

# Joseph Smith's Dog, Old Major

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When it comes to history, interesting information is often found in the little-known, incidental details. Discovering the lesser-known facts in people's lives helps one understand more about their disposition, character, temperament, motivation, and personality—who they really were and what they were like. One such aspect of the life of Joseph Smith is how he came to own a dog and his close relationship with this canine companion.

George A. Smith (fig. 1) provided some of the best information about Joseph Smith's dog. In 1834, young George was one of over two hundred Mormon volunteers who made up the Camp of Israel (later known as Zion's Camp) that marched to western Missouri. In compiling his account of the day-to-day travels and events associated with the trek, George reported that on Thursday, June 5, 1834, the company crossed the Mississippi River from Illinois into Missouri, then camped a mile west of the settlement known as Louisiana. The presence of the Mormon company alarmed some of the local inhabitants, who were aware of their presence and were leery of their intentions. On this occasion Samuel Baker, the oldest member of the camp, presented Joseph Smith with a dog. George reported, "There was a Gentleman in our Camp named Samuel Baker, from Norton, Medina Co. Ohio, who was nearly 80 years old and had walked the whole journey. . . . Father Baker brought with him a large and very faithful watch dog and being satisfied that the spies who were watching our Camp sought the life of Joseph, presented the dog to him; this dog was greatly attached to Joseph and

was generally by his side, keeping close watch of every thing that approached the camp.”<sup>1</sup>

George A. Smith’s narrative indicates that Baker gave Joseph Smith the dog for two significant reasons. First, during the company’s month-long travels the dog had become “attached to Joseph.” For this type of bonding to take place, the Prophet had likely paid considerable attention to the dog during the journey (petting, stroking, feeding, engaging in playful interaction), which resulted in him becoming attached to the canine as well. Recognizing the fondness Joseph Smith and the dog had for each other, Baker was willing to relinquish ownership. Second, given this mutual sense of attachment, the dog could serve to protect the Mormon leader. This relationship is illustrated by an incident that took place after the last Mormon company crossed the Mississippi



FIGURE 1. George A. Smith, date unknown. Smith reported that Samuel Baker gave a dog to Joseph Smith in June 1834 during the Camp of Israel’s (Zion’s Camp) expedition to Missouri. Courtesy Church History Library.

1. George A. Smith, *Memoirs of George A. Smith, 1817–September 10, 1847*, 29, MS 1322, George A. Smith Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, [https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps\\_pid=IE714718](https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE714718). George A. Smith’s memoir, created years later, provides the most information about Samuel Baker of any accounts of Zion’s Camp.

Financial records of the camp indicate that Baker made two financial contributions, for \$5.44 and \$1.00. “Account with the Church of Christ, circa 11–29 August 1834,” in Matthew C. Godfrey, Brenden W. Rensink, Alex D. Smith, Max H Parkin, and Alexander L. Baugh, eds., *Documents, Volume 4: April 1834–September 1835*, vol. 4 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Matthew C. Godfrey (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2016), 144, 146, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#). Samuel Baker died in Nauvoo, Illinois, date unknown. Milton V. Backman Jr., *A Profile of Latter-day Saints of Kirtland, Ohio and Members of Zion’s Camp* (Provo, Utah: BYU Department of Church History and Doctrine, 1982), 4.

River. George A. Smith wrote: "Levi Hancock, one of Sylvester Smith's Comp[an]y, had while waiting to cross the River made a fire of a large joint of sweet elder and landing on the bank being the last to cross, Sylvester formed his company in single file and marched them to the Notes of Levi's fire and as they came into Camp they made quite a Military appearance, this excited Joseph's faithful watch dog which attacked them as if they had been an enemy although the dog was called off and did no injury, it enraged S. [Sylvester] Smith to that extent that he used much abusive language to Joseph, threatening the dog's, life."<sup>2</sup> To make matters worse, the next morning Sylvester protested once again, only this time it was about the dog's barking during the nighttime, and this resulted in another exchange of harsh words between the two men. Sylvester threatened to kill the dog a second time, to which Joseph Smith countered, "If you kill that dog I will whip you."<sup>3</sup> Cooler heads eventually prevailed, but the incident was not fully resolved until after the members of Zion's Camp returned to Kirtland, Ohio.<sup>4</sup>

What breed was the dog? In a popular history volume of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, *The Story of the Church*, author Inez Smith Davis, a great-granddaughter of Joseph

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2. Smith, *Memoirs of George A. Smith*, 29.

3. Smith, *Memoirs of George A. Smith*, 29. For a similar account, see Heber C. Kimball, "Extracts from H. C. Kimball's Journal," *Times and Seasons* 6 (February 1, 1845): 788–89.

4. This incident between Joseph Smith and Sylvester Smith was one of several heated exchanges that occurred between the two men during the 1834 expedition to Missouri. After returning to Ohio on August 11, a council was held to investigate charges issued by Sylvester Smith against the Prophet. After some deliberation, the Mormon leader was found innocent of any wrongdoing. "Minutes, 11 August 1834," in Godfrey and others, *Documents, Volume 4*, 99–101, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#). Later, on August 28–29, the Kirtland high council convened to try Sylvester Smith for his membership in the Church. He was found guilty regarding the false accusations he had made against Joseph Smith, whereupon he issued a public confession, and although he was removed from the high council, he retained his membership in the Church. See "Minutes, 28–29 August 1834," in Godfrey and others, *Documents, Volume 4*, 120–35, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#). For specific mention in the council minutes regarding the incident with Joseph Smith's dog, see Godfrey and others, *Documents, Volume 4*, 125, 129–30, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#).



**FIGURE 2.** Mastiffs are known for their loyalty. Photograph by ocean yamaha, Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>.

Smith, wrote that the dog was a “great mastiff,”<sup>5</sup> in all likelihood an English mastiff—the largest breed of dogs in terms of mass, not necessarily height or length. English mastiffs reach full physical maturity around eighteen months. Males can weigh anywhere from 160 to 230 pounds, females from 120 to 170 pounds. They have large, square heads, a black mask (face), black ears, and drooping jowls (with plenty of excess drool and slobber). Because of their size, they have a relatively short life span, generally from eight to ten years, but some live longer. They are powerful and muscular canines (figs. 2, 4). In spite of their size, English mastiffs are the gentle giants of the dog species—affectionate,

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5. Inez Smith Davis, *The Story of the Church: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and of Its Legal Successor, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 3d ed. (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1943), 304. Davis was a daughter of Vida Elizabeth Smith, who was a daughter of Alexander Hale Smith, one of four surviving sons of Joseph and Emma Hale Smith. As a direct descendant of Joseph Smith, Inez Davis was familiar with many of the personal histories and stories associated with Joseph and Emma’s family passed on to her by her mother, her grandfather Alexander H. Smith, Joseph Smith III, and other Smith family members.

peaceful, good-natured, dignified, and somewhat docile. On the other hand, they are also courageous and extremely protective of their human caregivers and are excellent guard dogs. They have a keen sense and a natural, instinctive perception of threatening situations and will intercede if danger threatens their guardians.<sup>6</sup>

In recounting his childhood memories, Joseph Smith III said it was a white dog.<sup>7</sup> English mastiff's coats are generally fawn (light yellowish tan), silver fawn, apricot fawn, or dark fawn-brindle (brownish or tawny color with streaks of other color patterns), not exactly white. So, from Joseph III's description, the dog was likely silver fawn in color. A number of contemporary sources, including statements by Joseph Smith himself, indicate the dog's name was Major, and in some instances he was referred to as "Old Major." It is not known whether he was named Major by Samuel Baker, the original owner, or by Joseph Smith. At the time the Prophet gained custody, Major was probably full grown but still relatively young, around eighteen months, which would indicate that he was probably born around 1832 or 1833.

Joseph Smith III (fig. 3) had two early recollections of Major, both of which took place in the fall of 1838



FIGURE 3. Joseph Smith III. After the martyrdom, Old Major became the loyal companion of eleven-year-old Joseph Smith III. Courtesy Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

6. "Mastiff," American Kennel Club, <http://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/mastiff/>; *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "mastiff," last modified April 26, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/animal/mastiff>; "Mastiff," Dogtime, <http://dogtime.com/dog-breeds/mastiff#/slide/1>.

7. Joseph Smith [III], "The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith (1832–1914)," *Saints' Herald* 81 (November 6, 1934): 1414. Smith's memoirs were edited by his daughter Mary Audentia Smith Anderson and appeared serially in the *Saints' Herald* from 1934 to 1937. A photo-reprint edition was published under the same title. See Joseph Smith III, *The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III (1832–1914)*, ed. Richard P. Howard (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1979), 2.



FIGURE 4. The English mastiff is one of the oldest and largest breeds of dogs. Photograph by Radovan Rohovsky, GNU Free Documentation License.

while the Smith family was living in Far West, Caldwell County, Missouri. Young Joseph was just six years old at the time, but he remembered that Major had been in some sort of fight with another dog, and during the struggle the other dog had chewed on Major's ears, causing them to be sore. It was during this time that Joseph III's younger brother Frederick, who was two years old at the time, was placed on the floor near Major. And while mastiffs are generally known to be good-natured toward young children, on this occasion, "the baby pulled his ears, which hurt him so that he growled fiercely." This caused the Prophet to spring into action in defense of the young-

ster. "Father punished him severely for this, boxing his ears soundly," Joseph III recalled. The harsh treatment taught Major a hard lesson that day, and from that time on when a young child was placed near him, "he would spring to his feet immediately and go away, evidently never forgetting the punishment he had received for growling at the baby."<sup>8</sup> Joseph III recalled that on another occasion, after hearing some excitement taking place outside the Smith's home at Far West, he went to the door or window and saw his father walking away from the house, and then he saw Major jump from an upper window to a platform below and follow his master off.<sup>9</sup>

Joseph Smith may have been allowed to have Major with him during part of the time he was incarcerated in Missouri, and if so, this was

8. Joseph Smith [III], "Memoirs of President Joseph Smith," 1414. Although Joseph III did not state that it was his younger brother Frederick who pulled Major's injured ears, he was likely the child mentioned. The youngest child, Alexander Hale Smith, born June 2, 1838, would have been only a few months old at the time.

9. Joseph Smith [III], "Memoirs of President Joseph Smith," 1414.



perhaps the most significant role this pet played in Joseph's life. Evidence for this comes from a statement by Aaron W. Harlan (fig. 5), a longtime resident of Lee County, Iowa, who visited Joseph Smith in Nauvoo on several occasions in the early 1840s. In a February 17, 1888, letter to the editor of the Keokuk, Iowa, *Post*, Harlan wrote, "I visited Joseph Smith at Nauvoo several different times, say about once each six months. I have ate with him at his table, and played with his dog, and on noticing that the dog was getting old, I said to Mr. Smith: 'Your dog is unusually fat.' Yes, said Mr. Smith, he lives as I do, and shall as long as we both live, and then added that when he was a prisoner in Missouri, that dog could not be separated from him, and for months when he slept, that dog always remained awake by his side." Then, alluding to Joseph Smith's character, Harlan good-naturedly added, "The man that will reciprocate the fidelity of a dog, cannot be altogether bad."<sup>10</sup>



FIGURE 5. Aaron W. Harlan, c. 1861–1864. Harlan recalled Joseph Smith telling him that his dog, Major, was with him during the Prophet's Missouri imprisonment. Courtesy Wilson's Creek National Battlefield.

10. A. W. Harlan, letter to the editor, February 17, 1888, (Keokuk, Iowa) *Post*, publication date unknown, copy in Hawkins Taylor Papers, 1837–1890, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, copy in the possession of John W. Welch. The published letter appears under the heading "Mr. A. W. Harlan's Recollections of Joseph Smith and the Mormon City of Nauvoo."

Aaron W. Harlan was born November 15, 1811, in Union County, Indiana. He came to Montrose, Iowa, in 1834, where he was hired to help build the Fort Des Moines barracks. He settled in Croton, Iowa, located in the eastern part of Lee County, Iowa. He went to California for a time during the gold rush and later served four years in the Union Army as a commissary sergeant. He died on April 30, 1911, at the age of 99 and is buried in the Croton Cemetery. See "Scenes in Early Iowa," *Iowa Historical Record* 7 (October 1891): 189; and

A ten-volume scrapbook from the 1880s entitled "History of Keokuk" has recently been donated to the Iowa State Historical Society. These beautiful volumes are held in the Iowa State Historical Library and Archive in Iowa City.

Because Keokuk is just across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo, this trove of documents sheds light on the context of events in Nauvoo in the 1840s. Many items preserve memories of people who experienced the years of Iowa Territory and early statehood. Volume 9 contains minutes, news articles, and information about the many churches in and around Keokuk. It also includes about thirty pages of local newspaper clippings about the Mormons in Iowa and Nauvoo.

Among these clippings is an article by A. W. Harlan, published by an Iowa newspaper, the (Keokuk) *Post*, in February 1888. A shrewd and accurate observer, Harlan was an early settler in Iowa. Two of his publications—an article on slavery in Iowa before statehood, and the diary he kept on his trek to the California gold fields in 1850—appeared in *The Annals of Iowa* in 1897 and 1913.

In the clipping shown here from the 1888 recollection, Harlan tells about times when he visited Joseph Smith at his home in Nauvoo.

**MORMON RESEARCHES.**  
MR. A. W. HARLAN'S RECOLLECTIONS  
OF JOSEPH SMITH AND THE MORMON  
CITY OF NAUVOO.  
(Special Correspondence of The Post.)  
CROTON, Iowa, Feb. 17.—*Editor Post:*  
—In your issue of Nov. 5th, 1887, you published an article entitled "Mormon Researches," in which there is much truth, indeed more truth than I would have thought could have been contained in so short an article. And yet there are a few things that are not fairly stated. In two places the Mormons are represented as orthodox christians, I speak from my own knowledge, and say at that day they put a different construction on some portions of the testament, and many portions of the old testament from what the other sects did at that time. I have always been a skeptic and been called an infidel, and as such in seeking knowledge I visited Joseph Smith at Nauvoo several different times, say about once in in each six months. I have ate with him at his table, and played with his dog, and on noticing that the dog was getting old, I said to Mr. Smith: "Your dog is unusually fat." Yes, said Mr. Smith, he lives as I do, and shall as long as we both live, and then added that when he was a prisoner in Missouri, that dog could not be separated from him, and for months when he slept, that dog always remained awake by his side. The man that will reciprocate the fidelity of a dog, cannot be altogether bad. His wife Emma cooked the dinner herself, while the





**FIGURE 6.** Liberty Jail, c. 1878, original glass-plate photograph by Jacob T. Hicks. Photograph courtesy Clay County Historical Society and Museum, Liberty, Missouri. This is the earliest known photograph of the jail.

If Joseph Smith was allowed to have his dog with him during his Missouri imprisonment, it is not known exactly when Major was actually with him, but there are some clues. On October 31, 1838, the Prophet and six other Mormon leaders were arrested at Far West by Samuel D. Lucas, major general of the militia companies from Jackson and Lafayette Counties. During the month of November, the Mormon prisoners were temporarily incarcerated in Independence (November 4–8), and at Richmond (November 9–29). Following a seventeen-day court of inquiry in Richmond, Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, Alexander McRae, and Caleb Baldwin were charged with treason and ordered to be sent to Liberty Jail in Clay County to await the spring term of the circuit court. While it is possible that Major may have been with Joseph Smith during his short stay in Independence and his nearly

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“Aaron W. Harlan,” Ancestry, <https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=60525&h=13487177>.

three-week stay in Richmond, it seems more likely that it was not until he and the other prisoners began their confinement in Liberty Jail (fig. 6), on December 1, that the authorities would have permitted him to have custody of his dog.

It is important to note that during this era, regulations regarding the incarceration of inmates were not like they are today. Prisoners were not only allowed to have visitors, but family members and friends were permitted to take up lodging for a day or two or even for weeks at a time.<sup>11</sup> Given these allowances regarding visitors, it may not have been out of place for the Mormon prisoners to have had other privileges, including the keeping of a dog.

If Joseph Smith was allowed to have Major with him in Liberty Jail, how did the dog get there? The most logical answer is that Emma, his wife, brought Major. In fact, she and Phebe Rigdon, wife of Sidney Rigdon, were the first Latter-day Saints to visit the Mormon prisoners in Liberty Jail. The two women arrived on December 8, one week

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11. For examples of individuals who visited the Mormon leaders in Liberty Jail, see Dean C. Jessee, "Walls, Grates and Screeking Iron Doors: The Prison Experience of Mormon Leaders in Missouri, 1838–1839," in *New Views of Mormon History: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington*, ed. Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 26–27. During the Richmond preliminary hearing (November 9–29, 1838), Sidney Rigdon was ill, so his daughter Athalia R. Robinson (wife of George W. Robinson, who was also a prisoner) was allowed to lodge with the prisoners in order to take care of her father and to be with her husband. See Alexander L. Baugh, "'Silence, Ye Fiends of the Infernal Pit!': Joseph Smith's Incarceration in Richmond, Missouri, November 1838," *Mormon Historical Studies* 13 (Spring–Fall 2012): 141. The wives of Parley P. Pratt, Morris Phelps, and Luman Gibbs—Mary Ann Pratt, Laura Phelps, and Phila Gibbs—each stayed with their husbands for a period of time during their incarceration in the Richmond jail. In fact, Pratt's wife Mary Ann and two of their children stayed for almost three months. Laura and Phila were also with their husbands for a period of time during their imprisonment in the Columbia, Boone County, jail, although they may have lodged with the jailor's family. See Alexander L. Baugh, "'Tis Not for Crimes That I Have Done': Parley P. Pratt's Missouri Imprisonment, 1838–1839," in *Parley P. Pratt and the Making of Mormonism*, ed. Gregory K. Armstrong, Matthew J. Grow, and Dennis J. Siler (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark, 2011), 154; see also Alexander L. Baugh, "The Final Episode of Mormonism in Missouri in the 1830s: The Incarceration of the Mormon Prisoners in Richmond and Columbia Jails, 1838–1839," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 28 (2008): 19–21, 31, 33.

after their husbands and the other Mormon men began their incarceration in the prison. Emma and Phebe remained overnight and then left the next day, December 9, to return to Far West.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps Emma brought Major along on this occasion to give herself and Phebe a sense of protection as they traveled the forty miles from Far West to Liberty, or perhaps it was just so her husband could see his beloved dog. She might not have had any intentions of leaving Major with her husband at the jail, but perhaps while she was there, the sheriff, the jailor, or some other official allowed Joseph to keep the dog. Another possibility is that Emma brought Major to the jail at the time of her second visit to Liberty eleven days later. On this occasion, she was accompanied by Nancy Baldwin (wife of Caleb Baldwin, one of the prisoners) and Thirza Cahoon. The three women arrived on December 20 and stayed until December 22.<sup>13</sup>

Emma's last visit to the jail came on January 21, 1839.<sup>14</sup> By this time, most of the Latter-day Saints, including Emma, were making final preparations to leave the state. Uncertain as to how much longer her husband and the other prisoners would remain confined in jail and knowing she would shortly be moving to Illinois, it makes sense that this visit was when she took Major with her back to Far West.<sup>15</sup> Given the dates and timetables of Emma's three visits to Liberty, Major spent at least a month (December 20, 1838, to January 21, 1839), but possibly up to six weeks (December 8, 1838, to January 21, 1839), with Joseph Smith in the jail.

On March 21, 1839, Joseph Smith wrote a letter from Liberty Jail to Emma, who by this time was living with John and Sarah Cleveland a

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12. Lyman Wight, Journal, quoted in Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 8 vols. (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1967), 2:309. Joseph Smith III may have also accompanied his mother, Emma, on this occasion. See Joseph Smith [III], "Memoirs of President Joseph Smith," 1414.

13. Wight, Journal, 309.

14. Wight, Journal, 315.

15. Emma Smith and her four children left Far West on February 7, 1839, and arrived in Quincy, Illinois, in mid-February. See "Historical Introduction," in Mark Ashurst-McGee, David W. Grua, Elizabeth A. Kuehn, Brenden W. Rensink, and Alexander L. Baugh, eds., *Documents, Volume 6: February 1838–August 1839*, vol. 6 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Matthew C. Godfrey (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2017), 338 n. 389.

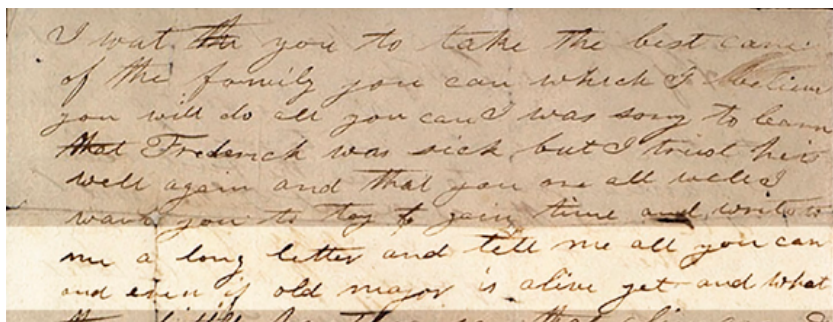


FIGURE 7. Highlighted excerpt of Joseph Smith's March 21, 1838, letter to Emma Smith in which he asks if "old major" is still alive. Courtesy Church History Library.

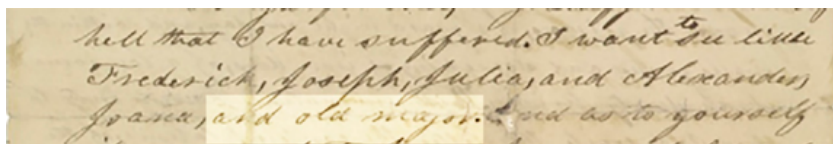


FIGURE 8. Highlighted excerpt of Joseph Smith's April 4, 1839, letter to Emma Smith in which he states that he wants to see "old major." Courtesy Church History Library.

few miles east of Quincy, Illinois. At the time, Joseph had just received a letter from Emma that included a number of particulars regarding the current condition of the members of the Church generally as well as of herself and their children.<sup>16</sup> In his response to Emma, Joseph wrote, "I was sorry to learn that Frederick was sick but I trust he is well again and that you are all well I want you to try to gain time and write to me a long letter and tell me all you can and even if old major is alive yet"<sup>17</sup> (fig. 7). Two weeks later, on April 4, in what would be his last letter to Emma from Liberty Jail, Joseph again expressed similar sentiments: "My Dear Emma I think of you and the children continually. . . . I want <to> see little Frederick, Joseph, Julia, and Alexander, Joana, and old major"<sup>18</sup> (fig. 8). Both of these letters illustrate not only that Joseph

16. "Letter from Emma Smith, 7 March 1839," in Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents*, Volume 6, 339–40, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#).

17. "Letter to Emma Smith, 21 March 1839," in Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents*, Volume 6, 374, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#).

18. "Letter to Emma Smith, 4 April 1839," in Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents*, Volume 6, 404–5, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#). "Joana"

Smith missed the companionship of his faithful dog, but also that Major was considered part of the family.

The Smith family continued to enjoy the company of Major in Nauvoo during the early 1840s. As noted earlier, Aaron W. Harlan remembered seeing the dog during one of several visits he had with Joseph Smith at his home in Nauvoo. Another visitor, Charlotte Cole, recalled a time when she and her brother attended an evening meeting at the Prophet's home. It was a particularly cold night and Old Major was lounging in the room at the time the meeting was about to begin. Charlotte recalled hearing Joseph say, "It is too cold tonight to turn the dog out." Then, addressing his loyal four-legged friend, he said, "Major . . . you can go under the bed." To her surprise, "the dog did as he was told and stayed there while they held the meeting."<sup>19</sup>

One report in the *Times and Seasons* also makes mention of Old Major. Apparently, some individuals who were not members of the Church accused the Prophet of "enriching himself" from the Church coffers. In response to this accusation, in 1841, the Quorum of the Twelve issued a statement summarizing the extent of Joseph Smith's material wealth: "When Br. Joseph stated to the general conference the amount and situation of the property of the church, of which he is trustee, . . . he also stated the amount of his own possessions on earth; and what do you think it was? we will tell you; his old Charley horse, given him in Kirtland; two pet deer; two old turkeys, and four young ones; the old cow given him by a brother in Missouri, his old Major, dog; his wife, children, and a little household furniture, and this is the amount of the great possessions of that man whom God has called to lead his people in these last days."<sup>20</sup>

Smith family lore holds that at the time Joseph and Hyrum and their party left for Carthage, Illinois, Old Major sensed danger. "Those nearest and dearest to Joseph and Hyrum felt impending calamity," wrote Inez Davis. "Even Joseph's great mastiff, Major, for the first time in his faithful life, refused to obey orders to 'go back home,' and insisted on

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was Johanna Carter, an orphan who apparently lived with the Smith family. See Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents*, Volume 6, 404 n. 817.

19. Artemus S. Ward, "Kindness to Animals," *Juvenile Instructor* 39 (February 15, 1904): 125. Ward was recounting what Charlotte Cole, his aunt who was living in his home, had told him.

20. "An Epistle of the Twelve, To the Brethren Scattered Abroad on the Continent of America, Greeting," *Times and Seasons* 2 (October 15, 1841): 569.

staying close to his master, and when imprisoned in an upper room, jumped from a second-story window to follow.” The faithful dog was probably not able to follow the company any great distance and so returned home. Davis wrote that when his master never returned, “old Major transferred his loyalty to the eldest son Joseph [III], never leaving him night or day, and refusing to permit strangers to approach him.”<sup>21</sup>

If Major was born around 1832 or 1833, he would have been about eleven or twelve years old at the time of Joseph Smith’s death. Since the life span of the English mastiff is around ten years, Major probably did not live very long after 1844.

John the Revelator taught that “every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them” will enjoy a state of eternal happiness (Rev. 5:13). Joseph Smith’s understanding of this verse led him to conclude that “John saw all the beasts . . . in heaven” and that “God will gratify himself with all these animals.”<sup>22</sup> No wonder, when the Prophet’s favorite horse died, he said that he expected he would have it in eternity.<sup>23</sup> He no doubt felt the same about his ever-loyal canine friend and companion, Old Major.

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21. Davis, *Story of the Church*, 304.

22. “Journal, 8 April 1843,” in Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843*, vol. 2 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011), 346, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#). For an expanded account, see “8 April 1843 (Saturday Morning): William Clayton Report,” in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 185–86. Modern revelation also teaches the concept that the entire animal species will be resurrected and enjoy an eternal existence (see D&C 77:2–4).

23. As cited by Orson F. Whitney, “Latter-day Saint Ideals and Institutions,” *Improvement Era* 30 (August 1927): 855. Joseph Smith was known to have owned three horses, but he likely had several others. While on Zion’s Camp, he purchased a horse, which he named Mark Anthony. See Smith, *Memoirs of George A. Smith*, 31. As mentioned, in Nauvoo Joseph Smith owned an “old” horse named Charley, which he acquired in Kirtland. See “An Epistle of the Twelve,” 569. Charley was probably the horse that died and that Orson F. Whitney referred to when he wrote that Joseph Smith hoped he would have in the next life. The third horse known to have been owned by the Joseph Smith was a horse he named Joe Duncan, after Joseph Duncan, governor of Illinois from 1834 to 1838. “History, 1838–1856, Volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” June 27, 1843, 1587, Church History Library, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers](#)



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[website](#); “History, 1838–1856, Volume F-1, [1 May 1844–8 August 1844],” May 27, 1844, 62, Church History Library, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#). Joseph Smith rode this horse to Carthage before his murder. See George Q. Cannon, *The Latter-Day Prophet: History of Joseph Smith Written for Young People* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1900), 197.