

REASSESSING JOSEPH SMITH JR.'S FORMAL EDUCATION

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How much formal schooling did Joseph Smith obtain in his youth and early adulthood? Such a question might appear innocuous, but it is fraught with implications that extend beyond a simple historical account of his educational opportunities. The amount of Smith's formal education, or rather the various assumptions surrounding his presumed lack of it, has been enlisted by followers and detractors alike in order to frame Smith's life within the narratives of divinely-inspired prophet or deceptive fraud, perhaps most acutely in the context of attacking or defending the origin and authenticity of the Book of Mormon.¹ As

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1. Orsamus Turner's skeptical statement (1851) connects Smith's purported lack of education with one of several authorship theories: "there is no foundation for the statement that their [the Smith family's] original manuscript was written by a Mr. Spaulding, of Ohio . . . but the book itself is without doubt, a production of the Smith family, aided by Oliver Cowdery" (Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents: Volume 3* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998], 50–51). (Subsequent citations will use the abbreviation "EMD," followed by volume and page numbers.) By portraying Smith as being "a dull scholar," "lazy, indolent," "illiterate," and "possessed of less than ordinary intellect," skeptics could attribute the existence of the Book of Mormon to some alternative method or source. For "a dull scholar," see Christopher Stafford's statement, and for "lazy,

Dennis Wright and Geoffrey Wright observe, “Ironically, both perspectives use the Prophet’s lack of formal education to strengthen their respective views.”² Any attempt to isolate the amount of time Joseph may have actually spent in classrooms thus presents a challenge with deeper implications.

Furthermore, with the passage of time and the development of traditions, such representations become further entangled in cultural identities, transforming historical speculations into theological propositions that approach canonical certainties, interweaving Smith’s humble origins with the cosmologies of either faith or disbelief. These depictions, when further coupled with fragmentary historical records, complicate the process of excavating below the weighted representations in order to determine with any precision what might have actually occurred. Given such circumstances, this essay attempts to step back from the entangled layers of critical and apologetic modes to reexamine the historical sources and the assumptions underlying competing claims. By retracing the locations and educational practices of the places where Smith lived in his youth and early adulthood, this review will seek to demonstrate that Smith’s formal education was more extensive than passing speculations and shared cultural memory might suggest.

Before embarking on an analysis of Joseph’s life in relation to his formal educational opportunities (i.e., time spent in a formal school setting, as opposed to the various and common avenues of informal educational practices in early nineteenth-century America), I want to

indolent,” see the Manchester Residents Group Statement, EMD 2:194, 18. For “illiterate,” see Pomeroy Tucker’s account, and for “possessed of less than ordinary intellect,” see Orsamus Turner’s account, EMD 3:93, 49.

2. Dennis A. Wright and Geoffrey A. Wright, “The New England Common School Experience of Joseph Smith Jr., 1810–16,” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: The New England States*, edited by Donald Q. Cannon and Arnold K. Garr, Regional Studies Series (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 237.

begin by exploring two important issues that will help to contextualize the interpretation of the incomplete array of historical references that address Joseph's formal education: first, the role of education in the Smith family home, and second, an analysis of some of the more commonly known statements regarding Joseph's limited education and abilities.

Smith Family Culture and the Role of Education

A review of Joseph Smith Jr.'s common school education necessarily begins with the importance of education within the Smith family home. Though this essay focuses on Joseph's formal schooling, as opposed to domestic education and self-improvement, the role of family culture nevertheless constitutes the foundation of early nineteenth-century educational practices. For instance, that his father, Joseph Sr., had been a professional schoolteacher was certainly one of Joseph Jr.'s greatest advantages.³ So, too, was having a mother, Lucy, who had been raised in a household where her own mother, Lydia Mack, was also a schoolteacher.⁴ Indeed, Lydia may well have influenced Joseph Jr. directly. Lydia and Solomon Mack lived in Tunbridge, Vermont, where they were in constant close reach of their grandchildren, from the time of Joseph Jr.'s birth in 1805 to the Smith family's move to Lebanon, New Hampshire, in either 1811 or 1812.⁵

3. According to Lucy, Joseph Sr. was already teaching school in Sharon, Vermont, when Joseph Jr. was born. See EMD 1:253. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 19.

4. A. Gary Anderson indicates that Lydia was "a young schoolteacher and a member of the Congregational church. She was well educated and from a well-to-do religious family. . . . Lydia took charge of both the secular and religious education of their eight children" (A. Gary Anderson, "Smith Family Ancestors," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow [New York: Macmillan, 1992], 1361).

5. Lydia and Solomon moved to Tunbridge, Vermont, in 1799. See Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), 29.

Education was deemed no less important on Joseph's paternal side of the family. In April of 1799, Asael Smith, Joseph Jr.'s grandfather, who also lived in Tunbridge, Vermont, wrote a message to his entire family, admonishing them all to live good lives. In his treatise, Asael urged his family to educate their children: "Make it your chiefest work to bring them up in the ways of virtue, that they may be useful in their generations. Give them, if possible, a good education."⁶ Asael's message came two months after the birth of Alvin Smith, Joseph Jr.'s oldest brother, and may have been inspired by the new generation of grandchildren. Moreover, apart from parents and grandparents, older siblings got involved in the education of younger brothers and sisters.⁷ After his training at the prestigious Moor's Charity School, Hyrum, Joseph's second oldest brother, would have been expected to share in the education of his younger siblings. Indeed, Hyrum's commitment

Although the Smith family moved several times from the year of Joseph Jr.'s birth in 1805 to either 1811 or 1812, "all the moves were in a tiny circle around Tunbridge, Royalton, and Sharon, immediately adjoining towns, and probably never involved a distance of more than five or six miles" (Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 19). Thus, the Smith children's education in this period would have occurred under the watchful eye of Lydia. For a crucial and detailed historical account of the Smith and Mack families living in this region, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003, 25–37.

6. Quoted in Hill, *Joseph Smith*, 23 (spelling and punctuation modernized).

7. For instance, Gordon and Gordon describe the childhood education of Almira Hart Lincoln, who grew up in a home where "the oldest children always tutored the youngest, turning the home into a school" (Edward E. Gordon and Elaine H. Gordon, *Literacy in America: Historic Journey and Contemporary Solutions* [Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003], 83). Education simultaneously involved the inculcation of good moral character "through the processes of imitation and explanation, with adults and older siblings modeling attitudes and behavior and youngsters purposely or inadvertently absorbing them" (Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783–1876* [New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980], 373).

to education would result in his becoming both a school trustee and schoolteacher in Palmyra.⁸

This family concern for education thus created a dynamic where the parents and the older children were actively involved in the entire family's instruction. Lucy would recall how she and her husband acted "together in the education and instruction of our children,"⁹ and John Stafford (1805–1904), a neighbor to the Smiths in Manchester, New York, remembered how the Smiths "had school in their house, and studied the Bible."¹⁰ Ever since the colonial period, the task of teaching children how to read and write typically began at home, and the responsibility belonged chiefly to the mother.¹¹ And even though Joseph Sr. had been a schoolteacher, the cultural expectation of raising educated, moral, upright children would have primarily fallen to Lucy. As education historian Lawrence Cremin observes, "the new literature on child-rearing involved the vastly expanded responsibilities of the mother," placing special emphasis on raising virtuous and principled citizens.¹² Thus,

8. Richard Behrens claims that following Joseph Jr.'s leg surgery in the winter of 1812–1813, Hyrum became "young Joseph's principal tutor since Joseph could not attend school" (Richard K. Behrens, "Dreams, Visions, and Visitations: The Genesis of Mormonism," *John Whitmer Historical Association* 27 [2007]: 177). In her Smith family history, Lucy mentions how Hyrum "was one of the trustees" in a Palmyra school district (EMD 1:374). After getting married, Hyrum had moved back to the Smith's former residence in the log cabin on Stafford Road in Palmyra, see Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 47. Mrs. S. F. Anderick, a former resident of Palmyra, claimed "Hyrum was the only son sufficiently educated to teach school. I attended when he taught in the log school-house east of uncle's [the Smith's log cabin on Stafford Road]. He also taught in the Stafford District" (EMD 2:208).

9. EMD 1:282.

10. EMD 2:122.

11. Cremin, *American Education*, 128.

12. Cremin, *American Education*, 65. Gordon and Gordon add, "the mother's role as primary tutor was of supreme importance. Though the literature of the

having both a mother and a father actively involved in his education, young Joseph would have been exposed to greater instructional resources at home than most of his rural peers.

The Smith family's emphasis on the importance of education provides a vital contextual framework for historical inquiry. Though sickness, relocation, and financial exigencies would constrain educational opportunities, Lucy and Joseph Sr. nevertheless engaged in a lifelong effort to provide their children with a solid foundation of instruction. The interpretation of historical accounts, particularly when confronting the lacunae in documentation, should therefore be mindful of Lucy and Joseph Sr.'s efforts and concerns. Interpretations that assume Joseph did not attend school whenever the historical documentation is silent runs counter to Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack's conscientiousness and stated efforts to provide their children with a good education. Thus, as a touchstone for the examination of educational practices, the cultural values within the Smith home offer guidance in the exploration of Joseph Jr.'s formal common school education, from youth to early adulthood, from Royalton, Vermont, to South Bainbridge, New York.

Representations

Furthermore, the survey of Joseph's educational experiences requires an examination of the claims, often inconsistent and contradictory, made about his level of literacy. The majority of such statements, whether favorable or unfavorable, constitute retrospectives deeply informed by his eventual prophetic and miraculous accomplishments. The contextualization of assertions therefore requires the recognition that historical depictions of Joseph's level of education rarely, if ever, present uncomplicated or unbiased accounts of Joseph's life, delivered for no other purpose than the enrichment of posterity. Addressing every

period spoke of both parents acting as teachers, most books were written for women" (Gordon and Gordon, *Literacy in America*, 83).

claim about Joseph's education extends beyond the scope of this essay; nevertheless, in order to emphasize the need to interpret such statements in their cultural context, I will look at two of the most common representational claims that are invoked as evidence of Joseph's lack of education: Emma's assertion that Joseph could not dictate a simple letter, much less a text the size of the Book of Mormon; and Joseph's own statement that his education was limited to the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

In an 1879 interview, Emma Smith delivered her opinion on whether or not Joseph could have composed the Book of Mormon by famously declaring, "Joseph Smith . . . could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter, let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon."¹³ Emma's statement, some forty years after the event, is often, and unfortunately, interpreted as a literal and objective depiction of Joseph's writing and composition skills. Nonetheless, as his surviving letters, revelations, and journal entries well attest, Joseph could certainly write and dictate coherent letters and intricate texts.¹⁴ In order to appreciate Emma's claim, we therefore need to reintroduce her comment to the cultural context in which it was given.

13. EMD 1:542. See also, Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *The Saints' Herald* 26 (Oct. 1879), 290.

14. For instance, observe Joseph's style in the opening section of an Oct. 22, 1829 letter to Oliver Cowdery: "Respected Sir, I would inform you that I arrived at home on Sunday morning, the 4th, after having a prosperous journey, and found all well. The people are all friendly to us, except a few who are in opposition to everything, unless it is something that is exactly like themselves. And two of our most formidable persecutors are now under censure and are cited to a trial in the church for crimes, which, if true, are worse than all the Gold Book business. We do not rejoice in the affliction of our enemies but we shall be glad to have truth prevail." (Spelling and punctuation modernized.) For an online review of Smith's written and dictated materials, see The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/>. For the original letter, see "Letter to Oliver Cowdery, 22 October 1829," The Joseph Smith Papers <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-oliver-cowdery-22-october-1829>.

Emma's juxtaposition of Joseph's inability to write a "well-worded letter" with the production of a book of over five hundred printed pages reveals the assumptions she shared with her audience. Here, she is specifically invoking a parallel with introductory classroom exercises in nineteenth-century education: letter-writing was one of the earliest and most basic composition assignments children encountered at home and at school. By copying and composing short letters, children learned the style and format of basic correspondence, along with the skill of assembling cohesive paragraphs. For instance, one of the most popular letter-writing schoolbooks of the early nineteenth century was Caleb Bingham's *Juvenile Letters* (1803), which consists entirely of short, easy-to-read letters written by fictional children "from eight to fifteen years of age."¹⁵ Thus, Emma's depiction of Joseph's writing ability presents two polar extremes: the expansive Book of Mormon text pitted against a simple "well-worded letter." In other words, in order to emphasize her opinion that Joseph could not have produced the Book of Mormon, Emma declared that Joseph could not compose at the level of a child receiving his first writing lessons in one of the most elementary forms of composition exercises. Emma's hyperbolic statement should be read with the same tone as, "he couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time," or more specifically, "he couldn't compose at the level of *Dick and Jane*, much less write a whole book." Yet, in spite of this dismissive characterization, Emma's facetious exaggeration need not be interpreted as an intentional misrepresentation. Her comment merely serves to highlight her emphatic belief that Joseph could not have created the work without divine assistance.¹⁶ Thus, while Emma's comment provides insight into

15. See Caleb Bingham, *Juvenile Letters; Being a Correspondence between Children, from Eight to Fifteen Years of Age* (Boston: Caleb Bingham, 1803).

16. Later in the same interview, Emma states, "my belief is that the Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity—I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired. . . . It would have been improbable that a learned man could do

her beliefs and sense of humor, a literal interpretation of her assertion obscures Joseph's actual compositional skills.

Joseph's self-representation of his educational opportunities appears in what Dan Vogel describes as "the earliest known attempt by Joseph Smith to record a history of his life."¹⁷ Dictated in 1832, the statement reveals how the indigent circumstances of the Smith household "required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the family; therefore, we were deprived of the benefit of an education. Suffice it to say, I was merely instructed in reading, writing and the ground rules of arithmetic, which constituted my whole literary acquirements."¹⁸ While this depiction may initially appear straightforward, several issues require a cautious interpretation of what precisely this statement means. I do not want to minimize the essential claim being made regarding Joseph's childhood opportunities. As this essay hopes to demonstrate, his chances to participate in formal education were limited and intermittent, with few chances to complete a full year of school without significant interruptions. Nevertheless, if we interpret "deprived of the benefit of an education" to mean "entirely denied an education," then Joseph's statement contradicts itself (i.e., if completely deprived, Joseph would not have learned basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills). Thus, the statement requires further contextualization.

Joseph's description of "reading, writing and the ground rules of arithmetic" invokes a common, formulaic phrase in early nineteenth-century America (indeed, it remains common today, often expressed as "the three R's"), which operates as a shorthand depiction of the most basic, fundamental level of education that early Americans hoped to achieve in an education system. Gideon Hawley, the first New York Superintendent

this; and, for one so ignorant and unlearned as he [Joseph] was, it was simply impossible" (EMD 1: 542).

17. EMD 1:26.

18. EMD 1:27 (spelling and punctuation modernized).

of Common Schools, invoked this formula in the process of working toward a standardized curriculum in his 1819 publication, *Instructions for the Better Government and Organization of Common Schools*, in which he writes, “in every common school the course of study to be pursued must necessarily embrace *reading, writing and arithmetic*. These are the first rudiments of education. . . . Reading, writing and arithmetic, as they are the means of acquiring all subsequent knowledge, may justly be considered the necessities of education. . . . Nothing short of these will constitute a common school, or satisfy the lowest requisites of the school act.”¹⁹ The phrase, however, does not provide a detailed account of the actual training and material children encountered in classrooms.

In the process of learning how to read, children studied grammar, the basics of rhetoric and composition, geography, short passages on history, and other potential subjects (depending on the skills and interests of the instructor). We also know from various historical accounts that Joseph owned several common school textbooks that were published and available during his school years, such as Lindley Murray’s *English Reader* (1799), Charles A. Goodrich’s *A History of the United States of America* (1822), and Thomas T. Smiley’s *Sacred Geography* (1824).²⁰ Thus, Joseph’s description of “reading, writing, and arithmetic” elides a rich variety of topics and exercises that actually occurred in classrooms. Joseph’s enlistment of this formulaic phrase therefore functions as a rhetorical device to convey his limited educational opportunities to his readers, without going into the unnecessary detail of outlining every topic, every skill, or every assignment he encountered. Put another way, the rhetorical effect of Joseph’s depiction would have been defeated, obviously, if he had said, “I was merely instructed in reading, writing,

19. Gideon Hawley, *Instructions for the Better Government and Organization of Common Schools* (Albany, N.Y.: State of New York, 1819), [3] (emphasis in original).

20. For a list of Joseph Smith’s books, see H. Michael Marquardt, “Books Owned by Joseph Smith,” <https://user.xmission.com/~research/about/books.htm>.

arithmetic, basic rhetoric, composition, geography, and history,” though such a catalogue would have more accurately depicted the curriculum he would have encountered in common school classrooms.

Joseph’s representation of his educational achievements requires further recognition of how this depiction functions within the context of his entire narrative. Joseph’s 1832 history was not an indifferent account of his life. Rather, the account represents his first attempt to construct a narrative that centers on his divine prophetic calling. As Vogel aptly observes, “The History was begun in the midst of challenges to Smith’s authority, primarily initiated by Bishop Edward Partridge in Missouri, which evoked Smith’s introduction of the office of president of the high priesthood. It is therefore not simply an autobiographical sketch, but an apology setting forth Smith’s credentials as leader of the church.”²¹ As part of this project, Joseph’s reference to his humble beginnings, contrasted with his rise to prominence as God’s chosen instrument, evokes the commonplace trope of the humble individual who, against all odds, rises to greatness—a popular framework of biographical representations in both secular and religious maelstroms of early nineteenth-century America.²² Thus, the formula of “reading, writing, and arithmetic,” as a representation of the bare minimum level of education one might receive, acts as a counterpoint to the lofty heights to which God would come to elevate Joseph’s life and work. Nevertheless, setting such rhetorical effects aside, we do not receive a detailed account of Smith’s educational

21. EMD 1:26.

22. This framework remains a popular narrative formula today. For instance, using Abraham Lincoln as a point of reference, Richard L. Bushman situates Smith’s life and accomplishments within this same trope: “Reared in a poor Yankee farm family, he had less than two years of formal schooling and began life without social standing or institutional backing. . . . Yet in the fourteen years he headed the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Smith created a religious culture that survived his death . . . published the Book of Mormon . . . built cities and temples and gathered thousands of followers” (Bushman, *Rough Stone*, xx).

experiences, and are left to wonder about the actual time he spent in school and the lessons he learned. By retracing his life and experiences, this essay therefore aims to further the discussion surrounding Joseph's background, education, and training.

Royalton, Vermont: 1809 to 1811/1812

Junius F. Wells, a member of the Mormon Church who purchased the farm where Joseph had been born, provides the first reference to Joseph's earliest formal education. When describing the Smith's family life in rural Vermont, Wells indicates that "during this period, Joseph, Senior, worked on the farm summers, and taught school part of the time winters. His son Joseph attended the school on Dewey Hill, and was taught his letters by Dea[con] Jonathan Kinney, the schoolmaster there."²³ Joseph Jr. was born in Sharon, Vermont, on December 23, 1805. Sometime between the months of March and December in 1808, the Smiths, who had been moving among several locations in the region, relocated to Royalton, Vermont, where they lived for approximately three to four

23. Mary Evelyn Wood Lovejoy, *History of Royalton, Vermont, with Family Genealogies, 1769–1911*, vol. 2 (Burlington, Vt.: The Town of Royalton and The Royalton Woman's Club, 1911), 646. Jonathan Kinney, Jr. (1790–1851), was a member of the First Congregational Church in Royalton. According to church records, he was elected deacon in 1829 (the writer of his genealogical sketch in *History of Royalton* claims 1833). Junius Wells's use of Kinney's title "Deacon" is therefore anachronistic, as Kinney was not yet a deacon when the Smith family lived in Royalton. Even so, Kinney, who turned twenty during the 1809–1810 winter term (the same term Joseph Smith would have been of appropriate age to start attending school), was of the typical age of young schoolteachers at the time, making Wells's claim plausible. For a list of the elected deacons, see *ibid.*, vol. 1, 229. For Kinney Jr.'s genealogical sketch, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, 844. Wright and Wright refer to him as "Jonathan Rinney," following Donna Hill's use of "Rinney" in her biography of Joseph Smith. Hill does not provide her source and the variant spelling appears to be either a typo or a transcription error. See Wright and Wright, "The New England Common School," 237; and Hill, *Joseph Smith*, 35.

years.²⁴ The exact length of their stay is uncertain. According to Lucy's account, the Smith family moved out of the area in 1811; according to tax assessment records, however, the move did not occur until sometime between May 1812 and May 1813.²⁵ In either case, Joseph Jr. would have grown from a three-year-old toddler to a five- or six-year-old child in Royalton, Vermont, prior to the family's relocation.

During that time in Vermont, it was typical for children to start school at the age of four. Ever since the General Assembly of the State of Vermont passed the Act for the Support of Schools in October of 1797, determinations regarding the formation of schools, allocation of funding, and selection of trustees in any given district were made "according to the number of children in such district between the age of four years and eighteen years old."²⁶ These ages were based on the *customary* ages of children attending school throughout the state, but they were not the *exclusive* ages of those who actually attended classes. In any given district, children might start school earlier than four or attend later than eighteen. Indeed, children throughout New England were known

24. The dates throughout this essay are based on Vogel's chronology. See EMD, Appendix B, "Chronology, 1771–1831," 5:377–456.

25. *Ibid.*, 382. After Royalton, Vt., the Smith family moved to Lebanon, New Hampshire. As Vogel indicates, if Lucy's date for the move were 1811, then Joseph Sr.'s name should have appeared on the May 1812 tax assessment records in Lebanon. But it does not appear until the following year in May of 1813, suggesting that Lucy's memory was not accurate and that the Smiths moved to Lebanon sometime between May 1812 and May 1813.

26. Vermont, *Laws of the State of Vermont; Revised and Passed by the Legislature, in the Year of our Lord, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety Seven* (Rutland, Vt.: State of Vermont, 1798), 494, 97. The 1797 Act was still in force when the Smith family moved to Royalton. A reprint of the laws appeared the same year they moved into the town, see *The Laws of the State of Vermont, Digested and Compiled*, vol. 2 (Randolph, Vt.: State of Vermont, 1808), 181–86. See also Wright and Wright, "The New England Common School," 243.

to start school as young as two or three years of age.²⁷ Nevertheless, in order to have a common standard of funding for all the counties, the state used the census figures and school records to identify the population that customarily attended school and allocated funds accordingly.²⁸

That children four years of age, and even younger, were attending common schools was not unusual.²⁹ Throughout the United States in

27. Memoirist Warren Burton (1800–1866) started school at three-and-a-half years old in New Hampshire; New York editor Horace Greeley (1811–1872) began school two months shy of his third birthday; social reformer Elizabeth Buffum [Chace] (1806–1899) started at two years of age and “could read very well” by the age of three; and Dr. Henry E. Spalding (1843–1912), future President of the Boston Homeopathic Medical Society and the Massachusetts Surgical and Gynecological Society, started school at two-and-a-half years in a farming community after he wandered “into the nearby district school and from that time he was a regular attendant.” For Warren Burton, Horace Greeley, and Elizabeth Buffum Chace, see Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1983), 15. For Henry E. Spalding, see Rev. D. Donovan and Jacob A. Woodward, *The History of the Town of Lyndeborough, New Hampshire, 1735–1905* (Medford, Mass.: The Tufts College Press, 1906), 858.

28. Specific to Joseph’s time in Royalton, local historian Mary Lovejoy asserts that 705 children “between four and eighteen years of age” attended school in the combined districts, in accordance with the Act of 1797. Lovejoy’s phrasing for the ages of school children repeats, nearly verbatim, the language of the 1797 Act, without providing details regarding students younger than four or older than eighteen who might have also attended school (the ages were used for funding estimates, not attendance restrictions). The same year, at the start of the winter term of 1809–1810, Joseph Jr. turned four years old and would have been of an appropriate age to attend school. Lovejoy, *History of Royalton*, vol. 1, 295–96. For a review of how Royalton residents responded to the Act of 1797, see *ibid.*, 293–94.

29. Citing Kaestle’s study in common school education, Wright and Wright observe that very young rural children often attended school with older siblings: “Because there was no standard age for starting to attend school, many two- and three-year-olds were sent to school along with their older brothers and sisters” (Wright and Wright, “The New England Common School,” 246). See Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 15. In his memoir, Rev. Warren Burton, who

the earliest decades of the nineteenth century, the average starting age for school children ranged from four to five years.³⁰ And though the

attended common school in Wilton, New Hampshire, recalled how a young classmate could not answer a question about the alphabet, because “he is but two years and a half old, and has been sent to school to relieve his mother from trouble rather than to learn” (Rev. Warren Burton, *The District School As It Was* [Boston: Carter, Hendee and Co., 1833], 48). Even so, Wright and Wright offer a conservative estimate for young Joseph’s start: “An exact chronology is impossible, but it appears that Joseph began school in Royalton, Vermont, in 1810” (Wright and Wright, “The New England Common School,” 238). If this date is true, however, the question then arises as to why Joseph’s parents held him back from school, in spite of his eligibility to start earlier. Winter terms for common schools in small rural towns in the first decade of the nineteenth century often started on the Monday of the first full week in December. If this were the case for Royalton, winter classes in 1809 would start on Monday, December 4, a little over two and a half weeks prior to Smith’s fourth birthday on Saturday, December 23. Thus, the winter 1809 term would have been the age-appropriate time for Smith to start. Even if the winter term started earlier, Smith, according to the conventions for reckoning age, was already nearing the end of his fourth year of age at the start of the 1809 winter term.

30. One of the first attempts to provide national statistics on school attendance appeared in Archibald Russell’s *Principles of Statistical Inquiry* (1839). Because the data were fragmentary for his study, not only for education but for several other categories (manufacturing, agriculture, occupations, vital statistics, crime, etc.), Russell acknowledges that his essays “do not aspire to the character of a statistical treatise.” Russell was a pioneer in social statistics, and this book, in spite of its self-admitted flaws, was nevertheless popular and “earned him widespread recognition in mid-nineteenth century America” (Peter J. Wosh, “Bibles, Benevolence, and Bureaucracy: The Changing Nature of Nineteenth Century Religious Records,” *American Archivist* 52, no. 2 [Spring 1989]: 172). In order to determine the number and ages of schoolchildren, Russell turned to state school records, or made estimates based on state censuses and common cultural practices. In his review, Maine and Illinois reported students ranging “between the ages of 4 and 21,” and “between 4 and 16 years of age,” respectively. All the remaining states, when noted, reported ages between (or within) the range of five and twenty, with the New England states figured between five and fifteen. None of the ranges identify beginning students as being older than five years of age in any of the states included in the survey, suggesting that four and five

determination of such ages may have been arbitrary in each state, they often reflected the circumstances of the population, particularly in farming communities. In rural schools, according to historian Carl Kaestle, children “began at younger ages and enrolled in greater proportions than their urban contemporaries. By the age of four or five, and until the age of about fourteen, most rural children in the North . . . attended school at some time during the year.”³¹ Kaestle further suggests that “parents who sent very young children to school seem to have done so through a desire to have them out from under foot. . . . One can understand the desire of rural mothers with busy work schedules to be freed from the care of toddlers.”³² Thus, basing estimates on the customary ages of school attendance in Royalton, the following scenarios emerge: if the Smiths moved out of town in 1811, as Lucy suggests, Joseph would have been able to attend school for three, possibly four, terms (winter 1809–1810, summer 1810, winter 1810–1811, and summer 1811); if the Smiths moved in 1812, as tax assessment records indicate, Joseph would have been able to attend five terms (the terms noted above, along with winter 1811–1812). Accordingly, if he started school at the same age

were typical starting ages throughout early nineteenth-century America. See Archibald Russell, *Principles of Statistical Inquiry; As Illustrated in Proposals for Uniting an Examination into the Resources of the United States with the Census to be Taken in 1840* (New York, N.Y.: D. Appleton & Co., 1839), iii, 217–31.

31. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 15. School attendance at three and four years of age was not, however, limited to rural areas. For example, Josiah Holbrook, a Boston-based education reformer and promoter of the early lyceum movement, indirectly reveals the ages of schoolchildren in Boston in a critical essay on formal pedagogical methods in common schools: “Whoever will look at the nature and course of exercises and management, to which many children are subjected, from the time they enter a school-room *at the age of three or four years*, till they cease their school education, must be convinced that their tendency is to cramp, not to invigorate the faculties, either physical, intellectual, or moral” (Josiah Holbrook, “Abuses: Schools,” *The Family Lyceum* [1833]: 102 [emphasis added]).

32. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 15–16.

as his Royalton peers, Joseph could have received either one and a half or two and a half years of formal schooling, depending on the date of the Smith family's departure. The point is significant: prior to Joseph's departure from Royalton, he may well have obtained as much formal education as historians tend to attribute to his entire lifetime, if not more.

West Lebanon, New Hampshire: 1811/1812 to 1814/1815

Lucy Smith provides the next reference to her children's formal schooling in her history, *Biographical Sketches* (1853). In 1811, according to Lucy, the Smith family relocated approximately twenty-three miles southeast of Royalton, across the Connecticut River, to the town of West Lebanon, New Hampshire. About the same time, Hyrum began attending Moor's Charity School, originally called Moor's Indian Charity School, which was located on the same campus as Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, approximately seven miles north of the Smith's new home in West Lebanon.³³ Though Moor's Charity School was technically a separate institution from Dartmouth at the

33. In his biography of Hyrum Smith, Jeffrey S. O'Driscoll notes that "documenting Hyrum's presence from school records is difficult. His name cannot be located in the records of 1811, and the rolls for the school years ending in 1812 and 1813 are missing. Records show a 'Hiram Smith' from Lebanon attending the session from August 1814 to August 1815. Hyrum Smith had moved from Lebanon to nearby Norwich, Vermont, by that time, but the record is probably referring to him" (Jeffrey S. O'Driscoll, *Hyrum Smith: A Life of Integrity* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003], 17–18n26). The records indicate Hyrum was a "charity scholar," which meant his tuition and board were covered by annual rental income from lands owned and leased by Moor's and Dartmouth. In his *History of Dartmouth College*, Frederick Chase indicates how Moor's "had thirty scholars in 1780, eighty in 1794, forty-four in the fall of 1813, and sixty-one in the summer of 1814. Of these sixty-one about seventeen were charity scholars, carried upon the Moor's School share of the Wheelock rents." Frederick Chase, *A History of Dartmouth College and the Town of Hanover New Hampshire (To 1815)*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., vol. 1 (Brattleboro, Vt.: Dartmouth College, 1928), 634.

time, the distinction was largely in name only.³⁴ Hyrum's acceptance would have held the hope of a promising career, and upon the Smith family's arrival in West Lebanon, Lucy indicates that "as our children had, in a great measure, been debarred from the privilege of schools, we began to make every arrangement to attend to this important duty. We established our second son Hyrum in an academy at Hanover; and the rest, that were of sufficient age, we were sending to a common school that was quite convenient."³⁵ (It should be noted that Lucy's recollection here has minimal bearing on Joseph's education: her statement refers to challenges that occurred previously in Vermont, where Joseph had only recently started school.) Because Lucy did not specifically name the children who "were of sufficient age" to start school in West Lebanon, some historians have assumed Joseph Jr. did not attend school at this

34. Apart from training ministers for evangelical work among Native American nations, Moor's Charity School was often perceived as a preparatory school for Dartmouth and other institutions of higher learning. The last two years of Moor's curriculum dovetailed with the first year of Dartmouth's curriculum and entrance examinations (such as the study of the Greek New Testament and rhetoric). In terms of institutional identity, the primary reason Moor's Charity School and Dartmouth College were separate institutions in the early nineteenth century related to funding issues: Moor's relied heavily on donations from English and Scottish societies for propagating the gospel among Native Americans, while Dartmouth received state funding. The Scottish and English donors were concerned that funds for Moor's might be diverted to Dartmouth, so the two institutions kept separate financial records in order to maintain their subsidies. Moor's Charity School would eventually be absorbed officially by Dartmouth College in the early twentieth century (John King Lord, *A History of Dartmouth College, 1815–1909: Being a Second Volume of A History of Dartmouth College and the Town of Hanover, New Hampshire, Begun by Frederick Chase*, vol. 2 [Concord, N.H.: The Rumford Press, 1913], 232–44). See also Chase, *A History of Dartmouth College*, vol. 1, 239–48; 588–600.

35. EMD 1:260.

time.³⁶ Nevertheless, children in New Hampshire started school at the same ages children started in Vermont.³⁷

Unlike Vermont and New York during this period, New Hampshire based school funding on overall population, rather than census numbers and school records for children within a particular age range.³⁸ As such, the state did not provide information in its laws reflecting the customary age for children to start school. Even so, memoirists and observers indicate that children in the state began school as early as two to three years of age.³⁹ During his tours through New England and New York from 1795 to 1816, Timothy Dwight, IV (1752–1817), President of Yale College, observed, “In Massachusetts, New-Hampshire, and Vermont, schools are everywhere established. They are often styled parochial schools. . . . To these little seminaries the children of New-England are universally sent, from two, three, four, and five years of age, to the period in which they have learned to read, write, and keep accounts. . . . I speak of the common schools only.”⁴⁰ Within this context, the year the Smith family

36. Assuming the Smiths moved to West Lebanon in 1811, Bushman, for example, speculates that Joseph Jr. did not attend school but “remained at home” (Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 20).

37. Wright and Wright indicate that “it is apparent from available histories that the schools in Vermont and New Hampshire were similar because of their geographical proximity and shared history” (Wright and Wright, “The New England Common School,” 242). Though the Smith family crossed state lines in their move from Royalton to West Lebanon, they remained in the same Upper Connecticut River Valley region.

38. From 1808 through at least 1830, state funding for New Hampshire schools (whether through state taxes, bank taxes, or the state “literary fund”) was “divided among the towns in the ratio of representation” (American Education Society, “Common Schools,” *The Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society*, [Nov. 4, 1830]: 230–31).

39. Warren Burton and Horace Greeley attended New Hampshire common schools before their fourth birthdays. See footnote 27.

40. Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New-England and New-York*, 4 vols., vol. 4 (London; Edinburgh: William Baynes and Son; Ogle, Duncan & Co.; H. S. Baynes

moved to West Lebanon becomes irrelevant with respect to schooling: Joseph Jr., who turned six in December of 1811 and seven in December of 1812, would have been old enough—indeed, much older—than children “of sufficient age” to start school in New Hampshire.⁴¹

The winter of 1812–1813 would, however, bring a traumatic interruption to young Joseph Jr.’s formal education. Whether or not he started school that winter term, he certainly would not have finished it. During the winter, a typhoid epidemic “swept through the upper Connecticut Valley and left 6,400 dead in five months.”⁴² Young Joseph was not spared the fever. The story is well-known: the infection spread through his body, eventually locating in his lower left leg and causing a bone infection. The Smiths summoned medical doctors from Dartmouth and the decision was eventually made to cut the infected bone from Joseph’s leg. Though the operation was successful, Joseph would have been bedridden for the next several months, waiting for the wound to heal.⁴³

Joseph’s experience would, of course, affect his formal schooling. His attendance during the winter term of 1812–1813 would have been abruptly cut short by his infection and surgery. He almost certainly missed the 1813 summer term as well, not only because of convalescing at home,

and Co. (Edinburgh), 1823), 287. Dwight’s depiction of common schools as “parochial schools” is part of his wider vision of New England’s religious exceptionalism: although common schools were technically nondenominational, they nevertheless served as part of God’s teleological plan for New England; thus, all common schools were, to use his term, “parochial schools.”

41. As Vogel has noted, Joseph Sr.’s name does not appear on the May 1812 tax assessment records in West Lebanon, suggesting that the family arrived in New Hampshire *after* 1811. Furthermore, according to Jeffrey S. O’Driscoll, Hyrum Smith’s “name cannot be located in the record of 1811” for Moor’s Charity School, providing additional evidence for the timing of the move. Thus, Joseph Jr. was most likely six years old, soon to turn seven, when he started school in West Lebanon. See EMD 5:382. O’Driscoll, *Hyrum Smith*, 17n26.

42. Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 20.

43. *Ibid.*, 21.

but due to a possible trip to Salem, Massachusetts, with his Uncle Jesse. “When he had so far recovered as to be able to travel,” Lucy recorded, Joseph Jr. “went with his uncle, Jesse Smith, to Salem, for the benefit of his health, hoping the sea-breezes would be of service to him.”⁴⁴ Thus, for the 1813 school year, Joseph’s educational improvement would have been limited to reading books, family devotionals, and domestic education.

Lucy’s history suggests Joseph returned to formal schooling in the winter of 1813–1814, after approximately a full year of recuperation. Immediately following her account of Joseph’s surgery, Lucy indicates that, “Having passed through about a year of sickness and distress, health again returned to our family” (her 1845 manuscript reads, “After one whole year of affliction we were able once more to look upon our children and each other in health”).⁴⁵ Young Joseph, though continuing to convalesce and recover, was apparently no longer bedridden. Thus, from the time of his return until the Smith family’s move to New York, Joseph may have experienced one of the longest periods of sustained formal education in his lifetime: because he would remain on crutches until the Smith family’s move to New York, Joseph would have been prevented from performing heavy farm labor for the remainder of the

44. EMD 1:268. See also Wright and Wright, “The New England Common School,” 238. Interestingly, Jesse Smith’s extremely detailed and precise business ledger, currently in possession of the LDS Church History Library, does not indicate a trip to Salem during the summer of 1813. Joseph’s trip to Salem, of whatever length and whenever it actually took place, would have offered its own form of practical education. Salem was a major port city of trade: merchant ships brought exotic cargo from all over the world, and its bustling shops were packed with a rich panoply of merchandise and patrons. Yet, such excitement would have been counterbalanced by a hostile British navy patrolling along the seacoast, seizing ships, impressing sailors, and threatening invasion. See Hill, *Joseph Smith*, 36; Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 18; Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: the Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995; repr., First Vintage Books Edition), 8.

45. EMD 1:268.

family's stay in the Connecticut Valley, allowing him full participation at school in both winter and summer months.⁴⁶ In such a compromised physical condition, school attendance, reading, meditation, and domestic chores would have been the extent of his activities.

Norwich, Vermont: 1814–1815 to the Winter of 1816–1817

Sometime between May of 1814 and March of 1816, the Smith family moved back across the Connecticut River to Norwich, Vermont, situated approximately two miles west of Dartmouth. The exact time of their arrival is yet again uncertain.⁴⁷ Furthermore, records are silent regarding the Smith children's school attendance, though Wright and Wright observe, "When considering this period in Joseph's life, it seems consistent to assume that his mother would have again encouraged him and his siblings to attend public school."⁴⁸ During their stay in Norwich, the family was plagued with a series of crop failures, which left the

46. For Smith's length of time on crutches, see Vogel, *The Making of a Prophet*, 18; Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 21; Hill, *Joseph Smith*, 36. When she recounted the family's move to New York in the winter of 1816 to 1817, Lucy mentioned that Joseph "was still lame" (EMD 1:274).

47. According to Vogel, "probably in the late spring or early summer of 1814, the Smiths returned across the Connecticut River to Norwich, Vermont" (Vogel, *The Making of a Prophet*, 19). In addition, Vogel notes that tax assessment records indicate the Smiths moved out of Lebanon between May 1814 and May 1815, though he also observes, "exactly when they arrived in Norwich is less clear, although it was certainly before the birth of Don Carlos [one of Joseph's younger brothers] on 25 March 1816." Vogel suggests Lucy may have misremembered the dates of the family's move, "or the Smiths may have lived in a remote quarter in or near the town and later moved onto Murdock's property [the rental property the Smiths leased]" (EMD 5:383).

48. Wright and Wright, "The New England Common School," 238.

family destitute.⁴⁹ After hearing about cheap land and better farming conditions in western New York, no doubt combined with rumors of the economic potential of the region, Joseph Sr. decided to relocate the family to Palmyra, New York, a town that would become a stop along the Erie Canal. In late 1816, Joseph Sr. went to Palmyra by himself to make arrangements, while the family packed their belongings and followed after him, apparently in January of 1817.⁵⁰

Thus, in terms of formal schooling opportunities, the timing of the Smith family's departure provides a window for their stay in the Upper Connecticut River Valley. From the time the family arrived in West Lebanon, New Hampshire, in 1811 or 1812 to their final departure from the area in the winter of 1816–1817, Joseph Jr. would have been eligible to attend school for either five or six terms (winter 1811–1812, summer 1812, then skipping the 1813 school year, followed by winter 1813–1814, summer 1814, winter 1814–1815 and summer 1815). Depending again on arrival and departure dates, the amount of eligible formal education for this period would be between two to three school years.

Palmyra, New York: 1817 to 1820/1821

The Smith family's move to Palmyra, a journey of about three hundred miles, would have taken approximately one month.⁵¹ The move would occur in the middle of the 1816–1817 winter term, effectively disrupting the start of the school year, though one account suggests the children attended the latter part of that term after initially getting settled in western New York State. Jacob E. Terry of East Palmyra was one of Joseph's classmates. Vogel observes that if Jacob's sister, Elizabeth, is correct

49. See Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 27; Hill, *Joseph Smith*, 37; Brodie, *No Man Knows*, 8–9; Vogel, *The Making of a Prophet*, 19–24.

50. Vogel observes that Martha Coray, Lucy's amanuensis for her history, wrote in her notebooks, "1816 [1817] moved to . . . Palmyra in Jan[uary]" (EMD 5:384).

51. Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 29.

in her memory of the dates and locations where their family lived, as recorded in the *Parshall Terry Family History* (1956), then “this would indicate that Joseph Smith attended school immediately after his arrival at Palmyra sometime during the winter of 1816–1817.”⁵² Such partial attendance would not be the last time the children’s formal education would be interrupted, particularly because of financial exigencies. Upon their arrival, Lucy records how the Smiths held a family council regarding their “destitute circumstances” and how they “came to the conclusion to unite our strength in endeavouring to obtain a piece of land.”⁵³ This being the case, the children old enough to work likely spent their summers earning money to help the family, rather than attending school during the summer terms. Thus, though he had only recently stopped walking with crutches, Joseph probably started working in the summer of 1817. And given the continued financial struggles of the Smith family, Joseph may never have attended another summer term at any common school again.⁵⁴

52. By 1819, the Terry family had moved from Palmyra. If Elizabeth’s memory of the dates is inaccurate, then, according to Vogel, “it is possible for Jacob E. Terry to have attended school with Joseph Smith either in the winter of 1816–1817 or 1817–1818” (EMD 3:261). That Lucy and Joseph Sr. would immediately enroll their children in school upon their arrival is consistent with their actions when they arrived in West Lebanon midway through the winter term, when they promptly enrolled their school age children into classes. See EMD 1:260. 53. EMD 1:276.

54. Christopher Stafford, a neighbor of the Smiths in Manchester, New York, recalled that “Jo was away much of the time summers” (EMD 2:195). Mrs. S. F. Anderick, a neighbor of the Smiths, confirmed Joseph was away “from home much summers. Sometimes he [Joseph] said he had been to Broome County, New York, and Pennsylvania” (EMD 2:210). Vogel notes that Joseph Jr. and his brother Samuel were not listed on the 1820 census, “perhaps because they were hired out in another township” (EMD 5:391). Joseph likely spent his summers performing manual labor on various farms and occasionally acting as a treasure-hunting seer. Prior to hearing about Smith finding the gold plates, for instance, Lee Yost, “a Michigan merchant and former resident of Fayette, New York [a

Insight into the Smith family's financial challenges, particularly in relation to formal education, emerged with the 2008 discovery of Philander Packard's school records.⁵⁵ Packard, a school teacher in Palmyra's District No. 1 (the same district in which the Smith family lived), kept a record of tuition payments he received from his students.⁵⁶ Instead of entering the child's name, however, Packard listed funds received under the heads of households. "Joseph Smith" appears among them, nestled in a list that includes several of the Smith family's neighbors.⁵⁷ And as

town approximately twenty-four miles southeast of Manchester, New York],” recalled seeing Joseph with a team of treasure hunters searching among Native American ruins on the farm of his wife's grandfather in Fayette (EMD 5:287).

55. Donald L. Enders, “Treasures and a Trash Heap: An Early Reference to the Joseph Smith Family in Palmyra,” *The Journal of Mormon History* 40, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 201–222.

56. For the boundaries of the nineteen school districts in existence in 1814, see Town of Palmyra, “Town of Palmyra Board Meeting Minutes,” Palmyra, N.Y.: Town & Village of Palmyra, 1819, <http://www.palmyrany.com/minutes/TB/1814.pdf>.

57. The identity of this “Joseph Smith” is not entirely conclusive. While Packard's list includes several of the Smith family's neighbors, suggesting that the “Joseph Smith” entry may very well be Joseph Smith Sr., the criteria establishing the claim can be problematic. Enders argues, “in 1817, the schoolhouse where Philander Packard was teaching . . . was the only one in the village, standing at East Main and Mill streets. That year, the township (as opposed to the village) had at least eight school districts.” While it is literally true that Palmyra did have “at least eight school districts,” the total number was actually twenty, significantly altering the perception of the educational landscape of the township (see Appendix B). Furthermore, Palmyra Village had the highest population density in the township and would have required more than one common school to cover the five- to fifteen year-old population. Enders's assumption that Packard was “the only teacher in the village” further leads him to the conclusion that Packard's forty-three students were the only ones in attendance in the village, while the remaining “seventy-nine (or 65 percent) of the school-age children received no formal instruction during the fall of 1817” (Enders, “Treasures and a Trash Heap,” 215). Contrary to this estimate, Palmyra (town *and* village) taught a total of 987 students out of 1,050 total children between the ages of five and fifteen

Donald L. Enders observes, the payments from the Joseph Smith family were the second lowest in the account book, bested in meagerness only by the widow Hannah Hurlbut and her child.⁵⁸ The document provides stark evidence of impoverished family circumstances. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that Packard's notes are not *attendance* records but running *accounts of payments*. Interpreting the documents as attendance records for poor families is, in fact, highly problematic. Thus, contextualizing Packard's records within New York's common school system is crucial.

Before the Smith family moved to Palmyra, Gideon Hawley, Superintendent of Common Schools for the State of New York, had been mounting an aggressive campaign to provide a common school education to all the children in the state. Since 1812, when New York instituted a statewide common school system, universal access to education had become a social and political priority; and Hawley recognized that children from poor families often could not afford to pay their share of teachers' wages and therefore could not regularly attend school. Hawley thus participated in shaping new laws for the common schools, explicitly giving local school commissioners the power to waive tuition costs for poor families. Encouraged by Hawley's advocacy, the legislature passed The Act for the Better Establishment of Common Schools on April 15, 1814, which allowed commissioners and local trustees "to exonerate from the payment of the wages of such teachers, or the residue aforesaid [balance of wages not paid by the state], of such wages, all such poor persons within their district, as they shall think proper."⁵⁹ Hawley's

in the 1817–1818 school year. Thus, rather than Enders's claim of seventy-nine untaught children in Palmyra village alone, in reality only sixty-three children between five and fifteen years in the town and village *combined* did not attend school during that time (see Appendix B).

58. Enders, "Treasures and a Trash Heap," 212–13.

59. The State of New York, "The Act for the Better Establishment of Common Schools," (Albany, N.Y.: The State of New York, 1814), 11.

strategy proved to be an enormous success. Between the state funding and the waiver of local fees, children from poor families gained access to the same educational opportunities as all other common school students, and overall statewide attendance began to rise significantly in each successive year. In his report to the legislature for the 1819–1820 school year, Hawley revealed in the progress of the common school system:

There is now therefore, reason to believe that the number of children in the state who do not attend any school, and who are not otherwise in the way of receiving a common education, is very small. The public bounty is sufficient to defray the expense of most schools for about three months in the year; and where that is expended in different parts of the year, so as not to defray the whole expense of the school for any particular part, it is understood that in most districts, poor children have been permitted to attend the district school free of expense, under that provision in the [1814] school act which empowers districts to exonerate such children from the payment of teachers' wages.⁶⁰

As Hawley's presentation indicates, payment for common school education came from both public and private sources: state funding covered a portion of the year ("about three months"), while local taxes and assessments made up the difference for teachers' wages. If the local commissioner and trustees deemed a family too poor to pay an assessment (in full or in part), the children would be entitled to attend school either free of charge or at a reduced rate, in accordance with the family's ability to pay. Thus, Packard's school records reveal the families who could afford to pay, along with the families who apparently could not. But the point needs to be reemphasized that the accounts do not indicate actual attendance at school. Indeed, rather than providing evidence of the Smith children's lack of attendance, Packard's school

60. *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New-York at Their Forty-Fourth Session* (Albany, N.Y.: The State of New York, 1820), 556. (All subsequent *Journal* citations will be abbreviated as JA, followed by the session and page numbers, e.g., JA 44:556.)

record very likely suggests the opposite. Because the “Joseph Smith” family was one of the poorest in the records, they would have been among the most eligible candidates for tuition waivers. And if they did in fact receive full or partial waivers, the Smith children could have been in regular attendance at classes, even though Packard’s accounts would show a near absence of payments. The widow Hannah Hurlbut’s child, for example, though the least able to pay, with empty column after column of payments received, would nevertheless be entitled to, and may well have been participating in, full and regular attendance over the duration of Packard’s accounts. Thus, while Packard’s records potentially reveal the indigent circumstances of the Smith family, they nevertheless do not confirm the actual attendance or non-attendance of the Smith children at school.

The unreliability of Packard’s records as attendance records is further complicated by the time period they cover. As Enders astutely observes, Packard’s notes cover only the period from September 9 through October 7, 1817, while “the columns are blank after Friday, October 10, possibly because it was harvest time, even though the headings continue through Saturday, November 1.”⁶¹ The point is significant: planting and harvest times were the two busiest periods in the life of a farming family. And in the first decades of the nineteenth century, when frontier towns rapidly grew in size and started to become well established, school years often lengthened from shorter periods (roughly five months) to longer sessions (seven to eight months). Such changes resulted in schools commencing winter terms during the fall harvest season. For a poor family like the Smiths, who could not afford to hire additional laborers, the oldest children would likely have stayed home to work on the farm, delaying attendance until after the harvest. Thus, Packard’s records are silent on the Smith children’s status in the post-harvest winter months. Nevertheless,

61. Enders, “Treasures and a Trash Heap,” 202.

the records, even if indirectly, offer potential insights into the working and educational lives of the Smith children.

Harvest season did not occur at precisely the same time each year, because of weather conditions and the annual variations for the maturation of crops. Nonetheless, the harvest season in upstate New York for sweet and silage corn, barley, beans, oats, potatoes, and wheat usually finished by the end of October. The exceptions were field corn (dried and hardened, usually for animal feed) and possibly soybeans (an uncommon crop in upstate New York, used for animal feed in this period), which usually occurred by the end of November.⁶² In terms of scheduling the actual harvest, farmers relied heavily on weather predictions in the yearly almanacs. In 1817, for example (the fall season in which Packard kept his school records), almanacs covering New York, Pennsylvania, and the surrounding states (mostly New England) consistently urged readers to prepare for winter in late November with the anticipation of snow and storms in early December.⁶³ Whether or not

62. On crops, Bushman notes, "Most farmers planted corn for family and animals on the first cleared land. Wheat followed in the second year, with the possibility of a small surplus beyond the family needs" (*Rough Stone*, 33).

63. For the first week in December, Smith & Forman's almanac predicts "Hard [rain?], Snow, with bluster weather" (*Smith & Forman's New-York and Jew-Jersey Almanac, For the Year of Our Lord 1817* [New York: Smith & Forman, 1816]). Pennsylvania-based almanacs consistently predict "snow" on November 28. See *The New St. Tammany Almanac, For the Year 1817*, (Philadelphia: George W. Mentz, 1816); Joshua Sharp, *Bailey's Rittenhouse Almanac, For the Year of Our Lord, 1817* (Philadelphia: Lydia R. Bailey, 1816); *Poor Will's Almanac, For the Year 1817*, (Philadelphia: Joseph Rakestraw, 1816). "If no signs of storms and winds should fail in this month," warns a Windsor, Vermont almanac for the start of December, "we shall have enough of it [i.e., if all the predictions for the month come true, the month will be filled with more than enough storms and winds]. High winds with a driving storm" (Truman Abell, *The New England Farmer's Diary and Almanac, From the Year of the Creation, According to Sacred Writ, 5779, and the Christian Era, 1817* [Windsor, Vt.: Jesse Cochran, 1816]). For the start of December, a Hartford, Connecticut almanac that "will serve for any of the adjoining States" waxes poetic: "Now frowning winter rears its

inclement weather actually occurred, farmers would nevertheless have worked to finish harvest before those dates.

Thus, if he were working on the family farm or hiring out to neighbors for the 1817 harvest, Joseph Jr. would likely have delayed attendance at school until the end of October at the soonest, or the end of November at the latest. Planting season for the following year would not begin until late March at the earliest (usually early April), which would result in Joseph attending approximately only four to five months each school year in Palmyra and later in Manchester. This estimate finds indirect support from Lemuel Durfee's account book for 1815–1829. After Durfee purchased the Smith family farm on December 20, 1825, the Smiths continued to work the property, while Samuel Harrison Smith (Joseph's younger brother) worked for Durfee to pay the rent on the farm. Durfee's account reads, "April, the 16 day, the year 1827, S. Harrison Smith, Son of Joseph Smith, began to work for me by the month. Is to work 7 months for the use of the place where said Joseph Smith lives."⁶⁴ This "7 months" span, from April to November, coincides with the regular farming season, from planting to harvest. This then suggests that the Smith children who hired out their labor were working the same yearly schedule as their adult contemporaries, causing them to delay their attendance at school each year.⁶⁵

head array'd in all majestic dread. Now expect foul weather" (A. Allen, *Allen's New-England Almanack, For the Year of Our Lord 1817* [Hartford, Conn.: Peter B. Gleason & Co., 1816]).

64. H. Michael Marquardt, "Historical Setting of Mormonism in Manchester, Ontario County, New York," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, vol. 35, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 73 (spelling and punctuation modernized).

65. Apart from Durfee's account book, other indirect evidence suggests the schedules the Smith family followed to balance winter schooling with the months devoted to farm labor. For example, when Joseph established the "school of the prophets," Dean C. Jessee informs us that, "The 1835–36 session of the school met between 2 November and 29 March" (Jessee, ed. *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Brigham Young University Press, 2002],

While the precise details of his school attendance in Palmyra are elusive, Joseph Jr. still managed to appear at school. Several of his former classmates mentioned attending with him during the family's years in Palmyra. William H. Cuyler, a lifelong resident of Palmyra, "attended school with Joseph Smith the Mormon, and his brothers—particularly Alvin [1798–1823] and William [1811–1893]."66 Isaac Butts also "attended school with Prophet Jo" in Palmyra.⁶⁷ And Jacob E. Terry of East Palmyra was said to be "a school associate and friend of young Joseph Smith, they being the same age."⁶⁸ The Smith family would remain taxpaying residents in the Palmyra school districts from 1817 to late 1820 or early 1821, but they were not planning to stay in town indefinitely.

Between April 1819 and April 1820, some of the members of the Smith family moved "into a small log cabin on the property of Samuel Jennings on Stafford Road near the southern border of Palmyra township."⁶⁹ This cabin was adjacent to a parcel of land they hoped to purchase for a family farm in the neighboring town of Manchester. Though they did not yet own the land, the Smiths were apparently confident enough of its purchase to start developing the property. For approximately two to three years, the Smiths maintained residences on both Main Street and Stafford Road in Palmyra; and the cabin appears to have served initially as an outpost, where family members stayed who were developing the Manchester land.⁷⁰ The Smiths would eventually take

88n31). This span of time coincides with Samuel Smith's work schedule for Durfee, suggesting it was common practice to dedicate seven months of the year to farm work, while devoting the remaining five months to such activities as school attendance.

66. EMD 3:169–170.

67. EMD 2:202.

68. EMD 3:261–2.

69. EMD 5:389.

70. The Smiths are associated with three different locations at this time: the Main Street home in Palmyra, the Jennings' cabin in south Palmyra (on the northern

formal possession of the Manchester property sometime between July 1820 and February 1821.⁷¹ This period therefore marks the time when the Smith family became official residents of Manchester.⁷² Whether or not the children started attending school in Manchester at this time, however, is not known.

As of April 1822, the Smiths were still recorded on the Palmyra road list, suggesting that the family had not yet made a full transition to the Manchester farm.⁷³ Therefore, the children apparently could have attended school in either Palmyra or Manchester during the 1820–1821 winter term. These dates provide a framework for Joseph’s potential attendance at school in Palmyra. If he started school in Manchester during the same period in which the Smiths took possession of the new farm (1820–1821), then Joseph Jr. would have been eligible to attend three winter terms in Palmyra (winter 1817–1818, winter 1818–1819

border of Manchester), and the adjacent Manchester farm. According to Vogel, the April 1820 Palmyra road list appears to indicate two dwelling locations for the Smith family: “Alvin appears as fifteenth and Joseph Sr., as forty-second on a forty-four-name list, probably indicating that part of the Smith family moved sometime between April 1819 and April 1820 to the south end of Stafford Road.” Vogel further adds, “Alvin was apparently on Main Street, perhaps running the family’s cake and ale shop, and Joseph Sr. was south on Stafford Road near the Palmyra township line, evidently occupying the Jennings cabin” (EMD 5:389–90). Bushman notes, “The Smiths moved onto their [Manchester] land in stages. Before obtaining title to the land, the Smiths raised a log house adjacent to their prospective purchase on the land of a local merchant, Samuel Jennings, possibly to begin clearing land they intended to buy” (*Rough Stone*, 32).

71. Vogel notes that as of June 22, 1820, “the entire 300 acres of Farmington (now Manchester) Lot 1 is taxed to the heirs of Nicholas Evertson [the owners of the property prior to the Smiths], indicating that the Smiths had not yet contracted for their land” (EMD 5:391).

72. At this time, the Smith farm was technically within the town of Farmington; Manchester had not yet been created. As Vogel notes, the town in 1821 was divided into two townships: the western half continued under the name of Farmington, while the eastern portion became Manchester (EMD 5:391–392).

73. EMD 5:392.

and winter 1819–1820). If, however, he continued to attend school in Palmyra after the Smiths officially purchased the Manchester property (this would assume he traveled back and forth the relatively short distance between Manchester and Palmyra), then Joseph would have been eligible to attend five winter terms in Palmyra (winter 1820–1821 and winter 1821–1822, in addition to the above mentioned).

Manchester, New York: 1820/1821 to 1825

At this stage, Joseph's age becomes a factor for consideration. Less than three months after the beginning of the 1820–1821 winter term, Joseph turned fifteen years old. According to the New York Act for the Support of Common Schools, passed the previous year in 1819, the local commissioners of common schools distributed state funds "according and in proportion to the number of children, between the ages of five and fifteen years, inclusive, living in each such [school] district."⁷⁴ The age range, though arbitrary, nevertheless reflects cultural assumptions about the normative age range of common school students in New York. Therefore, because he turned fifteen on December 23, 1820, Joseph could have dropped out of school at that time, without disrupting social conventions or doing anything unusual in comparison to his peers. Yet, in spite of this option, Joseph nonetheless attended at least one term in Manchester, as attested by Joseph's former classmates in the township.⁷⁵

74. The State of New York, *The Act for the Support of Common Schools; Passed April 12, 1819; With Extracts from Acts Passed March 30, 1820, and March 23, 1821; Also, The Act to Amend the Act for the Support of Common Schools, passed April 17, 1822* (Albany, N.Y.: The State of New York, 1822), 9–11.

75. Manchester would not exist until 1821, when it was created out of Farmington (see footnote 72). To avoid confusion and maintain consistency, however, I am referring anachronistically to the Smith's farm in Farmington as being in Manchester; see EMD 5:391–92. Even though members of the Smith family were possibly staying in the Stafford Road cabin in Palmyra as early as 1818 or 1819, Joseph's attendance at a Manchester school in this early period is problematic. The family did not become official residents of Manchester until they formally

contracted for their new farm sometime between July of 1820 and February of 1821; thus, they would not have begun paying taxes or school assessments to Manchester Township until that time (EMD 5:391–392). In order for the Smith children to attend school in Manchester prior to that time, Joseph Sr. and Lucy would have been required to get permission from the trustees of both Palmyra’s and Manchester’s school districts (see EMD 3:258n4, where Vogel indicates, “according to early maps of Manchester, the Smiths’ former residence was included in school district 11”). Permissions for families to transfer children from one school district to another (within a township or across township lines) took place during town meetings. Palmyra’s minutes in 1815, for example, indicate how “Enoch Saunders is set off from 1st School District in Palmyra with leave to annex himself to Farmington. Parshall Terry is set off from Palmyra with leave to attach himself to Farmington. Isaac Sweezy is set off from Palmyra with leave to attach himself to Williamson. Martin Harris [Joseph’s early supporter] is set off from School District No. 1 and attached to School District No. 8 in Palmyra.” None of the town minutes record the Smith family transferring their children from a Palmyra school district to a Farmington/Manchester district, which strongly suggests the Smith children attended school in Palmyra until the family became taxpaying residents of Manchester between July 1820 and February 1821 (when they could transfer schools without needing permission or being recorded in the town minutes). See Town of Palmyra, “Town of Palmyra Board Meeting Minutes,” Palmyra, N.Y.: Town & Village of Palmyra, 1815, <http://www.palmyrany.com/minutes/TB/1815.pdf>. While the Manchester trustees could have allowed the Smith children to attend their school, the Smiths normally would have been required to cover all the costs of their children’s attendance. The 1822 revision of the common school act of New York indicates, “But if children, not residing in the district, be permitted, by the trustees, to attend their school, as such permission might have been withheld, *it may, and ought, if granted, to be on condition that no part of the public money shall be applied for their benefit*” (The State of New York, *The Act for the Support of Common Schools*: 35 [emphasis added]). The Smiths were struggling financially at this time, suggesting the children would have continued to attend school in Palmyra, where they would not incur additional expenses. An exception to this rule would be the case in which neighboring townships shared a school district. Nevertheless, Manchester school district 11 was not a jointly-shared school district with Palmyra. The only school district the two towns shared at this time was Palmyra’s District 21, formed on February 14, 1820, which contained Palmyra lots 46, 50, 53, and part of 37 in Township 12, 2nd range, joined together with Manchester

Orrin Porter Rockwell, a well-known Mormon convert and longtime confidant of Joseph's, "was a schoolmate and friend of Smith's" in Manchester.⁷⁶ Moses C. Smith, another Manchester classmate (not related to Joseph), was said to have "attended [school] with the Prophet and once they had an altercation."⁷⁷ And Samantha Payne, also of Manchester, claimed to have "attended school with [Joseph] for some time."⁷⁸ Thus, if he started attending school in Manchester during the first term in which he was eligible as a resident, Joseph would have attended at least the winter 1820–1821 term.

A subsequent question then naturally arises: did Joseph stop attending school in Manchester after the 1820–1821 winter term or did he continue to participate longer? Again, historical documentation does not provide a clear answer. Nevertheless, a look at the laws governing school funding, coupled with the state's statistics on school attendance, offers further insight and clarification. To begin, in order to determine how much money the state would allocate to each school district, New

(Farmington) lots 25 and 78 in Township 11, 2nd range. See Town of Palmyra, "Town of Palmyra Board Meeting Minutes," Palmyra, N.Y.: Town & Village of Palmyra, 1819, <http://www.palmyrany.com/minutes/TB/1819.pdf>. For helpful online maps showing lot numbers, see Dale R. Broadhurst's webpage: <http://olivercowdery.com/smithhome/smithmap.htm>. In summary, the earliest any of the Smith family children could have attended a Manchester school would be the 1820–1821 winter term.

76. See Elizabeth Kane's interview, EMD 3:406. Caroline Rockwell Smith, Porter Rockwell's sister, also stated, "I attended school with their [the Smith's] children" (EMD 2:199). Benjamin Saunders, about two years younger than Caroline Rockwell Smith, said, "I knew young Joseph just as well as I did my own brothers. Went to the same school with the younger boys" (EMD 2:137). Though Benjamin's and Caroline's statements do not specifically identify Joseph as a classmate, their observations demonstrate Lucy and Joseph Sr.'s commitment to have all their children educated; therefore, the idea that Joseph would be excluded from such influence and withheld from school is untenable.

77. EMD 3:258.

78. EMD 2:172.

York's Act for the Support of Common Schools in 1819 measured the population of *all* the children "between the ages of five and fifteen years" within every county, regardless of actual attendance. Legislators then used this overall population to determine the amount of money each county would receive. It is important to note, however, that this law did not *restrict* school attendance to children between those ages of five and fifteen; the figures merely provided guidance for funding allocations.⁷⁹ Thus, students could attend school at *any* age. The 1822 clarification of the 1819 Act states, "In applying the public money, it must always be paid to the teacher on account of his wages. It is not to be distributed among the scholars or their parents; *nor is it to be applied for the exclusive benefit of children between the ages of five and fifteen years*, or of any other particular description of scholars. *All who reside in the district and attend the school, as they may of common right, must necessarily participate equally in the benefit of the public money.*"⁸⁰ As such, Joseph could have continued attending common schools for the remainder of his teenage years in Manchester, if he so chose. And whether or not he took advantage of this opportunity, many of his peers did.

According to the annual reports of the New York Superintendent of Common Schools, students throughout the state frequently attended classes at ages younger than five and older than fifteen years. And this was certainly true for Manchester. In the 1821 school year (when Joseph

79. The state paid teachers a flat rate based on the census numbers and school records of children between five and fifteen within any given school district. Teachers did not receive additional money if more children attended than the census indicated, nor did they receive less if all the eligible children did not attend.

80. The State of New York, *The Act for the Support of Common Schools*, 35 (emphasis added). The logistics of tracking a moving population of settlers during a period of intense migration made attendance figures at each country schoolhouse difficult to record. Therefore, in lieu of using actual school attendance records exclusively, state officials also based funding allocations on the more reliable census figures.

turned sixteen), Manchester taught a combined total of 1,051 students. Of these students, 972 were five to fifteen years of age, leaving a remainder of seventy-nine students either younger than five or older than fifteen (7.5 percent of all students).⁸¹ And the pattern continued for all the years the Smith family resided in Manchester: in the 1822 school year, seventy-four students younger than five or older than fifteen attended (6 percent of the total 1,236 students taught);⁸² in 1823, sixty students younger than five or older than fifteen attended (7.8 percent of the total 770 taught);⁸³ in 1824, eighty-three students younger than five or older than fifteen attended (9.8 percent of the total 850 taught);⁸⁴ and in 1825, the number of students younger than five or older than fifteen jumped to 179 (18.2 percent of the 985 taught, or nearly one in five students).⁸⁵

Joseph's continued presence in school and desire for an education are suggested not only by the presence of other older students in Manchester, but by additional clues. During this same period, for example, Joseph attended a juvenile debating society, likely during the 1821–1822 winter when he turned sixteen, which reveals an ongoing and self-motivated desire to improve himself.⁸⁶ Tantalizing clues also

81. The figures are listed under Farmington (Manchester and Farmington had not yet split) (JA 45:632).

82. Though the two towns had technically split by now, Manchester and Farmington filed a joint return for 1822 (JA 45: Appendix A-11).

83. Manchester stopped filing a joint return with Farmington this year, which explains the drop in numbers (JA 47: Appendix A-12).

84. JA 48: Appendix B-13.

85. JA 49: Appendix G-20.

86. H. Michael Marquardt indicates that Orsamus Turner, who provides us with this account, moved away from Palmyra in the summer of 1822 (H. Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816–1844* [Longwood, Fla: Xulon Press, 2005], 49). Thus Joseph's attendance with Turner at the debate society likely occurred at the same time as the 1821–1822 school winter term, if not earlier (rural debate clubs met most frequently during the winter months, when farm work was minimal). In addition, specifically after January 1822, at least one

emerge from his personal library. For example, Joseph owned the Reverend Charles A. Goodrich's schoolbook *A History of the United States* (1822), an advanced school reader that Joseph donated to the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute on January 31, 1844.⁸⁷ First published sometime after March 8, 1822, Goodrich's *History* quickly became popular in common schools and was "reprinted forty times in just ten years; eventually his work sold over 150,000 copies during the decade of the 1840s."⁸⁸ Nevertheless, rather than encountering this popular text in school, Joseph likely used this schoolbook in one of the several avenues of self-improvement he pursued, such as domestic education or participation with the juvenile debate society.⁸⁹

More directly linked to classroom study, Joseph's copy of Murray's *English Reader* (1799) suggests Joseph's impressive level of common school achievement. Murray's *Reader* was one of the most advanced

other "debating school" formed in the Palmyra area. See Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*, 50n56. Yet, the records for all these clubs are currently lost or unknown.

87. Kenneth W. Godfrey, "A Note on the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute," *BYU Studies* 14, no. 3 (1974), 1–2.

88. Barry Joyce, *The First U.S. History Textbooks: Constructing and Disseminating the American Tale in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Lexington Books, 2015), 45. On March 8, 1822, Goodrich submitted his manuscript for copyright to Charles A. Ingersoll, Clerk of the District of Connecticut. See Rev. Charles A. Goodrich, *A History of the United States of America*, 3rd ed. (Hartford: Barber & Robinson, 1823), imprint.

89. Even though we do not have records of the schoolbooks in Manchester classrooms during Joseph's years there (approximately 1822 to 1825), New York common schools rarely used American history textbooks at this time. In 1826, the first year state records identified schoolbooks in common school classrooms, only six towns in the entire state used an American history text, none of them in Ontario, Wayne, or Chenango counties. See JA 50: Appendix A-9, A-40. While a local Manchester teacher may have adopted Goodrich's *History* during Joseph's attendance at school, it is much more likely that Joseph obtained this book on his own.

textbooks that youths encountered in common schools.⁹⁰ Only the oldest and most experienced common school students studied from this text, which required a prerequisite sequence of schoolbooks that included primers, spellers, grammars, and other introductory readers. Thus, Murray's *Reader* not only reveals Joseph's abilities, it also signals the extensive history of educational development needed in order to acquire the skills necessary to use this book. Joseph's participation in a juvenile debate club and his ownership of Murray's *Reader* and Goodrich's *History* therefore provide clues which suggest that Joseph continued—even if only intermittently—to attend school in Manchester during his later teenage years.⁹¹ In any event, Smith's formal education in Manchester would have ranged from a minimum of one winter term (1820–1821) to a maximum of five winter terms (1820–1825).

South Bainbridge, New York: 1825 to 1826

The final location in this review of Joseph's formal education is South Bainbridge, New York. In October of 1825, Josiah Stowell hired Joseph Jr. to work as a sryer for a team of treasure hunters. A few months later, Joseph was arrested and stood trial in Bainbridge on March 20, 1826, accused of being a "disorderly person and an Impostor."⁹² According to court documents, Joseph admitted to working for Stowell as a treasure-hunting seer, but asserted that the majority of his time was

90. John Henry Evans, *Joseph Smith: An American Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1989), 33, 436.

91. Thomas Davies Burrall of Geneva, New York, claimed Joseph worked for him as a woodcutter, "through the winter in company with some twenty or thirty others, rough back-woodsmen" (EMD 3:363–64). Even though Burrall's memorial account contains several historical inaccuracies, it is nevertheless possible that Joseph may have worked for him at some point. If so, this would likely have interrupted at least one of the winter terms during the family's Manchester period.

92. EMD 4:248–49.

spent working on Stowell's farm "and going to school."⁹³ Stowell's son, Josiah Jr., corroborated the court record in an 1843 letter, in which he claimed, "I have been intimately acquainted with him [Joseph Smith Jr.]. He then was about 20 years old or there about. I also went to school with him one winter."⁹⁴ Another student, Asa B. Searles, also claimed to have attended school with Smith in Bainbridge.⁹⁵

When he started school with Josiah Jr., Joseph was nineteen years old and would turn twenty in the course of the winter term. From a modern perspective, Joseph's advanced age for such instruction might seem awkward, but no doubt his history of intermittent attendance contributed to his desire to participate. The circumstances surrounding his attendance, however, urge caution against the exclusive assumption that Joseph's attendance derived from a desire to fill any potential gaps in his education. For instance, as an older student in Chenango County, Joseph was certainly not alone. The county was consistently one of the highest in the state for teaching youths both younger and older than the statewide category of students "between the ages of five and fifteen years." When he attended school, Smith was one of 238 students who fell outside the range of five to fifteen years, which amounted to 23.3 percent of the total 1,023 taught. Assuming half of those students were older than fifteen (state statistics unfortunately group the two age groups together), then roughly 12 percent of the students were older than the five to fifteen category. In other words, when Joseph, age nineteen, started the winter term in Chenango County, roughly 12 percent of his classmates were also older than fifteen.⁹⁶ Josiah Stowell, Jr., in fact,

93. EMD 4:249.

94. EMD 4:80 (spelling and punctuation modernized).

95. EMD 4:177.

96. JA 50, vol. 1: Appendix A-13 (only 18 of 21 school districts reported this year). In the 1825 school year, Bainbridge taught 225 students younger than five or older than fifteen (25.3 percent of the total number of students taught). See JA 49: Appendix G-8 (only 16 of 20 school districts reported this year). In

who was born April 16, 1809, was himself sixteen years of age when he attended school with Joseph, and would turn seventeen before the end of the school year. Thus, Joseph's attendance may reflect his desire to participate in the same activities as his peers, as much as a personal desire to improve his education.⁹⁷

Regardless of his reasoning, however, Joseph's time in school would not have been idle, and his age suggests an important role he may have played in the classroom. Older students were regularly enlisted as teaching assistants when the class was separated into groups, according to skill levels. For several years prior to this time, several New York schools were also experimenting with a new form of pedagogy known as the Lancasterian system.⁹⁸ In this model, older students, under direction of the schoolteacher, participated in the teaching process by guiding

the 1824 school year, Bainbridge taught 248 (26.3 percent of the total number). See JA 48: Appendix B-4.

97. Winter terms took place when the work on farms were at a minimum, and the choice between working in the cold weather on a farm or finding shelter in the local schoolhouse with his new friends may well have influenced Joseph's motivations. Regarding older students attending common schools, Joseph's attendance was not anomalous. For instance, Oliver Culver, a twenty-five-year-old resident near Rochester, New York, was so determined to attend classes that he helped build his local schoolhouse. See Rick Grunder, *Mormon Parallels: A Bibliographic Source* (LaFayette, N.Y.: Rick Grunder Books, 2014), 42.

98. On March 16, 1817, Gideon Hawley proposed the introduction of the Lancasterian system (aka "Lancastrian") to selected schools in New York: "it is respectfully submitted, whether the time has not arrived when some provision ought to be made for the encouragement, and gradual introduction into our schools, of the Lancastrian system of education. . . . The great principle, which forms the distinctive character of this system . . . is a kind of self teaching, which the scholars are made to undergo, by means of monitors selected from themselves" (JA 41:478). The experiment, however, did not last long. In 1844, Samuel S. Randall observed, "after an ephemeral and sickly existence, these institutions, from which such favorable results were expected, languished, and with few exceptions, disappeared" (*A Digest of the Common School System of the State of New-York* [Albany, N.Y.: The State of New York, 1844], 25).

younger students in their exercises. It is possible that Smith may have been acting as a monitor, though the historical record is unfortunately silent on such details. Yet, such participation well may have influenced Joseph's desires to teach: he would eventually instruct members of the "school of the prophets" in grammar, as well as teach grammar to his family.⁹⁹ In any event, the 1825–1826 winter term was likely the last time Smith attended class in a common school.

Tallying the Time

Throughout this essay, I have revisited several of the claims and historical accounts regarding Joseph's formal education in an effort to interrogate popular notions regarding his level of literacy. I believe a close examination of the existing evidence confirms that Joseph Sr. and Lucy faced significant challenges in providing a formal education for their children. Frequent relocation, illness, and financial exigencies would have contributed to a string of interruptions, resulting in gaps and intermittent school attendance over the years. At the same time, however, the historical accounts reflect the family's recognition of the importance of education and a persistent effort to obtain it. And if the available historical references provide relatively accurate representations, then the overall amount of Joseph's formal education requires significant upward revision.

Because the historical record does not precisely identify each and every term Joseph attended school, a countless number of speculative combinations can be formulated either to expand excessively or minimize unnecessarily the number of his years of formal education. On one hand, we might claim Joseph rarely attended school, regardless of the available

99. In his journal entry of November 5, 1835, Joseph records, "in the evening lectured on Grammar" (to the "school of the prophets"). On November 11, 1835, Joseph states, "returned home and spent the evening, around my fire-side, teaching my family the science of grammar." See Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 101–02, 109.

evidence. On the other hand, we might claim Joseph attended, in full or in part, every school term that he would have been eligible to attend (excluding, of course, his times of illness and the summer terms when he was likely working), spanning from the 1809–1810 winter term in Royalton, Vermont (the term in which Joseph turned four years of age and became eligible to attend school) to the 1825–1826 term in South Bainbridge, New York (the last known school term Joseph attended, when he turned twenty years of age). In the latter case, the total number of school terms that Joseph was technically eligible to attend during those fifteen years would have included six full winter terms, six full summer terms, and nine partial winter terms—or approximately ten years of school (see Appendix A for a year-by-year breakdown). What Joseph actually experienced in his life, of course, would surely have occurred somewhere in between these two extremes. To that end, this essay will attempt to minimize speculation by outlining a scenario of Joseph's participation in formal schooling that is grounded in direct and indirect historical references.

Junius Wells provides the first reference to Joseph's formal education by claiming that Joseph learned his letters from Deacon Jonathan Kinney in Vermont. This requires a minimum of one school term. If we assume he did not begin school until the 1810 summer term (delaying his start until he was four and a half years old), and if we also assume the Smith family moved to West Lebanon in the fall of 1811, then Joseph could have attended school in Royalton for three full terms (summer 1810, winter 1810–1811, summer 1811). Yet, this is the same period when Lucy claimed the Smith children had been deprived of the benefit of an education. Therefore, we will limit the estimate of Joseph's time to the winter 1810–1811 school term.

Next, assuming Lucy's dates, the Smith family moved to West Lebanon in the fall or winter of 1811, which would allow Joseph to attend the 1812 school year (winter 1811–1812 and summer 1812). As discussed earlier, Lucy stated in her history that all the Smith children who “were

of sufficient age” were sent to a local common school. Joseph, who turned six years of age during the 1811–1812 winter term, would have been included. This brings the total amount of Joseph’s formal education to two winter terms and one summer term, or approximately one and a half school years.

In the 1812 to 1813 winter, Joseph fell ill. Though he likely started the winter term, Joseph would have withdrawn early, as the leg surgery and subsequent convalescence would have prevented him from attending school for the remainder of the term. Joseph most likely missed the following summer 1813 term, as well. One year after the surgery, Lucy stated that everyone in the family returned to health. No longer bedridden, though still lame and using crutches, Joseph would have had the opportunity to return to school and pick up where he left off. Thus, between the first half of the 1812–1813 winter term, combined with the latter half of the 1813–1814 winter term, Joseph would add the equivalent of one more winter term. This raises the estimated amount of formal education to approximately two school years.

Even though Joseph remained on crutches until the family moved to Palmyra, Lucy’s claim that all the children in the family returned to health further suggests that Joseph’s condition allowed him to return to school for the remainder of the Smith family’s time in the Upper Connecticut Valley. Furthermore, Joseph’s continued physical challenges that would have prevented heavy farm labor, would have allowed him to attend school during the summer terms. Nevertheless, for this estimate, I will *not* include any summer school sessions for this period. Rather, for the sake of argument, this scenario will assume that family exigencies did not permit Joseph to attend during these summers, though he was apparently physically capable to do so. This results in the equivalent of approximately one more year of formal school (winter 1814–1815 and winter 1815–1816). Joseph’s total time in formal school would then be the equivalent of just over three years.

Sometime during the winter of 1816 to 1817, the Lucy and the children spent one month relocating to Palmyra, New York, from Norwich, Vermont. Once the family arrived, Lucy and Joseph Sr. appear to have enrolled the children in school for the remainder of the winter term (February and March). Between starting the winter term in Norwich, withdrawing to prepare for and complete the move to New York, and then finishing the term in Palmyra, the Smith children may have attended between two to three months for the winter 1816–1817 term. This estimate will limit the school time to the final two months in Palmyra, bringing Joseph's total school time to approximately three and a half years.

Shortly after their arrival in Palmyra, the Smiths held a family council and determined to pool their efforts in an attempt to get established. Therefore, in this scenario we will assume that Joseph, now eleven years old, began to work the same seasonal schedule as an adult, splitting time between family labors and hiring out to local farms and employers. This also means that from this time forward, Joseph would miss all future summer school sessions. Furthermore, he would start late in every ensuing winter term (thus limiting his time in school to between four and five months per year). We will also assume Joseph worked this same schedule during every subsequent harvest season, both in Palmyra and Manchester. Using the property tax records as a guide, Joseph's partial attendance during the winters would include four months of each winter term in 1817–1818, 1818–1819, and 1819–1820. This brings to the total time to the equivalent of approximately five years of formal schooling.

Several accounts from former classmates indicate Joseph also attended school in Manchester, which requires a minimum of one partial winter term (winter 1820–1821). During this period, Joseph participated in a juvenile debate club, which reveals his interest in self-improvement—an activity that also suggests continued attendance at school. Furthermore, Joseph's possession of advanced school texts, particularly Murray's *English Reader* and Charles Goodrich's *A History of*

the United States of America, alerts us to his level of achievement within the common school system. Therefore, this estimate will propose that Joseph potentially attended school in Manchester during the 1820–1821, 1821–1822, and 1822–1823 winter terms. This intermittent attendance equates to one school year and approximately four months, raising Joseph's total estimated time in formal school to six years and approximately four months. Finally, this scenario will assume that Joseph did not attend school, in either the winter or summer terms, during the 1824 or 1825 school years. Thus, the last time Joseph attended a common school would be the 1825–1826 winter term in South Bainbridge, Chenango County. This final term increases the overall estimated time that Joseph spent in formal education to the equivalent of approximately *seven full school years*—a notable increase to that proposed in previous historical representations, and one that will require the careful evaluation of future historians.

Because of the several gaps in the historical record, this estimate, of course, can either be increased or decreased, according to any given historian's perceptions and intents. In any case, however, the overall combined effect of historical sources points to a higher amount of Joseph's formal education than is traditionally acknowledged. My aim, however, is not to assert a specific figure of time; other supportable estimates certainly exist. Rather, I want to highlight the implications that can emerge when traditions and cultural contexts are brought into discussion with a detailed review of historical evidence: such incongruence, even when resistant to definitive measurements and final authoritative claims, opens windows to neglected historical narratives.

Another Facet of Joseph's Life

Joseph Smith's dynamic transformation from an uneducated farm boy to an exalted prophet of God remains deeply entangled in cultural traditions, religious identification, and the Mormon cosmology of faith. Yet,

an excavation below the often-hagiographical representations reveals a narrative of Smith's life that is equally compelling for its resonance with the individual struggle for respect and self-determination. Regardless what praise or criticism would be heaped upon his memory, Smith rose to prominence through tenacious determination, persistent hard work, and systematic self-improvement. Moreover, Smith's formal study would surely have been complemented by *informal* avenues of education, including instruction at home, reading, attendance at Sunday school, participation in a juvenile debate society, and even his preparations to become a Methodist exhorter.¹⁰⁰ One could argue that Smith, like so many of his ambitious fellow citizens in a striving nation, was above all an autodidact. The story of a young man, struggling against economic disadvantages and intermittent opportunities to attend school, would be inspirational and serve as a prime model for Mormon ethics of industriousness and productivity, were it not overshadowed by the near-exclusive enlistment of Smith's early life as evidence of divine manifestations beyond his humble and "uneducated" capabilities. Neither would Smith be an easy target for critics hoping to portray him as an illiterate farm boy who duped a bunch of so-called gullible, illiterate folk into following him. For below the surface of both idealized and demeaning stories, a persistent pattern of ambitious preparation begins to emerge, revealing the narrative of an individual's yearning to overcome his seemingly insurmountable obstacles to achieve a prominent role in public life and religious leadership. Smith's story truly exemplifies the ideological aspirations and ambitions of early nineteenth-century Americans, though the narrative of his self-motivated ascendance has receded into the background. It is, however, a story that deserves more nuanced respect, greater attention, and continued research.

100. EMD 2:127; EMD 3:49–50.

Appendix A: Joseph Smith Jr.—Common School Years

School Term	Joseph's Location	Joseph's Age (born December 23, 1805)	Notes
Winter 1809–1810 (i.e., the start of the 1810 school year)	Royalton, VT	3 (turns 4 on Dec. 23)	Eligible to attend school
Summer 1810	Royalton, VT	4	Eligible to attend school
Winter 1810–1811	Royalton, VT	4 (turns 5)	Eligible; attends a minimum of one school term in Royalton
Summer 1811	Royalton, VT, or West Lebanon, NH	5	Eligible ¹
Winter 1811–1812	Royalton, VT, or West Lebanon, NH	5 (turns 6)	Eligible
Summer 1812	Royalton, VT, or West Lebanon, NH	6	Eligible
Winter 1812–1813	West Lebanon, NH	6 (turns 7)	Typhoid epidemic; leg operation; winter term interrupted
Summer 1813	West Lebanon, NH (Salem, MA?)	7	Bedridden, Convalescing
Winter 1813–1814	West Lebanon, NH	7 (turns 8)	Eligible to return to school

School Term	Joseph's Location	Joseph's Age (born December 23, 1805)	Notes
Summer 1814	West Lebanon, NH	8	Eligible; on crutches, no heavy labor
Winter 1814–1815	West Lebanon, NH, or Norwich, VT	8 (turns 9)	Eligible; ² on crutches
Summer 1815	Norwich, VT	9	Eligible; on crutches
Winter 1815–1816	Norwich, VT	9 (turns 10)	Eligible; on crutches
Summer 1816	Norwich, VT	10	Eligible; on crutches
Winter 1816–1817	Norwich to Palmyra, NY	10 (turns 11)	The family moves 300 miles; winter term interrupted
Summer 1817	Palmyra, NY	11	Eligible, but likely starts working ³
Winter 1817–1818	Palmyra, NY	11 (turns 12)	Eligible; attends a minimum of one school term in Palmyra
Summer 1818	Palmyra, NY	12	Likely working
Winter 1818–1819	Palmyra, Main Street, and Palmyra, Stafford Road	12 (turns 13)	Eligible
Summer 1819	Palmyra, Main Street, and Palmyra, Stafford Road	13	Likely working

School Term	Joseph's Location	Joseph's Age (born December 23, 1805)	Notes
Winter 1819–1820	Palmyra, Main Street, and Palmyra, Stafford Road; working Manchester farm (Farmington)	13 (turns 14)	Eligible ⁴
Summer 1820	Palmyra, Main Street, and Palmyra, Stafford Road; Palmyra to Manchester (Farmington)	14	Likely working out of town ⁵
Winter 1820–1821	Palmyra, Stafford Road; Palmyra to Manchester (Farmington) ⁶	14 (turns 15)	Eligible; attends a minimum of one school term in Manchester
Summer 1821	Palmyra, Stafford Road; ⁷ Manchester (Farmington)	15	Likely working; unlikely at school
Winter 1821–1822	Palmyra, Stafford Road; ⁸ Manchester formally separates from Farmington	15 (turns 16)	Eligible
Summer 1822	Manchester	16	Likely working
Winter 1822–1823	Manchester	16 (turns 17)	Eligible
Summer 1823	Manchester	17	Likely working
Winter 1823–1824	Manchester	17 (turns 18)	Eligible

School Term	Joseph's Location	Joseph's Age (born December 23, 1805)	Notes
Summer 1824	Manchester	18	Likely working
Winter 1824–1825	Manchester	18 (turns 19)	Eligible
Summer 1825	Manchester	19	Likely working
Winter 1825–1826	South Bainbridge	19 (turns 20)	Attends school

Summary

Minimum Number of School Terms Attended: 4 (one per town: Royalton, Palmyra, Manchester, South Bainbridge)

Total Number of Winter Terms Eligible for Attendance: 15

Total Number of Summer Terms Eligible for Attendance: 6

Equivalency in Eligible Full School Years: Approximately 10.5

Appendix A Notes

1. The precise timing of the Smith's move to West Lebanon is unknown. Either the Smiths moved between school terms in 1811 or 1812 (not affecting the children's schooling), or they moved at a time that would have partially interfered with the winter term. The move was regional, approximately twenty-three miles, which would have minimized the amount of school time lost.
2. The timing of the seven-mile move to Norwich, Vermont, is unknown. If it occurred during a school term, the impact would have been minimal.
3. Joseph may have started working summers to assist the family.
4. Though the family might have started developing the Manchester farm prior to contracting the land, the Smiths were not yet Manchester taxpayers. The children would likely have continued attending school in Palmyra.

5. Vogel observes that “both Joseph Jr. and Samuel Harrison are missing from the 1820 census, perhaps because they were hired out in another township” (EMD 5:391).
6. Vogel notes, “Joseph Sr. and Alvin contract with Zachariah Seymour for 100 acres of the Evertson land in Farmington [later Manchester].... This occurred after Seymour received power of attorney for the land on 14 July 1820 and before 5 February 1821” (EMD 5:391). In terms of schooling, the same date range applies to the earliest timing for the Smith children’s eligibility to attend school in Manchester.
7. Vogel notes that Lucy Smith, daughter to Joseph Sr. and Lucy, “is born in Palmyra (NY), perhaps indicating that the Smiths had not yet moved to Farmington” (EMD 5:392).
8. Vogel observes how in April of 1822, “Joseph Sr. and Alvin appear on the Palmyra road list, indicating that the Smiths had not yet moved to their Farmington (Manchester) property” (EMD 5:392).
9. See Town of Palmyra, “Town of Palmyra Board Meeting Minutes,” Palmyra, N.Y.: Town & Village of Palmyra, 1816, <http://www.palmyrany.com/minutes/TB/1816.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2015).

Appendix B: Common School Statistics for Palmyra, Manchester (Farmington), and Bainbridge, 1817–1826¹⁰¹

Palmyra

School Year	1817	1818	1819	1820	1821
Joseph's Age	11	12	13	14	15
Overall Students Taught	NA*	987	908	1,100	1,253
Students 5 to 15 Years	NA	1,050	886	1,025	1,048
Students under 5, over 15	NA	NA	22 (2.5%)	75 (6.8%)	205 (16.4%)
School Districts	NA	18†	20	20	25
Districts Reporting	NA	NA	16	20	20
Average Months School in Session	NA	NA	NA	8	5††

101. For 1817 statistics, see JA 41:480, 484, 490. For 1818, JA 42:443, 447. For 1819, JA 43:474, 479, 480. For 1820, JA 44:559 [published typo reads 259], 562. For 1821, JA 45:626, 632. For 1822, JA 46: Appendix A-5, A-11. For 1823, JA 47: Appendix A-4, A-12, A-20. For 1824, JA 48:B4, B13, B21. For 1825, JA 49: Appendix G-8, G-20, G-30. For 1826, JA 50, vol. 1: Appendix A-13, A-20, A-27.

School Year	1822	1823	1824	1825	1826
Joseph's Age	16	17	18	19	20
Overall Students Taught	1,276	628	690	685	777
Students 5 to 15 Years	1,109	552	582	608	687
Students under 5, over 15	167 (13.1%)	76 (12%)	108 (15.7%)	77 (11.2%)	90 (11.6%)
School Districts	22	9	10	10	11
Districts Reporting	21	9	10	10	11
Average Months School in Session	7	7	8	8	8

Note: from 1817 to 1823, Palmyra statistics are recorded under Ontario County; from 1823 to 1826, Palmyra statistics are recorded under Wayne County.

*Palmyra did not submit a report for the 1817 school year.

‡Shaded areas indicate Joseph's age group and potential location for school attendance.

†This figure likely indicates the number of school districts that reported, rather than the total number of districts (in 1816, Palmyra created a 20th school district).⁹

††This figure is likely a misprint.

Manchester (Farmington)*

School Year	1817	1818	1819	1820	1821
Joseph's Age	11	12	13	14	15
Overall Students Taught	675	984	977	1,215	1,051
Students 5 to 15 Years	790	852	1,028	1,113	972‡
Students under 5, over 15	NA	132 (13.4%)	NA	102 (8.4%)	79 (7.5%)
School Districts	18	14†	18	22	21
Districts Reporting	NA	NA	14	19	14
Average Months School in Session	NA	NA	NA	7	8

School Year	1822	1823	1824	1825	1826
Joseph's Age	16	17	18	19	20
Overall Students Taught	1,236	770	850	985	987
Students 5 to 15 Years	1,162	710	767	806	821
Students under 5, over 15	74 (6%)	60 (7.8%)	83 (9.8%)	179 (18.2%)	166 (16.8%)
School Districts	18	11	12	13	13
Districts Reporting	18	10	12	13	13
Average Months School in Session	8	7	8	8	8

*1817 through 1821 statistics are for Farmington (Manchester not yet created); in 1822, Farmington and Manchester filed a joint report; 1823 through 1826 statistics are for Manchester.

‡Shaded areas indicate Joseph's age group and potential location for school attendance (statewide inconsistencies in a standard for determining who qualified as a fifteen-year-old means Smith could have been counted in either category for 1821).

†This figure likely represents the number of districts reporting, rather than total number of districts.

Bainbridge, Chenango County

School Years	1817	1818	1819	1820	1821
Joseph's Age	11	12	13	14	15
Overall Students Taught	642	567	772	774	721
Students 5 to 15 Years	537	458	607	571	544
Students under 5, over 15	105 (16.4%)	110 (19.4%)	165 (21.4%)	173 (23.3%)	177 (24.6%)
School Districts	17	17	18	21	18
Districts Reporting	12	11	16	13	14
Average Months School in Session	NA	NA	NA	6	8

School Years	1822	1823	1824	1825	1826
Joseph's Age	16	17	18	19	20
Overall Students Taught	866	838	943	891	1,023
Students 5 to 15 Years	699	679	695	666	785
Students under 5, over 15	167 (19.3%)	159 (19%)	248 (26.3%)	225 (25.3%)	238 (23.3%)
School Districts	19	20	19	20	21
Districts Reporting	17	18	19	16	18
Average Months School in Session	8	7	7	7	6

‡Shaded area indicates Joseph's age group and location for school attendance.