FROM THE WINTER OF 1835 THROUGH THE SUMMER OF 1837:
FURTHER EXPANSION OF ADULT EDUCATION IN KIRTLAND

A Proliferation of Schools

From the fall of 1835 through the summer of 1837, adult education in Kirtland expanded in remarkable ways. The two preceding seasons of adult education in Kirtland before this period intensified the growing hunger for education among the leaders and missionaries of the Church. In fact, the craving for learning became contagious among many if not most adult members of the Church. John Corrill (1839), who had been appointed a Church historian in 1838 (see Smith, 1980, Vol.3, p.13), recalled: “They had been previously commanded to seek learning and study the best books, and get a knowledge of countries, kingdoms, languages, etc., which inspired them with an extravagant thirst after knowledge” (pp. 22-23).

Returning missionaries were eager to be taught the doctrines of the restored Church as well as to improve their minds in secular ways. As more and more members were craving opportunities for education, further schools were established to meet their growing wants and needs. There were further sessions of the Elder’s School. A Hebrew school was established. Further, a variety of evening schools were offered. The combined curricula offered during this time period included theology, English grammar, writing, reading, common arithmetic, mathematics, geography, history, debating, singing and foreign languages including Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.

In anticipation of these schools, missionaries began leaving their fields of labor in the
fall and returned to Kirtland. Even leaders and missionaries of the Church living in Missouri left their families for the winter and traveled to Kirtland (nearly a thousand miles) to participate in the schools. John Corrill recorded:

In the fall, and early part of the winter of 1835, the elders gathered in to Kirtland, to the number, I should think, of three or four hundred, who remained there through the winter. Schools were instituted for the use of the elders and others. Some studied grammar and other branches: they also employed the celebrated Hebrew teacher, Mr. Seixas, who gave them much insight, in a short time, into that language. (pp. 22-23)

Probably relying on Corrill, yet at the same time corroborating Corrill’s memory, Heber C. Kimball (1848) recalled this time period in nearly the same words:

In the fall and early part of winter of 1835 the Elders of Israel consisting of Elders, priests, Teachers, and deacons gathered to Kirtland to the number of four hundred, who remained there through the winter. Schools were instituted for their use. Some studied grammar and other branches. (p. 31)

A letter written by W. W. Phelps (1835-36) to his wife in Missouri, dated 16 September 1835, reveals the sense of anticipation for the upcoming season:

A letter from the Twelve [Apostles] of the last week, says they will return to prepare for school about the 1st of October. Br. Marsh was meek and in good health and spirits. The travelling elders begin to come in: Kirtland will be filled with them in a short time.

Finding board and room for so many Elders was not easy. Peterson (1972) has observed:

“A number of elders resided in neighboring communities; thus, at considerable cost and effort, arrangements were made for clothing, board, and room so that all who wished could attend.” Continuing, he said, “Although each elder could obtain board and room for about one dollar per week, many families had to make great sacrifices so that each one could obtain

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1 There exists two copies of this manuscript in the LDS Church Archives in Salt Lake City, UT. The two copies, each written in different handwriting, are given the following designations: Book No 94B and Book No 94C. This quote came from the latter.
the education which the Lord had asked him to acquire” (p. 50).

What is known about these schools during this time period come more from references made in journals, letters, and autobiographies and less from the History of the Church. Yet, neither the History of the Church, nor any other document tenders a complete listing of the schools, or when and where they took place. Only by drawing upon all these sources can we piece together a picture of adult education in Kirtland from the fall of 1835 to the summer of 1837. Because of the nature of the documents, this picture is at best fragmented! Therefore, the conclusions drawn in this study are open to debate.

The Fall of 1835

The Elder’s School

As the summer of 1835 was drawing to a close, the Church in Kirtland began gearing up for the next session of the School of the Elders. This session was often called the School of the Prophets by those who attended (e.g., Johnson, 1947, p. 27; Smith, 1946, p.463; Smith, 1984, p. 88, 166-117). As in the previous season, there is no evidence that the footwashing ceremony was used to initiate new members. In September of 1835, the Messenger and Advocate ran the following notice announcing another session of the School of the Elders:

“The elders are informed that the school will commence on Monday the 2nd of November. Those wishing to attend will do well to arrange their business so as to commence with the commencement of the school” (Whitmer, 1835, p. 191). On 2 November, the elders gathered in the printing office where they “engaged in regulating the affairs of the school” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 299). Unfortunately, the records offer no specifics as to what they did. On the next day, 3 November, with the School organized, Joseph Smith (1980) dedicated the
School. The *History of the Church* records:

I then went to assist in organizing the Elder’s School. I called it to order and made some remarks upon the objects of this school, and the great necessity of our rightly improving our time and reining up our minds to the sense of the great object that lies before us, viz--the glorious endowment that God has in store for the faithful. I then dedicated the school in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Vol. 2, p. 301).

In this statement, the phrase, “the great necessity of our rightly improving our time,” has reference to education. Joseph Smith saw the value of educating adults in order for them to adequately accomplish “the great object that lies before us.” Initially, this had reference to the planned solemn assembly but, ultimately, it meant the advancement of the Church. He had, indeed, been converted to the idea of adult education. His enthusiasm for the adult education is demonstrated by his efforts to recruit members of the Church to participate in programs offered in Kirtland. Before the 1835 session of the Elder’s School had begun, he gave instructions to several of the leadership of the Church to “attend this fall the solemn assembly of the first Elders for the organization of the school of the prophets” (Smith, 1984, p. 88). Even after the School had begun, Joseph Smith continued to recruit members to attend. For example, in a letter to Harvey Whitlock, dated 16 November 1835, a few weeks after the Elder’s School had begun, Joseph Smith (1984) encouraged Whitlock to come to Kirtland as soon as possible and attend the school:

I hope on the receipt of this, you will not loose any time in coming to Kirtland: for if you get here in season, you will have the privilege of attending the School of the prophets, which has already commenced and, also receive instruction in doctrine, and principle, from those whom God has appointed whereby you may be qualified to go forth, and declare the true doctrines of the Kingdom according to the true doctrines of the mind and, will of God. (pp. 116-117)

On another occasion, while being visited by two of the leaders of the Church in Missouri a week after the 1835 session of the School began, he encouraged them to “tarry for a little
season [in Kirtland] and attend the school” (Smith, 1984, p. 103).

George Smith (1946) recalled attending the Elder’s School beginning in the fall of 1835. He gave us this insight:

I found my father living in a small house near Cousin Joseph’s [Smith] overseeing his farm and other property. I assisted him a few days at work on the farm, closing up the fall work, and then commenced going to the School of the Prophets, which school was held in the room under the printing office, and was taught by Joseph Smith, Jr., and Sidney Rigdon. I studied English grammar about six weeks: the school was removed to the attic story of the temple. (p. 463)

Benjamin F. Johnson (1947), who joined the Church in the spring of 1835, remembered the fall 1835 session of the School of the Elders in this way:

In the following winter [1835-1836] I attended the “School of the Prophets” with the Prophet and most of the first elders of the Church, where was first taught the Lectures on Faith, as contained in the Doctrine and Covenants, and grammar was taught by Elder William E. McLellin. I also attended an evening class in geography in which I rapidly acquired the elements of that study, which inspired in me a thirst for history and other reading. (pp. 21-22).

William Draper (1807-1881) recollected attending school during this period and called the school a theological school. Said he: “And the following winter (1835-36) had the privilege of attending the theological school which was superintended by the Prophet Joseph and his councilors from which I received much good instructions preparatory to the endowment when the [Kirtland] temple was finished” (p. 2). In a letter written by W. W. Phelps to his wife on 14 November 1835, he recorded that the enrollment of the school continued to increase as the more Elders arrived in Kirtland. An extract of the letter reads: “The Elders are coming in every day, almost, The school has commenced under the charge of President Sidney Rigdon as teacher” (Journal History, 14 Nov. 1835).

From these statements regarding the School of the Elders, the following can be deduced:

• The main thrust of the Elder’s School was theological though English grammar was
taught as well. As in the 1834 session of the Elder’s School, it would seem that the 
*Lectures on Faith*, and perhaps other theological subjects as well, was the main focus 
of the School.

- It also appears that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon were the main teachers of the 
theological subjects while William E. McLellin taught grammar.
- The School was held in the printing office during the fall but they planned on moving 
it to the attic of the Temple in the winter. This occurred on 18 January 1836 (see 
Smith, 1984, p. 169).

**Night Schools**

After the Elder’s School began, a number of different night schools or classes offering a 
variety of secular subjects were organized at various times throughout the fall. It is unclear 
whether these schools were sponsored by the Church or individuals. The subjects offered 
included English grammar, writing, history, geography, and debate. This can be ascertained 
from the following statements:

- An extract of a letter written by Phelps (1940) to his wife on 18 December 1835, 
reads: “Great exertions are making in schools; besides the Elders school, there are two 
evening grammar schools, and one writing school; and as soon as the attic rooms are 
completed in the Lord’s house as much as one or two more will commence” (p. 30).
- Quoted above, Benjamin F. Johnson (1947) said, “I also attended an evening class in 
geography in which I rapidly acquired the elements of that study, which inspired in 
me a thirst for history and other reading” (pp. 21-22).
- In a post script to a letter written by Oliver Cowdery (1962) to William Frye dated 25
December 1835, Cowdery wrote of other subjects which were studied:

There are a great number of elders in Kirtland now, many of whom are attending an English school. We are expecting a Hebrew school to commence in a few weeks, if we get a room prepared. The most of the those Elders who are now in the school are studying and receiving grammar, history, writing, etc. (p. 240)

- Milo Andrus (1814-1875) confirmed the study of grammar: “On our return to Kirtland from the mission in the East, I went to school in Kirtland, studied grammar, and then studied Hebrew under Professor [Joshua Seixas] of New York” (p. 5).

- Orson Pratt (1975) recorded in his journal under the date of 18 November 1835, “Commenced going to school and also the study of Kirkham’s English Grammar” (p. 73).

- From the journal of Joseph Smith we learn that a debating school was held in the home of his brother, William (see entries for 12, 16, 18, December 1835, in Smith, 1835, pp. 131, 134, 138-144). Joseph Smith was initially unaware that this school was being offered. However, when he learned of it, he approved. In a letter written to his brother, Joseph Smith (1984) wrote:

  Br. William, having received your letter I now proceede to answer it, and shall first proceede, to give a brief naration of my feelings and motives, since the night I first came to the knowledge, of your having a debating School, which was at the time I happened in with, Bishop [Newel K.] Whitney his Father and Mother &c - which was the first that I knew anything about it, and from that time I took an interest in them, and was delighted with it, and formed a determination, to attend the School for the purpose of obtaining information, and with the idea of imparting the same, through the assistance of the spirit of the Lord, if by any means I should have faith to do so; (p. 140)

The Debating School was organized with a leader who could render a final decision (see Smith, 1984, p. 134). How long the Debating School continued is not known.
Who taught the Night Schools?

Two statements made by Heber C. Kimball and Thomas B. Marsh may suggest that Sidney Rigdon, though teaching theology in the Elder’s School in the daytime, was teaching one of the night schools. Kimball (1864), recalled that in the fall and winter of 1835-36, “I attended grammar school, taught by Elder Rigdon, about five weeks, and then commenced studying Hebrew under Professor J. Seixas, at which I continued during the winter” (p.569). Likewise, Marsh (1864) said, “In the winter of 1835-36, I attended school, studied the first English grammar under Sidney Rigdon, and Hebrew under Professor Seixas (a Hebrew by birth)” (p.391). Neither statement specifies that the school attended was a night school. However, it seems logical that Rigdon, who loved grammar, may have taught one of the evening schools.

For a brief period in December, Orson Pratt (1975) taught a night grammar school. He recorded in his journal, “Commenced the evening school. Taught about 15 nights when in consequence of other business of more importance closed” (p. 75). Other than Orson Pratt, for sure, and probably Sidney Rigdon, who else taught night classes is unknown.

Lyceums Come to Kirtland

The lyceum movement, which was spreading throughout the United States, made its appearance in Kirtland in the early winter of 1835. The Kirtland United Lyceum Society was formally organized and chartered on 31 December. According to their charter, this school was to meet on “Thursday evening of each week for the discussion of questions, reading of compositions and selected pieces, declaim and for instruction in the various branches of scientific and useful knowledge” (Journal History, 31 Dec. 1835). No history of this school
exists beyond the existence of the charter, however.

_________________________The Winter of 1836_________________________

Several of the fall schools continued into the winter of 1836 and other schools offering new subjects were initiated. Most of these schools were held in the Temple. Construction of the Temple had begun with the laying of the cornerstones on 23 July 1833. Because of lack of funds and the Missouri problems, construction was slow. Nonetheless, “in poverty, and without means to do it” (Corrill, 1839, p. 21), members of the Church continued the work of building what was often called “the house of the Lord” (e.g., Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 161, 512).

The outside design of the temple was typical of contemporary church buildings. The inside consisted of two floors and an attic. The two floors were designed as large meeting halls that could be “divided into four compartments by means of curtains or veils hanging from the ceiling over head down to the floor, which could be rolled up at pleasure, so that the house could be used all in one or divided into four rooms and used for different purposes” (Kimball, 1833-37, pp. 89-90). The attic was partitioned into five class rooms. By January 1836, the building was enclosed with the attic rooms “finished and prepared for use” (Angell, 1967, p. 197). During the winter, work continued on the interior of the first two floors until they were finished in March. The Temple was dedicated on 27 March.

The History of the Church states that on 4 January 1836 a Hebrew School commenced in “the west room in the upper part of the Temple” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 356). This is confirmed in a letter written by W. W. Phelps (1835-36) to his wife, dated 5 January 1836: “The Hebrew school has commenced in one of the attic school rooms in the Lord’s house”
Elder’s School

The winter of 1836 was one of the most significant time periods of the Church in Kirtland. During this time, the Temple was completed and the members of the Church were readied for its dedication. The Elder’s School continued during this time period with the goal of preparing Church leaders and missionaries for the solemn assembly\(^2\) to be held as instructed in the revelation recorded in D&C 88 (see verses 70 and 117). Precious little exists to inform us as to the subjects taught in the Elder’s School during the winter of 1836.

We have William Draper’s (1807-1881) statement quoted earlier: “And the following winter (1835-36) had the privilege of attending the theological school which was superintended by the Prophet Joseph and his councilors from which I received much good instructions preparatory to the endowment when the temple was finished” (p. 2; emphasis added). Other than this nothing else is known.

Other Schools

Besides the Elder’s School, other schools were held during this period as well. Elisha Hurd Groves reported that he attended a grammar school: “Returned to Kirtland about the

\(^2\) As the solemn assembly was a religious meeting and not a school, the details of the assembly are beyond the scope of this study and therefore will not be discussed. For details, see Corrill, 1839, p. 23; Smith, 1980, pp. 429-433; Smith, 1984, pp. 213-216.
first of January 1836 And went into An English grammer School for A few weeks. from there I was taken out by the Prophet Joseph and put into an hebrew School” (quoted in Ogden, 1990, p. 74). Joseph Smith (1984) recorded organizing a singing school on 4 January: “meet [met] this evening at the Chapel [Temple] to make arrangements for a Singing School[.] [A]fter some altercation, a judicious arrangement was made, a committee of 6 was chosen, to take charge of the singing department” (p. 152). Caroline Crosby (1982), who had just moved to Kirtland with her husband and children in January, attended the signing school. In her autobiography, she remembered: “The brethren had meetings of some kind almost every evening in the week. Besides singing schools in which all ages took a part, from the young adult to the old gray heads. Consequently we also took a part with them, and met two(?) evenings in a week. The qui or was large” (p. 47).

But next to the Elder’s School, the most important school offered during the winter of 1836 was the Hebrew School. This school was of great importance to Joseph Smith. More is recorded about this school in both his journal and the History of the Church than any other school offered during the Kirtland period of LDS church history.

**The Hebrew School**

In January of 1836, a school was organized in which the sole subject taught was Biblical Hebrew. This seems an ambitious endeavor for a frontier village! But nonetheless it was attempted, and, surprisingly, was very successful. The genesis of studying foreign languages came in a revelation to Joseph Smith on 8 March 1833, as the first session of the School of the Prophets was nearing an end. The revelation, recorded as D&C 90, gives the following command: “set in order the churches, and study and learn, and become acquainted with all
good books, and with languages, tongues, and people” (vs. 15). The primary reason for
learning foreign languages was so the gospel could be taught throughout the world. In
September of 1834, Joseph Smith taught the Church that “the gift of tongues . . . was
particularly instituted for the preaching of the Gospel to other nations and languages” (Smith,
1980, Vol. 2, p. 162). In November of 1835 he told the leaders of the Church that they
should be “prepared to preach the Gospel to all nations, kindred, and tongues, in their own
languages” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 309). This is also reflected in a journal entry written by
Joseph Smith on 19 January 1836, after the Hebrew School commenced:

spent the day at school, the Lord blessed us in our studies. -- this day we
commenced reading in our hebrew - bibles with much success, it seems as if the
Lord opens our minds, in a marvelous manner to understand His word in the
original language, and my prayer is that God will speedily endue us with a
knowledge of all languages and toungs, that his servants may go forth for the last
time, the better prepared to bind up the law, and seal up the testimony (Smith, 1984,
p. 172)

After a month of studying Hebrew in the Hebrew School, Joseph Smith demonstrated his
personal conviction to the importance of learning languages. On 17 February, he recorded in
his journal:

attend[ed] the school and read and translated with my class as usual, and my soul
delights in reading the world of the Lord in the original, and I am determined to
persue the study of languages untill I shall become master of them, if I am permitted
to live long enough, at any rate so long as I do live I am determined to make this my
object, and with the blessing of God I shall succed to my sattisfaction (Smith, 1984,
p. 191)

After the Hebrew School, Joseph Smith continued to study as many languages as time and
Church duties permitted. By the time he was martyred in 1844, he had studied, at least to
some degree, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, German, and Egyptian (see Smith, 1938, p. 349; Smith,
Why Hebrew?

The question must be raised: Since the learning of languages was for spreading the gospel in foreign lands, why study Hebrew? Hebrew had not been used as a daily language for centuries. So why was Biblical Hebrew taught in the LDS adult education schools in Kirtland? Unfortunately, there are no records that give a definitive reason. Zucker (1968) offers this reason. On the evening of 2 November 1835, the day the 1835 session of the School of the Elders began, Joseph Smith and others attended a lecture given by a Jewish medical doctor by the name of Daniel Peixotto (spelled Piexotto in the History of the Church) in Willoughby, Ohio, just a few miles from Kirtland (see Smith, 1984, p. 99). Zucker writes:

Was it the lucky chance that, on November 2, 1835 – just as he was reorganizing the School – Joseph, with Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon and others drove over to the infant Willoughby University, four miles from Kirtland, to hear “Dr. Piexotto” lecture at the medical college and that, in talking with the Jewish physician, they learned that he could and would teach them Hebrew in Kirtland? Apparently, when Oliver Cowdery left for New York, within days of that encounter, he was charged to purchase the best textbooks he could find for the coming winter’s study of Hebrew.

Zucker concludes, “Very likely, it was the availability of a Jewish teacher that inclined the choice of languages, or even of studies, to Hebrew.” (pp. 43-44).

Against this view is a little known letter written by Oliver Cowdery (1833-46) to Lucius Parker (a cousin of Brigham Young, see Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 470) of Southborough Mass., dated 28 October 1835, five days before Dr. Peixotto’s lecture. Apparently, Parker, who was learned in the rudiments of Hebrew, had offered his services to teach Hebrew in the Hebrew School. The letter reveals that his services would not be needed as the leaders of the Church were looking for a competent scholar who could teach more than just the rudiments. Writing in behalf of the committee that was heading up the formation of the Hebrew School - Joseph
Smith, Sidney Rigdon, F. G. Williams, and Oliver Cowdery - wrote the following:

Dear Sir: Yours of the 16th is received. You say you are unable to teach only the rudiments of the Hebrew – Such being the fact, I am instructed by the Committee, for whom I correspond, to say, that your services will not be wanted. It is not, sir, out of disrespect that I say this, we have those who are able to teach the rudiments of the Hebrew, but we wished an accomplished scholar—such an one could find encouragement here—do you know, sir, where, or to whom, I may address and be accommodated? Your kindness on the subject of grammars and Lexicons is appreciated. We do not wish to employ a teacher in the other languages this winter.

(p. 57)

Hence, before the leaders of the Church attended Dr. Peixotto’s lecture on 2 November, they had already determined to organize a Hebrew School. How much earlier they had made this determination is not known.

From statements made after the School began, it is quite apparent that at least one of the motives for organizing the Hebrew School was to read bible in the original language. After the School commenced, the enrollment of the School continued to increase to the point the School was divided into several classes. There was not enough Hebrew Bibles for every student so existing bibles were divided so that each student could practice translating. On this occasion, Joseph Smith (1984) recorded in his journal: “we have a great want of books but are determined to do the best we can - may the Lord help us to obtain this language that we may read the scriptures in the language in which they were given” (p. 185). Why was this so important to Joseph Smith?

A letter written by the committee in Oliver Cowdery’s handwriting suggests a reason. Written to the wife of Joshua Seixas (the teacher who eventually taught the Hebrew School) on 13 February 1836, after the Hebrew School had begun, the committee stated:

3 Of this letter, Oliver Cowdery wrote: “Attended Hebrews School. In the afternoon wrote a letter in the name of the committee containing a request to Professor Seixa’s wife, for
We have the privilege of addressing you a few line through the kindness of Professor Seixas who we believe has been sent to this institution through the immediate direction of God to promote the cause of truth and benefit the fallen world. We are in this led to be thankful to our Redeemer in whose Glorious cause we are engaged as we are anxiously desiring to become acquainted with an individual of virtue & piety who understood perfect those languages in which the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were originally written as our only object – is to do good and lay aside error where we discover it forsake evil and follow righteousness and truly be the better prepared and qualified to render assistance to our fellow men and glorify the name of the Lord: in this our expectations are fully realized and we trust through the goodness of God to make a proper improvement of the blessing thus given. (Cowdery, 1833-46, p. 77-78; emphasis added)

To understand this statement, the LDS view of the Bible must be understood. Article of Faith 8 of the LDS church states: “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly” (Smith, 1980, Vol.4, p.541; also Smith, 1842, pp.710). It is believed that errors have been made in translations of the Bible. It appears from this letter that the purpose of the Hebrew School, at least by the time this letter was written, was to educate Church members in Hebrew so that they could eliminate translation errors thus preserving the truth found in the Bible. Whether this was the original motive for organizing the School or an acquired motive after the School began is never stated. But it is certain, Joseph Smith (1984) was deeply motivated to read the bible in the original language. As quoted earlier, he exclaimed after the School began, “it seems as if the Lord opens our minds, in a marvelous manner to understand His word in the original language” (p. 172).

A Search For a Teacher

After attending his lecture on 2 November, the committee contracted an agreement with the Dr. Peixotto to teach the Hebrew School. It appears, however, that after further

a valuable Lexicon” (Cowdery, 1836, p.422)
encounters with the doctor, members of the School felt he was not fully qualified to instruct them in Hebrew. The *History of the Church* states that on 21 November 1835, the Hebrew School met “to make some arrangements about a teacher. It was decided, by the voice of the school, to send to New York, for a Jew to teach us the language, if we could get released from the engagements we had made with Dr. Piexotto [Peixotto] to teach us, having ascertained that he was not qualified to give us the knowledge we wished to acquire of the Hebrew” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, pp. 318-319). “Perhaps,” Ogden (1990) surmises, “having met the man, they were not impressed. Or perhaps he gave them the impression that he was not exceptionally proficient at the language” (p. 67). The records are not entirely clear what happened next, but for some unstated reason, the School members decided to continue with Dr. Peixotto. They agreed to begin the Hebrew School when an appropriate room was made ready (Smith, 1984, p. 151) in the nearly completed temple. Finally both parties agreed on a date to begin the School. But the day before the class was suppose to start, Dr. Peixotto sent word that he would have to postpone his first visit for another week and a half (Smith, 1984, p. 151). Zucker (1968) explains the reason for the delay: “The Mormons were counting on Dr. Peixotto, but the Professor had an infant medical school on the frontier to strengthen, and the roads were muddy in the rainy season.” It became obvious to the School “that only a resident, full time teacher would do” (p. 44).

Disappointed, members of the Hebrew School thought it necessary to locate and hire another teacher. The *History of the Church* of 4 January 1836 records:

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4 This is confirmed in a post script of a letter written by Oliver Cowdery (1962) dated 25 December 1835: “There are a great number of elders in Kirtland now, many of whom are attending an English school. We are expecting a Hebrew school to commence in a few weeks, if we get a room prepared” (p. 240).
Met and organized our Hebrew school according to the arrangements that were made on Saturday last. We had engaged Doctor Piexotto to teach us in the Hebrew language, when we had our room prepared. We informed him that we were ready and our room was prepared. And he agreed to wait on us this day, and deliver his introductory lecture. Yesterday he sent us word that he could not come until Wednesday next. A vote was then called to know whether we would submit to such treatment or not; and carried in the negative; and Elder Sylvester Smith was appointed clerk to write him on the subject, and inform him that his services were not wanted; and Elders William E. M’Lellin and Orson Hyde despatched to Hudson Seminary to hire a teacher. They were appointed by the voice of the school to act in their behalf. (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 355).

The School Begins

The School members were determined to proceed with their study of the Hebrew language. Therefore, the History of the Church relates, “we concluded to go on with our school and do the best we could until we obtained a teacher; and by the voice of the school I [Joseph Smith] consented to render them all the assistance I was able to for the time being” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 355).

Joseph Smith was better suited than the other School members to be an interim teacher. W. W. Phelps recorded that shortly after the first meeting with Dr. Peixotto, Oliver Cowdery was sent to New York “to purchase tools for a book bindery and to secure some Hebrew books so that we may study Hebrew this winter” (Journal History, 14 Nov. 1835). Most likely, Cowdery’s selection of Hebrew books was guided through the advise of Lucius Parker who had counseled him regarding certain grammars and lexicons (see Cowdery, 1833-46, p. 57). Joseph Smith (1984) recorded in his journal that Cowdery returned on 20 November

5 “The Western Reserve College at Hudson, Summit County, Ohio, about twenty-eight miles south of Kirtland, was found in 1826. The college’s curriculum in the 1830’s was theology, languages, philosophy, and mathematics” (Smith, 1984, p. 152, note 129).
“bringing with him a quantity of Hebrew books for the benefit of the school, he presented me
with a Hebrew bible, lexicon & Grammar, also a Greek Lexicon and Websters English
Lexicon” (p. 119). The next day, Joseph spent the day at home “examining my books and
studying the hebrew alphabet” (p. 119). Joseph’s journal entries dated 27 November and the
4, 5, 8, 14, 22, 26, 30, 31 December indicates that he spent a great deal of time before the
School began on 4 January studying Hebrew in preparation for the Hebrew School (see
Smith, 1984, pp. 121, 125, 126, 133, 145, 146, 148). By the time the Hebrew School began,
Joseph was by far more studied in Hebrew than any other members of the School.

On 5 January, Joseph Smith recorded in the History of the Church: “Attended the
Hebrew school, divided it into classes. Had some debate with Elder Orson Pratt concerning
the pronunciation of a Hebrew letter. He manifested a stubborn spirit, at which I was much
grieved.” The controversy was cleared up the next day. “Attended school and spent most of
the forenoon in settling the unpleasant feelings that existed in the breast of Elder Orson Pratt.
After much controversy, he confessed his fault for entering into any controversy concerning
so small a matter as the sound of a Hebrew letter, and asked the forgiveness of the whole
school, and was cheerfully forgiven by all” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 356).

Joshua Seixas

The same day, William E. McLellen returned from the Hudson Seminary with the news
that they had hired a teacher. Joseph recorded in his journal: “Elder McLellen returned from
Hudson, and reported to the school that he had hired a Teacher, to teach us the term of 7
weeks for $320. That is 40 Schollars\(^6\) for that amount\(^7\), to commence in about 15 days hence.” He then noted that the newly acquired teacher was “highly celebrated as a hebrew schollar, and proposes to give us sufficient knowledge in the above term of time to read and translate the language” (p. 152). The teacher’s name was Joshua Seixas (pronounced Sayshius).

On 19 January, Joseph Smith (1984) recorded in his journal that the members of the School were making good progress under his tutelage:

spent the day at school, the Lord blessed us in our studies. - this day we commenced reading in our hebrew - bibles with much success, it seems as if the Lord opens our minds in a marvelous manner, to understand his word in the original language, and my prayer is that God will speedily endue us with a knowledge of all languages and tongues, that his servants may go forth for the last time, the better prepared to bind up the law, and seal up the testimony (p. 172)

Finally, on 26 January, Seixas arrived from Hudson to begin teaching the Hebrew School (Smith, 1984, p. 180). Seixas came from one of the oldest and most respected Jewish families in America. “His grandfather, Isaac Seixas, had come to America from Portugal in 1730. His father, Gershom Mendez Seixas, was a well-known rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish congregation in New York City” (Ogden, 1990, p. 69). This congregation was the first Jewish congregation in North America. In fact, Gershom Seixas was the “patriot Rabbi of the American Revolution” and one of “thirteen clergymen to participate in the inauguration of Washington as President in 1789” (Zucker, 1968, p. 45).

\(^6\) In his 1828 dictionary, Webster (1828) defined the word ‘scholar’ as “One who learns of a teacher; one who is under the tuition of a preceptor; a pupil; a disciple; hence, any member of a college, academy or school; applicable to the learner of any art, science or branch of literature.”

\(^7\) That is to say, $320 to teach forty students.
Joshua Seixas was born sometime before 1803. It is uncertain where he obtained his education. His father was a trustee at Columbia University in New York City and, therefore, Seixas may have obtained his education there (Ogden, 1990). His grand-daughter, Miss Blanche Moses, informs us, mainly from memory, the following facts about Seixas:

The date of Joshua’s birth is not certain, but it was before 1803. He married Menrietta Raphael of Richmond, Virginia. He taught at a theological seminary in New York, at a theological school in the vicinity of Boston (perhaps Andover). They resided for some time in Charlestown, Massachusetts, or that neighborhood. He also taught at Oberlin, Ohio. As best I can remember he died in New York in the early seventies. No documents are extant, so far as I know. (Snow, 1936, p. 69)

All accounts of Seixas agree that he was highly skilled in Hebrew. His skill as a Hebraist can be seen in a number of ways:

- He was the “chief Hebrew instructor” in the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, of which his father had been Rabbi, for several years. (Snow, 1936, p. 69, 70).
- He taught “Hebrew and other ancient languages at the theological seminary in New York, studied and taught at Andover, Massachusetts” (Snow, 1936, p. 70).
- Oberlin College in Ohio hired him to teach a course in Hebrew in 1835. During his stay at Oberlin, he gave private Hebrew lessons to individuals (see Smith, 1884, p. 6; Snow, 1936, p. 70).
- He “gave a six weeks’ course at Hudson, beginning December 8 and ending January 23” (Snow, 1936, p. 70). It was while he was teaching at Hudson, about twenty-eight miles south of Kirtland, that Seixas was approached by McLellin to teach at Kirtland.
- His skill as a Hebraist is seen in the fact that he knew the language well enough “to
point out the errors in *A Grammar of the Hebrew Language* by Moses Stuart of Andover Seminary” (Ogden, 1990, p. 71).

**Seixas Begins Instruction**

On the day Dr. Seixas arrived (26 January), Joseph Smith (1984) recorded in his journal:

> Mr. Seixas arived from Hudson to teach the hebrew Langu[a]ge & I attended upon the organizing of the class for the purpose of receiving his lectures in hebrew grammar— his hours of instruction are from ten to eleven A. M. & from two to three P.M. his introduction pleased me much. I think he will be a help to the class in learning the hebrew (p. 180).

From the *History of the Church* (1980), the journal of Joseph Smith (1984), and from Oliver Cowdery’s (1836) *Sketch Book*, it can be seen the Hebrew School met daily except for Sundays. After a few days of instruction, Joseph Smith wrote on 30 January that Seixas “is a man of excellent understanding – & has a knowledge of many languages which were spoken by the ancients” (p. 184).

The grammar used in the Hebrew School was Seixas’ (1834) *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the use of Beginners*. However, there were only a few copies of Seixas’ grammar available. Consequently, to aid students in their study of Hebrew, Seixas (1836) wrote a *Supplement of J. Seixas’ Manual Hebrew Grammar, for the Kirtland, Ohio, Theological Institution* (1836) which was printed in New York by West & Trow for the Hebrew School. The preface was written by Oliver Cowdery and states: “The following lessons, being a mere abridgment of Mr. Seixas’ Hebrew Grammar, were copied and arranged by himself, for the benefit of a class under his instruction, at the ‘Kirtland Theological Institution,’ there being

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8 The Church’s printing office was probably ill-equip to print the supplement because it required Hebrew type - a font not likely found in a frontier printing office. Therefore, the Church must have sought out a printer who could print the supplement for them.
only a few copies of his grammar in the country.” An examination of the supplement reveals that it was intended to be used by the students in association with lectures on grammar given by Dr. Seixas. The supplement also provided the student with a complete rendition of Genesis 1 in Hebrew. This suggests that not only were there not enough grammars for every student, there were not enough Hebrew Bibles as well.

Who Attended?

John Whitmer (1995) recorded in his autobiography that “The first elders attended this school” (p. 174). This included Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, F.G. Williams, and Oliver Cowdery. Most likely, the “first elders” also included of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, most of whom we know attended the Hebrew School, including Thomas B. Marsh (1864, p. 391), Brigham Young (1863, p. 471), Heber C. Kimball (1864, p. 569), Orson Hyde (1864, p. 792), William E. McLellin (1864, p. 808), Luke S. Johnson (1865, p. 5), William Smith (1883, p. 23), and Orson Pratt (1975, p. 75) and Lyman E. Johnson (Jenson, 1901, p. 192). But the school was open to any who wished to attend and could afford the tuition, which was $6.00 (Peterson, 1972, p. 59). For example, Levi Hancock (1803-1836) wrote: “I

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9 I made this assessment after personally examining a copy of both the grammar and supplement. I have been trained in Biblical Hebrew both in schools in America and in Jerusalem, Israel. I have taught Hebrew for several years at Brigham Young University - Idaho. Examining Seixas’ grammar, I found its explanation of the Hebrew language satisfactory. My examination of the supplement revealed that it would only be fully understood if accompanied by an oral explanation. Therefore, it became obvious that the supplement was used in association with Dr. Seixas’ lectures.

10 The leadership of the LDS church is divided into quorums. The leading quorum is called the First Presidency. Next to the First Presidency is the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Next to it are the quorums of the Seventy.
went to the Hebrew school and paid for my schooling” (p. 57). Also, Lorenzo Snow, who was not a member of the Church at the time (but later joined the Church and became the fifth president of the Church), attended the School (Smith, 1884, p. 6).11

**School Divided Into Classes**

On the second day of class, 5 January, the committee divided the Hebrew School into two classes (see Smith, 1984, p. 152). As enrollment continued to increase it was determined to begin a third class. On 1 February, Joseph Smith (1984) recorded in his journal, “attended scholl as usual - & in company with the other committe organized another class of 30 to receive Mr Seixas Lectures on the hebrew” (p. 184). Oliver Cowdery (1836) recalled, “Met with the remaining committee of the School and assisted to make up the other Hebrews class of 30, or 31” (p. 421). The next day, the new class began to receive lectures from Professor Seixas (Cowdery, 1836, p. 421). On 4 February, a fourth class was formed (Smith, 1984, p. 185; Cowdery, 1836, p. 422).

Joseph Smith recorded that with four classes, “we have a great want of books but are determined to do the best we can - may the Lord help us to obtain this language that we may read the scriptures in the language in which they were given” (p. 185). The next day, he wrote: “Attended school & asisted the committe to make arangements for supplying the third & fourth classes with books - concluded to divide a bible into several parts for the benefit of

11 Lorenzo Snow was attending Oberlin College during the time Joshua Seixas was teaching a Hebrew course at the College. In fact, Snow received private lessons from the Seixas (Snow, 1936, p. 67). Snow’s sister, Eliza R. Snow Smith (1884), had joined the Church and moved to Kirtland. She convinced her brother to come to Kirtland and attend the Hebrew School in hopes that he would eventually join the Church (see p. 6).
said classes continued study in the Hebrew” (p. 185).

One reason for the increasing enrollment was because Joseph Smith’s continuing efforts to recruit Elders to the School. Joseph Noble remembered the Hebrew School began just as he and “about 40 others” were leaving on a mission. He wrote:

President Joseph Smith called the leaders together and said to us it was a favorable opportunity to get a knowledge of the Hebrew and other languages. The hand of God was in it. We right about [turned right around] and went to school. The next six months I gained considerable information on the Hebrew and Chaldee language, so I could read and translate tolerably well. I had at this time no knowledge of the English grammar. That was against me in making progress. (p. 12)

Elisha Hurd Groves, recalled being taken out of another class by Joseph Smith and put into the Hebrew School: “Returned to Kirtland about the first of January 1836 And went into an English grammar School for a few weeks. from there I was taken out by the Prophet Joseph and put into a Hebrew School” (quoted in Ogden, 1990, p. 74).

Obviously, the number of students taking Hebrew far exceeded the original forty agreed upon in the original contract. How many actually attended? The actual number is hard to determine. William Smith (1883), a brother of Joseph Smith who attended the Hebrew School, writing years later, said “About eight hundred of the members of the Church” (p. 72) attended the Hebrew School in the winter of 1836. This seems an exaggeration. Hyrum Smith (1836), another brother of Joseph Smith, while attending the school wrote a letter to his cousin, Elias Smith, 27 February 1836, saying, “80 are studying the Hebrew language Divided into 4 classes” (p. 2). Both Joseph Smith (1984, pp. 152, 184, 185) and Oliver Cowdery (1836, pp. 421-422), recorded that there were around 115 students.
Results

The Hebrew School proved to be very successful. This can be concluded from the following points:

- On 15 February, Joseph Smith (1984) recorded in his journal:

  attended the Hebrew School at the usual hour, - spent the afternoon in reading hebrew, and in receiving and waiting on visitors - on this day we commenced translating the Hebrew language, under the instruction of professor Seixas, and he acknowledg’s that we are the most forward of any class he ever taught, [for] the same length of time (pp. 190-191)

- Some students were progressing so fast that Dr. Seixas singled them out for advanced classes. On 19 February, Dr. Seixas decided to form a class for those advancing faster. Joseph Smith records:

  professor Seixas handed me the names of a few whom he had selected from the first class, and requested us to meet together this afternoon and lecture, which we did, in the upper room of the printing-office - The names are as follows President’s S. Rigdon, O. Cowdery, W. W. Phelps - Bishop E. Partridge, Eldr’s [W] E. M’Lellin, O. Hyde, O. Pratt, Sylvester Smith, myself, and Scribe [Warren Parrish] - these, and professor Seixas requested to meet one hour earlier on the following morning (p. 192).

- The School was successful enough that several students became competent enough in Hebrew as to be able to translate the Hebrew bible. Note the following examples. In a letter to Joseph Smith dated 30 March 1836, Seixas wrote:

  Mr. Joseph Smith Junior has attended a full course of Hebrew lessons under my tuition; & has been indefatigable in acquiring the principles of the sacred language of the Old Testament Scriptures in their original tongue. He has so far accomplished a knowledge of it, that he is able to translate to my entire satisfaction; & by prosecuting the study he will be able to become proficient in Hebrew. (Quoted in Ogden, 1990, p. 80)

  Orson Pratt (1975) recorded in his journal, “During the winter I attended the Hebrew School about 8 weeks in which time I made greater progress than what I could have
expected in so short a period. I obtained a certificate from J. Seixas, our instructor, certifying to my capability of teaching that language” (p. 75). In a letter to Elias Smith, dated 27 February 1836, Hyrum Smith (1836) wrote, “I have been Studying 4 weeks in the Hebrew with the Help of god I can read in the Hebrew Bible & translate fluently” (p. 2). As noted earlier, after attending the Hebrew School, Joseph Noble (1810-36) “could read and translate tolerably well” in spite of the fact that he had no “knowledge of the English grammar” (p. 12).

- So successful was the Hebrew School that Joseph Smith requested Dr. Seixas to stay in Kirtland to teach a summer course. The History of the Church records that on 7 March the committee met with Seixas to make some arrangements about paying Mr. Seixas for his instruction, and to engage him for another quarter. We did not arrive at anything definite upon the point. However, Mr. Seixas has agreed to teach us three weeks longer, and perhaps a quarter, after having a vacation of two weeks, at the expiration of the present course. (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 405)

Though not mentioned in the History of the Church, it will be shown hereafter that Dr. Seixas did agree to teach during the summer of 1836.

**From the Summer of 1836 to the Summer of 1837**

The History of the Church records that on 29 March the Hebrew School ended (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 429). That same week the Temple was dedicated and the solemn assembly was held. Over a month later, on 9 May, Joseph Smith recorded in the History of the Church: “Brother Heber C. Kimball came to me for counsel, to know whether he should go into the vineyard to proclaim the Gospel, or go to school. I told him he might do either that he should choose for the Lord would bless him. He chose to go into the vineyard” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2,
What school he was referring to is not mentioned. But this statement reveals that a school of some sort was about to begin or already had commenced. But what school?

The two main sources of information regarding the adult education schools in Kirtland, the *History of the Church* and Joseph Smith’s journals, tell us nothing concerning schools from 9 May until January of 1837. Fortunately, from various autobiographies, journals, and a newspaper articles written at the time, we can determine what schools were being operated during this period.

In a non-LDS newspaper article entitled, “Mormonism” appearing on 25 August 1836, Coe (1836) reported that both the School of the Prophets (Elder’s School) and the Hebrew School were being held in the summer of 1836:

[The Mormons] have built a huge stone temple in this town [Kirtland] . . . The lower story is the place of worship, the middle for the school of the prophets, and the upper for an academical school; a distinguished professor of Hebrew is their teacher. He is now giving his second course, with about one hundred in each class. (p. 4)

This article is our only indication that the Elder’s School continued after the solemn assembly was held. Nothing is known of the curriculum studied. However, there is confirming evidence that there was a second session of the Hebrew School in the autobiography of Jonathan Crosby (1807-52):

We had very interesting meetings that winter in Kirtland. There was the dedication of temple, and the Solemn Assembly about the last of March, and the Conference on the 6th of April. After that, by request of the prophet, I attended the Hebrew School. He himself attended it and many others. This was in the summer of 1836. (pp. 14-15)

In his wife’s autobiography, Caroline Crosby (1982) recalled personally benefitting from her

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12 This is confirmed by Heber C. Kimball himself (see 1864, p.569).
husbands experience in the Hebrew School: “My husband attended a Hebrew school that summer, and made some considerable improvement. I also learned to read, but not translate. He bought a nice set of books, consisting of bible, lexicon, and grammar” (p. 53). Little else is known of regarding adult education in the summer of 1836.

In November, the “Kirtland High School” commenced and was held in the attic of the Temple. This is the first mention of the “Kirtland School” since the winter and summer of 1834-35. The Kirtland High School was open to all who wished to attend. In the History of the Church, the following is reported:

During . . . the week the “Kirtland High School[”] is taught in the attic story, by H. M. Hawes, Esq., professor of the Greek and Latin languages. The school numbers from one hundred and thirty-five to one hundred and forty students, divided into three departments--the classic, where the languages only are taught; the English department, where mathematics, common arithmetic, geography, English grammar, writing, and reading are taught; and the Juvenile department, the last two having each an assistant instructor. The school commenced in November, and on the first Wednesday in January the several classes passed a public examination in presence of the trustees of the school, parents and guardians, and their progress in study was found of the highest order. (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 474).

This is confirmed in an article written by Oliver Cowdery (1837) appearing in the January, 1837, edition of the Messenger and Advocate: 

Dring [During] the week a school is taught in the attic story of the house [Kirtland Temple], denominated the “Kirtland High School” coning of about 135 or 40 students under the superintendence of H. M. Hawes Esq. professor of the Greek & Latin languages. The school is properly divided into three departments, (viz.) The classical, where the languages only are taught, the English department where mathematics, common Arithmetic, Geography, English grammar, writing and reading are taught, and the Juvenile department the first principles and rudiments of an education are taught. These two departments have each an instructor assigned them. The whole is under the supervision of Mr. Hawes as principal. The school commenced in Nov. and on the first Wednesday in January and several classes passed a public examination in presence of the trustees of the School and the parents and guardians of the Scholars. We think the result of the examination, did honor to both teachers and scholars. Never did we witness greater progress in study
in the same length of time and in so great a number of scholars. (p. 444)

Wilford Woodruff, who became the Church’s fourth president, attended the Kirtland High School. This was his first experience in Kirtland adult education. He was unable to attend the previous schools in Kirtland because he had been serving missions for the Church. He arrived in Kirtland at the end of October, 1836. In Woodruff’s (1865) autobiography he recalled: “I was counselled by the Presidency to attend the school in the temple, taught by Professor Haws. I studied the Latin language and English grammar” (p. 263). A journal entry written by Woodruff during this time gives us further information about the School:

Jan 4th I met in company with the high School of Kirtland in the house of the Lord for the purpose of a public examination it being the last day of the first quarter the examination lasted about three hours then after an intermission of one hour we again repaired to the house & herd an interesting lecture deliverd on Education by Professer Haws We have now a vacation of four weeks & the next term will then commence (Jessee, 1972, p. 380)

George Smith, Joseph Smith’s cousin, also attended the school. He recalled the experience in these words:

[during the winter of 1836-37] I went to school in the upper part of the temple, studied Whipleys Compend of History, Kirkham’s Grammar, Olney’s Geography, and Jacob’s Latin Grammar. The school was in three departments, the first or juveniles were taught by Elias Smith; the more advanced by Marcellus F. Cowdery, and Professor Haws taught the classics. He requested me to take charge of a grammar class of beginners, preferring if I would lecture to them one hour a day, to give me my tuition free. He said I would have no difficulty as they were all beginners, and that although I had studied but a few weeks, I could keep ahead of them. But as soon as I commenced lecturing, all the scholars in the class of beginners criticized me. They bothered me many times, but I usually adjourned the class without letting them know my perplexity. I made very little proficiency in studying Latin, which I attempted for a few weeks. (p. 528)

An article written in the April 1837 edition of the Messenger and Advocate by S. A. Davis (1837) suggests Hebrew was taught as well: “The third, or attic story of the temple is divided into 5 rooms for schools, where the various branches of English, Latin, Greek and
Hebrew languages are now taught to a large number of students” (p. 490).

From these various accounts, we can determine several things:

- The original Kirtland School was under the tutelage of Sidney Rigdon and William E. McLellin. However, for the Kirtland High School, the Church had contracted H. M. Hawes, Esq., “a professor of the Greek and Latin languages” to be its principal. Who he was, where he came from, or his credentials are never stated. He was assisted by two other teachers, Elias Smith and Marcellus F. Cowdery.
- It appears that one of the reasons for hiring Professor Hawes was because of his language skills. Having made available the Hebrew School, the language of the Old Testament, the Church leaders desired to make available Greek, the language of the New Testament, and Latin, the language of the Vulgate (Latin version of the Old and New Testament).
- The high school offered a variety of courses in three department. The first department, taught by Elias Smith, was for juveniles where they received instruction on the “first principles and rudiments of an education.” The second department was for secondary education and taught by Marcellus F. Cowdery. The courses taught in the second department were English, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and history. The third department was where Greek and Latin were taught by Professor Haws. As noted, Hebrew was taught as well (by whom is not known).
- Some of the texts used included Whipley’s *Compendium* of History, Kirkham’s *Grammar*, Olney’s *Geography*, and Jacob’s *Latin Grammar*.
- There was a public inspection, including the trustees, parents, and guardians, to determine the progress of the school. The inspection consisted of a three-hour
examination. What kind of examination is not stated.

• The three teachers were not able to meet the needs of the students. Therefore, older students sometimes were offered free tuition for teaching younger students.

Adult Education Comes to an End in Kirtland

The next quarter of the Kirtland School began on 1 February 1837 (Cook, 1981, p. 190). When the quarter ended, so ended adult education in Kirtland. Kirtland was really only a way station (Allen & Leonard, 1992, p. 103). It was always intended that the Church would move to Missouri. Members of the Church had been moving there since 1831. But with the problems in Missouri in 1833-34, there was less of a draw for new converts to move to Missouri until the problems were settled. So many moved to Kirtland instead.

Eventually, problems erupted in Kirtland as well. In 1837, throughout the United States there was a run on banks that created a financial depression that effected the entire country. Kirtland was devastated. In the months prior to the bank run, several members of the Church in Kirtland were caught up in “the spirit of speculation” and had borrowed large sums of money hoping to make a sizeable profit. With financial depression sweeping the land, many members of the Church lost their money and were heavily indebt. The Kirtland bank which was under the direction of Joseph Smith and other Church leaders also failed. With its failure, Joseph Smith was in debt for about $100,000.

Joseph Smith became the scapegoat. Allen & Leonard (1992) wrote of this period:

Unfortunately, some of Joseph Smith’s closest associates failed to separate his role as prophet and religious leader from his activities in the temporal world, not recognizing that his business failure had nothing to do with the integrity of his religious experiences. Other honest men failed too, and so did much of the economy of western America in 1837. Nevertheless, through the summer the spirit
of apostasy fomented within the Church, with economics as a central issue. On September 27 Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon left for a trip to Missouri, and in their absence the internal strife became so serious that the Church in Kirtland seemed threatened with dissolution. Even the temple became the scene violent arguments as factions and bitterness grew. (p. 123)

Joseph Smith was denounced by some as a false prophet while others remained loyal.

When Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon returned from Missouri, they found the Church in terrible disarray. “Unable to reason with those who were now his enemies, Joseph had a hard decision to make. Threats were being made against his life, and he had reason to believe they would be carried out” (p. 123). Should he leave or stay? If he left, it would appear as if he were running out on his debts. If he stayed, he could face prison or the prospect of being murdered. Finally, in January, in the midst of life-threatening persecution, Joseph Smith fled Kirtland and went where most of the Church had gathered in Missouri.13

Thus came to an end the Kirtland period of Church history and with it the end of the LDS church sponsored adult education programs in that area. However, the quest to educate the members of the Church was neither stifled nor diminished. As the members of the Church gathered in Missouri, a letter appeared in the Church newspaper, *Elder’s Journal*, calling for the members to prepare themselves to educate them and their children:

> We wish the saints then to be apprised of this, that in order to obtain the ends of their calling, they will find it unavoidably necessary that they should be gathered into the cities in as compact order as possible. . . . It will be found that farming as well as all other business, can be carried on to better purpose through a well arranged order of things by living in cities than it possibly can by living in any other situation of life; and the opportunities of education be complete so that not only the rising generation but that which has risen also be able to obtain all the education that heart can wish, and that which will be well pleasing to God. (Rigdon, 1838, p. 54)

13 Later, Joseph Smith “made a list of all his Ohio debts and employed an agent to help settle with his creditors” (Allen & Leonard, 1992, p. 124).
Since those days, the quest to educate adults has remained a fundamental practice of the Church. Ezra Taft Benson (1988), a recent president of the Church, made this summary statement: “Since Church Education’s humble beginning in 1833, the Church has continued its emphasis on education. Today we sponsor education through a vast Church Educational System – seminaries, institutes, colleges, a university, and one of the largest adult education programs in the world” (p. 294).

**Summary**

Members of the Church had developed an “extravagant thirst after knowledge” (Corrill, 1839, p. 23). From the fall of 1835 to the summer of 1837, Kirtland saw a proliferation of adult education schools designed to meet the needs of an ever increasing enrollment of missionaries, Church leaders, and common members. A second season of the Elder’s School commenced on 2 November 1835. The elders studied theological subjects including the Lectures on Faith. They also studied English grammar. Shortly after the Elder’s School began, several night schools commenced providing opportunities for members of the Church to study English grammar, writing, history, geography and debate. Also, in December, the first lyceum, a non-Church sponsored adult education program, was established in Kirtland.

By January 1836, the attic portion of the Temple was finished making it possible for schools to be held within its five rooms. Therefore, the Elder’s School moved from the printing office to the attic of the Temple. That same month, a Hebrew School was organized and held in one of the rooms of the attic. The Church hired Joshua Seixas, a Jew from New York, to teach Biblical Hebrew to about 115 students. Further, two night schools - an English grammar school and a singing school - were also organized in January. All these
schools continued during the winter.

In the summer of 1836, further sessions of the Elder’s School and the Hebrew School were held in the Temple. In November, the Kirtland High School commenced under the supervision of Professor H. M. Hawes, Esq. He was a classics professor able to teach Greek and Latin. Professor Hawes was assisted by two other teachers so that a full range of students could be accommodated. The School was divided into three departments. In the first department, taught by Elias Smith, juveniles received instruction on the “first principles and rudiments of an education.” The second department was for secondary education and taught by Marcellus F. Cowdery. The courses taught in this department were English, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and history. The third department, where Greek, Latin, and Hebrew were taught, was instructed by Professor Hawes.

The Kirtland High School ended its last session in the summer of 1837. After this, adult education sponsored by the LDS church came to an end in Kirtland. Because of religious persecution, most members of the Church, including the Church leadership fled Kirtland to Missouri. But adult education in the LDS church did not end. To this day, the LDS church has continued to sponsor adult education programs throughout the United States and the world.