

A Historical Note on Joseph Smith's 1836 Visit to the East India Marine Society Museum in Salem, Massachusetts

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During the last week of July 1836, Joseph Smith, in company with Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, and Oliver Cowdery, left Kirtland, Ohio, to investigate the possibility of acquiring some kind of treasure reported to have been located in a house in Salem, Massachusetts. Mormon leaders in Kirtland were made aware of the treasure-cache by a Church member named Burgess whose report obviously convinced Joseph Smith to investigate personally the possibility of obtaining it. The Prophet's historic "mission" to Salem has generated considerable attention over the years, primarily because of the rather unusual motive behind such an undertaking. Additionally, while in Salem, Joseph Smith received a revelation (D&C 111) that provided important instructions concerning a number of questions he had concerning what course of action he and his companions should take during their stay in the city.

It is not the focus of this essay to examine in any great length the 1836 Salem mission. My purpose is to highlight one small incident associated with that episode—the visit by Joseph, Sidney, and Hyrum to the East India Marine Society museum.¹ Only a brief synopsis of the Salem trip will be given here.

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Fig. 1. Union Street, Salem, Massachusetts, 2002. Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, and Oliver Cowdery leased a house for temporary occupation on this street in August 1836. The street is located in downtown Salem and is only about two city blocks long. Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh.



Fig. 2. East India Marine Hall, 2002. In 1836, the building housed the museum collection of the East India Marine Society. Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh.



Fig. 3. Upper room of the East India Marine Hall, 2002. Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh.

Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, and Oliver Cowdery in Salem

On the evening of July 25, Joseph Smith and his traveling companions boarded the steamer *Charles Townsend* at Fairport Harbor, where they took passage to Buffalo, arriving the following day. Following a three-day trip on a line boat on the Erie Canal, the Mormon leaders arrived in Utica, New York, on July 29, where they went by rail, first to Schenectady, then to Albany. At Albany, the party boarded the *Erie*, which took them down the Hudson River to New York City, where they arrived the last day of July. After spending a few days conducting business in New York, they traveled by steamer to Providence, Rhode Island. There, they went by rail to Boston, then to Salem, where they arrived on August 4.² Where Joseph, Sidney, Hyrum, and Oliver boarded in Salem is not precisely known, but Burgess met them when they arrived and had probably made their housing arrangements ahead of time. A newspaper report published later that month stated the party “leased a house on Union Street,” which may have been where they had lived at the time of their arrival (see Fig. 1).³ During the next several weeks, the Mormon leaders attempted to locate the treasure trove and fulfill the injunction given in the revelation received on August 6 to “form acquaintance with men in this city” (D&C 111:3). This they did by engaging in public discourse and preaching.

Date 1836	Names	Residence
Aug. 5	Warren Inghalls	Lynn
6	Mr & Mrs Merbury	Georgetown D.C.
	William Dodge	Georgetown D.C.
	J. C. Abbott	St. Louis Mo
	Mr J. Messervy	St. Louis
	O. Cowdery	Windsor Ohio
	C. E. Hoacker	Philadelphia CP
	M. E. Chase	Salem N.C.
6	Samuel Rigdon	Cary Ohio
	Miss W. Brown study	Columbia Tenn
	Lydia C. Smith	Berlin Mass
	Clara W. Ware Marblehead	Marblehead
	Catherine P. Ware	West Cambridge
	Jennett M. Schouler	Lynn
	William Widdicombe	Granville Ohio
	Sherlock Mower	do do
	Mary G. Mower	do do
8	John W. Nichols	Andover
	John W. Nichols	do
8	Mr. Parker	Bradford, Ms.
	Mr. & Mrs. C. Sprout	Middleborough
	C. G. Gaptill	Waterville College, Me.
	Daniel J. Cheever	Boston
	Duranduh Cheever	Boston
	Francis Alexander Dix	Boston
	C. Clementina Angelina Dix	Georgetown D.C.

Fig. 4. Guest register of the East India Marine Society Museum showing the names of Oliver Cowdery and Sidney Rigdon who visited the museum on August 6, 1836. Photograph courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

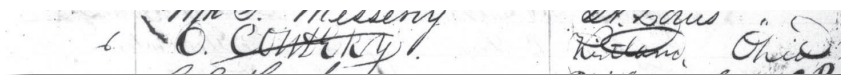


Fig. 5. Closeup of the guest register of the East India Marine Society Museum showing the August 6, 1836, signature of Oliver Cowdery,

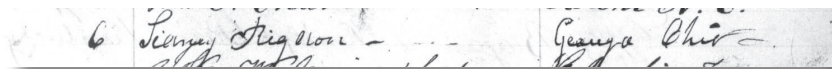


Fig. 6. Closeup of the guest register of the East India Marine Society Museum showing the August 6, 1836, signature of Sidney Rigdon.

By August 19, although still optimistic about the prospects of securing the hoped-for riches, Joseph Smith wrote Emma: “We have found the house, . . . very luckily and providential[ly] as we had one spell been most discouraged, but the house is oc[c]upied and it will require much care and patience to rent or b[u]y it, . . . if not now in the course of a few months.”²⁴ However, near month’s end, the decision was made to return to Kirtland, where they arrived sometime in September.

Visits to the East India Marine Society

On August 6 (two days after their arrival in Salem), Sidney Rigdon and Oliver Cowdery did some sightseeing. One of the places they visited was the East India Marine Hall, a 100 by 45-foot granite building, completed in October 1825, and home to the East India Marine Society, one of the oldest and most prestigious museums in America (see Fig. 2).⁵ The museum (now under the auspices of the Peabody Essex Museum) housed extensive collections from Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, and the Americas (see Fig. 3).

Rigdon and Cowdery’s signatures appear under the date of August 6 in the guest register of the museum (see Fig. 4). Cowdery’s signature (his name appears as the fifth person who signed the registry that day) reads “O. Cowdery,” with “Kirtland, Ohio” as his place of residence (see Fig. 5). Rigdon’s name is eighth on the list, also under the date August 6. He signed his full name and wrote “Geauga Ohio” as his place of residence (see Fig. 6). Coincidentally, it was on this same day that Joseph Smith received the revelation instructing them regarding their mission (D&C 111). This may help explain why Joseph and Hyrum’s names are noticeably absent from the museum register. Quite possibly at the time Sidney and Oliver were visiting the museum and other localities around the city, Joseph received and recorded the revelation.

Date 1836	Names	Residence
Aug 8	William Clark Mrs Sarah Clark Mrs Caroline Holman Miss C. F. Holman F. J. Clark John B. Low D. R. Morrison & Dacey David Kent & Dacey Wm. Bryan & Family	Melbaban Mass Alton Illinois Nahant Do Alton Illinois Gloucester Petersburg N. H. Lynn Mass Paris Kentucky
9	James M. Hewins Chas. C. Sewall	Medford Mass. Danvers
9	James Flint Samuel Flint Myrtice M. Curbin B. A. Holmes Miss Stewart Mr Samuel Mr Sharp Dr H. Caraway Joseph Smith Jr Rebecca Blanchard Jane Slater Daniel Eaton E	Middleton Danvers Baton Rouge La Do Port Eubank Miss B. P. La Mill Kirtland ^{Ohio} Gray Medford W. U Wells Maine

Fig. 7. Guest register of the East India Marine Society Museum showing the name of Joseph Smith Jr., who visited the museum on August 9, 1836. Photograph courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

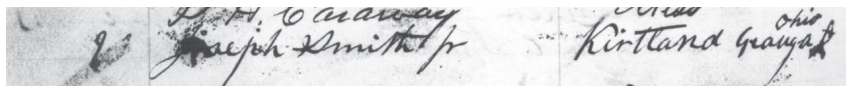


Fig. 8. Closeup of the guest register of the East India Marine Society Museum showing the August 9, 1836, signature of Joseph Smith Jr.

On August 9, the Prophet did some Salem sightseeing of his own, and it was on this occasion that he visited the East India Marine Hall. His name appears as the eleventh person on the museum's registry under that date (see Fig. 7). He signed his full name and gave "Kirtland Geauga Ohio" ("Ohio" was inserted above "Gauga") as his place of residence (see Fig. 8). Hyrum's name does not appear in the register, suggesting he did not visit the museum with his brother, or if he did, he neglected to sign his name.

I am indebted to Donald Q. Cannon, emeritus professor of Church History and Doctrine, BYU, for sharing the information about the 1836 registry. In 2002, members of BYU's Church History and Doctrine faculty, along with Cannon, visited the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem. The individual assigned to host our group showed us the register. When I asked if I could take a photograph of the pages where Joseph, Sidney's, and Oliver's names appear, I was told that a member of the library staff would take photographs, which could be provided for a nominal fee. Several weeks later, I received the photos, which are still in my possession.

Notes

1. For the most complete treatment of the 1836 mission to Salem see Kenneth W. Godfrey, "More Treasures Than One: Section 111," in *Hearken, O Ye People: Discourses on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Sandy, UT: Randall Book Company, 1984), 191–204; Donald Q. Cannon, "Joseph Smith in Salem (D&C 111)," in Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, eds., *Studies in Scripture Volume One: The Doctrine and Covenants* (Sandy, UT: Randall Book Company, 1984), 432–37; Donald Q. Cannon, "Salem, Massachusetts," in Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan, eds., *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2000), 1053–54; and David R. Roper, "Joseph Smith and Salem," *Essex Institute*, April 1964, 33–97. In addition, Lyndon W. Cook has also supplied important and relevant information about the Salem incident. See Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith: A Historical and Biographical Commentary of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1985), 220–21. Finally, Richard L. Bushman, Jeffery S. O' Driscoll, and Richard S. Van Wagoner briefly discuss the Salem episode in their respective biographies of Joseph, Hyrum, and Sidney. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 328–29, Jeffrey S. O' Driscoll, *Hyrum Smith: A Life of Integrity* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003), 146–47, and Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Book, 1994) 180–81.

2. Oliver Cowdery provided a detailed account of the journey from Ohio to Massachusetts. See Oliver Cowdery to Warren Cowdery, August 3 [August 4], 1836, in *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2, no.12 (September 1836): 372–75; and Oliver Cowdery to Warren Cowdery, August 24, 1836, in *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 3, no. 1 (October 1836): 386–93. See also Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed., B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1971), 2:463–66.

3. *Essex Register* (Salem, Massachusetts), August 25, 1836.

4. Joseph Smith to Emma Hale Smith, August 19, 1836, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

5. For a history of the East India Marine Society, see Walter Muir Whitehill, *The East India Marine Society and the Peabody Museum of Salem: A Sesquicentennial History* (Salem, MA: The Peabody Museum, 1949).