

Method Infinite

FREEMASONRY AND THE MORMON RESTORATION

★ CHERYL L. BRUNO ★

★ JOE STEVE SWICK III ★ NICHOLAS S. LITERSKI ★



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There is method in Mormonism—method infinite. Mormonism is Masonic.

—Edward Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom*

CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Introduction: Jachin and Boaz on the Woodpile	xi
1. Legends of the Craft: The Philosophic System of Freemasonry	1
2. The Enchanted Land: The Smith Family's Masonic Environs	15
3. A Gathering of Crows: William Morgan, Masonry, and Death	49
4. From Darkness to Light: The Prophet's Masonic Initiation	65
5. The Book of the Law, Long Lost, Now Found	91
6. Mormonism's Masonic Midrash	121
7. The Book of Abraham: Advancing the Interests of True Masonry	147
8. The Trowel and the Sword	173
9. Angel at the Threshing-Floor	199
10. The Grand Design: Joseph's Masonic Kingdom on the Mississippi	233
11. The Ancient Order of Things: Freemasonry Restored	249
12. Keeping a Secret: The Organization of the Female Relief Society	273
13. Greater than Solomon: Joseph Smith's "Grand" Aspirations	287
14. The Glory of this Latter House	319
15. Look to the West: The Political Kingdom of God	351
16. Treasures Hidden in the Grave	373
17. Death of a Builder	391
18. All Manner of "-ites"	417
19. That Which Was Lost	441
Bibliography	451
Index	489

PREFACE

*Tis this and 'tis that, They cannot tell what,
Why so many great Men of the Nation,
Should Aprons put on, To make themselves one
With a Free or an Accepted Mason.*

—Entered Apprentice Song, 1723

Scholars have largely disregarded the tremendous influence exerted by Freemasonry on nineteenth-century American political, social, and religious institutions. As Steven Bullock noted, Masonry seems “too obscure, too unusual to hold much [scholarly or historical] interest.” However, he further argued that this “very obscurity” of American “interest and emotional investment in Masonry” can provide “a point of entry that offers a new perspective” for the careful historian. Bullock’s study “seeks to understand the appeal of Masonry for eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Americans” and “to illuminate the society and culture that first nurtured and then rejected it.”¹

The appeal of Masonry in Joseph Smith’s Restoration movement deserves the same careful consideration. Smith was a teenager in a family with strong Masonic ties during the time and the place of the fraternity’s greatest upheaval and transformation. His involvement in Freemasonry was arguably earlier and broader than many modern historians have admitted. While no one thing can entirely explain the rise of Mormonism, the historical influence of Freemasonry on this religious tradition cannot be refuted.

This work approaches the subject of Mormonism and Masonry with Bullock’s view in mind. It offers a fresh perspective on the relationship between Freemasonry and the Mormon restoration. It asserts that the Mormon prophet’s firsthand knowledge of and experience with both Masonry and anti-Masonic currents contributed to the theology, structure, culture, tradition, history, literature, and ritual of the church he founded. There is a Masonic thread in Mormonism from its earliest days.

The topic of Mormonism and Freemasonry has been rife with misunderstanding and misrepresentation, often because scholars have invariably been lacking in one or both relevant perspectives. Few Latter-day Saints who were also Masons have authored book-length treatments of the relationship between the two traditions. The fact that the most obvious vestiges of Freemasonry are

1. Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730–1840*, 2.

evident only in the more esoteric aspects of the Mormon faith has made it difficult for Masonic authors to recognize, let alone fully grasp, the relevant issues. Even those with both Mormon and Masonic experience may not be versed in the nineteenth-century versions of the rituals, legends, and practices. Without this specialized background, many researchers and writers have missed the Masonic significance of numerous early Mormon statements, doctrines, and practices.

The authors have spent many years researching and wrestling with the subject of Freemasonry's influence upon Mormonism. Nick Literiski was the first Mormon Freemason in Hancock County since the Mormon exodus. Nick began the preliminary research and writing of this book in 2002, spending years traveling around the country to examine original records. The resulting expertise became noteworthy in many conferences and online venues. A change in life circumstances led Nick to pass years of research, analysis, and drafts of early chapters on to Joe Swick, a Mormon Freemason and Past Master of Verity Lodge No. 59 in Kent, Washington. Both Joe and Nick approached this project with the benefit of their experiences as Master Masons, Royal Arch Masons, Cryptic Masons, Knights Templar, and Scottish Rite Masons. A student of early Masonic history, Joe amassed a large library of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Masonic works. His collection, as well as his ideas and insights, have been invaluable to the production of this book. Cheryl Bruno came into the project in 2012. Her interest in esoterica in early Mormonism made Freemasonry a primary research topic, and her writing skills pushed the work to completion. As we researched, we found not just facts, but a fascinating story. The three of us, along with Clinton Bartholemew, Patrick McCleary, Roy Schmidt, Arturo de Hoyos, and Joseph Johnstun (who designed our fabulous book cover) spent hours discussing the evidence and implications of what we had discovered. We thank them, Holly Welker, who provided valuable editing assistance, and many others who have listened to our ideas and offered encouragement. Loyd Isao Ericson, instrumental in the production of *Method Infinite* during the long haul before and through the Covid crisis, has never ceased to believe in us and this project. Throughout our investigation, we have been inspired by the statement Edward Tullidge attributes to Eliza R. Snow: "There is method in Mormonism—method infinite. Mormonism is Masonic."² We hope this book will provide the reader a measure of the adventure and insight we found during the many years of its creation.

2. Eliza R. Snow in Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom*, 79.

INTRODUCTION

JACHIN AND BOAZ ON THE WOODPILE

In strength I will establish this mine house to stand firm forever.

—Richard Carlile, *Manual of Freemasonry in Three Parts*

Early spring in Salt Lake City is often chilly, though budding vegetation and early flowers saluted the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as they made their way to the Salt Lake Temple on the morning of April 4, 1899. In this inspiring setting, they held their quarterly meetings in preparation for the Church's upcoming semi-annual general conference. Seated at the front of the room was the quorum's aged president, Elder Franklin Dewey Richards. Throughout the day, each of the apostles spoke to the quorum on various topics pertaining to their ministry, but Richards's words were extraordinary. Elder Rudger Clawson, then the junior member of the quorum, recorded his impressions in his personal diary:

Pres. Richards . . . said he desired to say a few words about Freemasonry. A Masonic Lodge, he said, was established in Nauvoo and Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Willard Richards, John Taylor, Lorenzo Snow, Orson Hyde, F. D. Richards, and about 1000 others in all became Masons. Joseph, the Prophet, was aware that there were some things about Masonry which had come down from the beginning and he desired to know what they were, hence the lodge. The Masons admitted some keys of knowledge appertaining to Masonry were lost. Joseph enquired of the Lord concerning the matter and He revealed to the Prophet true Masonry, as we have it in our temples. Owing to the superior knowledge Joseph had received, the Masons became jealous and cut off the Mormon Lodge.¹

Fellow apostle Elder John Henry Smith, who had served since 1880, was more circumspect in his comments: "All of the Apostles met in their room in the Temple and the day was spent in happy talk and in giving instruction. At our afternoon meeting President F. D. Richards gave some pleasing explanations of Doctrine."² Elder Anthon H. Lund, also in attendance, simply wrote, "Meetings were very interesting today. Prest. Richards explained Nauvoo Masonry e.t.c."³ Other apostles, such as Elder Brigham Young Jr., recorded the meeting without comment on Richards's words.

1. Stan Larson, *A Ministry of Meetings: The Apostolic Diaries of Rudger Clawson*, 41.

2. Jean Bickmore White, ed., *Church, State, and Politics: The Diaries of John Henry Smith*, 422.

3. Anthon H. Lund diary, April 4, 1899, in John P. Hatch, ed., *Danish Apostle: The Diaries of Anthon H. Lund, 1890–1921*, 53.

Franklin Richards's diary provides context for his address to the Twelve. Twelve days earlier, he had spent an afternoon consulting the original records of the Nauvoo Lodge.⁴ His account of the April 4 meeting states:

I spoke of the Masonic Organization in Nauvoo & some of the circumstances which led up to the Prophet Joseph asking of the Lord & obtaining promise to restore that which was lost indeed to Restore all things which enraged the high officials of the Mystic Order so that the National Grand conclave expelled or cut off all the Mormon Masonic Order from their fellowship.

The brethren appreciated my explanation highly and I felt reli[e]ved in my Spirit for having accomplished it as it had pressed upon my mind for some time past.⁵

Of the twelve men serving as Apostles in 1899, only Richards had become a Master Mason in Nauvoo. The next senior apostle, Brigham Young Jr., was a child of nine years old when the Latter-day Saints left Illinois under his father's direction. The urgency obvious in Richards's diary reflects his sense that history was already being lost with the passing of the first Mormon generation. With his comments limited by obligations he held sacred, Richards had attempted to convey the nature of "Nauvoo Masonry" to the uninitiated.

Fourteen years earlier, Richards had returned to visit the remnants of Nauvoo, Illinois. The former Masonic Hall received considerable attention in his private diary, where he noted that the building had been repurposed into a private home. In a published account of the 1885 visit, Richards stated:

Every thing which signified the character of the building has been removed. This spoliation must have been recent, for I saw [Jachin] and Boaz lying upon the wood-pile, accompanied by other emblems and insignia which had been stripped from the building.⁶

The mention by Richards to seeing "Jachin and Boaz lying upon the wood-pile" as a sign of "recent spoliation" would have been a disturbing one for any Mason, and a profoundly distressing symbol for Richards and other Nauvoo Freemasons. In the Bible, Jachin and Boaz are the names of the pillars standing on the porch at the entrance to Solomon's Temple, and they are of great symbolic significance to Masons.⁷ *Jachin*, meaning "to establish," was the pillar situated on the south side of the entrance. *Boaz*, meaning "in strength," was located on the north side of the entrance of the Temple. In Masonic tradition, these pillars are said to allude together to the promise of God to King David: "In strength will I establish this mine house and kingdom forever."⁸

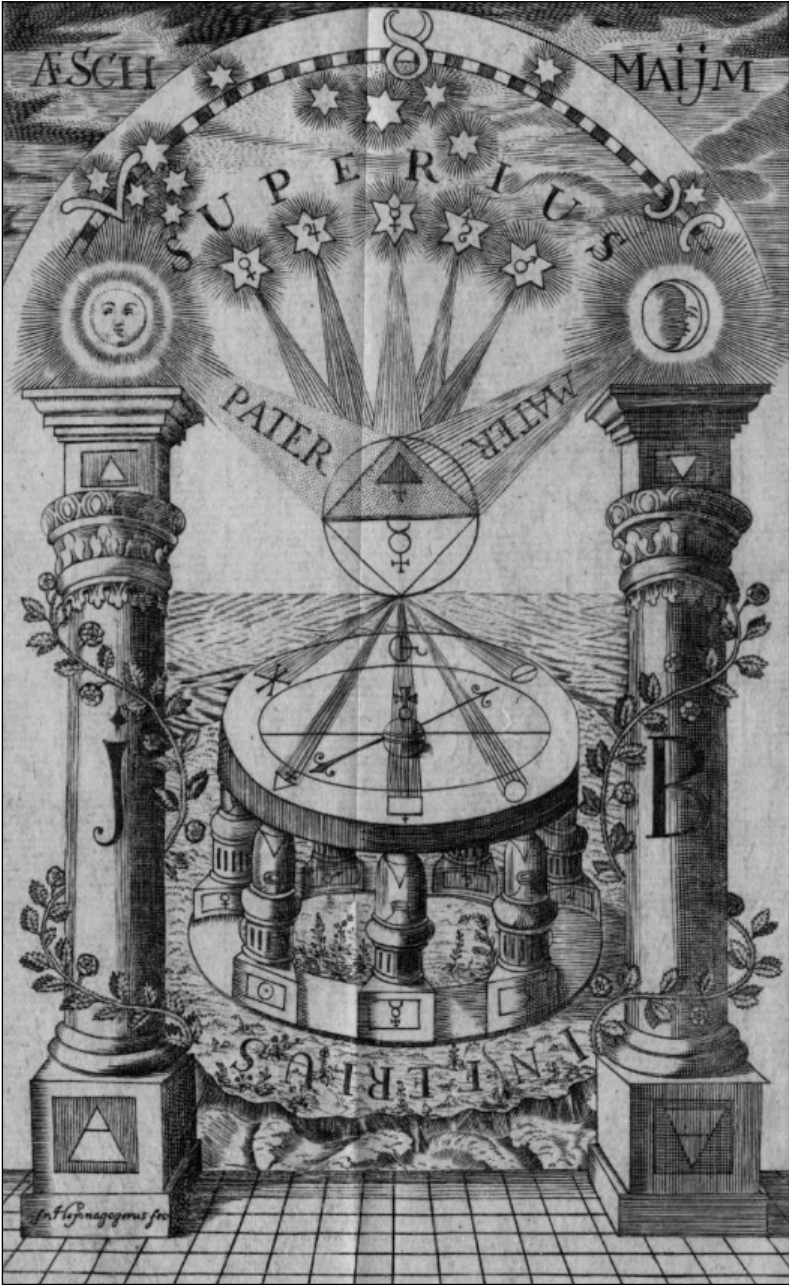
4. Franklin D. Richards journal, March 23, 1899.

5. Richards journal, April 4, 1899; emphasis in original.

6. Franklin D. Richards, "A Visit to Pueblo, Independence, Carthage, Nauvoo, Richmond, etc.," 471.

7. See 1 Kings 7:15–22 and 2 Chronicles 3:15–17 for the biblical description of these pillars.

8. These precise words are not found in the Bible. However, for their substance, see 1 Chronicles 17:11–14. For early Christian Freemasons, the two pillars alluded to the two



Mystical alchemical diagram of Boaz and Jachin, pillars of the Temple of Jerusalem, 1782.

Pillars representing Jachin and Boaz are placed inside of the entrance to every Masonic lodge, forming a portal through which candidates must pass each time they are admitted for initiation. Because pillars are often the symbol of a covenant, they are intended as a powerful reminder to the Freemason of certain covenants mentioned in the Bible and of his own Masonic obligations:

And [King Josiah] went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him . . . and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant. . . . And [he] stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord . . . to perform the words of this covenant . . . written in this book. (2 Kgs. 23:1–3)⁹

What was it that would “press upon” Richards’s mind so heavily, leading him to give clarification to the rising group of Church leaders before his death? Perhaps he foresaw just how deeply this part of Mormon history would be buried and forgotten. At the conclusion of the nineteenth century, Richards was speaking to a new generation of Mormons who were not Freemasons. His audience was so widely separated by time and by distance that they had become oblivious to an America that had been entrenched in Freemasonry. Present in the original colonies, Masonry grew and developed along with the new nation. Masonic orations and sermons were published as early as the 1740s and 50s. By the 1800s, it had become a vital part of popular social, political, and religious culture and discourse.

Richards, born in 1821, understood something in Freemasonry that explained and enriched the story of the Church’s origins and deepened the significance of Mormonism’s own Masonic-inspired rituals—and he wished to pass it on. But those who had turned the corner into a modern era had become far removed from the esoteric system that influenced how Joseph Smith and his colleagues both viewed and understood their work.

While the transformation of the elaborate Nauvoo Lodge into the common dwelling-place that Richards observed in 1885 was literal, he also became witness to a spiritual and historical transformation within Mormonism itself. By the time of his April 1899 meeting with the apostles, Richards had lived to see the transformation of Mormonism’s theocratic kingdom into a more conventional American church. Believing it was established by the hand of God through a prophet-heir to David’s throne, the Saints of the Great Basin Kingdom had assumed their “religious and civil” order would exist forever.¹⁰ Yet, like the gloriously beautiful Masonic lodge in Nauvoo, the Mormons’ own “grand design”

covenants: Old (Jewish) and New (Christian).

9. King Josiah is the famed restorer-king of Israel. During his reign, a copy of the lost Book of the Law was discovered by Hilkiah the Priest. The recovery of this book enabled Josiah to restore the worship of the true God to the Israelites. This account is important for Royal Arch Masons and has significant echoes in Mormon tradition as well. See 2 Kings 22, 2 Chronicles 34.

10. “This [the Masonic] society . . . is at once RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL,” and in it “great regard has been given to the first knowledge of the GOD OF NATURE, and



Former Nauvoo Masonic Hall, 1885.

lay stripped of the emblems and insignia of its holy and Masonically inspired purpose. Eight months later, the senior apostle would pass on, leaving President Lorenzo Snow as the last surviving Nauvoo Mason.¹¹ By the time the Nauvoo Masonic Hall was restored in the latter part of the twentieth century, even its original purpose would be masked with a new name, the “Cultural Hall.”¹²

Overshadowed by such significant events as the First Vision and the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, one of the most pivotal events in Mormon history has gone largely unappreciated. On March 15 and 16, 1842, in the upper room of his store in Nauvoo, Illinois, Joseph Smith followed the footsteps of his older brother,

that acceptable service wherewith he is well pleased.” William Hutchinson, *The Spirit of Masonry: in Moral and Elucidatory Lectures*, 9; emphasis in original.

11. Michael W. Homer, “‘Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry’: The Relationship between Freemasonry and Mormonism,” 75.

12. The building’s sign does make note that the “Cultural Hall” was used for a variety of purposes, including Masonic meetings. Historian Stanley B. Kimball took exception to the renaming of the building during a conversation with LDS Apostle Mark E. Peterson, who responded, “Why do historians have to tell everything? What is this mania you have for telling everything?” Kimball replied, “Brother Peterson, you can’t bottle up truth. Now, would you rather have responsible Mormon historians answer the critics, or should we just abandon the field and let the anti-Mormons run all over it?” Maureen Carr Ward, “The Maverick Historian: A Conversation with Stanley B. Kimball,” 109.

receiving the three degrees of Ancient York Freemasonry.¹³ Smith's formal induction into the Craft was a ratification and extension of Masonic activity in which he had been immersed since his youth. As an adult, Smith relied on Masonry as one of the primary lenses and means by which he sought to approach God and restore true religion. Yet this aspect of his work has been abandoned by his modern-day followers. Masonry in Mormonism has been placed upon the woodpile.

Just as Joseph Smith's name "should be both good and evil spoken of among all people" (JS—H 1:33), later writers would treat the prophet's participation in Freemasonry with varying degrees of excuses, speculation, and outright denial. From the very beginning, some would suggest that Smith plagiarized Freemasonry in the development of Mormon ritual. In his 1842 *History of the Saints*, John C. Bennett (a former assistant in the First Presidency) indirectly made such an allegation by reporting Mormon practices in specific language familiar to both Freemasons and readers of anti-Masonic exposés.¹⁴ Freemason Samuel Goodwin made the same accusation in 1921.¹⁵

Largely in response to such charges, modern writers have sought to distance Smith from the Fraternity and have downplayed the significant influence of Freemasonry on the Mormon Prophet's thinking. By the mid-twentieth century, Mormon writer E. Cecil McGavin concluded that Joseph Smith attended only six Masonic meetings during his lifetime. Three of these meetings, McGavin explained, were Smith's initiation under the direction of Illinois Grand Master Abraham Jonas, on March 15 and 16, 1842:

The Prophet was so busy with Church matters that he never took an active part in lodge work. It seems from the meager records that are extant, that Joseph Smith attended as many meetings on those two days as he did during the rest of his lifetime. . . . In the months that followed, he left the lodge work in the hands of others, never attending more than three subsequent meetings and never receiving a higher degree than the one the Grand Master conferred upon him at the third meeting he attended.¹⁶

Another Mormon historian wrote in 1992 that "Joseph Smith participated minimally in Freemasonry and, as far as is known, attended the Nauvoo Masonic Lodge on only three occasions."¹⁷

At the time these writers made their claims, the standard *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* included twelve separate occasions upon which Joseph Smith attended Masonic meetings.¹⁸ Additionally, secretaries

13. "History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]," The Joseph Smith Papers, 1289, 1295.

14. John C. Bennett, *History of the Saints, or, An Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism*, 265–78.

15. See Samuel H. Goodwin, *Mormonism and Masonry: Origins, Connections and Coincidences between Mason and Mormon Temple/Templar Ritual*, 50–64.

16. E. Cecil McGavin, *Mormonism and Masonry*, 90.

17. Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Freemasonry in Nauvoo," 527–28.

18. Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4:550, 552, 588, 589, 594; 5:18, 85, 200, 253, 260, 446; 6:287. Other references are

keeping the minute book of Nauvoo Lodge, despite occasionally missing some attendees, recorded Joseph Smith's attendance at no less than thirty-five Lodge meetings on twenty-seven separate days between March 15, 1842, and June 27, 1844.¹⁹ A comparison of the official minutes with the *History of the Church* indicates that neither provided a complete accounting of the Prophet's approximately forty visits. A typical 1840s Masonic lodge would have met twenty-eight times or fewer during the same period of time. Thus, Smith attended more lodge meetings than members of most Masonic lodges. While some writers appear to have performed inadequate research, resulting in errors which have been carelessly repeated over subsequent decades, others seem to have intentionally minimized the historical record.

Some writers have attempted to explain Smith's involvement in Masonry as a nineteenth-century equivalent of social and political networking.²⁰ However, to allege that he became a Mason in order to court social connections or political power is defamatory. In his petition to receive the degrees of Freemasonry, Smith would have submitted a written statement that he had no mercenary motive for entering the Fraternity.²¹ Thus, to claim that "Joseph Smith and his brethren sought membership in the Masonic lodge" because they "desired the prestige, protection, and power such an alliance should have guaranteed" is to argue against the integrity of the Prophet and his companions.²² Furthermore, the proceedings of the Nauvoo Lodge under Smith's direction demonstrate his unmitigated lack of concern for making friends and cementing alliances among local Freemasons. Still, this reasoning has been accepted among members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the present day.

In honor of the 150th anniversary of Joseph and Hyrum Smith's martyrdom in 1994, Gary James Joslin produced a tribute volume entitled *Saint Masons: The Divine Restoration and Freemasonry*. Joslin described his own work as "An account of the Restoration from the Heavens to this Planet of the Ancient

made to meetings in "the lodge," which are not included here due to lack of clarity.

19. See "Nauvoo Masonic Lodge minutes, 1841–1842."

20. David John Buerger, "The Development of the Mormon Temple Endowment Ceremony," 87–88.

21. "The subscriber, residing in the City of Nauvoo, State of Illinois, of lawful age, and by occupation a [unreadable], begs leave to state that, unbiased by friends, and uninfluenced by mercenary motives, he freely and voluntarily offers himself as a candidate for the mysteries of Masonry, and that he is prompted to solicit this privilege by a favourable opinion conceived of the Institution, a desire of knowledge, and a sincere wish of being serviceable to his fellow creatures. Should his petition be granted, he will cheerfully conform to all the ancient established usages and customs of the Fraternity." See the 1840 Petition of Stephen A. Douglas to Springfield Lodge No. 26 of Free and Accepted Masons, reproduced in Everett R. Turnbull, *The Rise and Progress of Freemasonry in Illinois 1783–1952*, illustration facing page 240.

22. McGavin, *Mormonism and Masonry*, 13.

Science of Righteousness, along with its Brief Contact with and the Testimony to Freemasonry in the Latter Days as a witness and Grand Sign from the Supreme Architect of the Universe.”²³ His writing suggested that Mormonism was the fulfillment of Freemasonry, concluding that the Masonic “torch had been passed” to a triumphant Mormonism. To make his case, Joslin points out several of what he interpreted as parallels between the Masonic legend of Hiram Abiff and Hyrum Smith, the Prophet’s older brother. Joslin’s observations, however, have been taken seriously by only a few Latter-day Saints.

On April 20, 1974, at a meeting of the Mormon History Association, Latter-day Saint educator Reed C. Durham Jr. attempted to objectively examine the relationship between Mormonism and Freemasonry. Unofficial transcripts of his speech, “Is There No Help for the Widow’s Son?” spread rapidly through the Mormon historical community. Durham’s insightful but controversial lecture reached its climax in stating “that there [were] few significant developments in the Church, that occurred after March 15, 1842, which did not have some Masonic interdependence.” Expanding on this theme, Durham noted,

The parallels of Joseph Smith and the history of Mormonism are so unmistakable, that to explain them only as coincidence would be ridiculous. . . . Aspects of [Masonic] legend seem transformed into the history of Joseph Smith, so much so that . . . it appears to be a kind of symbolic acting out of Masonic lore.²⁴

While Durham touched upon some of “these aspects of [Masonic] legend,” he focused chiefly on the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s assassination, leaving later researchers the task of fully investigating other possible parallels.

The reaction to Durham’s lecture was strong and immediate. His suggestions that Freemasonry had influenced Mormon doctrine and practice were interpreted by some Mormon scholars as an attack on the divine origins of the Church. By the following morning, Masonic iconography was removed from the angelic weathervane atop a Nauvoo Temple model in the local LDS Visitor’s Center in that city. And, as an employee of the LDS Church Educational System, Durham was required to issue a public “clarification,” reaffirming his belief in the prophetic mission of Joseph Smith.

In another controversial treatment, “The Treasure of the Widow’s Son,” researcher Jack Adamson noted parallels between Masonic legend and the Book of Mormon as well as the history of Joseph Smith. Taking a naturalistic approach, Adamson asserted that Smith had plagiarized Masonic legend and that Mormon scripture was filled with anti-Masonic “clang” (psychologically influenced morphing of words and terms). Still, even Adamson acknowledged certain inexplicable coincidences in the details of Smith’s death, in which he reportedly cried,

23. Gary James Joslin, *Saint Masons: The Divine Restoration and Freemasonry*, xxvi.

24. Reed C. Durham Jr., “Is There No Help for the Widow’s Son?”

“Is there no help for the widow’s son?”—an important phrase in Masonic ritual. This final scene constitutes a “symbolic acting out of Masonic lore”:

In this event, symbol is not merely transformed into Joseph’s inner history or his sacred writings. Rather, the action goes beyond metaphor and the symbol merges into tragic reality.²⁵

The study of Freemasonry and Mormonism has been greatly influenced by the many writings of the late Mervin B. Hogan, a leading light in the Utah Masonic Lodge of Research. Hogan argued strongly against the long-standing prohibition by the Grand Lodge of Utah barring active Latter-day Saints from Masonry in their jurisdiction. His nominal participation in Mormonism during this time allowed him to become a Utah Freemason despite this strictly enforced restriction. As a Mason, he would eventually come to play a critical role, positively influencing a change in the Masonic policy of exclusion. At the same time, the Church’s leader, President Spencer W. Kimball, sought to improve relations with the Masonic community by omitting language that discouraged participation in Freemasonry from the Church’s official policy book. Hogan’s work was undoubtedly groundbreaking and, in his numerous monographs, he frequently discussed the shared history of the two groups. Yet, as one of Hogan’s reviewers stated, “A definitive history on the subject of Freemasonry and Mormonism has yet to be written.”²⁶

In 1994, Michael W. Homer provided what was then the most significant scholarly analysis of Mormon involvement with Freemasonry: “Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry’: The Relationship between Freemasonry and Mormonism.”²⁷ Homer’s essay reviewed the oft-tempestuous relationship between the two groups throughout the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Briefly noting parallels between Joseph Smith’s life and Masonic legend, Homer observed that “[t]he mythology associated with Smith’s martyrdom also has Masonic undertones” and that certain “images are similar to portions in the legend of Hiram Abiff.”²⁸ In 2014, Homer expanded his article into a book-length treatment titled *Joseph’s Temples: The Dynamic Relationship between Freemasonry and Mormonism*. In this work, Homer added a creative but controversial connection between Freemasonry and the LDS Church’s position on blacks and the priesthood.

Furthermore, Matthew B. Brown and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw have both compared Mormon temple ritual with the ancient past, and they both downplay the relationship of the Mormon endowment with Masonic rites;²⁹ Clyde

25. Jack Adamson, “The Treasure of the Widow’s Son,” 11.

26. Kent L. Walgren, “Fast and Loose Masonry,” 176.

27. Homer, “Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry,” 76.

28. Homer, 95–96.

29. Matthew B. Brown, *Exploring the Connection between Mormons and Masons*, 21–24; Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Freemasonry and the Origins of Modern Temple Ordinances,” 159–237.

Forsberg has explored esoteric aspects of Mormonism and Freemasonry in two books and several articles;³⁰ a chapter in Samuel M. Brown's book on the early Mormon conquest of death has included an insightful chapter on Freemasonry in Mormonism;³¹ and numerous others have made their own contributions. Yet none of these writers have captured the full scope of the influence of Masonry on the culture in which Joseph Smith lived, nor have they recognized the incorporation of so many aspects of the Fraternity into the early Church.

Official LDS publications have been reticent to discuss the influence Freemasonry had on the Church. In the 2018 church-published volume, *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days: Volume 1: The Standard of Truth: 1815–1846*, despite several chapters covering Nauvoo, Masonry is mentioned only to discount its similarity with the temple endowment.³² An entry on “Masonry” on the Church official website covers the subject more fully but takes a similar approach. “There are some similarities between Masonic ceremonies and the endowment, but there are also stark differences in their content and intent,” the essay states. It also perpetuates the view that Joseph Smith's purpose in becoming a Freemason was to make social and political connections:

In joining, Joseph may have assumed he would gain a network of allies who could give him access to political influence and protection against persecution. After being betrayed by some of his closest associates in Missouri, Joseph may have found Masonry's emphasis on confidentiality and loyalty appealing.³³

This book will present evidence that Joseph Smith's actions, in tandem with those of the Mormon Masonic Lodges, were diametrically opposed to what they would have been if the object in joining with Freemasonry was gaining allies. It will demonstrate the strength of Masonry's presence in the culture that surrounded Joseph Smith, from his birth to his death. Throughout his life, Smith was deeply enmeshed in the esoteric tradition that surrounded the Craft, and he developed groups and associations within his new Church organization modeled upon the Fraternity. Masonry would thus influence the Mormon restoration from Vermont to New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Believing himself to be a Masonic restorer, Smith called upon God to inspire him to create ritual in the Masonic mold. In doing so, he sought to know the true name of Deity—which in Masonic tradition had been “long lost”—and to bring his followers into the presence of the Divine.

30. Clyde R. Forsberg Jr., *Divine Rite of Kings: Land, Same Sex and Empire in Mormonism and the Esoteric Tradition*; Clyde R. Forsberg Jr., *Equal Rites: The Book of Mormon, Masonry, Gender, and American Culture*.

31. Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as it is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death*, 170–202.

32. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days, Volume 1: The Standard of Truth 1815–1846*, 454–55.

33. “Masonry,” Church History Topics.

To ground the discussion, we will begin with general background on Freemasonry, then move to an overview of the prevalence of Freemasonry throughout the Northeast United States during Joseph Smith's formative years. We will then provide an explanation of Masonic midrash and the way Joseph used it to produce canonical LDS texts, social structures, and rituals. This Masonic technique affected the way Smith explained his own experiences in restoring "true Masonry" from his first vision to his presidential campaign. We will explore the proliferation of Mormon Masonic Lodges during the Nauvoo period and the Masonic imagery that surrounded the Mormon leader's death. Finally, we will demonstrate how the perpetuation of Masonic elements in numerous sects that succeeded Smith's Mormonism highlights the essential value of Freemasonry in the founding movement.

Opinions in this book are our own and do not attempt to represent the official views of any church organization. However, our approach comes from the perspective of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints headquartered in Salt Lake City. Therefore, the spelling, capitalization, and hyphenation of the phrase "Latter-day Saints" in the name of the Church is used regardless of time period. We do use the words "Mormon" and "Mormonism" for ease of expression and because this convention has been liberally employed throughout the era we are writing about. Furthermore, we have the greatest of respect toward both Latter-day Saint endowment and Masonic rituals, and we have taken great care when discussing the content of these ceremonies. Also with due respect, we generally refer to people by surnames, except when first names are needed to distinguish between family members.

In researching the topic at hand, we have identified both broad ideas and specific items that have been overlooked, misunderstood, or even misrepresented by both Mormons and Masons. In other cases, 160 years have buried the details to the point where conclusions must be reached by circumstantial evidence. Wherever this is the case, we have tried to demonstrate clearly the reasoning behind our conclusions. We believe, as Franklin D. Richards taught, that Joseph Smith's claimed "restoration of all things" contains far more of Freemasonry than either his critics or his supporters have previously imagined.

CHAPTER 8

THE TROWEL AND THE SWORD

This union was made after the example set by the Israelites when they erected the second Temple who, whilst they handled the trowel and mortar with one hand, in the other held the sword and buckler.

—Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay,
Ramsay's Oration of 1737

The biblical book of Nehemiah contains a story both revered and allegorically utilized by Cryptic Masons of the York Rite of Freemasonry.¹ The story is portrayed on English Royal Arch tracing boards and exposed in Bernard's 1829 *Light on Masonry*.² As recounted in the Bible, after Nehemiah received permission to gather a group of Jews to rebuild Jerusalem and restore the walls of the temple, the work was greatly hindered by their enemies so that each laborer "with one of his hands worked in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon" (Neh. 4:17). Freemasons visually depict this scene with an emblem of the temple masons holding the implements of Masonry: a trowel and mortar in one hand, and a sword in the other for defense.³ Along with a broken triangle symbolizing the Lost Master's Word, these objects are associated with themes of restoration and recovery.⁴ They are mentioned in the "old verses" quoted by Joseph Laycock in his lecture delivered March 8, 1736, at the constitution of a new lodge in Gateshead, England:

1. A Master Mason may join the York Rite to further enhance his knowledge of Freemasonry. There are three primary bodies of the York Rite: The Royal Arch Masons (including four degrees), the Cryptic Masons (three degrees), and the Commander of Knights Templar (three degrees).

2. "Sov. 'What is your name?'

Can. 'Zerubbabel; the first among my equals, by rank a Mason, by misfortune a captive.'

Sov. 'What is the mercy that you demand of me?'

Can. "That, under the protection of the G. A. of the universe, the king will restore our liberty and allow us to return and rebuild the temple of our GOD.' . . . When the brethren hear the alarm, they detach the trowel from their aprons, and hold it in the left hand, and the sword in the right."

David Bernard, *Light on Masonry: A Collection of All the Most Important Documents on the Subject of Speculative Free Masonry*, 323, 325.

3. Even earlier, in 1536, the image was portrayed as a Masonic emblem featuring a cloud from which emanated arms holding a sword and trowel. See Henry Green, ed., Whitney's "Choice of Emblemes," *A Fac-simile Reprint*, 66.

4. George Oliver, *Historical Landmarks and Other Evidences of Freemasonry, Explained; a Series of Practical Lectures, with Copious Notes*, 2:353n17.

When *Sanballat Jerusalem* distress'd
 With sharp Assaults in *Nehemiah's* Time,
 To War and Work the Jews themselves address'd,
 And did repair their Walls with Stone and Lime.
 One Hand the Sword against the Foe did shake
 The other Hand the Trowel up did take.⁵

The first reference to temples in the Latter-day Saint canon shares this biblical legend. Like Nehemiah, Nephi and his people encountered opposition as their numbers increased in the new land. In the tradition of Tubal Cain in Masonic legend, Nephi taught his people smithing skills. Once they were able to forge metal, he armed his people so that they could protect themselves from hostile Lamanites while building a temple. With tools of masonry in one hand and swords in another, Nephi's workmen built a structure "after the manner of King Solomon" (2 Ne. 5:14–16).⁶ This Book of Mormon temple story subtly introduces elements suggested in the biblical account but more liberally included in the Masonic sources.

In the early 1830s, Joseph Smith sought to restore keys and authority preparatory to the literal recovery of Masonry's symbolic Lost Word. This endeavor required the construction of temples similar in form and function to those of the Freemasons. From their first efforts to build and develop temples, Latter-day Saints shared the Masonic perception of Old Testament temples, and their encounters with the hostility of the outside world were also framed in terms of the "trowel and the sword."

Hiram, Ohio: "A Hill of Zion"

The Latter-day Saint city and temple-building impulse—with a Masonic flair—can be seen as early as 1831. Late in this year, Joseph Smith visited a small settlement in Hiram, Ohio (also known as Hiram Hill), which had coincidentally been founded at the turn of the century by a group of Freemasons and named for one of their ancient Grand Masters. Daniel Tilden of Lebanon, Connecticut, was one of the original purchasers.

After the first schoolhouse was built in Hiram in 1820, another was begun in the Center District of town. According to a town historian, "A frame building was put up to subserve the purpose of a schoolhouse, and with a Masonic

5. William Smith, *The Book M: or, Masonry Triumphant*, 20; emphasis in original. These lines are from the degree of *R. Y. C. S.* (Knight of the Order of the Rosy Cross) from the Royal Order of Scotland, which is likely the oldest high degree system in existence. It may date before 1732, when Joseph Laycock was appointed Provincial Grand Master of the Harodim body in London. The authors wish to thank Arturo de Hoyos for this information and these references.

6. Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism*, 110.



Foundation of John Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio.
Photo by Nicholas S. Literski.

Hall above, but it was never completed.”⁷ The mention of a building such as this necessitates a group of Masons living in Hiram or nearby.⁸ As was common at the time, local Masons may have met in a large upper room in a private home. The John Johnson farmhouse, where Joseph Smith would later live, was just such a place.⁹ It may have even been built with that purpose in mind—with a large upper room suitable for meeting, and the square and compasses, implements of speculative Masonry, etched in two locations on exposed foundation stones.¹⁰

7. Alvah Udall, “Early History of Hiram: A Few Anecdotes Will Serve.”

8. Morning Star Lodge at nearby Mantua, Portage County (five miles from Hiram), was granted a charter at the Ohio Grand Lodge meeting of January 1827. This lodge could have been working sporadically for as many as ten years, as “brethren near Mantua” had presented petitions at the Grand Lodge in both 1817 and 1820. After 1827, however, the Lodge was never again represented in meetings of the Grand Lodge of Ohio and was retroactively declared extinct as of 1826. See *The Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Ohio at its Several Grand Communications from 1808 to 1847, Inclusive*, 91, 113, 176. Several brothers from this lodge later became founding members of Nauvoo Lodge.

9. A person named John Johnson may have received two of the three craft degrees in 1806, in Olive Branch Lodge No. 11 at Chester, Vermont. This may not have been the same John Johnson, since it is a common name, and this lodge was located about thirty miles from his home in Pomfret, Vermont.

10. Nicholas S. Literski, “Joseph Smith’s Masonic Tutors.” See also Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations*, 274n11. Staker writes that “[the compass and square] marks were a common symbol that

The religious ideas of Alexander Campbell took deep root in this section of the country. Campbellite views on baptism, the Lord's Supper, the necessity of implicit obedience, and the notion of a restoration of strict biblical constructs were adopted by many of the residents of Hiram. They called themselves learners, "Disciples," or "Rigdonites," after one of their most ardent converts, Sidney Rigdon. Well educated in eastern schools, Rigdon became a preacher, and from his cabin home in Mentor made many long preaching tours in every direction.¹¹ His several congregations included future Mormon converts Newell K. Whitney, Lyman Wight, Isaac Morley, Frederick G. Williams, Titus Billings, Oliver Snow, David Pond, Lucius N. Scovil, Basil Windsor, Walter Carlton, Rufus Edwards, the Reddens, the Beechers, the Careys, and the Richersons, to name a few.¹²

On November 8, 1830, Rigdon was baptized by Oliver Cowdery into Joseph Smith's newly formed church, followed by many of his parishioners in the following year. Two of the leading Methodists in the area, John Johnson and Reverend Ezra Booth, traveled thirty miles north to Kirtland with their wives to visit Smith. A miraculous healing of Elsa Johnson's arm by the Prophet impelled them to baptism in late March 1831.¹³ Booth was so roused by his new faith that he returned to Portage County preaching Mormonism to the Methodists, Baptists, and Symonds Ryder's Disciples congregation in Hiram. Large numbers of converts soon filled the small town.

The new Portage County Saints approached Smith with what some said was "the purpose of getting the settlement removed to Hiram."¹⁴ This scenario seems plausible considering the sizeable group of enthusiastic converts gathered in the area. While on his way to survey the possibilities, Smith "had a vision which told him that Hiram Hill was the 'Hill of Zion' for which he had been searching . . . and that the principal office of the church should be here."¹⁵ Because of this,

a professional stonemason had worked on the foundations" and not a sign of Johnson's interest in Freemasonry. However, the icon of the joined square and compasses is not used by operative stonemasons but is a symbol used by speculative Freemasons around the world.

11. Charles H. Ryder, "A Hill of Zion: Reminiscences of the Early Days of Mormonism in Ohio," 9. The development of religion in this area was also traced by A. S. Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve, Ohio*.

12. Richard McClellan, "Sidney Rigdon's 1820 Ministry: Preparing the Way for Mormonism in Ohio," 156–59.

13. Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People*, 284. Staker places the baptism shortly before Marinda Johnson's baptism in April 1831 and the establishment of an LDS branch in neighboring Nelson by Lyman Wight and John Whitmer on April 9.

14. Ryder, "A Hill of Zion," 9.

15. Ryder, 9; Lucius V. Bierce, "Hiram," 1. Bierce was Ohio Grand Master during the late 1850s and maintained personal relationships with Freemasons throughout the state. He provides the earliest known reference to a proposed Mormon temple at Hiram—the site of which he vaguely locates "on a hill near the 'Hinckley farm.'" It is possible that Bierce obtained his "Mormon" information from John Tilden, whose story of non-participation in the 1832 tar and feathering is told in Bierce's work. A 1934 fictional story

many Saints believed Hiram “had been marked to be the Mormon capital instead of Kirtland.”¹⁶

Records indicate the site of the contemplated temple was chosen—a picturesque elevated spot on Symonds Ryder’s property “near the Hinckley farm.”¹⁷ One local reminiscence states that, as a preparation for the work of building the temple, rows of beautiful maple trees were transplanted along the roadside.¹⁸

Joseph Smith and his small family relocated to Hiram on September 12, 1831,¹⁹ where they were offered a home with John Johnson. The Whitmers, the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon, and other leading members and their families arrived during the winter of 1831–32. Many built cabins adjacent to the Johnson property. Meetings were held in local schoolhouses, and men were sent to the surrounding areas on mission assignments. “There was hardly a family in the township which was not wholly or in part converted,” one local history indicated. More than sixty people had been baptized, and, along with those who had moved into the area, the Church boasted over two hundred members.²⁰ In later years, when older residents were questioned about the Mormons, they recalled that “the plan of Smith at this time was to build three Zions—one in Kirtland, one in Hiram and one in the Far West [Missouri].”²¹

Many of the revelations included in the Doctrine and Covenants were received by Smith while he lived in Hiram, and they caused a great stir in the vicinity. According to a close friend, Joseph B. Noble, Smith became convinced of the theological necessity of polygamy “while he was engaged in the work of translation of the Scriptures,” evidently a reference to Smith’s and Rigdon’s early 1830s revision of the Bible.²² The Prophet’s interest in this subject may evidence his seeing himself as a Solomonic figure in many ways.

by Abram Garfield relies upon Bierce’s article to tell the tale of the Mormons at Hiram. It mentions the proposed Hiram temple and replicates Bierce’s misspelling of Whitmer as “Whittemore.”

16. James B. Holm, ed., *Portage Heritage*, 77.

17. Bierce, “Hiram,” 1; Ryder, “A Hill of Zion,” 9.

18. Ryder, 9.

19. “History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834],” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, 153.

20. Ryder, “A Hill of Zion,” 9.

21. Ryder, 9.

22. Joseph B. Noble, speech at a quarterly stake conference held at Centerville, Utah, June 11, 1883, quoted in Andrew Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 232–33. See also Michael R. Caldwell, *The John Johnson Family of Hiram, Ohio: For He Is a Descendant of Joseph*, 57–58. Caldwell cites a family recollection that Joseph Smith spoke to Orson Hyde when he was courting Marinda Johnson, saying, “God has given that woman to me. Do not marry her.” Caldwell suggests that this statement may have been used as a basis for accusations of early polygamy on the part of Smith. Years later, Joseph F. Smith said “that the women who entered into plural marriage with the Prophet Joseph Smith were shown to him and named to him as early as 1831; when the Prophet Joseph Smith received the revelation in

Another revelation on three heavenly kingdoms resembled one of the Campbellite teachings so closely that Cecil McGavin called it “the last straw—the straw that broke the Campbell back.” One opponent, recognizing the Masonic flavor of the revelations, observed that Smith “out masoned King Solomon,” but “the ‘Campbellites’ complained that he had stolen their thunder and was running wild with it.”²³ Smith’s recasting of several Christian doctrines appeared to his contemporaries to draw from Freemasonry as well as the unique and innovative Campbellite religion. This angered both opponents and adherents to those two traditions.

While the practice of consecration of property into a communal society was not uncommon in 1830s America, Smith’s revelation on the subject was the cause of great consternation among his followers.²⁴ One source states that while Smith was away, his “charts and papers” were examined and found to contain “a plot . . . to take the property of all the converts out of their hands and form a great stock company, with Smith as the head or president.” This plan took some members by surprise, and “was far more than they could endure.”²⁵ In consequence of the ensuing outrage, both Smith and Rigdon were tarred and feathered by a group of disgruntled members and townspeople on the night of March 24, 1832.²⁶

Over the next year, the Mormons struggled to maintain their presence in Hiram as the leading families began to move on. Within a week of their painful ordeal, Smith and Rigdon left for Missouri to conduct church business and would not permanently return. Emma and her adopted daughter, Julia, remained with the Johnsons for six months after the attack (with the exception of a short stay in Kirtland). They moved to Kirtland on September 12, 1832, and took up quarters in an apartment above Newel K. Whitney’s store. The Whitmers and a group of nearly one hundred members from the Hiram branch departed on May 2, 1832,

relation to the eternity of the marriage covenant, which includes plural marriage, in 1831, the Lord showed him those women who were to engage with him in the establishment of that principle in the Church, and at that time some of these women were named and given to him, to become his wives when the time should come that this principle should be established.” See Joseph F. Smith, “Correction,” 2.

23. E. Cecil McGavin, *Historical Background of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 191.

24. See, for example, the Rappites, the Harmony Society, Zoarites, New Philadelphia Colony, Oberlin Colony.

25. Ryder, “A Hill of Zion,” 9.

26. A late secondhand witness, Clark Braden, alleged that Eli Johnson led the attack and that its intent was to punish Smith for an improper relationship with John Johnson’s daughter Marinda. Fawn McKay Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 119. Braden identified Eli as a son of John Johnson, but he was, in fact, John’s brother and Marinda’s uncle, and he was living with the family at the time. The mob enlisted the services of a physician to castrate Smith, lending credence to the accusation of sexual impropriety.

and traveled to Missouri. There they formed the Whitmer Settlement (or Timber Branch) in Jackson County.²⁷

In the face of continued harassment by his neighbors, John Johnson moved to Kirtland in early 1833 and opened an inn next to Whitney's establishment. Many of his adult children and their spouses also obtained property in Kirtland at this time. Father Johnson sold most of his 160 acres the following spring and donated the \$3,000 to the Church's United Firm, which managed all financial aspects of the communal order. These proceeds, along with other funds from donations to the United Firm, were used to pay the mortgage on a large piece of acreage upon which the Kirtland temple lot was laid out. Thus, Kirtland, rather than Hiram, became the site for the first Mormon temple.

Kirtland, Ohio: Masonic Architecture, Appurtenances, and Inner Workings

On June 1, 1833, Joseph Smith received a revelation that the temple in Kirtland should be built "after the manner which I shall show unto three of you" (D&C 95:14)—referring to Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams. This instruction is significant in view of the Masonic tradition that King Solomon's temple was built under the direction of three principals: Solomon, King of Israel; Hiram, King of Tyre; and Hiram Abiff, skillful artificer. Williams was said to have reported:

We [Smith, Rigdon, and Williams] went upon our knees, called on the Lord, and the building appeared within viewing distance. I being the first to discover it. Then all of us viewed it together. After we had taken a good look at the exterior, the building seemed to come right over us, and the makeup of this hall seemed to coincide with what I there saw to a minutia.²⁸

Mormons were directed to construct the temple with dimensions of 55 feet in width and 65 feet in length with a "lower court," a "higher court," and an attic story.²⁹ These dimensions were considerably different than the biblical description of Solomon's temple, which was a rectangular building roughly 30 feet wide, 105 feet long, and 45 feet high.³⁰

By the 1830s, "Solomon's Temple, Spiritualized"—that is, the mystical significance of that temple in all its aspects—had been one of the central allegorical concerns of Freemasonry for nearly two centuries, and Masonic lodges were said to symbolically represent that sacred edifice. It makes sense then that the first realized temple of the Latter-day Saints was more closely aligned conceptually

27. Levi Jackman, *A Short Sketch of the Life of Levi Jackman*. The move had been planned at a Church Conference the previous November.

28. Truman O. Angell, *Autobiography*, 14–15.

29. Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom*, 81; See also William S. West, *A Few Interesting Facts Respecting the Mormons*, 4–5.

30. William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely, *Solomon's Temple: Myth and History*, 25.

with Masonic temples than any biblical model. An examination of the use of the Kirtland temple, as well as its appurtenances, demonstrates a reliance upon a Masonic rather than an ancient Jewish conception of Solomon's temple. Instead of being strict imitations of the biblical model, Masonic temples were reconstructions made for allegorical purposes, each aspect being a "type" of Christ.³¹

By the time the Kirtland temple was built, several Mormon insiders were already well acquainted with the signs, symbols, and inner workings of Freemasonry.³² They participated in and were impacted by Masonic motifs in the rituals and ordinances performed within the lodges, in the architecture and use of ritual space, and in the historical backdrop of the temple's establishment. Even those who were neither Freemasons nor involved in the inner circle of men who had received washings and anointings had sufficient cultural awareness of the Fraternity so that they could recognize Masonic influence as the temple took shape. According to Edward Tullidge,

There is a grand Masonic consistency in the divine scheme of the Mormon prophet, and the sisters began to comprehend the infinite themes of their religion when they worked in the temple at Kirtland, and beheld in the service the glory of Israel's God.³³

A significant difference between the Kirtland temple and the Jewish temple is that while ritual space in the Jewish temple was based on animal sacrifice, the organization of the inside of the Kirtland temple was more conducive to Masonic meetings. Although the lower court was to be "dedicated unto me for your sacrament offering, and for your preaching, and your fasting, and your praying, and the offering up of your most holy desires" (D&C 95:16), these offerings were figurative, in the Masonic tradition, rather than literal. Both Masonic and Mormon temples illustrate a theme of restoration and an allegorical ceremony of passing through a veil to come into the presence of God.

The cornerstone of the Kirtland temple was laid on July 23, 1833. At this time in the United States, cornerstone ceremonies of important civil and religious buildings were frequently held by Freemasons, with the cornerstones being most often laid in the northeast corner of the building. Albert Mackey explained the symbolism of this placement: The east, as the source of material light, represents a new day arising, "dissipating the clouds of intellectual darkness and error." The north is the place of darkness and symbol of the profane world. With one surface of the stone facing the north and the other facing the east, it is "neither wholly

31. Two major works that were influential in shaping Masonic ritual were Samuel Lee's 1689 *Orbis Miraculum, or, The Temple of Solomon Pourtrayed by Scripture-light*, which describes the temple of Solomon for Christians; and John Bunyan's 1688 *Solomon's Temple Spiritualized, or, Gospel-light Brought out of the Temple at Jerusalem*, which displays its allegorical significance.

32. These included Newel K. Whitney, Orson Hyde, Heber C. Kimball, Hyrum Smith, and Warren Cowdery.

33. Tullidge, *Women of Mormondom*, 79.

in the one part nor wholly in the other, and in so far it is a symbol of initiation not fully developed.”³⁴

At times, this symbolism did not seem to fit the building being dedicated. The United States Capitol building, for example, was considered the center of the Federal City and of the nation. Its cornerstone was laid in the southwest corner by George Washington, assisted by members of Maryland’s Lodge No. 9, Virginia’s Alexandria Lodge No. 22, and Federal Lodge No. 15. Brigham Young later explained that the first stone of the Kirtland temple was laid at the southeast corner, the point of greatest light at high noon.³⁵ This was an overt Masonic reference that followed the example set by Washington and his Masonic companions.

It seems likely that the cornerstone for the Independence, Missouri, temple, designed at the same time as Kirtland but never completed—was also laid at the southeast. On August 3, 1831, Smith and seven other Elders gathered at the site to dedicate the ground and lay the cornerstone. John Whitmer’s account of the event mentions the cornerstone was laid at the northeast by Smith, but in 1929, excavations revealed a southeast cornerstone labeled “SECT” (South East Cornerstone Temple) and a “witness marker” on the northeast.³⁶ The witness marker is etched with a “surveyor 4” (backwards numeral “4”) and a zero, referring to it being forty feet from the southeast cornerstone, and thus subordinate to it.

Ezra Booth wrote a picturesque description of the Missouri temple site, directing locals who wished to visit to “walk one half of a mile out of the Town, to a rise of ground, a short distance south of the road.” There,

they will be able to ascertain the spot, by the means of a sappling [sapling], distinguished from others by the bark being taken off on the north and on the east side.—On the south side of the sappling will be found the letter, T, which stands for Temple; and on the east side ZOM for Zomar; which Smith says is the original word for Zion. Near the foot of the sappling, they will find a small stone, covered over with bushes, which were cut for that purpose. This is the corner stone for the Temple.³⁷

The Kirtland temple was a notable edifice for a small frontier town. From the outside, it didn’t look substantially different than many New England chapels of the day.³⁸ Its inner architecture, however, was unique. Taken separately, these elements might attract little notice, but their concurrent presence suggests a strong reliance upon Freemasonry.

34. Albert Gallatin Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry: Illustrating and Explaining its Science and Philosophy, its Legends, Myths, and Symbols*, 166, 168.

35. Brigham Young, April 6, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:133.

36. “John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847,” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, 32.

37. Ezra Booth, letter number 6 to Rev. Ira Eddy, November 14, 1831, quoted in Michael Marquardt, “Ezra Booth on Early Mormonism: A Look at his 1831 Letters,” 76. For Zomar, see “Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language, circa July–circa November 1835,” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, 23.

38. Laurel B. Andrew, *The Early Temples of the Mormons: The Architecture of the Millennial Kingdom in the American West*, 41–53.

First, a set of three pillars frame each side of the seating section. These are reminiscent of the three Masonic pillars, “Wisdom,” “Strength,” and “Beauty.” Many Masonic tracing boards include three pillars representing the three allegorical principles that “support” a lodge. Pulpits in the east and west of both stories of the Kirtland temple suggest the organization of a lodge, with officers located in the sections designated East and West. Gilbert Belnap, a Nauvoo Mason, was impressed by the “poolpit [pulpit] at each end of those rooms [‘on the first and second floors’] constructed for the purpose of accommodating those holding different degrees of the holy priesthood.”³⁹ The pulpits are arrayed in a tiered pattern of three by three. This arrangement is related to the Royal Arch and emphasizes the sacred character of the number three, which suggests the presence of divine power.

The front face of each pulpit was engraved with a series of three cryptic gilt letters related to the office of the men who were appointed to each pulpit.⁴⁰ Masons characteristically form abbreviations using the first letter of each word. These are widely employed throughout the Masonic system in acronyms, monitors (booklets containing the wording of ceremonies, rituals, and prayers), signets, and so forth. Following the letters in a formal Masonic document are placed three points in a triangular form. These dots indicate a Masonic title or a technical word.⁴¹ The letters P, E, and M carved into the sacrament table in front of the pulpit are also placed in this triangular formation.

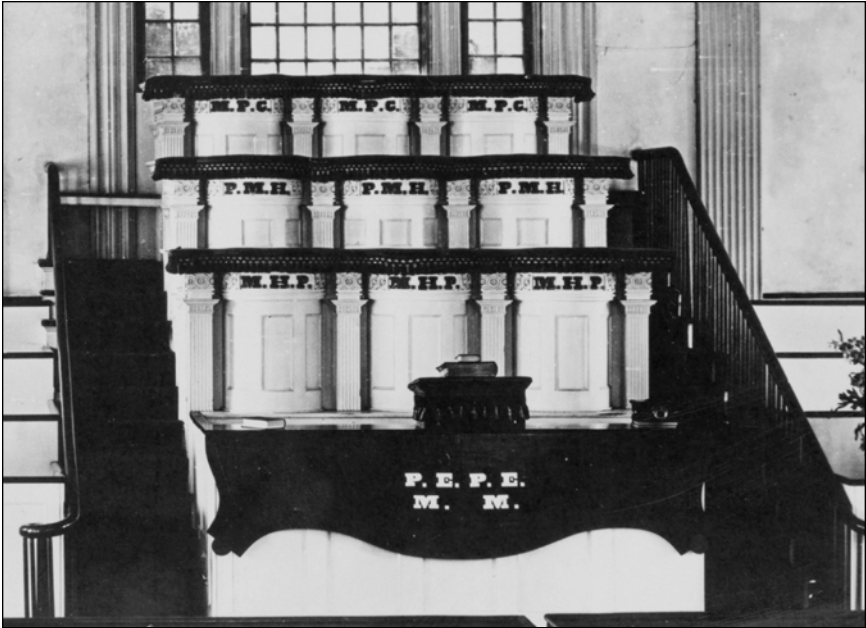
On the west end of the building, behind the sacrament table and pulpits, is a magnificent window framed by a double arch and keystone combination, resting upon two pillars. These items were vital to Royal Arch legend and used in nineteenth-century Masonic lodge rooms. Smith’s purpose in building a temple was to provide a place for making covenants, encountering the Lord, and being endowed with “power from on high” (D&C 95:8). The architectural components symbolized these objectives. The arch, as represented in some Royal Arch chapters, has three letters (J Z H)⁴² engraved upon it representing the three principal

39. Gilbert Belnap Autobiography, 33.

40. “There is a pulpit in the west end for the Melchizedek priesthood, composed of four seats parallel with each other, those in the rear suitably elevated, and each seat calculated for three officers and accommodated with a suitable desk, which is ornamented with a cushion and fringe, and a curve for each occupant, on the front of which is the initials of his office, in gilt letters. The desk of the front seat consists of the leaves of the communion table, upon which are the initials of its occupants, in letters of stain. There is also a pulpit in the east end for the Aaronic priesthood, which is of the same construction.” West, *A Few Interesting Facts Respecting the Mormons*, 4–5.

41. “Three points in a triangular form are placed after letters in a Masonic document to indicate that such letters are the initials of a Masonic title of a technical word in Masonry...it is not a symbol, but simply a mark of abbreviation.” Albert G. Mackey, William J. Hughan, and Edward L. Hawkins, *An Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry and its Kindred Sciences, Comprising the Whole Range of Arts, Sciences and Literature as Connected with the Institution*, 2:785.

42. JZH: Jerubbabel, Zedekiah, Haggai.



Kirtland Temple Pulpits, ca. 1912.

officers of the chapter. It stands for “the Blue Arch of Heaven and the rainbow which . . . represents God’s covenant with mankind after Noah’s flood. . . . The legend upon which the ceremony [of the Royal Arch] is based speaks of not one arch but nine [3X3], supporting and enclosing a vault beneath the temple of Solomon.”⁴³ Royal Arch history informs us that “[b]eneath King Solomon’s temple was a vaulted chamber containing nine arches and it was within the ninth of these that the Sacred Name [of Deity] was deposited.”⁴⁴

Written on the wall between the men and women’s entrance of the Kirtland temple were three Latin phrases: *Laus Deo* (praise God), *Crux Mihi Anchora* (the cross is my anchor), and *Magna Veritas et Prevalebit* (great is truth and it shall prevail). Such Latin mottos are employed by Freemasons on banners or on the heads of documents to express the character and design of different branches or orders.⁴⁵ For example, the motto for the Order of the Red Cross is *Magna est Veritas, et praevalabit*. Both it and the slogan *Laus Deo* appeared in Bernard’s 1829 *Light on Masonry*.⁴⁶

43. Duncan Moore, *In Search of That Which Was Lost: True Symbolism of the Royal Arch*, 58–59.

44. Moore, 56.

45. Mackey, Hughan, and Hawkins, *Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, s.v. “Motto” (2:495).

46. Bernard, *Light on Masonry*, 154, 296.

The phrase “Holiness to the Lord” emblazoned above the main entrance to the Kirtland temple conveys a sense of awe and reverence.⁴⁷ This expression is associated with temple worship in the Old Testament, where it was engraved upon the gold plate of a crown worn as part of the priestly garments (Ex. 28:36; 39:30). Freemasons used this biblical axiom since at least 1710 when it appears in the Dumfries manuscript.⁴⁸ In the Royal Arch degree, “Holiness to the Lord” is found upon the mitre of the High Priest, is spoken in praise three times by characters who have made a marvelous discovery, and is painted on the central symbol of the arch.

An elegant, narrow spiral staircase in the Kirtland temple curls purposefully from the first to the second floor. According to scripture, a “winding stair” was similarly located within King Solomon’s temple, connecting the ground floor of that structure with the middle chamber of the building (1 Kgs. 6:8). The Freemasons’ appropriation of the winding stair contains rich allegorical meaning and is featured prominently on tracing boards and in the design of many lodges, and Royal Arch aprons often depict pillar, arch, and veil behind a staircase consisting of three, five, or seven steps. In the Fellow Craft degree, the winding stair suggests spiritual advancement and the imparting of spiritual knowledge. In the middle chamber of the Lodge, the initiate learns about “the mystery of the Letter G.”⁴⁹ The figurative goal of the Masonic version of the winding stair is to represent heavenly ascent and to bring one near to God.

In the context of looking for the “Word,” the arch and keystone, pillars, three multiples of three, mysterious lettering, inscriptions, winding staircases, and passing through veils are all significant. They are key elements of the Royal Arch ritual, which points to the restoration of King Solomon’s Temple and the discovery of “that which was lost.” Many of these features are biblical; however, they don’t all occur together and in the context of restoration in the Bible as they do in Freemasonry.

Kirtland School of the Prophets

During Mormonism’s Kirtland period, Joseph Smith found in Masonry a system of teaching that enabled him to present complex principles to a select group

47. Malcolm C. Duncan, *Duncan’s Masonic Ritual and Monitor or Guide to the Three Symbolic Degrees of the Ancient York Rite and to the Degrees of Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master, and the Royal Arch*, 246–47. Threefold repetition of “Holiness to the Lord.”

48. Dumfries Manuscript No. 4, in Harry Carr, *The Early Masonic Catechisms*, 68.

49. In the lower degrees, the initiate is told that the letter G stands for “God” and for “Geometry,” which the Supreme Architect of the Universe used to design the cosmos. The mystery of the letter G is that the symbol contains layers of meaning, which the initiate learns as he progresses in knowledge and understanding. See William Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry*, 50; and Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, 15.

of the leading elders of the Church. The first recorded meeting of the Kirtland School of the Prophets was held in the upper room of Newell K. Whitney's store on January 23, 1833, and it was organized in the same tradition as the Masonic Schools of Instruction.⁵⁰ The school became a prototype of forthcoming Kirtland temple ritual.

Whitney, a young merchant and businessman, had been a Freemason since July 26, 1819, when, at the age of twenty-four, he was raised to Master Mason in Meridian Orb Lodge No. 10 at Painesville, Ohio. Not content to only receive the three degrees of Craft Masonry, Whitney also received the Royal Arch Degree, taking an active part in the attempted formation of a Royal Arch chapter at Painesville.⁵¹ He would repeat that effort in Hancock County in 1843, after the establishment of craft lodges at Nauvoo and Warsaw.⁵²

For a time, Whitney affiliated with the Campbellite, or Disciples of Christ tradition, and he was baptized into Joseph Smith's church in November of 1830. Meetings of Kirtland's leading elders in his respectable dry goods store resembled those of contemporary nineteenth-century lodges that frequently occupied an upper room in an existing building, such as a tavern.

An announcement was soon made that a new edifice was to be built to house the School of the Prophets and to "endow those whom I [the Lord] have chosen with power from on high" (D&C 95:8).⁵³ Language such as this suggested that, just as the School of the Prophets was an elite and exclusive group, the endowment would also be given to a chosen and selective company whom the Lord would honor with his presence.⁵⁴ Not unlike the Masonic Fraternity, the Mormon School of the Prophets was a select body with specific membership requirements (D&C 88:133, 138). Its meetings began with a ritual greeting of uplifted hands between the instructor and class members. Zebedee Coltrin recalled:

Elder Orson Hyde was the teacher and saluted the brethren with uplifted hands, and they also answered with uplifted hands. . . . The teacher saluted the brethren (one or more) as they came in. This salutation was given every morning when they met.⁵⁵

50. For background on the name, see Joseph F. Darowski, "Schools of the Prophets: An Early American Tradition," 1–13.

51. Newell K. Whitney, letter Painesville, Ohio masonic chapter, March 27, 1827.

52. "Masonic Notice," 2.

53. See David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship*, 6.

54. Joseph Smith spoke of the grand design he had for the School of the Prophets in a letter to W. W. Phelps:

"[Y]ou will see that the Lord commanded us in Kirtland to build an house of God, & establish a school for the Prophets, this is the word of the Lord to us, & we must— yea the Lord helping us we will obey, as on conditions of our obedience, he has promised <us> great things, yea <even> a visit from the heavens to honor us with his own presence." See "Letter to William W. Phelps, 11 January 1833," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, 19.

55. School of the Prophets Salt Lake City Meeting Minutes, October 3, 1833 [58].

This formality was described as “a salutation to one another in the house of God, in the school of the prophets” (v. 136), connecting the school with the planned temple. In this responsorial greeting, men were received by covenant as brothers “in the bonds of love” (v. 133). This indicated a mystic fraternal tie in which they were bound together by mutual obligations to God.

Masonic tradition identifies prayer with uplifted hands as a Jewish practice. This type of prayer is likewise found in the Book of Mormon’s description of the tradition of the apostate Zoramites meeting in their false synagogue. One person at a time would

go forth and stand upon the top thereof, and stretch forth his hands towards heaven, and cry with a loud voice, saying: Holy, holy God . . . we thank thee . . . that we are a chosen and a holy people. . . . Now the place was called by them Rameumptom, which, being interpreted, is the holy stand. (Alma 31:14, 18, 21)

While the context makes clear it is associated with a false religious form, the action itself is not spoken of disparagingly. Rather, it is the words that accompanied this ritual act that are treated with disapproval. Thus, there was no contradiction when in the School of the Prophets, Joseph Smith himself inaugurated the practice of prayer with uplifted hands.⁵⁶

Following the greeting, class members received confidential instruction. As in Freemasonry, emphasis was placed on learning certain “liberal arts and sciences” such as astronomy, geography, geology, history, languages, and politics (D&C 88:77–79). Those who attended in the winter and early spring of 1833 were instructed in several secular topics as well as church doctrine to prepare them for their ministry. Members of the School of the Prophets were given admonitions concerning their personal habits, spiritual practices, and comportment. But “above all things,” they were to “clothe [them]selves with the bond of charity, as with a mantle” (v. 125). This mirrored Masonic injunction: charity is the chief characteristic of the Lodge. From the very first degree, Freemasons are told that such charity is an identifying mark of the individual Freemason, for like the soul itself, it endures forever: “Faith may be lost in sight; Hope ends in fruition; but Charity extends beyond the grave, through the boundless realms of eternity.”⁵⁷

One of the courses of study at the School of the Prophets was the *Lectures on Faith*, which contains the earliest articulation of the Mormon doctrine of divinization. As was true of the instruction of candidates in the Masonic degrees, the lectures utilize a catechismal structure. For example, members of the school learned in Lecture 5 that by keeping the commandments they would grow “from grace to grace and become heirs of the heavenly kingdom . . . being transformed into the express image” of God. Referencing John 14, Lecture 7 explains Jesus

56. See Eliza R. Snow’s description of the Kirtland Temple Dedication in Tullidge, *Women of Mormondom*, 82–95.

57. Mackey, Hughan, and Hawkins, *An Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry and its Kindred Sciences*, 1:260.

“declares to his Father, in language not to be easily mistaken, that he wanted his disciples, even all of them, to be as himself and the Father. . . . [T]he Savior wished his disciples to understand that they were to be partakers with him in all things, not even his glory excepted.”⁵⁸ The perfectibility of human personality is an idea that was strongly apparent among contemporary Masonic writers such as Hosea Ballou and was seen symbolically in Masonic ritual. The members of the School of the Prophets were to sanctify themselves so that they would become worthy to see the face of God (D&C 88:68). From among the members of the School, the “sons of Jacob” were to “build a holy city” (v. 58). The grand purpose of the school and eventually the temple ritual was to receive the name of God (D&C 109:9, 19, 22).

The Development of Early Temple Rituals

Masonic rites are known for their appropriation and ritualization of scriptural stories. Likewise, the first temple ordinances and proto-rituals seen in the School of the Prophets adapted such biblical precedents. These included the washing of feet, washing and anointing, the Hosanna Shout, and the passing through veils of the temple.

Washing of Feet

A ritual introduced in the School of the Prophets that contained a peculiarly Masonic flavor found its scriptural basis in a scene from the Gospel of John where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. As in the Bible, Mormon washing of feet had been used in several different circumstances, but in the School of the Prophets it took on a more formal aspect.⁵⁹ An 1832 revelation to the School directs:

And he shall be received by the ordinance of the washing of feet, for unto this end

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INDEX

A

Aaron's Band. *See* Masonic degrees.
Aaron's Rod, 18, 19n21, 116n114
Aaronic Priesthood, 182n40, 333, 337, 436
Abbott, Jacob F., 291n15, 314
Abrac, 42–48, 53
Abraham, 12–13, 118, 130, 131n38, 134, 135n50, 137, 142–43, 148, 150, 153, 156–60, 162n48, 166–168, 188n62, 235n4
Adam, 13, 77, 133–34, 142–43, 157, 167, 169, 251, 317, 327–28, 346, 349, 378, 380, 385, 387
Adam-Ondi-Ahman, 142, 143n75, 167, 215, 222n91, 431, 447
Adams, George J., 426, 437
Adams, Harriet, 334
Adams, James, 253–55, 261, 293, 304n73, 332n46, 334
adoption. *See* priesthood adoption.
Adoptive Masonry. *See* Masonic degrees.
Age of Enlightenment, 15, 25–27, 46–47, 65, 379
Ahiman Rezon, 199, 387
Ahman, 169, 196, 362n24
Akirop, 124–25, 200
alchemy, 1, 30, 37–38, 114, 385
Aldrich, Mark, 299, 393n9, 401, 402n48, 403, 410
allegory, 6–7, 10–12, 18, 42, 68, 70, 88–89, 108n77, 137, 144, 168, 170, 205n26, 287, 320–22, 340–41, 347, 349, 385, 391, 449
Allen, Albern, 291
Allen, Charles, 258, 260, 298n52, 363n33
Allen, Ethan, 17, 26
Allen, Joseph K., 297, 308n92
altar, 8n23, 66, 74, 79, 83, 98, 154n24, 169, 193, 207, 274, 312, 332, 337, 340, 345, 349, 378, 424, 436, 449
American Indians. *See* Native Americans.

ancient order of things, 150, 170, 249, 252, 272, 333, 358
ancient themes in Mormonism, xix, 121–46, 149, 231, 250, 309, 387, 447
Angel of the Prairies, 369
Anointed Quorum, 189n68, 333–35, 353–54, 363, 368, 392, 426, 431, 435, 438
anti-Masonry, ix, xvi, xviii, 10, 12, 14, 16n3, 29, 46, 57–63, 88, 117–120, 136, 236, 245, 319n1, 352, 354–58, 395, 399, 410, 439, 449
apostasy, 13, 118, 119n125, 120, 151, 160, 186, 202, 209, 250–52, 261, 289, 319, 324n18, 335, 378, 393–94, 425n28
apotheosis, 137, 160, 348, 348n92, 373
April 6th, 192, 254, 285, 307, 356, 421
apron, ix, 77, 83, 118, 147n1, 159n39, 184, 200, 224, 327–28, 335, 375, 395, 433–34
architecture, 3, 179–84, 319, 321, 335–38
Ark of the Covenant, 28n50, 150, 346
Armies of Israel, 206n31, 221–22, 223n94, 231
ashlars, 8, 205n26, 287
astronomy, 4, 136, 148, 154, 156, 159–60, 166, 186
authentic vs. spurious Masonry, 13–14, 62–63, 117–20, 134–35, 150–51, 223n94, 288–89, 304, 319n1, 447
Avard, Sampson, 211–13, 217–19, 222–23
avenging mason, 200, 231, 354

B

Babylonian captivity, 6, 18n15, 107, 122–24, 135n50, 166, 233, 331, 347, 370
Backenstos, Jacob, 264, 363n33
list of participants in Smith's murder, 394n12, 402–3, 410
Ballard, Melvin J., 252
ballot (Masonic), 23–24, 51, 262n54, 263–65, 270, 275–78, 295, 296n41, 303, 392

- Ballou, Hosea, 26, 187
- Baltimore Convention, 80, 300–302, 395, 397
- Baneemy, 224, 428–30
- Barnum, Guy C., 430
- Batavia, NY, 49–54, 57–58, 60, 63, 277, 413
- Battle of Crooked River, 223, 229
- Baurak Ale, 334
- Beaver Island, Lake Michigan, 425–28
- bee, 128–29, 414
- bee house, 414
- Beech, Rufus, 307
- Bennett, John C.,
 accusations, xvi, 225, 228, 269–72, 278,
 294, 353, 393
 “brother of Gideon,” 207
 disfellowshipped, 268
 helps build Nauvoo, 235, 237–38
 involvement in Nauvoo Lodge, 255, 258,
 260, 265–69, 297
 joins Strang, 426
 spiritual wifery, 279, 282
- Benson, Ezra Taft, 445
- Bernard, David
Light on Masonry, 60, 110, 125, 173,
 183, 190, 213, 224, 255, 322–23, 398
 Convention of Seceding Masons, 58
- Bidamon, Charles, 408–9
- Bidamon, Lewis
 and Jupiter talisman, 408
 married Emma Smith, 439–40
- bifurcated priesthood 139, 441
- Big Fan, 202–5, 207, 231
- bishop
 at Black River, 243
 endowment, 334n55
 establishment of office, 241
 lays cornerstone of temple, 203
 of Kirtland (Newel K. Whitney), 189,
 241, 370
 storehouse, 210
 Wight ordained, 432
 of Zion (Edward Partridge), 189, 241
- Black, Marcellus, 409
- Black River, WI, 242–43, 431–32
- blindfold, 65, 70–71, 78–79, 82, 325
- blow, 11n38, 106, 343, 393, 395, 399
- Blue Lodge Masonry. *See* Masonic degrees.
- Boggs, Lilburn W.,
 appoints Priestly McBride, 253, 292, 395
 assassination attempt, 225, 292n22, 363
 extermination order, 233
- Book of Abraham, 107n71, 144–72, 267,
 320, 346, 386
- Book of Mormon, 91–120, 122–130
 antiMasonic Bible, 117–20, 319n1, 354
 Book of the Law, 96, 441
 coming forth of, xviii, 40, 91–96, 108, 122
 Danite connection, 211–12, 224n103,
 244
 golden plates, 92, 96, 110–11, 423
 and Kabbalah, 384
 Martin Harris involvement in, 58
 Masonic correspondences, 83, 108–11, 118,
 122–30, 146, 174, 186, 200, 330n40
 midrash, 122–30, 146
 and Native Americans, 302
 printing of, 58
 stored in chest, 36
 translation of, 58, 102, 112–13, 139
 witnesses, 177
- Book of Moses, 131, 133–38, 320, 330n40
- Book of the Law, xiv n9, 91, 96, 109–11,
 116, 120, 130, 336
- Boston, MA, 287, 351, 392, 437, 439
- brother of Jared, 125–29, 137, 224n103
- Briggs, Jason, 439
- bright fraternal chain. *See* fraternal chain.
- brow of a hill, 5, 412–14
- Brown, James, 291n15, 313
- Brown, Robert, 57
- Bruce, Eli, 56, 59, 354
- Bruce, James, 428
- Bullock, Thomas, 266n74, 333, 376–77,
 381, 392, 405n57, 420n12
- Burtis, Stephen H., 290, 293, 297
- Butler, John L., 216, 226n116, 258
- bylaws
 Grand Lodge of Illinois, 255n35, 296
 Grand Lodge of Vermont, 24
 Nauvoo Lodge, 260, 265–66, 271, 298,
 305n80
 Relief Society, 273
 Strang, 426

C

- cable tow, 8, 66, 70, 79–80, 118, 325
 Cagliostro (Joseph Balsamo), 166, 278, 354
 Cahoon, Reynolds, 189n69, 226n116, 282, 362n26, 372
 Cain, 62, 119n125, 133–35, 151n13
 Caldwell County, Missouri, 201–2, 221n85, 222
 Camp Floyd, UT, 316
 Campbell, Alexander, 120, 130, 176, 242
 Campbellites, 176, 178, 185, 211, 241, 396
 Canandaigua, NY, 33–35, 49, 52–55, 59, 94
 Cannon, David H., 229
 Cannon, George Q., 366, 406, 412
 Captain Kidd, 30, 102
 Carn, Daniel, 226n116, 227
 Carnegie, Stephen W. B., 252, 262, 295, 395, 397–98
 Carter, Jared, 206, 217, 224, 363n33
 Carter, Gideon, 224n103
 Carter, Gideon, Jr., 433
 Carter, Simeon, 190n74
 Carthage Greys, 393n8, 397, 400–401, 406–7
 Carthage, IL, 283, 356, 372, 395–411
 Carthage Jail, 284, 393–94, 401–8
 Carthage Vigilance Committee of Safety, 400–401
 Cartwright, Peter, 364–65
 catechism, 4, 50, 74, 78, 168–69, 186, 349, 430
 celestial lodge, 142, 343, 395
 celestial ascent, 89, 136–37, 160, 164, 184, 238, 277, 324, 330–32, 347, 381, 386
 celestial marriage, 278, 280n43, 283, 334
 celestial Masonry, 120
 cemetery (Nauvoo), 413–15
 Chaffin, Lewis R., 306
 chain of belonging. *See* fraternal chain.
 Chandler, Michael, 147–48, 162
 charge (Masonic), 8, 158, 189, 215, 262, 287, 337, 346, 348, 351, 356, 364, 366, 373
 charter, 227n122
 Allegany Lodge, Friendship, NY, 422
 Hiram Lodge, Augusta, IA, 313
 Illinois lodges, 252, 290
 Morning Star Lodge, Mantua, OH, 175n8
 Nauvoo city, 237, 354, 356–357
 Nauvoo Lodge, 294, 301, 310
 proposed Utah lodges, 419
 Rising Sun Lodge, Montrose, IA, 293, 303, 306, 309–10, 313, 315
 Royal Arch chapter, Batavia, NY, 51
 Vermont lodges, 20–21
 Warsaw Lodge, Warsaw, IL, 411
 Charvatt, Charles, 251
 Chase, Dudley, Jr., 24
 Chase, Mason, 39, 92n5, 103
 Chase, Willard, 39, 95n16, 96, 101–3, 106
 Chief Keokuk, 302
 Chittenden, Abraham, 402n48, 403
 Christian character of Masonry, 6, 8–12, 15, 60–62, 65, 68, 71, 82, 108, 140n68, 142, 170, 211, 246–47, 252, 320–21, 342, 348, 351, 383, 395, 416
 Church of Christ (Cutler), 434–37
 Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion/Church of Christ (Rigdon), 420–22
 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strang), 422–27
 Church of the Firstborn, 142, 281
 cipher, 46, 158, 162–64, 197, 265, 278–79, 422, 424–25
 circumambulation, 8, 66, 77, 312
 clandestine lodges, 314, 228, 314, 377, 393, 404, 417
 Clark, Hiram, 258, 260, 363n33
 Clark, Laban, 19
 Clark, Susan, 437
 Clayton, William
 alibi for Joseph, 363
 keeps Nauvoo Lodge minutes, 266, 271, 297, 377
 Mason, 377
 Nauvoo Temple ritual, 323, 336, 346
 reports King Follett discourse, 377–92
 reports Last Charge, 194
 scribe, 368–69
 Joseph's tomb, 412
 writes about key words, 317
 Cleminson, John, 219
 Cleveland, Sarah M., 275
 Clinton, DeWitt, 57
 Clitherall, MN, 436
 Cobb, Rowland, 430

- Cock, Oliver, 314
 code names, 138n59, 197, 224–25, 305, 334n58
 code words, 280, 341, 346
 Coltrin, Zebedee, 87–88, 185
 Columbus, IL, 256, 260, 295
 combinations, 117–18, 133, 221, 319n1
 Commerce, IL, 233, 302
 communitarianism, 178–79, 206, 217n68, 221–22, 231, 240–43, 431–36
 Community of Christ. *See* Reorganized Church.
 Companies
 Carthage Greys, 400–401
 Danites, 217–22, 225–26
 Nauvoo Legion, 308, 356
 Order of Enoch (Cutler), 436
 Pine Company, 242–43, 431–32
 stock, 178
 treasure seeking, 102, 105
 Warsaw Rifle Company, 401, 410
 Congregation of Jehovah's Presbytery of Zion, 428–31
 consecrated oil, 190
 consecration. *See* communitarianism.
 conspiracy, 60, 118, 352, 357, 400–401, 412
 Constitution of United States of America, 16, 204, 352, 358
 constitutions
 Council of Fifty, 244, 366
 Danite, 210–13
 Masonic, 2–3, 10, 68, 71, 150, 210–11, 213, 236, 274, 302
 Relief Society, 273
 Conyers, J. B., 313
 Cook, Margaret, 273
 Cooley, Horace, 264
 cornerstones, 8, 180–81
 Far West Temple, 203–4, 435
 Independence Temple, 181
 Kirtland Temple, 180
 Nauvoo Masonic Hall, 165n56, 267, 306, 308–9
 Nauvoo Temple, 356
 Corrill, John, 95n16, 98, 189, 202, 207–8, 211n43, 213, 218
 Coulson, George, 306
 Council in Heaven, 153, 331, 347, 368–69, 386, 447
 Council of Fifty, 130, 194, 238, 244, 354, 362–71, 389–94, 404, 414, 419, 426, 431, 434–35, 444–45
 Council of Twelve, xi–xii, 191, 195, 229, 335, 338, 359, 367, 370, 418, 421, 427–28, 431–32, 435–38
 traveling High Council, 188, 190
 Covington Conference, 434
 Cowdery, Oliver, 20, 52n13, 98, 108, 139, 154, 160–61, 176, 189, 195, 202, 239, 367, 370
 Cowdery, Warren, 180n32, 195–96
 Cowdery, William, 19
 Cowley, Matthias F., 252
 Craft Masonry. *See* Masonic degrees.
creatio ex nihilo, 132n38, 133
 creation, 26n43, 38, 62, 127, 132–33, 144–45, 152–56, 240, 332, 337–40, 348–49, 386–88
 Crocker, Hannah Mather, 276
 Cruben, Edwin, 300n58, 309, 322
 cry of distress. *See* grand hailing sign of distress.
 Cummings, Horace, 264
 Cummings, James, 259, 264
 Cumorah, 40, 94–111
 Cutler, Alpheus, 371, 413, 433n61, 434–37
- ## D
- Daniel, 209
 kingdom of God prophesied by, 208–9, 220–21, 355, 371, 450
 Daniels, William M., 401n43, 403, 405–6
 Danites
 in Kirtland, 200–201, 224, 231
 in Missouri, 199–231, 305, 353–54, 362n26, 363, 444
 in Nauvoo, 219, 226–27, 230–31
 in Utah, 230
 Daughter of Zion, 201–2, 209–10, 226–28
 David's Chamber, 414
 Daviess County, MO, 215–16, 219–20, 221n85, 222n91, 226
 Davis, George T. M., 400–401
 Davis, Daniel C., 290

- Davis, Jacob C., 401, 410
 death, 132, 156, 277, 343, 348, 356, 386–90
 of Alvin Smith, 99–101
 and Council of Fifty oaths, 366
 and Danite oaths, 212–15, 363
 of Hiram Abiff, 4–5, 168, 343, 373, 415–16
 of Jesus Christ, 4, 140n68, 348
 of Joseph Smith, xviii, xxi, 229, 285, 333, 373, 391–416, 421
 of King Follett, 374–76
 and Masonic oaths, 199, 214
 of a Mason, 328
 passing the veils, 347
 raising, 344
 three knocks, 74n61, 343, 373, 416
 of William Morgan. *See* William Morgan.
- degrees in Mormonism
 Cutler ritual, 436
 Danite ritual, 223
 degrees of glory, 140–41
 Egyptian papers, 154, 166–69
 endowment, 270, 278, 309, 324, 328, 339, 349
 First Vision, 85–86
 King Follett discourse, 380
 obtaining the Book of Mormon, 95
 Relief Society, 275
 translating, 107
- delegates, 254, 293, 300, 302–3, 395, 397, 399
- demit/demission
 John C. Bennett, 268
 from Nauvoo Lodge, 290–91, 293
 moot Congress plan, 361
- Deseret, 56, 129, 419
- destroying angel, 225–26, 356
- dispensation (allowance for a lodge), 227n122, 252–57, 260, 266, 292–99, 302–3, 305–8, 310, 313–15, 417, 422, 427
- dispensation (period of time), 13–14, 139, 218, 319, 368
 dispensation heads, 130, 143, 447
- dispensionalism, 13–14
- divining rod, 18–20, 112, 116n114
- Doctrine and Covenants, 138–46, 177, 201, 238, 338, 373
- Douglas, Charles (a.k.a. Elvira Field), 427
- Dunham, Jonathan, 224–25
- dutchman, 220
- ## E
- East, 87, 181–82, 190, 196n110, 236, 332n48, 338–39, 351, 369, 380
- Easter Star Degrees. *See* Masonic degrees.
- education, 36, 136, 205n26, 236–40, 247, 257
- Egypt, 2, 12, 31, 45, 123, 130, 143, 147–52, 156, 160, 170, 214, 345, 382, 388, 431
- Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar, 154, 161–70
- Egyptian rites, 6n17, 158–59, 165–66, 169, 196, 278, 354
- elect, 91, 429
- election
 Gallatin, 216
 Grand officers, 253–54, 262, 303
 Hancock County, 257, 356–58
 National Grand Lodge, 397–98
 Nauvoo Lodge, 260, 265n68, 297–98
 Presidential, 358–59, 397
 Relief Society, 275n12
 Warsaw Lodge, 410
- electioneers, 364
- Elias, 195, 376
- Elijah, 139, 195, 367, 423n24
- Ellsworth, Edmund, 359n21
- Elohim, 341, 384–85
- Emmett, James, 371
- endowment/induement, xix–xxi
 ancient, 252, 393, 447
 apostate, 151
 celestial Masonry, 420
 Cutler, 435–37
 Kirtland, 86, 165, 187–91, 194, 197, 325
 Masonic, 165, 325–30
 Nauvoo, 166n62, 167, 228–29, 250–51, 280, 282, 289, 320, 322–43, 346–50, 362, 373, 418
 Rigdon, 421
 spiritual, 39
 Strang, 425
 Thompson, 428, 430
 Utah, 229, 378–79, 444, 446
 Wight, 431–34

- endowment house, 229, 445–46
 Enlightenment, 3, 25, 65–71, 75, 81–85,
 89, 205n26, 347, 424
 Enoch, 2, 8, 12–13, 118, 127, 142
 Ethiopic, 428–29
 gold plate, 18, 94, 98, 110–11, 116, 158,
 164
 legends of, 92, 94, 111, 130, 134–38, 143
 in Mormonism, 131, 134–38, 142–43,
 234, 252, 276
 order of, 436
 pillars, 160–61, 346
 Thompson, 428–29
 Entered Apprentice degree. *See* Masonic
 degrees.
 equinox, 97, 101, 105
 Erie Canal, 32–33, 37, 58
 ethics, 199, 200n5, 210, 261
 eulogy, 376
 exaltation, 50, 128, 164, 195, 246, 277,
 331, 333, 347–50, 356, 373, 380–81,
 386–87, 436
 examination (Masonic), 50, 68, 256, 292
ex materia, 387
ex nihilo, 26n43, 132n39, 387
 Exodus
 biblical, 122–24, 347
 Mormon, x, 122–24, 226, 419
 Masonic, 12, 122–24, 347
- F**
- facsimiles, 154–60, 267
 faculty of Abrac, 42–46, 48, 53
 Fancher party, 420
 Far West, MO, 63, 177, 203, 214, 221–26,
 242, 435
 Farr, Lorin, 366
 Farr, Winslow, 361
 Fellow Craft degree. *See* Masonic degrees.
 Felshaw, William, 258, 297–98, 307n88,
 363n33
 Female Benevolent Society, 275
 Field, Elvira, 427
 Fielding, Joseph, 250–51
 Finney, Charles G., 66–67
 First Vision, xv, xxi, 65–89, 92, 94
 five points of fellowship, 8, 100, 337, 343–46,
 350, 420, 447
 fivefold kiss, 345
 folk magic, 25–29, 43–48, 91, 95, 101, 104,
 113, 164n54, 217, 247, 250, 384–85,
 408–9
 Follett, King, 224–25, 318, 374–76
 Ford, Thomas, 394, 397, 399, 401, 409–10
 forgery, 92, 253, 423n25
 Fort Madison, IA, 305
 Fort Niagara, 54, 56, 59
 Foster, Charles, 393–94
 Foster, Robert D., 270, 361, 392
 foundation stone, 92
 Franklin, Benjamin, 236, 351
 fraternal chain, 145–46, 251, 350, 388–90,
 447
 Fraternity of Rodsmen, 18–19
 Free and Accepted Order of Baneemy, 428–31
 funeral, 304n73, 308, 318, 374–76, 416, 432
- G**
- Gadianton, 118–119
 Gallagher, William, 410
 Galland, Isaac, 302
 Gallatin, MO, 216, 219, 226
 garden of Eden, 142–43, 157, 328, 337–39,
 346, 369
 Gardner, Gerald B., 345
 garment
 Cutler, 436
 Masonic, 325, 382
 Moroni, 212
 priestly (Israelite), 184, 190
 Mormon temple, 251, 326–27, 333, 339,
 348, 420, 446–47
 Thompson, 430
 Wight, 433–34
 Zion, put on, 209, 234
 Gates, Susa Young, 282
 geometry, 4, 126, 151, 184n49
 Gideon, 207, 224, 231
 Gideonites, 200, 202, 205–7, 224–25
 Goforth, William G., 377
 gold, 8, 30, 184, 191, 385, 388–89
 Gold Bible Company, 105

- gold plate (Enoch), 18, 30, 91, 94, 98, 107, 109–12, 116, 136, 158, 346, 432
- golden plates (Book of Mormon), 36, 40, 91–98, 104–5, 110–11, 117, 148, 423
- Goldsmith, Gilbert, 413–14
- Gould, Hallie, 436–37
- Grand Architect, xviii, 9, 10, 134, 142, 184n49, 243, 249, 379
- Grand Chaplain. *See also* Masonic offices.
George A. Patterson, 268
Joseph Smith, 262
Salem Town, 153
- grand council, 107, 150n11, 236, 296, 331, 347, 368–70, 386, 421, 426, 429, 434.
See also council in heaven.
- grand design, xiv, 129, 233, 248, 430
- grand hailing sign of distress, 215–16, 284, 399, 402–5, 416
- grand leveling principle, 2, 145, 222, 245–46, 326, 350, 358
- Grand Lodge, 3–4, 10, 24, 203, 210, 227n122, 236, 261–62, 300–302, 313, 325, 365, 397–98, 420, 427n36
- Grand Master, 3–4, 12–13, 130, 174, 196, 203, 263, 292, 316–17, 325, 365, 386, 397–98, 412
- Grandin, Egbert, 36n80, 58, 131
- Graves, Alvin C., 259, 314
- Green Mountain Boys, 17–18, 27n46, 30n61
- Greene, John P., 359
- Greene, Samuel D., 50, 53, 54n22
- grove, 74, 77–80, 83, 89, 338, 357, 375–76, 421
- Grover, Thomas, 268
- Grover, William N., 401, 410
- Gurley, Zenas, 214, 306
- H**
- habeas corpus*, 357
- Ham, 135, 150–51
- Hamilton, Artois, 396, 400
- Hatfield, John, 291
- Hawley, Lavinia, 432
- Hawley, John P., 432n57
- Harris, George Washington, 49, 53–54, 57, 62–64, 413
- Harris, Martin, 58, 103, 112–13, 119, 189
- Harris, Lucinda Pendleton Morgan, 49, 62–64, 255, 398–99
- Hatch, Jeremiah, 422
- Haws, Peter, 371
- heavenly ascent. *See* celestial ascent.
- Hedlock, Reuben, 154, 156
- Helm, Meredith, 296–99, 301, 307
- hermeticism, 1, 37–39, 170, 304, 385
- Heroines of Jericho, 193, 277, 284. *See also* Masonic degrees.
- Hibbard, David, 414
- hieroglyphics, 128, 140, 148–49, 159, 163–66, 265
- Higbee, Chauncey, 393
- Higbee, Elias, 217
- Higbee, Francis, 393
- High Council, 63, 190, 260, 268, 337, 421, 435
- High Priest
biblical, 130, 139, 168, 252, 393
Cutler, 436
Masonic, 85, 116, 153, 168, 184, 188, 328, 368
Mormon, 188, 190, 215, 225, 337
Strangite, 426
Thompson, 428
- hill Cumorah. *See* Cumorah.
- Hinkle, Colonel George M., 203, 222, 224
- Hiram Abiff, xviii–xix, 4–5, 28, 57, 63, 66, 100, 106, 121, 124, 126, 168, 179, 192, 200, 340, 343, 346, 349, 373, 391–93, 403–4, 407–16, 442
- Hiram, King of Tyre, 63, 179, 288, 318, 393, 442
- Hiram, OH, 174–79
- hive off, 86, 129, 291
- Hoar, Robert, 418
- Hobart, Otis, 434
- Hoge, Joseph, 357–58
- Holbrook, Joseph, 203
- Holiness to the Lord, 116, 184
- Holmes, Jonathan H., 413–14
- hollow square, 222, 310
- Holy Ghost/Holy Spirit, 376, 425
- holy of holies/*sanctum sanctorum*, 5, 320, 331, 347, 368, 386, 412–15
- hosannah shout, 187, 191–96, 204, 368

Houston, Sam, 365
 Humphreys, Ansel, 303
 Hunter, Edward, 413
 Huntington, Dimick B., 203, 316, 323,
 413–14
 Huntington, Oliver, 205, 216, 223, 255
 Huntington, William D., 413–14
 Huntington, Zina Diantha, 283–84, 404
 Hutchinson, Jacob F., 314
 Hyde, Orson, xi, 67, 75, 77, 78n88, 79, 82,
 177n58, 185, 226, 259, 316, 360, 381, 435
 hymns, 26, 121, 142, 187, 356, 414
 hypocephalus, 156, 158

I

iada, 429
iame, 429
 Illuminati, 354, 422–27
 illumination, 65–89, 91, 126–27, 142, 225,
 240, 320, 340
Illustrations of Masonry. See William Morgan.
 immortality, 7, 144, 151–52, 326, 341, 380,
 389
imperium in imperio, 358, 369
 initiation/initiate
 Masonic, xiv, xvi, 4, 11, 40, 43, 46, 59,
 74, 78–89, 92–93, 100, 103, 110, 124,
 129, 134, 137, 140, 154, 156, 158,
 164–65, 168, 184, 211, 223, 240, 249,
 257, 262–64, 269, 276, 287, 289,
 294–95, 300–301, 308, 320, 325–26,
 329–30, 343, 348–49, 358, 384–85,
 392, 418, 430
 Mormon, 169, 217, 223, 225, 228, 326,
 335, 337, 346–50, 356, 363, 416, 422,
 430, 435
 initiatory, 327, 345
 Inspired Version of the Bible. See Joseph
 Smith Translation
 installation, 28, 193–94, 254, 260–71, 274,
 290, 293, 297–302, 305, 308, 315
 intelligences, 151–53, 429
 irregular Masonry, 264–65, 270, 289–90,
 296, 303, 314, 322n8, 398, 411
 Ivins, Charles, 393

J

Jachin and Boaz, xii–xiv, 56, 448
 Jackson, Andrew, 354, 358–59
 Jackson County, MO, 143, 179, 220, 353,
 434
 Jackson, Hiram, 418
 Jacobs, Zina. See Zina Diantha Huntington.
 Jacob's ladder, 8, 331, 381–82
 Jaredites, 126–27, 129
 Jerusalem, xiv, 6, 107, 122–24, 129, 138,
 142, 166, 173–74, 196, 209, 233–34,
 288, 369–70, 391
 Jesus Christ, 4–5, 13, 45, 64–67, 74, 77, 82,
 87, 109, 111, 116n114, 130, 137, 139,
 141–45, 170, 186–87, 191, 195, 209, 213,
 218, 225, 230, 234–35, 244, 324, 327,
 329, 334, 348, 370, 381, 391, 395, 425
 jewel, 115, 262, 293, 373, 408–9
 Joabert, 124, 200
 Johnson, Aaron, 298n52, 306n81, 307n88,
 310, 361
 Johnson, Benjamin F., 151, 250–51
 Johnson, Eli, 178n26
 Johnson, Elsa, 176
 Johnson, John, 175–79
 Johnson, Lyman, 202
 Johnson, Marinda, 176n13, 177n58
 Jonas, Abraham, xvi, 254–57, 260–69,
 291–95, 301, 395, 398
 Jones, Dan, 401, 412
 Joseph Smith Translation, 130–35
 Josephus, 160–61, 347
 Jupiter talisman, 46, 164n54, 408

K

Kabbalah, 1, 129, 383–86
 Kane, Elizabeth, 101–2
 keen Mason, 86, 251
 Kesler, Frederick, 313
 keys
 Emma Smith, 97, 104
 explanatory, 154, 158, 160
 of discernment, 41, 280, 304, 338, 409
 of the kingdom, 85, 139
 of knowledge, 11, 85, 342
 Masonic, 140, 158, 169, 251, 280–81

- Priesthood, 139, 174, 195, 281, 289, 333, 362, 367–70, 436
 Relief Society, 280–81
 of revelation, 251, 373
 of translation, 92, 116, 128
 Urim and Thummim, 112, 116–17, 128
 key words, 1, 46, 156–58, 160, 169, 251, 317, 323, 333, 337, 346–47, 363, 366, 404
 keystone, 107, 109, 111, 182, 184, 312
 Kimball, Heber C., 37, 55, 105, 206, 229, 245, 250–51, 254–55, 258, 260, 287, 322–23, 370
 Kimball, Sarah M., 273
 Kimball, Spencer W., xix, 445
 Kimball, Vilate, 372
 Kinderhook plates, 164n56, 267
 king, 244–45, 416. *See also* prophet, priest, and king.
 David, 12
 Lord, 191, 208–9, 422
 Strang, 426–27
 Cutler, 433, 436
 King, Henry, 302
 King James Bible, 131
 King Solomon. *See* Solomon.
 kingdom
 celestial, 46, 64, 329
 of the earth, 142, 209, 218, 369, 420, 425
 of God, 12, 85, 95, 109, 130, 139, 208–9, 218–22, 231, 235, 250, 280–81, 310, 333, 338, 370–71, 381, 420, 425, 444
 Great Basin, 14, 211
 heavenly, 141, 153, 178, 186, 281, 337, 346
 millennial, 208, 212, 231, 247, 359
 of Nauvoo, 235
 of priests, 276
 theocratic, 14, 199, 210, 231, 237, 246, 248, 282, 317, 351–59, 362, 368–70, 389, 391, 393, 426, 450
 Kingsley, Ebenezer, 54
 Kirtland Egyptian Papers, 161–70, 196
 Kirtland, OH, 68, 144, 148, 160–62, 169–70, 176–79, 184–85, 189–90, 196, 200–201, 206, 224, 234–35, 238, 241–42, 257, 319–22, 365, 384, 428, 431. *See also* Danites.
 Kirtland School of the Prophets, 87, 184–87, 353, 431, 434
 Kirtland Temple, 86–88, 168–69, 179–84, 191–98, 325, 428, 432–35
 Kneeland, David, 314
 Knight of the Holy Sepulchre. *See* Masonic degrees.
 Knight, Joseph, 96–98, 102–103, 105
 Knight, Vinson, 226n116, 264
 Kolob, 151–56
- ## L
- Laban, 123–24, 200
 ladder. *See* Jacob's ladder.
 Lamanites, 174, 435. *See also* Native Americans.
 lambskin, 77, 118, 327, 375, 395
 Lamech, 110, 130, 134–35
 landmarks, 3, 261, 263n59, 272, 294
 Lapham, Fayette, 39, 111
 Last Charge, 367, 371
 Law of retribution, 229–30
 Law, William, 227, 357, 389, 393
 Law, Wilson, 393
 Lawrence, Samuel T., 97, 101–2, 105
 Lecture at the Veil, 348
 Lectures on Faith, 186, 382
 Lee County, IL, 292, 438
 Lee, John D., 204n24, 214n56, 215–16, 339, 360, 404
 Lehi, 83, 118, 122–24
 level, 2, 4, 37, 145, 245–46, 326, 344
 leveling principle. *See* grand leveling principle.
 Lewis, Catherine, 341
 Lewis, Joseph, 104
 Lewis, Hiel, 104
 Lewis, Philip B., 414
 liberal arts and sciences, 4, 36, 136, 142, 166, 186, 238, 247
 Liberty pole, 204–5
 Liberty Jail, 233, 368
 lifeguards, 226, 228, 295
 Lincoln, Abraham, 357
 lineage, 63, 107, 126, 235, 370
 Little, Jesse C., 251
 Lodge of Sorrow, 374
 loss, 4, 109, 251, 343, 346, 373, 389

Lost Word of Masonry, xi–xii, xx, 5, 8, 25–26,
30–31, 45–48, 65, 91, 93, 96, 107, 111,
137, 168, 173–74, 184, 195, 251–52,
289, 317, 331, 346–47, 358, 373, 386,
390, 404, 409, 416, 424–25, 441, 449
lost Book of the Law, 109–111, 116, 120,
122, 124, 131, 322
Mason word, 104, 416
grand key word, 156–57
Grand Omnific Word, 45, 51, 94, 169,
341, 358, 393, 409
Lyceum, 238–40
Lyman, Amasa, 269n85, 323, 362n26

M

Mace, Wandle, 239, 336, 361
Madison, James, 105–6
Manchester, NY, 33, 36, 41, 52, 60, 69, 103
Manifest Destiny, 369
manna, 46
Mansion House, 334, 412–14
Manti, IA, 435–36
Markham, Stephen, 396–97
Marks, William, 333, 413, 426
Marsh, Eliphas, 291
Marsh, Thomas B., 226
Mason at sight, 263
Masonic degrees
 Aaron's Band, 322
 Adoptive Masonry, 166, 193n96,
 275n10, 276n21, 277, 284, 351
 Master Mason's Daughter, 284
 True Kindred/Kinsman's Degree, 284
 Heroines of Jericho, 193, 277, 284
 Eastern Star Degrees, 166
Blue Lodge (Craft Masonry), 3–4, 6, 159,
265, 341, 425
 Entered Apprentice, 3–4, 21, 34, 51,
 66–69, 74, 78, 83, 129, 134, 189,
 262–64, 320, 325–26, 332, 340,
 378, 381–82, 430
 Fellow Craft, 4, 184, 264, 332, 342, 424
Master Mason, xii, 3–5, 50, 55, 59, 66,
78, 97, 100, 103, 106, 134, 156, 185,
189, 223, 239, 253, 262, 264, 269,
284, 294, 300, 305, 320, 327–28,
332, 341–43, 348, 360–63, 374,
382, 391–92, 399, 401–4, 409, 411,
416–22, 427, 431, 434, 437, 439
Knight of the Holy Sepulchre, 322
Prince Hall, 151n13, 315
Rite of High Egyptian Masonry, 166
Rite of Memphis, 166
Rite of Perfection, 388
Scottish Rite, 5–6, 158, 387, 439
 Elu of the Nine, 124–25, 200
The Secret Monitor, 322
York Rite, 5–6, 173, 309
 Royal Arch. See Royal Arch Masonry.
 Rite of Exaltation, 138n60, 195, 331,
 347, 386
 Royal and Select Master (Cryptic Rite),
 5, 173, 197, 397
 Knights Templar, x, 1, 217, 296, 332,
 439
Masonic Lodges
 African Grand Lodge (Prince Hall),
 151n13, 315
 Allegany Lodge No. 225, Friendship, NY,
 422
 Allegheny Lodge No. 277, Pembroke, NY,
 259
 Augusta Lodge No. 233, Augusta, NY, 258
 Batavia Lodge No. 433, Batavia, NY,
 50, 54
 Blazing Star Lodge No. #3, VA, 258
 Blazing Star Lodge No. 30, Rumford, ME,
 259
 Bodley Lodge No. 1, Quincy, IL, 255–56,
 261n51, 263–65, 272, 291–94, 301,
 312–13, 395, 410
 Center Star Lodge No. 11, Granville, OH,
 259
 Columbus Lodge No. 6, Columbus, IL,
 256, 261n51
 Des Moines Lodge No. 1, Burlington, IA,
 303, 313,
 Federal Lodge No. 15, Randolph, VT,
 21–33, 58, 181
 Federal Lodge No. 33, Hoosick, NY, 258
 Forest Lodge No. 263, Pomfret, NY, 258
 Fort George Lodge, Upper Canada, 259
 Franklin Lodge, 32
 French Lodges, New Orleans, 309

- Friendship Lodge No. 89, Barnesville, OH, 258
 Friendship Lodge No. 129, Bainbridge, NY, 40, 258
 Friendship Lodge No. 272, NY, 258
 Genesee Lodge, NY, 392
 Grand Lodge of Canada, 21
 Grand Lodge of Connecticut, 21
 Grand Lodge of England, 3n9, 20n27, 315, 390n78
 Grand Lodge of Illinois, 252–56, 263, 265, 267, 290, 293–96, 299–307, 310, 313–15, 417
 Grand Lodge of Iowa, 302–3, 314
 Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 254, 257, 309
 Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, 20
 Grand Lodge of Michigan, 427
 Grand Lodge of Missouri, 253–54, 292, 295, 310
 Grand Lodge of the United States (National Grand Lodge), 300–302, 395, 398
 Grand Lodge of Utah, xix
 Grand Lodge of Vermont, 21–24, 32
 Grant Lodge No. 85, Williamstown, KY, 257
 Hancock Lodge No. 20, Carthage, IL, 396, 402–3
 Harmony Lodge No. 3, Jacksonville, IL, 261n51, 402n48
 Harmony Lodge No. 11, VA, 259
 Harmony Lodge No. 187, Potsdam, NY, 259
 Helm Lodge UD, Nauvoo, IL, 299, 303, 307–308, 314–15, 317, 360
 Herman Lodge, Quincy, IL, 408–9
 Hiram Lodge No. 7, Augusta, IA, 313–17
 Hiram Lodge No. 10, New York, NY, 258
 Hiram Lodge (proposed) Nauvoo, IL, 298fn52, 307–8, 315
 Keokuk Lodge UD, (Eagle Lodge) Keokuk, IA, 302–3, 315, 417
 La Harpe Lodge, La Harpe, IL, 306–7, 314
 Lodge No. 14, Western Canada, 392
 Macon Lodge UD, IL, 261n51, 289–90
 Maine Lodge No. 20, Farmington, ME, 259
 Manchester Lodge No. 269, Farmington (later Manchester), VT, 33
 Meridian Orb Lodge No. 10, Painesville, OH, 185, 259
 Miami Lodge No. 46, Cincinnati, OH, 257
 Milnor Lodge No. 303, Victor, NY, 35, 55, 258,
 Morning Dawn Lodge No. 7, Gallipolis, OH, 259
 Morning Dawn Lodge No. 48, Waterford, VT, 258
 Morning Star Lodge No. 83, Mantua, OH, 259
 Mount Moriah Lodge No. 112, Palmyra, NY, 14, 33–35, 39, 58, 60, 259
 Nauvoo Lodge, U.D., Nauvoo, IL, xii, xiv, xvii, 227, 255–71, 276, 284, 289–302, 305–315, 322, 354, 363, 374–377, 392–95, 408–9, 417–22, 427, 431, 434
 New England Lodge No. 48, Worthington, OH, 259
 Nova Cesaraea Harmony No. 2, Cincinnati, OH, 258–59
 Nye Lodge (proposed) (1), Nauvoo, IL, 298, 303–7
 Nye Lodge U.D. (2), Nauvoo, IL, 299, 303, 305, 308n92, 314–17
 Olive Branch Lodge No. 11, Chester, VT, 175n9
 Olive Branch Lodge No. 221, Frankfort, NY, 258
 Ontario Lodge No. 23, Canandaigua, NY, 33–37, 52
 Pickaway Lodge No. 23, Circleville, OH, 268
 Queen of Sheba Lodge, Andwerp, NY, 258
 Reclamation Lodge, Nauvoo IL, 408n66, 439
 Rainbow Lodge No. 26, Middletown, VT, 259
 Rising Sun No. 12, Montrose, IA, 290–93, 297, 301, 303, 306, 314–17, 377
 Rising Sun No. 28, Royalton, VT, 31n66
 Skaneateles Lodge, NY, 253
 Springfield Lodge No. 26, Springfield, IL, 253, 289–90
 St. Clair Lodge No. 24, Belleville, IL, 377

- St. John's Lodge, Boston, MA, 392
 St. John's Lodge No. 21, NY, 259
 St. John's Lodge UD, IL, 301
 Sylvan Lodge No. 229, NY, 302
 Tioga Lodge No. 79, Binghamton, NY, 258
 Tyro Lodge No. 12, Caledonia, MO, 258
 Warsaw Lodge No. 21, Warsaw, IL,
 299–300, 313, 396, 402–3, 410–11
 Washington Lodge No. 220, Blooming
 Grove, NY, 253
 Washington Lodge No. 256, NY, 259
 Western Star Chapter No. 35, LeRoy, NY,
 50
 Widow's Son Lodge No. 60, Charlottesville,
 VA, 258
- Masonic offices
- Grand Chaplain, 153, 262
 Grand Master, xvi, 3, 4, 12–13, 130, 143,
 168, 174, 196, 203, 252–57, 260–63,
 267, 292–303, 307, 310–17, 325, 351,
 365, 386, 395–98, 411–12
 Grand Orator, 132
 Grand Secretary, 4, 296
 Grand Senior Warden, 4
 Junior Deacon, 4, 260, 290, 297, 326
 Junior Warden, 4, 83, 290, 297, 341, 422
 Marshal, 203, 375
 Master of the Lodge/Worshipful Master,
 3–4, 24, 26, 30, 59, 65, 82–83, 98,
 224, 245, 253, 256–57, 260–63, 267,
 290–307, 310–13, 316–17, 341, 351,
 365, 374, 380–81, 392–94, 397–98,
 408, 410, 418–19, 422, 427, 439
 Past Master, x
 Secretary, 4, 41, 260, 264–67, 275, 294,
 297, 309, 395–96, 410
 Senior Deacon, 78n85, 260, 264, 290,
 297, 375, 410
 Senior Warden, 4, 21, 26, 260, 290,
 297–98, 307, 341, 351
 Steward, 4, 260, 297–98, 375, 410
 Treasurer, 4, 260, 297, 392
 Tyler, 4, 260, 297–98, 316, 338–39
- Masonic signs and tokens, 1, 8, 156, 160,
 251, 319, 323, 333, 337, 341–42, 347,
 362–63, 386, 420
- Masonic symbols
- acacia, 5, 413, 415
 all-seeing eye, 39, 310–11, 424, 446, 448
 arch, 25, 107–11, 182–84, 336–37, 417
 ashlars, 287
 bee, 128–29
 beehive, 126n17, 128–29, 446
 cabletow, 8, 66, 70, 79–80, 118, 325
 candlesticks, 424
 clothing, 77, 83, 118, 184, 200, 325–28,
 375, 395
 cornerstone, 8, 180–81, 203
 crown, 128, 137, 195, 331, 334, 348, 382,
 386
 cubic stone, 109–10
 flaming sword, 338, 446
 foundation stone, 92
 fraternal handshake, 446, 448
 globes, 338
 golden delta, 18, 30, 91, 94, 98, 107,
 109–112, 116, 136, 158, 346, 432
 hoodwink, 70–71, 74, 79, 340
 inverted star, 446
 Jacob's ladder, 8, 331, 382
 keystone 107, 109, 111, 182, 184, 312
 level, 2, 4, 37, 145, 245–46, 326, 344
 in Mormon iconography, xviii, 128–29,
 182–84, 310–12, 335–38, 424, 426,
 445–46
 on Mormon temple garments, 251,
 327n27, 420
 numbers, 8
 pillars, xii–xiv, 8, 103, 108–9, 136–37,
 160–61, 182, 184, 336, 338, 346, 426
 plumb, 4, 37, 424, 446
 the Saints John, 109, 138–39
 signs and tokens, 1, 8, 156, 160, 251, 319,
 323, 333, 337, 341–42, 347, 362–63,
 386, 420
 Solomon's Temple, xii, 1–2, 4–6, 8, 11–12,
 92, 106–107, 110, 116, 118, 121, 124,
 157, 174, 179–80, 183–84, 196, 252,
 288, 318–21, 339, 347, 349, 391–93,
 412–13, 437, 441
 square and compasses, 2, 4, 8, 36,
 156, 160, 175, 249, 274, 326–28,
 335–36, 382, 445–46

- sun, moon, and stars, 8, 72–73, 152, 336, 424, 446
- three knocks, 5, 74, 343, 349, 373, 416, 420
- triple tau, 340
- trowel, 3–4
- trowel and sword, 173–74, 197
- winding staircase, 8, 184, 331
- working tools, 2, 4, 8, 36, 224, 382–83
- Master Mahan, 133–34
- Master Mason degree. *See* Masonic degrees.
- Master Mason's Daughter. *See* Masonic degrees.
- McArthur, Duncan, 291
- McBride, Priestly H., 292, 395, 398
- McRae, Alexander, 291n15, 291n19
- Meginnis, Benjamin, 418
- Meguire, William W., 418
- Melchizedek, 12–13, 131, 134, 156–57, 191, 317, 328, 346
- Melchizedek Priesthood, 182n40, 188n62, 190, 328, 333–34, 338, 342, 346, 436, 423n24, 433n61, 436
- meteor, 407
- midrash, xxi, 121–46, 149–60, 166, 170, 320, 441
- Miller, David C., 51, 53, 56, 58
- Miller, George, 242–43, 258–62, 267, 269, 291–94, 297, 333, 371, 426–27, 431–32
- millennial kingdom, 208, 212, 231, 247, 359
- millennialism, 19, 231, 244, 289, 369, 434
- minutes
- Bodley Lodge, 255n36, 256, 313, 395
 - Burlington Lodge, 303
 - Carthage Council meeting, 396–97
 - Columbus Lodge, 256
 - Council of Fifty, 366
 - Covington Conference, 434
 - Illinois Grand Lodge, 296, 305
 - King Follett, 376–77
 - McIntire, 240
 - Nauvoo Lodge, xvii, 262–71, 291–98, 301, 305–8, 363, 392, 417–18
 - Relief Society, 274, 280, 282
 - treasure seeking trial, 41
- Mississippi River, 233, 235, 260, 292, 302, 305, 313, 365, 371, 376, 398, 410, 414–15, 418, 431
- Missouri war, 229–31
- Moffitt, Levi, 313
- Monona County, IA, 429–30
- Montrose, IA, 292–93, 301, 377, 418
- Morgan, Lucinda Pendleton
- letter to anti-Masons, 62–63
 - marriage to George Harris, 63–64
 - marriage to William Morgan, 49
 - patriarchal blessing, 63–64
 - plural marriage to Joseph Smith, 63
- Morgan, William
- abduction, 49, 54–56, 60, 135, 200, 352
 - and George Harris, 49, 54, 62–63
 - background, 49–50
 - connections with Smith family, 52–53, 60
 - disappearance, 56–60, 62, 301
 - Masonic affiliation, 50–51
 - Illustrations of Masonry*, 51–53, 56, 69–70, 74, 76, 78, 82, 255, 323–26, 341, 344–46, 404, 424
 - in Ontario county, 52–53
 - posthumous baptism, 64
 - trial, 59
- Morgan affair, 16, 49–64, 88, 117, 199, 245, 252, 260, 349, 352–55, 396, 398
- Morley, Isaac, 176, 242, 431
- Mormon Grand Lodge (proposed), 314–16, 398, 419–20
- Moroni (prophet and angel), 92–94, 97
- Moroni (captain), 205, 212
- Moses, 12–13, 30, 45, 113, 118, 122, 130–33, 137, 139, 143, 190, 195, 214, 431
- motto, 132, 183, 356, 387–88
- Mount Moriah, 5, 107, 111, 412
- Mountain Meadows, 230, 420
- mummies, 147–48, 162, 169
- Myers, J. S., 299
- mysteries of godliness, 188n63, 324, 328–30, 348
- mysticism, 11, 25–26, 46–47, 247, 340, 383

N

- National Grand Lodge, 300–302, 395, 398.
See also Masonic lodges.
- Native Americans, 29, 40, 93, 174, 246, 302, 435

- Nauvoo, 14, 60, 68, 158, 170, 196, 211, 229, 267–68, 273, 278, 292–93, 312, 320, 335, 350, 355, 358, 363, 372, 392–95, 398–400, 405, 419–23, 428, 431–32, 434, 438–39
 city charter, 237, 354–57
 graveyard, 413
 period, xxi, 154, 160, 242, 320
 police, 226–27, 295, 354, 414
 University of Nauvoo, 238
- Nauvoo Brass Band, 356, 374
- Nauvoo City Council, 219, 227, 260, 394
- Nauvoo Expositor*, 393, 396
- Nauvoo House, 242, 414
- Nauvoo Legion, 226, 308, 353–54, 356–57, 394
- Nauvoo Lodge, xi–xvii, 185, 227, 250, 255–71, 276–77, 284, 289–315, 321–22, 354, 363, 374–377, 392–95, 398, 408–9, 417–22, 427, 431, 434–95. *See also* Masonic lodges.
- Nauvoo Masonic Hall, 335
- Nauvoo Masonry, xii, xv, 182, 251–52, 340, 343, 349, 359, 416, 439
- Nauvoo Municipal Court, 357
- Nauvoo Neighbor*, 419
- Nauvoo Temple, 18, 86, 167–69, 188, 192, 197–98, 231, 242, 250, 318–50, 356, 358, 376, 381, 391, 412, 418, 428, 432–36
- Nehemiah, 173–74, 234
- Nephi, 118–19, 123–24, 130, 137, 174, 200, 205, 212
- New Jerusalem, 142, 234
- new name, 46, 114n105, 224, 333, 337, 342, 349, 430
- Neibaur, Alexander, 67, 77, 384
- Nibley, Hugh, 127, 133–34, 160, 345
- Nichols, Jesse P., 360
- Noah, 8, 12–13, 30n63, 99, 116–18, 125–30, 134–35, 142, 150–51, 156–57, 183, 346
- Norton, Eli, 227
- number mysticism, 8, 141, 182, 340–41
- Nye, Jonathan, 296–305, 309
- O**
- oaths and obligations, xii, xiv, 3–4, 7, 27, 43, 55, 78–80, 117–18, 122, 124, 133, 135, 139, 186, 197–200, 205, 210–18, 224–31, 278, 304–5, 319–22, 341, 349–56, 362–63, 366, 378, 403, 405, 424–26, 430, 438–39
- Oath of Vengeance, 228–30, 354, 446
- Occasional lodge, 263
- Olney, Oliver, 227
- Omnific Word, 45, 51, 94, 169, 341, 358, 393, 409
- Operative Masonry, 1–4, 50, 130, 204, 224, 287, 341, 379
- Order Lodge, 228, 272, 278, 353
- Order of Enoch (Cutler), 436–37
- Order of Rebecca, 335
- ordo ab chao*, 132–33, 387
- P**
- Pack, John, 361
- Pagan Prophet. *See* Lucien Woodworth.
- Page, John E., 426
- Paine, Thomas, 26–27
- Palestine Grove, IL, 438
- Palmyra, NY, 14, 32–39, 46, 57–58, 69, 73, 94, 100, 131
- parables, 220, 288
- Parker, John D., 258, 260n49, 291n15, 297, 298n52
- parliamentary procedure, 365
- Parrish, Warren, 154, 189, 196n108
- Partridge, Edward, 189–91, 241
- Passing of the Veils, 6, 123, 128, 130, 138n60, 153, 169, 180, 184, 187, 194–95, 329–31, 338, 343–50, 368, 373, 386, 420
- Passover, 432
- Patriarch of the church, 53, 63, 241, 260, 421, 429, 432–33, 438
- patriarchal order, 12–13, 118, 130, 137, 150, 154, 168, 248
- Patton, David W., 217
- Peck, Reed, 213, 220
- Pedernales River, TX, 432
- penalties, 93, 104, 156, 160, 197, 199, 214, 227, 319, 323, 327, 333, 341–42, 363, 366–67, 407, 420, 425, 437
- Penny and Sewing Societies, 438
- perfection of human personality, 86, 137, 140, 244, 248, 344, 382–83
- Perry, Asahel, 262, 297, 316

- petition, 17, 21–25, 33–34, 37, 51, 72–75, 252–56, 261–66, 270, 275–76, 289–90, 295, 303, 306–308, 314–15, 326, 344, 381, 392, 410, 422, 427, 440
- Pettigrew, David A., 259, 290
- Pharaoh, 156, 159
- Phelps, Morris, 218n73, 361
- Phelps, William Wines, 44n121, 59, 116, 142, 154, 161–65, 187, 202, 206, 223, 283, 304, 316, 359–60
- Pine Company, 242, 297, 431, 435
- plural marriage, 63, 177, 227, 277–84, 354, 393, 404, 427–28, 433, 437–39, 443
- political missionaries, 364–65
- Polychronicon, 127
- polygamy. *See* plural marriage.
- Pond, David, 176
- Potosi, WI, 432
- potter's wheel, 382
- Pratt, Orson, 63, 67, 70, 75, 81, 93, 108, 116, 292
- Pratt, Parley P., 144, 204, 208, 223, 250, 266, 304, 369, 420
- prayer
- Joseph Smith, 77–79, 81, 98, 188, 195, 203, 404–5
 - Masonic ritual, 64, 66, 74, 77–79, 153, 158, 182, 192, 262, 274, 326, 329–30, 344, 349, 368, 386
 - Mormon ritual, 192, 194, 196, 229n125, 329, 333, 342, 349
- prayer circle, 277
- School of the Prophets, 87, 186–87
- Preparation, IA, 430
- preparation rooms, 312, 337
- Priestess Lodge, 437–39
- priestesses, 334, 416
- priesthood
- ancient, 12, 38, 139, 157, 250
 - in Book of Abraham, 150–51, 154–57, 167–68, 346
 - in Book of Mormon, 118–19
 - Alpheus Cutler, 436
 - Masonic, 12, 85, 188, 250–52, 272, 328, 332, 334
 - Mormon, 85, 88, 130, 139, 145, 170, 182, 188–91, 195, 197, 204, 228, 235, 250, 272, 328, 333–34, 337–38, 342, 346–47, 350, 367–70, 376, 381, 390, 393, 418, 441
- secular, 16
- Charles Thompson, 430–31
 - William Smith, 438
 - and women, 273, 276, 281, 333–34, 437n73, 438
- priesthood adoption, 433
- Priests Lodge, 438
- Prince Hall degree. *See* Masonic degrees.
- principal sojourner, 122
- procession, 203, 374–75, 413, 416, 426
- progression, 1, 86, 167, 202, 347, 380–81, 440
- prophecy, 30, 64, 88, 104, 112, 143, 160, 192, 208–10, 282, 391, 420
- prophet, priest, and king, 130, 160, 195–96, 244, 334, 358, 368, 370, 380, 416, 426, 445
- Protestantism, 47, 171, 247
- proxy
- Masonic, 254, 297n47, 297n48
 - Mormon, 436
- pseudepigrapha, 136, 339, 428–29
- pure language, 162, 164, 168–70
- ## Q
- quarry, 197, 204, 287, 441
- Quincy, IL, 255–56, 263–64, 296, 395, 408–409
- Quincy, Josiah, 318, 336
- Quorum of the Anointed, 228, 246, 282, 332–35, 353, 362–63, 368, 371, 392, 404, 431, 435, 438. *See also* Anointed Quorum.
- Quorum of Twelve, xi–xii, 188, 190–91, 195, 226, 229, 279, 335, 338, 359, 367, 370, 418, 421, 427–28, 431–38
- ## R
- race, xix, 151
- Rameumptom, 118, 186
- Randolph, VT, 21, 23–24, 27
- Red Brick Store, 261, 316, 321, 334, 339, 364

- Relief Society, 273–85, 333, 353, 371, 398, 438
- Reorganized Church (RLDS), 415, 439
- restoration, ix, xvii, xx–xxi, 11, 13, 18, 20, 30, 47, 70, 88, 91, 94, 107, 109, 111, 117, 120–23, 138–39, 143, 149, 156, 164, 169, 173, 176, 180, 184, 210, 233–35, 251–54, 272, 289, 312, 317, 320, 324, 333, 346, 358, 368, 370, 373–74, 387, 391, 398, 404, 425, 431, 440
- resurrection, 129, 140, 156, 239–40, 304, 338, 343, 369, 380–81, 438
- return and report, 447
- Rich, Charles C., 285, 361
- Rich, Sarah, 284–85
- Richards, Franklin D., xi–xxi, 360, 366, 369, 448
- Richards, George F., 443, 446
- Richards, Jenetta, 334
- Richards, Levi, 67, 361
- Richards, Phineas, 361
- Richards, Willard, 158, 218, 221, 267, 274–75, 280, 323, 333–34, 359–60, 363, 377, 386, 405–6, 412, 418
- Richmond, B. W., 398, 413
- Rigdon, Nancy, 210
- Rigdon, Sidney
 baptized, 176
 Danite involvement, 211, 214, 218–22, 355
 early preaching, 176
 excommunication, 435
 Kirtland endowment, 179, 191–92
 Masonry, 262–64, 300, 305, 420–22
 Missouri preaching, 194, 202–9, 219, 226
 ordinances, 189
 purchase of Nauvoo, 233
 Rigdonites/Disciples, 176, 241–42
 scribe, 135n51, 177
 and succession, 420–21
 tarred and feathered, 178
 tomb of, 412
 vision, 141
- Ripley, Alanson, 229
- Rite of Exaltation. *See* Masonic degrees, exaltation.
- Rite of High Egyptian Masonry. *See* Masonic degrees.
- Rite of Illumination. *See* illumination.
- Rite of Memphis. *See* Masonic degrees.
- Rite of Perfection. *See* Masonic degrees.
- ritual
 ancient roots, 12, 137, 158, 180, 184, 288, 345, 385
 elements of Masonic, 3–7, 45, 66–67, 74, 89, 142, 158–59, 184, 187, 233, 322, 325, 340–44, 349, 382, 388, 409, 412
 exposing of, 5, 36, 51, 56, 60, 67–71, 74, 76, 78, 82, 107, 110, 134, 190, 199, 212–13, 223–24, 230, 278, 322–25, 341, 343, 353, 356, 404
 Mormon use of Masonic, xiv, xvi, xx, 68, 85–88, 122, 124, 133–38, 165, 169, 195, 213, 223, 228, 231, 318–20, 324, 334–35, 338–349, 373, 386, 390, 404–5, 425–27, 433
 Mormon temple, xix, 169–70, 185–93, 319–35, 338–50, 443
 making of, xx–xxi, 6, 65, 93, 121, 165–66, 169–71, 187, 196–98, 240, 272, 289, 300, 309, 322, 335, 349–50, 395, 416, 420, 422, 427, 430–36
 symbolism in, 3–8, 65–66, 70, 77, 80, 100, 123, 137, 140, 142, 214, 249, 277, 320, 326, 330–31, 343–49, 373, 382, 416
 treasure seeking, 30, 42
- Robinson, Chauncey 264
- Robinson, Ebenezer, 64, 202, 204, 240, 254, 339, 361
- Robinson, George W., 221, 355, 422
- Robinson, Randall, 92
- Rockwell, Porter, 101–2, 225–26
- Rockwood, Albert, 208, 216, 221, 226n116, 297
- Rocky Mountains, 293, 371
- rod of nature. *See* divining rod.
- Rogers, Hiram, 296
- Rogers, Noah, 259, 297–98
- Rogers, Noble, 259
- Rolfé, Samuel, 259–60, 297–98, 310
- Rosh Hashanah, 105
- rough stone, 127, 287, 383
- Roundy, Shadrach, 297

- Royal Arch Masonry, 5–6, 18, 21, 25, 41, 46, 50–52, 56–57, 85, 91–94, 98, 107–108, 122–24, 128, 130, 135–40, 150, 153, 158, 164, 166, 169, 173, 182–85, 193–99, 213, 233–34, 247, 265, 277, 284, 289, 296, 309, 319–20, 330–36, 340–41, 347–49, 354, 368, 370, 373, 386, 426
- Royal Arch cipher, 46, 116, 158, 164, 197, 265, 278–79, 422
- Royal Arch companions, 6, 11, 53, 107, 169, 331, 386
- rubbish, 107–8, 412–14
- ruffians, 5, 97, 104, 106, 340, 392–93, 405–7, 411, 413
- Ryder, Symonds, 176–77
- S**
- sacrament of bread and wine, 86, 187–88, 195
- Saint John, 18, 30, 34, 138–39, 306, 394
- Salt sermon, 202, 219
- Sanctum Sanctorum*/Holy of Holies, 5, 128, 153, 320, 331, 347, 368, 386, 412–15
- School of the Prophets, 86–87, 169, 184–88, 196–97, 238, 246, 354, 431, 434
- Scottish Rite. *See* Masonic degrees.
- Scovil, Lucius, 176, 259–60, 293–98, 305, 307, 310, 316, 323, 332, 361, 392, 418–19
- scribe
- 1826 court, 38
 - Ebenezer Robinson, 64
 - Emma Smith, 107, 135n51
 - John Whitmer, 135n51
 - of Joseph Smith, 67, 107, 138
 - Martin Harris, 58
 - Masonic Scribe, 347, 368
 - Nauvoo Lodge, 266
 - Oliver Cowdery, 161
 - Sidney Rigdon, 135n51
 - Thomas Bullock, 376–77
 - W. W. Phelps, 161
 - Warren Parrish, 189
 - Willard Richards, 377
 - William Clayton, 368, 377
- second anointing, 188, 334–35, 362, 418, 433–38
- secrecy, 4–5, 45, 66, 77, 82–83, 93, 100, 116, 119, 124, 126, 129, 134–35, 139–40, 158, 169–70, 196, 207, 212, 214, 218, 227–28, 265, 268, 278–80, 304, 322, 331, 354, 366–67, 378, 385–86, 389, 413, 436–37
- secret combinations/secret societies, 59, 93, 117–18, 133–34, 199–200, 207, 210, 213–14, 228, 277, 332, 350, 352, 354, 356, 358, 400, 427, 439, 443, 447
- seer stone, 29, 31, 38–40, 45–46, 92, 102–3, 112–13, 127–28, 431
- philosopher's stone, 38, 109
- Seixas, Joshua, 257, 260
- Senate hearings, 230
- sentinel, 347, 397
- seven liberal arts and sciences, 36, 136n57, 142, 166, 186, 238, 247
- Sharp, Thomas C., 356, 364, 399, 410
- Shem, 99, 130, 134, 150
- Sherwood, Henry G., 259, 270, 293–94, 297–98, 305, 307, 363
- Shurtliff, Luman Andros, 211–15
- sign of distress. *See* Grand Hailing Sign of Distress.
- Sloan, James, 297
- smith, 28, 124–26, 174
- Smith, Agnes Coolbrith, 278–79
- Smith, Alvin, 35–37, 97, 99–101, 103
- Smith, Asael, 21, 23, 27, 47
- Smith, Bathsheba, 323
- Smith, David Hyrum, 414
- Smith, Don Carlos, 190, 240, 278
- Smith, Elias, 361
- Smith, Emma Hale, 97, 103–4, 106, 178, 275, 278–83, 334–35, 372, 398, 408–9, 412–15, 439
- Smith, Frederick M., 415, 439–40
- Smith, George A., 88, 316, 323, 335, 360, 419
- Smith, Hyrum, xv, xvii–xviii, 27–28, 31–32, 36–37, 60, 97, 103, 189, 214–15, 218–19, 229, 259–60, 282–85, 294–301, 307, 310, 317, 334, 357–59, 363, 371, 374, 392–402, 406, 408, 412, 415–16, 419–20, 423, 438
- Smith, Jesse, 27, 47
- Smith, John, 22n35, 33, 217, 222, 259, 293
- Smith, John Henry, xi

- Smith, Joseph, Jr.
 alibi for Boggs murder attempt, 363
 and Alpheus Cutler, 434–35
 attendance at Masonic meetings, xvi–xvii,
 264, 293, 297, 307–8, 392
 birth, 30–31, 68
 burials, 411–15
 Campbellite influence, 178, 241
 and Charles Thompson, 428–30
 and Council of Fifty, 362, 364–71, 391, 426
 death, 295, 300, 398–407, 410, 413–21
 early exposure to Masonry, 16, 33, 36,
 42–46, 49, 60–61, 138, 154, 198, 441
 First Vision, 67–89
 flees to the West, 371–72, 399
 in Carthage, 393–408
 in Hiram, OH, 177–179
 in Kirtland, OH, 86–88, 148, 160–62,
 168–70, 178–198
 in Liberty Jail, 233, 368
 in Missouri, 202–31, 310
 in Nauvoo, IL, 226–28, 233–394
 involvement in Danites, 204, 214, 217–27,
 230–31
 involvement in Nauvoo Lodge, 262, 264,
 269, 308–309
 involvement in Relief Society, 273–81, 285,
 333
 and James Strang, 423–27
 leg operation, 31
 and Lyman Wight, 431, 433
 Masonic restorer, 6, 11, 40–41, 118–22,
 139, 146, 170, 250, 272, 289, 316,
 318, 350, 391–92, 398, 424, 442
 and National Grand Lodge, 301, 315, 318,
 397–98, 418, 442
 networking, xvii, xx
 parallels, xviii–xix, 324, 391–401, 407,
 409, 412–16
 plural marriage, 63, 177, 278–81, 284,
 393, 399, 404, 413
 politics, 238, 316, 353–59, 362–65, 368,
 391, 397–98, 420
 preaches, 375–90
 and Quorum of Anointed, 332–34, 362–63,
 426
 receives Masonic degrees, xv–xvi, 262–64,
 269–71, 300, 420
 ritualist, 86–88, 165–71, 174, 187–97,
 205, 228, 270, 272, 275–76, 280–81,
 287–88, 304, 309, 322–29, 332–35,
 338–40, 343, 346, 349–50, 373, 404,
 416, 418, 439
 social order, 151, 233–48, 273, 302, 350,
 353, 441–42
 statements on Freemasonry, xi, 14, 151,
 250–52, 304–305, 316–18
 temple building, 177–84, 203–4, 247,
 318–19, 322–24, 332, 335–36, 350,
 358, 374, 391, 425
 translation projects, 58, 91–172, 387
 treasure seeking, 29–30, 38, 42, 46,
 99–104, 111–16, 384–86
 and William Morgan, 52
- Smith, Joseph Sr.
 birth and background, 16–17
 drunkenness, 23
 ginseng crop, 23–24
 involvement with Wood group, 19–20
 in jail with Eli Bruce, 59
 and Jonathan Nye, 296
 Masonic membership, 33–35
 Patriarch, 63–64, 241
 petitioned Federal Lodge, 22–23
 relocations, 31–33
 reputation of, 24, 100
 treasure seeking, 26, 29, 38–42, 46–48,
 105, 111
 Universalist, 27, 47
 and William Morgan, 52–53
- Smith, Joseph, III, 439–40
- Smith, Joshua, 259, 297
- Smith, Lucy M., 335
- Smith, Lucy Mack, 23–24, 27, 31–32, 41–43,
 53, 59–60, 98, 101–2, 105, 113, 117
- Smith, Mary Fielding, 334, 412, 414
- Smith, Robert F., 396–97, 401, 403
- Smith, Samuel, 33
- Smith, Samuel H., 264, 270, 412
- Smith, Sophronia, 31
- Smith, William, 112, 257, 264, 355–56,
 426, 433–39
- Smoot, Abraham O., 302, 360

- Smoot, Reed, 230
 Snow, Eliza R., x, 192, 273
 Snow, Erastus, 360
 Snow, Lorenzo, xi, xv
 Snow, William, 361
 Solomon, 5, 110, 170, 178, 196, 252, 288, 316, 393, 403–4, 415, 442
 Solomon's Temple, 2, 4, 110, 157, 179, 183–84, 319, 321, 347, 393, 412–13, 437, 441
 Southwick, Solomon, 58
 Southwick, Wall, 396–97
 Sparks, Quartus S., 360
 "Specimen" letter, 162–64
 speculative Masonry, 2–3, 8, 11–12, 50, 61, 69, 100, 134, 140, 175, 176n10, 321, 341, 385
 spiritual wifery, 279, 437–38
 Spring City, UT, 445–46
 Springfield, IL, 253–54, 409
 Springfield Masonic Hall, 261
 spurious Masonry, 13–14, 62–63, 117–20, 134–35, 150–51, 277, 288–89, 304, 442, 447
 station, 86, 351, 368, 380–81, 438
 Stevens, Henry G., 403, 410
 Stevens, Thaddeus, 352–53
 Stiles, George M., 264
 Stoal/Stowell, Josiah, 40–42, 52, 101
 Stout, Allen, 243, 295, 308
 Stout, Hosea, 226, 240, 361
 Stowell, Arad, 41
 Stowell, Simpson, 41
 Strang, James J., 422–28, 438
 swarming, 128–29
 Swartzell, William, 214–15, 225
 sword of Laban, 124, 200
- T**
- Taylor, John, xi, 215, 275, 283, 292, 316, 327, 339, 360, 363, 383, 402, 405
 temple
 Beaver Island, 425
 Enoch's, 110–11, 183, 252
 Far West, 203, 205, 435
 Hiram, OH, 174, 177, 179
 Independence, MO, 181
 Kirtland, 86–88, 168–70, 179–84, 189–98, 242, 319, 325, 428, 431–35
 Masonic, 247, 285, 312, 320–21, 331, 348, 358,
 Nauvoo, xviii, 168–70, 192, 197–98, 235, 242, 280, 289, 297, 310, 318–23, 335–39, 342, 356, 358, 373–76, 381, 391, 412, 418, 428, 435–36, 445, 450
 Nephite, 118, 174
 Salt Lake City, xi, 448
 Solomon's. *See* Solomon's Temple.
 St. George, 252, 446
 Zodiac, 432–34
 tetragrammaton, 45, 99, 116
 Texas, 354, 365, 431–35, 450
 theodemocracy, 359
 theocratic ethics, 200n5, 230
 Thompson, Charles, 428–431
 Thompson, Moses, 24
 three distinct knocks. *See* Masonic symbols.
 title of liberty, 205, 211–12
 tomb of Joseph, 412, 415
 tongues, 88, 191, 283
 Tower of Babel, 118, 126
 Town, Salem, 12, 146, 153, 170, 378
 tracing board/trestleboard, 8, 126–27, 159, 173, 182, 184, 335, 391
translatio imperi, 235, 368–69
 treasure seeking, 29–31, 37–42, 46–48, 52, 91–110, 317–18, 385
 Trinity, 109, 341
 True Kindred. *See* Masonic degrees.
 Tubal Cain, 28n50, 125, 134n47, 174
 Tullidge, Edward, x, 180, 251
 Twelve Apostles. *See* Quorum of Twelve.
 tyler, 4, 316, 338–39
 Tyrian Masons, 62, 288
- U**
- United Firm, 179
 United Order, 221–22, 241, 436
 upper room, xv, 86, 175 185, 316, 321, 364, 418
 Upper Room Work (Cutler), 436

- Urim and Thummim, 36, 46, 111–17, 139, 317
 utopianism, 1, 15, 231–33, 241–48, 272, 431
- V**
- Valley of Loami, WI, 432
 Vanansdall, William, 259, 290
 Van Buren, Martin, 358
 Van Cott, John, 366
 Van Dusen, Increase, 323
 Vermont, Republic of, 16–17, 20
 veil, 6, 30, 123, 128, 130, 153, 160, 169, 180, 184, 187, 194–95, 329–31, 338, 343–50, 368, 373, 386, 420, 441
 vengeance, 199–200, 208–9, 228–30, 354
Views on Government, 397
 vigilantes, 208, 223, 231, 393, 399–400
 virtue, 2, 11, 42, 140, 145, 243, 246, 278–84, 287, 328, 351, 382, 388–90
virtus junxit mors non separabit, 388, 390
 visiting brethren, 256, 270, 292, 309, 375
Voice of Innocence, 283
 Voorhease, William, 409
 Voree plates, 424–25
 Voree, WI, 423–26
- W**
- wages, 4–5, 41, 348, 391
 Waite, Arthur Edward, 79, 326
 Walker, Cyrus H., 357
 Waller, Calvin, 33
 Waller, John Curtis, 21–22, 33
 Walters, Luman, 105
 Warren, W. B., 296
 Warsaw, IL, 185, 299–300, 307, 356, 399, 401
 Warsaw Cadets, 401, 410
 Warsaw Independent Battalion, 401, 410
 Warsaw Rifle Company, 401, 410
Warsaw Signal, 323, 356, 399, 410
 washing and anointing, 187–91, 326, 339–40, 434
 washing of feet, 86–88, 187–88, 197, 428
 Washington, George, 49, 181, 351
 Wasson, Lorenzo D., 414
 Watt, George D., 245, 361
 weathervane, xviii, 336, 445
 Webb, Thomas Smith, 51, 136, 190, 255, 309
 Weed, Thurlow, 57, 352
 Weeks, William, 310–11, 336
 Wentworth, John, 67
 West, 5, 87, 94, 182, 312, 336–37, 351, 353, 358, 369, 392, 412–14
 Weston, William A., 259, 314
 Whig, 236, 357, 400
 White, David Nye, 67
 Whiting, F. Lewis, 437
 Whitmer, David, 177–79, 189, 202, 214
 Whitmer, John, 181, 189, 200, 202
 Whitney, Clark L., 314
 Whitney, Elizabeth Ann, 275, 282
 Whitney, John, 52–53, 55, 355
 Whitney, Newel K., 52, 86, 176–79, 185, 189, 241–42, 255, 259–60, 297, 321, 323, 370
 Whitney, Orson F., 241
 Wicca, 158, 345
 Wight, Lyman, 176, 217, 222, 224, 242, 371, 431–35, 438
 Wight, Orange Lysander, 434
 Williams, Christopher, 259, 290
 Williams, Eli H., 403
 Williams, Frederick G., 85, 176, 179, 189
 Williams, Levi, 401, 406–7, 410
 Williams, Samuel, 400
 Williams, Wesley, 403
 Wills, John, 410
 Winchester, Benjamin, 360
 Wingate, Edward B., 422
 Winter Quarters, NE, 194, 435
 Wisconsin pineries, 242, 297, 431, 435
 women, 121, 166, 195, 230, 273–85, 322, 333–37, 351, 404, 428, 430, 436–39
 Wood, Joseph, 438
 Wood Scrape, 17–20
 Wood, Nathaniel, 17–20, 38
 Wood, Wilford, 267
 Woodruff, Wilford, 192–95, 201, 229, 289, 292, 310, 323, 360, 366, 377–80, 397
 Woodworth, Lucien, 366–67, 371
 working tools, 2, 4, 8, 36–37, 224, 382–83
 Worrell, Frank, 401

Y

- Yelrome, 242
 York Rite. *See* Masonic degrees.
 Young, Alphonso, 361
 Young, Ann Eliza Webb, 350
 Young, Brigham, 105, 129, 181, 194–98,
 203, 230, 245, 252–55, 278–79, 292, 295,
 316, 322–23, 328, 333–35, 342, 347,
 350, 356, 360, 367, 372, 378, 393, 399,
 414–21, 427–28, 431, 435, 438, 442–43
 Young, Brigham, Jr., xi–xii
 Young, Joseph, 366
 Young, Mary Ann Angell, 334
 Young, Phineas, 360
 Young, Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs.
See Zina Diantha Huntington.

Z

- Zarahemla, IA, 292–93, 302
 Zedekiah, 122
 Zion, 63–64, 137, 142, 167, 174–77,
 181, 189–90, 201, 209, 214, 217, 229,
 234–35, 241, 350, 369, 429
 Zion's Camp, 206, 231, 431
 Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution
 (ZCMI), 446
Zion's Harbinger and Baneemy's Organ,
 428–29, 431
 Zodiac, TX, 431–34
 Zohar, 384
 Zomar, 167, 181
 Zoram, 124, 186