

Foundations of Faith at Adam-ondi-Ahman

Elder Ken Wilcock – 11 October 2020

Grateful to be here with you, Grateful to be here as a Senior Missionary at this Sacred Location for the past 19 months and to be associated with the other Missionaries who have consecrated 20 months of their lives to serve the Lord here. Grateful for the acquaintances that we have made with so many of you gathered here this beautiful Sunday Afternoon.

Previous to our call here, we met with a business acquaintance of mine who had served here as Director in 2016. He suggested that we should purchase the book “Sacred Places in Missouri” by Lamar Berrett. As a novice student of history, I had already bought one, but had no idea at the time that this book would launch me on to the path of adventure that it did.

Soon after my wife and I arrived here in March of last year, I went out exploring and started finding these Orange 1” steel pipe post in various locations. Looking into the book, “Sacred Places in Missouri” it mentions these markers placed at certain locations and by that I was able to learn what these markers identified. The book mentioned that 15 of these posts had been placed and it soon became a quest of mine to find all 15.

Brigham Young University sent Archeological Research Crews out here during the summers between 1979 and 1984 to excavate and locate as many as the foundations of buildings and structures that had been established by the Saints who lived in in 1838 as they could. Along with the physical research much historical research was completed so as to link people with places as much as possible. The book, “Sacred Places in Missouri” is the repository of most of that research and has been a most valuable guide to me in my own quest for knowledge and understanding on what occurred here.

Adam and his Family

We learn from the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, which was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1830, about Adam being driven out of the Garden of Eden and after many days he built an altar and offered sacrifice. What was not known was where the altar was and where Adam and Eve had gone after having been driven out of Eden. In March of 1832, Section 78 of the Doctrine and Covenants was revealed identifying the

location of Adam's dwelling to be in the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman. In April of 1835, Section 107 described the great council meeting that Adam held with his righteous posterity at Adam-ondi-Ahman. Evidently this location must have been the topic of conversation of some of the early Saints as William W. Phelps wrote the song, Hymn # 49, Adam-ondi-Ahman, and it was published in Emma's hymnal in 1835. It was sung as one of the hymns during the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in March of 1836.

Less than 2 years later as the prophet had left Kirtland and established a home in Far West, Missouri, he sent an expedition of brethren in December of 1837 to find additional areas where they could establish communities of Saints, led by Oliver Cowdery. One of the members of that expedition was Lyman Wight who was so impressed with this valley, that he purchased a 40-acre farm with an existing cabin at the western end of the valley. In February of 1838, he moved his family from Far West to here along with 2 other families. They began farming and established a ferry crossing on the Grand River 3 miles North east of us here.

In March of 1838, the Prophet brought a Survey Crew out of Far West to determine if this was a good place to establish a community and if so to survey out a townsite. It was while they were here, on March 17th, 1838, that it was revealed to the Prophet, that this was the place they had talked about, sang about, and dreamed of, Adam-ondi-Ahman. A place where Adam and Eve had lived for hundreds of years and raised a righteous posterity. A place where Adam had held a significant council meeting and the Savior had appeared to them. They further identified the remains of a Nepitish altar which had been established in the location where Adam had built his alter on Tower Hill, to the West of us.

From the revelation received here, at that time, known as Section 116, we also learn that this is the location where Adam will come once again to sit with his righteous posterity as spoken by Daniel the prophet. A great council meeting where again the Savior will appear prior to His great and terrible second coming. I think a large percentage of those early Saints in 1838 thought that they could establish homes here and be here when that great council meeting occurred. After having been driven out of their attempts to establish Zion in Jackson County, much as Adam and Eve had

been driven out of Eden, they had now found a place where they could live and meet with the Savior at that next great council meeting.

On June 28, 1838, the Prophet Joseph Smith organized the Adam-ondi-Ahman Stake, calling his Uncle John Smith, to be the Stake President with Reynolds Cahoon and Lyman Wight to be his counselors. From that time on the community began to grow at a rapid pace, with several families moving into the community almost every day for the next couple of months.

By the month of August, over 200 cabins had been started and many families were living in their wagons waiting to get started on their new homes. The book, "Sacred Places in Missouri", on page 417, list the names of 83 different heads of families that were known to have tried to established homes at Adam-ondi-Ahman with an estimated population of 600 in the town site, and almost 1,000 more individuals building homes in the surrounding area.

The majority of the church leadership were New Englanders who were opposed to slavery, while the majority of the Missourian's were Southerners, and some were slave holders. The sudden expansion of the Saints in Daviess County was alarming to some of the Missourian's who gathered in the County seat of Gallatin, on election day in August of 1838 and determined to prevent the members of the Church from voting. A knockdown drag out fight occurred where none were killed but several were knocked unconcise and many more were injured.

Vigilante groups were formed and began to prey on isolated cabin sites of members driving them out of their homes which they then plundered and often burned to the ground. By the middle of November of 1838 most of the Saints had left their homes and gathered to Farr West assuming they could achieve safety in numbers. Apparently, Zion was not to be redeemed in that season.

Foundations

Most of the 200 cabin sites were established in haste simply by laying logs on soil. In the ensuing 140 years from when the cabins were built until BYU archaeologist began to search them out. The cabins built, logs on soil would have completely deteriorated with no visible evidence of their existence. Some few of the individuals took the time to establish stone

foundations for their homes, which enabled the BYU team to locate them, some of which they were able to identify purpose of or ownership of who built them. It is those foundations of which I wish to focus on now.

Lyman Wight

On the Trail from the Tower Hill Overlook to Preachers Rock, off to the right of the trail just uphill from Preachers Rock, an Orange post with a number 4 marks the location of Lyman Wights second cabin. As was mentioned, Lyman Wight was the first of the Saints to settle here and five places here are marked with his name ascribed to them. This location is easily reached from the Tower Hill parking lot. Once the Prophet had identified the sacred significance of this Valley, Lyman decided to build a better, more substantial home, closer to Tower Hill. This was the site he chose, and the home he constructed there became somewhat of a headquarters for the Church here from the middle of August through the departure of the Saints in November. The building stood for more that a century being dismantled in the 1950's.

So, who was Lyman Wight? Lyman was born in upstate New York in 1796 and at the age of 16, enlisted in the United States military during the War of 1812, fighting in the battles of Sackets Harbor, New York. In 1826 he moved his family to Ohio and by 1829 had joined the Campbellites in the Kirkland area. In November of 1830 he was baptized a member of the Church of Christ by Oliver Cowdery. In June of 1831, Lyman Wight was ordained as the first High Priest in this dispensation by the Prophet Joseph Smith. Afterwards he was sent on a Mission to Missouri where he settled in Jackson County until driven out by the Missourians to Clay County. He then traveled back to Kirtland with Parley P. Pratt to inform the Prophet of the difficulties they had encountered. He was appointed as the commanding Officer in Zion's Camp second only to the Prophet, and recruited volunteers in Pennsylvania, New York, Indiana Illinois, and Michigan. He was instrumental in acquiring land and employment for the Saints in Clay County as they built the Michael Arthur home in Liberty. His log cabin on the Michael Arthur farm was the temporary headquarters for the Church in Missouri at that time and he was appointed to the Missouri High Council.

Later he moved to Far West, and from there he moved his family to this location, in Daviess County, which was identified as Adam-ondi-Ahman. Here he served as a counselor to the Stake President, John Smith, who he had ordained as a High Priest in June of 1833. Lyman was a natural born leader and men were eager to follow him and as such he was able to organize them in accomplishing much good. Other locations which bear his name here are the Ferry Crossing on the Grand River, the barn he built, the spring he and the Prophet helped to develop, and of course his first cabin site West of the Pecan Grove. Lyman was a bit over aggressive in the offensive actions the Saints engaged in around the Adam-ondi-Ahman area which resulted in his incarceration with the Prophet in Liberty Jail.

After they were released from imprisonment in Missouri, Lyman again served as a counselor to President John Smith in the Zarehemla Stake across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo. On April 8, 1841, he was ordained an apostle. He was instrumental in bringing many of the disaffected Saints in New York and the Kirtland area, back into the Church and helped to relocate them to Nauvoo. In 1844 he was sent to Wisconsin to lead the brethren working in the pineries there to provide lumber for the building of the Temple and homes in Nauvoo. He was there when the Prophet was martyred, and afterwards claimed that the Prophet had called him to lead a mission to Texas to preach the gospel to the Native Americans there. He did so against the counsel of the rest of the Quorum of the 12 and organized a branch of the Church there. He was later excommunicated when he refused to move to Utah. Although considered an apostate to the Church, he maintained throughout his life his testimony and dedication to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the Revelations of the Prophet. The foundations he established here at Adam-ondi-Ahman are a witness to that dedication.

President John Smith

John Smith was born the 16th of July in 1781, in Derryfield, New Hampshire. He was 10 years younger than his older brother Joseph Smith Senior. Because of his relationship to the Prophet, he was known by many as Uncle John. He was baptized and confirmed and ordained an Elder by his brother Joseph on January 8th, 1832. He was quite sick and had been for some time, when he was baptized, but after they had broken the ice and

baptized him in the cold water, he was instantly healed. On June 3rd, 1833, he was ordained a High Priest by Lyman Wight in Kirtland Ohio. In 1838 he moved to Far West and on June 28, of that year he was ordained to be the Stake President of the Adam-ondi-Ahman Stake, where he and his son George A Smith built a log cabin just East of the town Center. We were able to locate some of the foundation stones of his home here. After the Missourians drove them across the Mississippi River in 1839 he relocated to Green Plains, Illinois and in June he moved to Nauvoo. In October he was ordained to be the Stake President of the Zarahemla Stake in Iowa, across the river from Nauvoo. He again chose Lyman Wight to be one of his counselors.

The Prophet ordained him to be the Patriarch to the Church in January of 1844, at which time he moved back to Nauvoo. In 1847 he traveled to the Salt Lake Valley and was called as the first Stake president of the Salt Lake City Stake. He was left in charge of all the Saints that spent that first winter there while the Apostles went back to Winter Quarters, Nebraska. In 1839 he was again ordained to be the presiding Patriarch to the Church, where he served until his death in May of 1854. From the time of his conversion by his brother Joseph Smith Senior, he remained true to the faith.

Benjamin Franklin Johnson

Benjamin Franklin Johnson was born July 28, 1818 in Chautauqua, New York. He was the tenth child of Ezekiel and Julia Hills Johnson and younger brother to Joel Hills Johnson, (High on a Mountain Top). He was baptized and confirmed a member of the Church in the spring of 1835 in Kirtland, Ohio. Shortly after his baptism he was ordained an elder by

In 1838, at the age of 20, he moved to Adam-ondi-Ahman and was given the altar site on Tower Hill as his building lot. As he was not married at the time, he devoted most of his energy to helping others build homes for their families and as such he was provided with food and shelter so he never attempted to build on the rockpile that was referred to as the Nephitish Altar. In the fall of 1838, he was arrested and held in custody for 8 days under continuous guard. During that time, a man threatened to shoot him unless he gave up Mormonism. He refused and so the man aimed and pulled the trigger, and the gun did not fire. The man reloaded and tried 2 more times and the gun would not fire. Finally, in frustration, he cleaned

and reloaded again and added extra powder so that when he pulled the trigger, the gun exploded in his face killing him. Benjamin was unharmed.

In Nauvoo he served as a personal secretary to the Prophet Joseph Smith and on the 16th of May, 1843, he and his wife Melissa Johnson, were the very first couple to receive the sealing ordinance of Eternal Marriage by the Prophet in this dispensation.

He went to the Salt Lake Valley in 1848 where he served in the Utah Territorial Legislature from 1855 to 1867. In 1882 he moved to Arizona and died there in 1905, True to the Faith.

William Huntington

William Huntington was born March 28, 1784, in Grantham, New Hampshire. In 1804 he moved with his parents to Watertown, Jefferson County, New York, being among the first settlers of that county. In 1805 he returned to New Hampshire and married Zina Baker, Daughter of Doctor Oliver Baker, on September 26, 1805.

War of 1812 Veteran

He participated in the war of 1812, playing the fife, and engaged in at least one battle, the Battle of Sacketts Harbor. After the war he suffered financial reverses. Through the hard work and indomitable courage of both he and his wife, finances were recouped and for a season the going was smooth. In 1816 he joined the Presbyterian Church.

Nephite Visitor

In the fall of 1830, an unknown traveler came to their house and asked for food and lodging. He was told that their food was plain, and the lodging would have to be in the kitchen; but if he could put up with it, he was welcome. After a hearty meal, William told their guest that they usually sang songs and had a little program each night. If he was not too tired, they would like to have him join in. He said he would like that. The songs they sang were all hymns, and the music religious. At the close, William announced that they always read a chapter in the Bible before retiring and invited the stranger to join in. The stranger explained the difficult passages with such clarity and meaning that Zina was moved to say, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could have the gospel taught to us in the plain and simple way that Christ taught it in its entirety." The man promised them if they continued to live as they were and pray for this light and knowledge, it would not be long before it would be given them. The next morning, they

awoke to a slight skiff of snow. The stranger left after having his breakfast and thanking his host warmly. William sent one of the older boys to tell him that if he came that way again to be sure to stop by. But the boy could see no sign of him, not even tracks in the snow.

A few years later, he was telling the story of the stranger in the presence of the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) and was told by the Prophet, 'My son, you have entertained one of the Three Nephites'.

Conversion to Mormonism

In the winter of 1832-33 Hyrum Smith brought the gospel to them. William read the Book of Mormon and immediately believed it. He preached to his neighbors and friends and held meetings in his home. In 1835 he, his wife, and two children were baptized by Elder Dutcher. His home became the home of the traveling elders and all Saints.

Move to Kirtland

May 18, 1836, William sent two of his children, Dimick and Presinda and their families to Kirtland, Ohio, waiting only to sell out his farm etc. On October 1, 1836 he moved to Kirtland with quite a number of the Saints under the direction of Apostles Orson Pratt and Luke S. Johnson. Being ordained an elder previous to leaving, William arrived in Kirtland on October 11. He bought a farm from Jacob Bump for \$3,000. He was defrauded of this and was forced to day labor. This started a period of misfortune and persecution. His children often went to bed hungry. For a period of two weeks his family lived on greens.

His house was the hiding place of father Smith, Hyrum, Samuel, and Don Carlos Smith while they attempted to escape persecutions in Kirtland. The Egyptian mummies were also hidden in his home. In Kirtland he received his washings and anointings in the temple and was a high priest and high counselor until he left Kirtland. He lost \$500 in the Kirtland Bank when he left. He was telling the story of the stranger in the presence of the Prophet and was told by the Prophet, 'My son, you have entertained one of the Three Nephites'.

Move to Missouri

On May 21, 1838, he started for Far West, Missouri. He arrived two months later and moved (by counsel) to Adam-Ondi-Ahman, where he was chosen commissary agent for the brethren of the Armed Defense. He was also foreman of the committee to confer with the mob after the surrender of the Church in Far West. He was on the committee to help the poor and get

them out of the state of Missouri. He did this with much personal sacrifice and exertion, his own family being the last to leave.

Harrison Burgess

Harrison Burgess was born September 3, 1814, in Putnam, New York. He was the eldest son of William and Violaty Burgess. He was not raised in a religious home, although he said his father did raise them in a "moral and virtuous" environment. Harrison left home at 14. Being the oldest he was put to work early. He had little formal education during his childhood; however, he would complete his education during his teenage and adult years.

His interest in religion was first sparked in 1832. During his 17th year he heard the restored gospel being preached by Elder Simeon Carter. He said he became convinced the Bible and Book of Mormon were true scripture. He was baptized by Elder Carter and was confirmed a member by Orson Pratt. He would serve a brief mission in 1833 before becoming a member of Zion's Camp in 1834. During the long march to Missouri he, along with other members of Zion's Camp, contracted cholera. He was healed by a priesthood blessing given to him by Zerah Cole. In February 1835, he was ordained as one of the first members of the Quorum of the Seventy. That same year he married Sophia Foster. He would fill several other church callings, including a mission to England. In 1862 he arrived in Utah and settled his family in Southern Utah. He died February 10, 1883.

His experience with the gold plates came shortly after his conversion. He was bearing his testimony of the Book of Mormon to a congregation when thoughts of doubt entered his mind. Here is his account of what occurred.

"On the third Sabbath in May 1833, while speaking to a congregation I declared that I knew the Book of Mormon was true, the work of God. The next day while I was laboring something seemed to whisper to me "Do you know the Book of Mormon is true?" My mind became perplexed and darkened, and I was so tormented in spirit that I left my work and retired into the woods in misery and distress and therein cannot be described.

"The voice all the while seemed to ask how I know the Book of Mormon is true?" I remained in this situation about two hours before it came into my mind the faith that the Brother of Jared had in obtaining knowledge of God. Finally, I resolved to know whether I had proclaimed the truth or

not, and commenced praying to the God of Heaven, for a testimony of these things, when all at once the vision of my mind was opened, and a glorious personage clothed in white stood before me and exhibited to my view the plates, from which the Book of Mormon was taken."

Harrison Burgess received a special witness and consequently served and sacrificed much. Harrison became stalwart in his faith, becoming a special witness of Christ and His restored gospel. To whom much is given much is required. Much was given and required of Elder Harrison and he remained faithful until the end.

My Testimony

Each of these short accounts of individuals who established foundations here at Adam-ondi-Ahman in 1838, have helped to build and stabilize my Foundation of Faith. My experiences of finding their foundations and learning of their histories, of putting real people to real places here, has been a source strength to my testimony. As my wife and I stood at the site of Lyman Wight's cabin # 1 West of the Pecan Grove on June 27th, at the setting of the sun, this year, we felt a renewed love and witness of the Prophet Joseph Smith's dedication and sacrifices that will remain with us always.

We are eternally grateful for the experiences we have had here, for our acquaintances we have made with many of you. For the Senior Missionary couples of 3 different groups who we have learned from, lived with, and shared this part of our lives with. For our Emeritus General Authority Directors, Elder and Sister Child and Elder and Sister Walker. For the efforts and commitment of Keith Bowen, Joe Peck, and Kris Karlson and the Missouri Mormon Frontier Foundation, to preserve and memorialize the history of these early Saints who dedicated their lives to establish these Foundations of Faith that have so blessed our lives. For the written records such as the Sacred Places in Missouri book by Lamar Berrett that initiated my efforts of finding these foundations.

In my 64-year sojourn on this earth, I can truly say that our time here at Adam-ondi-Ahman has been the best 19 Months of our lives.

My Thanks to each and everyone of you for being a part of this adventure.

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