

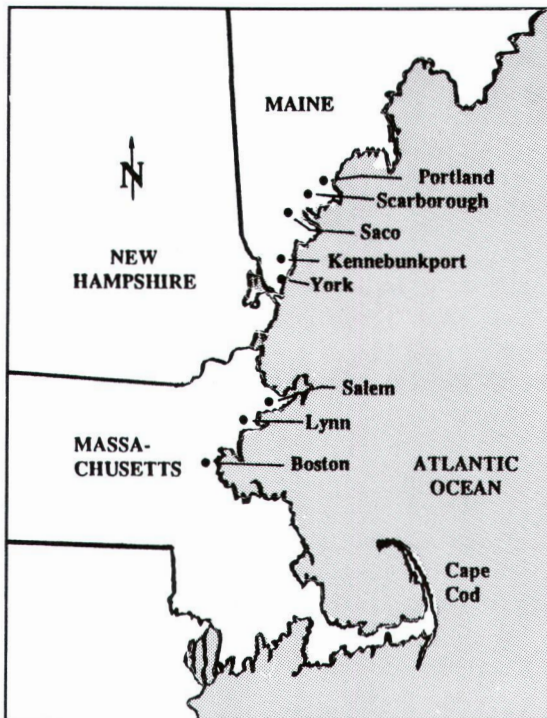
Chapter 3

Church Missionaries Converted Cochranites

Jacob Cochran established his small denomination in the area between Boston, Massachusetts, and Portland, Maine. By 1830 Cochran had gone into hiding to escape imprisonment due to his practice of polygamy; and his denomination was struggling to continue under the leadership of John Dennett and others. Shortly after the Book of Mormon was published in March 1830, Latter Day Saint missionaries began to make their way into the Boston area, where they found that making converts among the Cochranites was fruitful. So successful were they that a Church conference was held in Saco, Maine (the heart of the Cochranite area), August 21, 1835, at which nine of the newly ordained apostles were in attendance (*RLDS History of the Church* 1:583; *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 [October 1835]: 204–207; *LDS History of the Church* 2:252). The LDS reference states that seven of the Twelve met in conference at Saco, Maine.

But the converting of the Cochranites and their gathering to Church headquarters at Kirtland, Ohio, and later to Nauvoo, Illinois, brought the Church more than just increased numbers. It also brought the plague of polygamy—for some of the Cochranites brought their doctrines with them. This was a natural consequence of the fact that these people had lived in polygamy for years. They were men who had practiced polygamy, women who had been plural wives, and children born of polygamy. They had been indoctrinated with the belief that polygamy was a sacred doctrine.

An even more devastating result of missionary work among the Cochranites was that some of the Latter Day Saint missionaries, including Apostles Orson Hyde and Brigham Young,



Richard Price

The area where Church missionaries converted many Cochranites in the early 1830s.

accepted the doctrine of polygamy and began practicing it at Nauvoo before Joseph Smith's death. Joseph moved to bring these men before the High Council for trial, but was martyred before he accomplished the task.

Two of the first missionaries assigned to take the gospel to this area, which included the states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine, were twenty-six-year-old Orson Hyde, and the Prophet Joseph's younger brother, Samuel Smith, who was twenty-two. They left Kirtland, Ohio, on February 1, 1832, for their mission. Each kept a journal in which he recorded his daily experiences as they traveled through this area, preaching at every opportunity. The original *Journal of Orson Hyde* and the *Missionary Journal of Samuel Harrison Smith—1832* are now in the archives of the LDS Church Historical Department in Salt Lake City, Utah. Typescripts of the two journals, which tell of their work among the Cochranites, were obtained by Richard and Pamela Price. Below are extracts taken from Orson and Samuel's journals.

Orson wrote on June 29, 1832, at Boston:

Preached in the evening . . . two ladies confessed their faith in the work, and a Miss and Mrs. [Augusta Adams] Cobb.

Samuel penned on the same day:

Baptized three: Augusta Cobb, Elizabeth Harendeen and _____ Porter.

Orson recorded on July 1, while still in Boston:

attended to Sacrament, considerably disturbed by false spirits in a man and woman that believed in the Cochranite Doctrine. We cried against them and after a little got them considerably quelled. . . . Not a very good time because of disturbance.

Samuel wrote of that meeting:

Somewhat interrupted this day in the meeting by a man and woman that taught the doctrine of the devil, such as . . . having spiritual wives. . . . They came to our meeting. The woman arose and began to preach and we requested her to stop and

she would not, and we cried against her spirit, for we knew that it was an unclean spirit, and we cried against it that it was of the devil, and it made considerable stir. The man that had the same spirit tempted us, saying: "Cast the Devil out," crying amen to the words of the woman. After considerable muttering and grumbling and shaking of her frame, she stopped and we proceeded with our meeting.

This was the first time that Orson and Samuel mentioned Cochranism in their journals. Note that Augusta Cobb, one of the baptismal candidates, was in the meeting where Cochranites were present. She later became a plural wife of Brigham Young (*The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 2 [April 1920]: 54).

Orson and Samuel continued their walking and preaching journey from Massachusetts, through New Hampshire, and into Maine, staying a part of the time in polygamous homes. On September 25 they were in the village of York, Maine, where they again came in contact with the Cochranite woman who had disrupted the Sacrament service in Boston on July 1. Samuel explained concerning her:

a large congregation came together and Brother Orson preached to them. . . . We then were invited to go home with a young man by the name of Ludgkins and stayed overnight with him. His stepmother we had seen before. We had seen her in Boston, the woman that came into our meeting and we had cried against her spirit.

On September 28 Orson and Samuel were in Kennebunkport, Maine, another Cochranite stronghold. Orson wrote:

attended a Cochranite meeting, and they said, "if any one had a message from God there was liberty to give it unto the people." And I commenced by prayer, but thought I would not tell them about the work then, but would get their confidence in the first place.

Samuel added to the story on that same day:

we went to a meeting in the evening and the people were called

Cockrinites because the man that first preached their faith, his name was Cockrin. They gave liberty for anyone to speak . . . Brother Orson spoke to them and exhorted them to faithfulness to the Lord and to humility and to stand in the Council of the Lord, that they might know the voice of the Good Shepherd, that they might when the voice came “behold the Bridegroom Cometh” go out to meet him. And they said “Amen.” When meeting closed, we spake that we would like to preach to the people. . . . They would not let us.

On October 10 Samuel and Orson were still among the Cochranites. Orson wrote:

Visited three families but without much hope of doing anything to profit them because of the “Cochranite’s,” a de-luded sect of people, by whom many had been deceived, and the people were afraid of the truth, and for this cause the way of truth was evil spoken of. . . . [B]ut few came out to meeting.

Samuel’s journal for October 10 contains this revelation:

a less number came together in the evening than before, but we declared unto them that they must repent and go up to Zion.

On the following day, October 11, they walked only three miles to Ogunquit and found another Cochranite congregation, in which they were allowed to preach. Orson’s journal states:

preached to a congregation of Cochranites who gave liberty; *told them again to repent and go up to Zion*, and we lifted our cry in the Spirit, and I hope some of them will go; but they had a wonderful lustful spirit, because they believe in a “Plurality of wives” which they call spiritual wives, knowing them not after the flesh but after the spirit, but by the appearance they knew one another after the flesh. (italics added)

Samuel gave his opinion about the Cochranites. He recorded:

the people in these parts were under a delusion and such a spirit of confusion had seized them that it appeared to be impossible to teach them, to get them to hear and understand

by the right Spirit.

The astounding thing about Orson's preaching (for he nearly always took the lead) was the fact that he preached the doctrine of the gathering to the Cochranites, and urged them to gather without weighing the terrible consequences of polygamy entering the Church.

On October 15 Orson and Samuel were in the town of Newburyport, Maine. Orson wrote:

called on Mr. Goodrich and Stimpson; tried to persuade them to go to Zion, and they seemed to have some little disposition to go, but could not bring them to repentance before God. Came up about two miles farther to Mr. [Timothy] Hams and tarried all night; found him an enthusiastic man,—a Cochranite—Not much hopes of going to Zion or embracing.

On October 16 Orson and Samuel remained at Mr. Ham's. Historian G. T. Ridlon, Sr., wrote that Ham was "among the more notable who went out to plant Cochran's standard" (Ridlon, *Saco Valley Settlements*, 279). The two ministers helped Ham dig his potatoes and Samuel says, "Got them [members of Ham's family] to wash some clothes." That evening Samuel and Orson had a meeting with the Cochranites.

On October 17 Orson recorded:

Visited three families and talked a good deal; some hopes of their going to Zion some time.

In commenting upon Orson's sermon, Samuel said:

Brother Orson preached to them. . . . Spake upon the Covenant. Declared unto them that they must repent, all of them and be baptized and go to Zion. But they were hard and unbelieving and we had not much hope of them.

But by the next evening, October 18, Samuel had more hopes for some of the Cochranites, for he and Orson had moved to the home of still another Cochranite, Captain Andrews. Samuel was encouraged. Not only had Captain Andrews subscribed to the Church's periodical, *The Evening and the Morning*

Star, but there were hopes that some of the Cochranites would “gather.” Samuel declared:

visited some of the neighborhood and found some that we thought would go to Zion.

On October 20 and 21 they were guests of a polygamous Cochranite and his plural wife. Orson reported:

Trarried all night at Mr. McKinney’s, who lived with what he called a spiritual wife.

On October 22 they left Kennebunkport and traveled to a neighboring Cochranite settlement. Since they were walking from one Cochranite group to another, it appears that friendly Cochranites were directing them in making new contacts. The journals of both men verify that before preaching on October 24, near Hollis, Maine, they visited with Samuel Hill and a Mr. Burrell [who were evidently Cochranites]. Some, who were opposed to Cochranism, were suspicious of Orson and Samuel because they were fraternizing with those polygamists who had caused so much sorrow among the people of that area. On the evening of October 24, after Orson had preached, a man questioned the two missionaries about their Cochranite connections:

One man arose and said the people would not be likely to receive it [the doctrines brought by Orson and Samuel] if it were true because of Cochran’s description. He then mentioned the names of two Cochranites, and said if we had any fellowship for them he wished us to depart out of their coast. I then told them that our message was from God, and it was as much to Cochranites as Free Will Baptists, and that I should rejoice as much to see a Cochranite redeemed from his errors as a Free Will Baptist. But I told them I had no fellowship with error nor iniquity. They did not request us to hold another meeting; but a man three miles from the place was there, a Cochranite, and he invited us to go there; and we gave out an appointment for the next evening.

Samuel told the same story in these words:

one man arose and said that there had been a deceiver through that country and had deceived the people and the people were

afraid and . . . if we had fellowship with that people that had been deceived (Kockranites) he should desire us to depart out of their coast, that the people would not desire to hear us any more. We told him our mission was unto all people and we did not believe in the doctrine of the Kockranites. . . . Hill [one of the two men they had been visiting] was some believing, but rather stupid . . . yet we had hopes that he and his family would go to Zion.

On October 25 Orson and Samuel were in the town of Limon, Maine, guests of Simeon Weymouth, a Cochranite. They helped Weymouth husk corn that day and the next, and he allowed them to preach evenings in his home. On the twenty-seventh, Orson and Samuel again visited Timothy Ham, a Cochranite, and the Dennett family, whose daughter was very ill. On the twenty-eighth the missionaries preached twice.

Orson wrote:

Samuel preached in the spirit; people paid good attention, and some, I think will go to Zion.

By October 30 Orson and Samuel were guests at the George Dennett home, and were helping him dig potatoes by day and having meetings “at the School House” at night. They had a good attendance. On November 1 they returned to visit their Cochranite friend, Simeon Weymouth, and again spent the night. On November 2 they returned to Dennett’s and preached the funeral sermon of the Dennett girl, whom they had visited earlier. This show of concern by Orson and Samuel, as well as their having helped with the harvest, and staying in their homes, caused the Cochranites to show so much interest in the Restored Gospel that the missionaries had a prayer meeting with members of the polygamous sect.

On Sunday, November 4, the two men attended a Methodist meeting, but were not persistent in making contact with the Methodists, and were soon back with the more obliging Cochranites. Orson revealed:

Went to Methodist meeting in the forenoon, hoping to give out an appointment for evening, but the Minister gave out an appointment before me, and we arose disappointed, but I spoke to them about 15 minutes, and bore a strong

testimony upon the “gathering.” Held a meeting in the evening at Mr. Dennit’s; cried against one unclean spirit, and had a very good time and meeting.

Samuel confirmed:

Went to a meeting expecting to give out an appointment for the evening, but the preacher gave out one for himself. We returned to Dennet’s and Timothy Ham and others that were in the doctrine that was called Cochranites and some of them desired us to come into their quarter and preach. Ham began to pray as he called it and went into a wonderful spirit of distraction and confusion, yea, it was an evil spirit and we bore testimony against his spirit. Stayed overnight at Dennet’s. Held a meeting in the evening.

The missionaries spent November 6 at Simeon Weymouth’s, and then returned to Dennett’s. On the eighth they traveled to Weymouth’s, where they baptized Simeon Weymouth and his wife Esther, Sally Taylor, and Lovey Dennett. Under the date of November 9 Orson’s journal states:

Went up three miles to S. [Simeon] Waymouth’s and baptized him [George Dennett], and in the evening had prayer, and a very good time; and the Lord was with us; and Satan also came in—a crazy sort of a female; we cried against her, and after a short time got her still. Tarried [stayed that night] at the same place.

Upon reading Orson’s description of the woman who disrupted the meeting, one is left to wonder if she were a plural wife; and if so, was her mental derangement a result of the baptism of one of the Cochranite men? Elders Hyde and Smith never addressed the problems of the polygamous wives and children in their journals. Their fate has been a well-kept secret for over 160 years.

Now the mysterious puzzle begins to fit together. The shelves of many libraries still hold heart-wrenching stories, such as the following example:

We know of a sea captain who lived on the west side of the Saco [River]. He had married a beautiful daughter of respectable parentage, and to them two pretty boys had been given. Before Jacob Cochran appeared in that community peace and contentment reigned in that home-circle. But the father, a man of speculative and unstable mind, was swept from his moorings by the sophistry of this imposter and spent the time that should have been devoted to the interests of his family with the followers of the “New Apostle to the Gentiles,” as some called him. He had a “spiritual wife” assigned to him, said farewell to Hannah [his legal wife], tore her children from her bosom, and left for the westward, where a community of primitive Mormons had congregated. When these sons had grown to manhood they retained a faint recollection of a mother, and refused to call one by that dear name who had taken her rightful place. They instituted a searching inquiry for their mother’s family, came east and visited the old homestead, but, alas! too late to see her who had found a premature grave in consequence of the great sorrow that had fallen upon her heart. (Ridlon, *Saco Valley Settlements*, 280)

On November 12 Orson and Samuel were guests at the home of John Dennett. This may have been the notorious John Dennett previously mentioned—the leader of the Cochranites, who took Jacob Cochran’s place at the head of that sect when Cochran fled.

On the thirteenth Orson and Samuel preached and stayed all night with a neighbor. Orson summed up his thoughts with these words:

I think some of them will go to Zion.

The above selections from the journals of Orson and Samuel are sufficient to show that the Church’s missionaries labored extensively among the Cochranites. A vast amount of information is available in libraries in many states, including the LDS Church and RLDS Church archives, which shows beyond a shadow of a doubt that polygamy entered the Church through the Cochranite religion!

There were other polygamous societies in America and England during the Kirtland-Nauvoo period, and they too con-

tributed toward polygamy entering the Church. But Cochranism was the polygamists' primary mainspring into the Church. However, many who joined the Church in Cochranite areas were not polygamists, but stalwart Christians with excellent morals. Among those faithful ones were two young women, Mary Bailey and Agnes Coolbrith, who were baptized as a result of Orson and Samuel's preaching. Samuel Smith, the Prophet's brother, married Mary Bailey, and Don Carlos Smith, another brother, married Agnes Coolbrith. Also from the midst of the Cochranites came Arthur Milliken, who married Lucy Smith, Joseph's youngest sister. Neither Mary nor Agnes embraced polygamy, and Arthur Milliken was a faithful member of the Church during the presidencies of Joseph the Martyr and his son, Joseph III. Arthur and Lucy bitterly opposed polygamy.

Orson Hyde and Samuel Smith were not the only missionaries who journeyed through the Cochranite areas. Other Church ministers traveled and preached throughout the region with great success during the Kirtland and Nauvoo eras. But Saco, Maine, a Cochranite stronghold, was one of the most fruitful fields for missionary work—so much so that a conference was held in Saco on June 13, 1834 (*The Evening and the Morning Star* 2 [August 1834]: 181; RLDS *History of the Church* 1:521). The following year, "On August 21, 1835, nine of the Twelve [apostles] met in conference at Saco, Maine" (*Messenger and Advocate* 2 [October 1835]: 204–207; RLDS *History of the Church* 1:583). With nine of the twelve apostles making their appearance in Saco, there is no doubt that each one of them became well acquainted with the doctrines of Cochranism, for at that time it was a popular secular and religious news topic. Those evil dogmas must have made a deep impression on the apostles, for of the twelve who were in the apostolic quorum at the time of Joseph's death, at least eleven became polygamists!

