

³ *Newel Knight Journal*, Allen version, p 1.

⁴ In the spring of 1831 a small advertisement was placed in the Bainbridge newspaper that described the Knight property to potential buyers, as the family was leaving for Kirtland.

and agreed to buy it from Emma's father. Her father, Isaac Hale, was very unhappy that Emma's husband was involved with mysterious gold plates that he was not allowed to even see. While the couple worked to get settled, the controversial gold plates were stored in a box under their bed in their little home.⁵

When Joseph and Emma needed help in coming months they knew they couldn't turn to the Hales for help. There was too much friction in that relationship. Joseph Knight also knew that, and when the young couple came to him in early winter, Father Knight wrote he didn't have much to give at the time, but he gave them a little cash and a few provisions. How the young couple got from Harmony to Colesville is not described in Joseph Knight's written history, but possibly they walked, or came up the Susquehanna River by ferry.

Joseph Knight, Jr. wrote about Joseph Smith coming to Colesville to ask for financial help in early 1828 after Joseph and Emma had moved to Harmony. Joseph Knight, Jr., wrote:

I left my Father, purchased a building spot adjoining my Father's and began to work for myself, and nearly ready to build a large house. Joseph [Smith] had commenced to translate the plates. He told my father he wanted fifty dollars. My father could not raise it. He then came to me. The same day I sold my house lot and sent him a one horse wagon. Father and I often went to see him and carry him something to live upon.⁶

It's probable that Joseph Smith needed help to make a payment to his father-in-law on their Harmony home.

When summer arrived in 1828, life for Emma and Joseph had not gotten any easier. Martin Harris had come to Harmony in the spring to help take dictation from Joseph as he translated plates, and in June, Martin convinced Joseph Smith to let him take 116 pages home to Manchester to show his wife.

The same day Martin left, Emma gave birth to her first child, a baby boy that only lived three hours. Her recovery was difficult. A few weeks later Joseph took a stage to Manchester to find out what happened to the 116 pages when Martin didn't return, and Joseph Smith learned they were lost.

Transportation and communication are rarely mentioned in journals or stories from the Smith or Knight families, but both significantly impacted everyday life.

It is likely that Joseph and Emma did not own a horse or wagon in their early years of marriage. They walked, arranged a ride from others, took a stage coach ride, or perhaps took a ferry on

⁵ Linda King Newel and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, Doubleday, 1984, p 22.

⁶ William Hartley, *They are My Friends, Joseph Knight, Jr. Incidents in Church History, Appendix B*, p.214. This gift from Joseph Knight, Jr. to Joseph Smith, Jr. of a one-horse wagon probably went toward a payment on a house because in ensuing months Joseph and Emma don't seem to have any source of transportation.

the Susquehanna River to get from Harmony to Colesville, or anywhere else they went. Possibly Joseph Smith used Father Knight's wagon and horse to go get the plates from the Hill Cumorah because neither he or his own father, Joseph Smith, Sr., owned a horse and wagon.

When on long journey of more than a day, one might stop at a tavern that had food and rooms for the night. Taverns were friendly places even for women and children.

Mail was frequently used to communicate with friends. Mail delivery in the time was often sent between communities by stage coach, and only delivered to a single designated place in the community. There was no mail directly to home for many more decades to come, but a letter might be personally delivered by a friend passing nearby.

In the summer and fall of 1828, after the loss of the 116 pages, translation of the Book of Mormon stopped for a time and Joseph could work on his land or for others for a bit. As winter settled in, it appears circumstances may have been hard on several Smith households. Late in January of 1829, Joseph Smith, Sr. and his son Samuel came to the Colesville home of Joseph Knight, Sr. to ask for some assistance. Joseph Knight gave them a little, and told them they had come far enough, and took them over to Joseph and Emma's house in his sleigh the next morning.

In February of 1829, Joseph Smith received a revelation directed to his father, Joseph Smith, Sr., that spoke of a "marvelous work and a wonder" that was about to come forth. That revelation, now known as Section 4 of the Doctrine and Covenants, was probably given during that visit when Joseph Knight took Samuel and Joseph Smith, Sr. to Harmony.

In late March, Joseph Knight, Sr., took his wife Polly over to see Joseph and Emma in Harmony, and it bolstered Polly's faith in the young prophet tremendously.⁷

Joseph and Polly's faith came to be shared by many members of their extended family. Polly had three brothers, Hezekiah, Ezekial, and Benjamin Peck, who with their families all lived just a few miles away in South Bainbridge. Polly's sister, Esther Peck Culver, and Joseph Knight's sister, Molly Knight Slade and her family also lived nearby. All of these siblings welcomed the news about a restored Gospel and became members of the Colesville Branch in 1830 when it was organized.

The moral support and help with food and necessary items like lined paper for translating⁸ from the Knights to Joseph and Emma Smith continued throughout April and May until the translation was almost finished. When Joseph Smith decided they needed to move to Fayette to complete the translation work in June of 1829, Newel Knight took his wagon 25 miles to Harmony, packed up Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and drove them to the Whitmer home in

⁷ Joseph Knight, *Recollections of Early Church History*, LDS Church Archives manuscript 4270, handwritten, p 5.

⁸ See Joseph Knight, Sr.'s written account of taking provisions to Joseph and Emma Smith in the accompanying article in the Knight Connections to Come Follow Me, *Joseph Knight, Sr.'s Support for Translation*..

Fayette, New York.⁹ When the Book of Mormon was coming off the press in Palmyra in late March of 1830, Joseph Knight, Sr. took Joseph Smith in his wagon from Harmony to Manchester to see the book and get copies. Joseph Smith and Joseph Knight, Sr. stayed in the Smith family home for a short time, and soon after the church was organized. Joseph Knight took the young church president back to Harmony a few weeks later.¹⁰ A year later, when Joseph Smith, whom they followed as a prophet, asked them to leave their homes and move to Kirtland, Ohio, Polly and Joseph, and all of their children and most of their extended family members in the Colesville Branch did just that.

The Knights were faithful friends to Joseph Smith and his wife and family, and faithful followers of the prophet Joseph Smith.

Children of Joseph and Polly Peck Knight, and their families as of 1829

(More details about the lives of each of the children can be found on the website on the Posterity of Joseph and Polly Knight page.

1. Nahum Knight, age 33 and wife Thankful, age 32. They married at age 20 and 19 in 1816. Their children:
Joseph, 12; William, 11; John, 7; Bethany, 4; Sally, 2; Richard, 1; (children Eliza, Newel and Mary were born after 1829)
2. Esther Knight Stringham, age 31 and her husband William, age 41. They married in 1816 when Esther was 18 and William 28. Their children:
Julia, 12; Harriet, 8; Alonzo, 7; Amos, 3; (another child, Hyrum was born in 1833)
3. Newel Knight, age 29, and his wife Sally, age 25 were married four years earlier in 1825. In the first years of their marriage Sally delivered two stillborn baby boys. They later had two sons, Samuel and Eli born in Missouri. After Sally passed away, he married Lydia Goldthwaite and they had 8 children.
4. Anna Knight DeMille, age 25 was married to Freeborn DeMille, age 34. They married in 1819 when Anna was 15, and Freeborn was 24. Their children:
Mariah, 9; Orpha, 7; Lora, 1; (In later years children Olivia, Adelia, Elias and Lovina joined their family)
5. Joseph Knight, Jr. age 21, unmarried and living at home.
6. Polly Knight age 18, unmarried and living at home.
7. Elizabeth Knight age 12, living at home.

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⁹ Hartley, *They are My Friends*, p 36.

¹⁰ Joseph Knight, Sr., *“Recollections of Early Church History,”* p 6.