

Sidney Rigdon: Post Nauvoo

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Although Sidney Rigdon was a prominent and well-known figure in early Mormon history, his life and thought after his excommunication from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are almost completely unknown to Latter-day Saints today. For this reason, his activities during this period shall be given in brief summary. Thereafter, four aspects of Rigdon's life after his excommunication will be considered in some detail: (1) his views on Joseph and Emma Smith, (2) his supposed attempt to return to the Church's doctrine and organization as practiced in Kirtland, (3) his beliefs about and involvement with polygamy, and (4) his relationship to and feelings concerning individual apostates and factions, feelings resulting directly or indirectly from Joseph and Hyrum Smith's deaths.

PITTSBURGH

On 8 September 1844 Sidney Rigdon was excommunicated in Nauvoo. He did not remain there; in fact, by the eleventh he reached St. Louis, and on the twelfth or thirteenth he left that city for Pittsburgh. Within a month he had persuaded the Church members there to follow him and had begun publishing a newspaper to support his claims to leadership.¹

While Pittsburgh remained his stronghold through May of 1846,² many branches of the Mormon Church also felt his influence.

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¹Orson Hyde to "Dear Brethren," 12 September 1844, Box 39, folder 18, Brigham Young Collection, Archives Division, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; hereafter cited as Church Archives. See also *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh), 15 October 1844, p. 11. This paper's name was later changed to *Messenger and Advocate of the Church of Christ*, and it also moved its offices to Greencastle, Pennsylvania. Both titles are hereafter referred to as *PM&A* (*Pittsburgh Messenger and Advocate*). In addition, see *People's Organ* (St. Louis), 16 and 18 September 1844. Cited in Cecil A. Snider, "Newspaper Clippings about the Mormons in Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, etc., from Contemporary Newspapers in Various States," 7: 259-68.

²James Smith to James Strang, 16 May 1846, item 22a. The original is in the James J. Strang Manuscripts, Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Hereafter cited as Strang Papers. The writer had access to a microfilm copy. James Smith was at one time a member of Rigdon's Grand Council. See *PM&A*, 15 April 1846, p. 168. Manuscript quotations in this article are by permission of the respective repositories.

By early November 1844, Sidney had traveled to New York City and Boston, and to New Egypt and Woodstown, New Jersey. Returning to Pittsburgh, probably about the middle of December, he indicated that he had organized a congregation of his followers in each of those cities and that it had been the most successful mission he had ever undertaken.³

Sidney did not rest long in Pittsburgh. On 16, 18, and 20 February 1845 he spoke in the Kirtland Temple to what he estimated to be about nine hundred persons a day. The next week he again preached in Kirtland and also in Painesville to what he said were large groups. He then returned to Pittsburgh.⁴

With great optimism, he organized the Church of Christ there on 7 and 8 April 1845.⁵ But the subsequent death of his daughter Eliza affected his mental stability, and he became overly visionary, confusing and even angering many members. As a result, widespread dissension developed in his church.⁶ The church was further fragmented by a decision, made by 25 July, to move the headquarters from Pittsburgh and to require the Pittsburgh members to help pay for the new location with the proceeds from the sale of their own belongings.⁷

ANTRIM TOWNSHIP

By 15 August 1845, while looking for a new location for the church's headquarters, Sidney Rigdon, accompanied by William McLellin, found a farm in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, which he thought suitable.⁸ Sufficient money was raised, and on 3 April 1846 Sidney's brother-in-law, Peter Boyer, paid its owner, Andrew

³PM&A, 15 January 1845, pp. 88-89; *The Prophet* (New York City), 16 November 1844, p. 2, and 7 December 1844, p. 2; *New York Herald*, 22 November 1844, p. 2.

⁴PM&A, 15 March 1845, p. 145. *The Telegraph* (Painesville, Ohio), 12 February to 5 March 1845, does not mention Rigdon's preaching. Another account of Rigdon's preaching in Kirtland, which may refer to a second visit at a later date, is found in Reuben McBride to Brigham Young, 28 July 1845, Box 18, folder 15, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.

⁵PM&A, 15 April 1845, pp. 169-72.
John W. Rigdon, "Life Story of Sidney Rigdon," p. 184, Church Archives. There are two pages numbered "184." This is the second page thus numbered. See also John W. Rigdon, "Lecture Written by John W. Rigdon on the Early History of the Church," p. 26, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. There are two copies; page references in this paper refer to the typescript. In addition, see Benjamin Chapman to James Strang, 24 March 1846, item 16, and James Smith to James Strang, 16 May 1846, item 22a, Strang Papers, Church Archives. See also a list in the Church Archives of revelations which Sidney Rigdon purportedly received in Pittsburgh. Eliza probably died between 26 September 1845 and 13 May 1846.

⁶*New York Messenger*, 20 September 1845, p. 91; PM&A, July 1846, p. 490.
⁸PM&A, 1 August 1845, p. 281, 15 August 1845, p. 297, March 1846, p. 464, July 1846, p. 489; William Terman to Brigham Young, 7 March 1846, Box 19, folder 4, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives. Some of the research on the Antrim period was funded by a grant from the college council of Brigham Young University.

McLanahan, \$14,700 for approximately 390 acres in Cumberland Valley about a mile west of Greencastle.⁹

On 13 May Sidney Rigdon started for Antrim Township with his family and Ebenezer Robinson. Before moving to McLanahan's farm, Sidney and a few of his followers lived for a short time in Greencastle in a home on the corner of Carlisle and Madison streets. Most of his one hundred to two hundred adherents who moved to Antrim Township joined him on the farm.¹⁰ Sidney evidently had plans to build extensive manufacturing facilities and a temple, but none of these were ever built—possibly due to lack of money.¹¹

He proselyted near what is now Tomstown and interested a few individuals. He also preached in Greencastle and frequently among a communistic group of Seventh Day Baptists located at Snow Hill, but without success.¹² In June and July of 1846 Rigdon's newspaper had praised the kindness and hospitality of Greencastle's citizens, but by December Rigdon's feelings had apparently changed. At that time, according to William McLellin, who by then had become embittered and had left Sidney, the Rigdonites desired conflict. Sidney Rigdon himself supposedly tried to arouse opposition in Greencastle so that blood would cover the town.¹³

Rigdon's group commenced a six-month-long conference in the farm's barn in September of 1846. During this conference, Sidney Rigdon became emotionally overwrought and taught a number of doctrines which caused many to leave him. As a result, by mid-December only a faithful few remained. Nonetheless, the conference continued another three months. Sometime during these three months, Sidney and his remaining followers apparently knelt in the meadow back of the barn from sunset until dawn, awaiting the

⁹Deeds of Franklin County, Pennsylvania, 1784–1963, 20: 319–20. Copy on film (42408, pt. 66), at the Genealogical Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. *PM&A*, June 1846, p. 478, also notes the farm had "been purchased and the deed secured." *PM&A*, November 1845, p. 398, implies that by that date Boyer had already paid \$1,500 towards the purchase of the land. Due to other printed accounts of the purchase, a search was made in the index to "Mortgages of Franklin County, March, 1821 to February, 1846," which showed no record of a mortgage (Genealogical Society, 42410, pt. 2).

¹⁰James Smith to James Strang, 16 May 1846, item 22a, Strang Papers, Church Archives. Isaac McCauley noted that "Elders Hyde and Heber, William E. McLellin, Zody [Leonard Soby], Grimes, and Ranger also moved to the Antrim farm" (I. H. M'Cauley, *Historical Sketch of Franklin County, Pennsylvania* [Chambersburgh, Pa.: John M. Pomeroy, 1878], p. 192). Ebenezer Robinson indicated that Samuel James, Edward B. Wingate, Joseph H. Newton, Leonard Soby, and Amos B. Tomlinson also followed Rigdon to Antrim Township (Ebenezer Robinson to J. Fraise Richard, Jr., 24 April 1886. First printed in [Chambersburgh] *Public Opinion* and cited in the *Franklin County School Annual* [Chambersburgh, Pa.: N.p., 1930], pp. 53–54. A xerox copy is at the Harold B. Lee Library, BYU. See also *Echo-Pilot* [Greencastle, Pa.], 22 September 1949, sec. 2, p. 1, col. 6).

¹¹*St. Louis American*, 17 June 1846, p. 3; cited in Snider, "Newspaper Clippings," p. 264. See also *Kittochitinny Historical Society Papers* 9 (Chambersburgh, Pa.: Franklin Repository Press, 1923), p. 352.

¹²*Kittochitinny Papers*, pp. 70 and 355; Jacob H. Stoner, *Historical Papers—Franklin County and the Cumberland Valley Pennsylvania* (Chambersburgh, Pa.: Craft Press, Inc., 1947), p. 264.

¹³*PM&A*, June 1846, p. 473, and July 1846, p. 486; *The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ* (Kirtland, Ohio), April 1847, p. 19, and *Kittochitinny Papers*, p. 355.

advent of the Messiah.¹⁴ If this account is true, the Savior's failure to appear likely caused most of Rigdon's last supporters to depart.

In January 1847, a judgment of \$2,980 was awarded Andrew McLanahan for a debt owed him by Peter Boyer. As Peter Boyer either refused to pay or had no funds, the farm—for which he had paid—was seized on 7 April 1847. On 6 August 1847 it had been sold to pay McLanahan his judgment.¹⁵

FRIENDSHIP, ALLEGANY CO., NEW YORK

About May, seeing that the farm would likely be sold, Sidney left Antrim Township. He moved to Jackson Hill between Friendship and Cuba, New York, to a farm belonging to George Robinson, the husband of his daughter Athalia.¹⁶ While there he preached the only public sermon he apparently ever gave in the Friendship area.¹⁷ In November or December of 1850, Sidney relocated at the Robinsons' home on the corner of Main and East Water streets in Friendship. Sometime before 2 June 1859, Sidney, his wife Phebe, and their daughter Phebe began living with the Rigdons' daughter Sarah and her husband, Edward Wingate, who also lived in Friendship.¹⁸ Here, Sidney and his wife apparently remained until Sidney died.

For about six years after moving to New York, Sidney had no known involvement with Mormonism or any of its offshoots. Then in 1853 he wrote Lyman Wight, asking if news of a Texas goldstrike were true and indicating he might move to Texas.¹⁹ As far as is now known, Lyman Wight never answered. In 1856, Sidney received a letter from a onetime Latter-day Saint who had more recently been a

¹⁴Peter Hess to James Strang, 14 December 1846, item 45, Strang Papers; John Rigdon, "Life Story," second p. 184; Frederick B. Blair, comp., *The Memoirs of W. W. Blair* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1908), p. 133; Joseph H. Newton to Stephen Post, 29 August 1864, The Papers of Stephen Post, Church Archives (hereafter cited as Post Papers). The Post Papers are also on microfilm at the Harold B. Lee Library, BYU. This copy, which is the one this writer generally used, seldom gives box and folder designations, and so they are generally not given in this article. Letters in this collection are almost all arranged in chronological order and can be found by using the collection's register. When a letter is out of order or apart from the main group of letters, a box and folder location is supplied. Unless otherwise identified, all letters cited in this article are from the Post Papers. (See also *The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ* [Kirtland, Ohio], April 1847, p. 19; *Kittochitinny Papers*, p. 423.)

¹⁵Deeds of Franklin County, Pennsylvania, 1784–1963, 21: 39 (Genealogical Society, 42408, pt. 66). This chronology is supported by the fact that some of Rigdon's followers were still in Antrim in mid-July 1847 hoping the farm would be redeemed (Jeremiah Hatch, Jr., to Abram Hatch, 11 July 1847, Hatch Family Papers, Church Archives).

¹⁶Jeremiah Hatch to Abram Hatch, 11 July 1847, Hatch Family Papers, Church Archives; Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 23 January 1856; John Rigdon, "Lecture," p. 26, and "Life Story of Sidney Rigdon," second p. 184.

¹⁷John W. Rigdon, "Life Story of Sidney Rigdon," p. 185.

¹⁸Papers of Sidney Rigdon, Church Archives. See also Jeremiah Hatch to his nephew, 2 June 1859, Hatch Family Papers.

¹⁹Sidney Rigdon to Lyman Wight, 22 May 1853, Lyman Wight Letterbook, Archives of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Auditorium, Independence, Missouri; hereafter cited as RLDS Archives.

Strangite, Stephen Post. In his answer to this and Post's next letter Sidney attempted to show that he was the rightful leader of the Lord's work. Post still had doubts and wrote again. Sidney startled Post by calling him to be his spokesman, but Post accepted the call.²⁰

Sidney quickly conceived some elaborate plans. In April 1856, he directed Stephen Post to call a conference for October at Kirtland and to issue a pamphlet setting forth Sidney's views on succession in the Church. Post did neither. Sidney then requested Post to provide the financial support to publish a treatise which Sidney had written on the future of the world. Although received by Post, this also was probably never published.²¹

As a result of their correspondence, Sidney Rigdon did preach sometime between 19 September and 3 December 1859 in Centerville, Crawford County, Pennsylvania, where Stephen Post lived.²² Their exchange of letters between 1856 and 1863 served to strengthen their relationship but otherwise had few concrete results. During this period, Sidney Rigdon wrote to at least four other individuals, but nothing came of that correspondence.²³

Then about 1861, Joseph Newton of Sidney's Pittsburgh and Antrim Township church began a correspondence with him that lasted for the next several years.²⁴ Little resulted from their letters until sometime in 1862 when various persons approached Joseph Newton, on their own initiative, and requested baptism. He became excited and considered preaching publicly, but Sidney dissuaded him.²⁵ Nevertheless baptisms continued. By May 1863, enough persons had been baptized in Philadelphia that Sidney traveled there, remained for more than three weeks, and organized the Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion. At this time, Sidney Rigdon also convinced Joseph Newton to pay for the printing of *An Appeal to the Latter-Day Saints*, which will be discussed later.²⁶

This church remained centered in Philadelphia only a short time. In June 1864 Sidney counseled Stephen Post to move to Iowa. Then in July Sidney told his leaders they should live close together in Iowa.

²⁰Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 23 January, 22 February, and March 1856.

²¹Sidney Rigdon to "Dear Brother," written in April 1856, after the fifteenth; Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 3 December 1856. An unsigned copy of this treatise is in the Post Papers.

²²John Rigdon to Stephen Post, 3 December 1859, and Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 19 September 1859.

²³During the same time period, Sidney may also have taught at Simeon Atwood's in Erie County, Pennsylvania. Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 19 September 1857, (after the 14th) November 1869.

²⁴Joseph Newton to Stephen Post, 15 May 1863.

²⁵Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, October 1862, Box 2, folder 3. This letter is filed by mistake (due to its unclear date) with letters dated October 1869.

²⁶Joseph H. Newton to Stephen Post, 25 June 1863, and a newspaper article which appeared in the *Signal*, Post Papers.

Other members were instructed to form branches in the West about two to three hundred miles apart and to avoid settling in Missouri and Kansas.²⁷ By April 1865 both Stephen Post and Joseph Newton had located in Attica, Marion County, Iowa. This branch became and remained the largest concentration of Rigdonites until they moved near Emerson, Manitoba, Canada, in August 1875.²⁸

For a time, Sidney Rigdon considered moving to Attica,²⁹ but he stayed in Friendship, where he guided the church by mail, and relied on his two counselors—Elders Post and Newton—to carry out his directives. This system worked fairly well until May 1868, at which time he became displeased with Newton's teachings. Sidney delayed disciplinary action, hoping Newton would decide to follow his counsel. But Newton did not; so in April 1869 Sidney wrote Stephen Post that Joseph Newton was no longer to act as a member of the First Presidency.³⁰ Joseph Newton was eventually excommunicated, as was John A. Forgeus, the president of Rigdon's Quorum of the Twelve.³¹ Although the movement had lost its initial impetus, Sidney Rigdon kept sending letters, and a remnant held together for at least six years after his death in 1876.³²

JOSEPH AND EMMA SMITH

Rigdon's views of Joseph and Emma help explain his attitude toward Joseph Smith III, and Joseph III's feelings toward him. Rigdon's comments also suggest that tension between Emma and himself during the Nauvoo period helped estrange Joseph and Sidney. His treatment of his relations with the Smiths also serves to illustrate the type of changes which occurred many times in Rigdon's perspective of past events and, finally, shows the extent to which Sidney felt himself persecuted.

Upon his return to Nauvoo from Pittsburgh in August 1844, Sidney taught that Joseph, though dead, still held the keys of the kingdom and that a temporary guardian needed to be called to preside over the Church in Joseph's name. Until he left Nauvoo for

²⁷Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 26 June 1864, and Joseph H. Newton, 19 July 1864.

²⁸Attica was probably at its height in 1867, when about thirty members lived there. "Church Record of the Attica (Iowa) Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion," p. 1, and Journal of Stephen Post, 17 August 1875, Post Papers.

²⁹Section 18, Copying Book A, 1 September 1864, Post Papers. In July 1869, Rigdon's followers in Attica were still expecting that he would move there (Heman C. Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church* [Independence, Mo.: N.p., 1900], 3: 538).

³⁰Sidney Rigdon to "Brethren of the Priesthood," May 1868, and Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 1 April 1869.

³¹Journal of Stephen Post, 1 July and 18 September 1869, Post Papers.

³²"Church Record of the Attica Branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion," pp. 28-30, Post Papers.

Pittsburgh, Sidney Rigdon evidently maintained publicly that Joseph had fallen as a faithful martyr.³³

In St. Louis, on his way to Pittsburgh, Sidney also implied that he and Emma, Joseph's widow, shared good relations. According to Orson Hyde, Sidney commented to James Small that Emma had offered to let him have the new translation of the Bible and "other sacred things" and had said she would follow him.³⁴ Whether or not Emma did make such a statement, Rigdon's assertion that she did suggests that he then had no publicly announced bitter feelings about Emma; he evidently welcomed her help and association.³⁵

By November, Sidney had begun openly declaring that Joseph had fallen during the Nauvoo period due to the introduction of polygamy.³⁶ Sidney may have finally been venting bitter feelings which he might have held against Joseph for moving in August 1843 to disfellowship him if certain charges proved true and for attempting in the October 1843 conference to have him removed from the First Presidency.³⁷ Or he may have been upset because he believed Joseph had desired to take his daughter Nancy as a plural wife in 1842.³⁸ Another possibility is that he felt polygamy was antithetical to his personal piety. Thus he may have attacked Joseph in order to assail polygamy; he could not logically reject practicing polygamy, unless he presented Joseph as a fallen prophet at the time it was introduced.

Rigdon's bitterness toward polygamy during the Pittsburgh and Antrim periods seems to suggest that those feelings were then the basic cause of claiming Joseph a fallen prophet. But years later, in

³³Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 8 August 1844, Church Archives; Journal of Brigham Young, 7 August 1844, Box 47, folder 2, and 6 September 1844, p. 60, Box 46, folder 1, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives; *The Prophet* (New York City), 7 December 1844, p. 3.

³⁴Orson Hyde to "Dear Brethren," 12 September 1844, Box 39, folder 18, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.

³⁵On 8 September 1844, William Marks said that Emma had indicated within the past week that she and Sidney Rigdon were on good terms (*Times and Seasons*, 5 [1 October 1844]: 665).

³⁶On Joseph's being a fallen prophet see, for example, *PM&A*, 1 November 1844, pp. 2-3, 6, and 8, and 1 February 1845, pp. 105 and 107. For statements by Sidney and his followers that Joseph introduced polygamy, see pp. 60-61 and fn. 59 of this article.

³⁷"Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," 13 August 1843, Church Archives; a microfilm copy is in the Harold B. Lee Library, BYU. *Times & Seasons*, 4 (15 September 1843): 329-30.

³⁸Although their versions differ in important ways, John C. Bennett, John Rigdon, and Orson Hyde all indicated that Nancy told her father that Joseph Smith had asked her to be his wife. From Joseph's account of his meeting with Rigdon's family, it appears that Sidney believed his daughter and was angry at the Prophet. (John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints, or, A Expose of Joe Smith and Mormonism* [Boston: Leland and Whiting, 1842], p. 245; John Rigdon's affidavit cited in Joseph F. Smith, Jr., *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1905], pp. 83-84; Orson Hyde, *Speech of Orson Hyde delivered before the High Priests Quorum, In Nauvoo, April 27th, 1845* [Liverpool: James and Woodburn, 1845], p. 28. See also Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1969], 5: 46 [hereafter cited as HC].) John Rigdon said that the difficulties between Sidney and Joseph concerning Nancy were settled. But John probably softened the truth in order to make his father appear as good as possible (John Rigdon, "Life Story of Sidney Rigdon," p. 177).

correspondence with Stephen Post and in a printed pamphlet, Sidney Rigdon emphasized Joseph's supposed defamation of his and his family's character.³⁹

During the Pittsburgh and Antrim periods, Sidney's publicly stated feelings toward Emma changed, and by June 1846, he was sharply criticizing her as well as Joseph.⁴⁰ Eleven years later, Sidney was calling Emma "a perfect she devil."⁴¹ In 1864 he accused her of being the person who led Joseph to slander him, labeling this as the major cause of his excommunication.⁴²

SUPPOSED RETURN TO KIRTLAND'S DOCTRINE AND ORGANIZATION

After Sidney Rigdon was excommunicated, he had opportunity of renouncing any doctrine or organizational innovation which he felt had corrupted the Church. He had a chance, if he so desired, to return to the Church's doctrine and organizations as he had known them during the Kirtland period. In fact, he stated his intention to do so,⁴³ but in actuality he did not. Sidney did reject polygamy and the expanded role of the Twelve, but he accepted a number of major innovations introduced in Nauvoo and, in fact, added a number of his own.⁴⁴

In Nauvoo, Sidney had taught baptism for the dead⁴⁵ and had received a further part of his endowment.⁴⁶ He definitely continued to teach baptism for the dead and probably also taught what he understood of the endowment.⁴⁷ In his correspondence with Stephen Post, Sidney never mentioned the endowment nor did he comment directly on baptism for the dead, but he did indicate on one occasion that if the members of the LDS Church did not repent that they and their dead would "perish together." Sidney also frequently stated that a major part of his own mission was to prepare the way for

³⁹Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 25 January 1864, Box 5, folder 8. An undated copy of this letter is found in Section 4, Copying Book A, between October 1863 and 19 June 1864, Post Papers. See also Joseph H. Newton, William Richards, and William Stanley, *An Appeal to the Latter-Day Saints* (Philadelphia: N.p. 1863), p. 48, Post Papers.

⁴⁰PM&A, June 1846, p. 475.

⁴¹Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 6 March 1857.

⁴²Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 25 January 1864. See fn. 39.

⁴³PM&A, 1 November 1844, p. 16

⁴⁴There are no known evaluations by Sidney Rigdon of his comments on his Nauvoo views or on his post-Nauvoo views concerning (1) the nature of the Godhead, (2) a plurality of gods, and (3) adoption by sealing. Josiah Ells, who was with Sidney in both Pittsburgh and Antrim, indicated that while in Antrim he once heard Sidney lecture on the "embodiment of the Holy Ghost." Unfortunately, I have been unable thus far to find a copy of the PM&A extra in which it was published (*The True LDS Herald*, 15 January 1864, p. 23).

⁴⁵Times and Seasons, 2 (15 April 1841): 387.

⁴⁶Times and Seasons, 5 (2 September 1844): 638; HC, 7: 238; Hyde, *Speech*, p. 8; *The Prophet* (New York City), 16 November 1844, p. 2, col. 2.

⁴⁷PM&A, 1 May 1845, p. 186; James Smith to James Strang, 16 May 1846, item 22a, Strang Papers. By May, Smith had left Rigdon to follow Strang.

Elijah's coming.⁴⁸ During the Pittsburgh period, Sidney also ordained many as prophets, priests, and kings.⁴⁹ Over twenty years later, he had Joseph Newton bestow on Stephen Post the same honor.⁵⁰

Also while in Nauvoo, Sidney had become a Mason. There is no known evidence which indicates whether or not he participated in Masonry while in Pennsylvania, but upon moving to New York he again became involved. On 18 June 1851, Allegany (Masonic) Lodge Number 225 received a charter. Among the charter members were Sidney Rigdon and three of his sons-in-law—George W. Robinson, Jeremiah Hatch, and E. B. Wingate.⁵¹ Sidney's son, John W. Rigdon, noted that his father was a "very dedicated Mason and was a regular attendant [sic] at the Masonic Lodge." In addition, John maintained that Sidney was "frequently called upon to speak at public occasions of the order" and when he died was given a Masonic burial.⁵²

Although Sidney maintained some of the doctrine as well as some of the organization as practiced in Nauvoo, he introduced a number of organizational changes into his churches. In Pittsburgh and Antrim, his church had a council of seventy-three which was next in authority to the First Presidency.⁵³ While this structural alteration was not found in his second church, Sidney did introduce a new relationship between the members of the First Presidency. Instead of designating Stephen Post and Joseph Newton as first and second counselors with one subordinate to the other, he assigned them separate responsibilities. In addition, both men were each to have

⁴⁸Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 23 January 1856.

⁴⁹PM&A, 15 April 1845, p. 168; Journal of George Albert Smith, 3 September 1844, p. 84, Church Archives; *The Prophet* (New York City), 7 December 1844, p. 3; John A. Forgeus to Stephen Post, 2 May 1869, Post Collection.

⁵⁰Journal of Stephen Post, 8 March 1868, Post Papers. See also, Joseph H. Newton to Stephen Post, 17 January 1865, and Section 20 (dated between 13 December 1864 and 16 October 1865), Copying Book A, Post Papers.

⁵¹"The History of Friendship," p. 59. Copy located in Arlene Hess, "Collected Materials Relative to Sidney Rigdon and His Descendants and Other Subjects Used in Preparation for the History of Friendship, New York," Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

⁵²John W. Rigdon, "Life Story of Sidney Rigdon," pp. 185, 199.

⁵³PM&A, 15 April 1845, pp. 168-69, 173. Prior to Sidney Rigdon's excommunication, he and Samuel James, later one of his counselors in Pittsburgh, were both members of the Council of Fifty. They both became members of the Council on 19 March 1844 but were dropped from the Council on 4 February 1845 (D. Michael Quinn, "The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844 to 1945," *Brigham Young University Studies* 20 [Winter 1980]: 194-95). Wilford Woodruff stated Sidney "attended some of the councils that president Smith held with the Twelve and others," and one of Rigdon's followers made mention of "the fifty" (*The Prophet* [New York City], 19 October 1844, p. 3, and PM&A, 1 November 1844, p. 10, col. 2; see also HC, 6: 267). Rigdon's acquaintance with the Council of Fifty may have been why he introduced a council of seventy-three into his Pittsburgh church.

two counselors.⁵⁴ Another change which Sidney made was the introduction of female priesthood holders and quorums—prophetesses, elders, priestesses, teachers, and deaconesses—who were to warn and/or bless any member of the church.⁵⁵

Rigdon's second church differed in a number of other ways from the Kirtland church. First, it was not called the Church of Christ, but the Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion.⁵⁶ Eventually, citing a scripture indicating God would give his followers a new name, Sidney instructed his flock to take upon themselves the name "Mennonite."⁵⁷ Sidney had earlier introduced a further doctrinal innovation when he declared that because "of an ancient covenant [sic] obtained by Melchisedec" that Melchizedek's descendants were to receive the gospel before the Lamanites did.⁵⁸

Although he spoke of returning to the doctrines and organization of the Kirtland period, after his excommunication Sidney Rigdon accepted many of the doctrines first taught in Nauvoo and introduced many new doctrines into his theology.

POLYGAMY

Through his newspaper Sidney attacked the practice of polygamy at Nauvoo, which he and his followers indicated Joseph had introduced.⁵⁹ Sidney found it hard to believe that there were those who could "invent and propagate doctrines so ruinous to society, so debasing and demoralising as the doctrine of man having a plurality of wives."⁶⁰ Later he added, "Did the Lord ever tell any people that sleeping with their neighbor's wives and daughters had any thing to

⁵⁴Section 14, Copying Book A, September 1864, Post Papers.

⁵⁵Section 15, Copying Book A, October 1864, Post Papers; "Church record of the Attica Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion," pp. 10-11; Sidney Rigdon to Sarah Newton, 1 June 1868; Sidney Rigdon to the "presidency," January 1869; Sidney Rigdon to the "Children of Zion," 18 January 1869. Among others, Phebe, Sidney's wife, was ordained a prophetess (see Section 17, Copying Book A, October 1864).

⁵⁶Joseph H. Newton to Stephen Post, 25 June 1863, and a newspaper article which appeared in the *Signal*, Post Papers.

⁵⁷Journal of Stephen Post, 19 September 1875, Post Papers.

⁵⁸Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 23 January 1856.

⁵⁹The following are among the comments which Rigdon's followers and William Law made as to when polygamy was introduced. Samuel Bennett: "How did he [Joseph Smith] transgress the law of God? I answer, he taught the doctrine that a man could have ten wives" (1 November 1844, p. 11, col. 1). "We found that he [Joseph Smith] was teaching the unholy spiritual wife doctrine secretly and denying it openly" (2 December 1844, p. 39, col. 1). "He [William Law] settled the question forever on the public mind, in relation to the spiritual wife system, and the abominations concerning it. As Joseph Smith and others had attempted to get him into it" (15 March 1845, p. 145, col. 2). William Small: "It is not long since a difficulty existed between myself and the church in this city, in consequence of the 'spiritual wife' system or doctrine; it originated between Hyrum Smith and myself; I had become acquainted with one of his 'spiritual wives' in St. Louis who informed me of the fact herself, that she was married to Hyrum. I mentioned this at one time in Nauvoo which soon reached Hyrum's ears, and made him feel rather unpleasant towards me" (1 January 1845, p. 70).

⁶⁰PM&A, 15 October 1844, p. 13.

do with preparing the way of the Savior's coming[?]"⁶¹ Sidney felt that the introduction of polygamy "led to the deaths of the Smiths, and that if that system had not been introduced they might have been living men today."⁶²

Although bitterly against polygamy while in Pittsburgh, Sidney Rigdon evidently taught it or something similar for a time in Antrim. Ebenezer Robinson, who had been Rigdon's first counselor in Pittsburgh and Antrim, wrote in 1886 that Sidney Rigdon had not practiced polygamy in Antrim,⁶³ but the weight of testimony seems to be that he at least taught it as a doctrine. Peter Hess, a Strangite, in a letter written 14 December 1846, claimed that a follower of Sidney Rigdon from Antrim Township reported that during a conference which had begun in the latter part of September, and which was held in the farm's barn, "that Mr. Rigdon had introduced a System of Wifery or the Battle Axe System or free or common intercourse with the women."⁶⁴

Under the date of 18 April 1859 the "Journal History" indicates that Harvey Whitlock, who became a Rigdonite in 1845 and remained with Sidney until at least June 1846,⁶⁵ testified that the Rigdonites had engaged in an "arrangement for temporary swapping wives." In commenting on Stephen Post's refusal to discuss polygamy, Isaac Sheen stated that "Sidney is undoubtedly aware that if his elders 'discuss the doctrine of polygamy,' they will be put in remembrance of the detestable, adulterous system which he established in Pennsylvania about eighteen years ago."⁶⁶

If Sidney did indeed practice or preach polygamy for a time, it suggests that in his earlier vehement harangues against polygamy that either he was only seeking a way to attack Joseph and the Church in Nauvoo and was not really against it, or that the practice of polygamy was a temporary aberration in his beliefs caused by his being subject to extreme emotional pressure. Because he was so forceful in his earlier criticism of polygamy, because he was evidently under a tremendous strain as indicated by his previously mentioned attempt to arouse opposition in Greencastle, and because he had a tendency

⁶¹Ibid., 15 February 1845, pp. 113, 114.

⁶²Ibid., June 1846, p. 475.

⁶³Ebenezer Robinson to J. Fraise, Jr., 24 April 1886. First printed in (Chambersburgh, Pa.) *Public Opinion* and cited in the *Franklin County School Annual*, pp. 53-54.

⁶⁴Peter Hess to James Strang, 14 December 1846, Strang Papers, item 45.

⁶⁵PM&A, 15 July 1845, pp. 267-68, and June 1846, p. 466.

⁶⁶*The True LDS Herald*, 15 January 1864, p. 16. As Josiah Ells stated in the above article, Rigdon had instructed Post not to discuss polygamy (Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 26 September 1863, Box 5, folder 7). Two other references to Rigdon's practicing polygamy, at least one of which refers to a time after his excommunication, are found in Joseph F. Smith, *Blood Atonement*, pp. 16 and 49.

to become highly emotional, the second alternative seems more likely to this writer.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER FACTIONS AND INDIVIDUAL APOSTATES

Rigdon's views of and relationship with those who had dissented from the Church previous to Joseph's death, and with factions which arose directly or indirectly from his death, offer a number of insights into the man. First, Sidney Rigdon consistently maintained that he was Joseph's rightful successor. He therefore never joined a group led by any other individual. Although a large part of his consistency in this matter can be attributed to his inordinate pride, it does reflect to some degree a fixed conviction. Also, his active involvement in perpetrating his beliefs demonstrates his personal conviction of the Restoration and the centrality of religious involvement to his life.

George Hinkle

Besides the Latter-day Saints,⁶⁷ the first major group centered in Nauvoo with which Sidney Rigdon had contact was that of George Hinkle. On 5 February 1845, Sidney responded to a letter that Mr. Hinkle, a former Mormon, had sent him on 8 January in which Hinkle had proposed to combine his followers with Rigdon's. Sidney felt such a course to be of "vast importance." He replied that if Mr. Hinkle continued to desire to join the Rigdonites he should attend the April conference in Pittsburgh. Sidney closed his letter to the man who in 1838 had been responsible for his delivery to a group of intensely anti-Mormon Missourians by telling George Hinkle to "be assured" of his "most abiding friendship."⁶⁸ George Hinkle decided to unite with Sidney Rigdon and in April was baptized. He subsequently strove with good success to bring his own previous followers under Rigdon's banner. He was not awarded a position in Sidney Rigdon's First Presidency for his efforts but did become a member of Rigdon's Grand Council. He remained with Sidney until almost the end of the Antrim period, at which time he moved to Illinois where he attempted to organize another following.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Due to space limitations, and as Sidney Rigdon's correspondence with Brigham Young will be treated by Ron Esplin, research historian for the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at Brigham Young University, at a later date, Sidney Rigdon's contact with the LDS Church is not considered any further here.

⁶⁸HC, 3: 196-99; *The Ensign* (Buffalo, Iowa Territory), April 1845, pp. 158-59.

⁶⁹Ibid., and May 1845, p. 175; PM&A, 15 April 1845, p. 168; *The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ* (Kirtland, Ohio), May 1848, p. 90, and December 1847, p. 35; George Hinkle died in the fall of 1862 and, as far as this writer now knows, had no connection with Sidney Rigdon's second church (*True LDS Herald*, 1 February 1877, p. 47).

John C. Bennett

After Joseph's death, John C. Bennett initially supported Sidney Rigdon's claim to leadership by sending one of Rigdon's supporters a revelation which he claimed Joseph had received in Nauvoo on 7 April 1841 and had entrusted to him. According to Bennett, Joseph had wanted it published after his death. Part of the purported revelation said that either Hyrum Smith or Sidney Rigdon would survive Joseph and that the survivor would be the "Imperial Prince to all Israel and over all authorities and Ecclesiastical powers." The revelation continued:

Behold the great day of apostasy is at hand, and after the kingdom shall be set up there shall be great wickedness, such as never was before; and my people will reject their prophet [Sidney Rigdon] and refuse council, and they will set up strange gods, and follow rulers that will usurp authority for filthy lucre's sake. And the apostasy shall be great, and they shall be ruled by twelve horns pushing them to destruction.

Sometime before 10 May 1845, Sidney's newspaper published this revelation in an extra edition.⁷⁰ While its publication suggests that it was used to help strengthen Sidney's position, it is mentioned only once in his preserved letters to Stephen Post.

But for some reason, John C. Bennett did not personally ally himself with Sidney Rigdon although he was approached to do so. In a letter he wrote from Cincinnati 28 March 1846, to James Strang, Bennett indicated that he had that day received a letter from Rigdon's first counselor, Ebenezer Robinson, and George Hinkle of Rigdon's Grand Council. This letter supposedly requested him to attend what appears to be the April 1846 conference. But in his letter to James Strang, Bennett stated: "I shall unite with you [Strang] or with none. There is nothing attractive to me under any other leader than yourself."⁷¹ While not desiring to follow Sidney Rigdon, Bennett referred to him as his "Friend" later in the letter. Although Bennett did not associate himself with Sidney and, in fact, joined with Strang, Sidney Rigdon voiced no animosity toward John C.

⁷⁰*The Prophet* (New York City), 10 May 1845, pp. 1-2; Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 20 December 1856. Neither the text of this revelation nor any comment on it appears in any of the regular issues of the *PM&A*, but *The Prophet* claimed it was copied from an extra. On 1 February 1866, Post noted in his journal that he talked to Ebenezer Robinson, who said he had printed the revelation in Pittsburgh and confirmed that Rigdon had no knowledge of the revelation until after he was rejected at Nauvoo. A handwritten copy is also in the Post Papers. Stephen Post evidently showed this purported revelation to his brother Warren, a Strangite, who copied it into his journal ("Personal History of Warren Post," pp. 75-78, RLDS Archives. Microfilm copies of the Warren Post diary are at the Church Archives and the Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

⁷¹Papers of Martin Wilford Poulson, Box 11, folder 3, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

Bennett, an occurrence which is unusual in light of Rigdon's relations with those who failed to join with or support him.⁷²

James Strang

James Strang also interacted with Sidney Rigdon. By late October 1844 James Strang was concerned about the strength of Rigdon's appeal.⁷³ At what was probably a later date, he wrote to Sidney; but Sidney did not answer, as Strang desired that Sidney assume a subordinate position as one of his counselors.⁷⁴ Sidney also treated Strang's call for missionaries lightly, feeling that if these missionaries preached for a thousand years the world would be no nearer the rest of God.⁷⁵

In April 1846, a Strangite conference at Voree voted to delay final action on Sidney Rigdon until the October conference. In the interim, George Adams was to visit Sidney. He reported in the October conference that while he had traveled to Greencastle to talk with Sidney he had not seen him and did not consider further effort worthwhile. John C. Bennett, calling himself a "warm personal friend" of Sidney, then suggested that Strang seek revelation on Sidney's standing. Strang did so, and as a result Sidney Rigdon was replaced by George Adams as counselor in the First Presidency. Supposedly, Sidney was dropped because he continued to rebel against the Lord and receive revelation from the devil.⁷⁶ More likely it was that Sidney had already lost most of his following and Strang's organization had already attracted most of them;⁷⁷ therefore, there was no practical need to have Sidney associate with them.

While Strang's newspapers contain numerous references of Sidney and his followers, only one will be mentioned here. On 11 December 1846, Stephen Post, later Rigdon's counselor, but then a Strangite, wrote that he felt "much respect" for Sidney Rigdon. But he added that "Sidney Rigdon died in the estimation of Joseph, as a councillor, in 1843," although through Hyrum's pleadings Sidney had been retained.⁷⁸

⁷²PM&A, 15 October 1846, p. 367; James J. Strang, "Chronicles of Voree," p. 111, Church Archives; Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, March 1867.

⁷³Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 25 October 1844.

⁷⁴James Strang to James Smith, 22 April 1846, item 22, Strang Papers; James J. Strang, "Chronicles of Voree," pp. 37-38, Church Archives.

⁷⁵James Smith to James Strang, 16 May 1846, item 22a, Strang Papers.

⁷⁶James J. Strang, "Chronicles of Voree," pp. 62, 111, and 117-18, Church Archives.

⁷⁷Letters to James Strang, 15 April, 23 and 24 March 1846, from Hazen Aldrich, James W. Pugh, and Benjamin Chapman respectively, items 214, 20, 16, Strang Papers; Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1848* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964), p. 154; *Voree Herald*, September 1846, p. 5.

⁷⁸Zion's Reveille, 18 February 1847, p. 24.

RLDS

Sidney Rigdon's involvement with the Reorganization began almost simultaneously with the establishment of his second church in 1863. When Sidney organized his church in Philadelphia he also published a seventy-two page pamphlet entitled *An Appeal to the Latter-day Saints* which attacked the claims of Joseph Smith III and strongly accused his parents of slander.⁷⁹

In a letter dated 10 September 1863, Sidney Rigdon commanded Stephen Post to go to Pittsburgh, where some followers of Sidney were yet living, and to use this pamphlet in proselyting. He did so. As a result, an RLDS, Josiah Ells, a former Rigdonite in Pittsburgh and Antrim, decided to answer Rigdon's pamphlet.⁸⁰ His reply was published in two parts in the 15 January and 1 February 1864 issues of the *True LDS Herald*. It attempted to demonstrate, by a lengthy analysis of Rigdon's doctrinal arguments and his past behavior, the falsity of Rigdon's claim he was the Lord's chosen leader.⁸¹

After talking with Ells on 10 November, Stephen Post also decided to write a letter. He, therefore, spent the next three days writing a letter to Joseph III. His effort was published between 31 January and 12 March 1864 in a pamphlet entitled *Zion's Messenger* which defended Rigdon's right to be a leader of the Lord's work.⁸²

In his previously mentioned letter of 10 September 1863, Sidney Rigdon also told Post that he was required to see Joseph III and "to warn him of the judgments of God" which awaited him unless he ceased "his abominations before the Lord." In February of 1865, Stephen Post wrote Joseph III and invited him to correspond. As Joseph III evidently did not reply, Post visited him in Nauvoo on 17 December 1865. Post told Joseph III that he "called on him by request of one who had been a friend of his fathers and had suffered with him also for this work." Joseph answered that "he did not wish to hear any call himself a friend of his father who slandered him and alluded to the appeal which he said he supposed Sidney endorsed." As Joseph III had company, they "did not have a lengthy conversation." On the twenty-first, Stephen Post again spoke with Joseph III but left no record of what they discussed. On the twenty-third, Post preached in Nauvoo. He was followed by Joseph III, who attempted

⁷⁹Joseph Newton to Stephen Post, 25 June 1863, and *An Appeal to the Latter-day Saints*, pp. 47-48, Post Papers.

⁸⁰Journal of Stephen Post, 11-13 November 1863, and 31 January and 12 March 1864, Post Papers; Stephen Post and William Hamilton, *Zion's Messenger* (Erie, Pa: Sterett and Gara, 1864), pp. 1-8 (this copy is incomplete, only eight pages being preserved; a complete copy is in RLDS Archives). As with the *Appeal*, Sidney avoided having his name attached to its writing (Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 25 November 1863).

⁸¹*True LDS Herald*, 15 January and 1 February 1864, pp. 17-31, 33-39.

⁸²Stephen Post to Joseph Smith III, 11 November 1863.

to show the reason Rigdon's claim was rejected by the Twelve, the legality of Rigdon's excommunication trial, and the fact that Sidney had been a spokesman only to the people near Perrysburg and not for Joseph Smith.⁸³ This was Post's last recorded contact with Joseph III until August 1879, but he had numerous encounters with other RLDS members during the next year and sporadically thereafter.⁸⁴

That such interaction should occur was almost inevitable because of the timing of the organization of Sidney's second church and his subsequent instructions for his faithful to gather to Iowa, where probably the greatest number of RLDS were then located. In addition, until March 1866, Stephen Post had been instructed to go only to believers in the Book of Mormon.⁸⁵ As he was not to go to Utah, this, of course, meant that most of his efforts would be concentrated on RLDS members.

Sidney evidently had no personal contact with young Joseph's followers, but he did receive a number of letters from them. Among those who wrote was H. P. Brown, who in July of 1860 inquired how Sidney felt about young Joseph's being President of the Church. Sidney did not answer.⁸⁶ Then in September of 1864, Samuel Wilcox wrote Sidney, telling him to follow young Joseph.⁸⁷ A few years later, in September of 1867, William W. Blair sent Sidney some proof sheets of the first edition of Joseph Smith's inspired revision of the Bible.⁸⁸

Sidney's organization enjoyed a fairly successful period from 1864 through 1867. But weakened by internal dissent and unable to mount a major proselyting effort,⁸⁹ it gradually gave way before the efforts of the Reorganized LDS Church. In 1867, for example, two RLDS, William W. Blair and Ebenezer Robinson, arrived in Philadelphia, where Sidney's church had begun, and found a branch of his supporters there, many of whom had lost "confidence" in his guidance. After Ebenezer Robinson, who had been one of Sidney's counselors in Pittsburgh and Antrim, sharply criticized some of

⁸³Stephen Post to Joseph Smith III, 19 February 1865, Box 5, folder 8; Journal of Stephen Post, 17, 21, and 23 December 1865; Stephen Post to James Post, 20 and 25 December 1865.

⁸⁴Journal of Stephen Post, 2 and 5 February; 11 and 25 March; 1, 8, and 19 April 1866; 30 June 1867; April 1868; 5 June 1870; Joseph Smith III to Stephen Post, 6 August 1869, Joseph Smith III Letterbook, pp. 304-306, RLDS Archives.

⁸⁵Joseph Newton to Stephen Post, 2 March 1866, and Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 26 September 1863.

⁸⁶Sidney Rigdon to Stephen Post, 17 July 1860.

⁸⁷Samuel Wilcox to Sidney Rigdon, 14 September 1863.

⁸⁸Blair, comp., *The Memoirs of W. W. Blair*, p. 135.

⁸⁹See Journal of Stephen Post, 1864-1867, Post Papers; "Personal History of Warren Post" (Stephen's brother), pp. 36, 64, 70 and 72, RLDS Archives.

his past behavior, he and Elder Blair baptized ten of this group, although some still followed Sidney Rigdon.⁹⁰ Then in April and May 1868, William Blair wrote four articles for the *Herald* attacking Sidney Rigdon.⁹¹

The Rigdonite movement continued to decline and by Sidney Rigdon's death in Friendship, New York, in 1876, was very weak, lasting only about another decade.

⁹⁰Ebenezer Robinson became a member of the RLDS Church on 28 April 1863 (Blair, comp., *The Memoirs of W. W. Blair*, pp. 83 and 132-33).

⁹¹*True LDS Herald*, 15 April and 15 May 1868, pp. 100-102, 113-17, 129-32, 145-47.