

# The Murder of the Prophet and Transition of Authority

The Circumstances Leading to the Prophet's Death.



## The Murder at Carthage Jail

Carthage Greys left to guard the jail.

Before sundown: a mob stormed the jail

Frank Worrell, the officer in charge:

“I can prophesy better than old Joe, for neither he nor his brother, nor anyone who will remain with them will see the sun set today.

Joseph I. Benlley, “Road to Martyrdom: Joseph Smith’s Last Legal Cases” BYU Studies (Journal 55:2)

## The Murder at Carthage Jail



# The Murder at Carthage Jail

June 27, 1844: Just after 5:00 p.m.

Upper room of the Carthage Jail

**Hyrum Smith:** shot through the door, the ball striking him on the left side of his nose

**Joseph Smith:** Four balls struck him from inside and outside the Jail. Jumped or fell through window, landing on his left side. He struggled to sit up, and died within seconds. Perhaps shot and bayoneted while on leaning against the well.

**John Taylor:** Seriously wounded, but survived.

**Willard Richards** Escaped serious harm.

## The Murder at Carthage Jail



### The Principal Non-Mormon Agitators

- Mark Aldrich: Warsaw businessman who lost money
- Levi Williams: A religious minister
- Jacob Davis and William Grover: Lawyers and politicians fear of Mormon power
- Thomas Sharp: Publisher of the *Warsaw Signal*

### Principal Church Member Dissenters

- William Law: Former Counselor in First Presidency
- Wilson Law: Brother of William and former member of Nauvoo City Council and Brigadier General in Nauvoo Legion
- Robert and Charles Foster: Businessmen and land speculators
- Francis and Chauncey Higbee: Lawyers and sons of Joseph's close friend, Judge Elias Higbee. Chauncey was excommunicated for "unchaste and unvirtuous conduct towards certain females."

### Circumstances Leading to Prophets Murder: Complex and Long in Developing

1. Strong political division in Hancock County and the State
2. The Nauvoo Charter
3. Use of the Nauvoo Municipal Court
4. Substantial in migration of new comers—foreign converts
5. New doctrine: Plurality of Gods and Secret Marriages.
6. Freedom of the Press



Thomas Sharp in *Warsaw Signal*: June 1841

“Are you prepared to see one man control your affairs? Are you prepared to see the important offices of sheriff and County Commissioner selected by an unparalleled knave, and thus have power to select jurymen who are to sit and try your rights of life, liberty and property? If it comes to this, that Joseph Smith is in control of our county, are we not in effect, the subjects of a despot?”

Quoted by Marvin Hill, “Carthage Conspiracy Reconsidered: A Second Look at the Murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. 97.no, 2, Summer 2004.

## Factors of agitation and dissenters

Joseph delivers King Follet address on April 7, 1844 - is a man like one of yourselves

Harold Bloom, Yale, one of America's most respected literary critics: "One of the truly remarkable sermons ever preached in America."

Joseph: "You never knew my heart. No man knows my hist[ory] . . . When I am called at the trump & weighed in the balance you will know me then."

"God that sits enthroned is a man like one of yourselves."

Wilford Woodruff notes: "It is the first principle to know that we may converse with him and that he once was a man like us."

Quoted from Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling* (Alfred A. Knoff, 2005).

Is your heart broken by  
*"Some maiden fair,  
 Of bright blue eyes and auburn hair"*  
 Then thank your stars that you have  
 escaped with your neck, and make  
 the welkin ring with a hearty laugh.  
 (A lightning bolt of wit strikes the

One Issue, 1000 copies, published June 7, 1844.  
Seven Essays in support of “Reformed Church”

In the face of Joseph’s moral crimes, “shall we lie supinely and suffer ourselves to be metamorphosed into beasts by the Syren tongue.”

The paper aimed “to explode the vicious principles of Joseph Smith and those who practice the same abominations and whoredoms” — meaning primarily polygamy.

Warsaw Signal, June 12, 1844

“We have only to state that this [destruction of the Expositor] is sufficient! War and extermination is inevitable! CITIZENS ARISE. ONE and ALL!!! Can you stand by, and suffer such INFERNAL DEVILS! To ROB men of their property rights, without avenging them? We have no time to comment: every man will make his own. LET IT BE MADE WITH POWDER and BALL!!!”

Joseph Smith (Spring 1844)

I shall not be sacrificed until my time comes. Then I shall be offered freely. . . I defy all the world, and I prophecy they never will over throw me till I get ready. I cannot lie down until my work is finished

\* \* \*

God will always protect me until my mission is fulfilled.

## The Keys

“Brethren, the Lord bids me hasten the work in which we are engaged. . . . Some important scene is near to take place. It may be that my enemies will kill me, and in case they should, and the keys and power which rest on me I can only succeed in placing them upon your heads, then let me fall a victim to murderous hands if God will, knowing that my work is done, and the foundation laid on which the kingdom of God is to be reared.”

“[The Twelve could not be killed at once] and should any of you be killed, you can lay your hands upon another and fill up your quorum. Thus can this power and these keys be perpetuated in the Earth.”

\* \* \*

“for the Lord is going to let me rest a while . . . I feel that I am free. I thank my God for this deliverance.”



Joseph Smith (August 1842)

I have the whole plan of the kingdom before me, and no other person has.

[Two days later explaining his feelings] that in as much as the Lord Almighty has preserved me until today, [He] will continue to preserve me by the united faith and prayers of the Saints, until I have fully accomplished the dispensation of the fullness of the Priesthood . . . that all the powers of Earth and Hell can never prevail against it.

As quoted by Ronald K. Esplin, “*Joseph Smith’s Mission and Timetable: ‘God Will Protect Me until My Work Is Done,’*” *The Prophet Joseph : Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith* (Ed. L. Porter and S. Black: Deseret Book, 1988), pp 306-307.



## After Joseph's death & Gathering of the 12 Apostles

### Time Line

<u>Date</u>	<u>Significant Event</u>
8 July 1844	Parley P. Pratt was the first of the Twelve to arrive in Nauvoo
16 July 1844	Brigham Young received confirmation of the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum, but knew the keys of the kingdom were still on the earth
3 Aug. 1844	Sidney Rigdon arrived in Nauvoo from Pittsburgh claiming to be “guardian” of the Church
6 Aug. 1844	Most of the remaining members of the Twelve arrived in Nauvoo from the East
8 Aug. 1844	Brigham Young was transfigured before the people, and the Twelve were sustained as the presiding quorum in the Church

### Willard Richards to Brigham Young (Three days after murder)

- “The saints have borne this trial with great fortitude and forbearance. They must keep cool at present. We have pledged our faith not to prosecute the murderers at present, but leave it to Governor Ford; ... vengeance is in the heavens.”
- The City Council: “Be peaceable, quiet citizens, doing the works of righteousness, and as soon as the Twelve and other authorities can assemble, or a majority of them, the onward course to the great gathering of Israel, and the final consummation of the dispensation of the fulness of times will be pointed out.”
- Elder John Taylor writing to Saints in Great Britain: “The action of the saints has been of the most pacific kind, remembering that God has said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay.’ ”

## Gathering of the 12 Apostles

Two days before Joseph's death Parley P. Pratt started home from New York State.

Parley wrote that as he talked with his brother William:  
“a strange and solemn awe came over me, as if the powers of hell were let loose. I was so overwhelmed with sorrow I could hardly speak. ... ‘Let us observe an entire and solemn silence, for this is a dark day, and the hour of triumph for the powers of darkness. O, how sensible I am of the spirit of murder which seems to pervade the whole land.’”

### Others of the Twelve had similar experiences

George A. Smith learned of the Martyrdom from a newspaper account in Michigan on 13 July. At first he thought it a hoax, but when the report was confirmed, he hastened home with his three missionary companions. Overcome by worry and fatigue, he broke out in hives over his entire body. He could not even eat, but he traveled on, arriving in Nauvoo on 27 July.

Chapter Twenty-Three: The Twelve to Bear Off the Kingdom,” *Church History in the Fulness of Times Student Manual* (2003), 286-96.

## Gathering of the 12 Apostles

Elder Pratt walked 105 miles across the plains of Illinois,.

He was hardly able to eat or sleep, wondering how he should “meet the entire community bowed down with grief and unutterable sorrow.”

He prayed for assistance. “On a sudden the Spirit of God came upon me, and filled my heart with joy and gladness indescribable; and while the spirit of revelation glowed in my bosom with as visible a warmth and gladness as if it were fire. The Spirit said unto me: ... ‘Go and say unto my people in Nauvoo, that they shall continue to pursue their daily duties and take care of themselves, and make no movement in Church government to reorganize or alter anything until the return of the remainder of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. But exhort them that they continue to build the House of the Lord which I have commanded them to build in Nauvoo.’”

## Gathering of the 12 Apostles

Monday, 5 August, Sidney Rigdon in meeting with the Apostles who were in Nauvoo:

“Gentlemen, you’re used up; gentlemen, you are all divided; the anti-Mormons have got you; the brethren are voting every way ... everything is in confusion, you can do nothing, you lack a great leader, you want a head, and unless you unite upon that head you are blown to the four winds, the anti-Mormons will carry the election—a guardian must be appointed.”

Elder George A. Smith responded:

“Brethren, Elder Rigdon is entirely mistaken, there is no division; the brethren are united; the election will be unanimous, and the friends of law and order will be elected by a thousand majority. There is no occasion to be alarmed. President Rigdon is inspiring fears there are no grounds for.”

## The Meeting Aug 7



August 7: Sidney Rigdon was invited to make a statement:

“The object of my mission is to visit the saints and offer myself to them as a guardian. I had a vision at Pittsburgh, June 27<sup>th</sup>. This was presented to my mind not as an open vision, but rather a continuation of the vision mentioned in the *Book of Doctrine and Covenants* . . . no one could take the place of Joseph as the head of the Church and that he, as the designated spokesman for the Prophet, should assume the role of guardian of the Church.



Aug 7 Brigham Young spoke:

“I do not care who leads the church ... but one thing I must know, and that is what God says about it. I have the keys and the means of obtaining the mind of God on the subject. ...“Joseph conferred upon our heads all the keys and powers belonging to the Apostleship which he himself held before he was taken away, and no man or set of men can get between Joseph and the Twelve in this world or in the world to come.

“How often has Joseph said to the Twelve, ‘I have laid the foundation and you must build thereon, for upon your shoulders the kingdom rests.’”

Brigham Young asked:

“Do you want Brother Rigdon to stand forward as your leader, your guide, your spokesman. President Rigdon wants me to bring up the other question first, and that is, Does the church want, and is it their only desire to sustain the Twelve as the First Presidency of this people?”

The vote was then taken, and all hands went up.

Brigham then asked, “If there are any of the contrary mind, every man and every woman who does not want the Twelve to preside, lift up your hands in like manner.”

No hands went up.

Benjamin F. Johnson (age 26)

“Brigham Young spoke I jumped upon my feet, for in every possible degree it was Joseph’s voice, and his person, in look, attitude, dress and appearance was Joseph himself, personified; and I knew in a moment the spirit and mantle of Joseph was upon him.”

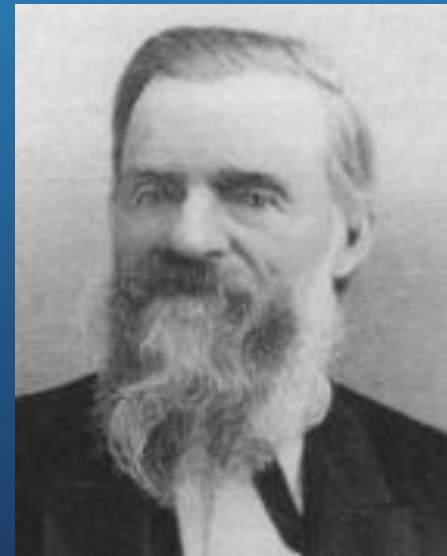
Zina Huntington, (age 21)

“President Young was speaking. It was the voice of Joseph Smith—not that of Brigham Young. His very person was changed. ... I closed my eyes. I could have exclaimed, I know that is Joseph Smith’s voice! Yet I knew he had gone. But the same spirit was with the people.”

### Anson Call

“Before he had spoken many sentences, I discovered that it was the voice of Joseph, and had I have been where my eyes could not have beheld him, I should have believed that Joseph had been speaking. It was Joseph’s voice and Joseph’s gestures through the entire discourse. I became perfectly satisfied that it was the voice for me to follow in connection with the majority of the brethren.”

Anson Call’s Journal



“Currently known records establish that 129 people gave written testimonies or say that a transformation or other spiritual manifestation occurred. Of these, sixty-eight people created first hand documents: personal journals, personal narratives told to a scribe, or first-person testimonies published in Church magazine articles.

Testimonies from sixty-one people are secondhand: accounts gleaned from biographies written by family members or from historical compilations.”

Lynne Watkins Jorgensen, “The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph Passes to Brother Brigham: One Hundred Twenty-nine Testimonies of a Collective Spiritual Witness,” Previously in *BYU Studies* 36:4 (1996)