

Notes and Comments

JESSE GAUSE, COUNSELOR TO THE PROPHET

Robert J. Woodford*

As we restudy Church history there appears for a few brief moments in 1832 an unobtrusive character who might have become one of the leading authorities of the Church, but instead took his exit as silently as he had entered, never to be heard of again. This man, whose name should also be as well-known to the Latter-day Saints as are the names of Sidney Rigdon, Frederick G. Williams, Hyrum Smith, Joseph Smith, Sen., and John Smith, was Jesse Gause (rhymes with house). Now a virtual unknown, Gause was the first of these men called to be a counselor to the Prophet Joseph Smith. How Jesse Gause came to such prominence and then faded into obscurity is not known among the pages of Church history. Unfortunately, there is so little recorded concerning him that forming a profile of the man is difficult.

Our earliest reference to Jesse Gause is as a member of the Shaker communities in Hancock near Pittsfield, and possibly in North Union, Ohio as well.¹ His conversion and baptism are not found in any of the records of the Church, but one writer has suggested that he was converted by Reynolds Cahoon in late 1830.² It was not until 8 March 1832, when Jesse Gause was called to be a counselor to Joseph Smith³ in the presidency of the high priesthood, that his name is even mentioned in sur-

*Robert J. Woodward is an instructor for Seminaries and Institutes and for the BYU Salt Lake Center.

¹Mario S. DePillis, "The Development of Mormon Communitarism 1826-1846" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1961), p. 171.

²Ibid.

³Joseph Smith received a revelation in November 1831 that gave him instructions concerning the organization of the presidency of the high priesthood. Most of that revelation is now found published as Section 107:59-100 in the Doctrine and Covenants. Joseph Smith was ordained president of the high priesthood on 25 January 1832 by Sidney Rigdon.

living Church records. The notation in the Kirtland Revelation Book is as follows:

March 8, 1832. Chose this day and ordained brother Jesse Gause and Broth Sidney to be my counsellors of the ministry of the presidency of the high Priesthood. . . .⁴

One week later, a revelation concerning Jesse Gause was received by Joseph Smith, confirming Jesse in his work and giving further direction in his office and calling. There are two manuscript copies of this revelation extant: one in the Kirtland Revelation Book, located in the Church Historical Department, and the other in the library of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In both of these Jesse Gause's name has been crossed out and Frederick G. Williams' name written above it.⁵ Since that time, all published copies of this revelation (Section 81 of the Doctrine and Covenants) list Frederick G. Williams as the one to whom it is directed. Since this revelation contains instructions, duties, and promised blessings to the one called as counselor to the Prophet, the revelation was just as appropriate for Frederick G. Williams as it was to Jesse Gause.

After Jesse Gause was ordained, he appeared in a leading role in the Church for only a short time. In April 1832, he accompanied Joseph Smith, Newel K. Whitney, and Peter Whitmer, Jr. on a trip to Missouri. They arrived 24 April and began holding conferences with the Saints in Zion on the 26th.⁶ In the minutes of a meeting of the Literary Firm held on Monday, 30 April, Jesse Gause was listed as a counselor to Joseph Smith.⁷ Joseph left Independence that day to return again to Kirtland, and Jesse Gause remained behind to conduct further business.⁸ On his return trip home he stopped at North Union, Ohio, to retrieve his wife from the society of the Shakers there.⁹ An elder of this Shaker community, Matthew Houston, wrote a letter to his friend, Seth Y. Wells, who was a member

⁴Kirtland Revelation Book, p. 10, located in the Church Historical Department.

⁵The author of this change remains unidentified.

⁶"Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," 1, 24 April 1832, Church Historical Department. See also, *Far West Record* (typescript), p. 24, Church Historical Department.

⁷*Far West Record*, p. 27.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 27-34.

⁹The formal name of this church is: United Society of True Believers in Christ's Second Appearing. The church originated in England with Ann Lee as its founder.

of the Shaker bishopric at New Lebanon, about Jesse Gause's vain attempt to reunite with his wife. Part of this letter reads as follows:

And sure enough I presume you was acquainted with Jesse Gause from Hancock he was here a few days since after his wife Minerva—she utterly refused being his slave any longer—he had to go away without her. altho he tryed what the law could do for him he was very much intraged threatened to take away Minerva's child—she presented it to him but he went away without it and her—he is yet a Mormon—& and is second to the Prophet or Seer—Joseph Smith—this state of exaltation may tend to steady him or keep him away from us a little longer—for which I am heartily glad for he is certainly the meanest of men.—

But Minerva certainly conducts herself cleverly so far We find no fault with her—at any rate she cut off Old Jesse verry handsomely—& he felt it to his gizzard.¹⁰

One important item in the letter is the reference to Jesse Gause's being "second to the Prophet or Seer—Joseph Smith."

Upon his return to Kirtland, Jesse was called to serve a mission with Zebedee Coltrin. They began their journey on 1 August 1832, and traveled until the 19th, at which time Coltrin decided to return to Kirtland because of severe pains in his head. After praying with and for each other, they parted. Jesse Gause continued east and walked right out of the history of the Church, never again to return.¹¹ There appears to be no other record of the man either in or out of the Church.¹²

Some months after the departure of Jesse Gause, the presidency of the high priesthood was reorganized with Frederick G. Williams replacing him as counselor. This reorganization was commanded in Section 90 of the Doctrine and Covenants, and actually took place in 18 March 1833.¹³

¹⁰Matthew Houston to Seth Y. Wells, North Union, 10 August 1832, WHRS, as quoted in DePillis' dissertation, p. 184. Spelling errors are in the original.

¹¹Zebedee Coltrin, Journal, pp. 29-35, Church Historical Department.

¹²Under the date of December 3, 1832, Joseph Smith recorded: "Br Jese and Mogan and William McColen was excommunicated from the Church &C." D. Michael Quinn feels Jesse Gause is one of these three men excommunicated on that date. See D. Michael Quinn, "The Evolution of the Presiding Quorums of the LDS Church," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974):24.

¹³Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1959-60), 1:334.