

Jesse Gause: Joseph Smith's Little-Known Counselor

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In the 1981 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, the introduction to section 81 states: "The historical records show that when this revelation was received in March 1832 it called Jesse Gause to the office of counselor to Joseph Smith in the First Presidency. . . . Brother Gause served for a time, but was excommunicated from the Church in December 1832." Who was Jesse Gause? Despite his brief prominence in the early Church organization, he was virtually lost in the annals of Church history until quite recently.¹ Although Jesse Gause's biography is still sketchy, it provides insight into early Church conversions and quorum organization.

Jesse Gause was born about 1784 at East Marlborough, Chester County, Pennsylvania, as the second son of Mary Beverly and William Goss.² Jesse's mother was a Quaker who had fallen under disapproval in 1781 for permitting a Baptist minister to perform her marriage to William Goss, a veteran of the American Revolution who was a nonmember of the Society of Friends.³ Despite this initial rift with the Society of Friends, the entire family of William and Mary Goss eventually became Quakers and changed the spelling of their name to Gause. In 1806, the adult Jesse Gause requested and received membership in the Society of Friends.⁴

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¹Aside from a brief reference to Jesse Gause in the seven-volume *History of the Church* (which did not mention his position as counselor), his significance was first discussed in Mario S. DePillis, "The Development of Mormon Communitarianism, 1826-46" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1960), pp. 58-64. Gause was first identified as the original subject of D&C 81 in D. Michael Quinn, "The Evolution of the Presiding Quorums of the LDS Church," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 24. See also Robert J. Woodford, "Jesse Gause—Counselor to the Prophet," *Brigham Young University Studies* 15 (Spring 1975): 362-64; Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo: Seventy's Mission Bookstore, 1982), pp. 171-72. The present article has more information about Jesse Gause than these other sources.

²Wilford Jordan, ed., *Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania, New Series* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1954), pp. 117-18; Gause Family Records, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania; Probate of Wills, Book 17, p. 22, Chester County, Pennsylvania; J. Smith Futhey and Gilbert Cope, *History of Chester County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: H. Everts, 1881), p. 562.

³New Garden Monthly Meeting of Friends, 7 July 1781, p. 267, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Jordan, *Colonial and Revolutionary Families*, pp. 117-18.

⁴London Grove Monthly Meeting Record, 6 August 1806, p. 133, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

For more than twenty years, Jesse Gause was a Quaker in good standing, but his movement from place to place indicates a great restlessness. In 1808 he moved from Chester County to Fayette County, Pennsylvania, returning to Chester County in 1811. In 1812 he moved again, this time to Wilmington, Delaware. From 1812 to 1815, Jesse Gause taught at the Friends' School in Wilmington, but this stability seemed marred by the fact of his service in the state militia in 1814. It is unclear whether he was pressured into military service during the War of 1812 despite his Quaker pacifism or whether he was reasserting the military tradition of his father. In any event, Jesse left Wilmington in 1815 and moved to Philadelphia where he married Martha Johnson, a fellow Quaker. In 1816, he and his bride left Philadelphia for Belmont County, Ohio, and then in 1821 moved to Jefferson County, Ohio. They remained there less than three months before returning to his family home in Chester County, Pennsylvania, where they stayed only a few weeks before moving to Wilmington. There from 1822, Jesse Gause seemed settled until his wife died shortly after the birth of their fourth child in 1828.⁵

Jesse Gause remarried almost immediately after his wife's death, and these abrupt changes in his marital situation seemed to precipitate a religious crisis in his life. On 30 January 1829, Jesse Gause resigned from the Society of Friends and soon moved to Hancock, Berkshire County, Massachusetts.⁶ Exactly seven months after his resignation from the Quakers, Jesse Gause and his children were listed as members of the Hancock "Family" of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (the "Shakers"). The Shakers believed in strict celibacy, even for married couples who converted to the movement.⁷ Although Jesse's new bride had recently given birth to their first child, she joined with her husband in conversion to the Shakers. Two years later, Jesse Gause moved from Massachusetts to Ohio, where his life merged briefly with that of Joseph Smith.

⁵William Wade Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy*, 5 vols. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards Brothers, 1936-50), 4:87, 204, 331; J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Delaware, 1699-1888* (Philadelphia: L. J. Richards, 1888), pp. 684-85, 691; Public Archives Commission of Delaware, *Delaware, Archives, Military Records*, 5 vols. (Wilmington, Del.: Star Publishing Co., 1912-16), 5:901; and following manuscript records at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania: Quaker meeting records of Londongrove, Redstone, Kennett, Wilmington, and Philadelphia. There is more than one person named Jesse Gause in the Quaker records and previous publications. Woodford and Cook misidentified some of these men as the Jesse Gause of Mormon history.

⁶Wilmington Quaker Membership Record, 1815-27, p. 45; Wilmington Quaker Membership Record, 1828-65, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁷Diary of Richard McNemar, 1822-35, item 255, box 50, Shaker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Edward D. Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953); Lawrence L. Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

For some reason, Jesse Gause left the four children of his first marriage in the care of his sister who had also joined the Shakers in New England.⁸ Then he, his second wife, and their young child traveled nearly six hundred miles from Hancock Village to the Shaker Family at North Union, Cuyahoga County, Ohio. They arrived there 22 October 1831.⁹ North Union was only fifteen miles from the new headquarters of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at Kirtland. As early as March 1831, another Shaker, Leman Copley, had joined the Church. Seven months before Jesse's arrival, in March, Leman Copley and Parley P. Pratt had made an unsuccessful visit to preach to the Shakers at North Union.¹⁰ It is not known when or how Mormon missionaries contacted Jesse Gause, but less than five months after he came to Ohio as a Shaker, he was converted to the Church and was soon chosen as a counselor to Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith was sustained and ordained President of the High Priesthood on 25 January 1832. He was at this time without counselors, but during the first week of the following March a revelation authorized the Prophet to appoint an unspecified number of counselors to assist "the presidency of the high Priesthood."¹¹ In an obscure entry in one of the records books from Kirtland, Joseph wrote:

March 8th 1832.

Chose this day and ordained brother Jesse Gause and Broth[er] Sidney [Rigdon] to be my counsellors [sic] of the ministry of the presidency of th[e] high Pri[e]sthood.¹²

Both men were simply called "counselors" to the Church president, but President Gause may have had the precedence of being first counselor: Joseph Smith listed him first when recording the organization of the First Presidency, and Jesse Gause was also nearly ten years older than Sidney Rigdon at a time in the Church when seniority was determined on the basis of age.¹³ On 10 August 1832, one of Gause's

⁸Gause Family Records, Chester County Historical Society.

⁹Records of the Church at North Union, vol. 177, p. 12, series V-B, Shaker Manuscripts, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

¹⁰Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971), 1:167; Parley P. Pratt, Jr., ed., *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1961), p. 61; D&C 49:1-3.

¹¹*History of the Church*, 1:243; Reynolds Cahoon Diary, January 1832, Library-Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Church Archives); Revelation to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, March 1832, MS, Newel K. Whitney Family Papers, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

¹²Kirtland Revelations Book, MS, pp. 10-11, Church Archives.

¹³Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History*, 22d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1973), p. 153. Before I realized that Jesse Gause was almost ten years older than Sidney Rigdon, I concluded that circumstantial evidence seemed to indicate Sidney Rigdon was probably functioning as first counselor (see Quinn, "Evolution of Presiding Quorums," p. 24).

Shaker associates wrote that Jesse Gause “is yet a Mormon—and is second to the Prophet or Seer—Joseph Smith.”¹⁴

An obvious question about Gause’s appointment is why Joseph Smith chose as counselor a man who had been a member of the Church only a few months, maybe even weeks, when the Prophet could have advanced to that position other men who had been associated with the Church from its beginning. The answer seems to lie in the revelation concerning the United Order that Joseph Smith also received in March 1832, just before he chose counselors and formed a presidency:

For verily I say unto you, the time has come, and is now at hand; and behold, and lo, it must needs be that there be an organization of my people, in regulating and establishing the affairs of the storehouse for the poor of my people, both in this place and in the land of Zion. (D&C 78:3)

Jesse Gause had three years’ experience with the communitarian Shaker families in Massachusetts and Ohio, and another twenty-three years’ experience with the close-knit Quakers. To Joseph Smith, he must have appeared ideally suited as a counselor to assist in the organization and direction of the Mormon efforts in living the ideals of the revelatory law of consecration and stewardship.

President Gause actively functioned as a counselor in the First Presidency during the spring and summer of 1832. Joseph Smith’s history records that the Prophet took Jesse Gause with him from Kirtland to Missouri to fulfill the revelation that Joseph establish the United Order among the Saints in Zion.¹⁵ The presence of Jesse Gause and Sidney Rigdon in the meetings in Missouri for this purpose in April–May 1832 was significant, because both had previously been members of religious groups that practiced economic communitarianism.¹⁶ In addition to helping the Prophet establish the United Order in Missouri, Jesse Gause was one of the eight high priests at the Missouri conference of 26 April 1832 who sustained Joseph Smith in his position as President of the High Priesthood.¹⁷

On 15 March 1832 Joseph Smith had dictated a revelation to his new counselor Jesse Gause in which Jesse was appointed to preach

¹⁴Matthew Houston to Seth Y. Wells, from North Union, Ohio, 10 August 1832, Shaker Manuscripts, series IV–A, folder 51, Western Reserve Historical Society.

¹⁵*History of the Church*, 1:265; D&C 78:8–9; Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–44* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982), pp. 43–50.

¹⁶Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 88; F. Mark McKiernan, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: Sidney Rigdon, Religious Reformer, 1793–1876* (Lawrence, Kan.: Coronado Press, 1971), pp. 27–29; DePillis, “Development of Mormon Communitarianism,” pp. 58–64.

¹⁷Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, pp. 43–44; *History of the Church*, 1:267.

the gospel “in the land of the living, and among thy brethern [sic],” an apparent reference to the Shakers from whom Gause had been converted.¹⁸ Therefore, on 1 August 1832 he began a missionary journey with Zebedee Coltrin that took them to the Shaker community at North Union, Leman Copley’s settlement at Thompson, and the Rappite community of Economy near Pittsburgh.¹⁹ On 20 August 1832, Zebedee Coltrin recorded in his diary: “Brother Jesse and I after prayer with and for each other parted in the fellowship of the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”²⁰ But after the summer of 1832, something changed in Gause’s relationship to Mormonism, and he “denied the faith.”²¹

As with his conversion from Quakerism to Shakerism, his desertion of the Mormon church may have centered in his personal family circumstances. During his missionary journey of August, Jesse Gause visited his second wife, Minerva, at North Union and tried to persuade her to leave the celibate Shakers and join his conversion to the restored gospel. His wife refused to listen to him and even offered to give him their child rather than go with him herself.²²

In view of what is known about Jesse Gause’s troubled family relations in the summer of 1832, his disaffection from Mormonism may have resulted from his learning about polygamous theory and practice that were emerging at that time. The 1830 Book of Mormon provided for the theoretical possibility that God could suspend the prohibition against polygamy, and this theoretical possibility could also be construed from the circumstances of an unpublished revelation dictated by Joseph Smith in July 1831.²³ In fact, a Mormon dissenter referred to this 1831 revelation in a newspaper exposé published in Ohio less than two months after Jesse Gause arrived there.²⁴ But two men who later became members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles affirmed that it was not until 1832 that Joseph Smith secretly made specific what had heretofore been ambiguous potentials of polygamy in Mormonism. Orson Pratt acknowledged the existence of an 1831 revelation but indicated that Joseph Smith privately removed ambiguity from the matter about the time Jesse Gause was converted to the Church and became counselor:

¹⁸Kirtland Revelations Book, index; “17 Revelation to Jesse Gauze [sic] March 15, 1832,” and pp. 17–18 for revelation to “my servant Jesse.”

¹⁹Zebedee Coltrin Diary, 1 August–20 August 1832; Journal History of the Church, 1 August 1832, both at Church Archives.

²⁰Zebedee Coltrin Diary, 20 August 1832.

²¹Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, pp. 47–48.

²²Matthew Houston to Seth Y. Wells, 10 August 1832.

²³Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, pp. 132–35.

²⁴Ezra Booth letter, 6 December 1831, in *Ohio Star* (8 December 1831).

In the fore part of the year 1832, Joseph told individuals, then in the Church, that he had inquired of the Lord concerning the principle of plurality of wives, and he received for answer that the principle of taking more wives than one is a true principle, but the time had not yet come for it to be practised [sic]. That was before the Church was two years old.²⁵

William E. McLellin also claimed that by the time of the birth of Joseph Smith III on 6 November 1832, the Prophet had begun polygamous cohabitation.²⁶ In view of Gause's prior conversion to the celibacy of the Shakers and his current problems with his wife, who refused to abandon her Shaker conversion, it is easy to imagine the kind of emotional and spiritual devastation Jesse Gause would have experienced in the fall of 1832 had he learned of these first stirrings of polygamy.

Whatever the cause, sometime between his joyful departure from his missionary companion in August 1832 and the following December, Jesse Gause apostatized from the Church. Joseph Smith recorded that "Bro. Jesse" was excommunicated on 3 December 1832, and Frederick G. Williams was appointed as counselor in place of Gause in a revelation of 5 January 1833, which was never published in the Doctrine & Covenants.²⁷

Gause's activities after 1832 are unknown, but in September 1836, a brother was appointed legal guardian for the orphan "children of Jesse Gause late of the County of Chester deceased."²⁸ Nearly forty years later, his sister Hannah said that Jesse "died away from his family when [his son Owen, born 1825] was a little boy, and no record seems to have been found."²⁹ Apparently, Jesse Gause continued to be a restless geographic wanderer and religious seeker until his death at age fifty-two.

Joseph Smith had originally chosen Jesse Gause and Sidney Rigdon as his counselors on 8 March 1832, but exactly one year later the Prophet received a revelation in which the positions of Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams as his counselors were affirmed (D&C 90:6, 19–21). In view of the 1833 revelation, Joseph Smith on 18 March 1833 reorganized the First Presidency: "Accordingly I laid

²⁵*Journal of Discourses*, 13:193.

²⁶William E. McLellin to Joseph Smith III, July 1872, p. 2, RLDS Research Library and Archives, the Auditorium, Independence, Missouri.

²⁷Joseph Smith Journal, 3 December 1832, Church Archives; Cook, *Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 362.

²⁸Orphans Docket, 17:199, Chester County, Pennsylvania.

²⁹Annie Gause, "Notes from Conversation with Aunt Hannah," ca. 1873, Gause Family Papers, Chester County Historical Society. Jesse Gause does not appear in the indexes of the 1840 manuscript census, and undoubtedly he died about 1836, even though his family did not know the exact circumstances.

my hands on Brother Sidney and Frederick and ordained them to take part with me in holding the keys of this last kingdom, and to assist in the Presidency of the High Priesthood, as my Counselors.’’³⁰ Jesse Gause had been called and chosen to this high responsibility in 1832, but he did not serve with endurance beyond a few months. When the revelation appointing Jesse Gause to the presidency was published for the first time, his name was simply removed and that of Frederick G. Williams was substituted in its place.

³⁰*History of the Church*, 1:334.