During the years of 1834 through 1837, the School of the Prophets - which was initially limited to a few select members - expanded into a variety of schools with open enrollments offering expanded curricula in both religious and secular courses. The first expansion came during the winter of 1834-35 where two adult education programs were offered in Kirtland. During this winter a building was built in which the expanded programs could meet while the Temple was being built. This chapter will focus on these events.

______________________The Winter of 1833-34

The winter of 1833-34, the year after the School of the Prophets was initiated, saw no classroom instruction. Cook (1981) suggests a number of reasons for this. First, there was a “the lack of an appropriate facility in which to house the students” (p. 189). The first session was only for the “first laborers” in the new church, which were few in number. But later sessions were to be expanded to include many others, eventually any who wanted to participate. With increased enrollment, the “school room” in the Whitney Store which only measured 10 x 14 was wholly inadequate.\footnote{It appears that church meetings were held in a “house” that the Church rented. On 30 April 1833, the leaders met to discuss collecting money to pay the rent for the house. For whatever reason, the house was not considered by the leaders as a viable place in which to hold the school, for on 4 May, the leaders met to discuss building a school house for the School of the Prophets (Smith, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 342).} So during the next year, constructing a building...
for the school was a priority.

Second, the Church leaders were preoccupied with several local matters including the Church’s indebtedness, failed business ventures of some of the leaders, including Joseph Smith, and “the apostasy of Dr. Philastus Hurlburt and subsequent litigation involving [Joseph Smith] and Hurlburt” (p. 189). Third, the Church leaders had “a preoccupation with the difficulties of the Missouri Saints” (p. 187). In the early years, the LDS church had two centers of gathering for those who joined the faith: Kirtland, Ohio, and Jackson County, Missouri. The LDS people in Jackson County faced several problems with the Missourians which led to a variety of conflicts. The net result of these conflicts was that the Missourians forced the LDS people to leave their homes in Jackson County and seek refuge in other parts of Missouri (for details regarding these conflicts, see, Allen & Leonard, 1976; Van Orden, 1994). These conflicts came to a head during the winter and summer of 1833-34. Therefore, because of this and the other stated reasons, no adult education schools were offered during the fall and winter of 1833-34.

**A Building to Meet In**

As noted, one of the major concerns facing the expanding educational efforts was to have a place large enough to meet increased enrollments. The revelation recorded in D&C 88 commanded the construction of such a house. On 23 March 1833, a council was convened to

---

2 Philastus Hurlburt was excommunicated from the Church because of immorality and threatening the life of Joseph Smith. Because of the later, Joseph Smith was involved with various litigation that led to a court trial. Further, during all this, Hurlburt led a campaign of anti-Mormon rhetoric which brought persecution against the Church. Responding to these matters took a great deal of Joseph Smith’s time. (See Backman, 1983, pp. 201-210)
appoint a committee to purchase land in Kirtland where the Temple was to be built (see Smith, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 334). After the land was purchased, a city plat was surveyed. Further revelations (see D&C 95) gave the “manner” and “pattern” of construction and design of the Temple. From these it was obvious that the Temple was not to be an ordinary school house. Rather, it was to be a sacred edifice with the title, “House of the Lord.” Befitting such a title, the building would be more exquisite and costly, taking more time than a simple school house. On 1 June, a circular was sent to the various branches of the Church explaining the urgency of the construction of the Temple:

And unless we fulfil this command, viz: establish an house, and prepare all things necessary whereby the elders may gather into a school, called the School of the Prophets, and receive that instruction which the Lord designs they should receive, we may all despair of obtaining the great blessing that God has promised to the faithful of the Church of Christ; therefore it is as important, as our salvation, that we obey this above-mentioned command, as well as all the commandments of the Lord.

The circular asked for financial donations that not only would help pay for the construction of the building but also to “aid the Elders to attend this school”:

We have met in conference, and agreed to form a subscription, and circulate it through the churches. The conference also appointed Hyrum Smith, Reynolds Cahoon, and Jared Carter, a committee to superintend this business, viz; that of circulating subscriptions to establish a fund to build a house, and to aid the Elders to attend this school.

The circular also informed the branches that many had already made financial donations to this end:

The subscriptions are now in circulation among us, and our Heavenly Father is opening the hearts of our brethren beyond the expectation of many; and not one brother among us, as yet, refuses to exert himself to do something in a temporal way to bring about the establishing of this house and school and we say, may our Heavenly Father open your hearts also, that you, with us may gather together something to aid as a temporal benefit. (Smith, 1980, Vol.1, p.350)

With financial donations coming in, construction of the Temple began in July of 1833. It
was evident, however, that the building would take some time to complete.

Joseph Smith and the other leaders had to grapple with the question of where to house the School while the Temple was being built. In the fall of 1833, a council of the leaders was held concerning “the subject of building.” In a letter to the members of the Church in Missouri dated October 10, Frederick G. Williams reported:

It was decided by the council that we should discontinue the building of the Temple during the winter, for want of materials; and to prepare and get all things in readiness to recommence it early in the spring. It was also agreed that we should set the hands immediately to erect a house for the printing office, which is to be thirty by thirty-eight feet on the ground; the first story to be occupied for the School of the Prophets this winter, and the upper story for the printing press. (Smith, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 418)

Construction began immediately. By 18 December 1833, the building was ready to be used. On that date, Joseph Smith assembled the Elders “in the printing office, and bowed down before the Lord, and [he] dedicated the printing press, and all that pertained thereunto, to God” (1980, Vol. 1, p. 465). Now a place large enough for the school was available. However, because of the various interruptions previously discussed, the next session of the School of the Prophets would have to be postponed until the fall of 1834.

School of the Elders

In the fall of 1834, missionaries began returning from their missions. The leaders of the Church felt it was time to begin the next session of the School of the Prophets. But they decided to divide the School into two schools: the School of the Elders for theological training and the Kirtland School for secular education (Allen & Leonard, 1992, p. 107). The Elders’ School commenced sometime between 25 November and 1 December 1834 (see Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, 170-175). The Elder’s School differed from the original School of the
What the term “Elders” meant to the early members of the Church is not always clear. Writing of the Elder’s School that met the following year, Heber C. Kimball said “In the fall and early part of winter of 1835 the Elders of Israel consisting of Elders, priests, Teachers, and deacons gathered to Kirtland” (1848, p. 31). Whether the same meaning can be applied to the Elders participating in the schools during the fall and winter of 1834-35 is unknown.

Preparations for the Elder’s school began as early as October and continued into November. In October, Joseph Smith recorded:

It now being the last of the month, and the Elders beginning to come in, it was necessary to make preparations for the school for the Elders, wherein they might be more perfectly instructed in the great things of God, during the coming winter. A building for a printing office was nearly finished, and the lower story of this building was set apart for that purpose, (the school) when it was completed. So the Lord opened the way according to our faith and works, and blessed be His name. (Vol. 2, pp.169-170)

By December, the School was up and running. With the focus of study being theological in orientation, Heber C. Kimball (1864), who was in attendance, simply called it a “Theological School” (p. 568). The History of the Church records the following regarding

---

3 What the term “Elders” meant to the early members of the Church is not always clear. Writing of the Elder’s School that met the following year, Heber C. Kimball said “In the fall and early part of winter of 1835 the Elders of Israel consisting of Elders, priests, Teachers, and deacons gathered to Kirtland” (1848, p. 31). Whether the same meaning can be applied to the Elders participating in the schools during the fall and winter of 1834-35 is unknown.
what was studied:

December 1.– Our school for the Elders was now well attended, and with the lectures on theology, which were regularly delivered, absorbed for the time being everything else of a temporal nature. The classes, being mostly Elders gave the most studious attention to the all-important object of qualifying themselves as messengers of Jesus Christ, to be ready to do His will in carrying glad tidings to all that would open their eyes, ears and hearts. (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, pp. 175-176)

The “lectures on theology” mentioned in this statement refer to a series of lectures written for the School called the Lectures on Faith (1985). These lectures were included in the first edition of the D&C but later removed and published as a separate work. Heber C. Kimball recalled: “In the winter of 1834-5, I attended the Theological School established in Kirtland, in which the lectures on faith, contained in the book of Doctrines and Covenants, originated” (p. 568 ). Likewise, Zebedee Coltrin remembered: “It was in a larger school on the hill [printing office on the hill where the Temple was built] afterwards, where Sidney [Rigdon] presided that the lectures on faith that appear in the book of Doctrine and Covenants were given” (Graffam, 1981, p. 44).

The Lectures on Faith were seven lectures addressing three major themes regarding the doctrine of faith: (1) “faith itself – what it is”; (2) “the object on which it rests”; and (3) “the effects which flow from it” (p. 1). The lectures (except for five and six) are written as a catechism with the lectures divided into numbered paragraphs followed by several questions pertaining to the lecture. It appears, though it is by no means certain, that the Lectures on Faith were written by a committee made up of Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Frederick G. Williams, and Oliver Cowdery (see Dahl, 1990, p. 2-10), in preparation for the School of the Elders (see Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 165, 169, 180).

It is difficult to ascertain who taught the seven lectures on faith in the School of the
Elders (Dahl, 1990). Contemporary records regarding the School are scarce. In fact, only two sources give an account of who may have taught. The first comes from Zebedee Coltrin’s comments quoted above which states that Sidney Rigdon presided at the School. It is most likely that Coltin meant “taught” rather than “preside.” It is generally conceded by most LDS scholars that Joseph Smith presided over the School of the Elders as he had presided over the School of the Prophets (see Dahl, 1990, p. 11). The second source is the only known description of class procedures in the School of the Elders. It comes from Heber C. Kimball (1964):

A certain number were appointed to speak at each meeting. On one occasion I was called upon to speak on the principle of faith. Several brethren spoke before me, and quoted every passage mentioned in the Scriptures on the subject. I referred to an original circumstance which took place in my family. My daughter had broke a saucer; her mother promised her a whipping, when she returned from a visit on which she was just starting; she went out under an apple tree and prayed that her mother’s heart might be softened, and when she returned she might not whip her; although her mother was very punctual when she made a promise to her children to fulfil it, yet when she returned she had no disposition to chastise her child. Afterwards the child told her mother that she had prayed to God that she might not whip her. Joseph [Smith] wept like a child on hearing this simple narrative and its application. (p. 568)

In this statement, it seems that many were involved in teaching the lectures. This is in accord with the revelation commanding the organization of the School of the Prophets. Recall that class room instruction was not only to be done by the appointed teacher but also every member of the school was to be given an opportunity to teach (D&C 88:122). Heber C. Kimball’s description seems to indicate that the instructions for teaching the School of the Prophets found in D&C 88 were applied to the School of the Elders. If this is correct then it would appear that Rigdon was the teacher in charge and members of the School were assigned by him to either teach or expound on various aspects of the lectures.
The Kirtland School

The Winter of 1834-35 Session

The second school sponsored by the Church in the winter of 1834-35 was referred to as the Kirtland School, and was viewed as a high school. This followed just “twelve years after the first American high school was established in Boston” (Peterson, 1972, p. 42). The focus of this school was on secular subjects. It is not known when the Church leaders decided to establish this school. By November 1834, however, they were ready to proceed.

In a journal entry written by William E. McLellin (1994), we are told that “The brethren also while They were together chose Jos[eph Smith], Sidney [Rigdon], Frederick [G. Williams] and Oliver [Cowdery] as trustees of the high school in Kirtland and they ingaged me for $18 per month to assist in instruction in s’d school” (p. 149).

McLellin recorded in his journal that the School commenced on 22 December. He wrote: “On Monday 22nd The school commenced in Kirtland. W[illiam] E. M[cLellin] & Elder Burdock⁴ teachers” (p. 152). Heber C. Kimball (1864), who attended the School of the Elders, also enrolled in the Kirtland School. Later, he wrote, “Dec. 22. – I commenced going to a grammar school, taught by Sidney Rigdon and Wm. E. McLellin; many elders and some of the sisters attended. I continued six weeks” (p. 568). From this statement, which will be discussed more fully later, it appears that by 22 December, the Elders’ School had come to an end while the Kirtland School had “commenced.” This would only make sense since the Kirtland School would have to use the same “school room” in the printing office that was utilized by the Elder’s School. This school continued until the “last week in March, to give

⁴ This is probably Thomas Burdick who was born on 17 November 1795 in Canjoharie, New York.
the Elders an opportunity to go forth and proclaim the Gospel” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 218). McLeLlin reported that Joseph Smith was one of the students who enrolled in the School (see McLeLlin, 1994, p. 313).

The Journal History$^5$ of the LDS church records that the mission of the Kirtland School was similar to that of the original School of the Prophets and the Elder’s School:

[A] grammar school was organized and commended in Kirtland, Ohio, taught by Sidney Rigdon and Wm. E. McLellin. It was held especially for the benefit of the young Elders of the Church, many of whom lacked the necessary education as representatives of the Church and missionaries to preach the gospel to the world. (Journal History, 22 Dec.)

From Heber C. Kimball’s statement quoted above, Sidney Rigdon and William E. McLeLlin co-taught the school. He mentions nothing of Elder Burdock. The credentials of Sidney Rigdon have already been discussed. Regarding McLeLlin’s credentials, all that is known is from a statement he made in 1835: “Since the year 1827 I have taught school in five different States, and visited many schools in which I was not engaged as teacher” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 200). Besides this statement, nothing else is known of his education and teaching experience.

In February 1835, the board of trustees of the Kirtland School, consisting of Joseph Smith, Frederick G. Williams, Sidney Rigdon, and Oliver Cowdery, requested a report be made of the progress of the Kirtland School. William E. McLeLlin (1835) was given the task to write the report which was printed in the February, 1835, issue of the Messenger and

$^5$ In 1906, Church Historian Andrew Jenson was assigned the responsibility of putting together a journal history of the Church. The journal is a “a retroactive compilation of sources in the form of annals extending back to 1830, a history that by 1932 had grown to 518 volumes” (Searle, 1992, p. 591). It is not numbered by pages but by dates. The Journal History is not published but is available for public use in the library of the Church Historians Office at the LDS church office building in Salt Lake City, Utah.
Advocate, a monthly newspaper printed by the Church in Kirtland between October 1834 and September 1837 (see Hedges, 2000). It also appears in History of the Church (see Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 200). This report is our only source of information regarding the particulars of this School. It reads as follows:

Kirtland, Ohio, Feb. 27, 1835.

Having been requested by the Trustees of the “KIRTLAND SCHOOL,” to give a small sketch of the number of students who have attended this installation, and of their progress in the different sciences, I cheerfully comply with the request, having been an instructor therein from its commencement, in Dec. last.

The school has been conducted under the immediate care and inspection of JOSEPH SMITH, jr.; F.G. WILLIAMS, SIDNEY RIGDON, & O. COWDERY. Trustees.

When the school first commenced, we received into it both large and small, but in about three weeks the classes became so large, and the house so crowded, that it was though advisable to dismiss all the small students, and continue those only who wished to study the sciences of penmanship, arithmetic, English grammar and geography. Before we dismissed the small scholars, there were in all about 130 who attended. Since that time there have been, upon an average, about 160, the most of whom have received lectures upon English grammar; and for the last four weeks about 70 have been studying geography one half the day, and grammar and writing the other part.

T. Burdick’s arithmetic, S. Kirkham’s grammar and J. Olney’s geography have been used, with N. Webster’s dictionary, as standard.

Since the year 1827 I have taught school in five different States, and I have visited many schools in which I was not engaged, as teacher; but in none, I can say with certainty, have I seen students make more rapid progress, than in this. I expect myself to leave the institution, but yet, I have a great desire to see it flourish. I therefore most cheerfully recommend it to all those whose circumstances and situation will allow them to attend, as being a place where strict attention is paid to good morals as well as to the sciences. W. E. McLELLIN.

From this report, as well as Kimball and McLellins statements quoted earlier several things are worth noting regarding enrollment, curriculum, and outcome.

- The Kirtland School was considered a high school.
- It was taught by Sidney Rigdon, William E. McLellin, and an Elder Burdock.
- There was an open enrollment.
- Both men and women attended.
• Even little children were allowed to attend, though because of space they were eventually asked to leave.

• The school’s curriculum was secular rather than theological. Courses included penmanship, arithmetic, English grammar, and geography.

• Text books (including Burdick’s Arithmetic, Kirkham’s Grammar, Olney’s Geography, and Noah Webster’s Dictionary) were used as the source of study.

• According to McLellin’s experience as a school teacher, the students in the Kirtland School made a more rapid progress than any place he had taught or visited.

The Spring-Summer of 1835 Session

Directly after McLellin’s report in the Messenger and Advocate, the following notice appeared:

Notice. The spring term of the “Kirtland School” will commence on the 20th of April next. Young gentlemen and ladies from a distance can obtain board, in respectable families for $1.00 to $1.25 per week. The Trustees of this institution design introducing the higher branches of English literature, at as early a period as possible. [Editor.]

Oliver Cowdery, a member of the Trustees of the Kirtland School, was the editor of the Messenger and Advocate at that time.

This notice is of interest. It meant that some form of adult schooling would now be available during spring and summer for the first time in Kirtland. Schooling, which had been held during the winter months so that the Elders could do missionary work in the summer, would now be available to other Church members. This suggests the Church leaders were concerned about the educational needs of the whole Church and not just missionaries. Therefore the Kirtland School was expanded to include “young gentlemen and ladies.”
a more diverse enrollment future sessions of the Kirtland School would expand their course offerings as the needs of the people changed.

From inadvertent evidence found in the History of the Church (see Smith, 1980, Vol. 2: pp.240, 283)\(^6\), we learn that even though the Kirtland School was expanded to include “young gentlemen and ladies,” adults - both male and female - were invited to attend. Further, we learn that Sidney Rigdon was in charge of the school. However, nothing else is known concerning the spring and summer session.

Summary

Because of a number of problems that arose in the Church, the second session of the School of the Prophets was postponed until the fall of 1834. Construction on the Temple where the School of the Prophets was to be held began in the summer of 1833. The design, which was given by revelation, was more elaborate than a simple school house. The Temple would also serve as a house of worship. Consequently, the Temple’s construction would take longer than initially anticipated. With the Church leaders planning on increased enrollment,

\(^6\) From the evidence, the following can be pieced together. Shortly after the Kirtland School ended at the end of March, William E. McLellin and Orson Hyde left Kirtland to do missionary work in the eastern states. Hyde returned briefly to Kirtland and then rejoined McLellin. While in Kirtland, Hyde visited the Kirtland School and was unimpressed with its conduct. Sometime after Hyde’s return to the mission fields, McLellin received a letter from his wife explaining that she was unable to attend the Kirtland School in the summer. He responded saying, “I am glad that it is not [within your power to attend] since Elder Hyde has returned and given me a description of the manner in which it is conducted; though we do not wish to cast any reflections.” The “reflections” referred to Sidney Rigdon, who was not only the principal of the school but a member of the First Presidency, the governing quorum of the Church. Some how, the ruling council in Kirtland had access to the letter and were troubled by the insulting remarks. Upon their return to Kirtland, both McLellin and Hyde were reprimanded for their. They “frankly confessed, and were forgiven and all things were satisfactorily settled.”
the problem of finding a place large enough to house the School of the Prophets was considered. With the Church also needing a printing office, the Church leaders decided to proceed with building a two floor building - the second floor would be utilized as the printing office while the first floor would serve as an interim school room.

As the fall of 1834 approached, the leaders decided that the School of the Prophets would be divided into two schools: one, the School of the Elders, would be for theological training while the second, the Kirtland School, would handle secular education. These schools would commence after the missionaries returned from their fields of labor. Accordingly, the Elder’s School commenced sometime towards the end of November 1834. A specially prepared set of lectures, known as the Lectures on Faith, became the text of the theology class.

In December, the Elder’s School came to an end and the Kirtland School commenced. It was also called a high school. The curriculum consisted of classes in penmanship, English grammar, arithmetic, and geography. Text books consisted of those commonly used in other educational settings. The school was open to all, including both men and women. About 160 attended. The school was taught by Sidney Rigdon and assisted by Thomas B. Marsh. The winter session ended the last week of March so missionaries could return to their fields of labors. However, a session was held during the summer providing education for the first time during the summer months. The Church invited “young gentlemen and ladies” to attend this school along with the adults.

By all appearances the School of the Elders and the Kirtland School were successful ventures in adult education. Most members of the Church who had come to Kirtland had grown up without many opportunities for education. The schools provided by the Church
were, in many cases, the best opportunities some of these adults had for formal education.

This is represented in a letter written by Benjamin F. Johnson (1967) to a friend, George S. Gibbs, in 1903:

Dear Brother:

In resuming my answer to your scholarly and effusive epistle, I feel in every degree incompetent to the task. Especially do I feel the want of learning, and my writings, of course, must betray to you my poverty in classical education. Through childhood and early youth, my advantages, even for primary education, were the most meager. At seventeen, I attended the winter term of the grammar school taught by William E. McLellin, in Kirtland, and presided over by the Prophet; at the same time attending night lectures in geography. These were my greatest opportunities for schooling, and in them was finished my school education; and if I have acquired in life anything further of worth, it has been as snatched from the wayside while on the run as a missionary, pioneer or while in Nature’s great laboratory with the axe, plow, spade or garden implements. (p. 325)

Johnson’s educational experience was typical of many in early America. This serves to underscore the importance of the adult educational programs promoted by the Church in Kirtland. As the next session approached, the success of the schools became known throughout the Church. Missionaries and Church leaders were recruited from near and far to come to Kirtland to attend the Schools. As the summer drew to an end, missionaries and leaders left their assigned labors and traveled to Kirtland in hopes of participating in the next season of schools.