

GLEANNING THE HARVEST:  
STRANGITE MISSIONARY WORK, 1846–1850

by

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

### GLEANNING THE HARVEST: STRANGITE MISSIONARY WORK, 1846–1850

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This thesis argues that in studying the missionary work of the followers of James J. Strang, one gains a better understanding of the expectations and complexities of first generation Mormons. The introduction provides a background of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strangite) from 1844 through 1850. Chapter One discusses the reasons why former Mormons joined Strang, which included their dissatisfaction with Brigham Young and their attraction to the doctrines and positions of Strang. Chapters Two and Three analyze and discuss the successes and failures of Strang's actual missionary work. The work initially succeeded because of the converts' desire for a prophet, the use of the Latter-day Saint networks, and the effectiveness of the Strangite missionaries. The work ultimately failed, however, because of internal dissension, newly introduced and controversial doctrines, and the countering efforts of the LDS Church and other Mormon Restorationist groups. The fourth chapter provides a case study of the Strangite missionary work by discussing the church's activities in England. Chapter Five

concludes the thesis by giving an account of an unsuccessful mission to the Native Americans, providing a brief history of the movement after 1850, and discussing the ultimate failure of Strangism. In essence, this thesis argues that a correlation generally existed between the Strangites' view of how Strang was following the perceived principles of Mormonism and their belief in Strang's prophetic mission. In other words, Strangites, like all early Mormons, had their individual ideals concerning Mormonism and what it represented. This thesis will use the Mormon-to-Strangite conversion to illustrate the complexities involved in finding their version of Mormonism.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could not have completed this thesis without the wonderful help of many individuals and institutions. First, I am most grateful for a travel grant from the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at Brigham Young University and a research grant from the History Department at Brigham Young University that afforded me the opportunity to travel, research, and acquire reproductions of valuable manuscripts. I appreciate the helpful and resourceful staff of the library and archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah, especially the help and encouragement from Ronald G. Watt, Steven R. Sorenson, and Ronald O. Barney; I also am thankful for the help of the staff at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Brigham Young University. Ronald E. Romig at the archives of the Community of Christ in Independence, Missouri, was also generous with his time in pointing out sources. The staff at the Clarke Historical Library at Central Michigan University, in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan; the Burton Historical Library at Detroit, Michigan; the library at the Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas; and Carrol Fink of the Library of Michigan, in Lansing, Michigan, all provided their time and effort in supplying me with photocopies of invaluable sources, which furthered my study.

William Shephard of Voree, Wisconsin, was kind in sharing not only his sources and files, but in giving me a place to sleep during my research trip. His insight and

devotion has given me a greater understanding and appreciation of James J. Strang and his teachings. John Hajicek was also helpful in answering my inquiries regarding sources. Vickie Cleverley Speek shared her research with me and pointed out errors in some of my understanding of Strangism.

My committee has been extremely helpful in making my thesis shine. Susan S. Rugh has given me a better understanding of what American society was doing during the timeframe of this thesis. Richard E. Bennett has provided me invaluable insight into Strangism, the LDS Church, and the relationship between the two. Our conversations upon this subject have been enjoyable and educational. Ronald W. Walker provided encouragement all along the process of writing this thesis. It was under his supervision that I first found the enjoyment of LDS History. Also I am grateful to Richard Lloyd Anderson for his friendship, support, and mentoring for the last three years.

Finally I would like to thank my family, especially my wife, Emily. The countless hours of help that she has devoted to this thesis and to me were beyond the call of duty. I also owe a debt to my cute girls who sacrificed many games of “chase” so that I could finish this thesis.



## FOREWORD

My interest in the history of James J. Strang and the people who followed him began after I discovered that my great-great-grandfather, William Capener, when only a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for a few years, joined the Strangite Church. Having heard very little of Strang and being naive about the environment of the LDS Church at the time of Joseph Smith, I did not understand how my ancestor could have left the Mormon Church. Now, after three years of studying Strangism, I not only understand why he made that choice, but I am also impressed that he showed his faith in the Mormonism he knew by following Strang—and then by later rejecting him.

I feel it necessary to acknowledge my biases: I am a believing member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Utah tradition) and as such take particular interest in the history, development, and success of the LDS Church. But at the same time, I am keenly interested in learning about Strangism. Thousands of Mormons (e.g. believers in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon) exercised their faith by joining Strang and it is in the story of these faithful believers that I hope to portray.

## CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
FOREWORD.....	ix
LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES, & MAPS .....	xi
INTRODUCTION TO THE STRANGITE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT.....	1
1. CONVERTING TO STRANGISM.....	17
2. RISE OF STRANGISM.....	39
3. DEPARTURE FROM STRANGISM.....	73
4. MISSIONARIES TO ENGLAND.....	105
5. IMPRESSIVE FAILURE.....	129
APPENDIX: CHARTS & MAPS.....	141
HISTORIOGRAPHY.....	149
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	159

LIST OF CHARTS, FIGURES, AND MAPS

	Page
FIGURE 1: JAMES J. STRANG . . . . .	3
FIGURE 2: VOREE HILL. . . . .	8
FIGURE 3: PLATES OF VOREE . . . . .	23
FIGURE 4: VOREE HERALD . . . . .	32
CHART 1: MISSIONARIES . . . . .	141
CHART 2: EASTERN STRANGITE MEMBERSHIP CITIES . . . . .	143
MAP 1: WISCONSIN AND MICHIGAN . . . . .	145
MAP 2: STRANGITE MISSIONARY WORK . . . . .	146
MAP 3: NEW YORK . . . . .	147

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STRANGITE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

“[T]hus Saith the Lord...[James J.] Strang is a wicked & corrupt man &...his revelations are as false as he is[. T]herefore turn away from his folly.”

—Brigham Young, January 1846<sup>1</sup>

“I tell you Strangism has no grounds[and] it is [blown] to the 4 winds.”

—Orson Hyde, March 1846<sup>2</sup>

“[S]trangism was not worth investigating[;] it was not worth the skin of a fart.”

—Heber C. Kimball, February 1846<sup>3</sup>

Even though leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) derided James J. Strang and questioned the worth of investigating his religious movement, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strangite Church) shares a common heritage with the LDS Church. This heritage is especially seen in the fact that Joseph Smith's life-work provided a template for Strang as a prophet, for Strang's church policies, and for the Strangite missionary organization. In attempting to successfully duplicate and replicate Smith's church, Strang knew that most of his missionary success would occur among the LDS congregations—especially amid those who disagreed with the leaders who succeeded Smith. Eventually, through the conscious doctrinal and policy decisions Strang and others made, as well as the counter-attack of the LDS Church, the Strangite Church's numbers decreased dramatically. As the Strangite Church developed into a unique organization, many members, convinced that Strang had departed from the

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<sup>1</sup> Brigham Young Journal, January 31, 1846, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, hereafter cited as LDS Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Discourse of Orson Hyde, page 2, March 7, 1846, “General Church Minutes,” LDS Archives.

<sup>3</sup> Willard Richards diary, February 23, 1846, LDS Archives.

foundations of Mormonism, left Strang to search for the Mormon group that best fit their ideals. Strangism thus briefly provided for thousands of believers one of the first major outlets (or way-stations) to express their faith in Mormonism after the death of Joseph Smith. With diverse backgrounds that influenced their religious beliefs, the Mormon Church's first generation (those who first joined the Mormon Church and were not raised in it) did not hold a uniform theology of Mormonism.

This thesis deals with the limited time frame of 1846–1850, which was the highpoint of the Strangite Church, and specifically focuses on Strangite missionary work and the members who first embraced Strangism. In order to understand how the Strangites gleaned the Mormon harvest, it is necessary to briefly provide background of the religion and then place this work within the broader scope of previous Strangite scholarship; this introduction will do both.

During the mid-nineteenth century the American religious environment was experiencing profound transformations. Popular religious revivals empowered the common American, allowing ministers and missionaries to emerge from the ranks of farmers, tanners, lawyers, and blacksmiths.<sup>4</sup> Americans were also voicing their religious freedom by reaching outward in social reform—in effect using religion to change secular conditions.<sup>5</sup> It was in this context that both Mormonism and Strangism developed.

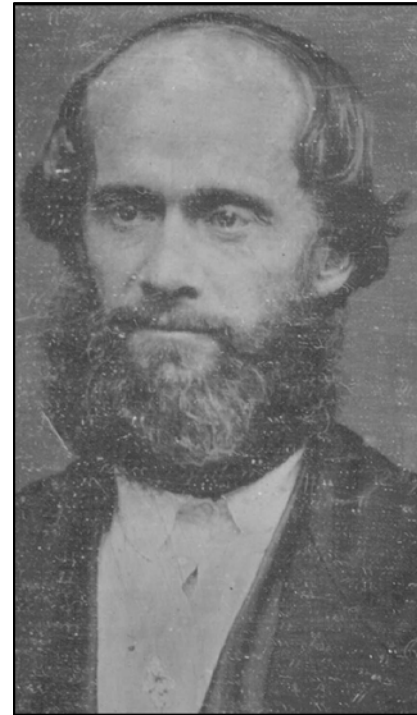
Joseph Smith (1805–1844) founded the LDS Church in 1830, and it quickly gained converts through its own missionary effort and convincing message. With converts congregating from many parts of the United States, Canada, and Europe, the

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<sup>4</sup> See Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

growth seemed promising. Yet, after a turbulent and dramatic fourteen years, Joseph Smith was martyred at Carthage, Illinois, on June 27, 1844. Without a clear succession pattern, many Latter-day Saints did not know whom to accept as their leader. The largest group followed LDS apostle Brigham Young, who called the church to gather with him and go west. Although much smaller, another membership base gravitated toward James J. Strang.

Born in 1813, Strang grew up in New York as an unhealthy, yet intelligent child, and as he grew, he gained a talent for debate, a trait used in his later proselytizing (see fig. 1).<sup>6</sup> After his friend Benjamin Perce moved to Wisconsin, Strang married Mary Perce, Benjamin's niece, and they both joined him in Wisconsin. Before moving to Racine County, Wisconsin, Strang worked as a lawyer, postmaster,



Courtesy John Hajicek

Fig. 1. James Jesse Strang from a daguerreotype taken in 1856.

temperance lecturer, newspaper editor, and as a manager of the political affairs for the local Democratic Party. While living in Wisconsin Territory, Strang practiced law with Caleb P. Barnes and likely learned about the LDS Church from his friend and relative, Moses Smith (no known relation to Joseph Smith), one of the first Latter-day Saints in

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<sup>5</sup> Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> The best source on Strang's life before his contact with the Latter-day Saints, and from which information for this paragraph is taken, is Roger Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island: The Life and Assassination of James Jesse Strang* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 12–31.

Wisconsin.<sup>7</sup> In February 1844 Strang traveled to Nauvoo to learn more about the LDS Church.

According to Strang, Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and Sidney Rigdon (the three men who made up the First Presidency of the LDS Church) spoke with Strang during his visit to Nauvoo and “more fully instructed” him about the LDS Church and its doctrine.<sup>8</sup> Strang accepted their teachings and on “the twenty fifth day of February in that year [1844] he [Strang] was baptized by Joseph Smith who [also] gave him the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.”<sup>9</sup> The next Sunday, March 3, Strang was ordained an elder under the hands of Hyrum Smith.<sup>10</sup>

Joseph Smith, at this time feeling a need for the LDS Church to branch out into other areas of the United States, asked Strang “to return to Wisconsin and make more full examinations of the country with direct reference to the advantages it might offer to the

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Perce, Lydia Perce Smith (wife of Moses Smith), and William Perce (the father of Mary Perce Strang) were all siblings. Thus Strang and Moses Smith both married into the Perce family; Strang married the niece and Smith married the sister (Myraette Mabel Strang, Perce Family History, unpublished manuscript, State Library of Michigan, Lansing). This relationship is contrary to that supplied by most every other work on Strangism, which states that Strang, Benjamin Perce, and Moses Smith were all brothers-in-law. See Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island*, 25 and Milo M. Quaife, *The Kingdom of St. James: A Narrative of the Mormons* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 8–9. I am indebted to Vickie Speek for pointing out this family relationship. Speek is writing a book on Strang and his church, forthcoming from Signature Books. For information concerning Moses Smith, see David L. Clark, “Moses Smith: Wisconsin’s First Mormon,” *Journal of Mormon History* 21 (Fall 1995): 155–170.

<sup>8</sup> “A Record of the establishment and doings of the Stake of Zion called Voree in Wisconsin, made by the Scribes appointed to that office,” 6, microfilm copy, Brigham Young University, original in private hands. Hereafter “Chronicles of Voree.” The “Chronicles of Voree” is apparently a contemporary manuscript dated journal of the Strangite Church of unknown authorship. A transcription of this manuscript has been compiled by John J. Hajicek (Burlington, Wisconsin: J. J. Hajicek, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 6. The quote continues that Joseph Smith “blessed him with many and great blessings and said I seal upon thy head against God’s own good time the keyes of the Melchisedec Priesthood and afterwards but in the same ordinance Thou shalt hold the keys of the Melchisedec Priesthood, shalt walk with Enoch, Moses and Elijah and shalt talk with God face to face.”

<sup>10</sup> “Chronicles of Voree.” A search of the elder’s licenses granted at Nauvoo during these months in 1844 does not list Strang. When later asked to produce his license, it was said that he did not have a

Saints.”<sup>11</sup> Strang fulfilled this request and relayed to Joseph Smith a letter at the end of May concerning the value of the area.<sup>12</sup> Joseph Smith likely received this letter at the beginning of June 1844, only weeks before his death.

According to the Strangite version of events, on June 17, 1844, Joseph Smith wrote the “Letter of Appointment” to James Strang in answer to his report of the surrounding country as a possible gathering place. In the letter, Smith said that his “present work was almost done,” and that he would “soon be called...[to] the land of Spirits.”<sup>13</sup> Smith then related a vision he had seen in which the Lord called Strang to establish a church center in Wisconsin, to call it Voree, and to gather the Saints there to build a house to God.<sup>14</sup> On the same day Smith allegedly wrote the letter, Strang claimed his own vision of Voree built up and many people gathered there.<sup>15</sup> Ten days later, but before Strang received the letter, Strang claimed to see a second vision. This time an angel appeared to him about the same time as Joseph Smith’s death. The angel anointed Strang’s head, gave him instructions, and prophesied about Strang’s future.<sup>16</sup> The

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license because he had not received one. “General Church Recorder,” LDS Archives and Crandell Dunn to Elder Appleby, August 4, 1846 as found in *Millennial Star* (Liverpool, England) 8 (October 15, 1846): 98.

<sup>11</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 8.

<sup>12</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 9–10.

<sup>13</sup> Letter of Appointment, or Joseph Smith to James J. Strang, June 18, 1844. Original in the James Jesse Strang Collection, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, microfilm copy in author’s possession, hereafter cited as Strang Collection, Yale, #4. Each letter has been supplied a number by a later cataloger, which will also be provided here. This letter is printed in many places in early Strangite Church history including “Letter from Joseph Smith to James J. Strang,” *Voree Herald* 1 (January 1846): [1]. A reprint is found in Quaiife, *The Kingdom of Saint James*, 235–237 and a partial image of this letter is found in Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island*, 93–94.

<sup>14</sup> Letter of Appointment.

<sup>15</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 9–10.

<sup>16</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 10–12.



followers of Strang explain that this Letter of Appointment and the two visitations authenticate Strang's prophetic calling.<sup>17</sup>

After receiving the alleged letter and upon hearing of the death of Joseph Smith, Strang attempted to confront some of the LDS Church leaders, including Brigham Young, who were on their way to Nauvoo.<sup>18</sup> Though Strang did not meet with the leaders, he was able to start spreading the word about his appointment as successor. Two and a half weeks after receiving the Letter of Appointment, Strang began a mission to several states "teaching the brethren and preaching of the gathering [to] Voree, [as well

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<sup>17</sup> Obviously debate has centered around this letter ever since its alleged writing. A secondhand source mentions William Smith hearing Emma Smith, Joseph's wife, claim that "Joseph received a letter from Mr. Strang." Emma also told William Smith that Hyrum Smith and John P. Green had consulted with Joseph Smith and they "came to the conclusion that Joseph would write a letter [back to Strang.]" *Voree* (Wisconsin) *Herald* 1 (July, 1846): [3]. Not surprisingly, most non-Strangites felt the letter was a forgery. Both John Taylor of the LDS Church in the *Millennial Star* 8 (October 15, 1846): 94 and Joseph M. Cole of Sidney Rigdon's group in *The Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate* (Greencastle, Pennsylvania) 2 (June 1846): 480, claimed to be with Joseph Smith the whole day the alleged letter was written, and they said Smith did not write to Strang.

Others, who never saw the original, called it a forgery based on its language and rhetoric. "[T]hat letter is a notorious forgery. [A]nd every man acquainted with Joseph Smith's manner of doing business, and his style of writing will readily discover" it. Brigham Young to branches in the neighborhood of Ottawa, Illinois, January 24, 1846 Strang Collection, Yale, #11. For those who saw the letter, some found fault with the Nauvoo postmark, and critics argued against the printed—instead of cursive—characters. See Norton Jacob Journal, 7, LDS Archives and Crandel Dunn Journal, 53–54, LDS Archives.

Present-day tests and comparisons show that the postmark is genuine but that the writing is a forgery. According to one interpreter, Joseph Smith, or at least someone from Nauvoo, did indeed send a letter to Strang but when it reached him, someone—perhaps Strang—likely tampered with the letter, carefully keeping the postmark intact. Charles Eberstadt, "A Letter That Founded a Kingdom," *Autograph Collectors' Journal* (October, 1950): 3–8. Eberstadt described the paper of the letter itself, and said that "[t]he noteworthy feature of the two leaves [of the letter] is that they did not originally form part of the same folded letter-sheet....The first leaf [of the letter] could...have been detached and a blank [sheet of paper] substituted, leaving three blank pages on which to forge the letter, tied as it would have been by an authentic postmark." Charles Eberstadt, "A Letter That Founded a Kingdom," 7.

Joseph Smith's signature in the letter seem to be a copy of Smith's actual signature. The rest of the letters in the signature match the block letters of the body of the letter. Of course the letters "J" and "O" are not a sufficient sample for comparison, but it appears that the apparent forger had an original signature of Joseph Smith to copy. Thus there is a strong possibility that Smith actually wrote something to Strang as suggested by William Smith. For an image of the signature on the Letter of Appointment, see Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island*, 92–93, and for an image of Smith's signature, see, Dean Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, revised ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), especially 569.

<sup>18</sup> "Chronicles of Voree," 14. This episode was likely written after the fact and whether Strang was actually on his way to Nauvoo to confront the Twelve is circumspect.

as] hoping to meet the Twelve and other influential Elders on their return to Nauvoo.”<sup>19</sup>

The missionary work of the new movement had begun with Strang leading the way.

Of three towns Strang is known to have visited, Florence, Michigan, was the location for a dramatic scene—one that, in many ways, foreshadowed the strained relations between the LDS and Strangite Church. A group of LDS leaders, most of whom had just only heard about the death of their beloved prophet, held a conference at Florence on August 5, 1844.<sup>20</sup> Both James Strang and Aaron Smith, an early and influential supporter of Strang, attended and they presented the Letter of Appointment to the local assembly. The conference immediately began to address the letter’s content and resolved to have “a copy of Joseph’s letter...sent to Nauvoo by two of the Elders.”<sup>21</sup> The two chosen were Strang’s uncle-in-law, Moses Smith who was also a brother to Aaron Smith, and Norton Jacob, a supporter of Brigham Young. These two men traveled to Nauvoo to report the letter and Strang’s claims to the Twelve.<sup>22</sup> Before they left, another meeting was held in Florence where Strang was denounced and told to go to Nauvoo and report to the Twelve. In the words of the Strangite record, the elders of the LDS Church “attempted to forbid Elders Strang and [Aaron] Smith [from] proceeding on their

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<sup>19</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 14.

<sup>20</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 13 lists “[t]hirteen Elders and several brethren” and the official minutes of the conference lists four high priests, three seventies, and five elders, one of which was James Strang. “Minutes of a special conference,” Joseph Smith Collection, LDS Archives.

<sup>21</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 13.

<sup>22</sup> Norton Jacob reported this meeting with the Twelve in Nauvoo, “when the folly of the Strang Revelation was fully made manifest” by the Twelve. Journal, August 24, 1844, LDS Archives.

mission.”<sup>23</sup> However, Strang and Smith disregarded this action and continued to preach about the letter’s validity and Strang’s new calling.



Courtesy John Hajicek

Fig.2. Wisconsin hill where Voree plates were found.

Strang’s activities are virtually unknown during the first half of 1845. Yet one of the validations of Strang’s prophetic calling for many Strangites occurred on September 13, 1845 in Voree, Wisconsin. Strang asked four men to follow him and dig at the base of a tree to obtain an ancient record—the location having been revealed to Strang earlier (see fig. 2).<sup>24</sup> They did so, and “to the depth of about three feet,” they found “three plates of brass.”<sup>25</sup> As they dug, the witnesses found that “no part of the earth...exhibited any sign or indication that it had been moved or disturbed at any

time previous.”<sup>26</sup> Public attention was drawn to these visible Voree plates. Soon after, Strang miraculously translated the three plates, revealing that a sole survivor/prophet of a destroyed ancient people had foretold that the “forerunner men shall kill, but a mighty Prophet there shall dwell.”<sup>27</sup> LDS members who had experienced the death of their prophet Joseph Smith could now, according to the Voree plates, look toward the “mighty

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<sup>23</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 13. See also Crandall Dunn to Elder Appleby, August 4, 1846, as found in the *Millennial Star* 8 (Oct 15, 1846): 98.

<sup>24</sup> Aaron Smith, Jirah B. Wheelan, James M. Van Nostrand, and Edward Whitcomb. See “Chronicles of Voree,” 27.

<sup>25</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 26.

<sup>26</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 27.

<sup>27</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 31. These were not the last plates Strang would obtain or translate. While in Beaver Island, Strang published the Book of the Law of the Lord purported to be translated from another ancient record that contained the law of God. These plates would be known as the plates of Laban. See Quiafe, *Kingdom of Saint James*, 187–89 and Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island*, 97.

Prophet”—James Strang.<sup>28</sup> Strang’s recovery of the plates and his ability to translate them, as well as his supernatural visitations of angels and revelations undoubtedly proved to many Strang’s ability to commune with the heavens and furthered his ability to convert members to his church. Many of these converts, familiar with the miraculous experience of Joseph Smith and his recovery of the golden plates, must have found Strang’s story enticing.

Several newspapers reported the discovery of the Voree plates, which alerted thousands of the new religion.<sup>29</sup> With a background in journalism, Strang knew the power of the press and likely had plans early on of printing his own newspaper in hopes of reaching as many potential converts as possible. The first Strangite newspaper appeared in Voree in January 1846. Not surprisingly, the content of the first issue included the Letter of Appointment, the witnesses’ testimony of the Voree, and Strang’s translation of this newly discovered record. In addition, the newspaper contained a new revelation given through Strang. The letter, the plates, and the revelations were all credentials of a prophet.<sup>30</sup> The newspaper at Voree lasted in several forms for over four years.

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<sup>28</sup> More than forty years after the Voree plates were found, Isaac Scott wrote to the *Saints’ Herald*, the newspaper of another cousin organization—the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Scott said that he spoke to Caleb P. Barnes, a self-proclaimed accomplice as well as law partner to Strang, who stated that the “whole thing [concerning the plates and Letter of Appointment was] for speculations, to sell lands which they owned where they intended to build Voree.” *The Saints’ Herald*. 35 (December 29, 1888), 831–32. Barnes was also reported to have said that the Voree plates were made out of a brass kettle belonging to Strang’s uncle-in-law Benjamin Perce *The Saints’ Herald*. 35 (December 29, 1888), 831–32. With the Strangite plates no longer extant and therefore not available for testing, there is no way to confirm the various claims. Wingfield Watson, a member and defender of the Strangite Church, directly answered some of these accusations in his *Prophetic Controversy, No. 3; or the Even Balances by which Isaac Scott, Chancy Loomis, and the Founders of the Reorganization Are Weighted and Found Wanting. In Two Chapters* (Boyer, Mich.[?]: n.p. 1889).

<sup>29</sup> See Van Noord *King of Beaver Island*, 35–36.

<sup>30</sup> *Voree Herald* 1 (January 1846): [1–4].

With this first newspaper issue, Strangism officially debuted, and it soon met with both early success and almost immediate apostasy. Many Latter-day Saints flocked to Strang for a myriad of reasons, including a dissatisfaction with Brigham Young's leadership and an attraction to Strangite doctrine and theology. However, the conversion of several controversial figures led many followers of the new church to doubt Strang's prophetic call. This lack of internal cohesion, which would plague the Strangite Church throughout its history, initially came after the adoption of several new doctrines and after the modification of established LDS theology. At the head of one of these apostasies, or "pseudo" movements as Strangites called them, was the earlier mentioned Aaron Smith, who was also one of the witnesses to the Voree plates and a former councilor to Strang in the re-organized Strangite first presidency. Smith's break with Strang came over actions Strang took, contrary to Smith's wishes. Smith did not agree with the secret ceremonies in Voree, called the Order of the Illuminati, and decided to leave and form his own church. Eventually, any former member of the Strangite Church who left and preached against Strangism was labeled as a "pseudo" or "pseudo movements."

The men and women who left Strang believed he was departing from the fundamentals of Mormonism, and as a result they sought their religious faith elsewhere. This Strangite apostasy had a two-fold effect upon the church: those who fell away from the church attempted to convince others of the futility of following Strang, creating a church-wide ripple effect; and, secondly, those who remained were forced to solidify around Strang and his cause. The result was a smaller and weaker, yet more unified group.

Despite the ferment and dissatisfaction of some, Strang was still able to establish a colony at Beaver Island in Lake Michigan, and by 1850 it became the official church headquarters. The gradual move to Beaver Island from Voree caused many to wonder whether Voree had truly been appointed as a gathering place by God, as earlier doctrine had dictated, or whether the new location was simply a paper city to line the pockets of speculators.<sup>31</sup> The doctrine of polygamy—the marriage or sealing of multiple wives to one husband for spiritual rewards—also became a hotly debated doctrine among the Strangites, just as it was amid the Latter-day Saints. Despite his original strong language against polygamy, Strang married a second wife in 1849.<sup>32</sup> The result was further dissatisfaction among his followers.

By 1850, situated in their new home at Beaver Island, the Strangites continued to live their religion but did not place as heavy an emphasis on the missionary movement as they had before and instead, focused on strengthening the members on Beaver Island. During this stage, Strang was elected to serve in the Michigan State legislature. He was tried, but acquitted, in several court cases for various offences and in a further exercise of political or temporal power and was crowned king and ruler of the people who followed him.<sup>33</sup> Yet Strang's regal dynastic order did not last. In 1856 a member disgruntled over Strang's supposed tyrannical rule on Beaver Island shot Strang in the back. Although he

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<sup>31</sup> Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island*, 67.

<sup>32</sup> Quiafe, *Kingdom of Saint James*, 100–105. See also John Quist, “Polygamy among James Strang and His Followers,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 31–48.

<sup>33</sup> See Quiafe, *Kingdom of Saint James* and Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island* for information regarding Strang and his church on Beaver Island. Strang possibly was again replicating his predecessor in crowning himself as king and ruler. Joseph Smith, in his last months of life was too anointed and crowned king in the Council of Fifty. See D. Michael Quinn, “The Council of Fifty and its Members, 1844 to 1945,” *BYU Studies* 20 (Winter 1980): 163–198; and Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967).

lived for a week, he refused to name a successor. Non-Strangites who had been eyeing Beaver Island for their own use, drove the Strangites from their home. Scattered to several states, no one within or without the Strangite movement claimed the succession to this day. The Strangites now consist of two congregations, one in Wisconsin, and one in New Mexico, with approximately one hundred members in total.<sup>34</sup>

## **Missionary Work**

Missionary work, by definition, is the effort to gain converts for a specific church, and LDS leaders and members developed their missionary system stemming from their own experience in the diverse American-religious system, which was largely influenced by Protestantism.<sup>35</sup> Protestants distributed religious tracts, sent out circuit riders, and held revival meetings—traits LDS missionaries adopted and exhibited as well. At first, LDS missionaries preached to family, friends, and acquaintances. Later, as the LDS Church developed their missionary program and their renown spread, the church moved to urban areas, and missionaries used the printed word, including the Book of Mormon and public speaking to supplement their former proselytizing efforts.<sup>36</sup> LDS missionaries were fully

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<sup>34</sup> William Shepard, a member of the Strangite Church, was my source for present Strangite numbers, although there are some dated statistics in Frank S. Mead revised by Samuel S. Hill, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, New Tenth edition (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995): 172.

<sup>35</sup> See Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

<sup>36</sup> For an excellent study on nineteenth century Mormon missionary work, see Samuel George Ellsworth, “A History of Mormon Missions in the United States and Canada, 1830–1860” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1951). See also Richard S. Williams, “The Missionary Movements of the Latter-day Saint Church in New England, 1830–1860” (Master’s Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1969); William E. Hughes, “A Profile of the Missions of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1849–1900” (Master’s Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1986); and Rex T. Price Jr., “The Mormon Missionary of the Nineteenth Century” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1991).

aware of the environment in which they preached. The contemporary society was satiated with the Bible—and Mormon doctrines were constantly grounded in biblical proofs.<sup>37</sup> Another factor in LDS missionary work was the work of the individual missionary. “Joseph Smith always maintained a healthy respect for the resourcefulness that characterized spontaneous expressions of religious faith and devotion” of individual missionaries.<sup>38</sup> In fact, many early publications of the Mormon church were missionary tracts espousing the new doctrines and revelations of LDS theology. Strang did very little to impede this previous proselytizing effort, and encouraged his missionaries to continue as they had under Joseph Smith.

Because most of the Strangite missionaries were former LDS missionaries—and as the audience was largely made up of Latter-day Saints—the Strangite missionary movement had many similarities to the LDS missionary effort. The differences came in the details concerning the proselytizing and doctrines. But as the LDS Church succeeded, so too did Strangism—for a time. By 1850 Strangite influence reached from the LDS-centered Winter Quarters in Iowa to the Eastern seaboard, and it had even crossed international boundaries into Canada and England. The effective use of the media, the ability to tap into the LDS missionary network, a convincing doctrinal argument that capitalized upon a strong sentiment for a prophet, and discontent among many with Brigham Young’s leadership all contributed to Strangism’s substantial growth. Strang’s

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For the importance of the Book of Mormon in the LDS Church, see Grant Underwood, “Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS Theology,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17 (Autumn 1984): 35–74 and Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Ellsworth, 38

<sup>38</sup> Ellsworth, 39.



ability to match many of Joseph Smith's strategies and successes helped former Latter-day Saints justify their conversion to Strang, basing their decision on the continuity of the religion to which they felt they had originally been converted.

Strang thus based the formulation of his church on the accepted patterns of early Mormonism. Those who accepted his teachings hoped that Strang was the successor to Joseph Smith. This was furthered by the powerful influence of the press and the missionary organization of the church. Yet Strang's later policies and teachings severely tested their desires to believe, as over the years Strang shifted doctrine in such a manner to alienate many members of his church. It is through the Strangite missionary work that the story can be told. The Strangite missionary movement endured both through times when the Strangites gained wide publicity and moderate success, to times when missionaries did not proselytize and the church lost many members. This study reveals the religious expectations of the LDS members after the death of Joseph Smith, tells the story of the individual Strangites and their experiences, and also shows the formation of a unique religion: the Strangite Church.

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In order to understand how this thesis will contribute to Strangite historiography, I will provide a brief overview of the past works on Strangism as well as an explanation of my methodology.<sup>39</sup> In the beginning polemics marked the historical writing of not only Strangism, but of Mormonism as well. Scholars began to interpret Strangism early in the twentieth century with Henry E. Legler and Milo M. Quaife leading the way.<sup>40</sup> They not

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<sup>39</sup> A full historiographical essay is provided at the back of this thesis before the bibliography and provides more detail than given here.

only produced important works, but also assembled a large collection of primary sources of Strang and his church that might have otherwise been lost. With the rise of “New Mormon History,” some scholars, applying historical methodology to Mormon history, turned their attention to Strangite history as well, with positive results. Yet most of the books and monographs of Strangism have been on its founder and not on the church or members within the church. This thesis, instead of focusing on Strang, provides an in-depth study of the individuals of the Strangite Church, something not done in a significant work on Strangism to date. There has been some work on polygamy within Strangism and some work on the period of Beaver Island, but a general work of Strangism, including a look at missionary work, is still lacking.

Thankfully there is not a dearth of primary sources for Strangism. The largest collection is held at the Beinecke Library at Yale University and several university and public libraries in Wisconsin and Michigan as well as the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah, hold a large collection of manuscripts. Another vital source for Strangite history comes from the newspapers published from 1846 through 1856.<sup>41</sup> These newspapers not only supply researchers with important Strangite history, but provide a glimpse of the Mormon environment during this time period.

For the most part, this thesis will recount the Strangite missionary efforts from 1846–1850 topically and geographically. Chapter One discusses various reasons for a

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<sup>40</sup> See Henry E. Legler, “A Moses of the Mormons,” *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society* 32 (1903): 180–223 and Milo M. Quaipe, *The Kingdom of Saint James: A Narrative of the Mormons* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930).

<sup>41</sup> The newspapers are *Voree Herald* (1846) published monthly, *Zion’s Reveille* (1846–1847) published mainly weekly, and the *Gospel Herald* (1847–1850) published weekly.

conversion to Strangism. Chapter Two addresses the successes of Strangite missionary work. Chapter Three discusses the difficulties the missionaries encountered. Chapter Four discusses the English mission as a case study of the successes and failures. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the thesis by explaining the changes in and influence of doctrine, policy, and societal trends surrounding the Strangites as well as the reasons Strangism ultimately failed. Each chapter will deal with the process of the missionary work, including the difficulties, appeals, successes, and setbacks. By 1850, the Strangite Church had both gained many converts but suffered through many apostasies that spawned or strengthened various other schismatic groups, but at the same time, unified those who decided to stay with the Strangite Church. It is the expectation that this thesis will contribute to the growth of not only Strangite history, but LDS scholarship as well.

## CHAPTER 1: CONVERTING TO STRANGISM

Nauvoo March 7<sup>th</sup> 1846

President B Young Sir having understood that knews [news] has reached you in the camp that I have turned from the church. I felt like addressing you a line and let you know the truth of the matter; for a few days my mind was wrought upon by the influence of the Spirit of the devil through [Strangism] it seemed as though these must be some claims to his pretensions.... But, thank God, I have got out of it right side up with care; I have prayed God to forgive, and I pray you and all the saints with you and Else where to forgive me.... let me say with those over me the faithful of the twelve and all others a[r]e the authority I am satisfied with, and never intend to leave nor forsake and all my covenants are and <ever will> reamin inviolate and sacred

Yours Respectfully Rufus Beach<sup>1</sup>

Rufus Beach, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, wrote his letter to Brigham Young during 1846, the year that the Strangite Church came out of relative obscurity and began to gain numerous converts among the Mormon ranks. Beach was not alone. Many women and men in Mormondom had similar yet more sustained experiences as Beach. Most however did not write apologetic letters to Brigham Young. They instead quickly became known as “apostates.” The assumption in Mormon thought, then and now, has been that those who joined a schismatic organization like the Strangites had lost their faith, and rebelled against Brigham Young and Mormon doctrines. Yet this view of post-1844 Mormonism ignores many complexities.

Why then did so many Latter-day Saints join Strang? Of the many answers to this question, two stand out: first, Strang’s converts disagreed with Brigham Young and the Twelve and the controversial doctrines or policies associated with their leadership including (but not limited to) polygamy and the decision to move west; and second, they made a conscious choice to follow Strang, believing that their decision was theologically

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<sup>1</sup> Rufus Beach to Brigham Young, March 7, 1846, Brigham Young Collection, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereafter to be cited as LDS Archives.

correct. Many simply believed that Strang was a prophet and his religion was the true continuation of Mormonism.

After the death of Joseph Smith, the Twelve Apostles, under Brigham Young's leadership, attempted to carry out Joseph Smith's doctrines, wishes, and legacies. Some of which had been veiled in secrecy. Yet this supposed policy led to problematic results and repelled some Mormons. The most obvious difficulties to be discussed below included the rumors of polygamy, the fact that Brigham Young was not officially sustained as prophet for the first few years of his leadership, and the gathering to Utah.

One of the doctrines most detested by former Mormons and future Strangites—and also least experienced firsthand by the LDS Church in general—was the practice of polygamy or “spiritual wifery” as it was called by many who did not understand or accept it. Joseph Smith began to take polygamous wives in Nauvoo, or perhaps earlier.<sup>2</sup> Young and his associates privately continued the practice until 1852 when polygamy was officially announced. During the early years of his movement, Strang quickly capitalized on the circulating rumors surrounding Young and others practicing polygamy, and Strang denounced the practice forcefully. As late as September 1848, a Strangite newspaper, the *Gospel Herald*, was still denying the fact that Smith had introduced the doctrine of spiritual wifery.<sup>3</sup> Yet Strang may not have been straight forward in his condemnation. It

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<sup>2</sup> See B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret New Press, 1930), 7 volumes, 2:93–110 for a sympathetic treatment of polygamy. For another view see Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), and Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> For instance, in a notice published in the *Gospel Herald*, former LDS apostle John E. Page stated that the “saints are hereby instructed that it is their duty and privilege to withdraw their fellowship and

is likely that by at least 1846 Strang knew that Joseph Smith had, in fact, practiced polygamy.<sup>4</sup>

So why did Strang denounce polygamy so forcefully? First, he may not have believed Smith was acting as a prophet at the time he introduced polygamy (a common belief of several schismatic groups past and present), or maybe he, too, sanctioned polygamy and, like Smith, believed that the doctrine should be privately taught. Or perhaps still more likely, Strang was catering his message to people with various understandings of Mormonism—public and private. It is therefore possible that despite Strang’s knowledge of Smith’s practice of polygamy, he adopted a strong anti-polygamy stance in the hope of gaining as many converts as possible. Whether he privately supported plural marriage is impossible to know, but Strang certainly adopted it later on—bringing about dire consequences to his movement. The fact that so many joined Strang because of his anti-polygamy stance shows the necessity of either catering to their expectations or keeping a belief in polygamy a secret—ultimately Strang did both.

For many future Strangites, the rumors of polygamy were an affront to what they believed was one of Mormonism’s unchangeable creeds. P. Matteson wrote to Strang, “I am well acquainted with many of the principles advocated by the Mormon people, which

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support from any and every person that in any form whatever sanctions polygamy.” “Spiritual Wifery,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (September 7, 1848): 115.

<sup>4</sup> Early on, several of Strang’s close associates either knew of, or actually participated in, plural marriage for themselves, including William Smith, John C. Bennett, George J. Adams, and John E. Page. In a letter to Strang George J. Adams, a member of the Strangite First Presidency, wrote “if he [Joseph Smith] had taken My council and laid aside the several Spiritual Wife doctrine... he would have been a living man until this” day. George J. Adams to Strang, June 20, 1846, James Jesse Strang Collection, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, microfilm copy in authors possession, hereafter cited as Strang Collection, Yale, #34b. Each letter has been supplied a number by a later cataloger, which will also be provided here. For information on Strang’s anti-polygamy stance see, Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri: Winter Quarters, 1846–1852*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 19.

the Book of Mormon denounces in the most positive terms Such as Spiritual Wives, Secrit orders & meetings &c., &c.”<sup>5</sup> Matteson was not alone among church members in his opposition to plural marriage. An entire group of Saints living at Kirtland rejected Brigham Young and the Twelve because of the Kirtland Saints’ anti-polygamy stance. At a meeting held in Kirtland in August 1846, they “utterly disclaim[ed] the whole system of Polygamy known as the spiritual wife system lately set up in Nauvoo.”<sup>6</sup> Strang understood the prevailing bitterness against polygamy and deftly spread word of its practice. For example, at a meeting held on April 7, 1846, at the Strangite headquarters in Voree, Wisconsin, the Strangite High Council, an ecclesiastical group organized to discipline members, brought charges against the Twelve in Nauvoo because the Twelve believed “[t]hat polygimy fornication adultery and concubinage are lawful and comendable.”<sup>7</sup> For one disaffected woman, Louisa Sanger, the doctrine of polygamy was at the heart of her decision to accept Strang. The Voree prophet, she thought, had unequivocally denounced the doctrine. “In the name of God & the Lord Jesus Christ,” Strang wrote Sanger,

[M]ay their bones rot in the living tomb of their flesh: may their flesh gen[era]t[e] from its own corruption a loathsome life for others: may their blood swarm with a

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<sup>5</sup> P. Matteson to Strang, April 2, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #17.

<sup>6</sup> “Kirtland,” *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [2]. Members of the Knoxville, Illinois, branch, to be discussed below, were another group that disagreed over doctrine, telling Strang that they were leaving the Twelve and “all there wicked and secret abominations.” Isaac Paden to Strang, May 17, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, # 30.

<sup>7</sup> “A Record of the establishment and doings of the Stake of Zion called Voree in Wisconsin, made by the Scribes appointed to that office,” 74, microfilm copy, Brigham Young University, original in private hands. Hereafter “Chronicles of Voree.” The “Chronicles of Voree” is apparently a contemporary manuscript dated journal of the Strangite Church of unknown authorship. A transcription of this manuscript has been compiled by John J. Hajjcek (Burlington, Wisconsin: J. J. Hajjcek, 1992). The reprinting of these minutes in the *Voree Herald* left out this particular charge and in its place left ellipses with the note that it was “[t]oo bad for print.” “Conference at Voree,” *Voree Herald* 1 (April 1846): [5].

leprous life of motlike ghastly corruption, feeding upoin [upon] flowing life, generating chilling agues burning fevers & loathsome living corruption. May peace & home be names forgotten to them; & the beauty they have betrayed to infamy, may it be to their eyes a crawling mass of putridity & battering corruption, a loathsome ghastliness; its delicate hues a sickly light that glares from universal corruption; its auburn tresses the posthumous growth of temples of crawling worms, its fragrant breath the blast of perdition. With desires insatiate may each gratification turn to burning bitterness & glowing shame.<sup>8</sup>

This strongly worded letter must have had the desired effect. Sanger expressed an interest in the new church and they continued their correspondence for some time.

For many Latter-day Saints, plural marriage was not the only message separating them from Brigham Young and the other apostles. Some Mormons felt Joseph Smith set up a legitimate succession pattern that Strang followed but Young did not. After Smith's death, each Latter-day Saint had to answer the succession question. With no established precedents in place, conflicting possibilities soon emerged. Historian Ronald K. Esplin has argued that because Church members in Nauvoo had witnessed Smith placing added responsibility and authority on the Twelve, men and women were prepared to accept that the Twelve were the designated leaders.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, other Church members around the country did not enjoy the benefit of this observation and instead depended mainly on the revelations given by Smith in the Saints' new scripture, the Doctrine and Covenants. Some scriptural statements explained that "he [Smith] shall not have power,

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<sup>8</sup> Strang to Louisa Sanger, March 16, 1845, LDS Archives. This "revelation" from Strang was circulated around Nauvoo among the upper leaders of the church. At least two contemporary copies—one in the hand of Thomas Bullock and the other in the hand of Wilford Woodruff—of this revelation are held at the LDS Archives. The revelation likely surfaced in Nauvoo on April 27, 1845. Williard Richards' Diary, March 16, 1845, LDS Archives states "James J. Strang wrote Louisa Sanger from Burlington. rec[eive]d in my office April 27."

<sup>9</sup> See Ronald K. Esplin, "The Emergence of Brigham Young and the Twelve to Mormon Leadership, 1830–1841" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1981) and Ronald K. Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity" *BYU Studies* 21 (Summer 1981): 301–41.



except to appoint another in his stead.”<sup>10</sup> Many Latter-day Saints not only interpreted scriptural passages like these to mean Smith would appoint a specific successor before he died, but Mormons throughout the country in 1846 also were apt to use these revelations when considering Strang’s appointment by Joseph Smith. In an epistle to “the Elders of the Church” printed in the first issue of Strang’s newspaper, the would-be successor to Smith gave his view on the law of succession. According to Strang, Smith had been instructed to name his successor before dying, which, according to Strang, Smith did in the Letter of Appointment.<sup>11</sup>

Strang also argued that the Twelve’s position on succession was not in accordance to the law of God and the revealed organization of the church. At the death of Joseph Smith, the Twelve, under the leadership of Brigham Young, took the reins of the majority of the LDS Church. Strang immediately knew that the Twelve were his most formidable opponents and argued frequently and forcefully against their position. The Twelve “are a travelling, presiding high council, to officiate in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the [first] presidency of the church, agreeably to the institution of heaven; to build up the church, and regulate all the affairs of the same, in all nations.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the Twelve were to be “sent out holding the keys, to open the door by the proclamation of the

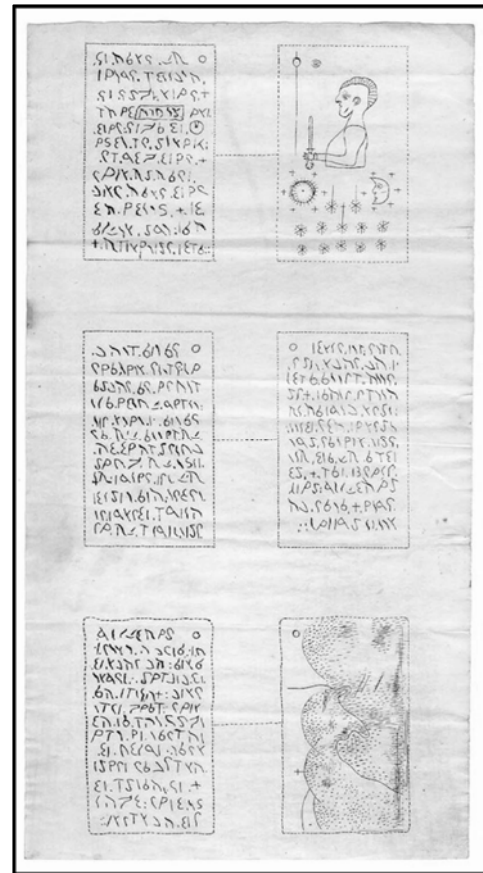
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<sup>10</sup> Doctrine and Covenants, Nauvoo, 1844 ed., Section 14 paragraph 2, found in the contemporary Utah Mormon D&C 43:4. *The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Containing Revelations given to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, with Some additions by his successor in the Presidency of the Church* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Salt Lake City, Utah, 1981). This revelation and several others were used by several different Mormon Restorationist organizations to justify their legitimacy and position on succession.

<sup>11</sup> “An Epistle,” *Voree Herald* 1 (January 1846): [2].

<sup>12</sup> 1844 D&C section 3, paragraph 12, 103–4.

gospel of Jesus Christ”<sup>13</sup> but “that the Twelve should [not] dictate all the affairs of the Church in all the world, because they not only are under the direction of the first Presidency but the High Council is above them and they are amenable to it.”<sup>14</sup> Strang clarified this relationship between the High Council and the Twelve as he interpreted the imagery contained on the discovered Voree plates (see fig. 3). For Strang, the two sets of twelve stars on the plates respectively symbolized the High Council of the whole church and the Twelve. “These stars [representing the apostles] are larger than those which represent the *high-council of the church*,” he wrote, “because *the Apostles* have a more important ministry [of missionary work]; but are placed below them because they are subject to their discipline.”<sup>15</sup> Thus Strang summarized his position by providing a hyperbolic musing: suppose a “man...during the lifetime of



Courtesy John Hajicek

Joseph...said that, the Twelve were at the head of

Fig. 3. Facsimile of Voree plates.

<sup>13</sup> 1844 D&C section 3, paragraph 13, 104.

<sup>14</sup> James J. Strang to “the Elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,” ca. December 1845 found in the “Chronicles of Voree,” 39. See also “An Epistle,” *Voree Herald* 1 (January 1846): [2]. For a modern and contrasting view of this see Esplin, “The Emergence of Brigham Young and the Twelve to Mormon Leadership, 1830–1841” (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1981) and Esplin, “Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity” *BYU Studies* 21 (Summer 1981): 301–41.

<sup>15</sup> “Voree Plates,” *Zion’s Reville* 2 (February 4, 1847): 14. Emphasis in original.

the Church[. He] would have been looked upon either as a reckless and hair-brained liar or utterly insane.”<sup>16</sup> In effect, Strang was rhetorically asking the readers of his epistle: “whence is the change” from the Twelve’s position before Smith’s death to after?<sup>17</sup>

Many Mormons agreed with Strang’s position that the Twelve did not have a rightful place to lead the church, but instead was as a quorum subservient to the president. For example, Esther Ormsby believed: “I have always had implicit ~~confide~~ <con>fidence in the twelve in their respective calling but the arm can not b[e] the head.”<sup>18</sup> For many, the Twelve had a specific role in the church and should not have assumed an elevated position. Another Strangite asserted that when the Twelve began “to lead the Church they assumed a place and an office in the church that never was Conferd on them by revelation.”<sup>19</sup> Some members had been skeptical of the Twelve for a time. Warren Post, for example, stated that he saw “many things which was abominable” while in Nauvoo in 1845–6, yet Post “was determined not to murmur.”<sup>20</sup> This simmering alienation from the Twelve manifested itself when these church authorities embarked upon Mormonism’s famed exodus to the West.

This decision to take the church to the Great Basin became not only a physical and spiritual test for those who went, but also was a trial of faith for those who remained behind. This journey into unknown country was easier for those who had been ejected

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<sup>16</sup> “An Epistle,” *Voree Herald* 1 (January 1846): [3].

<sup>17</sup> “An Epistle,” *Voree Herald* 1 (January 1846): [3].

<sup>18</sup> Esther Ormsby to Strang, May 17, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #29.

<sup>19</sup> Isaac Paden to Strang, May 17, 1846. Strang Collection, Yale, #30.

<sup>20</sup> Warren Post “Autobiography,” in private hands but filmed at one time by the LDS Family History Library, film # 1887644. Post was one of Strang’s later apostles.

from their homes in Nauvoo, but others who now felt established had to decide whether or not to uproot their families and follow the Twelve. Many future Strangite members questioned the wisdom of leaving Nauvoo for an unknown location and seriously considered Strang's claims. For instance, Calvin B. Childs, in writing to Strang, noted that one of the difficulties he had with the Twelve was their plan to "emigrat[e] to Calafornia."<sup>21</sup> To this objection, some westward-bound LDS members had a response. Elias Adams, a Mormon writing from Mt. Pisgah, Iowa, to his Strangite brother, claimed that the journey to the Basin was divinely led. "Br Orson Pratt [a Mormon apostle] bro[ugh]t us a written Revelation the other day giving much important instruction relative to our journeying West."<sup>22</sup> This revelation was known as "The Word and Will of the Lord," now printed as D&C 136. This divine mandate served to encourage some LDS members better than human loyalties could provide. Yet others disagreed. The Knoxville, Illinois branch originally had resolved to support the Twelve, but upon finding "the twelve had taken great advantag claiming there owne measures to be the measures of Joseph & Hiram....the Presedent [of the branch] then Declared the Branch free and independant from all obligations exclusively belonging to the western expedition."<sup>23</sup> Strang strongly played upon this theme, warning those "about to leave the haunts of civilization & of men to go into an unexplored wilderness" not to go. In effect, Strang counseled that "God has not called you to" travel west.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Calvin B. Childs to Strang, April 26, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #23.

<sup>22</sup> Elias Adams to George Adams, February 18, 1847, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Archives. See Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri*, 156–157.

<sup>23</sup> Isaac Paden to Strang, May 17, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #30.

<sup>24</sup> "An Epistle," *Voree Herald* 1 (January 1846): [3].

Strang hinted at the difficulty of the trail and the experiences that some would face on their journey if they chose to follow Young and the Twelve—and in this he was right. One Strangite told of the hardship experienced by his family in the early spring of 1847. “I have just received a letter from my mother,” reported Uriah C. H. Nickerson, “in the Western Mormon Camp” based in Iowa. “My father,” Nickerson continued “died of exposure and suffering. Three others of our family, making four out of six, have fallen victims to this rash undertaking.” Following this terrible account of suffering, Nickerson commented: “[I]s not this sufficient, with the many evidences we have of the sufferings of those who have gone west, to prove that God has rejected them?”<sup>25</sup> More such complaint and justification came with the Mormon ordeal at Winter Quarters, near present-day Omaha, Nebraska, after the Saints completed their toil across the Iowa plains. This again confirmed for the Strangites that God did not sanction the move west. For church members not wishing to subject themselves to the toil and tragedy of the exodus, Strangism offered a way out. By converting to the new prophet, these men and women could avoid the road west.

Yet Mormons did not join Strang simply because they rejected plural marriage, Brigham Young, and the Twelve. Nor was it just because people did not want to go west. Through his writings and preaching, Strang convinced many Mormons that he was the legitimate successor. When Joseph Smith died, the concept of the LDS Church being led by a prophet, seer, revelator, and translator had already become indelible and undeniable

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<sup>25</sup> “Important from “The Camp of Israel,”” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (February 25, 1847): 27. Nickerson and John Shippy took a mission to the Camp of Israel and brought back “22 souls [including Nickerson’s mother], 7 wagons, 50 head of cattle and 5 head of horses...[with] many more families expected soon from that quarter.” Uriah C. H. Nickerson and John Shippy to Editor, July 20, 1847, as found in *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (July 29, 1847): 80.

for many members. Therefore many Latter-day Saints, confronted with the prospect of the Twelve taking leadership, balked at the void of a prophet-less church. Some newly-converted Strangites wrote to Strang to express their gratitude that *one* person was at the head of the church again: “Having long been a mourner in Zion I begin to have a gleam of hope again thinking that God has raised a successor to the Prophet Joseph,” said one.<sup>26</sup> And again: “I rejoice to hear that we have a Prophet.”<sup>27</sup> For these people, Strang’s prophetic leadership contrasted sharply with the lack of any prophet at the head of the Brighamites until that office and title were re-introduced in 1848. Taking a report published in the *Times and Seasons* of the first LDS Church conference after Smith had been killed out of context, Strang was quick to point out that no Latter-day Saint hand was raised when Brigham Young asked the members of a Nauvoo congregation if they wanted a “Prophet, [or] a spokesman” to lead the church.<sup>28</sup>

At the time of this meeting, the Twelve had explained that although they intended to fulfill Joseph Smith’s measures, no one could take his place as prophet. Young and his associates had argued that while the apostles were to lead the church, Smith still held the keys of authority. Though this stance would later change when Brigham Young was sustained as a prophet three and a half years later, many Mormons felt that the presence of a prophet was a fundamental part of the restoration of Smith and not something to be put aside.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, before Joseph Smith died, Mormon apostle Parley P. Pratt adapted a

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<sup>26</sup> Esther Ormsby to Strang, May 17, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #29.

<sup>27</sup> James W. Pugh to Strang, March 23, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #20.

<sup>28</sup> *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois) 5 (September 2, 1844): 637 and *Voree Herald* 1 (January 1846): [4].

<sup>29</sup> For example, the Twelve argued “Let no man presume for a moment that [Joseph Smith’s] place will be filled by another; for, *remember he stands in his own place*, and always will; and the Twelve

popular song to spread the message of Mormonism: “[a] church without a Prophet, is not the church for me / It has not head to lead it, in it I would not be.”<sup>30</sup> After Smith’s death, the Strangites sang this tune with gusto, while members of the LDS Church, according to the Strangites, “dropped [it] like a hot potato.”<sup>31</sup>

Although there were reasons to be drawn to Strang, there was also a great deal of hesitation as many hoped that they would not regret their choice. About a year after Smith’s death, Reuben Miller offered a prayer in Strang’s behalf: “may [the Lord] inspire your heart to moove on the cause of Zion with mightly power,” Miller wrote, and “May the Lord bless you-and inspire your heart.”<sup>32</sup> Sounding the same cautious refrain, Naomi Alvord began her letter skeptically: “[I]f Indeed I am writing to a Prophet of <the> Lord,” she began. But she then ended more hopefully: “[f]rom one who for nearly a year past has been trying to believe the Lord would do as he has said.”<sup>33</sup> In the case of many converts, this cautious hope led to a belief, resulting in many Mormons moving from the LDS Church to the Strangite Church. Strang suddenly found himself with an important windfall. Because many Mormons hoped there was truth in Strang’s prophetic calling, they were more likely to sustain Strang beyond what most would have normally done. Only after Strang committed egregious errors—or so people thought—did many followers leave his church. Thus initially the Strangite Church, to some extent, was

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Apostles of this dispensation stand in their own place and always will.” *Times and Seasons* 5 (August 15, 1844): 618, emphasis in original.

<sup>30</sup> *Times and Seasons* 6 (February 4, 1845): 799.

<sup>31</sup> *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [1].

<sup>32</sup> Reuben Miller to Strang, February 15, 1845 [1846], Strang Collection, Yale, #14.

<sup>33</sup> Naomi Alvord to Strang, April 20, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #218.

driven more by the hope and desires of its members than by the leadership of any single leader.

Many converts to the new cause did not blindly accept Strang's call; they wanted proof that a prophet was leading them. For example D. W. Elmore wrote to Strang to ask if Strang "enjoy[ed] this gift [of the Holy Ghost]...And are you empowered of God to communicate the same by the laying on of your hands?"<sup>34</sup> Others asked Strang to provide for them a revelation on their behalf, which might convince them of his authenticity. "[S]hould the true Spirit move you to say anything to me by way of instruction, or commandment, &c" wrote one correspondent, "you will please...visit me."<sup>35</sup> Several women sought healing blessings: "if you are the successor of Joseph you have the keys whareby you can ask & receive an answer[.] I pray you be intreated upon by me & plead with the lord in our behalf that [my husband] may be healed I[f] you [r]eceive a [r]everlation concearning this matter send it by male."<sup>36</sup> Whatever the solicitations or questions, Strang was having an effect. By 1846, the movement had drawn to its body hundreds and perhaps thousands. It seemed to have momentum on its side, with Strang personifying the return to "true Mormonism."

Strang assured present and future supporters of his intention to continue to advocate the past principles of Mormonism, and he accused Young and the Twelve of doing the opposite. "Much has been said about carrying out Joseph's measures," Strang said, referring to the goals and policies of his adversaries. However, "[t]his is a very

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<sup>34</sup> D. W. Elmore to Strang, May 21, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #307.

<sup>35</sup> Samuel Northup to Strang, March 9, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #447.

<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Lurena Clark to Strang, June 26, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #285.



grave error. There are no persons in the Church or out of it, who have done so much to defeat [Smith's] measures as" the Twelve.<sup>37</sup> Strang therefore told his followers not to concern themselves with the Twelve, as God "has raised up faithful servants to lead to truth, holiness and safety, as many as would hearken."<sup>38</sup> His reference to "faithful servants" of course was to himself, and those in the burgeoning movement who believed him. Many would follow Strang because they felt he was the one to build upon Smith's foundation, and that the Twelve were departing from it.

To prove his calling as a prophet, Strang also claimed to have experienced several stunning spiritual experiences similar to Joseph Smith's. Those already in the faith knew of the miraculous emergence of the Book of Mormon, the visitation of angels, the divinely guided translation of the plates, and Smith's formal revelations. Strang made similar claims; he too had his own set of ancient plates, visitations of angels, and divine revelations. One published poem, entitled "The City of Voree" illustrated these experiences. It went: "The angels too, have blessed the place,/With messages of truth and grace....Thus truth springs out from under ground,/To testify to all around,/That James, a prophet's called to be,/And lead God's Church in fair Voree."<sup>39</sup> In contrast, Brigham Young did not seem to exhibit such divine or miraculous characteristics in his leadership. Thus, tales of miracles proved to many that it was Strang, not Young, who had been appointed successor to Joseph Smith.

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<sup>37</sup> "Carrying out Joseph's Measures," *Voree Herald* 1 (March 1846): [4].

<sup>38</sup> "Carrying out Joseph's Measures," *Voree Herald* 1 (March 1846): [4].

<sup>39</sup> "Poetry," *Voree Herald* 1 (July 1846): [4].

Strang's message required two vital propagating tools: missionaries and an official newspaper. The latter was served by the Strangite organ, the *Voree Herald*, that began in January 1846, which, in turn, was succeeded by the *Zion's Reveille* (1846–1847), and the *Gospel Herald* (1847–1850), and, finally the Beaver Island-based *Northern Islander* (1850–1856). The effectiveness of the missionaries and newspapers often went together. On one hand, missionaries spread the gospel and brought newspapers into homes where they could either introduce Strang's claims or strengthen the Strangites' resolve. In turn, the published news and letters from members and missionaries were designed to further the work of missionaries by demonstrating the movement's success and by creating a unity among the Strangite Church.

Of course, none of this was peculiarly innovative. Religious publishing in the American Midwest had a long heritage, as did such work among the Mormons themselves.<sup>40</sup> The LDS Church had been printing religious newspapers and pamphlets since the early 1830s, and it continued to do so throughout the remainder of the century, and beyond.<sup>41</sup> Strang fully embraced these precedents, but found them difficult to meet. Producing a newspaper taxed both finances and health, as Strang admitted. “Did you ever write when your mind was dark, and your head seemed spinning round like a great wheel,” he once asked his readers, “or when all your ideas seemed lost in the bottom of a

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<sup>40</sup> For a study of Strang's printing environment, see Wesley Norton, *Religious Newspapers in the Old Northwest to 1861: A History, Bibliography, and Record of Opinion* (Ohio University Press: Athens, Ohio, 1977). For a summary of the publications in Mormonism, see Peter Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> These include *The Evening and the Morning Star* in Independence, Missouri, *The Evening and the Morning Star* in Kirtland, Ohio, *The Elders Journal* in Kirtland and Far West, Missouri, and the *Times and Seasons* at Nauvoo. See Crawley, *Descriptive Bibliography*.

deep, dark well, from whence you could scarcely draw them up?”<sup>42</sup> Yet, he knew of the press’s importance, being a former editor of the New York newspaper, the *Randolph Herald*. Strangite member, Stephen Post, must have stated the views of his leader when writing that “[t]he press is a mighty engine to spread truth when in right hands, and papers will reach people in numerous instances where preaching never can.”<sup>43</sup>

Strangite newspaper publishing probably began in December 1845, when Strang wrote an important letter stating his religious claims. He later proposed publishing a thousand copies of the document, “to be put into immediate circulation.”<sup>44</sup> This idea soon expanded into a newspaper, which began with a prospectus and a few scattered subscribers.<sup>45</sup> In January 1846 the first issue of the *Voree Herald* began the Strangite journalistic campaign. (see fig 4). This issue contained some of the founding documents of the movement. These included the Letter of



Fig. 4. The *Voree Herald*.

Appointment, a pastoral letter from Strang to believers of Mormonism, the testimony of the witnesses of the Voree Plates, a revelation given to Strang for the church’s edification, and, lastly, a collection of arguments for Strang’s succession. The next nine issues were printed on multiple Wisconsin presses,

<sup>42</sup> “Musings,” *Gospel Herald* 2 (November 25, 1847), 160.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Post to Strang, November 10, 1847, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (December 2, 1847): 167.

<sup>44</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 34.

<sup>45</sup> William Backenstos to Strang, December 29, 1847, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (January 27, 1848): 224.

including those of the *Southport* (Kenosha) *Telegraph*, the *Ottawa Constitutionalist*, and the *Elkhorn Star*. The tenth issue, also published in 1846, was printed in New York City. Thereafter, the newspaper assumed a new name, *Zion's Reveille*, and was printed on the newly acquired, Strangite-owned press.<sup>46</sup>

Strang did not work alone. Several converts with printing experience helped out, including John E. Page, John Greenhow, Gilbert Watson, and Francis Cooper.<sup>47</sup> Yet, there was a downside. In a cryptic history of his newspaper work Strang later suggested that because he allowed others to serve as editor, the quality of the work was hard to maintain.<sup>48</sup> Regardless of who worked at the newspaper office, Strang remained as editor-in-chief, and therefore set policy that tried to utilize the advantages of the press. “A well conducted religious periodical is like a thousand preachers,” said one of his contemporaries, “flying in almost as many directions, by means of horses, mailstages, steam boats, rail road cars, ships, etc., etc., offering life and salvation to the sons of men in almost every clime.”<sup>49</sup> Strang tried to have the *Voree Herald*, and its successors, do just that.

The *Voree Herald's* editorial policy and purpose were clear—to spread and maintain Strangism.<sup>50</sup> Hence, the news reported was often shaped and even exaggerated

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<sup>46</sup> *Northern Islander* (Beaver Island, Michigan) 6 (January 24, 1856): 249.

<sup>47</sup> Dale Morgan, “A Bibliography of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [Strangite],” *The Western Humanities Review* 5 (Winter 1950–51): 50.

<sup>48</sup> “Reciprocal,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (October 19, 1848): 154.

<sup>49</sup> *Religious Telescope* (Circleville, Ohio), November 27, 1839 as quoted in Norton, *Religious Newspapers in the Old Northwest*, 1–2.

<sup>50</sup> Gilbert R. Oberdas produced an incomplete study of the Voree newspapers in 1969. Oberdas divided the *Voree Herald's* content into several categories: 63 percent comprised church doctrine or church discussions for Strangism and against other religions; 21 percent covered church organization, (church

to achieve this goal. Thus, the movement's presses variously claimed that all the Book of Mormon witnesses except one were connected with Strang, as well as most of the extended Smith family; that Strangite missionaries were enjoying spectacular success in fields of labor such as Nauvoo and England; and that LDS apostle and stalwart, Parley P. Pratt, had died while going to Utah.<sup>51</sup> All these rumors and stories of course were designed with the purpose to promote Strang and undermine his rivals.

The *Voree Herald* had begun with less than a dozen subscribers and assets totaling only seventeen dollars.<sup>52</sup> However, because of Strang's ambitious plans and energy, he overcame these humble beginnings, and his press became a considerable religious voice. One convert, Benjamin Chapman, spoke of his own experience:

With some Difficulty I Borrowed [a copy of the *Voree Herald*] and Read [it,] and to my utter astonishment I could not Reject one word of it, for my hart was so Rejorsed that the Graet God had fulfilled hi[s] word in appointing A man through our Belove<d> Joseph to fill his place when he was taken.<sup>53</sup>

Others, like Mormon apostle John E. Page, were more reserved in their initial reaction.

I read your paper of Jan[uary].... My Prayre is that the god of Isreal...may deign to stoop to unworthy me, and bear testimony <to> me [of its truth]...as once he did in the case of President Smith and the Book of Mormon – When I gain that

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conferences and meetings); 12 percent dealt with articles on health, legal notices, public affairs, and other miscellaneous writings not necessarily associated with Strangism; and finally 4 percent addressed land promotion. Gilbert R. Oberdas, "The Voree Press: February, 1846 to June 6, 1850," Senior Seminar 494 paper, Wisconsin State University, 4–5, 9, and 16–17, Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereafter, LDS Library. Oberdas' method of measuring was to determine the nature of the article, literally measure the inches of each article, and tally the numbers. While Oberdas studied only a majority of the first ten issues, at best his work provides hints at what Strang chose to focus on in his printing. Oberdas is not an authority on Strangite history and while his study can be a gauge of what the newspapers contained, it should be treated with caution.

<sup>51</sup> For the claim that all but one of the witnesses joined Strang, see *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [4]; Smith's family support: *Voree Herald* 1 (July 1846): [3]; the success at Nauvoo: "The Prospect," *Voree Herald* 1 (March 1846): [2]; the success at England: "English Churches," *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [3]; and the false claim of Pratt's death: *Voree Herald* 1 (May 1846): [2].

<sup>52</sup> "Musings," *Gospel Herald* 2 (October 14, 1847): 124.

<sup>53</sup> Benjamin Chapman to James J. Strang, March 24, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #16.

blessing, I shall as fearlessly advocate your interest, and claims, as I did Pres-Smiths.<sup>54</sup>

At least partly due to the newspaper, Page, and many others like him, left Brigham Young and joined Strangism.<sup>55</sup>

In selling newspapers, Strang also sold many people on the idea of Strangism. Samuel Moore Reeve, excited after reading the newspaper and filled with a desire to spread the “good news,” believed “thou art the man whom the Lord had appointed to lead his people.... I am now ready to receive instruction, and Counsel from you, and to do all that My Circumstances, will admit of to help roll on the Kingdom of our God.”<sup>56</sup> The result built upon itself. As the newspaper brought in converts, Strang in turn received a fresh supply of missionaries to preach his message. Some of these new converts had been prominent members under either Joseph Smith’s or Brigham Young’s leadership, which also added prestige and legitimacy to Strang’s position as a prophet. However, the majority were drawn from the ordinary ranks of old Mormonism, who felt the desire, responsibility, or just plain conviction to follow the man they believed was a prophet of God.

The newspaper reached a wide audience among Mormon believers, but it could only go so far in spreading the word. Thus, equally important was Strangite missionary work (to be discussed in detail in later chapters). During the first years of his movement, Strang considered how this activity should take shape. The first details of the Strangite

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<sup>54</sup> John E. Page to James Strang, February 1, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #10.

<sup>55</sup> John Quist, “John E. Page: An Apostle of Uncertainty,” *Journal of Mormon History* 12 (1985): 53–68. See also Justin Page collection at L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Provo, Utah. Hereafter cited as BYU Special Collections.

<sup>56</sup> Samuel Moore Reeve to James J. Strang, July 12, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #36.

missionaries paralleled the Latter-day Saint method. Strang, as prophet and presiding authority of the church, controlled arrangements: he could form or end missions and assign or dismiss missionaries. However, he largely delegated much of this responsibility to his Twelve Apostles. For example, Ebenezer Page, a member of the Twelve, wrote to Phineas Wright, a president of the Seventy, to “call for all the members of you[r] several quorums to report themselves to you or us” to preach. Some Strangite apostles took seriously their call to organize missionary work. Wright then advertised in the *Gospel Herald* that “[w]e wish every member of the Seventies to report themselves, and as many to go out to preach as possibly can.” Both the letter from Page and the notice from Wright were printed in the *Gospel Herald* for the church members to read.<sup>57</sup> In another example of Strangite missionary procedure, newly appointed apostles Samuel Graham and Jehiel Savage wrote, in a letter to the church in December 1848, asking “[w]ho of the Seventies or Elders will, at this time, thrust in the sickle and reap?”<sup>58</sup> These solicitations from the Strangite Twelve often were heeded by members filled with enthusiasm for the work.

Some members expressed a desire to serve and asked Strang for the opportunity. For instance Scot convert, John Macauley, wrote to Strang, “I long to be sent on a mission to my own Native land.” Macauley had presided over a large conference in Scotland before Joseph Smith’s death, and he explained that “since I heard of orsin pratt [a Brighamite apostle] bieng gon to England I felt grived for the poor saints there.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ebenezer Page to Phineas Wright, March 1, 1848 and William Savage and Phineas Wright to members of the quorums of the seventies, March 3, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (March 9, 1848): 256.

<sup>58</sup> Jehiel Savage and Samuel Graham to the Church, December 27, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (January 11, 1849): 240.

<sup>59</sup> John Macauley to Strang, June 21, 1850, Strang Collection, Yale, #424.

Although this mission apparently never materialized, Macauley exemplifies the desire of many Strangites to spread Strangism to their former Mormon acquaintances and friends.

In sum, for many Mormons, Strangism filled a spiritual void by offering both doctrines as well as religious manifestations that they did not find in post-Smith Mormonism. Many who disagreed with Young and the Twelve over the doctrine of polygamy, the question of prophetic leadership, and the movement to the West, were attracted to Strang's claim as prophet as well as by his promise to maintain the principles of familiar Mormonism. The Strangite newspapers played an essential part in spreading Strang's message that helped gain many converts among dissatisfied Mormons; as did the missionaries that joined the ranks of Strangism. Finally, the Strangite Church's organizational structure helped to facilitate missionaries and missions throughout the nation and beyond. The task now is to trace the main missionary efforts.





## CHAPTER 2: RISE OF STRANGISM

I feel the strongest assurance of truth when I say that at no time since the organization of this church has there been a greater call for faithful preachers of the gospel than at the present.

—James J. Strang, 1847<sup>1</sup>

From 1846 to 1850, there were likely 4,000 to 6,000 Latter-day Saints who seriously investigated and/or joined the Strangite Church. This was in large part to the successful Strangite missionary program. Strangite missionary work prospered for several important reasons: first, the intense desire of the LDS converts for a rapid succession in the presidency; second, the exploitation of the faith of the already-established LDS communities; and finally, the caliber and conviction of the missionaries themselves. Strang knew where to find his audience, catered to their wants, and benefited from missionaries who were highly capable of spreading his message.

### **Desiring a Prophet**

“I am satisfied that Joseph [Smith] appointed J[ames]. J. Strang. It is verily so.”<sup>2</sup> In her 1846 endorsement of Strang’s prophetic calling, Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of and believer in Joseph Smith and his prophetic calling longer than anyone else living, exemplifies an important trend in Strangite missionary work: willing and hopeful converts. Latter-day Saints had given up much for their faith, including their lives in some cases. This level of commitment was not easily thrown aside—not even for those rejecting Brigham Young or the move westward. Yet there had to be a viable alternative for those wanting to maintain their faith in the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith’s calling,

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<sup>1</sup> “Message to the Conference,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (April 15, 1847): 53.

and the Mormon doctrines they espoused. Strangism offered that alternative. But Mormons converting to Strangism did far more than just add numbers to the Strangite membership records. Many of these converts seeking to maintain their faith in Mormonism hoped and prayed that Strang's calling was from God—resulting in an unusually supportive group of individuals. However, when this desire for a prophet was shattered, a large falling away from the Strangite Church resulted.

Lucy Smith did not maintain her faith in Strang. In fact, there is little reference to her further endorsing Strang. However, her conversion came at a difficult break with the Twelve as they moved west, an opportune time for many to consider alternative options.<sup>3</sup> Of course not all Latter-day Saints breaking with Brigham Young flocked to Strangism, but there were enough to make a noticeable impact.

One of the more notable converts from Mormonism to Strangism and an example of the converts' hope in Strang was George Miller. Miller was an important member of the LDS Church in Nauvoo, and a friend of Joseph Smith. Miller even described their relationship as “an intimacy...like that of Brothers.”<sup>4</sup> The death of his “Brother” prompted Miller to begin a life-long search for “another Joseph Smith,”<sup>5</sup> but unfortunately for the LDS Church, Brigham Young was not Miller's prophet. While migrating to Winter Quarters, Miller broke with Brigham Young and joined his family at the Lyman Wight

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<sup>2</sup> Lucy Smith to Reuben Hedlock May 11, 1846, as found in the *Voree Herald* 1 (June 1846): [1].

<sup>3</sup> See Lavina Fielding Anderson, “Epilogue: Lucy's Last Years,” in *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir*, ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2001), 779–797, especially 786–790.

<sup>4</sup> Miller to Thomas Reynolds, September 4, 1842, Thomas Reynolds Papers, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, as quoted in Richard E. Bennett, “A Samaritan had passed by” George Miller—Mormon Bishop, Trailblazer, and Brigham Young Antagonist,” *Illinois Historical Journal* 82 (Spring 1989): 6.

colony in Texas.<sup>6</sup> It was here that the two former Mormons “found common ground in their abiding faith in Joseph Smith.”<sup>7</sup> But this “common ground” did not last. Miller and Wright soon became disaffected with each other and Miller went in search of a prophet—and found Strang. Miller wrote to Strang “as I have spent a competency and my all in the church for the benefit of the saints, I still, as ever, desire to spend the remainder of my days in the cause of Zion, when made known to me through the medium God has appointed.”<sup>8</sup> His eventual move to Beaver Island, and his life-long support of Strang is a good example of a convert who believed in Mormonism and accepted Strang as the prophet.

Like Miller, other former LDS members sought out Strang. For example, several Mormons wrote from Missouri concerning Strangism. The majority of the LDS Church members were driven from Missouri in the winter of 1838–39 and found refuge in Illinois, but several disillusioned Mormons remained behind. It was likely some of these Mormons who wrote to Strang asking about his new claim in 1846–1847.<sup>9</sup> One woman, sick and without family, wrote from Far West, Missouri, asking Strang for relief from her illness. “I have a great favor to ask of you...It is that you would petition the Father in the

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<sup>5</sup> Bennett, ““A Samaritan had passed by,”” 8.

<sup>6</sup> Richard E. Bennett, “Lamanism, Lymanism, and Cornfields,” *Journal of Mormon History* 13 (1986–87): 45–59.

<sup>7</sup> Bennett, ““A Samaritan had passed by,”” 12.

<sup>8</sup> George Miller to Strang, Austin, Texas, June 12, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (August 16, 1849): 98–99.

<sup>9</sup> For example, see Naomi Alvord to Strang, dated Far West, April 20, 1846, James Jesse Strang Collection, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, microfilm copy in authors possession, hereafter cited as Strang Collection, Yale, #218. Each letter has been supplied a number by a later cataloger, which will also be provided here. See also George Walters to Strang, dated Kingston, Missouri, July 11, 1847, Strang Collection, Yale, #507.

name of Jesus Christ for my recovery to health.”<sup>10</sup> Another Missourian Mormon wrote to Strang rather candidly of the various schismatic groups, including the Brighamites, “cant all be right & I Hope that we are not all wrong.... I am the same As neare as I know as when I wrote you last[—]still looking on to See if there [are] aney that is doing good.”<sup>11</sup> Like these Mormons in Missouri, Latter-day Saints throughout the country were hopeful that God had again called a prophet and that Strangism was the correct form of Mormonism.

The missionaries noticed this phenomenon in a more general way. In February, 1847, James Cooper wrote to Strang from Michigantown, Indiana, and stated that there were “many faithful saints in this vicinity,” who were “firm in the faith of primitive Mormonism.”<sup>12</sup> George J. Adams, another missionary, wrote of his experience. “[W]e have visited Albion, [Michigan,] and preached to overflowing congregations in the school house.... [L]et me say, although I have been many years a preacher of this last dispensation, I have never before witnessed such a universal desire to hear and obey the truth.”<sup>13</sup> Strangism reinvigorated many former Latter-day Saints and fortunately for Strang, a network of potential converts was already in place.

### **Using the Mormon Networks**

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<sup>10</sup> Naomi Alvord to Strang, dated Far West, April 20, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #218.

<sup>11</sup> George Walters to Strang, dated Kingston, Missouri, July 11, 1847, Strang Collection, Yale, #507.

<sup>12</sup> James W. Cooper to Strang and Greenhow, February 27, 1847, as found in the *Zion's Reveille* 2 (March 11, 1847): 23.

<sup>13</sup> G. J. Adams to Francis Cooper, July 30, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (August 16, 1849): 99.

In the summer of 1846, James J. Strang personally visited Kirtland, Ohio, to hold a conference in the largest building in the area—the LDS temple. In a letter he wrote back to the Saints at Voree, Strang described the conference. “There were four hundred in attendance [at the Kirtland Temple] saturday[.] W[illia]m [Smith] preached twice during the setting and I did four times. Sabbath day I spoke eight hours in my most rapid manner on the order of the Church and in a congregation filling a space fifty five feet square there was not one unattentive person and I may safely say there were not five persons who were not convinced of the truth of every position I took.”<sup>14</sup> It was at this conference that a mission to England was planned, and a “full set of officers of the stake were appointed.”<sup>15</sup> The attendees resolved to “sustain and uphold with our faith and prayers, and acknowledge in his administration James J. Strang, as First President of this Church.”<sup>16</sup>

However, Strang went to Kirtland not only to have a building in which to preach or a forum in which to organize a mission to England. The trip to Kirtland was also symbolic of a return to a major hub of Mormonism. Kirtland was the operative center of Mormonism from 1831 to 1837—where Joseph Smith had lived and where the Saints built a temple in which to worship. Strang, an expert at public relations, stated “we have

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<sup>14</sup> James J. Strang to “Bretheren and Sisters,” August 14, 1846, as found in “A Record of the establishment and doings of the Stake of Zion called Voree in Wisconsin, made by the Scribes appointed to that office,” 102, microfilm copy, Brigham Young University, original in private hands. Hereafter “Chronicles of Voree.” The “Chronicles of Voree” is apparently a contemporary manuscript dated journal of the Strangite Church of unknown authorship. A transcription of this manuscript has been compiled by John J. Hajieck (Burlington, Wisconsin: J. J. Hajieck, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> “Kirtland” *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [1].

<sup>16</sup> “Kirtland” *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [2].

[the Kirtland temple] in peaceful and undisputed possession”<sup>17</sup> Yet, there was a more important reason why Strang was in Kirtland, and something that Strangite missionaries would emulate for the next five years: Strangism went to where the Latter-day Saints were located. Even after the bulk of the LDS Church moved, many Mormons remained in locations such as Kirtland, Missouri, and Nauvoo, Illinois.<sup>18</sup> Strangite missionaries knew this and pursued these potential converts. In fact, the Strangite missionary work would not have succeeded without the LDS branches and communities already in existence. The Strangites prospered because of Mormonism’s sixteen-year effort in gaining converts to Joseph Smith and when entering new areas, the missionaries first approached former Latter-day Saints living in that area.

Illinois was another example of this as it was home to thousands of Mormons for the first half of the 1840s with the center in Nauvoo, a boom-town on the banks of the Mississippi River north of Quincy. After Joseph Smith was killed, the Mormons were able to live in an uncomfortable truce with their neighbors until 1846, when they crossed the Mississippi River and began their trek across Iowa, eventually ending in Utah. As a major center of Latter-day Saints during the first part of 1846, Nauvoo became a center of Strangite activity as well. Strang was not only baptized a Mormon at Nauvoo, but he also sent some of his first missionaries there.

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<sup>17</sup> Strang to “Bretheren and Sisters,” August 14, 1846, as found in the “Chronicles of Voree,” 103. Although she does not address the Strangite’s claim to the Kirtland temple, see Kim L. Loving, “Ownership of the Kirtland Temple: Legends, Lies, and Misunderstandings,” *Journal of Mormon History* 30 (Fall 2004): 1–80 for an excellent study of the ownership of the Kirtland Temple.

<sup>18</sup> See for example, Davis Bitton, “The Waning of Mormon Kirtland,” *BYU Studies* 12 (Summer 1972): 455–464.

Moses Smith and Norton Jacob were first sent to Nauvoo to report to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles concerning Strang's appointment. On August 25, 1844, Moses Smith and Norton Jacob presented Strang's history. The Twelve immediately dismissed the story and warned Smith (Jacob, more in line with the Twelve, apparently escaped their attention) "to follow the council of the Twelve or he would be sure to fall."<sup>19</sup> The very next day the Twelve excommunicated Strang and Aaron Smith.<sup>20</sup> Moses Smith eventually returned to Wisconsin and in December 1845, he was directed by Strang to go on a mission to Nauvoo—he left in mid-January and several others followed at the end of February.<sup>21</sup> Thus it was in the early spring of 1846 that the first significant push for Strangism occurred in Nauvoo.

Whether the Strangites knew it or not, 1846 was a transitional time in Nauvoo and the surrounding areas. During the winter of 1845–46, thousands of Saints received their endowment in the Nauvoo Temple.<sup>22</sup> Also during the first part of 1846, many of the Saints were planning to move west—but not willingly. Neighboring settlements began pressuring the Mormons to leave the area, further spurring the Mormons on at break-neck

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<sup>19</sup> Norton Jacob journal/autobiography, August 25, 1844, LDS Archives. The story of Moses Smith is similar (although from a secondary source). "Several of the Twelve, who were there, met [Smith] with harshness; told him the revelation was false, and threatened him with excommunication in case he persisted in proclaiming it." "Obituary," *Gospel Herald* 4 (14 June 1849): 54.

<sup>20</sup> *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois) 5 (September 2, 1844): 629.

<sup>21</sup> "Chronicles of Voree," 35, 49, and 58. Moses Smith actually played an important part in the Emmett expedition. He left the group and returned to Nauvoo and guided Amasa Lyman and Daniel Spencer back to the camp to admonish and counsel the group. William G. Hartley, *My Best for the Kingdom: History and Autobiography of John Lowe Butler A Mormon Frontiersman* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1993), 150–51.

<sup>22</sup> According to one scholar, the endowment in Nauvoo "consisted of the ordinances of washing and anointing, followed by instructions and covenants setting forth a pattern or figurative model for life.... Within the context of these gospel instructions, the initiates made covenants of personal virtue and benevolence and of commitment to the church." Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 2004), 258–59



speed to finish their temple before leaving.<sup>23</sup> Some two thousand left in the month of February, but the majority remained behind for a time finishing or hoping to find means to fish preparations or having no plans to go west with the rest of the Saints.<sup>24</sup>

It was in this environment in Nauvoo that Moses Smith and other Strangite missionaries began to preach. Under the direct leadership of the LDS Twelve Apostles (led by Brigham Young until the middle of February 1846, and then under the direction of another member of the Twelve, Orson Hyde), the Saints at Nauvoo were “forbidd[en]...to hear [a Strangite missionary] or *any one that believed in Strang*, or to read the [Voree] Herald.”<sup>25</sup> Some obeyed this order but others felt a need to decide for themselves: “[w]e were also charged not to hear such persons or have any thing to do with them. But I claim to be free; and I believe the best way to arrive at the truth is to ‘Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.’”<sup>26</sup> Smith and his companions saw some of their success among these Saints who felt a “freedom” to explore other claims.

On January 25, 1846, Smith attempted to preach in the Nauvoo Temple concerning Strangism, but was not allowed. With the LDS leaders preaching against Smith, curiosity in Strangism abounded and a large gathering crowded around Smith outside of the temple wanting to hear him preach, which he did on a rock for some two

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<sup>23</sup> For the clashing of the Mormons and non-Mormons at this time see, Susan Sessions Rugh, *Our Common Country: Family Farming, Culture, and Community in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), especially chapter two and John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, eds. *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Richard E. Bennett, *We'll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846–1848* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1997), 32.

<sup>25</sup> “Obituary,” *Gospel Herald* 4 (June 14, 1849): 54, emphasis in original.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Moore Reeve to Strang, July 12, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #36. Reeve quotes 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

hours.<sup>27</sup> According to the Strangite record the Nauvoo police broke up the crowd and attempted to harm the preacher, yet Smith escaped and found refuge in a supporter's house.<sup>28</sup> The next Sunday, Brigham Young, possibly attempting to finalize the decision for many of his people, allowed Moses Smith to preach in the temple. Because no minutes exist of this meeting, it is impossible to tell exactly what occurred. Apostle Willard Richards's diary for February 1, 1846, states that "Moses Smith preached in the Temple advocating Strang – and was completely used up by Orson Hyde & others[. H]e and others were cut off this day, by acclamation."<sup>29</sup> The Strangite's version reads differently: "A great effort was made to defeat the effect of his words by clamour ridicule and out cry. in the midst of which they voted by acclamation to cut him off from the Church."<sup>30</sup>

However, despite the various setbacks, Moses Smith gained success and influenced Mormons and future Strangites alike. At least one person writing to Strang stated that it was from Smith that they heard the gospel.<sup>31</sup> Even faithful Mormons noted Strang's alleged calling. Isaac C. Haight mentioned in his diary that "many are turning away from the Church and from the Twelve apostles to fallow a new Prophet that has rose up pretending to receive his appointment by Joseph before his death and then confirmed by the visitation of an Angel who gave him the Urim and Thumim by which

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<sup>27</sup> "Obituary," *Gospel Herald*, 4 (June 14, 1849): 54.

<sup>28</sup> "Obituary," *Gospel Herald*, 4 (June 14, 1849): 54.

<sup>29</sup> Willard Richards diary, LDS Archives.

<sup>30</sup> "Chronicles of Voree," 59.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Chapman to Strang, March 24, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #16.

he discovered some plates &c.”<sup>32</sup> In the words of fellow Strangite missionary Reuben Miller, Moses Smith “has done a great deal of good” in Nauvoo.<sup>33</sup> Moses Smith, to be sure, was an important and influential missionary, but the fact that he had an interested audience of many thousands of listeners already familiar with Mormonism was crucial for his success.

Strangism might have offered inhabitants of Nauvoo an alternative to Brighamism, but those on the trail with the LDS Church were already committed to Brigham Young and felt a certain degree of fellowship. As many Latter-day Saints left Nauvoo for their unknown home in the west, Strangite missionaries followed the trail. In 1847 Strangite member Uriah C. H. Nickerson received a letter from his mother who was crossing Iowa with the Brighamite Camp of Israel. He relayed to Strang the suffering and trials the Mormons faced: “My father (Freeman Nickerson) died of exposure and suffering.... And my mother, now 66 years of age, has been compelled to sleep on the open prairie, in the snow, without tent or bed. This is but the common tale of woe in all the camp.”<sup>34</sup> Yet Nickerson did not quickly act on the suffering of his family. It was two months after the letter that Nickerson and John Shippy were appointed to a mission to the Camp of Israel in Iowa.<sup>35</sup>

In their letter summarizing the mission, Nickerson and Shippy added to the Strangites’ assumption that the Camp of Israel was to fail. “Hundreds on hundreds have

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<sup>32</sup> Isaac C. Haight, March 8, 1846, LDS Archives.

<sup>33</sup> Reuben Miller to Strang, February 15, 184[6], Strang Collection, Yale, #14.

<sup>34</sup> U. C. H. Nickerson to Greenhow, February 25, 1847, as found in the *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (February 25, 1847): 27.

<sup>35</sup> “The Minutes of the Annual Conference,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (July 8, 1847): 68.

dissented from the Brighamite usurpation, and are leaving for other countries.”<sup>36</sup> The missionaries also experienced some success. “[W]e preached many times [at the Chariton River], and some believed in the appointment of James J. Strang to be the true and legal successor to Joseph Smith in the prophetic office, and were baptized and agreed to go with us to Voree.” At Mount Pisgah, John Shippy (who had gone on by himself leaving Nickerson at Charaton River) found that the Brighamites “sent men around to every family in Garden Grove and forbid them hearing or harboring a Strangite, and threatened the life of Bro. Shippy in different places; yet they had to hear him privately, and many believed.”<sup>37</sup> Nickerson and Shippy led a company of twenty-two people from the Camp of Israel to Voree and stated that “many more families [were] expected soon from that quarter.”<sup>38</sup> However, these did not materialize and exact numbers from the Camp of Israel mission are not known. Willard Richards, an LDS Apostle, noted in his diary that Jehiel Savage came into the Camp of Israel to attempt to convert Latter-day Saints to Strangism, but he provided little detail to the amount of Strangite success.<sup>39</sup> As already mentioned, the commitment from the Mormons crossing Iowa might have lent to the lack of numerous converts for the Strangite missionaries, but the fact that these missionaries traveled to the Camp of Israel shows that they were expecting success.

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<sup>36</sup> Uriah C. H. Nickerson and John Shippy to Editors, July 20, 1847, as found in the *Zion's Reveille* 2 (July 29, 1847): 79. Many Mormons remained behind and did not continue on to Utah. One man wrote from Burlington, Iowa, to John E. Page in Voree and told him that he had “not gone to Salt Valley yet.” He told Page that he was “determined to still be a Mormon as much as ever, but I want the old stamp, that which brings intelligence, liberty and light. Elder Page, humbugery wont do for me.” Dwight Webster to John E. Page, February 20, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (April 20, 1848): 19.

<sup>37</sup> Uriah C. H. Nickerson and John Shippy to Editors, July 20, 1847, as found in the *Zion's Reveille* 2 (July 29, 1847): 79.

<sup>38</sup> Uriah C. H. Nickerson and John Shippy to Editors, July 20, 1847, as found in the *Zion's Reveille* 2 (July 29, 1847): 80.

Many areas of the country attracted the Strangites attention—largely because of the presence of Latter-day Saint branches. For instance, Strangites were “successful in the re-organization of the churches in southern Indiana.”<sup>40</sup> James Pugh, writing to Strang in 1846, provided an understanding of the Mormon religious environment in Cincinnati, Ohio, before Strangism arrived. “Heretofore There has been two parties in this place one being for Rigdon and The other f[or] The old organization,” or in other words, the Latter-day Saints.<sup>41</sup> After hearing of Strangism, “[t]he parties became united. And I think There is neither a man or woman in The place for Rigdon. The branch now meets together in union, and there are but one or two persons That I know of who are in favor of the california Expedition.”<sup>42</sup> Strangites not only went to where the Brighamites were, but also to any LDS group, including the Rigdonites. Even when traveling across national boundaries, Strangite missionaries sought out existing Mormon networks.

The Strangites traveled up to Canada in search of Latter-day Saints. At the end of spring in 1850, Phineas Wright raised a branch of twenty-six members in Leeds, Canada (an area with a history of Mormon activity).<sup>43</sup> When the missionaries returned to Voree, Wright reported at conference that “there was about seventy added to the church through their labors during the past winter; that many others who were luke warm in the cause were stirred up to diligence, and that God blessed them in their ministry, in confirming

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<sup>39</sup> Willard Richards diary, February 23, 1846, LDS Archives.

<sup>40</sup> “Indiana,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (September 2, 1847): 100.

<sup>41</sup> James W. Pugh to Strang, March 23, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #20. This letter was also printed in the *Voree Herald* 1 (April 1846): [6].

<sup>42</sup> James W. Pugh to Strang, March 23, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #20.

the word.”<sup>44</sup> Thus Strangism not only converted active Mormons, but also brought back inactive Mormons into the Strangite folds.

Areas along the East Coast became strong centers of Strangism as well. For example Strangite missionaries began proselytizing in 1846 to an important center of Mormonism and Rigdonism—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The first mention of Strangism in Pittsburgh sources comes in the latter part of March 1846 when it was recorded that Benjamin Chapman, a Nauvoo resident, returned with his family to Pittsburgh after hearing Strangism preached at Nauvoo. He then promised to quickly gather to Voree.<sup>45</sup> Then in September, the *Voree Herald*, in its exaggerated tones, announced that the “saints in Pittsburg [sic] have nearly all returned to the true order of the Church.”<sup>46</sup> Later, in the spring of 1847, James Smith, a resident of Pittsburgh, began to offer copies of the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants to Strangite Church members for a dollar apiece.<sup>47</sup> By summer of 1847 James M. Greig wrote to Strang and reported on the various Mormon churches (Brighamites and Rigdonites) in Pittsburgh. He concluded with the note: “All the old *valuable* members except 2 or 3 are with us heartily. We have the gifts and spirit among us richly.”<sup>48</sup> How many “valuable” Saints were originally in Pittsburgh is impossible to determine as documentation is scarce, but less than four months later,

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<sup>43</sup> See Richard E. Bennett, "A Study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Upper Canada, 1830–1850" M.A. Thesis, BYU University, 75 and Phineas Wright to Francis Cooper, March 27, 1850, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 5 (April 18, 1850): 37–8.

<sup>44</sup> “Minutes of a Conference,” *Gospel Herald* 5 (June 6, 1850): 90.

<sup>45</sup> Chapman to Strang, March 24, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #16.

<sup>46</sup> “Pittsburg,” *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [3].

<sup>47</sup> *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (April 15, 1847): 54.

<sup>48</sup> J. M. Greig to Strang, June 27, 1847, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (October 7, 1847): 119.

Greig wrote again and listed at least nine families in the Pittsburgh branch.<sup>49</sup> Despite the centers of Mormonism around the country, the missionary movement would not have succeeded without the help of the actual missionaries themselves.

### **Proselytizing with conviction**

Finally, yet likely most importantly, Strangite missionary work succeeded because of the caliber and conviction of the missionaries themselves. Many of the missionaries for Strang had been important and influential Mormons during Joseph Smith's life, and had vital experience in preaching, teaching, and living the precepts of Mormonism, which they transferred to Strangism. But it was not only their experience, but also their belief and testimony of Strang's prophetic calling that prompted them into action. One can have a large and willing audience to hear a religious message, but unless there are people dedicated to the message and convinced of its truth, the work will stagnate.

Reuben T. Nichols was one such successful Strangite missionary laboring in New York. Several Strangite missionaries sought out and preached among the New York Mormon branches. The *Voree Herald* noted, with obvious exaggeration, that “[a]ll [of] Northern and central New York is with” Strang. Strangism is known to have existed in over sixty New York locations—including towns in which missionaries preached, Strangite branches, districts, or conferences. One member estimated that one county had 70–100 members.<sup>50</sup> As Strangite missionary work is known to have penetrated twenty-

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<sup>49</sup> James M. Greig to Strang, October 15, 1847, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (November 4, 1847): 142.

<sup>50</sup> Z. H. Gurley to Francis Cooper, March 15, 1850, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 5 (April 4, 1850): 22.

five New York counties, and with ten of these counties having impressive Strangite activity, there could have been a total of over one thousand Strangite sympathizers in New York State, although not at any one time.<sup>51</sup> The efforts of missionaries, as well as leaders and individual members, contributed to the growth in New York, resulting in the highest number of Strangite converts in the East.

A member of the Mormon Church since 1833, Nichols first heard of Strang's position in the spring of 1846, and after some deliberation, he became convinced Strang spoke the truth.<sup>52</sup> He traveled to Voree, contacted Strang, and then began to preach the word—first in Illinois and then in his home state of New York, where he was appointed to oversee the Strangite missionary work in ten western counties.<sup>53</sup> In January 1847, Nichols presided over a conference at Batavia, New York, fifty miles west of Palmyra. At this conference it was resolved to accept Strang as a prophet, and Nichols ordained three high priests as well as organized a Strangite branch.<sup>54</sup> The next month, Nichols wrote to the editor of the *Zion's Reveille* and admitted that the “work moves slowly,” but that “the honest in heart both in and out of the church are awaking to the truth.”<sup>55</sup> In response, the editor wrote: “[o]ur thanks are due to Brother Nichols for the numerous subscribers he is

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<sup>51</sup> Although one hundred sympathizers in each of the ten counties might be too high an estimation, the conclusion of one thousand sympathizers can be justified by the extra fifteen counties with an unknown number of Strangite activity.

<sup>52</sup> “The Ministerial Labors of Reuben T. Nichols,” typescript, library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereafter, LDS Library.

<sup>53</sup> “The Ministerial Labors of Reuben T. Nichols,” LDS Library 6.

<sup>54</sup> “Minutes of Conference,” *Zion's Reveille* 2 (February 18, 1847): 23.

<sup>55</sup> Reuben T. Nichols to Brother Greenhow, February 18, 1847, as found in the *Zion's Reveille* 2 (March 18, 1847): 38.



continually forwarding us. He has assisted us more in that way than any other member in the church.”<sup>56</sup>

Nichols set out on a mission throughout New York in 1847 and met with many LDS Saints, though they were “left like clusters of grapes in the uppermost boughs.”<sup>57</sup> As he worked, he competed for converts against the Brighamites who had enjoyed a presence in New York since the beginning of Mormonism.<sup>58</sup> His regard toward them was not kind: “[i]t puts me in mind of a small bunch of straw burning—a great smoke, a little light, and less fire—only momentary at most.... They want no more prophets. Twelve apostles is prophet enough for them!”<sup>59</sup> In Steuben County, the Brighamites “would not receive them, neither would they receive my testimony.” At another location, Nichols fared better. Nichols “met one Brighamite who undertook to discuss with me the claims of James [J. Strang]. About two hours conversation satisfied him so that tears flowed from his eyes, and all that lived in that place believed and I organized them into a branch.” It appeared that Nichols succeeded in presenting Strang’s position, but in April

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<sup>56</sup> *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (March 11, 1847): 34.

<sup>57</sup> “The Ministerial Labors of Reuben T. Nichols,” LDS Archives, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Despite a continuous presence of LDS Church members in New York state from 1830–1844, scholarship has not adequately addressed this history. See David J. Whittaker, “Mormon Missiology: An Introduction and Guide to the Sources,” in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges, eds. (Provo, Utah: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), 490. For some mention of LDS missionary work in the east, including New York, see S. George Ellsworth, “A History of Mormon Missionary Activities in the United States and Canada, 1830–1846,” (Master’s thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1947).

<sup>59</sup> Reuben T. Nichols to Brother Greenhow, February 18, 1847, as found in the *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (March 18, 1847): 38.

1847, Nichols “took a job of getting out timber and putting up a barn frame” and quit preaching at least for a time.<sup>60</sup>

At the April 1847 Voree Conference, Nichols was appointed as leader of the Genessee New York District.<sup>61</sup> In October, he expressed a desire to again go on a mission and left in the winter of 1847–48. Nichols wrote in February and described his labors, with no mention of any baptisms.<sup>62</sup> Nichols apparently lost some desire to preach since almost two years later, another missionary commented that Nichols “seems...to take new courage, and is fully determined to do God’s will hereafter. He intends to go to the Island in the spring.”<sup>63</sup> Nichols wrote an 1849 New Year’s greeting to the Strangite newspaper and expressed both thankfulness to the missionaries and a desire to go to Beaver Island.<sup>64</sup> Nichols exemplified the determination and hard work of the average missionary trying his best to further the work with which he was commissioned.

Ebenezer Page, brother to Strangite apostle John E. Page, was another successful New York missionary. Page presided over the conference held in Jefferson County in November 1846 with over seventy members represented in five branches.<sup>65</sup> At a later

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<sup>60</sup> “The Ministerial Labors of Reuben T. Nichols,” LDS Library, 6.

<sup>61</sup> “The Minutes of the Annual Conference...” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (July 8, 1847): 68.

<sup>62</sup> Reuben T. Nichols to Strang, October 21, 1847, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (November 25, 1847): 153 and Reuben T. Nichols to Strang February 28, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (March 16, 1848): 259–60.

<sup>63</sup> Ebenezer Page to Francis Cooper, December 8, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (December 27, 1849): 241.

<sup>64</sup> Reuben T. Nichols to unknown recipient, January 1, 1850, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 5 (April 11, 1850): 26–27. Little is known of Nichols later life, but in 1879, Nichols corresponded with a Strangite member. Reuben T. Nichols to E. T. Couch, April 17, 1879, typescript copy, BYU Special Collections.

<sup>65</sup> “Conference Minutes,” *Zion’s Reveille* 1 (December 1846): 4.

conference in Jefferson County, where Strang presided, two members of the region were chosen as apostles: Ebenezer Page, the presiding high priest, and Ira J. Patten.<sup>66</sup> Page continued to work in New York and in June 1848, Page presided over the Otsego County New York Conference where he preached the importance of the gathering to Voree.<sup>67</sup> In September of the same year, Page wrote Strang and spoke of only one baptism, but that the members were “on their high heeled shoes for Voree in the spring;” perhaps even up to one hundred from Otsego.<sup>68</sup> “Truly the harvest is great, and the laborers are few,” remarked Page, and the “people are hungry and starving for preaching.”<sup>69</sup>

In November 1848, Page wrote that he visited Colesville “where the [LDS] church was first organized,” and Binghamton, where “by the grace of God...[he had] raised a branch of twenty-seven members, in the fall of 1830 and winter of 1831.”<sup>70</sup> The work, however, did not progress to his liking: “I just looked over my daily journal, I have traveled about twenty-seven hundred miles, and preached seventy-seven times and to some thousands of people, but not one of ten thousand received my testimony.”<sup>71</sup> Yet despite his discouragement Page, like other Strangite missionaries, continued to work. He

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<sup>66</sup> “Conference at Theresa,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (August 12, 1847): 86.

<sup>67</sup> “Minutes of the Conference at Cooperstown Otsego Co., N.Y.,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (July 13, 1848): 68.

<sup>68</sup> Ebenezer Page to Strang, September 11, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (October 19, 1848): 156–7.

<sup>69</sup> Ebenezer Page to Strang, September 11, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (October 19, 1848): 156.

<sup>70</sup> Ebenezer Page to Strang, November 1, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (November 16, 1848): 187. Page also met the cousin to Emma Smith, widow of Joseph Smith, who was a member of the Strangite Church.

<sup>71</sup> Ebenezer Page to Strang, November 1, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (November 16, 1848): 187.

“charter[ed] a lake boat to come from Fort Plain, on the Erie canal, in N. Y., to Beaver Island.” Strang felt that “[t]his [was] an excellent opportunity for all who wish[ed] to come up from all places east of there, and from every part of the State of New York” to go with Page.<sup>72</sup> In January, Page organized a branch of six members at Milford Centre, and saw nine baptized in Westford.<sup>73</sup> In May 1849, Page took a company of sixty Saints (thirty more members wanted to go but had debts) to Voree, unable to go to Beaver Island directly.<sup>74</sup> Page was not in New York again until January 1850 where he was a part of one major final Strangite missionary effort in the East as discussed in the Introduction.<sup>75</sup>

As has been discussed, missionaries were preaching in the center of Mormonism—Nauvoo. The Nauvoo mission produced some important converts: William Smith, the church patriarch and brother to Joseph Smith; John E. Page, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; and Jehiel Savage, a president of a Quorum of Seventy, to name a few.<sup>76</sup> Both John E. Page and Savage began to preach for Strangism shortly

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<sup>72</sup> *Gospel Herald* 3 (January 4, 1849): 225.

<sup>73</sup> Ebenezer Page to Strang, January 11, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (February 1, 1849): 250–51. See also “Minutes of a Conference at Westford, Otsego Co. N. Y.,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (March 1, 1849): 266–67.

<sup>74</sup> “Ebenezer Page, one of the Twelve, has just returned from a mission...accompanied by a company of about 60 saints.” *Gospel Herald* 4 (June 7, 1849): 52. Page’s version of the journey, as well as a recap of his mission appears in a letter published in the newspaper. Ebenezer Page to Strang, June 1, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (June 28, 1849): 68–69.

<sup>75</sup> Ebenezer Page to Francis Cooper, January 14, 1850, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (February 14, 1850): 285–6 and Ebenezer Page to Francis Cooper, February 11, 1850, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (March 7, 1850): 310–11. Ebenezer Page would become one of the witnesses to the plates of Laban, of which Strang would translate the Book of the Law of the Lord. He remained a member of the Strangite Church until at least 1855 (Warren Post diary, July 11, 1855, typescript, BYU Special Collections), but would also join at least two other restorationist groups, the RLDS Church and the church led by Sidney Rigdon. “[A] charge was preferred against Elder Ebenenezer [sic] Page, for teaching that Sidney Rigdon is the legal successor to Joseph the Martyr.” *The Saints’ Herald* 7 (June 1, 1865): 171.

after their conversion. On March 3, 1846, both spoke publicly for Strangism at the stand near the Nauvoo Temple. The surviving minutes of this conference show that Page and Savage relied much on the scriptures as well as rhetoric to defend Strang's claims. Page explained that when going "to the D. & C. ... for [support of the office of]...the 12[,] the same book shows the...necessity of a prophet ..." He continued by asking "where was the necessity for a prophet for the last few years[? None] more than there is now." Speaking against the common succession theme of the Twelve (that Joseph Smith gave authority to the Twelve to participate and officiate in sacred ordinances), Page asks, "why was not I receiving ordinances that the o[the]<sup>rs</sup> [i.e. the Twelve] were promoted to – I went to the council as often as...my circumstances wo[ul]<sup>d</sup> permit." After joining Strang, Page declared that "I felt that I threw off a heavy load – as great as when I was bap[tise]<sup>d</sup> by Emer Harris [into the LDS Church] – I feel like ano[the]<sup>f</sup> man – and – [the] king of spirit is in me."<sup>77</sup>

When Jehiel Savage rose to speak, he remarked upon a great concern that they had heard Orson Hyde teach at Nauvoo: "O. Hyde told me that the Book of D. C. is not to guide the Ch[urch]." Savage felt that a break from the Doctrine and Covenants was a break from Joseph Smith. However, it was not until Savage began to testify of the miraculous translations and appearance of angels to Strang that Orson Hyde interrupted the meeting and explained to the people that going west was what Joseph Smith had in

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<sup>76</sup> William Smith had read letters from Strang to his sister-in-law, Emma and his mother, Lucy. Perhaps it was these letters that converted Smith to Strangism, but the fact that several missionaries in Nauvoo were advocating the new church likely had an influence as well. The fact is, Smith was disgruntled with the Twelve for some time before word of Strangism was widely known. See Paul M. Edwards, "William B. Smith: 'A Wart on the Ecclesiastical Tree,'" in *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 140–157. For Savage's position see *Times and Seasons* 6 (January 15, 1846): 1096.

<sup>77</sup> General Church Minutes, March 3, 1846. LDS Archives.

mind when he was alive: “J. S[mith] devised the plan of going West - & sent me to Washington to get leave to go West – was that the Sp[irit] – if that is the voice of God, will going to Vorhee accomplish it? [Answer from the congregation] (No)”<sup>78</sup> Page and Savage’s remarks at this meeting served either to incite curiosity in Strangism or strengthen the resolve of the Nauvoo Saints against it, but regardless, word of Strangism spread.

John Shippy was another important missionary who brought much success and many converts into Strangism’s fold. Although the Strangites primarily spread throughout the United States, they also directed some of their missionary labors into England and Canada. Canada, with Shippy playing a prominent role, saw some success.

For the first couple of decades of the LDS Church’s existence, Mormon missionary activity spread throughout Upper Canada, or, roughly, present-day Ontario.<sup>79</sup> As early as March 1846, Strang called elders to work in Canada and the Canadian saints were invited to a conference to be held in Jefferson County, New York, in the summer of 1847.<sup>80</sup> John Shippy was in Canada as early as October 14, 1848, preaching and spreading Strangism.<sup>81</sup> A letter from Shippy noted his success: “I have a large circuit here, and calls are made continually on me or preaching more that I can possibly fill. I

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<sup>78</sup> General Church Minutes, March 3, 1846. LDS Archives.

<sup>79</sup> The best study of the LDS Church in Upper Canada is Richard E. Bennett, “A Study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Upper Canada, 1830–1850” (M.A. Thesis, BYU University, 1975).

<sup>80</sup> “The Future,” *Voree Herald* 1 (March 1846): [1] and “Conference,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (April 1, 1847): 50.

<sup>81</sup> A. Plumb, wishing to begin a debate with Strang concerning the divinity of the Book of Mormon, wrote that he would pay the subscription costs to John Shippy. A. Plumb to Strang, October 14, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (November 2, 1848): 175.

never saw as much need of preaching here as now.”<sup>82</sup> Shippy also wrote to Strang in December 1848 and spoke of his “large congregations and calls on every side” to preach. Shippy, an exception to most missionaries’ experience, wrote that he was reaching people that had never joined any Mormon Church: “I am breaking new ground where never Mormons stood. I have neither Brighamites or pseudoes to trouble me.”<sup>83</sup>

Shippy continued to preach and in the spring of 1849, he wrote concerning the formation of a new branch and a future conference.<sup>84</sup> At the end of his mission, Shippy reported to Strang that the Canadian Saints wished for more missionaries: “The brethren in Canada were unwilling to have me come home until I promised to go there again if possible, or Bro. Strang send an Elder. Truly the harvest is great, but the faithful laborers few.”<sup>85</sup> Shippy, like many missionaries felt a conviction towards the Strangite Church as well as the members he converted.

Samuel Graham was another important missionary among the Strangite ranks who began to preach and baptize during the winter of 1846–47 in Michigan. As mentioned elsewhere, the first missionary action was in 1844 at Florence, Michigan, when Strang and Aaron Smith introduced the Letter of Appointment to a group of Mormons. His reception was less than positive, but his later success in Michigan strengthened much of his church. He stated that “with a very few exceptions they [the Mormons in three

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<sup>82</sup> John Shippy to Strang, November 1, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (December 14, 1848): 211.

<sup>83</sup> John Shippy to Strang, December 13, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (January 4, 1849): 293.

<sup>84</sup> John Shippy to Strang, March 23, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (April 19, 1849): 20.

<sup>85</sup> John Shippy to Strang, n.d., as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (June 28, 1849): 71. In September 1849, Wright and Calkins went to Upper Canada to preach. Phineas Wright to Francis Cooper, October

counties] are prepared to receive the law of the Lord.... I think the prospects for the church to advance, yes even take the ground in many places is better than it ever has been.”<sup>86</sup> Graham would continue working in Michigan from 1846–50.

Graham used his family connection in his mission labors. For example, Graham made one stop in his missionary tour to Central Michigan College, the precursor to Hillsdale College, and spoke with the first college president, Baptist preacher Daniel McBride Graham (likely cousins with Samuel).<sup>87</sup> Central Michigan College was known for its open-mindedness. The college was co-educational and Daniel Graham’s first sermon at the college addressed the importance of education, temperance, and the evils of slavery.<sup>88</sup> At the April annual conference at Voree, it was “*resolved*, That this Church present the Michigan Central College with a set of standard works on the origin and faith of the same.” Samuel Graham also told the conference that the faculty of the college “made a proposition for a public discussion of” Strangism’s doctrine.<sup>89</sup> Strang printed the first discussion of this in the newspaper, but later, Daniel M. Graham wrote to Strang and explained that he was not able to continue the publication because he would be traveling for the next six months.<sup>90</sup> According to a college history, Graham retired from the

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[September] 31, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (October 25, 1849): 160 and A. B. Calkins to Francis Cooper, October 25, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (November 8, 1849): 171.

<sup>86</sup> Samuel Graham to Strang, n.d. as found in the *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (April 15, 1847): 55.

<sup>87</sup> For a history of Central Michigan College, see Vivian Lyon Moore, *The First Hundred Years of Hillsdale College* (Ann Arbor, Michigan[?]: Ann Arbor Press, 1943). In a letter from D. M. Graham to Strang, Graham says that he had spoken with his cousin concerning an upcoming discussion between Graham and Strang over Strangism. See below. D. M. Graham to Strang, October 26, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (November 9, 1848): 181.

<sup>88</sup> Moore, *The First Hundred Years of Hillsdale College*, 7–8.

<sup>89</sup> “Minutes of the Annual Conference...” *Gospel Herald* 3 (April 13, 1848): 16.



presidency of Michigan Central College in 1848 to become a minister to a congregation of the Free Will Baptists in Maine, thus leaving Strangism behind.<sup>91</sup>

In September 1848 there was another conference at Jackson with many missionaries and members in attendance. Several missionaries were appointed to various fields of labor, including the Grand River Rapids region, Jackson and surrounding area, and Ingham County.<sup>92</sup> At the close of 1848, Samuel Graham and Jehiel Savage wrote from Michigan expressing a desire for more missionaries. “The field is truly white for the harvest, but laborers are few. Who of the Seventies or Elders will, at this time, thrust in the sickle and reap?”<sup>93</sup> Like many other areas of Strangite labor, missionaries had a positive outlook of their work in Michigan—perhaps in part due to journalistic optimism, but no doubt with some basis. Yet many of these same missionaries felt hampered by the lack of those willing to work for the cause.<sup>94</sup>

George J. Adams, perhaps more than any other missionary in the Strangite Church, attracted attention and converts. Born in 1811 in New Jersey, Adams was known even before his Mormon career as a powerful speaker, given to acting as well as strong drink. Mormonism supposedly cured both of these “faults.” Adams was a convert to Mormonism in the early 1840s, and quickly rose to a prominent position under Smith,

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<sup>90</sup> “Divine Authority of Mormonism,” and “Preliminaries,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (October 26, 1848): 164–167, (November 2, 1848): 169–170 and D. M. Graham to Strang, October 26, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (November 9, 1848): 181.

<sup>91</sup> Moore, *The First Hundred Years of Hillsdale College*, 8, 526.

<sup>92</sup> “Conference Minutes,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (October 19, 1848): 157.

<sup>93</sup> Epistle from Samuel Graham and Jehiel Save, December 27, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (January 11, 1849): 240.

<sup>94</sup> In a notice of the *Gospel Herald*, several missionaries’ fields of labor were listed, but emphasis was given to the “progress” of “Bros. Graham, Savage and Brownson, in Mich.” *Gospel Herald* 3 (February 8, 1849): 256.

preaching several times in various areas throughout the country and England, including Nauvoo.<sup>95</sup> Adams rose in the estimation of Joseph Smith and he was trusted enough to become a member of the secretive Council of Fifty, a body of men in Nauvoo under the leadership of Joseph Smith.<sup>96</sup> After Smith died, Young felt significantly different toward Adams, and eventually Adams was excommunicated from the LDS Church.<sup>97</sup> Adams learned of and joined the Strangite Church early and began to preach effectively for Strang. When, exactly, he joined Strang is unknown, but likely John C. Bennett encouraged Strang to write Adams and solicit Adams' help in 1846.<sup>98</sup> The possible correspondence between the two notwithstanding, Adams began to preach for Strang in Ohio in the late spring of 1846. An item in the *Voree Herald* spoke with encouragement of "the giant intellect, and unwaried efforts of G. J. Adams" in the southern part of Ohio.<sup>99</sup>

Adams himself reported his missionary effort for the year by saying that "[i]n the latter part of May this year 1846, having become fully convinced by every testimony that any man could ask of the truth.... I [preached] in Lewisburgh, Georgetown, New Baltimore, Long's School House, Robinson School House, Twinsborough, and other

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<sup>95</sup> The best biography of Adams (unfortunately with sparse Strangite information) is Reed M. Holmes, *Dreamers of Zion: Joseph Smith and George J. Adams Conviction, Leadership and Israel's Renewal* (Brighton, England, Sussex Academic Press, 2003).

<sup>96</sup> See D. Michael Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Utah, Signature Books, 1994), 526 and Holmes, *Dreamers of Zion*.

<sup>97</sup> *Times and Seasons* 6 (April 15, 1845): 878. See also Holmes, *Dreamers of Zion*, 84–86.

<sup>98</sup> See John C. Bennett to Strang, March 31, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #227, "I wish you to write to brother Geo. J. Adams, at this city, so that he can organize the brethren here; and come down "like a thousand of brick" on the Rigdonites at Pittsburgh." Bennett, in another letter to Strang, apparently answers Strang's inquiry when he states "by all means, make George J. Adams the oth[er] Councillor." Bennett to Strang, n.d. [1846, possibly March], Strang Collection, Yale, #33a.

places, [all in Ohio] too [sic] listning thousands, for more than two months, many hundreds are believing, a number have been Baptised from week to week.”<sup>100</sup> Adams was a strong advocate for Strang, and worked in many places including Ohio, Illinois, and especially on the East Coast.

The September 1846 edition of the *Zion’s Reveille* exclaimed the highly optimistic, albeit inaccurate, statement that a “large majority of the Saints in the New England States...are with us [the Strangites].”<sup>101</sup> In the next issue George J. Adams was appointed as leader “of the churches in the New England States.”<sup>102</sup> Adams took this appointment to heart. In early 1847, he wrote to Strang that he was “anxious to visit all the states and provinces under my charge, and set the ball a rolling. I am preparing to set all New England on a blaze.”<sup>103</sup> If he can be believed, he was correct to his word: “I preached last Sunday to over one thousand people at Dover, N.H.... I am to have a large baptist church to preach in. Thousands are eager to hear the word of life in every direction.”<sup>104</sup> Several missionaries followed Adams’s exuberant lead. For example, Horace Church, in writing Strang and committing himself to Strangism, asked if he could

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<sup>99</sup> *Voree Herald* 1 (May 1846): [3].

<sup>100</sup> G. J. Adams to Strang, August 17, 1846, as found in the *Voree Herald* (August 1846): [3–4].

<sup>101</sup> “Progress of the Work,” *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [3].

<sup>102</sup> *Voree Herald* 1 (October 1846): [3]

<sup>103</sup> George J. Adams to Strang, February 5, 1847, as found in the *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (February 25, 1847): 27.

<sup>104</sup> George J. Adams to Strang, February 5, 1847, as found in the *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (February 25, 1847): 27. Adams is later found in Maine. Adams to Strang, July 19, 1847, as found in the *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (August 19, 1847): 92.

preach in Rhode Island, and J. S. Comstock wished to go to Connecticut, presumably, to preach.<sup>105</sup>

Adams was joined at this point by another vital missionary for the Strangite Church—James Strang himself. Hearing of the good prospects in Michigan, Strang, along with George J. Adams, took a summer missionary journey through Michigan and preached at several locations in 1849. In July he wrote from Albion and stated that he had been to Detroit and had preached at Jackson to interested audiences. “Last evening Bro. Adams preached here to as many as a large school house would contain, and vast numbers went away for want of room. This evening I shall preach at the Rail Road Depot.” It was also at this time in Michigan that Strang set out the plan for the next year’s missionary effort. “I have a measure in view...that is, to go to Voree a short time, then to Beaver a short time, and on through the east and south all winter, and back to Beaver and Voree early in the spring. We can stir up the whole county, and gather up more by two to one than have been gathered up in the last four years.... Every effort we have made for eighteen months past has been crowned with success.... For five years we have crept along, till we have got to walking. It is well to progress.”<sup>106</sup>

As early as December 1847, George J. Adams expressed his desire to preach in Baltimore and Washington D.C., but it was not until January 1849 that Adams was found baptizing converts in Baltimore, one of whom was on the Baltimore City Council.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Horace Church to Strang as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (December 28, 1848): 221–2 and J. S. Comstock to “Sister Sarah” as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (October 18, 1849): 148–9.

<sup>106</sup> James J. Strang to Francis Cooper, July 26, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (August 9, 1849): 95.

<sup>107</sup> Adams to Strang, December 28, 1847, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (January 20, 1848): 212. Adams to Strang, January 16, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (February 1, 1849): 252.

Shortly thereafter, Adams was excited “to have the pleasure of organizing the first branch of Later [*sic*] Day Saints in Baltimore, and I think the first in the State of Maryland.”<sup>108</sup>

One month later, Adams wrote that the “meetings are constantly crowded,” and also showed his success by converting a semi-famous individual.<sup>109</sup> “Dr. Charles W.

Appleton, one of the best temperance lecturers in the United States...had a vision a week ago last night...at the conclusion of which God commanded him to arise and obey the gospel... He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but went forward the same night and was baptized.”<sup>110</sup> By November 1849 the branch in Baltimore, less than a year old, was described as “very fine” with about forty members.<sup>111</sup> Strang, perhaps encouraged by the success in Baltimore and surrounding the areas, personally visited in the latter part of 1849 and the beginning of 1850.

Strang and Adams attended a conference in New York in October and before “they return[ed to Beaver Island] they...visit[ed] the city of Washington, and all the large

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<sup>108</sup> Adams was not the first to preach in Baltimore Area. In 1842 both Benjamin Winchester and Samuel C. Brown preached in Baltimore. *Times and Seasons* 4 (December 1, 1842): 28 and Ellsworth, “History of Mormon Missions,” 247. An publication dealing with LDS topics also originated from Baltimore in 1842 or 1843. *Times and Seasons* 4 (April 15, 1843): 175 and Peter Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church: Volume One 1830–1847* (Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1997), 209–10.

There is mention of the Strangite branch in a letter from Adams to Strang, March 19, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (April 19, 1849): 19. A Strangite conference took place in Baltimore whereby Adams and several other leaders ordained Joseph Canox presiding Elder of the branch. Several other advancements in the priesthood took place signifying a strengthening of the branch. *Gospel Herald* 4 (April 26, 1849): 24.

<sup>109</sup> Adams to Strang, March 19, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (April 19, 1849): 19.

<sup>110</sup> Adams to Strang, March 19, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (April 19, 1849): 19. C. W. Appleton writes of this vision in a letter to Peter Hess, dated April 9, 1849, published in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (June 7, 1849): 49–50. Research has turned up little information on Appleton. He apparently was a doctor as he wrote a pamphlet entitled “The People’s Physician: a new and valuable collection of useful and interesting receipts,” (Lancaster: Pennsylvania., John D. Forney, 1841). But the statement of him being “one of the best temperance lecturers in the United States,” is unsubstantiated.

cities in the eastern States.”<sup>112</sup> The pace that Strang and Adams set was indefatigable: in Washington D.C. Adams preached three sermons in one day and on the same day, Strang preached two sermons and “hundreds...went away [from the lecture] because they could not get into the hall, although it [was] very large.”<sup>113</sup> The *Boston Herald* wrote that after hearing Adams preach at the Washington hall full “to its capacity,” the editor found that as opposed to the “jarring sectari[an]s” and the religion they preach, Adams “brings to light order, beauty, simplicity, and the vast and benevolent purposes of deity concerning man.”<sup>114</sup> The next Sunday, Strang planned to lecture seven times in three different halls.<sup>115</sup> This heavy schedule took its toll and by mid-December, Strang, in Baltimore, wrote that he had been quite ill for a fortnight but was still able to preach.<sup>116</sup>

Attempting to gain more ground, Adams separated with Strang to preach elsewhere. Writing to Strang from Boston in December 1849, Adams stated that “[w]hat few brethren there are here Bro. [Samuel] Graham has built up firm in the faith, and they received me gladly and kindly. But the public at large have received me with a perfect rush, a regular enthusiastic demonstration.”<sup>117</sup> Adams’s version of this public reception is

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<sup>111</sup> Charles Douglass [Elvira Fields] to Frank Cooper, November 22, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (December 6, 1849): 202.

<sup>112</sup> *Gospel Herald* 4 (August 30, 1849): 110.

<sup>113</sup> Charles Douglass [Elvira Fields] to Frank Cooper, November 22, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (December 6, 1849): 202.

<sup>114</sup> *Boston Herald*, as quoted in *Gospel Herald* (January 17, 1850): 249–50.

<sup>115</sup> Charles Douglass [Elvira Fields] to Frank Cooper, November 22, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (December 6, 1849): 202. Strang did not just preach in Washington D.C., but prepared for the church’s move to Beaver Island. “I...received all desired aid in the public offices, in making copies of maps, surveys, records, &c.” Strang to Frank Cooper, March 8, 1850, as quoted in the *Gospel Herald* 5 (March 28, 1850): 12.

<sup>116</sup> Strang to Frank Cooper, December 18, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (January 3, 1850): 239.

not confirmed by other sources, but at least one newspaper viewed Strangism above the other groups of Mormonism. After describing the Rigdonites' downfall, and the "fighting Mormons" (Brighamites) adoption of polygamy, the *Boston Advertiser and Guide* wrote that the followers of Strang "may be called the peace party of the Mormons, or 'Saints.' They are the party that are now gaining numbers every where."<sup>118</sup>

Upon returning home, Strang summed up his mission to the East: "I have never known the Elders going to the field of their labors to encounter as violent opposition both from before and behind as those who came east last fall. Yet every man who stood to his post has been greatly prospered. We are reaping a rich harvest."<sup>119</sup> By 1850 this "harvest" was called to gather and the *Gospel Herald* continually printed notices of several groups of eastern Saints, especially from Baltimore and Washington D.C., going to Beaver Island.<sup>120</sup> The faithful answered the call to gather, but these same faithful members were also the members who strengthened the eastern branches. The result was a collapse of the branches throughout America.

Focusing on individual missionaries and their work only hints at the character of Strang's missionary force. From a list of about fifty missionaries (see appendix), several things are apparent. Many Strangite missionaries had long experience with Mormonism: William Smith, Joseph Smith's brother, had been a member of the LDS Church for a long

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<sup>117</sup> Adams to Strang, December 11, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (January 3, 1850): 235.

<sup>118</sup> *Boston Advertiser and Guide*, as quoted in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (January 3, 1850): 237–8. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>119</sup> Strang to Frank Cooper, March 8, 1850, as quoted in the *Gospel Herald* 5 (March 28, 1850): 13.

<sup>120</sup> See for example *Gospel Herald* 5 (April 25, 1850): 47; *Gospel Herald* 5 (May 16, 1850): 67; and "Emigration to Beaver," *Gospel Herald* 5 (May 23, 1850): 78. Adams wrote that he expected a

period, as had Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses of the golden plates. Aaron and Moses Smith were baptized in the early 1830's, as were John E. and Ebenezer Page.<sup>121</sup> Many other missionaries had preached effectively for Mormonism before Joseph Smith's death and many of the Strangite missionaries would continue manifesting religious leadership and charisma after they had left Strangism. For example, George J. Adams took a religious colony to the Middle East.<sup>122</sup> William E. McLellin began a church based on the Book of Mormon and David Whitmer's calling as prophet.<sup>123</sup> Stephen Post joined Sidney Rigdon and became his spokesman.<sup>124</sup> However, of all the missionaries' post-Strangite activities, one of the most lasting was the involvement with the RLDS Church (the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, now Community of Christ). At a conference of believers in the Book of Mormon in 1853, a revelation was received by H. H. Deam (a former Strangite), which explained how to organize themselves according to God's will. Three leaders (one of whom had been a subscriber to the Strangite newspaper) were chosen by people at the conference to choose seven members to be ordained apostles. Three of these seven appointees were former Strangite

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"number [of members] will go from [Washington D.C. and surrounding areas] to Beaver" in the spring of 1850. Adams to Frank Cooper, March 6, 1850, as quoted in the *Gospel Herald* 5 (March 28, 1850): 9.

<sup>121</sup> Aaron Smith was a member by at least August of 1832 when he and John Smith (uncle to Joseph Smith and no known relation to Aaron and Moses) baptized Moses Smith, John Smith Journal, August 19, 1832, LDS Archives. For information on the Pages, see John Quist, "John E. Page: Apostle of Uncertainty," in *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters*, John Sillito and Susan Staker, eds. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2002), 19–42. Ebenezer Page wrote to Strang and told him that he was a missionary in the LDS Church by at least late 1830. Ebenezer Page to Strang, November 1, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (November 16, 1848): 187.

<sup>122</sup> See Holmes, *Dreamers of Zion*.

<sup>123</sup> See Larry C. Porter, "The Odyssey of William Earl McLellin: Man of Diversity, 1806–83," in *The Journals of William E. McLellin: 1831–1836*, Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, eds. (BYU Studies: Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 291–378.



missionaries: H. H. Deam, Zenas H. Gurley, and Jason W. Briggs.<sup>125</sup> This meeting was the conception of the RLDS Church and many other prominent RLDS members had been involved at one time with the Strangite Church. The Strangite Church was not only an organization that attracted impressive missionaries, but was also the breeding ground for important leaders of future Mormon restorationist groups.

## Conclusion

It is clear that Strang benefited from Joseph Smith and his earlier work. First, the Strangites' devotion to Joseph Smith carried over to Strang—so much so that converts were willing to accept Strang's calling based on their desire to have a prophet like Smith immediately. Second, Strang used the network that LDS members and missionaries established under Smith to his advantage including conferences, branches, and missions. Finally, the powerful missionaries who learned and preached under Smith's direction and counsel continued under Strang's leadership. Yet as Strang moved more and more away

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<sup>124</sup> See M. Guy Bishop, "Stephen Post: From Believer to Dissenter to Heretic," in *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters*, John Sillito and Susan Staker, eds. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2002), 180–195.

<sup>125</sup> *The Messenger* 2 (April 1876): 21. This newspaper was edited by J. W. Briggs, an RLDS member in Salt Lake City. Both H. H. Deam and Ethan Griffith are listed as subscribers to the *Gospel Herald* in the same order. H. H. Deam to Strang, November 27, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (December 14, 1848): 211. See also "Remittance by Mail last Week for the Herald," *Gospel Herald* 4 (May 10, 1849): 32.

from Smith's heritage—redefining his church, doctrine, and theological stances—  
missionary work struggled to maintain its success.



## CHAPTER 3: DEPARTURE FROM STRANGISM

I have given you good gifts, and you have consumed them upon your lusts; I have chastised you, and ye have taken my name in vain; I have called you together to enjoy the blessings of my people, and ye have not heeded my call; I have revealed my authority to these that gathered and they have spurned it; I have appointed shepherds unto you, and ye have despised them, and have walked in your own ways, where they did not lead you: and because of your rebellious hearts, are you blind, and deaf, that seeing you perceive not; and hearing you understand not.

—Revelation to Strang, January 1849<sup>1</sup>

Thousands of Latter-day Saints converted to Strang from 1846–1850, but most of these members did not stay with Strang for long and eventually the missionary work failed to replace or strengthen these converts. This failure can be summarized as a three-fold problem: first, Strangism was plagued by internal dissension; second, new controversial doctrines and policies (particularly the practice of polygamy) deeply disturbed the rank and file members leading to a loss in faith and trust in Strang; and finally other LDS restoration groups, especially the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), began to address the threat of Strangism more seriously. This triple challenge ultimately led to its failure, but the Strangite church did not give up easily.

### **Dissenting in the church**

“[T]hey are...a mean stinking set of Mormons they are not worth to be called Saints.”<sup>2</sup> After lecturing in Cincinnati, George J. Adams did not think he would gain

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation given to Strang January 7, 1849, in “A Record of the establishment and doings of the Stake of Zion called Voree in Wisconsin, made by the Scribes appointed to that office,” 179-80, microfilm copy, Brigham Young University, original in private hands. Hereafter “Chronicles of Voree.” The “Chronicles of Voree” is apparently a contemporary manuscript dated journal of the Strangite Church of unknown authorship. A transcription of this manuscript has been compiled by John J. Hajieck (Burlington, Wisconsin: J. J. Hajieck, 1992). The revelation was also published in the Strangite newspaper, “Revelation, Given Jan. Seventh, 1849,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (January 11, 1849): 233.

many supporters in this section of Ohio. The various Mormon groups in Cincinnati, including the Strangites, were not free from bickering and difficulties. A Brighamite source confirmed this problematic environment. After hearing George J. Adams preach in favor of Strang and against Brigham Young, Jonathan C. Wright, a Brighamite “attempted to speak in defence of the people I love, & principles which I doubt not is approved of God...I was abruptly interrupted by the congregation & it was sanctioned by the president & consequently I had to stop.”<sup>3</sup> Both Adams and Wright were not impressed with the character and devotion of the people in Cincinnati who called themselves Mormons and consequently, the Strangite missionary work suffered in Ohio and elsewhere.

When schisms, factions, or even cliques formed within a particular branch, missionaries spent their time strengthening the branch, weeding out the difficult members, which cut in on their time preaching. Another deterrent to the missionary work was the outspoken individuals within the factions who went against Strang or his doctrines. These dissenters caused other members to doubt Strang, sometimes resulting in whole groups who left the church.

The Chicago branch was an example of how internal dissension wreaked havoc upon the Strangites. In May 1846, the branch at Chicago met and recognized Strang’s appointment with twenty-two members’ signatures.<sup>4</sup> In October, the Chicago branch was

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<sup>2</sup> Adams to Strang, June 20, 1846, James Jesse Strang Collection, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, microfilm copy in authors possession, hereafter cited as Strang Collection, Yale, #34b. Each letter has been supplied a number by a later cataloger, which will also be provided here.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan C. Wright to Brigham Young, April 12, 1846, LDS Archives.

<sup>4</sup> Conference of the branch of Chicago, Strang collection, Yale, #162.

represented in a conference as having thirty members with five elders.<sup>5</sup> But by December 1846, George J. Adams was sent to Chicago to “ascertain the situation of the church.”<sup>6</sup> Things were not well. Several were excommunicated and Adams set the branch back in order, or so he thought. One former member excommunicated at the December meeting at Chicago, Collins Pemberton, wrote a pamphlet entitled “Strangism Exposed to the World” with ten other signatories attached to this exposé.<sup>7</sup>

Pemberton and others also began to publish material to discredit Strang in the *Chicago Daily Mail*. The content was similar to the pamphlet: Strang was a thief, liar, and certainly not a prophet. Strang was quick to defend himself by writing directly to the editor of the newspaper to get a fair hearing. “We have received a long communication from [Strang],” reported the *Daily Mail* to its readers, “It is too long to publish entire, but we will endeavour to give the facts and declarations as stated.”<sup>8</sup> In his rebuttal, Strang denied sending out a missionary who was known to have been a thief as well as denied any Strangite secret society.<sup>9</sup> It is significant that an editor would supply in his columns a debate among a restorationist group; unfortunately the debate was highly public and the Strangite missionary work became stagnant in that area.

Kirtland, Ohio, the earlier confidence of Strang and others notwithstanding, became another center of dissent. Several members wrote to Strang disillusioned about

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<sup>5</sup> “Chronicles of Voree,” 108.

<sup>6</sup> “Proceedings of the Church at Chicago,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (January 28, 1847): 10.

<sup>7</sup> The only copy known is pasted into the Journal History of the Church, LDS Archives under January 5, 1847. However, several people later wrote in the Strangite newspaper the *Zion’s Reveille* that their names were forged. “Pemberton’s Forgeries,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (January 21, 1847): 6. See also “Placard No. 2.—More Pseudo Forgeries,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (January 14, 1847): 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Chicago Daily Mail*, as found in the *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (January 14, 1847): 3–4.

his prophetic call and in December 1846, Strang received a revelation that stated that “[b]ecause Kirtland is filled with unbelief and apostacy...therefore shall Kirtland be a waste and a desolation, a den of wickedness, and a habitation of the unfaithful, the unbelieving, and the rebellious.”<sup>10</sup> From the standpoint of the Strangites, this prophecy was literally fulfilled. After this separation of many of the Kirtland members, Strang estimated the number of Kirtland Strangites to be about one hundred—a far cry from the many hundreds who listened raptly to Strang’s speech at the temple only months before.<sup>11</sup> But Kirtland also housed several religious organizations that would damage Strangism further (see below).

By 1849 evidence of dissension reached Strangite leaders from the Philadelphia branch. At first news from the branch was encouraging. The Philadelphia Strangites held a conference where they passed a resolution to support Strang, discussed issues in dealing with “apostates,” and ordained one elder.<sup>12</sup> Following the conference, preaching in Philadelphia began anew. Peter Hess, a member of the branch wrote to George J. Adams and stated that the “meetings are well attended, all things considered,” and that the branch “will have some more to baptize soon.”<sup>13</sup> Strang also spent a week in Philadelphia on his

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<sup>9</sup> *Chicago Daily Mail*, as found in the *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (January 14, 1847): 3–4.

<sup>10</sup> “Extract from a Revelation Given Dec. 21, 1846,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (January 21, 1847): 8. For instance, Austin Cowles wrote Strang a note rejecting him as prophet. Austin Cowles to Strang, n.d. Strang Collection, Yale, #294. More importantly, seven prominent members of the church in Kirtland resolved “[t]hat we withdraw our fellowship from James J. Strang as the prophet and leader in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.” *New Era* 1 (January 1847): [2].

<sup>11</sup> *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (March 18, 1847): 38.

<sup>12</sup> “Minutes of a Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saint, Held in Philadelphia June 21st 1849,” *Gospel Herald* 4 (August 23, 1849): 101–2.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Hess to George J. Adams, July 30, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (August 30, 1849): 109.

mission to the East in 1849 and “preached eight times to respectable and attentive congregations, and baptized one, besides sowing the good seed in many hearts.”<sup>14</sup> The Strangite momentum in Philadelphia seemed to be accelerating, but individual actions soon strained many of the members’ faith.

Peter Hess joined Strangism early and was an influential Philadelphia member. Due to Strang’s introduction of polygamy, to be discussed below, he fell away. Amos Lowen, a Philadelphia branch member wrote “the church here is all gone to pot for which we may thank Peter [Hess] and the devil, Peter’s wife.” Contrary to Lowen’s view of the Hess’s, they were not solely to blame. Lowen also claimed that Thomas Braidwood, another important Strangite missionary in Philadelphia, said “he [Braidwood] will not preach any thing that begins with a J,” meaning James J. Strang.<sup>15</sup> By the end of 1850, the Philadelphia branch included individuals who were either apathetic toward Strangism or felt a sense of bitterness after leaving the Strangite Church, and consequently, did much to damage its reputation. The few faithful had little choice but to move to Beaver Island and eventually the LDS branch in Pennsylvania outlasted the dissent and inaction that plagued the Strangite branch in Philadelphia.

This dissension was not limited to the members of specific branches. As the missionaries tried to discredit this dissension, they could not preach as effectively and sometimes were even a part of the problem. C. A. Rogers, a Massachusetts resident, bemoaned the fact that “the Elders who were sent to New England in former times almost

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<sup>14</sup> James J. Strang to Francis Cooper, November 7, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (November 22, 1849): 187.

<sup>15</sup> Amos Lowen to Strang, June 22, 1850, Strang Collection, Yale, #418.



totally neglected the country.”<sup>16</sup> These missionaries, both from Nauvoo and likely Voree, would “hang around the cities sometimes three or four at a time, sucking the very vitals as it were out of the brethren in the branches that were never large enough to maintain more than one Elder at a time.” To put it more critically, Rogers stated that many members fell away “on account of a continual ding donging after money by Elders that are constantly preaching against a hireling clergy.” Presuming that Strang “abhor[red] such [things] worse than useless work” Rogers hoped the Strangite missionaries would improve.<sup>17</sup> However, according to one branch, at least one missionary would not improve.

In 1847, the Boston branch resolved that it would not “sustain Elder George J Adams, any longer as a public teacher in the church of Jesus christ of Latter Day Saints.”<sup>18</sup> This was a far cry from the adulation Adams had received by members in other areas across the country. In late 1846, Adams began editing *The Star in the East*, a Strangite publication, but he quickly gained criticisms concerning his newspaper. A group of Strangites from Pittsburgh “disapproved of some of the Matter Contained in the ‘Star in the East,’ and wrote to br[other] Adams, Stating thier objections, &c.”<sup>19</sup> By February 1847 a partially divided Boston branch, in a special meeting, made the above

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<sup>16</sup> C. A. Rogers to Strang, July 29, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (August 16, 1849): 98.

<sup>17</sup> C. A. Rogers to Strang, July 29, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (August 16, 1849): 98.

<sup>18</sup> Meeting of the Boston branch held February 1, 1847, Strang Collection, Yale, #170.

<sup>19</sup> James M. Greig to Strang, December 29, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #352. The letter does not mention the objectionable material, but historian Dale Morgan suggests that it was partly due to Adams’ positive remarks concerning the Bostonian theatre in the first number, which was considered taboo by conservative religious groups. Dale L. Morgan, “A Bibliography of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strangites),” *Western Humanities Review* 5 (1950): 54.

resolution disapproving of Adams' actions while in Boston.<sup>20</sup> According to branch records, Adams was accused of misusing church funds and, just as serious if not more so, "he has also taught that it was not wrong to commit fornication and Adultery under certain circumstances."<sup>21</sup> The branch, perhaps a bit rashly, stated "that this branch suspend Public meetings from this date untill we receive an answer...in referance to the proceedings of this Meeting."<sup>22</sup> Adams apparently responded to the charges in a letter to Strang: "I know I am a sinner; but I am a honest man.... My errors and faults are of the head, and not the heart."<sup>23</sup> Partly as a result of Adams's actions, little known missionary activity was seen in Boston for over a year.

In 1848 the toll of the previous year on the Boston branch became apparent. The presiding elder at Boston, David Brown, wrote to Strang and explained the situation: "The saints in Boston have no public meetings at this time, owing to the great expense of hiring a hall; yet we do meet together from time to time, as our circumstances will permit."<sup>24</sup> Despite the Boston Strangites' difficulties, the members began again to hope for success in 1849. William Skimmings wrote to Strang that after "the night of darkness has passed the dawn of a better day is arising, though our numbers are small and our means are limited, yet we have courage." Skimmings reported that since the arrival of

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<sup>20</sup> Jesse W. Nichols describes the branch as being influenced by people against Adams. Nichols to Strang, March 4, 1847, Strang Collection, Yale, #439.

<sup>21</sup> Meeting of the Boston branch held February 1, 1847, Strang Collection, Yale, #170. Adams, in March 1846, wrote to Strang as way of introduction and states that it is said that he "was fond of womin," but that it was "a Base lie" and that his Phrenological chart proved it. George J. Adams to Strang, March 27, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #34.

<sup>22</sup> Meeting of the Boston branch held February 1, 1847, Strang Collection, Yale, #170.

<sup>23</sup> George J. Adams to Strang, July 19, 1846, as found in the *Zion's Reveille* 2 (August 19, 1847): 92.

Samuel Graham, “the small spark that was in us is increasing, and we are determined by the help of God to blow it yet into a flame.”<sup>25</sup> Missionaries, including Strang and a repentant Adams, helped the work in Boston to progress. Yet the redoubling might have produced lasting effects had it occurred immediately after the major difficulties.

Even Strang could not quell the difficulties in some branches—in fact he sometimes began them. When Strang attended a conference in 1847 in Jefferson County, New York, unwanted consequences resulted.<sup>26</sup> Some felt his conduct at this conference did not warrant the role of prophet, and this hinted at later New York difficulties. After he returned to Voree, Strang sarcastically wrote “I have now letters laying before me, written in that region [Jefferson County], in which I am accused of criminal intercourse with more than forty different saints there, including every sister in the church in that region, of whom I have the slightest recollection, and several of whom I do not so much as know that they exist.”<sup>27</sup> For some members, the prophet portrayed in the newspapers and by word of mouth from the missionaries was different than the man with whom they had personal contact. This would be further amplified by some of the doctrines that Strang and others would begin to espouse.

## **Rejecting New Doctrines**

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<sup>24</sup> David Brown to Strang, October 5, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (October 26, 1848): 168.

<sup>25</sup> William Skimmings, October 13, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (October 25, 1849): 155. Samuel Graham, in a letter to Frank Cooper dated Boston, October 13, 1849, hoped that “by the help of God, [he] shall be able to revive the remaining spark in this place.” Letter as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (November 8, 1849): 171.

<sup>26</sup> See “Conference Notices,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (June 1, 1847): 63.

<sup>27</sup> “An Appeal,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (August 21, 1848): 98.

Whereas the mission system of the Strangite Church provided the converts, it was the Strangite doctrines that retained these converts and, for many, provided continuity to Mormonism and Joseph Smith. Yet when Strang altered or placed a different emphasis on several doctrines, many found this break with “established” Strangism startling, which led various members to doubt their original conversion. The introduction of new doctrines or policies prompted Strangite members either to solidify with the group or to surrender their resolve. When Strangites saw doctrines apparently become corrupted, they questioned not only Strang’s role as a prophet but also their reasoning for remaining members.

The doctrines that caused members to abandon Strangism included the rumors of Strang’s adoption of polygamy, his rejection of the divine nature of Jesus Christ, his sanctioning of various orders of fellowship and communal living, and the policy of re-baptism. These controversies served to shift Strang’s church away from Joseph Smith’s roots and created a unique organization—an organization to which many former Mormons would no longer adhere. But it was more than the lack of continuity—Strangites felt deceived by Strang’s handling of the introduction—or lack thereof—of a doctrine which to many, should not have been introduced.

As polygamy was such a drawing factor for many Strangites, it stands to reason that rumors of polygamy within Strangism likely caused the most difficulty for Strang and members across the church. Even after Strang married his second wife in 1849, his anti-polygamy stance continued for some time because he understood that many members would not support the controversial doctrine of multiple wives. Like the introduction of it in Joseph Smith’s administration, Strang’s first experiences with

polygamy were secretive with only several people in trusted positions in the know. Strang did not publicly announce the practice until the Strangites were well established on Beaver Island, although he toned down his anti-polygamy rhetoric before the introduction.<sup>28</sup> Thus in this study's timeframe, it was not the public announcement of polygamy that led Strangites to become disaffected, but rather the rumors only—suggesting the intense emotion concerning this moral affair.

On the 1849–1850 eastern mission tour, Strang's first polygamous wife, Elvira Field, dressed as a teenage male secretary named Charlie Douglas, accompanied him.<sup>29</sup> Since it was Strang's anti-polygamy stance that led many to convert from Mormonism, it stands to reason that when Field's identity was questioned, Strang lost a large number of his supporters. In a self-proclaimed burlesque report, James Canney wrote that one woman saw Field's feet when being washed and explained that "I look'd pretty sharp, & I told my husband soon's we got to bed that Charley was a Gal & I node [knew] it, for I node that was a woman's foot & I could swear to it."<sup>30</sup> The obvious clincher emerged with another story reported by Canney of a woman who had housed "Charley" for a night. While doing the washing, the woman noticed that a piece of material was torn out of Field's shirt. Later, after "Charley" had left, the same torn cloth from the shirt was found with bloody rags, "which women sometimes use."<sup>31</sup> The verdict was obvious, rumors spread quickly, and Strangism in the East was fatally injured. One member, after

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<sup>28</sup> See John Quist, "Polygamy Among James Strang and His Followers," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 31–48.

<sup>29</sup> See Quist, "Polygamy Among James Strang and His Followers," 35–36. Elvira Fields remained with Strang for the rest of his life and spoke sometimes of polygamy in Beaver Island, Quist, "Polygamy Among James Strang and His Followers," 35–36.

<sup>30</sup> James Canney to Strang, June 16, 1850, Strang Collection, Yale, #277.

hearing of the true identity of Charlie Douglas on Beaver Island wrote candidly of his thoughts and perhaps represents many others' mindset: "This information was quite a shock to my feelings from which I did not wholly recover.... The association of her in my mind was now that she was a lewd woman & Strang, guilty of gross corruption.... I had read in a revelation by Strang that he [Strang] was meeker than Moses; he now appeared to me more shamefaced than David's servants when they returned half shaved.... My feelings were much wounded & at the moment as I looked after them, if a withering look could have annihilated them I certainly should have done it."<sup>32</sup>

Another area suffered with the rumors of polygamy. T. W. Nixon, posing as Uriah C. Nickerson, "a member of the church of thirteen years standing, pretending to be well acquainted with [Strang]" came to Delaware and claimed "to have letters [from Strang]...advocating certain pernicious doctrines."<sup>33</sup> Two members from Philadelphia wrote that the "pernicious doctrine" Nixon spoke of was spiritual wifery. The above mentioned Peter Hess wrote to Strang and said Nixon stood up in a meeting and told the congregation that Strang "Believd and practised the spiritual wif System... [and] that he <strang> had now <5> five wives and had illegal intercosse with them at pleasure."<sup>34</sup> Another letter written by John Ursbruck dated the same day as Hess's basically told the

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<sup>31</sup> James Canney to Strang, June 16, 1850, Strang Collection, Yale, #277.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Post, "A leaf of the current of Life," Stephen Post Papers, LDS Archives, entry for June 30, 1850. Post's regular journal says nothing about Elvira Field or his feelings on this same date.

<sup>33</sup> Strang to Frank Cooper, September 8, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (September 27, 1849): 127. See also James Strang to Francis Cooper, October 12, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (October 25, 1849): 155.

<sup>34</sup> Hess to Strang, August 13, 1849, Strang Collection, Yale, #371.

same story.<sup>35</sup> Rumors of polygamy would continue to haunt Strangite missionary work from thereafter.

While polygamy went against the backdrop of American family morality, another change in doctrine arguably went against the Strangites' Christian faith. Most of traditional Christendom, including Mormonism, claimed that Christ was a divine being on earth. Yet Strang, in writing to a Catholic priest, argued that because of the apostasy of the true doctrine of Christ, a fundamental teaching had been introduced after Christ's death, namely that Christ was born to two human parents—Joseph and Mary. Strang argued that the Catholic Church, “filled all their books and creeds with a story, fit only for heathen mythology, of a liason of the God of heaven with a Hebrew peasant girl.” In other words, the Catholic Church as well as the Protestant Church, “resorted to the heathen fable of children begotten of gods on beautiful women.”<sup>36</sup>

Yet this apparent change of established Christian doctrine did not sit well for Strangite members reading the *Gospel Herald*. “We have this day been perusing the Gospel Herald,” wrote two members to Strang, “and in your answer to Mr. Rafferty [the Catholic priest] we see that you suggest the idea that JOSEPH was *really* the FATHER of JESUS according to the flesh, which idea was new to us.”<sup>37</sup> In another letter written to Strang, one member declared that he or she was “much shocked at the evident departure from the testimony of scripture.”<sup>38</sup> Two other people wrote with concerns about this

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<sup>35</sup> Ursbruck to Strang, Strang Collection, Yale, #501.

<sup>36</sup> “Catholic Discussion,” *Gospel Herald* 2 (November 11, 1847): 145.

<sup>37</sup> R. Anderson and G. W. Duncan to Strang, January 23, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (February 17, 1848): 234.

<sup>38</sup> Unknown to Strang, n.d. as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (February 17, 1848): 234.

doctrine as well. John Gaylord, an excommunicated Strangite, who asked to debate Strang in the newspaper, told Strang that the “testimony from the Book of Mormon states definitely that the Son of God should be born of the virgin Mary, and that he should be conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>39</sup> Jason W. Briggs also wrote several questions to Strang concerning the implication of such a stance.<sup>40</sup> Strang published an unfinished article spanning three issues in defending his position, but the stance was a difficult position to defend for believers in Latter-day Saint doctrine.<sup>41</sup> In answer to the several statements in the Book of Mormon concerning the divinity of Christ, Strang unsatisfactorily stated that he agreed with all the statements in the Book of Mormon except for one, in which he notes that an error in the first edition—“mother of God”—was “corrected in the subsequent editions” to “mother of the Son of God.” to affirm the position Strang argued.<sup>42</sup>

Debate over secret ceremonies contributed to the missionary movement’s lack of success. Newly-converted Strangite John C. Bennett, a one-time Mormon-turned enemy

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<sup>39</sup> John Gaylord to Strang, n.d. as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (March 30, 1848): 8. For Gaylord’s excommunication see “Chronicles of Voree,” 153–154.

<sup>40</sup> John Gaylord to Strang, n.d. as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (March 23, 1848): 2–4; (March 30, 1848): 6–8; and J. W. Briggs to Strang, February 18, 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (March 30, 1848): 8.

<sup>41</sup> Strang did not finish his “Lineage of Christ” series—but he did not drop the subject, and this doctrine is espoused by present-day Strangites. See “Musings. To be Continued,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (May 25, 1848): 40 and Strang’s note on the sacrifice of Christ published in the Book of the Law of the Lord, 147–58. See also William Shepard, Donna Falk, and Thelma Lewis, *James J. Strang: Teaching of a Mormon Prophet* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strangites): [Burlington, Wisconsin?], 1977), 26–53.

<sup>42</sup> “Lineage of Christ,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (April 6, 1848): 11. *Book of Mormon*, [photo-mechanical reprint of 1830 edition] (Independence, Missouri: Herald Heritage Reprint, 1970): 27 (1 Nephi 11:18). Strang apparently acquiesced to the other Book of Mormon passages quoted by Gaylord. It is unclear how explicit Joseph Smith wrote concerning this point of doctrine, but Orson Pratt, shortly after Smith had died, wrote that God the father and Mary must have been married and had Jesus “according to the flesh.” See Orson Pratt, “Celestial Marriage,” in *The Seer* (Washington, D. C.) 1 (October 1853):158.



to the LDS Church in Joseph Smith's day, played a role in introducing a organizational ceremony called the Order of the Illuminati. This order was secret in nature and the initiates were to swear loyalty to James J. Strang, after which they were anointed with oil allegedly laced with phosphorus producing a "miraculous" glow.<sup>43</sup> This secret order sparked a contention among many Strangites that quickly spread to open antagonism toward Strang. In fact some Strangites, alarmed with the secretive doctrines the church apparently embraced, organized themselves into their own anti-covenant party. Part of the controversy centered around Bennett because many Strangites felt animosity toward Bennett that had carried over from his public and highly controversial apostasy in 1842 under Joseph Smith.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps being influenced by this animosity, the Voree High Council went over Strang's authority and in October 1846 tried Bennett for introducing "Polygamy, and Concubinage" as well as "threatning Life, and ridiculing sacred things."<sup>45</sup> Although Bennett would soon leave the church, the effects of his actions spread to disaffected members throughout the Strangite Church.

Problems original to Strangism also plagued the organization. When the Strangite Church accepted John E. Page, a member of the Twelve under the leadership of Joseph Smith, several members, including counselor Aaron Smith, believed that a re-baptism

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<sup>43</sup> For information on the order of the Illuminati see, Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island*, 49–51 and 60–65 and Quaipe, *Kingdom of Saint James*, 49–57. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, America was paranoid over the infiltration of another secret order with the same name as Bennett's new ceremony and order. How much of this fear from the American mind was still around in the 1840s is unknown. See Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, 2nd ed. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967).

<sup>44</sup> The best work on John C. Bennett is Andrew F. Smith, *Saintly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

<sup>45</sup> *Mormon Doings*, n.d. [ca. December 1846 or January 1847], n.p. [Voree?], 452. It is from sources like these that speculation could be justified that it was from John C. Bennett from whom Strang initially heard of and began to practice polygamy.

was necessary for all newly-converted Strangites. Perhaps feeling that a re-baptism would lessen his arguments of Mormon continuity, Strang condemned this doctrine and criticized the position. “Aaron Smith [and others]...contend[ed] that *no man could hold his standing in the church, in the future, unless he would be RE-BAPTIZED.*”<sup>46</sup> Strang made it clear that Joseph Smith’s death and Strang’s appointment did not necessitate a re-baptism of all the former-LDS members.<sup>47</sup>

Strang’s contempt of re-baptism as well as of Aaron Smith is not subtle: “[t]hese principles, though utterly repudiated by the more intelligent, found many adherents.”<sup>48</sup> These adherents went on to provoke a rift within the Strangite Church. Strang, concerned with maintaining support from the new members, criticized the apparent leader of the insurrection—Aaron Smith, witness to the Voree plates and member of the first presidency.<sup>49</sup> Smith would not acquiesce and left the church and formed his own schismatic organization to compete against Strang for a time. Thus began the first known schismatic organization springing from the Strangite Church, which received the christening of a ‘Pseudo movement.’ Aaron Smith’s movement published its own

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<sup>46</sup> “History of the Late Apostacy at Voree,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (February 25, 1847): 25. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>47</sup> “Re-Baptisms,” *Voree Herald* 1 (March 1846): [1]. Strang wrote concerning the question of re-baptism as early as March of 1846, stating that other than personal transgression, a new leader of a branch does not require baptism of the whole branch, and likewise, a new leader of the church would not require those in the church Voree Herald, 1 (March 1846): [1].

<sup>48</sup> “History of the Late Apostacy at Voree,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (February 25, 1847): 25.

<sup>49</sup> Strang received a revelation in November 1846 stating that “unless my servant Aaron make speed to humble himself before me and cease to deny <my> words I will stretch out my hand upon him and he shall be brought very low and none shall heed him or do good unto him. And he shall know that I am God.” “Chronicles of Voree,” 121.

newspaper, held meetings, and attempted to establish itself throughout America before fading.<sup>50</sup>

However, the various schismatic and argumentative “apostates” from Strangism took their toll on the Strangites and the news of the Pseudos in Voree affected Strangites both in and outside of Voree. Some of these branches were in areas where Strang and other leaders could not always repair damage done, and the apostasy of a few members led to further apostasy throughout the rest of the Church. The Pseudos revealed the negative aspects of Strangism that would not have otherwise been publicized. Theological inaccuracy and religious hypocrisy, brought to the forefront by contesting religions, bring down religious leaders precisely because the two groups are competing for the same audience. The rise of the Pseudo movement brought with it a minute inspection of Strang’s character as leaders of the movement pointed out subtleties that tore away at Strang’s religious position.

Lousia Sanger was one example of a member who became disillusioned with Strang and wrote to him stating that it was “your own writings that destroyed my confidence in you.” This may have been Sangers’ immediate feelings, but she also admitted that her disassociation with Strang did not “come all at once – One grain after another was thrown into the scale against you until it finally turned, and since then I have felt perfectly indifferent to you.”<sup>51</sup> One cannot understand a break from a religious group without first understanding that there were many factors working against one’s resolve, and the Pseudos’ onslaught against Strang brought to light many of these factors. Yet an

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<sup>50</sup> See Steven L. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 4th ed. (Independence [?]: Herald House, 2001), 48. Eventually the pseudo movement became known as a general term for all non-Strangite Mormon groups, although it usually referred to those who broke with Strang.

unforeseen result to the Pseudo movement occurred as those defending Strang against the Pseudos strengthened many of the Strangites' resolve to stay with the church.

Realizing Voree was buckling under the weight of schisms and controversy, Strang attempted to reinforce the would-be city. His focus was not just on the spiritual needs of his fellow Voree residents, though that was a concern. Strang also was trying to make Voree prosper economically. Thus Strang founded another order at Voree with less of a backlash than the Order of the Illuminati. Unfortunately, it too would fail to meet Strang's expectations. The Order of Enoch was a form of communal living at Voree. In February 1848, Strang wrote a letter to his church stating that the "time has come that the saints must practice their religion and profess their faith."<sup>52</sup> Explaining that the "doctrine of the equality of the saints in their temporal things was taught in the beginning of the church," Strang told his members that the "time has now come" to gather and live equally.<sup>53</sup> Centered in Voree, the order consisted of a large communal farm and members of the order worked in lead mines near Voree. Though there were Strangites excited over the prospect, at the end of 1848, there were only about 150 members (including women and children) in the order who not only financially supported the publication of the *Gospel Herald* but provided other expenses for the church.<sup>54</sup> Thus though the order "supported more Elders while preaching the gospel than all the rest of the church," the strength did not lie in its numbers, but rather in the individual resolve of very few

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<sup>51</sup> Louisa Sanger to Strang August 19, 1849 Strang Collection, Yale, #55.

<sup>52</sup> "Pastoral Letter" from Strang to the Church, January [?] 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (February 3, 1848): 221.

<sup>53</sup> "Pastoral Letter" from Strang to the Church, January [?] 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (February 3, 1848): 222, 223.

<sup>54</sup> *Gospel Herald* 3 (December 28, 1848): 219.

members.<sup>55</sup> This was often the relationship between Strangites and their leader. Though many vocally supported Strang, few remained obedient when more was asked of them, and this inaction became detrimental to Strang and his cause, especially considering that there were outside organizations vying for the Strangite members.

## **Backlash**

Similar to the Strangite mode of missionary work, the LDS Church began to see the Strangites as the threat they were and began to both individually and collectively preach against the Strangites. In addition to this, other restorationist groups preached to Strangite congregations in hopes of gaining from their numbers. Often former Strangites founded or joined a differing restorationist church and they then preached against Strangism, resulting in many members reevaluating their religious decision. Former Strangite members from organizations such as the LDS Church, the Brewsterites, and the McLellinites all eroded Strang's numbers and credibility. Unfortunately for the movement, even one member could cause a stir.

For example, Reuben Miller was a one-time Strangite who apostatized and went back to the Brighamites but not until he wrote against Strang in at least two pamphlets. Miller was baptized into the LDS Church in 1843 and was quickly given responsibility as a leader and financial agent.<sup>56</sup> Miller first heard of Strang in the middle of January at St.

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<sup>55</sup> *Gospel Herald* 3 (December 28, 1848): 219.

<sup>56</sup> Biographical information comes from Miller's pamphlet "James J. Strang, Weighed in the Balance of Truth, and Found Wanting. His Claims as First President of the Melchisedek Priesthood Refuted," (Burlington, Wisconsin Territory: n.p., 1846). See also Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Reuben Miller, Recorder of Oliver Cowdery's Reaffirmations," *BYU Studies* 8 (Spring 1968): 277–293.

Charles, Illinois, and was in Nauvoo by late January 1846.<sup>57</sup> After listening to Strang's history, Miller stated that he would "go to Nauvoo and see what discoveries [he] could make in regard to Joseph's writing such an appointment, and the claims of the Twelve to the Presidency of the Church."<sup>58</sup> At this time, Miller was also directed to carry a letter from Strang to the Twelve that summoned them to an ecclesiastical trial for usurpation of authority.<sup>59</sup>

For about a week after reaching Nauvoo, Miller investigated Strang's claim privately, after which he began to publicly preach in favor of Strang.<sup>60</sup> Miller's activities on behalf of the Strangites in Nauvoo were arduous at best. On January 30, 1846, Brigham Young gave Miller a revelation, which said "that Strang is a wicked & corrupt man & that his revelations are as false as he is\_ therefore turn away from his folly-\_\_ & never let it be said of Reuben Miller\_that he ever was led away & entangled\_ by such nonsense."<sup>61</sup> However, one day later, Miller contacted then-LDS Apostle John E. Page and presented Strang's summons to him. The next day John E. Page wrote to Strang,

[Y]esterday I [John E. Page] was visited by my friend Bro- Miller a very strong advocate for your...claims to the first Presidency of the church...he read to me your Epistle, and discharged his mission faithfully, as a man should do where he has the salvation of men in view; he is a gentleman that commands my highest

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<sup>57</sup> Reuben Miller, *James J. Strang: Weighed in the Balance of Truth and Found Wanting*, Burlington, 1846, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Reuben Miller, *James J. Strang: Weighed in the Balance of Truth and Found Wanting*, Burlington, 1846, 1.

<sup>59</sup> "Chronicles of Voree," 55. For the original of the letter, see Strang to the Twelve, January 13, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #9.

<sup>60</sup> Miller, while in Nauvoo and before publicly joining Strangism, acted as proxy on January 27, 1846 for Hyrum Smith, and was sealed for Smith to Louisa Sanger for eternity. After which Sanger and Miller were sealed to each other for time the same day. Lyndon W. Cook, *Nauvoo Marriages Proxy Sealings: 1843-1846*, (Provo, Utah: Grandin Books, 2004), 137.

<sup>61</sup> Brigham Young diary, January 31, 1846, LDS Archives.

regard and esteem, and am in whome I repose the most implicit confidence, as far as integrity and veracity is concerned.<sup>62</sup>

Miller continued strongly advocating for Strang and within a fortnight he had printed three thousand copies of his pamphlet “A Defence of the Claims of James J. Strang.” This supported Strang as well as provided Nauvoo residents (as well as Mormons across the country) access to the information found in the first number of the *Voree Herald*.<sup>63</sup> The fact that it caught some people’s attention is made known by a letter from Hazen Aldrich, an early LDS Church member who had left the Church before Joseph Smith died: “A friend of mine at Keokuk sent me a Pamphlet containing the truth but the Publisher has not given his name: neither the time of its being published.”<sup>64</sup> An important and influential missionary in Nauvoo, Miller used the power of the press effectively for the Strangite cause.

But an April 1846 conference at Norway, Illinois, sowed seeds of discord for Miller that would adversely affect many of the Strangites throughout the country. Miller had been pondering Strang’s claim for some time, and at the conference in Norway, Miller heard a significant change in Strang’s story of his ordination. Instead of the angel telling Strang that he was to fill Joseph Smith’s place (as related to Miller in the first part of 1846), Miller heard that the angel touched and anointed Strang’s head with oil.<sup>65</sup> The Saints, upon talking with Miller, “replied that they knew well what [Strang] then said,

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<sup>62</sup> John E. Page to Strang, February 1, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #10.

<sup>63</sup> Morgan, “Bibliography” 43–109.

<sup>64</sup> Hazen Aldrich to Strang, April 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #214. See also Morgan, “Bibliography,” 51–2.

<sup>65</sup> Miller, *Weighed in the Balance of Truth*, 3.

and if it was a fact, that he now claimed to be annointed by the Angel, they could and would not receive him.”<sup>66</sup> The difficulty was not the fact that Strang was anointed by an angel—in fact, Miller had previously expressed concerns that the first version did not contain a physical contact between Strang and the angel—the major concern was Strang’s variation in his narrative.

After returning to Voree, Miller could not reconcile these differences in Strang’s story as well as his knowledge of specific doctrines he had learned in the Doctrine and Covenants concerning priesthood transmission, which he felt stated the priesthood must pass from Joseph Smith to Brigham Young, and not from an angel or other heavenly being. Thus in September 1846, Miller, once again a Brighamite, wrote a pamphlet against Strang and his “Claims as First President of the Melchisedek Priesthood.”<sup>67</sup> This twenty-six-page pamphlet supplies the various argumentation against Strang and his call to the office of prophet and president of the church. In essence, Miller stated that the Melchizedek priesthood had the “keys of mysteries and revelation” and that Strang did not have these keys, and hence, was not the successor of Joseph Smith.<sup>68</sup> Strang reported that the pamphlet was “small potatoes, and few in a hill.”<sup>69</sup> This apathetic notice notwithstanding, Strang’s initial feelings did not represent many of the Strangites’ attitude toward the pamphlet.

Strang later reviewed the first three pages of Miller’s pamphlet in two full columns in his newspaper, perhaps as a result of the concerns of other Strangites

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<sup>66</sup> Miller, *Weighed in the Balance of Truth*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Miller, *Weighed in the Balance*. The quote comes from the title.

<sup>68</sup> Miller, *Weighed in the Balance*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> “Reubenism,” *Voree Herald* 1 (October 1846): [3].



throughout the church. “Since the unfortunate disaffection of Bro [Reuben] Miller and others,” wrote Louisa Sanger to Strang, “I have heard their side of the story and now I want to hear the other side and I know not who can tell it so correctly as yourself.”<sup>70</sup> One missionary returning home found much excitement in consequence of Miller’s pamphlet, which “killed every Strangite Mormon in” Cincinnati, Ohio.<sup>71</sup> Miller’s pamphlet, in the eyes of the Brighamites was a success. In 1847, he was still getting requests for copies of his pamphlet from people across the nation.<sup>72</sup>

Miller did not stop preaching and publishing against Strangism. He remained in Voree because he felt it was his mission to make up for the wrong that he did. “I have made it my business to defend the cause of god, I rest upon the protecting own of allmighty god, and to him I apeal for wisdom and direction,”<sup>73</sup> After seeing a review of his pamphlet in the *Zion’s Reveille*, and a few statements speaking against his version of the story in the first pamphlet, he decided to publish a second pamphlet in 1847 entitled “Truth Shall Prevail: A Short Reply.”<sup>74</sup> After hearing of a contemplated Strangite mission

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<sup>70</sup> Louisa Sanger to Strang, July 15th 1847. A later person (perhaps Dale Morgan) had supplied the date 1846 for this letter in pencil, but Miller had not published his pamphlet until September and though there is a strong possibility that Miller told Sanger of his difficulties with Strang before publication, it is more likely that the letter was written in 1847.

<sup>71</sup> Lester Brooks to James Adams, February 10, 1847, as found in the *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (March 11, 1847): 36, and James Blakeslee to Francis Cooper, June 8, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (July 5, 1849): 73.

<sup>72</sup> Reuben Miller to Brigham Young, February 5, 1847, LDS Archives, wrote that “I am almost dayly receiving Letters from different Sections of this republic, calling for my pamphlet, And among the many, One from J. C. Little, and oan other from L. Hardey I sent them 200 copies.”

<sup>73</sup> Reuben Miller to Brigham Young, February 5, 1847, LDS Archives.

<sup>74</sup> “Truth Shall Prevail: A Short Reply to an Article Published in the Voree Herald (Reveille), by J. C. Bennett: And the Willful Falsehoods of J. J. Strang,” (Burlington, W. T., 1847). Miller, in a letter to Brigham Young writes that “The hour came out in their paper denighing some of my statements. And publishing a number of Lies against me. I considered it for the wellfare of the cause of god to publish my second apistle.” Miller to Young, February 5, 1847, LDS Archives.

to England, Miller proposed writing a third pamphlet for the LDS English audience. Yet, Brigham Young and Willard Richards, perhaps feeling cautious of Miller's zeal, wrote to Miller and in quite forceful language called him to return to the Camp of Israel.<sup>75</sup>

As a result of Strang's apparent inconstancy and certainly because of Miller's vocal and highly public withdrawal, many Strangites chose not to remain with Strang.<sup>76</sup> In fact, Miller wrote that "my faith is confirmed when I see its [the pamphlet's] affects. And the great revaluation it has affected, and still is affecting among the honest Saints, whole branches are delivered from the spirit of Anti christ or in other words Strangism"<sup>77</sup> If missionaries convinced of Strang's truth did so much good for Strang, LDS members convinced of Strang's deception did much harm.

Upon hearing that a former LDS-member had joined Strang, many Mormons quickly excommunicated their former co-religionists in hopes of nipping the difficulty in the bud. In March 1846 the LDS Macedonia Illinois, branch assembled "for the purpose of Cutting off From the Church Such as believed in J. J. Strang"<sup>78</sup> The Cambia New York branch also met in August 1849 and cut off Joel Skinner "for cursing, swearing, drinking

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<sup>75</sup> Willard Richards to Miller, September 17, 1847, LDS Archives. Miller wrote in April to Young and stated that "they have at their conferance, dicided that John E Page, and Mr Greenhow, and one or two others, go immideately to England. I am now preparing a communication to send to Bro Hyde, In which is imbodyed some of the visions and revalations of Mr strang. And the full history and paticulars of their Phosphorus Illumination, or great endowment, acompined by the proper vouches, and cirtificates. that he may Learn his true position, And he more fully prepared to floor them on their arrival there." Miller to Brigham Young, April 21, 1847, LDS Archives. This pamphlet was doubtlessly given up in order that Miller could go to the Camp of Israel.

<sup>76</sup> Louisa Sanger, writing from Ottawa, asks Strang about his version of the story after hearing about Miller. She states that "[t]hese are indeed trying times and I fear that but few who will be able to endure this day of trial." Louisa Sanger to Strang, July 15, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #37.

<sup>77</sup> Reuben Miller to Brigham Young, February 5, 1847, LDS Archives.

<sup>78</sup> "Record of the Macedonia Branch 1839-1850," March 22, 1846, as provided by staff at LDS Archives.

unchristian-like conduct, attending and holding Strangite meetings at his house and refusing to attend his own meetings.”<sup>79</sup> Yet Strangites did not easily give up.

Strangite Abigail P. Holmes, writing from Georgetown, Massachusetts, stated that there “are a few Brighamites left here, and a few who do not follow Brigham, but they seem to be lost in the fog that has overspread the church. I feel that there is something yet to be done in this region. There are souls here to save.”<sup>80</sup> On Christmas Eve 1849, Samuel Graham took up the invitation and planned to visit Georgetown, but was back in Boston about a week later with news that there were only three or four faithful in the midst of eighteen to twenty Brighamites—hardly an environment of Strangite growth.<sup>81</sup>

In Nauvoo, with thousands of LDS members ready to dispute Strang’s claims, the Strangite missionary work suffered. In a letter to Brigham Young dated March 1846, Orson Hyde, the LDS apostle who presided in Nauvoo for some time before the Saints left west, commented that a meeting against Strang had its desired effects: “Strangism and Pageism [John E. Page] were blown into annihilation by the Spirit and power of God through your humble servant... [And that] never in my life did I speak with that power that I did last Sunday.”<sup>82</sup> One week later, Hyde, in another letter to Brigham Young, stated that while he was praying “to the Lord to give [him] power to preserve his people from wolves, the Holy Ghost came...and [he] wrote.... a revelation against Strangism.” In

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<sup>79</sup> “Records of the Church...organized at Cambria, Niagra County, New York,” August 13, 1849, LDS Archives. Underlining in original.

<sup>80</sup> Abigail P. Holmes to Francis Cooper, December 9, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (December 27, 1849): 226. Holmes wrote an earlier letter to Strang dated March 11, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (April 19, 1849): 19–20.

<sup>81</sup> Samuel Graham to Francis Cooper, December 24, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (January 17, 1850): 254–55. Graham wrote to Strang on the first of January 1850 from Boston, Strang Collection, Yale, #333.

circulating this revelation in Nauvoo, Hyde and the Saints learned that Strang and other hopeful leaders like him were “instruments in [the Lord’s] hands, and are permitted to try [the] people, and to collect from among them those who are not the elect.”<sup>83</sup> But by the end of 1846, most of the Mormons had been forced out of Nauvoo and Strangism would search elsewhere for converts—and Brighamites would combat them where ever they went.

Several Latter-day Saint elders were careful about the Strangites in St. Louis, Missouri. “As to Strang and Rigdon,” wrote Joseph A. Stratton to Brigham Young in August 1846, “I here [hear] nothing said about them, if they have any followers in this place they keep very quiet. I have never so much as made mention of their names in Public nor yet have I Said any thing about the claims of any man or set of men to the Presidency of the church.”<sup>84</sup> Several weeks later, Jehiel Savage, a Strangite missionary, came to St. Louis and “intend[ed] taking a room to lecture in.” Stratton told Brigham Young, “I don’t intend to take any notice of him I dont fear him.”<sup>85</sup> With little success, Strangite activity all but ceased in the city of St. Louis.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Orson Hyde to Brigham Young, March 10, 1846, LDS Archives.

<sup>83</sup> “He that hath ears to hear,” photocopy, BYU Special Collections.

<sup>84</sup> Joseph A. Stratton to Brigham Young, August 2, 1846, LDS Archives.

<sup>85</sup> Stratton to Brigham Young, August 17, 1846, LDS Archives. The Brighamites even claimed to have converted Strangite apostle Charles Thompson. Stratton to Young, December 27, 1846, LDS Archives. See also “Charles B. Thompson,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (October 5, 1848): 140–143 and 3 (October 12, 1848): 148–151 for a letter from Thompson to Strang dated St. Louis, April 29, 1848, in which he gives his reasons for leaving Strangism. Strang extensively comments on this letter throughout.

<sup>86</sup> Henry Clifford, one Strangite believer, wrote one encouraging note from St. Louis which is edited and another letter describing Brighamite activity in St. Louis. Henry Clifford to Strang, February 11, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (March 8, 1849): 272 and Henry Clifford to Strang, April 14, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (June 7, 1849): 51.

To the east, Philadelphia was another important center of restorationist groups. An extant copy of the Philadelphia LDS Branch minutes has made Philadelphia an important, yet a somewhat untapped, study in Mormon branch history.<sup>87</sup> More than 700 people are listed as Mormon members in the Philadelphia branch and it has been estimated that the highest number at any one time was 334 in 1844.<sup>88</sup> Almost 175 of the 700 LDS members are known to have separated themselves from the branch for a variety of reasons. Thus, the Philadelphia branch was highly fluid with members joining and then leaving, many moving to Nauvoo or away from Mormonism, and beginning with 1846 some of these branch members joined Strangism, at least for a time.

The nature of Strangite conversion is difficult to measure because Strang did not require that former Mormons, baptized during Joseph Smith's lifetime, be re-baptized.<sup>89</sup> So a definitive and recordable step of conversion is absent in most cases, as is the record of when a member would leave the church. For example, Samuel G. Flagg was appointed as counselor to the Strangite presiding elder in Philadelphia in late 1846.<sup>90</sup> In December 1847, Samuel Flagg was ordained to the office of an elder in the LDS Church.<sup>91</sup> In February of 1850, Flagg wrote Strang about coming to Beaver Island and in March of 1850, the Mormon branch at Philadelphia cut Flagg off after he wrote asking them to

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<sup>87</sup> Some notable exceptions are David J. Whittaker, "East of Nauvoo: Benjamin Winchester and the Early Mormon Church," in *Journal of Mormon History* 21 (Fall 1995): 30–83 and Stephen J. Fleming, "Discord in the City of Brotherly Love: The Story of Early Mormonism in Philadelphia," *Mormon Historical Studies* 5 (Spring 2004): 3–27.

<sup>88</sup> *Times and Seasons* 5 (November 1, 1844): 701. See also Fleming, "Discord in the City of Brotherly Love," 24.

<sup>89</sup> See for example, "Re-Baptism," *Voree Herald* 1 (March 1846): [1].

<sup>90</sup> "Philadelphia," *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [3].

<sup>91</sup> Philadelphia branch minutes, 93.

remove his name from the records.<sup>92</sup> Did Flagg continually switch his loyalties or were the records simply imperfect? Flagg's example illustrates the difficulty of relying on records to indicate members' religious journey in and out of restorationist groups.

The Strangite branch in Philadelphia found it difficult to occupy the same city as a stronghold of Mormons. Strang became frustrated with those in Philadelphia: "If the branch at Philadelphia would catch the same spirit, we think that instead of asking us to send them a faithful Elder to preach to them they would ask one of the Apostles to send out the Elders there to preach to the people in darkness in all that region." Strang's disappointment continued—"[i]f we mistake not there are from twelve to sixteen high Priests and Elders in Philadelphia. Instead of having no preaching, you ought to keep up at least three meetings every Sabbath in the city, and several in the villages around."<sup>93</sup> Obviously, Strang felt that a branch the size of Philadelphia should sustain itself, and even increase numbers in and around the city. However, erosion of the Strangite branch usually occurred when Brighamites were close neighbors.

Kirtland was another area of difficulty with the smaller restorationist churches attacking the Strangite Church. After Joseph Smith's death, several Rigdonites gained inroads at Kirtland but according to one Strangite, these quickly collapsed by the time of the Strangites' arrival.<sup>94</sup> However, another schismatic group would cause much more difficulty for Strang. William E. McLellin, an early LDS Apostle under Joseph Smith and follower of Strang for a time, broke with Strang and formed his own church centered in

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<sup>92</sup> Samuel G. Flagg to Strang, February 4, 1850, Strang Collection, Yale, #309 and Philadelphia branch minutes, 96.

<sup>93</sup> *Gospel Herald* 3 (October 19, 1848): 155.

<sup>94</sup> Hazen Aldrich to Strang, [postmarked] April 15, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #214.

Kirtland based on his belief that David Whitmer was Joseph Smith's successor. McLellin took converts from Strang in Kirtland as well as other areas in the United States including Voree.<sup>95</sup> McLellin's publication, which commenced in March 1847, sparred back and forth with Strang's newspapers and provides a perfect example of the relationships among many of the schismatic Mormon groups. In noting McLellin's break from his church, Strang did not spare any delicacy in announcing it: "O, William, arch-apostate! who can hereafter have the least confidence in such a perfidious monster of iniquity? Cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord, and utterly forsake your adulterous propensities, for the God of heaven cannot look upon your abominations with the least degree of allowance. Let the daughters of the land rest in peace."<sup>96</sup> McLellin did not keep religious propriety in examining his former leader either. "I look upon Strang as being a kind of third-rate infidel, an unbeliever in all divine revelation.... Truly, J. J. Strang is a false Prophet, and base hearted man, whose great aim is to destroy others in order to build himself up.—But wo! thrice wo! will be his doom in the end."<sup>97</sup> As these illustrate, the fact that Strang and McLellin did not wholly ignore each other hints that they were concerned with losing converts.

Strang's former first counselor, Aaron Smith, joined McLellin as did several others in Kirtland, Voree, and elsewhere. After a deflating letter from Hiram Page, acting as spokesman for David Whitmer, in which Page told the "saints scattered abroad" that

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<sup>95</sup> *Ensign of Liberty* 1 (December 1847): 34 states that McLellin and others visited Voree and baptized forty-one people.

<sup>96</sup> "William E. McLellin's *Fourth (!) Apostacy*," *Zion's Reveille* 2 (January 14, 1847): 3.

<sup>97</sup> "J. J. Strang's L. D. Saintism" *Ensign of Liberty* 1 (May 1848): 91.

McLellin was wrong in some of his doctrine and position, McLellin's church fell apart.<sup>98</sup> McLellin then wandered among Mormon churches with varying degrees of loyalty until his death in 1883 in Missouri.<sup>99</sup>

Another Mormon group in Kirtland was founded by James Brewster in June 1848.<sup>100</sup> Brewster was born in 1826, only four years before the Mormon Church was organized. Brewster's parents joined Mormonism sometime in the 1830s and lived in Kirtland for a time until the family moved with the church to Illinois and lived in Springfield. Brewster began to receive revelations while living in Kirtland, and he started to translate the ancient religious text of Esdras, which Joseph Smith derided but which Brewster published. Brewster wrote to Strang in 1846 and claimed a knowledge "ever since the death of Joseph [Smith] that the twelve were not in their place and that they had no right to the office of the first president." Brewster explained that he believed in the entire message he found in a copy of the *Voree Herald*, "except the statement that James J. Strang is the man stand at the head of the church."<sup>101</sup> Two years later Brewster formed his own church and Strang had another church to contend against in Kirtland and elsewhere.

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<sup>98</sup> Hiram Page to Alfred Bonny, Isaac N. Aldrich, and M. C. Ishem, June 24, 1849, as found in *The Olive Branch* 2 (August 1849): 27–29.

<sup>99</sup> For information on McLellin, see Larry C. Porter, "The Odyssey of William Earl McLellin: Man of Diversity, 1806–83," in Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin 1831–1836* (Provo, BYU Studies and Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1994), 290–378.

<sup>100</sup> Information on James Brewster and his church, comes from Dan Vogel, "James Colin Brewster: The Boy Prophet Who Challenged Mormon Authority," in *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History*, Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 120–139. See also *Gospel Herald* 3 (June 29, 1848): 59.

<sup>101</sup> James C. Brewster to Strang, March 15, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #15.



Strang cordially welcomed Brewsterism and its newspaper, *The Olive Branch*, into the Mormon discussion. In speaking of *The Olive Branch*, Strang wrote, that “[t]hough it is the representative of some fundamental errors, it is at least in the hands of men who have some degree of moral honesty. And though we cannot bid them God speed, we wish them no mishap.”<sup>102</sup> Yet as some people began to leave Strangism for Brewsterism (including President of the Twelve John E. Page) this geniality waned. Upon explaining his views of Brewsterism in 1850, Strang writes that the Brewsterites “are driven about by every wind of doctrine.... All [Brewsterites] have denied parts of the revelations in the book of Doctrine and Covenants. All have denied more or less of the power of the priesthood, except their own, which they both adhere to and magnify. All have denied the authority of the church.”<sup>103</sup> Strang, in another article commented on a theological treatise found in *The Olive Branch*, “[t]he foregoing is one of the most barefaced perversions that we have ever seen.”<sup>104</sup> Brewster moved west with some of his followers in 1850 and the movement died out in the Midwest. Brewster is last known in Illinois in 1867, still involved with a Mormon group apparently not founded by him.<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>102</sup> “The Olive Branch,” *Gospel Herald* 3 (August 31, 1848): 111. The editors of the *Olive Branch* wrote in their columns an answer as follows: “The parents of the Olive Branch send their sincere respects to those of the Gospel Herald for the kind notice they have taken of our little son.... We choose much rather that the two children [the *Olive Branch* and the *Gospel Herald*] of the same family [Mormonism] may live in peace, and have no contention.” “Reciprocal,” *The Olive Branch* 1 (August 1848): 32. Reprinted in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (October 19, 1848): 154, with yet another reply.

<sup>103</sup> Strang to Mary J. Stiles, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (February 21, 1850): 294.

<sup>104</sup> *Gospel Herald* 4 (February 28, 1850): 301.

<sup>105</sup> Vogel, “James Colin Brewster,” 134.

Ironically, the major difficulties that confronted the Strangites were the very things that had first helped them further their cause. The same missionaries who had brought converts to the fold also led many members to reject Strang's appointment. Missionaries were crucial in the growth and sustaining of the church—but they also played a pivotal role in the failure of the work. Members, too, fell away when leaders, who had previously helped branches and districts gain members, created internal dissent.

Second, Strangism suffered with the introduction of new policies and doctrines. Strang's introduction to polygamy—especially the episode with Charlie Douglas—caused a major rift in the Strangite branches causing many of the faithful members to distrust Strang. This was a complete turnaround to their willingness to believe Strang before. In order to succeed, Strang had to continually strengthen his members, check the ambition of his leaders, and carefully introduce and transition new policies and doctrines in order to maintain and improve upon his original successes. In this he did not succeed.

A third reason for the receding of Strangism was the backlash from the LDS Church and other LDS restorationist groups. Finding that they had a formidable enemy in Strang, LDS missionaries began to proselytize again to their lost members, with much success. Mormon branches and networks that initially facilitated the Strangites in their missionary work brought damaging arguments against Strang and his church, reclaiming many members. Like the Mormons, other restorationists worked to gain converts among the Strangites and the church suffered as members left. One geographical location will now provide a case study of the successes and failures of the Strangite missionary movement: England.



## CHAPTER 4: MISSIONARIES TO ENGLAND

Despite Strang's desire to spread Strangism throughout the world, England was the only country beyond North America to which the Strangite Church was able to send missionaries. The mission itself was virtually a failure—three known missionaries worked in England for about two months gaining about as many converts—but the episode provides important insights and details of the Strangite missionary work. First and foremost, the English mission shows the successes and failures already outlined in the preceding chapters. The failures highlighted by the English mission include dissension among missionaries and the relentless attack of the LDS Church in England. However, the mission also points out the potential, albeit unrealized, successes for Strangite missionary work. Many Strangite missionaries were called to go to the centers of Mormonism in England that could have provided important sources of strength. Yet the Strangite failure to gain a significant source of membership in England foreshadows the ultimate failure church-wide.

Besides Nauvoo, England is the only place where records outline the conflict between Strangites and Brighamites. The English LDS newspaper the *Millennial Star*, combined with the Brighamite missionaries' personal writings, provide details concerning how the Brighamites' denounced the Strangites. In fact, the Brighamite records provide more detail of this Strangite mission than do the Strangite records. Thus, while the success and duration of the Strangite English mission might not justify a comprehensive examination, the insight it provides concerning the Brighamite side alone

warrants a detailed analysis—especially because the LDS Church’s attack against the Strangites was one of the main reasons for its failure.

The English mission revolves around an important character in Mormonism: Martin Harris. One of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, Harris carried a lot of clout in his representation of Mormonism. The fact that he joined Strang and then began to preach in England carried a lot of weight for Strang and was one of the reasons for the heavy assault by the LDS Church. Unfortunately for the Strangite cause in England, Harris’ convictions to Strangism did not match his convictions to Mormonism.

## **Beginnings**

In August 1846, Strang and several of his followers held a conference in the Kirtland Temple where they established a stake and set apart missionaries to spread the new religion. One focus at this meeting was England.<sup>1</sup> Strang saw success in England—with a decade long history of successful LDS missionary work—as vital for the future of his church.<sup>2</sup> Strang wrote that the Latter-day Saint branches in England were “in great confusion in consequence of the ... oppressions of the Brighamites,” and that it “is necessary to preach the true order in [the churches in England] now before a general

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<sup>1</sup> See “Kirtland,” *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [1–2]. Strang had considered sending missionaries to England since at least April 1846. “As soon as [George J.] Adams regulates the eastern churches, he should go to England which he is willing to do.” John C. Bennett to James J. Strang, Apr. 6, 1846, James Jesse Strang Collection, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, microfilm copy in authors possession, hereafter cited as Strang Collection, Yale, #228. Each letter has been supplied a number by a later cataloger, which will also be provided here. Emphasis in original.

<sup>2</sup> Quaipe, *Kingdom of St. James*, 46. At a later conference, “Strang presented the subject of the Russia Mission...[and] the India mission,” both of which were postponed and finally dropped because of a lack of money, official papers, and conflicts closer to home. “Conference Minutes,” *Voree Herald* 1 (October 1846): [1]. Later, Strang would talk with “representatives of fifteen tribes of...Indians, and [see] them prepared to receive the work.” “Indian Mission,” *Voree Herald* 1 (October 1846): [2].

apostasy [from Brighamism] shall take place.”<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, Strang called several missionaries, including Martin Harris, Lester Brooks (who, at the same conference, was ordained an apostle),<sup>4</sup> Moses Smith,<sup>5</sup> Hazen Aldrich,<sup>6</sup> and “Highpriests with several Elders.”<sup>7</sup> Of the four named, only Harris and Brooks went to England;<sup>8</sup> of the “Elders,” only William Capener is known to have accompanied them.<sup>9</sup>

Harris is best known in Mormonism for his role as one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon plates. In June 1829, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin

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<sup>3</sup> “English Churches,” *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [3].

<sup>4</sup> Strang considered calling Lester Brooks for an England mission as early as July 1846: “Pres. Strang said that it was contemplated to put Lester Brooks in the quorum of the Twelve and send him on a mission to England.” “A Record of the establishment and doings of the Stake of Zion called Voree in Wisconsin, made by the Scribes appointed to that office,” 96, microfilm copy, Brigham Young University, original in private hands. Hereafter “Chronicles of Voree.” The “Chronicles of Voree” is apparently a contemporary manuscript dated journal of the Strangite Church of unknown authorship. A transcription of this manuscript has been compiled by John J. Hajieck (Burlington, Wisconsin: J. J. Hajieck, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Moses Smith was a member of the LDS Church as early as 1839. Failing to go to England because of internal Strangite Church division, Smith later moved away from Voree, Wisconsin, the central location of the Strangite Church, and died in 1849. See “Obituary,” *Gospel Herald* 4 (June 14, 1849): 53–55. See also David L. Clark, “Moses Smith: Wisconsin’s First Mormon,” *Journal of Mormon History* 21 (Fall 1995): 155–70.

<sup>6</sup> Hazen Aldrich had been a president of the LDS Church’s original First Quorum of the Seventy in 1835–37. He was affiliated with the Strangites until 1848. Later, Aldrich is found in Ohio printing *The Olive Branch*, a paper sustaining another faction group led by James C. Brewster. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 535.

<sup>7</sup> “Kirtland,” *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [1].

<sup>8</sup> In a letter written shortly after the conference, Strang recounts what transpired: Lester Brooks was ordained one of the Twelve Apostles. Resolution[s] were passed (with but one dissention voice) sustaining the true authorities and order of the Church; and a strong mission appointed to go to England and such arrangements made that they will leave here with sufficient means to go by steam to Europe before the end of the month. of the Twelve Moses Smith and Lester Brooks. of the High priests Martin Harris and Hazen Aldrich, and several Elders go out. (Strang to “Bretheren and Sisters,” August 14, 1846, as found in the “Chronicles of Voree,” 102, emphasis in original.)

<sup>9</sup> Apparently only these three went to England. The *Zion’s Reveille* printed news from England and mentions that “Martin Harris and William Capner [sic], from Ohio, are the travelling companions of Brother [Lester] Brooks.” “News from England,” *Zion’s Reveille* 1 (December 1846): [3].

There was perhaps another “Elder” called at this conference who did not go. John Jordan wrote to Strang, “I had great impressions to go to England [however] I could not go knowing that the Church was

Harris became the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, beginning what would be a lifetime full of testimony to Joseph Smith's translation. They declared that an angel of God had shown them the golden plates and were told of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.<sup>10</sup> After years of membership Harris left the LDS Church, although he still believed in a majority of the Mormon doctrines. Many claim Harris's detachment from the LDS Church was in large part due to the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society as well as the influence of other dissenters in Kirtland in 1837.<sup>11</sup> Harris began to doubt the continued inspiration of Joseph Smith, and when the Church moved from Ohio, Harris remained behind, residing in Kirtland until 1870. During his thirty-three year stay in Kirtland, Martin Harris was involved with many different churches: the main body of the LDS Church, various Mormon schismatic groups, and even other churches not at all affiliated with the doctrines of Joseph Smith.<sup>12</sup>

Most likely Harris was not baptized into Strangism, since the Strangite Church often allowed former LDS Church members to become members based on their former baptism. However, the fact that Harris joined Strangism is clear. While attending a

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not able to support my family." John Jordan to James Strang, November 30, 1846, Strang Collection, Yale, #405.

<sup>10</sup> See "The Testimony of the Three Witnesses" which is found in the introduction of the Book of Mormon.

<sup>11</sup> See Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1981): 110–111 and H. Michael Marquardt, "Martin Harris: The Kirtland Years, 1831–1870," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, no. 3 (2002): 10–13 for a discussion of Harris's disillusionment with the LDS Church and Joseph Smith. For information of the Kirtland Safety Society see D. Paul Sampson and Larry T. Wimmer, "The Kirtland Safety Society: The Stock Ledger Book and the Bank Failure," *BYU Studies* 12, no. 4 (1972): 427–436 and Marvin S. Hill, C. Keith Rooker, and Larry T. Wimmer, *The Kirtland Economy Revisited* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Harris was a member of the Church of Christ with Warren Parrish, Luke Johnson and others and with the Shakers before being involved with Strang. See Marquardt, "Martin Harris: The Kirtland Years, 1831–1870," 1–40 and Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 164–166 for a review of Harris's affiliation with various religious groups in Kirtland.

Strangite meeting, Harris was put in the high council, presumably in connection with the office of high priest he had held since 1831. For Harris, membership on Strang's high council indirectly affirmed a belief in Strang and his calling—or at least he hoped for the possibility that he would be able to preach again the tenets of Mormonism as a Strangite.<sup>13</sup>

Lester Brooks, another missionary called to England had, like Harris, been in Mormon leadership under Smith's administration. A member as early as 1837, Brooks had once been a counselor for Kirtland Stake President Almon Babbitt.<sup>14</sup> Brooks did much in Ohio to further the cause of the LDS Church, including acting as clerk for many meetings and later acting as the presiding elder in Kirtland.<sup>15</sup> Precisely when he joined Strang is not entirely clear. In late 1844, Brigham Young appointed many high priests, including Brooks, to "preside over the branches...to go and settle down, where they can take their families."<sup>16</sup> However Brooks was preaching for the Strangite cause by May

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Harris was "ordained to the High Priesthood" on June 3, 1831. Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983): 7. For Martin Harris as a member of the Strangite High Council in Kirtland, see "Kirtland," *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [2]. When called to England at the Kirtland council, Martin Harris is named a high priest. Strang to "Bretheren and Sisters," August 14, 1846, as found in the "Chronicles of Voree," 102.

<sup>14</sup> For the 1840 reestablishment of the Kirtland Stake, see "Minutes of the General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Held in Nauvoo, Hancock County, Ill. Oct. 3rd, 1840," *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois) 1 (October 1840): 185–186. For the choosing of Brooks as a counselor, see "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 2 (July 1, 1841): 458.

<sup>15</sup> See *Times and Seasons* for the various conference minutes in Kirtland, for example, "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 2 (July 1, 1841): 458–460; "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 3 (November 15, 1841): 587–589; and "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 4 (August 1, 1843): 282–286. See also Lyndon W. Cook and Milton V. Backman, Jr., ed., *Kirtland Elders' Quorum Record, 1836–1841* (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book, 1985), 74.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971) 7:305–6.



1846 and, by the August 1846 conference, he was ordained an apostle in the Strangite Church.<sup>17</sup>

William Capener was not as experienced in Mormonism as his two missionary companions. In late 1846, Capener had been a member of the LDS Church for only two years. Capener moved to America from England in 1834 and six years later was working as a carpenter in the shipyards of Cleveland, Ohio. While in Ohio, Capener became acquainted with Thomas Wilson, president of the Cleveland Branch. Capener was soon baptized and thereafter ordained an elder in the Kirtland Temple in January 1845.<sup>18</sup> By October 1845, he was still a member of the Church, being mentioned in LDS conference minutes.<sup>19</sup> Like Brooks, the date of when Capener joined Strang is unknown; however, by the end of 1846, all three missionaries journeyed to England.

### **The Brighamite Response**

Both the Strangite and LDS Church sent missionaries to England at this time. LDS missionaries in England were sent to help work out some internal problems within

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<sup>17</sup> See “Kirtland,” *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [1], “We have favourable accounts from Northern Ohio, by letters from those tried brethren, Lester Brooks, [and] Hazen Aldrich.” *Voree Herald* 1 (May 1846): [3].

<sup>18</sup> What little information there is about William Capener comes from Gates and Hardy, “Sketch of William Capener;” Louise Rebecca Taylor and Margaret Wicks Taylor Cluff, “Sketch of the Life of William Capener,” *Daughters of the Utah Pioneers*, (ca. 1965); and other private family histories. However, the difficulty in relying on the life sketches of William Capener for his part with the Strangite Church is that, for whatever reason, the fact the Capener was a Strangite is ignored, and it is said that Capener went to England to settle some personal business.

<sup>19</sup> “Minutes of a Conference Held in This, the Cleveland Branch, Ohio, October 30, 1845,” *Times and Seasons* 6 (November 15, 1845): 1030–1031. During this conference Capener obtained a letter of recommendation from the branch with the assumed intention of moving from Cleveland, Ohio, but to where is unknown.

the LDS Church, to strengthen the members, and to preach the gospel.<sup>20</sup> In addition to recovering from the news of the murder of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum, Latter-day Saints in England were dealing with an embarrassing embezzlement scheme of the presiding leader of the LDS Church in England, Reuben Hedlock. The Joint Stock Company was, at least on paper, a way in which British Saints could cheaply immigrate to America. “The purposes of the...Company are for Trading as Merchants between the United Kingdom and America, and for Manufacturing the produce of those countries, or either of them.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, the company would invest money given to it by the Saints

to build ships to emigrate the poor saints to Nauvoo.... [V]ast sums of monney was soon collected and sent into the secratery as deposits on their emigration. As the funds began to swell the hearts of the projectors [i.e. Reuben Hedlock and Thomas Ward] began allso to unscrupiously appropriate it to there own use and to waste it in want...and thousands of [pounds] was squandered before detected.<sup>22</sup>

Strang jumped at the chance to publicly display this poor management of the Brighamite Church. “Brigham, sent an agent over to England to collect monies on account of the Church, the emigrating Saints, and the great joint stock company. Of course he took one of his own school, and the scholar showed his proficiency by disappearing with the money.”<sup>23</sup> Thomas Ward, an English LDS leader attempting to defend his colleague,

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<sup>20</sup> For a history of LDS missions in Great Britain see *Mormons in Early Victorian Britain*. Ed. By Richard L. Jensen and Malcolm R. Thorp, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Broad sheet, ca. 1845 BYU Special Collections.

<sup>22</sup> James Wilson reminiscence, typescript, BYU Special Collections. 27–28.

<sup>23</sup> “Fruits of Wickedness,” *Voree Herald* 1 (August 1846): [2].

stated that the money was lost in honest means, and that the “company had been originated by the suggestions of the spirit of God.”<sup>24</sup>

After hearing of the difficulties among the English Latter-day Saints, Brigham Young dispatched three apostles to England: Parley P. Pratt, John Taylor, and Orson Hyde—who had combated earlier with Strangism in Nauvoo. However, their mission had various facets. They were instructed to inquire whether the English government would help fund the LDS emigrants’ travel to Vancouver Island.<sup>25</sup> The three were also to investigate Hedlock’s and Ward’s involvement in the fiscal difficulties relating to the Joint Stock Company and, if necessary, disfellowship or excommunicate them.<sup>26</sup> Many English Latter-day Saints had invested considerable money in the Joint Stock Company, much of which was now lost, leading to distrust and dissension. Hence Hedlock was subsequently excommunicated. Such negative news made efforts difficult not only for the Mormon missionaries, but also for the Strangite missionaries—Harris, Brooks, and Capener—who, according to LDS Church authorities, acted without sanction and would complicate things all the more.

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<sup>24</sup> *Millennial Star* (Liverpool, England) 8 (September 1, 1846): 54. For more information of the Joint Stock Company see Richard Bennett, “We Might Have Gone to Vancouver’s Island,” *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Western Canada*, (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2000): 13–33.

<sup>25</sup> See Bennett, “We Might Have Gone to Vancouver’s Island” and Richard Bennett and Arran Jewsbury, “The Lion and the Emperor: The Mormons, the Hudson’s Bay Company and Vancouver Island 1846–1858.” *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly*, 128 (Winter 2000/2001): 37–62.

<sup>26</sup> Parley P. Pratt claimed that the reason the three apostles went to England at this time was thus: “Elder R. Hedlock, who was then presiding in England, was in transgression, and was engaged in a wild scheme of financeering, by which he obtained vast sums of money from the Church in a kind of joint stock organization, which professedly had for its object the emigration of the Saints to America, while in reality the money was squandered by himself and others in any and every way but to do good.” Parley P. Pratt Jr. ed. *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985): 311.

Many England-bound Latter-day Saint missionaries had direct or indirect contact with the Strangites before leaving America and were prepared to preach against the Strangite trio in England. One of them, Crandell Dunn, was an elder at the Florence, Michigan conference where Strang attempted to present the Letter of Appointment.<sup>27</sup> Oliver Huntington met two representatives of the Strangites on his way to England<sup>28</sup> and Samuel W. Richards, also a missionary sent to England, heard Strangite apostle Moses Smith preaching in Nauvoo.<sup>29</sup>

Anticipating the arrival of the Strangites in England, the three LDS apostles began to prepare the Latter-day Saints in England to reject the “apostates.” The *Millennial Star* spoke out strongly against Strang, Brooks, and Harris even before they stepped foot on English shores, and the attacks intensified after they arrived.<sup>30</sup> Not only did the Latter-day Saint leaders in England publish material against Strangism, they also began to preach against it in their meetings. In one of the first meetings the apostles attended, Elder Hyde made several remarks against Strang:

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<sup>27</sup> “Letter from Elder Dunn to Elder Appleby of Philadelphia,” *Millennial Star* 8 (October 15, 1846): 93.

<sup>28</sup> Oliver Huntington, Diary, July 25, 1846, typescript, BYU Special Collections, relates: While we were eating breakfast. Ebinezer Page and one [Joseph] Ketchum formerly Elders of the church but now Apostates and followers of James J. Strange, came to the door it being open, and although entire strangers to us seemed to want an invitation to come in, and passed the usual salutations of, ‘good morning’ . . . .

...No one felt to invite them in, but at length, to be a little civil I told them to come in. They soon disclosed themselves and their character, calling and spirit. A few minutes plain talk to them, sent them on their journey.

<sup>29</sup> Samuel W. Richards wrote that he “attended meeting at the temple. Preaching by Orson Pratt, followed by Moses Smith, who presented the claims of “Strang,” as President of the Church. He was followed by Brigham Young and Orson Hyde, who used him up, by tearing down the Principles of his foundation. When by vote of church, Moses Smith . . . was disfellowshipped by the Church and J. J. Strang, given over to the Devil.” Samuel W. Richards, Diary, February 1, 1846, LDS Archives, copy held at BYU Special Collections.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, *Millennial Star* 8 (October 15, 1846): 94–95.

When Jesus left the earth, who stepped in between him and the Twelve apostles to preside over the church? No one! But if Strang had lived at that period, he would have attempted it.... To talk of appointing another in Joseph Smith's place...exhibits a specimen of the most consummate ignorance, stupidity, and willful blindness."<sup>31</sup>

Missionaries also took the initiative to preach against the Strangites as well. Lucius Scovil spoke in a meeting against the "course and conduct of Martin Harris, Strang and company and others."<sup>32</sup>

### **The Strangites in England**

Once in England, the three Strangite missionary companions quickly sought out a place to preach and, like their American counter-parts, found the LDS branches to hold the most interested—and hostile—audiences. On October 25, 1846, Martin Harris and perhaps the other Strangites missionaries, attended a quarterly conference held at the Birmingham branch "as [an] advocate for Strang." Because Harris was by far the most famous of the three missionaries, the Brighamite eyewitnesses perhaps did not mention the other companions of Harris as frequently, though they may have still been there.<sup>33</sup> Of Harris's efforts, Cyrus Wheelock wrote the following in his diary: "in the afternoon our Conference was hounered by the August presence of Martin Harris who had Came all the

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<sup>31</sup> "Conference Minutes," *Millennial Star* 8 (November 15, 1846): 120.

<sup>32</sup> James Ure, Diary, November 2, 1846. LDS Archives.

<sup>33</sup> John Freeman, Diary, October 25, 1846, LDS Archives. A notice of Harris's activities at the Birmingham conference mentions that "Martin Harris and his escort have paid them a visit." "Notices," *Millennial Star* 8 (November 15, 1846): 128. Brooks mentions hearing Cyrus Wheelock testify against Strang, placing Brooks in the area of Wheelock. Lester Brooks to James M. Adams, January 12, 1847, Strang Collection, Yale, #54. The three could have stayed together, but, perhaps more likely, the three separated with perhaps two of them (probably Harris and Brooks) staying together, as hinted at by the life sketch of William Capener: "When they [Harris and Capener (no mention of Brooks)] reached England they separated, each going about his own business." Taylor and Cluff, "Sketch of the Life of William Capener," 4.

way from America to tell of the wonderful things performed by the wicked Twelve apostles and also that he was a witness of the Book of Mormon.” Not willing to let Harris gain any sympathy, Wheelock wrote, “I felt it my Duty to give a short history of the Character of said H[arris] which seemed to be anything but Edifying to him.” However, Harris would not be silenced. “[Harris] was very Desirous of speaking but the Conference with united voice informed him that they did not need his instructions he Reluctantly withdrew he however he was not to be put off[f] so he must and would preach and Accordingly Decamp to the Street and Cammenced holding forth to the annoyance of the people while thus [engaged] t[w]o policemen Verry politely wa[i]ted upon him Each affectionately taking an arm and thus the Curtain fell and the Drama Closed to the great Amusement of the Spectators.”<sup>34</sup> The LDS leaders in England found it necessary to dismiss Harris, but did feel he was a formidable opponent.

While in England, Harris preached the Book of Mormon, but the degree in which he was an “advocate of Strang” is difficult to measure. Wheelock, not knowing the extent of Harris’s feelings toward the Church, said that Harris “was cut off from the church and that the curse of God was resting upon him.”<sup>35</sup> Yet Charles Derry, whose wife had been at Birmingham, stated that Harris continued to testify of the Book of Mormon:

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<sup>34</sup> Cyrus Wheelock, Diary, October 25, 1846, LDS Archives. In a letter he later wrote to the *Millennial Star*, Wheelock put the incident in another way:

Martin Harris and his escort have paid them a visit. He introduced himself to their conference meeting and wished to speak, but on being politely informed by Elder Banks that the season of the year had come when Martins sought a more genial climate than England, he had better follow. On being rejected by the united voice of the conference, he went out into the street, and began to proclaim the corruption of the Twelve apostles; but here the officers of government honoured him with their presence—two policemen came and very gently took hold of each arm and led Martin away to the Lock-up. “Notices,” *Millennial Star* 8 (November 15, 1846): 128.

Harris, though led away by the policemen, was probably not convicted, as he was soon after found at another meeting. A fruitless search was made of the mention of Harris, Brooks, or Capener in the “Calendars of prisoners, 1801–1850, in the Warwickshire Quarter Sessions,” LDS Family History film number 225102–225104 for Birmingham in October and November.

My first wife ... told me that she saw him [Martin Harris] in Birmingham, in the Saint's Meeting House. He had gone there from this land to oppose the pretensions of Brigham Young and the Twelve apostles, who were then laying the foundations for polygamy and the Brighamite rule. A young man of her acquaintance, in the presence of the assembly, presented to him his testimony with his name in connection with the other two witnesses' names, and asked him if that was his name. Martin replied, 'It is.' 'Did you put your name to that testimony?' Martin answered, 'I did; and that Book of Mormon is the Book of God. I know more about that book than any man living.'"<sup>36</sup>

Another member at the conference later recollected that

an elderly man [at the conference] asked permission to speak a few words to us....[Cyrus Wheelock] told us that it was Martin Harris, and apostate from the faith; that he had abused him and his brethren coming across the sea, and he would not allow him to speak....When we came out of the meeting Martin Harris was beset with a crowd in the street, expecting that he would furnish them with material to war against Mormonism; but when he was asked if Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, he answered yes; and when asked if the Book of Mormon was true, this was his answer: "Do you know that is the sun shining on us? Because as sure as you know that, I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, and that he translated that book by the power of God."<sup>37</sup>

After his mission, Lester Brooks wrote several letters to members of the Strangite leadership explaining what transpired in England. He complained of the presence of so many LDS missionaries in England. "All [the Brighamite] bullies ... [are] over evry Conference and over evry large branch of the Church[. T]hey are determined to maintain

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<sup>35</sup> Martin Harris Jr. to George A. Smith, July 13, 1875, LDS Archives. Martin Harris Jr. was concerned over the "erronious [sic] ideas or thoughts circulated throughout the territory and in the church generally in reference to my father," with the event in Birmingham with Wheelock "which [Harris Jr.] believe[d] has given cause for these rumors about father." Harris to Smith, July 13, 1875. Martin Harris Jr. blamed Wheelock, in part, for spreading the "rumors" that Martin Harris "apostatized [sic] and... was excommunicated from the church." Harris to Smith, July 13, 1875. However, in an earlier letter, Martin Harris Jr. told Smith that if he can "supply us with any items of history of my father I shall feel greatly obliged." Martin Harris to George A. Smith July 9, 1875, LDS Archives.

<sup>36</sup> *True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 23 (April 1, 1876): 198.

<sup>37</sup> George Mantle, "Martin Harris in England," *Autumn Leaves* [Lamoni, Iowa] 2 (March 1889): 141. James Ure wrote in his diary that a letter was received from "Elder Wheelark [sic], President of Birmingham Conference informing...of the arrival of Martin Harris in that place." James Ure, Diary, November 17, 1846, LDS Archives.

the ground in that Country at all hazards.”<sup>38</sup> The Birmingham conference, with its unwelcome attitude, foreshadowed what was to come of the Strangite cause in England.

Already distanced from the English Saints because of the *Millennial Star*'s attacks, Harris was soon found at another meeting, where clues hint that he was beginning to separate from Strangism as well. At Birkenhead, close to Liverpool, Harris again encountered Latter-day Saint opposition: “Elder [James] Marsdon...handled them so effectually in Birkenhead, and made Strangism look so contemptibly mean, that Martin [Harris] publicly denied being sent by Strang.... This he did in presence of many witnesses.”<sup>39</sup> While in England Harris became a deterrent to the Strangite missionary effort.

### **A Target on Both Sides**

Many members and missionaries, both Latter-day Saint and Strangite, began to see the folly of sending Harris to England. Orson Hyde, noting Harris's arrival in England, said that Harris was “afraid or ashamed of his profession as a Strangite...[and] he tells some of our brethren on whom he called, that he was of the same profession with themselves...[but the] very countenance of Harris will show to every spiritual-minded person who sees him, that the wrath of God is upon him.”<sup>40</sup> Harris, unfortunately had become a target for both sides, not only with the Latter-day Saints, but also with the

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<sup>38</sup> Lester Brooks to James M. Adams, January 12, 1847, Strang Collection, Yale, #54.

<sup>39</sup> “Strangism—Invitation to Imposters,” *Millennial Star* 8 (November 20, 1846): 137. For the assumption that Brooks accompanied Harris see footnote 46.

<sup>40</sup> “Notices,” *Millennial Star* 8 (November 15, 1846): 128.



Strangite missionaries who likewise soon saw that Harris needed to leave England because he was no longer promoting the cause.

When Martin Harris left America, he had planned to “go to Europe and remain there one year or more.”<sup>41</sup> His “one year” actually turned into less than two months. Having distanced himself from Strangism, Harris found his mission cut short. Lester Brooks wrote that if “Martin Harris ever knew any thing about the principles of the gospel he has lost that knowledge.” Brooks began to do all he could to stop Harris.<sup>42</sup>

Despite Harris’s possible change of heart, the LDS apostles did not relent in attacking Harris and his companions. A section of the *Millennial Star* entitled “Sketches of Notorious Characters” presented short descriptions of James Strang, Lester Brooks, and Martin Harris.<sup>43</sup> The first lines of Strang’s report began: “Successor of Sidney Rigdon, Judas Iscariot, Cain...& Co. Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of His Most Gracious Majesty, Lucifer.”<sup>44</sup> The other sketches were similar in tone. Brooks was accused of teaming up with Nelson Millet, who swindled the Ohio Saints out of money in a bogus speculation scheme.<sup>45</sup> The longest of the three sketches featured Harris as one who had “yielded to the spirit and temptation of the Devil a number of years ago...[being] filled with the rage and madness of a demon. One day he would be

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Harris, “Martin Harris Affidavits,” September 4, 1846, BYU Special Collections.

<sup>42</sup> Lester Brooks to Adams, February 10, 1847, *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (March 11, 1847): 36.

<sup>43</sup> “Sketches of Notorious Characters,” *Millennial Star* 8 (November 15, 1846): 123–126.

<sup>44</sup> “Sketches of Notorious Characters,” *Millennial Star* 8 (November 15, 1846): 123.

<sup>45</sup> “Sketches of Notorious Characters,” *Millennial Star* 8 (November 15, 1846): 124. In 1844 Simeon Carter wrote to Brigham Young and said that he “Saw Elder Brooks [in Kirtland. H]e was in buisness with Millit & others...Militt Seames to be a good friend to the Cause[.] I lea[rm] he intends to lend goods bye Brooks & then come on in the Spring himself [to Nauvoo].” Simeon Carter to Brigham Young,

one thing, and another day another thing.... his own unbridled tongue will soon show out specimens of folly enough to give any person a true index to the character of the man.”<sup>46</sup> Harris, testifying of the Book of Mormon, but not of any one religion, could not satisfy anyone in England.

Further trouble followed the three Strangites. The *Millennial Star*, with Hyde and Taylor as editors, publicly invited the Strangites to meet with them and presumably debate them.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, they sent the letter by Elder Thomas Brown, who left it with the Styles family, who were new Strangite converts recently excommunicated from the LDS Church and who were housing the Strangite missionaries.<sup>48</sup> The Strangite missionaries were not there at the time, but the LDS apostles sent Elder Isaac Brockbank before the meeting to see that Harris and his companions received the letter. The *Millennial Star* prints the episode: “[Brockbank] found that they had received [the letter] in due time, but declined improving the admirable opportunity which we offered them on this occasion.”<sup>49</sup> The LDS apostles, who in America had both refused a public meeting with Strang, offered the same to Strang’s missionaries, only to be refused themselves.<sup>50</sup>

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October 1, 1844, incoming correspondence of Brigham Young, LDS Archives. This business venture as well as the trust in Millet must have failed shortly thereafter.

<sup>46</sup> “Sketches of Notorious Characters,” *Millennial Star* 8 (November 15, 1846): 124. There is no clue as to why Capener escaped from the full force of the editors of the *Star*. Most likely the reason is that the three persons written about were known to one degree or another in the church, whereas Capener, newly baptized in Ohio away from the main body, was unknown to the Twelve Apostles, or many of the American missionaries or British members.

<sup>47</sup> “Strangism.—Invitation to Imposters,” 137–8, *Millennial Star* 8 (November 20, 1846): 137–138.

<sup>48</sup> See Liverpool Branch minutes, LDS Archives. “Deacon George Styles and wife Margaret” were excommunicated for following the “Imposter James J. Strang.”

<sup>49</sup> “Strangism—Invitations to Imposters,” *Millennial Star* 8 (November 20, 1846): 138.

Sometime during their sojourn in England, Lester Brooks wrote to James Strang about their effort in England: “L. Brooks (the apostle) writes from Liverpool the most cheering intelligence,” the editor of the *Zion’s Reveille* reported.

Although the ... *Brighamatic clique* had forestalled public opinion, and placed every possible obstacle in the way, many of the brethren stood ready to receive the truth.... The apostate[s]... could not so pervert the right ways of the Lord as to turn the saints from the true faith. The brethren in the Isle of Man have written Brother Brooks to visit them, the *interdiction* of ... John Taylor ... to the contrary notwithstanding. The church may soon expect interesting and highly important information from that quarter. Martin Harris and William Capner, from Ohio, are the travelling companions of Brother Brooks. May Prosperity crown their efforts.<sup>51</sup>

Once again Strang used his press not to accurately portray the standing of his church, but to propagate propaganda. Even before this announcement, Strang had written that the work in England was “progressing.”<sup>52</sup> The LDS apostles in England were quick to counter this report, and the Strangite missionaries would eventually see that “prosperity” would not “crown their efforts”—mainly due to the strained relationship that grew between Harris and Brooks.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Strang had asked John Taylor and Orson Hyde in a letter, previous to their mission to England, to publicly show “by what means [the apostles] are authorized to act as leaders” of the church. Taylor and Hyde quickly responded:

“Sir,—After Lucifer was cut off and thrust down to hell, we have no knowledge that God ever condescended to investigate the subject or right of authority with him. “Your case has been disposed of by the authorities of the church, and being satisfied with our own power and calling, we have no disposition to ask from whence yours came.” *Millennial Star* 8 (October 15, 1846): 94. The letters were also reprinted In the *Voree Herald* 1 (August 1846): [4].

<sup>51</sup> “News from England,” *Zion’s Reveille* 1 (December 1846): 3. Some things about this statement can neither be confirmed or denied. Someone very well could have written Brooks from the Isle of Man to have the Strangite missionaries come, and the missionaries could have received a warm welcome from many people. Only careful examining of all the possible LDS Church minutes in England could shed further conclusive light on this letter. However, had there been many who stood ready to “receive the truth,” there would have been more about it portrayed in more detail in the subsequent issues of the Strangite papers, which did not occur.

<sup>52</sup> “Progress of the Word,” *Voree Herald* 1 (September 1846): [3].

<sup>53</sup> “That imposter publishes in his paper, in America, that his cause is very prosperous in England. All the Saints here know that he lies; and if he will lie about things that we do perfectly know and

Another appearance of Harris (again no mention is made of the other companions) is important to discuss but impossible to place. Since only one source mentions this event, the incident is suspect. If the scene did in fact take place, the event might be the Birkenhead episode; however, it appears more likely as if this occurrence is distinct. Joseph Tuttle recalled that Martin Harris stopped at Tuttle's house both before and after traveling to England. Harris related to Tuttle that he was going to England to "destroy the work [of Mormonism] as far as everything pertaining to it except the connection [Harris] had with the Book of Mormon."<sup>54</sup> Tuttle tried to convince Harris otherwise, but Harris said his "mind was fully made up that he would deliver a course of lectures against Mormonism."<sup>55</sup> Tuttle continued that when Harris arrived in England, he

rented a hall; had large circulars posted, announcing that Martin Harris, one of the three special witnesses to the Book of Mormon, would ... lecture to the people, exposing Mormonism; and all were invited to come and hear.... "I remember," said Martin Harris [to Tuttle upon returning from England], "of announcing my subject to the people, and of feeling a pain at my heart when I saw that little handful of Saints sitting before me, and realized that what I had to say would be as death to them; but I know of nothing more, I can tell you of nothing which occurred until [after speaking] I found myself surrounded by those Saints, who, with streaming eyes and broken utterances, were thanking me for the glorious manner in which I had defended the faith, and the powerful testimony I had borne to the truth of the work."<sup>56</sup>

In attempting to "destroy the work" of Mormonism, it appears that Harris found that his testimony of the Book of Mormon confirmed the faith of the LDS Saints in England but

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understand, can we trust his word in things that we do not know?" "To the Presiding Elders Abroad: Greeting," *Millennial Star* 8 (November 15, 1846): 122. The next issue of the *Millennial Star* stated that if the Strangite trio would print some religious pamphlets, the tracts "might open the way for Harris, Brooks, and Co.,...to get a place to lay their heads, which they are now unable to do without money." "Intelligence and Miscellany: Or, Tidbits for Our America Readers," *Millennial Star* 8 (November 20, 1846): 140.

<sup>54</sup> No Author, "Ye are my Witnesses," *Autumn Leaves* 1 (April 1888): 182–83.

<sup>55</sup> No Author, "Ye are my Witnesses," *Autumn Leaves* 1 (April 1888): 183.

<sup>56</sup> No Author, "Ye are my Witnesses," *Autumn Leaves* 1 (April 1888): 183.

he failed in maintaining or promulgating the faith of Strangism. The importance of missionaries dedicated to Strangite doctrine is clearly seen by the lack of conviction in Harris.

### **End of Mission and Aftermath**

Lester Brooks and William Capener were, in the eyes of the Strangites, better missionaries than Harris in proclaiming Strang's succession, but neither prospered in their efforts. While in England, Harris's Strangite views apparently dissolved, and Brooks found that Harris, though a strong witness to the Book of Mormon, did not testify of the truth of Strangism. Brooks, and probably Capener, having had enough of Harris and the difficulty of controlling him, "saw fit to persuade Martin [Harris] to return to America, which [Harris] did by way of Liverpool."<sup>57</sup> Though Harris bore a powerful testimony of the Book of Mormon, a rift developed between his teachings and the Strangite doctrine. The distance between Brooks and Harris widened with Brooks claiming later that he did not "want to go to the heaven that ... Harris will lead men to."<sup>58</sup> Dissension among the missionary companionship wreaked havoc upon any possibilities of Strangite growth in England.

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<sup>57</sup> Gates and Hardy, 5. Another sketch of William Capener stated Harris's return thus: [L]ater on one of grandfather ... [Capener's] trips to London he was attracted by a crowd gathered on the street and went to see what it was all about and to his astonishment, there was Martin Harris standing preaching Mormonism. He looked very unkept and ragged and like he was hungry. Grandfather took him, fed him and bought him a new suit of clothes that he might look more respectable but grandfather chided him for going there without an appointment by the proper authority. (Taylor and Cluff, "Sketch of the Life of William Capener," 4. See note 18 for the possible inaccuracies in Capener's biography.

<sup>58</sup> Lester Brooks to Adams, February 10, 1847, *Zion's Reveille* 2 (March 11, 1847): 36.

On December 8, 1846, less than one and a half months after their first meeting in England, Harris and Brooks arrived back in New York.<sup>59</sup> Brooks reported via letter to James M. Adams, a leader in the Strangite church, and told of his difficulties in England. Brooks said he suffered from ill health the entire time in England, but he did not come back because of his health. “I thought it very necessary that Martin Harris leave that country,” he wrote, “and there was no other way[,] only for me to come with him.” Brooks continued to tell Adams in his letter that “The Brighamites have as many as fifty men ... in England...they teach that Brigham Young was appointed President of the Church by revalation.” Brooks also told Adams that “the work is well begun in that Country[.] Brother William Capner from Cleveland I left in Charge.”<sup>60</sup>

With Harris and Brooks now home from their mission, Strang naturally was concerned with continuing the little progress his movement made in England. Brooks wanted to return himself but certainly not with Harris, for Brooks and Harris had diverged in their views of Mormonism.<sup>61</sup> Brooks expressed a desire to have “Br Strang if possible Brother Greenhow Br. [John E.] Page [and] William Smith”<sup>62</sup> sent over to England. Several months later, at the Strangite annual conference, it was proposed that “Elders Greenhow, W[illiam] Smith, (patriarch,) and John E. Page (if his circumstances

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<sup>59</sup> For the notice of the arrival of their ship, see “Arrived,” *The New York Herald*, December 8, 1846, 4. For a list of passengers, including Brooks and Harris, see Passenger List of Vessels Arriving at New York 1820–1897, Family History Library, microfilm # 002311.

<sup>60</sup> Brooks to Adams, January 12, 1847, Strang Collection, Yale, #54. Strang summarizes this letter: “The [Brighamites] in England have proclaimed that Joseph ordained Brigham Young, prophet, seer, revelator and translator. So Writes Elder Brooks to Elder Adams.” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (January 28, 1847): 12. Quaipe, *Kingdom of Saint James*, 244, contains a transcription of this letter and has “Capner” as “Cosmer.” A close inspection of the original, however, proves that it is indeed “Capner.”

<sup>61</sup> Lester Brooks to Adams, February 10, 1847, *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (March 11, 1847): 36.

<sup>62</sup> Brooks to Adams, January 12, 1847, Strang Collection, Yale, #54.

will admit) go on a mission to England.”<sup>63</sup> Had these men gone to England, a significant presence in England might have been established. However, in the same newspaper announcing these appointments, Greenhow’s suspension of duties was also published, and he and William Smith shortly thereafter were excommunicated. Page was also excommunicated before going to England as a missionary.<sup>64</sup> Thus Strang’s English mission efforts were frustrated.

After his mission to England, Lester Brooks stayed with the Strangites for several years. His faithfulness came into question on several occasions, yet Brooks wrote several letters to Strangite leaders reaffirming his loyalty.<sup>65</sup> Having moved to New York by 1850, Brooks did not “perform his duty as an apostle” and at a conference on July 6, 1850, it was moved and seconded that “the Priesthood be taken from Lester Brooks and given to some one that will fill the calling.”<sup>66</sup> In 1878, Lester Brooks died while still living in New York.<sup>67</sup>

For an unknown reason, when William Capener returned from England, he had completely forsaken the Strangite movement and told Brigham Young he was prepared to

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<sup>63</sup> “The Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Church...” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (July 8, 1847): 68.

<sup>64</sup> For information of John E. Page, see John Quist, “John E. Page: Apostle of Uncertainty” 19–41, in John Sillito and Susan Staker, eds, *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002). See also “Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, at Voree,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (October 14, 1847): 122.

<sup>65</sup> In one letter, Brooks writes to Strang, “let me remain a member in the church[.] I <am> not a rebellious man.” Lester Brooks to James J. Strang, March 14, 1847, holograph, Strang Collection, Yale, #258. Brooks wrote to Adams: “You can assure Brother Strang of my friendship towards him, and that I shall do all that I have power to do to build up the church.” Lester Brooks to Adams, February 10, 1847, as found in the *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (March 11, 1847): 36.

<sup>66</sup> *A History of the Church at the City of James, Beaver Island, State of Michigan, U.S.A., 1847–1855*, reproduced by John J. Hajicek (Burlington, Wisc., 1992), [69].

go to Utah with his family. Young instructed him instead to stay in Ohio and provide lodging for the traveling Mormon elders going on missions, which he did with much enthusiasm.<sup>68</sup> Capener returned to Cleveland and lived among the Latter-day Saints there.<sup>69</sup> Capener eventually came to Utah in 1852, and died in Centerville, Utah, in 1894.<sup>70</sup>

As for Martin Harris, after his mission to England, he was still testifying of the Book of Mormon. Shortly after his return to America, Harris was found preaching the “origin of Mormonism” to a Strangite congregation.<sup>71</sup> The majority of the Strangite Church however, including Strang himself, agreed with Brooks’s comment that “the greatest blunder that ever I committed was in taking Harris to England.”<sup>72</sup> Harris possibly

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<sup>67</sup> Dean C. Jese, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith* 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–92), 2:530.

<sup>68</sup> “In 1847 they [the Capener family]...prepared to come west with the main body of the church, but Brigham Young requested them to remain in Cleveland for a while to assist the Saints.” Taylor and Cluff, 2. “Brigham Young counseled brother Capener to remain in Cleveland, Ohio. ‘Stay, Brother Capener,’ he said, ‘Make a home for the foreign immigrants and a place of comfort for the local missionaries.’” Gates and Hardy, 5. James Willard Bay, in his Journal mentions staying with Capener on many different occasions. See James Willard Bay Journal, LDS Archives 1850–1852. When or how he exactly was re-converted to the main body of the church is unknown, perhaps in England surrounded by LDS missionaries, or perhaps influenced by Martin Harris.

<sup>69</sup> He became the clerk for the branch and even helped the presiding elder confront Gladden Bishop, a man receiving revelations for the church, at Martin Harris’s about “his character of...faith” and “also about going west.” (Gladden Bishop to Brigham Young, July 30, 1851, LDS Archives.) James W. Bay stated: “I and Br Capner went [to] Br Harises [sic] saw gladen [sic] Bishop talked with him som[e] on the gathering of the s[a]ints.” (James W. Bay Journal, July 17, 1851, LDS Archives.)

<sup>70</sup> Taylor and Cluff, “Sketch of the Life of William Capener,” 3 and 4. Capener, according to the histories, kept a diary “in which is recorded in very detail of a trip to various cities of England in 1846.” Sarah Ada Capner, “As I Remember My Dear Old Father Wm. Capener,” *Daughters of the Utah Pioneers* (ca. 1950), 1. Despite a thorough search, this diary has yet to be found by the author.

<sup>71</sup> “We also had Martin Harris, here about two weeks since, and was very glad to see him. We had often heard of him, but until then we never had the pleasure of seeing him. This man, although he has been buffeted and scoffed at by the world made our hearts glad in consequence of the unwavering testimony which he bore with regard to the origin of Mormonism.” James Smith to Strang and Greenhow,” ca. January 1847, in *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (February 11, 1847): 19.

<sup>72</sup> Brooks to Strang, March 14, 1847, Strang Collection, Yale, #258. In a later reference to the Strangite British mission, the editor of the *Gospel Herald* said, “Lester Brooks and Martin Harris ... [went



was cut off from the Strangite Church, or he simply went his separate way. By early 1847, Lester Brooks had heard that Harris was “at Kirtland Doing all he can against [James Strang];”<sup>73</sup> however, Harris did not cease from exploring other churches. He joined William McLellin’s church for a time and then several other organizations. In each case he continued to preach the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.<sup>74</sup> Harris apparently dreamed of going to England again, but remained in Kirtland until his move to Utah.<sup>75</sup>

As a case study, the English mission highlights one of the many episodes between the Strangites and Brighamites as well as the difficulty members and missionaries had in maintaining their faith in Strang. With only two known converts, the mission to England was an almost total failure for the Strangites. But for historians, this sole English mission exemplifies two of the primary difficulties of Strangite missionary work in general—how the Brighamites worked to thwart the Strangite cause as well as the disillusionment of, and dissension among, its own members and missionaries. In the case of the Strangite English mission, the Strangites were unable to penetrate into the Mormon branches because of the Brighamites’ forceful response against their work combined with the lack of response of a Strangite English missionary, Martin Harris. Despite this outcome, Strang likely did not think that the 1846 mission to England would be the last and spoke

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on the mission together], the folly of the latter defeated their work.” “Obituary,” *Gospel Herald* 4 (July 14, 1849): 55.

<sup>73</sup> Brooks to Strang, March 14, 1847.

<sup>74</sup> The *Gospel Herald* published minutes of a meeting of a church in Kirtland. This meeting disfellowshipped McLellin in which Martin Harris was a central figure: “Conference convened at 4 o’clock, P.M., and organized by appointing Martin Harris to Preside.” *Gospel Herald* 4 (July 5, 1849): 74. For further information on Martin Harris see Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*; and Marquardt, “Martin Harris: The Kirtland Years, 1831–1870” 1–40.

<sup>75</sup> David B. Dille on his way to a mission to England in 1853, wrote of meeting Martin Harris: “[Harris] said to me, ‘Just let me go with you to England, I see you can preach... You do the preaching and

optimistically of future missions to England for years after. Yet, none of these hopes materialized and the Strangite missionary movement would continue to decline.

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I will bear testimony to the Book of Mormon and we will convert all England.[']” Reminiscence of David Buel Dille, LDS Archives.



## CHAPTER 5: IMPRESSIVE FAILURE

For many disaffected Mormons, the Strangite Church became the outlet to express their faith. Disgruntlement with Brigham Young and other leaders, combined with a convincing argument, converted thousands of Strangites. The Strangite publications, including the newspaper, as well as the strong missionary undertaking, provided the methods whereby Strangism spread. The missionary movement prospered because of the use of the existing LDS networks, the Mormon believers' desire for a prophet, and the strength and dedication of the missionaries. It failed because of the introduction of controversial doctrines, the development of internal dissension, and the counterassault of the LDS Church and other Mormon restorationist groups. Little question remains in present-day minds as to the organizational failure of the Strangite Church—Strangism diminished even before Strang's death. In concluding my study of the Strangite missionary movement, I will provide an overview of the organized, but unfulfilled missions, and survey the Strangite gathering to both Voree and Beaver Island. I will also look at the reasons the movement ultimately failed as well as give a brief historical sketch and summary of the Strangite Church's history to the present. Finally I will address the question of the Strangite missionary effort's lasting influence upon the Mormon community of believers.

### **Unfulfilled Missions**

The planned, yet unfulfilled missions highlights the optimism portrayed by the Strangite leaders. The Strangites' excitement over missionary work did not always garner results and in several conferences or in private letters, missions were discussed that never

came to fruition. Some of these missions were established but very few missionaries went or were sent, such as the England mission or the mission to the Camp of Israel. Other proposed missions had no known missionary presence and unfortunately these missions, such as the mission to India and the mission to Norway, are all but lost to historical records because usually only the reference to the mission's initial organization can be located.<sup>1</sup> These proposed but unfulfilled missions perhaps show that the Strangite members, who were not making a concerted effort in preaching the word were, in effect, voicing their silent opinions that for whatever reason they did not feel up to preaching on their own. An example of the effect of this is George J. Adams' desire to serve a mission to Russia. Because he was needed to preach in the United States due to the lack of member missionaries, he never would go.<sup>2</sup>

Of all the proposed missions, the mission to the Lamanites is a final example of what Strang and his missionaries hoped to accomplish through their preaching. Yet this mission also resulted in a lack of success and progress. The Lamanite mission is also important in understanding the context of why so many Strangites gathered to Beaver Island.

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<sup>1</sup> At an October 1846 conference, a mission to India was discussed. "A Record of the establishment and doings of the Stake of Zion called Voree in Wisconsin, made by the Scribes appointed to that office," 110, microfilm copy, Brigham Young University, original in private hands. Hereafter "Chronicles of Voree." The "Chronicles of Voree" is apparently a contemporary manuscript dated journal of the Strangite Church of unknown authorship. A transcription of this manuscript has been compiled by John J. Hajieck (Burlington, Wisconsin: J. J. Hajieck, 1992). At the Norwegian conference, Goodman Hougas was "ordained an Apostle to open the gospel to the nation of Norway." "Chronicles of Voree," 78. This mission never materialized although it was four years before Brigham Young would appoint a similar mission. See Keith A. Ereksion and Lloyd D. Newel, "'A Gathering Place for the Scandinavian People': Conversion, Retention, and Gathering in Norway, Illinois (1842–1849) *Mormon Historical Studies* 1 (Spring 2000): 21–36.

<sup>2</sup> See the certificate of George J. Adams as found in "Chronicles of Voree," 80 and *Voree Herald* 1 (October 1846): [2]. "The Russian mission...press[es] heavy upon my mind." George J. Adams to Strang, December 28, 1847, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 2 (January 20, 1848): 212.

When he published the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith presented to the world the history, as well as the sacred destiny, of the Native Americans. According to early Mormon thought, the Lamanites were a group descended from the Jews who traveled to America. The LDS Church organized a mission to the Native Americans as one of its first acts and Strang continued this reformist strain by attempting to spread Strangism among the Native Americans.<sup>3</sup>

Referring to the LDS Lamanite mission, Strang wrote in late 1846 that a Native American mission “*has already been pointed out by the finger of God*” and that “a large mission, fully provided, will be on the ground early next Spring.” Having talked with “representatives of fifteen tribes of Indians,” Strang found that they were more than willing to “receive the work.”<sup>4</sup> In an August 1846 vision, Strang saw a beautiful land, later to be revealed as Beaver Island, where Native Americans gathered together and “were taught words of truth and ways of holiness.” In the vision, Strang learned that at this place “God [shall] establish his people, even the sons of Joseph, on an everlasting foundation, and from hence shall the gospel of the kingdom go unto the tribes, and they shall not any more be despised, for the nations that set the foot upon their necks will be cut off that they be no more a people.”<sup>5</sup> Falling in with many religious groups of the day,

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<sup>3</sup> For the American religious context of proselytizing to Native Americans, see C. L. Higham, *Noble, Wretched, and Redeemable: Protestant Missionaries to the Indians in Canada and the United States, 1820-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000). For a history of the LDS attitude to the Native Americans, see Ronald W. Walker, “Seeking the ‘Remnant’: The Native American during the Joseph Smith Period,” *Journal of Mormon History* 19 (Spring 1993): 1–33.

Because Strang was basing so much of what he introduced on Joseph Smith’s positions, it could be that Strang introduced the Lamanite mission solely to appease or attract those who felt that the mission to the Native Americans should not have ceased.

<sup>4</sup> “Indian Mission,” *Voree Herald* 1 (October 1846): [2]. Emphasis in original.

<sup>5</sup> “Revelation,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (January 14, 1847): 1. In Mormon theology, the descendents of Joseph of Egypt were both the Native Americans as well as most members of the church who were to

Strang developed a pro-Native American stance. Along with a missionary zeal, Strang's editorial policy throughout his stay in Voree was often in favor of the Native Americans' rights and emphasized the lack of Anglo-American sympathy or understanding.<sup>6</sup>

Little is known of the actual establishment of the Lamanite mission but by December 1846, B. C. Elsworth was commissioned as a leader of the mission.<sup>7</sup> Like pioneer reform movements of the day, Strang felt part of the mission consisted of enlightening the Native Americans to the ways of the white man. A school was set up on Beaver Island to follow Joseph Smith's goal of "intellectual...and moral improvement."<sup>8</sup> According to Strang, the Lamanite mission was "the most important of any in which the church has ever engaged."<sup>9</sup> Strang stated two reasons for its establishment: "First to give the Indians the arts of civilization; second, to get lands at such price that we can furnish a farm to every man according as he shall need, though he may be himself entirely poor."<sup>10</sup> This statement highlights that Strang had another motive besides converting the Native Americans to the gospel and hoped to establish an area where Strangites could gather, live, and sustain themselves and perhaps the entire Strangite Church.

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spread the gospel to the world. See Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> For example, in a letter from James Blakeslee to Francis Cooper, dated April 27, 1849, Blakeslee decries the selling of alcohol to Native Americans. This letter was printed in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (May 17, 1849): 34–35.

<sup>7</sup> "Indian Mission," *Voree Herald* 1 (December 1846): [2].

<sup>8</sup> "Indian Mission," *Voree Herald* 1 (October 1846): [2]. The Strangites "have a new project on foot, which they call the "Indian Mission," it is understood to be the establishment of a mission school, and a large colony or "stake" of their church, on ["]Big Beaver Island," in Lake Michigan." *Cincinnati Commercial* as found in the *Zion's Reveille* 2 (January 7, 1847): 4.

<sup>9</sup> "Indian Mission," *Zion's Reveille* 2 (January 14, 1847): 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Zion's Reveille* 2 (March 11, 1847): 32.

By the summer of 1847, Strang stated that “the gospel is now going to the Lamanites with success.”<sup>11</sup> In late summer, two apostles, Jehiel Savage and Ebenezer Page, took charge of the Beaver Island stake and the “operation of the Indian Mission.”<sup>12</sup> In a letter to the church printed in June 1848, Strang wrote that the “Mission House is nearly ready for use, and we expect soon to open a school for the instruction of both white and Indian children.” Yet things seemed to have not progressed as well as Strang would have liked: “Notwithstanding...the unfaithfulness and wickedness of one or two who have abandoned this great work, [Strang and the other leaders] fe[lt] well assured that the work here [was] going on to success in truth and righteousness.” Yet the letter also, “earnestly admonish[ed the Saints] to come and help us, and enjoy the fruit of [their] labor.”<sup>13</sup> While the work did not show the results that Strang may have desired, this did not stop individuals from preaching to Native Americans wherever they found themselves.

Very little is recorded concerning the Lamanite mission after the Saints moved to Beaver Island. While the Native Americans still had contact with the Strangites on Beaver Island, it seems to have resembled the settler/Native American relationships that spanned the frontier during this time period of American history.<sup>14</sup> Yet this ardor of the individual Strangites towards the Lamanite mission in the 1840s characterizes Strangism in general: an often-intense zeal on the part of the Church and the leadership with little

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<sup>11</sup> “Conference at Beaver Island,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (August 19, 1847): 90.

<sup>12</sup> *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (September 16, 1847): 108.

<sup>13</sup> James J. Strang and others to the church, June 26, [sic] 1848, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 3 (June 15, 1848): 49.



success to show for it. Yet those Strangites from all over the Strangite field who chose to gather with the church showed their true dedication.

### **Gathering to Voree and Beaver Island**

The LDS Church preached gathering from the beginning and Strang also believed that the physical act of gathering with the saints was an important step in one's spiritual wellbeing. According to the Strangites, Joseph Smith established the city of Voree in his Letter of Appointment to James J. Strang. Strang however, suppressed the appointment of Voree as a gathering place so land speculators would not flock to the area.<sup>15</sup> Yet, by the first issue of the newspaper, the gathering to Voree was not only mentioned but also encouraged. In Strang's first epistle to the church, he wrote the following: "Let the oppressed flee for safety unto Voree and let the gathering of the people be there."<sup>16</sup>

As gathering was a sign of true conversion to Strangism, a study of the growth at Voree provides a good test case of how seriously the various Strangites took their religion. Voree never became a large town while the Strangites were there. In the spring of 1847 there were about five hundred people in Voree.<sup>17</sup> This is not even close to the number of Mormons who gathered with Smith to Nauvoo, or even Kirtland for that matter. The lack of gathering is not surprising considering that some members joined

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<sup>14</sup> Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island*, 67–70, 125–28, 154–56, and 171–73 and Quaife, *Kingdom of St. James*, 82–83, 149–151, and 259–260.

<sup>15</sup> Land speculation followed the Mormons almost as much as did persecution. The nineteenth century was a time of intense money-making off land. For instance, see Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1965): 115–143.

<sup>16</sup> Strang to the church, *Voree Herald* 1 (January 1846): [3].

<sup>17</sup> John M. Bernhisel to Brigham Young, November 4, 1846, Brigham Young collection, LDS Archives. See also *New Era* 1 (January 1847): [3].

Strang because they refused to follow Brigham Young west. Some did not see the import of gathering to one place. For example, the members at the St. Clair conference expressed their concerns: “*Resolved....[t]hat this Conference do cordially concur with the measures of our beloved President wherein we are licensed to choose our location in reference to the stakes of Zion; that is to say, those who feel disposed to go to Voree may go and do well, and again, those who feel disposed to go to Beaver Island shall also do well; and those who feel at present not disposed to gather at either of the above mentioned places or stakes, are at liberty to remain in one or other of the numerous districts which may yet be organized in the United States.*”<sup>18</sup> Strang was quick to answer this apparent concession of his own policy. “I...have read with painful interest your...resolution.... [I]f any one has ever understood me to teach that the law of gathering was not binding on *all the SAINTS*, I beg him to be undeceived from this moment.”<sup>19</sup>

Strang knew how difficult moving would be for the Saints. He explained that the gathering was not to be done in haste and financial loss, but it still needed to be done. Yet the church was willing to help people gather. George J. Adams wrote that “[i]f a man is a farmer, and wishes to take up a good farm of 40 or 80 or 160 acres of land, he can do so without money or price [on Beaver Island], and own it by gift and promise of God.”<sup>20</sup> According to the Strangite leadership, there was little excuse not to gather with the Saints.

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<sup>18</sup> “Conference at St. Clair,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (August 26, 1847): 94.

<sup>19</sup> “Epistle,” August 8, 1847, as found in the *Zion’s Reveille* 2 (August 26, 184): 94. Emphasis in original.

<sup>20</sup> George J. Adams to Editor of the Gospel Herald, July 18, 1849, as found in the *Gospel Herald* 4 (August 23, 1849): 103.

Besides Voree, Strang appointed another place of gathering already discussed: Beaver Island on Lake Michigan. Beaver Island exemplified two doctrines close to Strang, including gathering and the Lamanite mission. Yet Strang must have been disappointed with the outcome of both. As has been said, the Lamanite mission produced few converts and likely only a fraction of the hoped for Native Americans came to Beaver Island. Yet the move to Beaver Island shifted Strangism into another chapter of their history. The years of the Voree-centered Strangite Church, i.e. 1846 through 1850, were a time of missionary work and gathering, but the years 1850 through 1856, the Beaver Island period of the Strangite Church, saw Strangism turn inward, focus on settlement, and turn to the rule of law, both in Michigan and in the royal order established by Strang. By 1850 the members' and leaders' fervor and excitement of gathering to Beaver Island distracted the missionaries' message. Strangites gathering to Beaver Island did not participate much in missionary activity as it was a primary source of immigration as has already been explained in the introduction. Strangites began to focus on moving to their new home rather than spreading the gospel message across the county and thus the largest missionary effort the Strangite Church would see was over.

### **Concluding the History of the Strangites**

The Strangite Church's move to Beaver Island effectively shut down Voree as a gathering place, slowed the full missionary effort, and began Strang's career as a colonizer. As has been mentioned, tensions with their non-Strangite neighbors heightened and when Strang was shot and killed by a disaffected member in 1856, the Strangites were forced to move from Beaver Island. Without a leader or successor (Strang refused to

appoint one, although he lay on his deathbed for some time), the Strangites were effectively scattered.

Several notable members carried on the Strangite cause, including Warren Post, Lorenzo Dow Hickey, and, most importantly, Wingfield Watson. As the people of the United States expanded west, so too did the Strangites. Locations such as Colorado and New Mexico saw concentrations of Strangites. However, the succeeding generations of Strangites continued to suffer from internal dissension and slow growth. In the last several decades, there has been a movement to gather again to Voree, and there is presently a church house in which to worship. Currently, there are less than one hundred members throughout the United States—a far cry from the thousands of Strangites attracted to the message of their prophet James J. Strang.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Importance of the Strangite Missionary Movement**

Ultimately Strang failed where his predecessor succeeded in terms of gaining converts. Previous historical thought focused on Strang's apparent ineptitude or unethical behavior for his religious miscarriage—explanations that now prove unconvincing, or at least incomplete. While some of Strang's decision and policy-making skills lacked at times, he still reached a wide spectrum of individuals with diverse convictions of Mormonism. Despite not achieving a more lasting presence, Strangism's efforts at missionary work garnered many converts. The number of converts can be viewed as an inconsequential attempt on the part of several dozen missionaries or, in comparison to

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<sup>21</sup> No one has seriously study has addressed Strangism after Strang's death. The work of Vickie Speek (forthcoming) promises to address much of the church's experience both during and after Strang's death.

Mormon numbers, can be a striking display of charismatic leadership and preaching. But Strang may have overemphasized his claim as successor in his effort to gain members looking for another Joseph Smith. When many of these members discovered that Strang did not live up to Smith they had to reevaluate their decision to follow Strang. Eventually, Strang had to represent his religion for what it stood for—not for what it most resembled. The Strangites had to view Strang as a prophet and king, instead as an heir to a martyr.

In Alexis de Tocqueville’s momentous commentary on Jacksonian-era American culture, he opined that two things threaten the existence of religion in general: schisms and indifference.<sup>22</sup> Although the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints struggled throughout its history with the former, the early LDS members showed and lived their conviction to Mormonism. Those LDS members who joined and preached for Strangism felt the desire to spread the Mormon gospel no matter who the leader was. Jason W. Briggs, who joined Strang, and then went on to join several other Mormon groups, explained this phenomenon: “although we were under different leaders we still claimed that we belo[n]ged to the original church, and as soon as we learned that any of our leaders were teaching false doctrine that was not taught in the original church we left it, and that was the reason we left Strang and [William] Smith, because we considered that they were teaching false doctrine, or doctrines that were not authorized in the original church, It did not make any difference to us, for we still considered that we were in the original church although under these different leaders.”<sup>23</sup> Latter-day Saints such as

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<sup>22</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, trans. Gerald E. Bevan (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 349.

Briggs, were converted to Joseph Smith and Mormonism, and many of them believed that Latter-day Saintism transcended all the other –isms or –ites. Thus Strangite missionary work was not only an indicator of a religion benefiting from the faith and hope of its main audience, nor was it just an example of a group of people or an individual who failed to maintain the momentum. Strangism was characterized by a group of people who sought a way to express and preach their convictions in a belief that superceded Strangism. Strangites truly gleaned the Mormon harvest.

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<sup>23</sup> Testimony of Jason W. Briggs, United States, Court of Appeals (8th Circuit) Testimony (Temple Lot Case), LDS Archives, 609.



## APPENDIX

**Chart 1: Strangite Missionaries 1846–1850\***

Missionaries	Areas Served or Called	Years
George Adams	Ohio, New England, Philadelphia, Maryland, Wisconsin, Boston	1846–1850
James Adams	Illinois, Beaver Island, Missouri	1846–1847
Hazen Aldrich	Ohio	1846
Charles Appleton	Maryland, Virginia, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, New England	1849
Samuel P. Bacon	New York	1847–1849
James Blakeslee	Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio, New York	1847–1850
Thomas Braidwood	Philadelphia, New York, Virginia	1849–1850
Jason W. Briggs	Wisconsin, New York	1849–1850
Lester Brooks	Ohio, England, New York	1846–1847
Hiram P. Brown	Wisconsin, New York	1846–1850
Brownson, George	Canada, New York, Michigan	1846–1850
William Capener	Ohio, England	1846
Calvin B. Childs	New York	1847
John S. Comstock	Michigan, Indiana	1847–1848
Henry H. Deam	Wisconsin	1848
Benjamin C. Ellsworth	New York, Lamanite Mission	1846–1847
Elvira Field (Charles J. Douglass)	New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia	1849–1850
Lucien R. Foster	New York	1846, 1849
Amos B. Fuller	Voree, Chicago	1846–1847
John C. Gaylord	Voree	1846–1847
Samuel Graham	Michigan, Massachusetts, New York	1847–1850
John Greenhow	Voree, England (called)	1846–1847
James M. Greig	Ohio, Beaver Island	1849–1850
Zenos H. Gurley	Canada, New York	1849–1850
Martin Harris	Ohio, England	1846
Peter Hess	Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York	1846–1849
Lorenzo D. Hickey	Michigan, New York, New England	1847, 1849–1850
Albert N. Hosmer	Baltimore, New York	1849



William E. Marks	Voree, Illinois	1846, 1849
William McLellin	Ohio	1846
George Miller	Voree	1846
Reuben Miller	Nauvoo, Illinois, Voree	1846
R. Frederick Mills	Voree, Beaver Island	1847
Reuben Nichols	Illinois, New York	1846–1850
Uriah C. Nickerson	Voree, Iowa,	1846–1848
Ebenezer Page	New York, Ohio, Massachusetts	1846–1850
John E. Page	Nauvoo, Illinois, England (called), Wisconsin,	1846–1849
Ira J. Patten	New York, Voree	1846–1849
Stephen Post	Pennsylvania	1846–1848
Warren Post	Pennsylvania, Voree	1846
Jehiel Savage	Illinois, Canada, Michigan, Lamanite Mission	1846–1850
Samuel Shaw	Beaver Island	1848–1850
John Shippy	Iowa, Canada	1846–1850
Aaron Smith	Kirtland, Wisconsin	1846
James Smith	Pittsburgh	1847–1850
Moses Smith	Wisconsin, Nauvoo, Kirtland, England (called)	1846–1848
William Smith	Nauvoo, Kirtland, Voree, Ohio	1846–1847
James J. Strang	Voree, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, New York, Massachusetts, New England	1846–1850
Jacob Syfrit	Philadelphia	1846–1848
I. C. Van Deusen	New York, Philadelphia, New Jersey	1848–1849
Gilbert Watson	Voree	1846–1850
Benjamin Wright	Wisconsin, Iowa, Voree, Illinois	1846–1850
Phineas Wright	Wisconsin, Illinois, Voree, Canada	1846–1850

\*Sources: *Gospel Herald*, *Zion's Reveille*, *Voree Herald*, and Frank J. Young, *Strangite Mormons: A Finding Aid*.

**Chart 2: Eastern Strangite Membership in Large Cities 1846–1850  
As Found in Primary Sources\***

Major Cities	1846	1847	1848	1849	1850	LDS #s
Baltimore	X [0–10?]	X [0–5?]	X [0–5?]	abt. 40 [50–75]	B [80–130]	No known branch
Boston, MA	B [30–40?]	B [30–40?]	B [20–30?]	S [40–50?]	S [30–40?]	793 [1843]
Pittsburgh, PA	S [30–40]	20–30 [20–30]	B [10–20]	S [10–20]	? [5–10]	Branch org. 1842
Philadelphia, PA	abt 30 [30–50]	B [20–40]	abt 50 [50–75]	B [60–90]	B [75–125]	334 [1844]
New York City, NY	B [10–30?]	S [10–30?]	S [10–20?]	S [20–40?]	S [30–50?]	40? [1844]

**KEY:** ? = Likely but not mentioned.

X = Likely no significant Strangite presence.

M = Strangite missionaries presence, Strangite presence and number unknown.

S = Strangite presence known, but no branch or number known.

B = Strangite branch known, but no number known.

[30–40] = Best estimate of numbers.

**NOTE:** When there is a Strangite presence (S), it is understood that there is likely a missionary presence as well (M).

This chart illustrates several things: first, the lack of numbers stated in the primary documents; second, and more significantly, the trend of missionary work. For example, by looking at Philadelphia, it is seen that the branch went from about 30 members to about 50 members from 1846–1848, yet the estimations indicate that there was a drop in numbers in 1847. Where numbers are not extant, trends can still be traced. Boston, for example, has a branch for the first two years, but then only has a Strangite presence. The Boston Branch may still have existed, but internal difficulties also could have just left them with a small group of members.

**Sources:** *Gospel Herald*, *Zion’s Reveille*, *Voree Herald*, Yale Collection, and Wilford Woodruff to Brigham Young, February 15, 1849, LDS Archives.



**Map 1: Michigan and Wisconsin**



Source: Clipart.com

**Voree, Wisconsin**

**Beaver Island, Michigan**

**Map 2: Strangite Missionary Work 1846–1850**



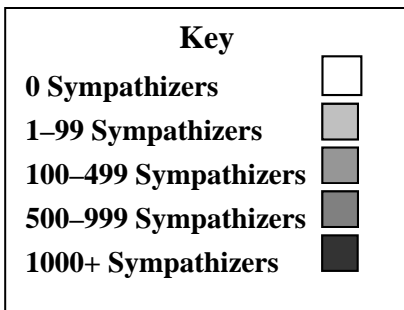
**Eastern United States**



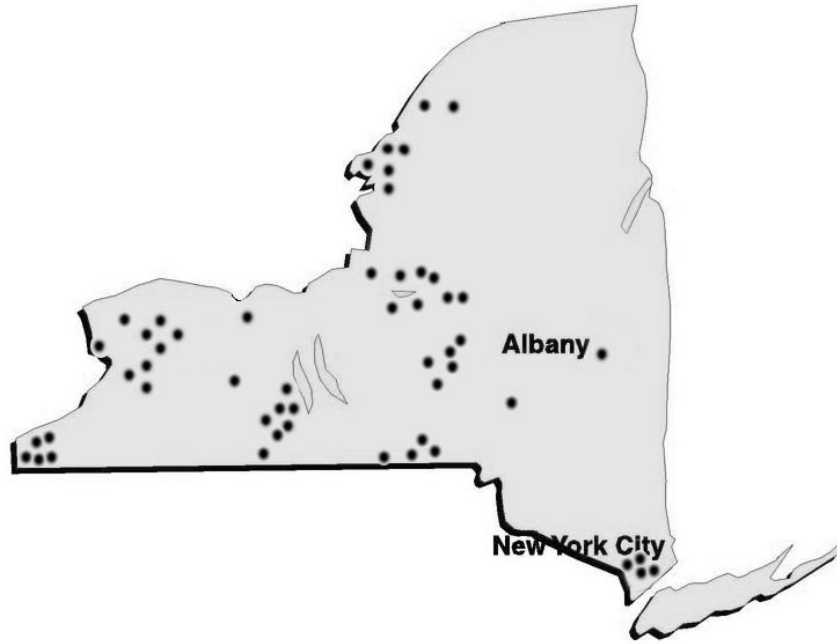
**Eastern Canada**



**England**



**Map 3: New York State as an Example of Strangite Penetration**



**Each dot represents an area of known Strangite missionary presence.**



## Historiography of Strangite Sources

Nineteenth and early twentieth century Strangite history, much like Mormon history, was characterized by attacks and apologetics, mostly focusing on the truth-claims of James J. Strang as a prophet. Strang wrote several pamphlets defending his position and providing a history of the Strangite Church, the most notable being *Ancient and Modern Michilimackinac including an account of the controversy between Mackinac and the Mormons*, (Saint James: Cooper and Chidester, 1854), which explains the position of the Mormons and the Gentiles on Beaver Island and the persecution of the Strangites. Strang also published a letter describing and defending his claim to the presidency of the Mormon Church, which was later published by Strang in pamphlet form: James J. Strang, *The Prophetic Controversy. A Letter From James J. Strang to Mrs. Corey. Saint James, Sept. 26, 1854*, (Saint James: Cooper & Chidester, 1856). Strang-supporter George J. Adams wrote a missionary tract called *A True History of the Rise of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints...Their Persecution, and Martyrdom of Their Prophet, Joseph Smith, and the Appointment of His Successor James J. Strang*, (Baltimore: Hoffman, Printer, 1849?), which strongly defends Strang's position. After Strang was killed, other members continued to defend Strang's position, most notably Wingfield Watson. George Miller, a prominent leader under Joseph Smith wrote a series of letters that appeared in the *Northern Islander*, which were compiled by Wingfield Watson and published in the early twentieth century: George Miller, *Correspondence of Bishop George Miller with the Northern Islander: From His First Acquaintance with Mormonism up to Near the Close of his Life*, (Compiled by Wingfield Watson. Burlington, WI: the compiler, 1916). Watson also published *An Open Letter to B. H.*



*Roberts, Salt Lake City, Utah*, (Burlington, Wisconsin: author, 1896?), which defended Strang's position as Smith's successor. A debate between Watson and W. W. Blair, an RLDS Church member, concerning Strang's leadership, was published in 1892 as *The Watson-Blair Debate which took place at East Jordan, Mich., commencing Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup> and ending Oct. 26<sup>th</sup>, 1891* (Clifford, Ontario: Printed at the Glad Tidings Office, 1892).

Another debate Watson took up with the RLDS Church was printed as *Prophetic Controversy, No. 3; or the Even Balances by which Isaac Scott, Chancy Loomis, and the Founders of the Reorganization Are Weighted and Found Wanting. In Two Chapters*, (Boyer, Michigan?, 1889).

Published works attacking Strang's history and position were also published both before and after his death. Reuben Miller was one such author: *James J. Strang, Weighed in the Balance of Truth, and Found Wanting* (Burlington, Wisconsin, 1846) and *Truth Shall Prevail* (Burlington, Wisconsin, 1847). Both brought interested readers a different story concerning Strang and his church. Collin Preberton published *Strangism Exposed to the World* (n.d. 1846?), which alienated some Strangite members. A son of Strang, Clement J. Strang wrote, "Why I Am Not a Strangite," *Michigan History* 26 (1942): 457–79, describing his dissatisfaction of the faith his father founded.

Most early history dealing with Strangism was couched in biographies of Strang—and there was a large interest in Strang at the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century. Charles K. Backus, "Strang, J. J., an American King, with portrait." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 64 (March 1882): 553–59, began the renewed interest in Strang. Much of the history continued with historical societies. George C. Bates, "The Beaver Island Prophet," *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society* 32 (1902):

225–35; “Michigan Monarchy: Sketch of James J. Strang and the Mormon Kingdom of Beaver Island,” *Historical Collections, Collections and Researches Made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society*, 18 (1891): 628–638; and Alexander St. Barnard, “The Murder of King Strang,” *Historical Collections, Collections and Researches Made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society* 18 (1891): 626–27, all prompted further research into Strang and his church. Reed, H. V. “The Mormon Community in Wisconsin,” *Chicago Illustrated Journal*, (January, 1873): 21–22; A. N. Somers, “An American King,” *National Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly* 14 (1901): 115–21 and Edward F. Waltrous, “James Jesse Strang; “King James” of Beaver Island.” *Century Magazine* 41 (1901–1902): 685–89 also spread the interest of Strang and his church as these were more wide-spread publications.

Henry Legler produced the first scholarly works on the Strangite Church at the turn of the twentieth century: “The King of Beaver Island,” *Chautauquan: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to the Promotion of True Culture* 31 (May, 1900): 133–37 and “A Moses of the Mormons,” *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society* 32 (1903): 180–223. Legler was not affiliated with any branch of the LDS Church, and thus did not have the need to defend or ridicule Strang and his church. His work on Strang and Strangism was an important step in Strangite historiography as he remained neutral (or at least for his time period) on issues regarding Strang. Legler also used two important and knowledgeable sources: Charles Strang, James Strang’s son and caretaker of many of Strang’s papers, and Wingfield Watson, the defender and Strangite Church leader during the later part of the nineteenth century. Many of Legler’s working notes are extant, and are held at the Historical Society of Wisconsin. Yet in “A Moses Among the Mormons,”

Legler does not cast a favorable light on Strang's religiosity—describing Strang as a dreamer with great ambitions. This view of Strang set the stage for later work on Strangism, describing Strang as a scheming and ambitious person who imitated Joseph Smith in his church leadership.

Milo M. Quaife's *The Kingdom of Saint James: A Narrative of the Mormons*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930) was a watershed in Strangite historiography. He set the standard for a biography of Strang that has yet to be matched. He agreed with Legler in describing Strang as an intelligent and ambitious, yet misleading man who went to great lengths to gain a following. Quaife's book used hundreds of then-newly-discovered documents. These primary sources were invaluable in reconstructing Strang's life, and Quaife's recovery of them to the historical world was one of the most important contributions to Strangite history.

One book-length study soon following Quaife's work is Oscar W. Riegel, *Crown of Glory: The Life of James J. Strang Moses of the Mormons*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935). Riegel's work is lacking entirely of footnotes or endnotes, and only has a brief section on sources. His work is peppered with fictional assumptions of what characters were thinking and especially how Strang reacted mentally to situations. Riegel's work does provide a loose narrative of Strang's life and therefore can give a reader an overview of Strang's actions and accomplishments, but a work of historical scholarship it is not.

With the advent of the "New-Mormon history" or the professionalization of history, LDS scholars began to address Strang without the polemics that had previously divided scholarship. However, the majority of this scholarship was still focused on Strang

and his life. Klaus J. Hansen, drawing upon his work of politics, the Council of Fifty, and Mormonism wrote “The Making of King Strang: A Re-examination,” *Michigan History* 46 (1962): 201–19, which discusses the influence of Joseph Smith’s political aspirations and compares them to Strang. Charles Eberstadt, in his “A Letter that Founded a Kingdom.” *Autograph Collectors’ Journal* (October 1950), has addressed the question of the Letter of Appointment, coming to the conclusion that it was in fact a forgery. No work has added to his conclusions since and almost all studies have come to the same conclusion. Lawrence Foster, “James J. Strang: The Prophet Who Failed,” *Church History* 50 (June 1981): 182–92 discusses the prospect of Strang’s position as a prophet and his failure. Robert P. Weeks’ several works on Strang emphasize his interest in utopianistic communities, including “For His Was the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory...Briefly.” *American Heritage* 21 (June 1970): 4–7, 78–86; *King Strang: A Biography of James Jesse Strang*, 1971; “The Kingdom of St. James and Nineteenth Century American Utopianism.” *The Journal of Beaver Island History* 1 (1976): 8–25; and “A Utopian Kingdom in the American Grain.” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 61 (Autumn 1977): 3–20. Unfortunately, Weeks gets some details wrong, and is lacking in his depth of Strangite, and perhaps more importantly, Mormon history. Community of Christ affiliated scholar William Russell has also written on Strang, providing a brief essay of Strang’s life in “King James Strang: Joseph Smith’s Successor?” in *Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History*, ed. F. Mark McKiernan et al., 231–56, 1973 (reprinted in John Sillito and Susan Staker, *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters*, [Salt Lake City, Signature Books, 2002], 131–158). Russell argues that Strang was divided in his personality between being ambitious and driven and having a desire to

serve humanity selflessly. Robert Bruce Flanders provides a very brief survey of Strangism in “An Introduction to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Strangite),” *Restoration* 1(July 1982): 6–7, but obviously there is little detail. Another work that has gained some attention is Russel B. Nye, *A Baker’s Dozen: Thirteen Unusual Americans*, (East Lansing, 1956) in which a chapter was devoted to Strang. The interest in Strang has not subsided in the popular mind either. In 1995, Bill Gilbert wrote in the popular magazine, *Smithsonian*, “America’s Only King Made Beaver Island His Promised Land.” *Smithsonian* 26 (August 1995): 84–92.

Journalist Roger Van Noord produced the latest book-length approach to Strangism, *King of Beaver Island* (University of Illinois Press, 1988). Like many large works on Strangism, Van Noord’s work mainly concerns the life and actions of Strang himself. *King of Beaver Island* filled a need, but was only partly effective, using several new sources but offering few new insights. The weakest aspect of Van Noord’s work is his lack of Mormon and American context, something essential in understanding Strangism. Also, Van Noord, like many before him, did not focus on the missionary effort throughout the church, an inexcusable gap for a subtopic in Mormon history.

Defenders of Strang have also surfaced in the historiography in the last several years. William Shepard, Donna Falk, Thelma Lewis, eds., *James J. Strang: Teaching of a Mormon Prophet*, (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strangites): Wisconsin?, 1977) have brought much of the teachings of Strang into one positive source. Doyle C. Fitzpatrick, *The King Strang Story A Vindication of James J. Strang, the Beaver Island Mormon King*, (Lansing, Michigan: National Heritage, 1970), produced the most promising book on Strang since the 1930s. However, in all views, Fitzpatrick failed in his

attempt and produced a poor biography ignoring much of the earlier scholarship in an attempt to defend Strang at all costs. Much more successful is the introduction by Strang's descendent Mark A. Strang in *The Diary of James J. Strang*, ed. by Mark A. Strang, (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press, 1961). Mark A. Strang argues that although James J. Strang may have been viewed as a failure, historians should begin to look at the impressive things that he was able to accomplish.

There have been topical works on Strangism that have made their appearance in the last several decades that have added to our understanding of Strangism. Unfortunately, missionary work has not been one of those topics. Polygamy has been the most written of topic of Strangism to date. Milo M. Quaife wrote "Polygamy at Beaver Island," *Michigan History Magazine* 5 (July–October 1921): 333–55; David Rich Lewis in his "'For Life, the Resurrection, and the Life Everlasting': James J. Strang and Strangite Mormon Polygamy, 1849–1856," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 67 (Summer 1983): 274–91, discusses the practice of Strangite polygamy as does Lawrence Foster, in his work *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiences of the Nineteenth Century*, 1984 in which he includes as one of his chapters a revised version of his paper, "James J. Strang: The Prophet Who Failed," with an emphasis added on Strangism's polygamist practices. However, the best work on Strangite polygamy is John Quist, "Polygamy among James Strang and His Followers," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 31–48. Quist analyzes the effect of the introduction of polygamy to Strangism and its members.

Other topics have been written on Strangism. Newel G. Brighurst's "Forgotten Mormon Perspectives: Slavery, Race and the Black Man as Issues among Non-Utah

Latter-day Saints, 1844–1873” *Michigan History* 61 (Winter 1977): 352–70, is the best, and quite surprisingly, the only work on race in Strangism. Sarah McKinley and Helen Collar discuss relations between Strangite and Native Americans on Beaver Island in “Chief Peaine and the Mormons,” *The Journal of Beaver Island History* 3 (1988): 19–30. Several works have discussed Strangite Church publications, including Henry E. Legler, “King Strang’s Press.” *Literary Collector* 8 (June 1904): 33–40 and John Cumming, “The Quest for the Mormon Press.” *The Journal of Beaver Island History*. 3 (1988): 31–35.

The Strangites’ time on Beaver Island has also proven to be a popular topic for historians, largely with the help of a semi-scholarly journal, *Journal of Beaver Island History*. Unfortunately, attention has not equated to quality. No one work gives an in-depth study on the Strangites on Beaver Island. The closest approach comes from the two book-length studies of Strang, Quaife’s *Kingdom of St. James* and Van Noord’s *King of Beaver Island*. But they again lack because it is a Strang-centered work, and not a Strangite-centered work. Some works on Beaver Island include Margaret S. Cronyn and John Kenny, *The Saga of Beaver Island*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Braun & Brumfield, 1958; Helen Collar, “Mormon Land Policy on Beaver Island,” *Michigan History* 56 (1972): 87–118; Helen Collar, “The Pre-Mormon Settlement on Beaver Island, 1837–1852,” *Journal of Beaver Island History* 2 (1980): 9–28; Helen Collar, “Who Profited from the Expulsion of the Mormons?” *The Journal of Beaver Island History* 3 (1988): 37–50; Shirley Gladish, “Beaver Islanders, 1848 to 1856: The Ordinary among the Extraordinary,” *The Journal of Beaver Island History* 4 (1998): 13–37; Bradley S. Hayden, “King Strang and the Beaver Island Mormons” *Chronicle: The Semi-Annual*

*Magazine of the Historical Society of Michigan* 27 no. 1/2 (1993): 2–7, 22; Carl A. Norberg, “Lost Treasure of the Beaver Island Mormon Colony,” *Inland Seas* 43 (1987): 188–193; and Richard F. Palmer, ed., “The Mormon Pirates of Beaver Island,” *Inland Seas* 54 (1998): 195–198.

There have also been specific biographies of leading Strangites that have provided important—but limited—detail of Strangism. Some of these works include, Peter Amann, “Prophet in Zion: The Saga of George J. Adams,” *New England Quarterly* 37 (December 1964): 477–500; Reed M. Holmes, *Dreamers of Zion: Joseph Smith and George J. Adams, Conviction, Leadership and Israel’s Renewal*, (Sussex Academic Press: Brighton, England, 2003); H. Michael Marquardt, “Martin Harris: The Kirtland Years, 1831–1870,” *Dialogue* 35 (2002): 1–40; John Cumming, “Lorenzo Dow Hickey: The Last of the Twelve,” *Michigan History* 50 (March 1966): 50–75; Richard E. Bennett, “A Samaritan had passed by: George Miller-Mormon Bishop, Trailblazer, and Brigham Young Antagonist,” *Illinois Historical Journal* 82 (1989): 2–16; Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Reuben Miller, Recorder of Oliver Cowdery’s Reaffirmations,” *BYU Studies* 8 (1968): 277–93; John Quist, “John E. Page: An Apostle of Uncertainty,” *Journal of Mormon History* 12 (1985): 53–68; Jerry L. Gorden, “Warren Post: Beaver Islander Too,” *The Journal of Beaver Island History* 5 (2002): 1–36; Craig L. Foster, “From Temple Mormon to Anti-Mormon: The Ambivalent Odyssey of Increase Van Dusen.” *Dialogue* 27 (1994): 275–286; John Cumming, “Wingfield Watson: The Loyal Disciple of James J. Strang,” *Michigan History* 47 (December 1963): 312–20;

Important reference works have facilitated study of Strangite history. The first and foremost is Dale L. Morgan, “A Bibliography of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day



Saints (Strangite),” *Western Humanities Review* 5 (1950) 43–109 and his manuscript work, “Calendar of Strang Manuscripts” at the Beineke Library at Yale University, especially his introduction. Frank J. Young’s *Strangite Mormons: A Finding Aid*, (Vancouver: published by the Author, 1996) provides an invaluable reference tool to many individuals who may have joined Strang. Some other helps include Steven L. Shields, *The Latter Day Saint Churches: An Annotated Bibliography*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987); Barry Christopher Noonan, *Index to the Gospel Herald Published at Voree, Racine County, Wisconsin January 1846–June 6, 185*, (Madison: The Wisconsin State Genealogical Society, Inc. 1988); Max J. Evans, “The Stephen Post Collection,” *BYU Studies* 14 (Autumn 1973): 100–103; T. F. Murphy, *Religious Bodies: 1936*, vol. 2 part 2 Denominations K to Z, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office. 1941): 836–839.

Several authors of LDS works have also written on the Strangites in greater detail than most, and have, for the space they have provided, produced good and concise histories. Some of these works include Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846–1852: “And Should We Die . . .”* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) and D. Michael Quinn, “The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844,” *BYU Studies* 16 (Winter 1976): 187–233. But, understandably, Strangism is not their entire focus, and neither of the above authors provides an in-depth study of Strangites. Works on Strangism must break from the past obsession with Strang and turn to focus on the Strangites and their church, addressing various topics, including missionary work, on the Strangite Church.

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