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Title Kirtland Camp, 1838: Bringing the Poor to Missouri

Author(s) Alexander L. Baugh

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Abstract In the spring and summer of 1838, the presidency of the Seventy in Kirtland organized Kirtland Camp to assist many of the poorer Church members living in Ohio to relocate to northern Missouri, a trek of more than eight hundred miles. Comprised of over five hundred individuals, including families, Kirtland Camp was the first Mormon company organized to assist in the migration of the Latter-day Saints in the history of the Church.

KIRTLAND CAMP, 1838: Bringing the Poor to Missouri

ALEXANDER L. BAUGH

Joseph Young, senior president of the Seventy (1835–81). Young was in one of the last groups of the original Kirtland Camp to arrive in Missouri. On 30 October 1838 his party was at Hawn's Mill at the time the community was attacked. Courtesy Church History Library.

Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon's abrupt departure from Kirtland on 12 January 1838 signaled an end to Kirtland as the headquarters of the Church.[1] For months previous to this time, Church leaders and members had encountered mounting opposition from bitter apostates and unfriendly antagonists. Fearing increased hostilities and unwarranted vexatious litigation, the Prophet considered that the most viable option was for the Church's leadership and those still loyal to the faith to relocate and unite with the Saints living in Caldwell County, Missouri. Mormonism was on the move once again.

In 1838, the Church members' optimism in Missouri ran high and prospects were promising. In December 1836, the state legislature created Caldwell County exclusively for Mormon occupation, and in the months that followed "the Saints came marching in," primarily from Clay County (where most had resettled following the expulsion from Jackson County in late 1833), but other Missouri counties as well. Land was relatively cheap, selling at $1.25 per acre; and in nearby Daviess County, which had not officially been surveyed by the federal government, a settler could stake a pre-emption claim up to 160 acres with no payment due until the land officially came up for sale.[2] In a revelation received by Joseph Smith in April 1838, just a few weeks after his arrival in northern Missouri, instructions were given indicating that Far West "should be built up speedily by the gathering of my saints; And also that other places should be appointed for stakes in the regions round about" (D&C 115:17-18). The call to gather to Missouri resonated with the Saints in Ohio, as well as those residing in the outlying branches in the Eastern states, and even those living in Ontario, Canada. The fact that the Prophet had moved to Missouri intimated to many that the final establishment of Zion must be imminent.

During the spring and early summer of 1838, Mormon families from various localities packed their belongings, sold out, and made their way to the

FROM THE EDITOR:

Since the article immediately preceding this one, "How Much Weight Can a Single Source Bear? The Case of Samuel D. Tyler's Journal Entry," deals with Kirtland Camp, and because many members of the Church are not as familiar with this camp as they are with Zion's Camp, a short historical article on Kirtland Camp seemed appropriate. I hope you enjoy it.

This map shows the route of the 1838 Kirtland Camp from Kirtland to Adam-ondi-Ahman. Map produced by Brandon Plewe, Brigham Young University Geography; after map in B. S. Plewe, S. K. Brown, D. Q. Cannon, and R. H. Jackson, *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2012), 38.

western frontier. But for many Saints, particularly those living in northeastern Ohio, it was not that easy, many of whom were still reeling from financial losses incurred as a result of the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society Anti-Banking Company and the depressed nationwide economic conditions from the "Panic of 1837."

On 6 March 1838, the presidents and members of the quorums of Seventy in Kirtland assembled in the temple to discuss how best to facilitate moving their families to Missouri. In their discussions, plans called for the Seventies and their families to travel together in a "compact body" or large group. In this way, they felt they could support one another, especially those families who were poor or in destitute circumstances. During a meeting held the following week on 13 March, a formal constitution outlining the bylaws and rules of the group was adopted.[3] However, when word of the Seventies' plan circulated among the members of the other priesthood quorums who were also in need of assistance, the invitation was extended to include them. Zera Pulsipher, one of the seven presidents, wrote of the decision to help those whose families were not of the Seventy: "When they heard that we were going together and would help one another they wanted to join us and get out of that hell of persecution. Therefore, we could not neglect them . . . they were poor and could not help themselves."[4]

During the weeks that followed, Kirtland bustled with activity as families made preparations for the eight-hundred-mile journey, and instructions from the presidents of the Seventy were implemented. Once organized, the company became known as Kirtland Camp. Initially, plans called for the company to leave Kirtland in mid-May, but delays postponed their departure until 6 July.[5] By this time, the camp was composed of over 170 household heads, totaling

What Was the Kirtland Camp?

- Kirtland Camp was the first organized Mormon migration company of more than 500 Latter-day Saints in one group. The company was organized under the direction of the seven presidents of the Seventy.
- Members of Kirtland Camp covenanted to live by a constitution that provided guidelines regarding the camp's organization and set a code of conduct for its members.
- Kirtland Camp's trek of over 800 miles began on 6 July 1838 in Kirtland, Ohio. The main company arrived at Adam-ondi-Ahman in Daviess County, Missouri, on 4 October 1838.
- For members of Kirtland Camp, their stay at Adam-ondi-Ahman was short-lived—about six weeks. Following the Mormon surrender to Missouri authorities in November 1838, they were forced to leave Adam-ondi-Ahman and temporarily relocate near Far West. They stayed there until February 1839, at which time they left Missouri by order of Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs.

Zera Pulsipher, one of the seven presidents of the Seventy (1838–62), assisted in the organization of Kirtland Camp. Courtesy Church History Library.

The only historical marker erected in honor of the Kirtland Camp is located in Fairborn, Ohio. Photograph by Michael W. Stevens.

over five hundred persons.[6] The company was divided into four divisions. Within each division "tent overseers" were appointed to supervise a few families that shared a common tent.[7]

In their westward journey, Kirtland Camp generally followed well-traveled roads, including the National Road (sometimes called the Cumberland Road), which in the 1830s ran from Maryland through southwestern Pennsylvania, central Ohio, and Indiana, and then terminated in Vandalia, Illinois (the original state capital). However, Mormons traveling from Ohio to Missouri generally left the National Road in western Indiana, striking out on a direct westerly course toward northern Missouri.[8] The mere size of the company caused it to move considerably slower than if a family was traveling independently. Rules dictated that the company travel no more than fifteen miles a day. Travel delays were common because of sickness, broken wagons and equipment, river crossings, inclement weather conditions, problems with animals, and food shortages. Some families even stopped to find temporary work so they could have enough food and money to continue. Not surprisingly, on 24 September, upon arriving at Paris, Monroe County, Missouri (after two and one-half months of travel), Kirtland Camp had been considerably reduced in number. The camp record reads: "Reorganized the camp which had become rather disorganized by reason of so many stopping by the way. The third division was put into the first and second, as that division had become quite small."[9] No mention is even made of the whereabouts of the fourth division. It short, Kirtland Camp was strung out for miles and across state lines.

On 2 October, nearly three months after beginning their journey, the main company of Kirtland Camp arrived safely at Far West.[10] At the time of their arrival, tension between the Mormons and the local inhabitants was increasing, especially in Daviess County, where during the previous month, vigilante groups had engaged in a number of isolated hostile actions against Mormon settlers. Hoping to strengthen the Mormon presence in the region, Church leaders directed Kirtland Camp members to move to Adam-ondi-Ahman, where they arrived on 4 October.[11] Unfortunately, however, their stay in "Diahman" was short-lived. Soon after Church authorities surrendered to Missouri officials on 2 Nov-

ember, the Mormons residing in Daviess County (which included Kirtland Camp members) were compelled to relocate in Caldwell County.[12]

Throughout the month of October 1838, additional groups and families who at one time had been part of Kirtland Camp, but for one reason or another had lagged behind, continued to make their way to Far West. Sadly, several of these road-weary travelers became innocent victims of the Hawn's Mill tragedy. Joseph Young, senior president of the Seventy, was leading one of these last groups of stragglers still on the road in late October. While passing through Livingston County, anti-Mormon raiders accosted the small party who threatened they would be killed if they proceeded; however, they were allowed to go on. Young's party arrived at the Hawn's Mill settlement on 28 October, two days before the fatal attack. Among their number killed were Warren Smith, husband of Amanda Barnes Smith, and their ten-year-old son Sardius. A second son, six-year-old Alma, was severely wounded. Nathan K. Knight, another Kirtland Camp member, incurred serious injuries but recovered.[13]

Ultimately, Kirtland Camp successfully assisted over five hundred Latter-day Saints to relocate from Ohio to Missouri. However, the unfortunate events associated with the Missouri-Mormon conflict and the executive order by Governor Lilburn W. Boggs calling for the expulsion of the Mormons from the state resulted in the Kirtland Camp members' stay in Missouri being only temporary. ■

Alexander L. Baugh is a professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University. He received his BS from Utah State University and his MA and PhD degrees from Brigham Young University. He specializes in the Missouri period (1831–39) of early LDS Church history. He serves as editor of *Mormon Historical Studies*, as codirector of research for the Religious Studies Center at BYU, and as a volume editor for the Joseph Smith Papers.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 3:1 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).
2. Jeffrey N. Walker, "Mormon Land Rights in Caldwell and Daviess Counties and the Mormon Conflict of 1838," *BYU Studies* 47/1 (2008): 27–29.
3. See *History of the Church*, 3:87–91.
4. Zera Pulsipher, Autobiography, typescript, 8, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
5. See Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 354; and *History of the Church*, 3:99–100.
6. Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 355. The number of Kirtland Camp members given in Joseph Smith's published history is 529. See *History of the Church*, 3:100. Gordon O. Hill places the number at 515. See Gordon O. Hill, "A History of Kirtland Camp: Its Initial Purpose and Notable Accomplishments" (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975), 22.
7. For accounts mentioning the divisions and "tent overseers," see *History of the Church* 3:102, 105, 109.
8. See Alexander L. Baugh, "Travel between Ohio and Missouri, 1831–1838," in *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History*, ed. Brandon S. Plewe (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2012), 38.
9. *History of the Church*, 3:143.
10. *History of the Church*, 3:147.
11. *History of the Church*, 3:147–48.
12. The Mormons living in Daviess County were given until 20 November to leave. See Alexander L. Baugh, *A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense of Northern Missouri* (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History and BYU Studies, 2000), 156.
13. See Baugh, *Call to Arms*, 115–34. Joseph Young's 4 July 1839 affidavit sworn before Adams County, Illinois, Circuit Court Judge C. M. Woods is the earliest and most widely published account of the Hawn's Mill Massacre. See Alexander L. Baugh, "Joseph Young's Affidavit of the Massacre at Haun's [*sic*] Mill," *BYU Studies* 38/1 (1999): 189–202.