

Missouri State Archives: Finding Aid 5.1

Mormon War Papers, 1837-1841

[Full-text transcription of: Witness William W. Phelps, a Mormon dissenter]

[No Print]

William W. Phelps a witness on the part of the state produced sworn and examined [deposeth]and saith,

That as Early as April last at a meeting in Far West of 9 or 12 persons, Mr Rigdon arose & made an address to them in which he spoke of having borne persecutions & law suits and other privations & did not intend to be a victim any longer, that they meant to resist the law and if a sheriff Came after them with writs they would kill him, & if any body opposed them they would take off their heads, Geo W Harris who was present observed you mean the head of their influence I suppose Rigdon answered he meant that lump of flesh and bones called the skull or scalp. Jo Smith Jr followed Mr Rigdon approving his sentiments and said that was what they intended to do both in their remarks observed that they meant to have the words of the Presidency to be as good and as indisputed as the words of God. And that no one should speak against what they said. Hyrum Smith was not in Far West at this time and think he was not in the Country. Some time in June steps were taken to get myself and others out of the County of Caldwell, and afforts were made to get the post office from me, being P. M., by a demand for it, I explained the law which seemed satisfactory & it was given up. I then informed the [2d] Presidency of the church by letter, that I was wiling to do anything that was right and if I had wronged any man I would make satisfaction. I was then notified to attend a meeting. Sidney Rigdon in an address again brought up the subject of the P. office. I told them if public opinion said I should give it up I would do so but they have to await the decision of the P. M. G. which they agreed to do, with the und=

=standing that a committee of three should

inspect the letters written and sent by me as well as those received by me – this committee however never made their appearance – after my case was disposed of another man's was taken up. he attempted to speak in his defence & said he was a Republican, several rushed up to ward him and stopt him, telling him if he had anything to say in favor of the presidency he might say it, and that was their republicanism – J. Smith Jr Sidney Rigdon & Hyrum Smith who compose the first presidency were there. It was observed in the meeting that if any person spoke against the presidency they would hand him over in to the hands of the brother of Gideon. I knew not at the time who or what it meant Shortly after that I was at another meeting where they were trying several, the first presidency being present. Sidney Rigdon was chief spokesman – the object of the meeting seemed to be to make persons confess and repent of their sins to God and the Presidency and arraigned them for giving false accounts of their money and effects they had on hand and they said whenever they found one guilty of these things they were to be handed over to the brother of Gideon Several were found guilty and handed over as they said – I yet did not know what was meant by this expression 'the brother of Gideon' – Not a great while after this [] of private meetings were held I endeavored to find out what they were and I learned from John Corrill and others they were forming a secret Society called Danites formerly called the brother of Gideon. In the Meeting above referred to in which I was present one man arose to Defend himself,

and he was ordered to leave the house, but commenced to speak, Avard then said "Where are my ten men" 30 or more men arose up where upon the man said he would leave the house. At this meeting I agreed to conform to the order of the Church in all things knowing I had a good deal of property in the county and if I went off I should to leave it. For some time before and after this meeting an armed guard was kept in town and one of them at my house, during the night as I supposed to watch my person

In the fore part of July – I being one of the Justices of the County Court was forbid by Joseph Smith jr from issuing any process against him I learned from the Clerk of the Circuit Court that declaration had been filed against Smith Rigdon & others by Johnson and in reference to that case, Smith told Dennison the Clerk that he should not issue a writ against him – I observed to Mr. Smith that there was a legal objection to issuing it that the cost, meaning the Clerks fee had not been paid – Smith replied he did not care for that – he did not intend to have any writ issued against him in the County – these things together with – many other alarmed me for the situation Of our County, and at our next Circuit Court I mentioned these things to the Judge & several members of the bar-

A few days before the 4th day of July last I heard D. W Patton known by the fictitious name of Capt. Fearnought say that Rigdon was writing a declaration to declare the church independent. I remarked to him – I thought such a thing treasonable to set up a government within a government – he answered it would not be treasonable if they could maintain it-

or fight till they died. Daniel Huntington and some others made about the same remark - Sidney Rigdon's 4th of July oration was the declaration referred to. Along through the summer & fall, a storm appeared to be gathering and from time to time I went out into Ray & Clay Counties – saw and conversed with many gentleman on the subject who always assured me that they would use every [assertion] that the law should be enforced, and I repeatedly made these things known in Caldwell County & that there was no disposition among the people to raise mobs against them from these counties

I never was invited nor did I attend any of their secret meetings. I was at the meeting the Monday before the last Expedition to Davis – having learned that steps would be taken there which might affect me. At this meeting the Presidency together with many others were there to the number of perhaps 200 or 300 or more.

Joseph Smith Jr I think it was who addressed the meeting and said in substance, that they were others about to go war in Davis County –

that those persons who had not turned out their property should be taken to maintain the war – this was by way of formal resolution and was not objected to by any present. A motion was then made by Sidney Rigdon that the blood of those who were thus backward should first be spilt in the streets of Far West. A few said amen to this, -- but immediately Mr Jo Smith Jr. before Rigdon's motion was put rose and moved that they be taken out into Davis County & if they came to battle they should be put on their horses with bayonets & pitch forks and put in front – this passed without a dissenting voice. There was a short made then by Jo Smith Jr. about carrying

on the war in which he said it was necessary to have something to live on, and when they went out to war it was necessary to take spoils to live on. This was in reference to the dissenters as well as to the people of Davis where they going in this speech he told the [anedote] of the Diah=
-ohman potatoes. Finding I should have to go and not wishing to be put in front of the battle. I sought a situation and went out with my waggon. This was the expedition in which Gallatin and Millport were burt. I went on to Diahamon a few days after the Mormon troops had gone out. I went to the tavern late at night when I found J. Smith Jr. Hyrum Smith & others. I informed J. Smith that the Clay troops had returned home some 40 or 50 in number, but told him that Genl. Parks was in Far West and his troops just behind.

There was a conversation among them as to what they [] and they came to the conclusion to send down to Lyman Wright at his house for him to send an express to Genl Parks that his troops were not needed. Some time before day I awoke and found Lyman Wright & Capt. Fearnought in the house – he said he had sent the Express to Genl. Parks informing him that his Militia was not needed – Wight asked J. Smith twice if he had arms to the point now to resist the law that he wanted that matter now distinctly understood- he said he had succeeded in smoothing the matter over with Judge King when he was out, and that he defied the U.S to take him, but that he had submitted to be taken, because he Smith had done so-

This was in reference to the examination for the offence for which he and Smith had been brought before Judge King in Davis. Smith replied the time had come when he should resist all law.

In the fore part of the night after my arrival I heard a good deal of conversation about driving out the mob from Davis. I heard J. Smith remark there was a store at Gallatin & a Grocery at Millport and in the morning and in the morning after the conversation between Smith and Wight about resisting the law a plan of operations was agreed on which was that Capt Fearnought who was present should take a company of 100 men or more and go to Gallatin and take it that day- to take the goods out of the store at Gallatin bring them to Di-ahamon and burn the store. Lyman Wight was to take a company and go to Millport on the same day, and Seymore Brunson was to take a company and go to the grind stone [fort] on the same day. This arrangement was made in the house before day while I was lying on the floor. When I arose in the morning some of the companies were gone. But I saw Lyman Wight parade a horse company – and start off with it toward Millport – I also a foot company the same day go off on the same day in the evening I saw both these companies return. The foot company had some plunder which appeared to be [feed] and bed clothes &c. They passed on towards the Bishops store. but I know not what they did with the plunder. I remained in the Camp one day and two nights at Diahamon when I returned to Far West. The night before I started to Far West an express [word crossed out] was sent from Joseph Smith and Lyman Wight to Rigdon at F West but what was [“in” crossed out] the contents of the Express I know not. When I returned to Far West I had a message in reference to having wood & provisions provided for the families of those persons living in Far West who were in Davis

and for the purpose of giving them that information I was invited to a school house where it was said the people had assembled. I went there and was admitted. The men being paraded before the door when I arrived in number about 40 or

50 – It was remarked that these were tried men and we all marched into the house. A guard was placed around the house and one at the door

Mr. Rigdon then commenced making Covenants with uplifted hands – the first was that if any man attempted to move out of the county or pack their things for that purpose that any [man] them in the house, [~~“seeing this”~~] seeing this without [~~“without”~~] saying anything to any other person should kill him and haul him [asine] into the brush, and that all the burial he should have should be in a turkey buzzards gut. so that nothing should be left of him but his bones.

That [] said was carried in form of a Covenant with uplifted hands – after the vote had passed he said now see if anyone dares vote against it, and called for the negative vote & others was moved. The next covenant that if any person from the surrounding Country came into their town walking about no odds who he might be, Anyone of [other] meeting should kill him and throw him aside into the brush this passed in manner as the above had passed

The third covenant was conceal all these things. Mr Rigdon then observed that the kingdom of heaven had no secrets – that yesterday a man had stopt his wind, and was draged into the hazelbrush and said he – “the man who that [lisp] it shall die.” There were several Companies organised at this meeting, and volunteers Called for, and I having assigned [~~“to me”~~] the command of the express company Called for volunteers wanting to be doing some= thing to make a show. Amasa Lyman a Dept.

was in that meeting, and was appointed by Mr Rigdon Capt. of a Company, whose duty it was to watch the Movements of the enemy, or mob in [B__ Combe], and if they burt one house in Caldwell his company was to burn four of theirs, and men were selected who were strangers in the community where they were to act toward the latter part of the instructions to Lyman’s Company, Rigdon observed that if the inhabitants in the surrounding Country Commenced burning houses in Caldwell, if they could not get clear of them in any other way they would poison them off. This last remark, I did not understanding as being particularly addressed to Lyman as

a part of the duty of his Company, but seemed addressed to the meeting generally This meeting was on Saturday and on the next Monday I returned to Diahamon with 7 or 8 waggons, 3 or 4 of which were moveing some families, tho I had been directed to take to Di-ahamon for use there.

I arrived at Diahamon that evening and next morning 4 of the waggons were loaded and sent back to Far West. Joseph Smith Jr and Hyrum Smith perhaps informed me they wanted 4 waggons a part of which were to haul beef and pork to Far West and what the balance of the [“balance of the” crossed out] loading was I did not know, but these waggons brought out by me, were pointed out, and taken back to Far West. I remained in the Camps at Diahamon that day—my waggon and another went down to Millport and brought up Slades goods which were there. Slade is not a Mormon, but has three brothers residing in or about Far West who are Mormons. The following of the Defendants were in the last

Expedition to Daviess – Joseph Smith Jr. P. P. Pratt Lyman Wight, Geo. W Robinson, Alanson Ripley, Geo. W. [“Robson” crossed out] Harris, Elijah Newman was one of my men. Isaac Morley was not there, Alexander McRae was there, Ebenezer Robinson, was there, Edward Partridge was there, James H. Rawlins was there, Sheffield Daniels I think was not there. Samuel Bent was there, and he was Called Capt Black Hawk – While in Adam-on-di-ahmon I saw Geo W Robertson with a clock under his arm which I afterwards Saw in Far West, and which was claimed by a Mr. McLaney of Daviess County as his property after the arrival of Genl. Clark at Far West and further [in] deponent saith not.

W. W. Phelps

[Blank page]