

FATHER KNIGHT AND THE DEED TO THE SMITH FARM



Most people, who have followed the Knight family history, know about Father Knight's part in the early restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the nineteenth century. However, few are aware of the part of Father Knight in the threat of the Smith's loss of their farm due to failure to make a last mortgage payment of \$100 in 1825.

In 1814, the Smith family moved to Norwich, Vermont from Lebanon, New Hampshire where Joseph, Jr. had a painful surgery due to typhoid fever. They struggled to survive, after three devastating years of freezing temperatures and crop failures. By 1816, thousands of immigrants moved to New York for climates that were more moderate. The Smith family dreamed of owning a farm in the Palmyra, New York area. In 1818, they contracted for a tract of land two miles from town. They struggled there to make the last annual payment to retire the mortgage by the end of 1825.

Young Joseph Jr., labored over the question of a true church. In 1820, he received the First Vision, and a visitation from angel Moroni in 1823. Besides working on the family farm, he left home to work for Josiah Stool (Stowell) in a treasure mining expedition. Mother, Lucy Smith, dictated a record in 1845, *History of the Prophet Joseph*, to a scribe, Martha Jane Coray. In it, she stated, "Soon after his return, we received intelligence of the arrival of a new (mortgage) agent for the Everson land, of which our farm was a portion. This reminded us of our last payment, which was still due, and must be made before we could obtain a deed of the place." Soon, Messrs.' Stool and Knight came to the family to purchase their wheat crop. The payment for the crop would provide the Smiths with the money to retire the mortgage, they thought. The mortgage agent was informed he would receive the payment by the 25th of December 1825. He agreed to the terms, and the Smiths were put at ease over their concerns of acquiring their dream of final ownership. When the time approached the due date in December, Father Smith started to go to receive payment from Mr. Stool and Mr. Knight. It is assumed that payment was collected due to later history, and no proof otherwise is known to exist.

One afternoon, two men approached the home, and asked Lucy..."some questions which I considered rather impertinent questions concerning our making the last payment on

the place; and if we did not wish to sell the house; furthermore, where Mr. Smith and my son had gone, etc.” She insisted that they had no thoughts of selling. Hyrum was approaching the house, and they went to him, and informed him that they had purchased the mortgage, and warned the Smiths to leave, and give the property to the “lawful owners.” Hyrum reacted with shock, as Lucy did.

In a short time, Hyrum went to an old friend, a Dr. Robinson and told him the story. This old man canvassed the village for subscribers to a statement of support for the Smiths, and received 60 within one hour. He gave it to Hyrum, who took it to the mortgage agent who became enraged. He told Hyrum these men had claimed that the Smiths had vacated the farm, and committed much damage to the property. Hyrum told the mortgage agent the reason that his father and brother were not home, presumably on their trip to Josiah Stool and Joseph Knight for payment. The agent sent a messenger to these two men to report to him quickly. They refused. The agent then threatened to “fetch” them with a warrant of charges. For this, they came quickly. They responded, “We’ve got the land, sir, and we’ve got the deed, so just let Smith help himself.” They agreed to surrender the deed if Hyrum could raise \$1000 by Saturday at 10:00 p.m. The time then was noon on Thursday.

Members of the family attempted to find someone who could help them raise the money. One friend, Mr. Durfee directed them to his son who was a “high sheriff” in the area. Mr. Durfee wanted to share the problem with his son. When the sheriff arrived, they tarried a short time, and then visited the farm (likely to inspect to see that no damage had been done by the Smiths). Lucy recalled, “The anxiety of mind that I suffered that day can more easily be imagined than described. I now looked upon the proceeds of our industry, which smiled around us on every hand, with a kind of yearning attachment that I never before had experienced; and our early losses I did not feel so keenly, for I then realized that we were young, and by making some exertions we might improve our circumstances; beside, I had not felt the inconveniences of poverty as I had since.”

Messrs.’ Durfee and Father Smith went to the agent who called for the two scoundrels, likely with a threat of arrest for fraud, to turn the deed over to the sheriff. At this point, the agent received the deed again, and held it for the Smiths to occupy the farm. This would suggest that the Smith family would be regarded as tenants or renters through the kindness of the agent. He told the Smiths they could live on the farm as long as they pleased. On the 20th of September 1827, Messrs.’ Stool and Knight came to the Smith home to see how they were doing with the matter of dealing with the mortgage arrangement. Father Knight therefore, was present at the Smith home on the night that Joseph Smith, Jr. and Emma went to the Hill Cumorah with his team and buggy.

The payment for the grain by Father Knight is not clearly proven in Lucy’s dictations, or other research sources. However, Father Smith and his son, Joseph, Jr. left home to obtain the crop payment, and returned without any mention (according to accounts) that the purchase was not completed (final payment made). In addition, Josiah Stool and Joseph Knight, Sr. would not have visited the family to ask about the mortgage, if payment had not been made by them to the Smiths, apparently assuming that the Smiths had obtained a deed by then upon final payment.

This sequel of events was just one challenge that prevented the Smith from realizing their dream of having title to their own farm. They struggled with disappointment and persecutions that might have failed others of raising and supporting a future prophet of the Lord, selected to usher in the restoration of the Church in the last dispensation. Father Knight, who assisted the Prophet in many other ways, was apparently unable to help them redeem the mortgage in this instance. The timing was not right, and the involvement of two dishonest men prevented a normal mortgage arrangement to be completed. However, this was another part of his association with this appointed family, that eventually developed into a love for their son, and commitment to follow him for the rest of their lives. We honor them for a heritage that supports our determination to live faithfully.

References:

Joseph Smith The Prophet, Improvement Era, 1901 (Dictated by Lucy Mack Smith)
Gospel Link, *Joseph Smith a Modern American Prophet* by John Henry Evans, Improvement Era
Stand by My Servant Joseph, William Hartley, Deseret Book Company, 2003



Joseph Smith Sr. home and farm in Manchester, NY (2015)