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## JOSEPH SMITH, SR., FAMILY REUNION

10/6/72

Dear President Lee,

It has now been a little over a month since the Joseph Smith, Sr., Family Reunion was held in Nauvoo, Illinois. Between 250 and 300 people gathered in Nauvoo, August 18th and 19th, for that historic occasion.

Among the many descendants of Joseph Smith, Sr., and his wife, Lucy Mack Smith, attending the reunion were President W. Wallace Smith of the Reorganized Church and his brother Reginald A. Smith. They are the last surviving grandsons of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Two grandchildren of the Patriarch Hyrum Smith also attended the reunion; Willard R. Smith and Edith Smith Patrick. It might be of interest to note that Edith Patrick and Reginald Smith, in addition to being great-grandchildren of Joseph Smith, Sr., are also related through marriage. A grandmother of Edith Patrick's deceased husband and a grandmother of Reginald Smith's wife, Allegra, were sisters.

Four grandchildren of Samuel Harrison Smith, the brother of Joseph Smith, Jr., and Hyrum Smith, attended the reunion; J. Winter Smith, David Winter Smith, Heman Tuttle Smith and Sue Smith Beatie. In addition to the many other descendants of Joseph Smith, Jr., Hyrum Smith and Samuel Harrison Smith attending the reunion, there were also descendants of their sisters, Katherine Smith Salisbury and Lucy Smith Milliken, in attendance. The others present included descendants of the George A. Smith and Mack Families, The Reorganized Church Historian, members of the press and friends of the family.

Forty participants at the reunion traveled by bus from Salt Lake City to Nauvoo and back again. Among those forty travelers were descendants of Joseph Smith, Jr., Hyrum Smith and Samuel Harrison Smith. With the exception of one great-granddaughter of Samuel Harrison Smith, Laura Smith Powers of the Reorganized Church, all the bus passengers were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My wife Toni and I were numbered among these forty travelers.

The Prophet Joseph Smith's great-great-granddaughter, Gracia Denning, made this bus trek while she was nine months pregnant. Seven hours after the bus arrived back in Salt Lake City from Nauvoo, August 23rd at 3:10AM, she gave birth to a son she named David Joseph Denning; the first descendant of the Prophet Joseph ever born in Utah.

Our bus load of weary travelers arrived in Nauvoo Thursday, August 17th, at about 11:30PM. With the exception of a few, we all stayed in



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the Nauvoo House on the banks of the Mississippi River. When we stepped off the bus we were greeted by several young teenagers, members of the Reorganized Church, who escorted our party into the Nauvoo House. The women stayed on the second floor and the men on the third. I watched in awe as the oldsters of our bus mingled with the youngsters who acted as our hosts and I had good feelings about the first mixing of members of the two churches who would meet under somewhat more formal circumstances later.

As we entered the historic old Nauvoo House I recalled that it was here in 1879 that Emma Hale Smith Bidamon, the former wife of Joseph the Prophet, departed this life. It was also here, in this same home, in 1909 that Alexander Hale Smith, the son of Joseph the Prophet and Emma Hale and great-grandfather of Gracia Denning, passed away.

During the time our group was settling down for the evening I took a walk alone, sometime after midnight, up Water Street to the Mansion House. Here, at the last home the Prophet Joseph was to know in his lifetime, I bowed my head and prayed to our Heavenly Father for guidance and blessings pertaining to the reunion that would follow the next two days. When I returned to the Nauvoo House, my wife Toni, Gracia Denning and Margo Wright, a vocalist and guitarist friend of my wife, were waiting for me. We went across the street to the old Smith Homestead and stood beside the graves of Joseph, Hyrum and Emma in the little graveyard that houses the remains of some 25 others, including Joseph Smith, Sr., and Lucy Mack Smith. Here, quietly and reverently, we offered up additional prayers concerning the reunion. Afterward, I asked Margo to sing "The Unknown Grave", a song about the burial place of the Prophet Joseph written by his son, David Hyrum Smith. She sang beautifully and her song seemed to glide through the dark warm air into the night with spiritual meaning. Later, we returned to the Nauvoo House; the girls to the second floor and I to the third and my bed near a little window from which I could look out on the recently visited graveyard and the Mississippi beyond.

The next morning by 9:00AM I set up the registration table in the Nauvoo Visitors Center. From 9:00AM until 11:00AM my wife Toni, Gracia and Margo, greeted and signed in members of the Smith Family who had arrived for the reunion. There was much excitement as relatives and friends greeted one another.

There were five reunion meetings held in historic Nauvoo during the family gathering. It was my privilege to act as Master of Ceremonies at all of these sessions.



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The first meeting began at 11:00AM in the L.D.S. Branch Chapel. Joseph Byron Smith, a great-grandson of Samuel Harrison Smith, gave the opening prayer. The song "America" was sung by the congregation with Lorene Smith, wife of Lynn E. Smith, a great-grandson of Joseph Smith, Jr. leading the singing and Erma Smith, wife of Joseph Byron Smith, providing the organ accompaniment. Those attending the opening meeting were greeted by Willard R. Smith, representing the descendants of Hyrum, Lynn E. Smith, representing the descendants of the Prophet Joseph, and Joseph Byron Smith, representing the descendants of Samuel. Lynn E. Smith, during his welcoming remarks, said, "... in behalf of the Smiths who remained in Nauvoo, I welcome all of the Smiths back to this community and humbly say, What has kept you so long?" Following the welcoming speeches a vocal duet, "Edelweiss" was performed by Margo Wright and Gracia Denning. After some announcements the girls returned and sang "Bless This House." Following this selection I showed a 45 minute slide-film presentation, "Seeds of Greatness", that I had produced concerning the Smith Family. At the conclusion of this film there were tears in the eyes of many. Lynn E. Smith concluded with prayer at 1:00PM.

The second meeting opened at 3:00PM in the L.D.S. Branch Chapel. Richard P. Howard, the R.L.D.S. Historian, gave the opening prayer. Margo Wright sang "I Believe" to her own guitar accompaniment. David Hyrum Smith, the last son of the Prophet Joseph, was the subject of the paper that was then read by F. Mark McKiernan, the R.L.D.S. Nauvoo Research Historian. Margo and Gracia followed his talk with a vocal rendering of the hymn written by David Hyrum; "The Unknown Grave." Jaynann M. Payne, an L.D.S. mother of 12 and B.Y.U. Lecturer, was the next speaker. She gave a historical-dramatic rendering of the life of Lucy Mack Smith. By the end of Jaynann Payne's talk I had received a request from Lynn E. Smith and his wife, Lorene, that the congregation sing "Come, Come Ye Saints" as a closing song. I felt it would be well to comply with their request but being somewhat skeptical to introduce a song to the reunion delegates that might be considered a "Utah" Mormon song, I remember nervously saying, "Well half of you know it and half of you don't." There was a laugh from the audience preceding the song, after I announced we would sing it in this manner, and when I heard the familiar words in the song "All is well, All is well", I too was able to smile. Joseph Fielding Patrick, a great-grandson of Hyrum Smith, gave the closing prayer at 5:00PM. Following this meeting pictures of the reunion delegates were taken on the west lawn of L.D.S. Chapel.

At 7:00PM the third reunion meeting was held in one of the Nauvoo Visitors Center theatres. Joseph S. Nelson, a great-grandson of Hyrum, gave the opening prayer. Maughan W. McMurdie, a Professor of Music at



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Western Illinois University, provided a special musical program followed by the featured evening speaker, Richard L. Anderson, a Professor of Religion at B.Y.U. and an eminent church historian. Richard Anderson spoke and gave a slide program on Joseph Smith, Sr., and his New England heritage. Following his presentation I called upon President W. Wallace Smith, who had just arrived that evening, to address us. President Smith spoke to us a few minutes and expressed his best wishes to all of us on the occasion of the first reunion of the family. A great-grandson of Katherine Smith Salisbury, Warren L. Van Dine, gave the closing prayer at 8:30PM.

Before this evening meeting took place, about 6:30PM, I was in the lobby of the Visitors Center when President W. Wallace Smith and his wife, Rosamond, arrived. Among those to whom I introduced President Smith, two stand out in my mind; Willard R. Smith and Edith Smith Patrick. I brought "Uncle" Willard over to President Smith and introduced them to each other. I remember "Uncle" Willard saying to President Smith as he warmly shook his hand, "Oh, I'm so very glad to meet you." "Aunt" Edith also greeted President Smith warmly and introduced herself as the sister of our late Joseph Fielding Smith. I'm sure President Smith noticed the remarkable resemblance between "Aunt" Edith and her deceased brother. While "Uncle" Willard and "Aunt" Edith conversed with President Smith, their 2nd cousin, I was thinking that it was there in Nauvoo, 112 years ago, that "Uncle" Willard and "Aunt" Edith's father, Joseph F. Smith, in company with his cousin, Samuel H.B. Smith, paid a visit to their cousins; Joseph Smith III Frederick Granger Williams Smith, Alexander Hale Smith and David Hyrum Smith. Joseph F. Smith and Samuel H.B. Smith also visited with the mother of these boys, their Aunt Emma Hale Smith Bidamon, the widow of the Propheet Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith III was the father of President W. Wallace Smith and Joseph Smith III's younger brother, Alexander Hale Smith, was the great-grandfather of Gracia Denning. David Hyrum Smith, their youngest brother, was the grandfather of Lynn E. Smith. Joseph F. Smith and Samuel H.B. Smith were on their way to a mission in England in 1860 when they stopped in Nauvoo for this visit with their kinsmen. To make these thoughts more poignant, President Smith was soon in conversation with "Uncle" J. Winter Smith, "Uncle" David Winter Smith and "Aunt" Sue Smith Beatie, the children of this very same Samuel H.B. Smith who accompanied his cousin, Joseph F. Smith, on that trek through Nauvoo so long, and yet such a short time, ago.

Following the evening meeting in the Visitors Center, I called together a special committee to make plans and recommendations for future family reunions. This committee consisted of Joseph Byron Smith and his son Allen, Lynn E. Smith and his wife Lorene, Joseph Fielding Patrick, a



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son of Edith Patrick, Dorothy Dean, a great-granddaughter of Katherine Salisbury, and Gracia Denning. We concurred on having a similar reunion next year on August 17th and 18th and thereafter on a biennial basis. It was further agreed that I should present this recommendation to the reunion participants the next day for their approval. It was also decided that I should state that an exact location for the reunion would be decided on later by the committee but that I might mention Independence, Missouri, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Kirtland, Ohio as possible future locations.

The next morning at 10:00AM we assembled again in the L.D.S. Branch Chapel. I might mention that the reason we did not hold any of our meetings in the R.L.D.S. Chapel, a few blocks away, was that I was approached the day before this by local representatives of the R.L.D.S. Church attending the reunion. They asked me if we might hold all of our meetings in the L.D.S. Chapel as we had air-conditioning and they did not. Clinton F. Larson, my good friend and Professor of English at B.Y.U., gave the opening prayer. After the prayer I called upon J. Winter Smith, the oldest member of the Smith Family present at age 91, to speak to us for a few minutes. He shared with us his observations of the reunion and following his remarks Margo Wright sang the "Mormon Hard Times Song." At the close of her song I presented for a reunion vote the special committee recommendation from the previous night. After a little discussion relative to holding the next reunion in Independence Missouri, during which time President Wallace Smith rose to set his position straight regarding use of the R.L.D.S. Auditorium and explain why he was reticent to schedule it for a family function without consulting others, I called for the vote. I explained that we were voting to have a reunion next year, somewhere, on August 17th and 18th and thereafter on a biennial basis. I further stated that the Reunion Committee would make location decisions at a later time. The recommendation was carried unanimously. Truman G. Madsen, a Professor of Religion and Chairman of The Department of Mormon Studies at B.Y.U., delivered a moving talk on Emma Hale Smith following the vote. At the conclusion of Truman's talk I saw redened eyes in the audience, including those of President Wallace Smith and Lynn Smith. Margo Wright sang "Joseph", as sung by Emma Smith in my play "Porter Rockwell", as a closing song. Reginald A. Smith dismissed us with prayer at 12:noon.

At 2:00PM the final meeting was held in the L.D.S. Branch Chapel. Before the meeting started a telegram had arrived for President Wallace Smith and I took it over to him. As I handed it to him I gave him the message that you had asked me to give to him President Lee; that I was to take him by the hand and say that President Lee sends him his warmest personal regards. Having complied with your wishes, President Smith said to



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me, "I'm sure that your President was sincere in his wish because you're the second person who has related it to me. Dr. Don Smith has given me this same message." Later, President Smith sent the telegram I had given him up to me on the stand to read to everyone. It was a wish for success to the Smith Family Reunion from the Alexander Hale Smith Family in Australia. After this I read a letter delivered to Joseph Byron Smith from "... the 5,000 members of the Jesse N. Smith Family" wishing us the very best on the occasion of our first reunion. H.G. "Bud" Fredrick, Jr., an R.L.D.S. Pastor and great-great-grandson of Joseph Smith, Jr., from Orlando, Florida, gave the opening prayer. Margo Wright sang "The Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief" and Lynn E. Smith spoke on the daughters of Joseph Smith, Sr. He was followed by Paul M. Edwards, a great-great-grandson of the Prophet Joseph and a professor at Graceland College, who spoke on the sons of Joseph Smith, Sr. At the conclusion of these talks I announced that the congregation would sing "God Be With You Till We Meet Again" to bring the reunion to a close. Just then, a man got up out of the audience and made his way up to the stand. I found out later that it was a Brother Harris, a great-grandson of Hyrum. But, not knowing what to expect at this time, I was somewhat un-nerved as to what might follow. He stood beside me and said that speaking not only for himself, but everyone present, he wanted to thank me for my part in making the reunion possible. Lynn Smith came up to my left side and putting his arm around me said that his great-grandparents, Joseph and Emma, had adopted twins and speaking for himself, in behalf of the family, the Smith's were hereby adopting me. To this statement the assembly seemed to concur and I could only respond with tears of gratitude.

President Lee, a very special thing happened at the close of this last meeting and I would like to share it with you. During the singing of our closing song, "God Be With You Till We Meet Again", I distinctly heard a voice in my mind say, "Joseph is here!" I gazed out at the audience during the closing words of the song and I saw that there were tears in the eyes of everyone. After the song Willard R. Smith came up out of the audience to the stand to offer the closing prayer. Before his prayer he turned to Lynn Smith who was still standing next to me and said, "I'm glad you said what you did about Buddy. I was about to say the same thing." During "Uncle" Willard's closing prayer he gave everyone the feeling that he was actually talking with our Heavenly Father. He gave thanks for the opportunity of the family gathering and he expressed the hope, on behalf of everyone, that the reunions would continue. The reunion officially ended at 4:00PM.

Following the close of the last meeting, President Wallace Smith, in shirt sleeves, walked down to the front of the chapel. He shook hands



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with me and thanked me for a job well done. I sincerely appreciated this gesture and the manner in which it was given.

For the benefit of those who had not been present at the first reunion meeting I put the slide-film of "Seeds of Greatness" back on and for nearly an hour the family and friends either watched the film or visited with each other in the chapel or on the grounds.

According to the schedule for our bus party, our bus arrived in the chapel parking lot at 4:00PM. Our group had planned to go to Carthage and visit the Carthage Jail. We invited Lynn Smith and his wife, Lorene, to join us as our group had grown very fond of them during the two day reunion. They accepted and we all boarded the bus together. We also invited Truman G. Madson and Ellis Craig, a grandson of Lot Smith, to accompany us and they accepted. We had a marvelous spiritual experience while visiting the jail as well as the warm fellowship during the trip to and from Carthage with our guests. I took some pictures of "Uncle" Willard Smith, "Uncle" J. Smith and Lynn Smith at the Carthage Jail. It was at this jail that "Uncle Willard's grandfather and Lynn Smith's great-grandfather were martyred 128 years ago. It was also here, while trying to get to his brothers in this jail, that "Uncle" J.'s grandfather, Samuel Harrison Smith, was to suffer the effects of a violent horseback chase. He died a month later in Nauvoo after helping to bring the bodies of his martyred brothers home.

Our bus returned us to Nauvoo for dinner about 7:00PM. The bus party ate at the Nauvoo Hotel. At our table was my wife Toni, Truman Madsen, Ellis Craig, Gracia Denning, Lynn Smith, Lorene Smith and Naomi Larson, the wife of Clinton F. Larson. During the course of the conversation at our table, Truman Madsen asked Lynn Smith what he thought about the two churches, we represented, coming together. Lynn Smith replied that ten years ago he would not have believed that a reunion of the Smith Family would have been possible. After more conversation I asked Lynn Smith if he was not suppose to be the Patriarch of The Reorganized Church. Lynn's wife Lorene replied, "Yes, and the man that holds that position now is not even a member of the family." Lynn Smith explained, "Lineal descent in our church is not the fundamental doctrine it was in the early days of the R.L.D.S. Church." Lorene told us that Israel Smith, the former R.L.D.S. President, had named her husband, both orally and in writing, to be the Church Patriarch. After Israel's death his brother, W. Wallace Smith, had disregarded this calling and appointed Roy Chevelle, a convert, to that position. When Lorene Smith had finished this statement, her husband Lynn said, "Now mama", in quiet understanding tones. Lorene replied, "Well I'm sorry but it's the truth!" Lynn Smith again replied, "... now mama."

After dinner, our party boarded our bus and returned across town



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to the L.D.S. parking lot. Here we bid adieu to Lynn and Lorene Smith and after an exchange of hugs and kisses we returned to our separate overnight accommodations for our final night's sleep in the City of Joseph.

Early the next morning, Sunday, August 20th, our bus, with everyone aboard, set out for Independence, Missouri, via Adam-ondi-Ahman, Far West and the Liberty Jail. While at Far West, we visited the temple site. It was here we came upon a small monument to commemorate the birth of Joseph F. Smith, the father of Willard R. Smith and Edith Patrick. The marker recorded that the birth of Joseph F. Smith had occurred a few hundred yards west on November 13th, 1838. I was aware of another significant birth that had happened here and I informed those present of that occasion. It was here, also within a few hundred yards, on June 2nd, 1838, that Alexander Hale Smith, the son of the Prophet Joseph and Emma Hale and the great-grand father of Gracia Denning, was born. The parents have both been quoted as saying that a real "Halestorm" was in progress the day Alexander was born. Later, at the Liberty Jail, keen feelings of compassion were aroused among the descendants of Joseph and Hyrum as we toured the jail and saw the presentation depicting their incarceration there for so many months during the winter of 1838-1839.

After our evening's rest in Independence, Missouri, we rose early and had our luggage out, according to schedule, by 8:00AM to meet our bus. At 9:00AM we were still waiting for our bus when the telephone rang back in my motel room. I rushed back into my room to answer it. It was our bus driver who, somewhat in a state of confusion, explained the delay. It seems that at 8:00AM our driver went to the R.L.D.S. Auditorium, the headquarters of the Reorganized Church that we were scheduled to tour. For some reason our driver expected to pick us up there instead of our motel. When he did not see us out in front of the building he went in looking for us. He asked everyone he could find inside, "Where's the family of Joseph Smith that wants to go back to Salt Lake City?" Meeting only puzzled looks and shocked responses he decided to check with his home office. They referred him to my telephone number at the motel.

Before noon we toured our information bureau in Independence. We also walked across the street to the R.L.D.S. Auditorium for a quick tour and courtesy call. We were greeted by President W. Wallace Smith who visited with us for quite awhile and had his picture taken with many. After the body of our group began the tour of the building with our guide, Mrs. Majel Smith, I fell back to thank President Smith for pausing to have his picture taken by so many of us, so many times. He replied, "Really Buddy, I don't mind having my picture taken."

We bid President Smith farewell and, after our tour of the building,





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bid Independence itself farewell. After we were all once again aboard our bus, and as it sped down the highway, west, towards Salt Lake City, I recalled an incident that had happened that morning when President Smith arrived to greet us. He was literally tackled by Joseph Byron Smith out of his excitement to see him. President Smith stands 6'6" and Joseph Byron about 5'6". While these two were struggling to regain their balance on the slick marble floor, "Uncle" Willard Smith approached President Smith and said, "This is the way I greet my friends", and reaching up he kissed his cousin firmly in the tradition of his family. All in all, I felt that this observation served to symbolize the effect of the Smith Family Reunion on President W. Wallace Smith in general; he had been engulfed by the love of his kinsmen and it had left him somewhat off balance.

During the closing hours of our bus trip home, I had a conversation with my friend Clinton F. Larson. In the course of that conversation Clinton made some significant remarks about the Reorganized Church, based on his observations during the reunion. He said that the Reorganized Church had outlived their need for their "reorganization." He also said that because they are no longer a part of us that they are in danger of being taken over by the liberal element within them. As I reflected upon the candid remarks that Lynn E. Smith had made to Truman Madsen, myself and others just two nights previous to this time, I felt that Clinton Larson's observations were correct. Further, Clinton explained that under some circumstances today you can be a polygamist and a member of the R.L.D.S. Church but this is not true of membership in our church. He commented that this issue had been the chief reason for discord among our two churches for over a hundred years but now the situation had reversed itself. In summarizing he stated that due to the obvious success of the L.D.S. family organizations, because of temple work, and the recognition of the Lord himself as the actual "head" of the church, the Reorganized Church should come and be one with us. We agreed that positive programs, such as the reunion we had just experienced, would serve as the kind of "means" needed to bring such a reconciliation about.

Later, on the bus, I talked with Joseph Fielding Patrick. We shared the opinion that the bringing together of the Smith Family is the first step in bringing together the L.D.S. and R.L.D.S. churches; especially since a division in the family is chiefly responsible for the R.L.D.S. Church today. Joseph Patrick told me that his uncle, Joseph Fielding Smith, spoke at his missionary farewell some years ago and stated that he hoped his nephew was going out to make friends of the church, not converts. He said his uncle went on to say that friends of the church would convert themselves. Both Joseph Patrick and I felt that this policy had been carried out during the Smith gathering in Nauvoo.

I want to assure you, President Lee, of the success of the reunion.



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It made us all feel wonderful. We laughed together, we wept together and we prayed together and all the while within us we had the testimony of a burning bosom; that assurance that we were engaged in the work of God. I know I speak not only for myself but for the hundreds of others who experienced with me "... the joy of being together."

There are some in the R.L.D.S. Church who remain suspicious of the motives behind the bringing about of the Smith Family Reunion. I was questioned at the Utah State Fair last September by two local officers of the Reorganized Church who asked me if the Utah Church hadn't sponsored the reunion in order to obtain names for our "Baptism For The Dead" work. I smiled and answered, "There's no need to worry about that; all that work was done a long time ago." One of my inquisitioners returned a smile and I heard the other one mutter as I left them, "I've always suspected as much."

I do most sincerely believe that the person responsible for the Smith reunion was the Prophet Joseph himself. I believe that he has gone to the Savior himself in behalf of his family. I further believe that the Savior has interceded in behalf of Joseph's family out of his love and concern for them. I hold these beliefs President Lee because of those matters I have discussed with you in person; those matters of an extremely miraculous and sacred nature that have involved several others, including members of the family themselves.

Sometime soon President Lee, at your convenience, I would like to show you and your wife the slide-film "Seeds of Greatness" that I produced for the reunion last August. I may, at that time, also be better able to relate some of the reunion occurrences in person.

I look forward to hearing from you President Lee and the opportunity of seeing you once again. Thank you sincerely for your encouragement and prayers. May the Lord bless you all ways, according to your needs.

Please accept my warmest personal regards, love and sustaining vote always,

Buddy Youngreen,  
An Elder in Israel

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