

# Dreams, Visions, and Visitations: The Genesis of Mormonism

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**T**his paper will review the environmental factors that contributed to the spiritual development of the Joseph Smith Sr. family from 1791 in eastern Vermont through 1830 in western New York. Special attention will be given to Joseph Smith Sr. as he filtered the rich local community discourse for family edification. Additional attention will be given to son Hyrum's direct exposure to the original source of much of the community discourse while he attended Moor's Academy at Dartmouth College. The methodology used in the paper will chronologically incorporate and integrate the elements that contributed to the spiritual foundations of this interesting family. We will consider background information on Joseph Smith Sr., 1791-96, his basic growth period during family formation, 1796-1803, a strong revival-based spiritual experience in 1804, and a seven-year period of challenges and reflection that culminated in a series of spiritual dreams from 1811 to 1819. The dream period coincides with son Hyrum's school exposure, family sickness, son Joseph's leg operation and recovery, cold winters, and intense revivals. Such factors and Joseph Smith Sr.'s reaction to them provide a uniquely rich family discourse from which emerged the prophet Joseph Smith.

## **Background**

Shortly after June 1791 Joseph Smith Sr., father of the prophet Joseph Smith, arrived in the White River Valley in the highly contested political, economic, and religious cauldron in the center of the new state of Vermont. Prior to entering the Union in 1791 the land which became Vermont had been subject to conflicting territorial claims made by New York, New Hampshire, and even Massachusetts. To further complicate the situation western Vermont was more ideologically affiliated with New York economic interests, and eastern Vermont was more aligned with New Hampshire and Massachusetts's religious focus. The resolution of geographical boundaries did nothing to resolve the ideological conflicts that had divided the residents of the area. The contest between economics and religion that had divided the thirteen colonies into economic enterprise efforts and religious refuges continued in Vermont.

Joseph Smith Sr., along with his parents and his siblings, came from eastern Massachusetts by way of southern New Hampshire. They purchased and settled farm land near the southern boundary of Tunbridge, Vermont, where the father and brothers soon cleared sufficient land for farms for each.<sup>1</sup> By December 1797 the family had become deeply involved with the Universalists Society in Tunbridge, Vermont.<sup>2</sup> Later some of the brothers and brothers-in-law strained family relations when they became Freemasons after the masonic lodge was founded in Randolph, Vermont, in 1798.<sup>3</sup> Joseph's mother, Lucy Mack, had joined her brother Stephen who had earlier come to Tunbridge from Gilsum, New Hampshire, with an economic focus to build the mercantile trade and to farm in the growing town even before the Smith family moved into the area.<sup>4</sup> Lucy worked in Stephen's store in town.

### Family Formation

Stephen introduced his sister Lucy to Joseph Smith Sr. The couple was soon married in January 1796<sup>5</sup> and received a \$1000 dowry from Stephen and his partner, John Mudget. The new couple owned a farm free and clear and had \$1000 in cash to start their new family. An untimely, probably premature or stillborn birth of a first son in 1797<sup>6</sup> was a setback for the new couple. In February 1798, however, a strong baby boy arrived and was named Alvin.<sup>7</sup>

Farming, however, does not appear to have been Joseph Smith Sr.'s consuming passion for he soon became interested in dowsing and treasure-seeking. He may even have been the Joseph Smith associated with Nathaniel Wood in nearby Rutland, Vermont, in the late 1790s.<sup>8</sup> Census records for 1800 do not confirm his residence in Tunbridge and appear to be those of a Joseph and Hannah Smith and family.<sup>9</sup> Joseph Smith Sr. also seems to have taken an interest in freemasonry and quite possibly even named his second son,

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<sup>1</sup> Larry C. Porter, "A Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1971), 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Randolph Masonic Lodge Records as researched by Nick Literski as interviewed by the author.

<sup>4</sup> Porter, "Origins of the Church," 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Records of Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Miscellaneous Items, Book A, 130, Tunbridge Town Clerk's Office, Tunbridge, Vermont.

<sup>8</sup> D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 36.

<sup>9</sup> Records, Book A, 402.

Hyrum,<sup>10</sup> after the principal characters in the masonic myth, Hiram king of Tyre and Hiram Abiff his principal architect, who according to the myth built Solomon's temple. Although Joseph's brother John, brother-in-law John C. Waller, and other relatives were accepted into the Randolph Lodge, Joseph appears to have been rejected in 1801.<sup>11</sup> This rejection, however, might have been that of the other Joseph Smith, leaving the source of Hyrum's name in question.

Hyrum's birth record, however, was not recorded in Tunbridge until 1803, further suggesting that the Smiths may have been living elsewhere in 1800. The apparent masonic rejection seems to have initiated a rift in the Smith family evidenced by Joseph Sr. becoming more closely affiliated with the Mack family. This rift was further advanced when Jason, Lucy's brother, visited the family from Canada in 1803. He related his spiritual seeker views and left one of his orphan charges with the Smith family for several months to be educated.<sup>12</sup> The Smiths soon began attending Methodist meetings, possibly prompted by Lucy's sister-in-law Sallie Ball Mack, a strong Methodist, until discouraged by Joseph's family. Thus three seeker dimensions were firmly established early in the developing Smith family discourse: treasure, rite, and spirit. The family was definitely seeking something special beyond the conformist rural life.

In 1802 the Smiths abruptly rented their farm. Probably at Lucy's behest Joseph Sr. went into the mercantile trade in Randolph as Stephen Mack had done in Tunbridge. Joseph soon entered into a promising ginseng venture but, due to a desire to capture all the profits and thus outshine his brother-in-law, he tried to sell the ginseng directly to China. Unfortunately Joseph lost his entire investment when an associate absconded with the proceeds—even though Stephen half-heartedly warned Joseph about the culprit's suspicious behavior.<sup>13</sup> This loss along with failure to collect trade receivables caused Joseph to default on his creditors in Boston. To settle his debts he had to sell his farm in a weak market and deplete the \$1000 dowry. In 1802 another tragedy rocked the family when Joseph's brother Stephen died. Stephen had been preparing for formal education and at seventeen<sup>14</sup> was probably ready to enter nearby Dartmouth College. There was some concern as to whether the attending physician, Dr. Joseph Tufts, had done too much or too little

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 397. Hyrum's name appears as Hiram on his birth record signed by his father and on Moor's School records and all documents prior to 1826, after which he appears to change his name after the William Morgan masonic killing—possibly to distance himself from the local Masons to protect his teaching job, the family's primary source of income. The more familiar spelling will be used throughout this paper.

<sup>11</sup> Randolph Masonic Lodge Records.

<sup>12</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Arlington, Va.: Stratford Books, 2005), 75.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>14</sup> Richard L. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1971, 2003), 139-40.

while treating Stephen Smith.<sup>15</sup> After Sophronia was born in Tunbridge in May 1803, the family moved onto the farm owned by Lucy's father, Solomon Mack, sometime after August 1804.<sup>16</sup>

### A Spiritual Experience

In 1803 Lucy also had her well-known seeker dream in which she first saw Joseph Sr.'s spiritual flexibility as a tree bending gracefully in the wind preparing to receive the gospel of the Son of God as compared with Joseph's brother Jesse's resistance as a pillar of marble.<sup>17</sup> Lucy was clearly conflicted by this family situation. However, to begin to understand this dream it is necessary to review the context of the development of the religious discourse in the upper Connecticut and White River Valleys. In 1769 Eleazar Wheelock founded Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, to teach the Native Americans, prepare missionaries, and train ministers for the rapidly growing towns in the region<sup>18</sup>—including Elijah Lyman<sup>19</sup> and Solomon Aikens,<sup>20</sup> uncles of Joseph Sr.'s later sisters-in-law, Clarissa Lyman and Mary Aikens.

### Spiritual Background of the Community

Eleazar Wheelock was a Yale graduate and a product of the Great Awakening; he was mentored by Jonathan Edwards, a traditional Puritan Calvinist, and George Whitefield, a Methodist Arminian closely associated with John and Charles Wesley.<sup>21</sup> Wheelock leaned in the direction of the Arminian concept of free agency rather than the Calvinist concept of predestination.<sup>22</sup> He selectively used Edwards's work on the Freedom of the Will, which discussed both approaches, as his principal religious text.<sup>23</sup> Dartmouth trained hundreds of ministers in the region by the early 1800s.<sup>24</sup> Traditional Calvinism, however, gained increasing strength in the region by 1810 and vehemently opposed both Universalism, which applied Christ's Atonement broadly to everyone, and Arminianism, which applied the Atonement's highest degree of glory to all those who would consecrate their lives to the service of Christ. Calvinism's

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 83.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>18</sup> Ralph Nading Hill, *College on the Hill* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth Publications, 1964), 31.

<sup>19</sup> George T. Chapman, *Sketches of the Alumni of Dartmouth College* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1867), 46.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Hill, *College on the Hill*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> John Wheelock, *History of Dartmouth College and Moor's School* (Hanover, N.H., 1815), 58.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Chapman, *Sketches of the Alumni*, 13-150.

narrow definition of the elect of God could tolerate neither heresy. In 1803 Jesse was clearly in the Universalist camp,<sup>25</sup> Lucy was a still a bit Calvinist, and Joseph Sr. appears to be undecided. Joseph's willingness to attend Methodist meetings with Lucy suggests that they were both heading in that direction.<sup>26</sup> As Universalism began to fade in the region and Calvinist rigidity was on the rise, the Smith family began seeking for some satisfying alternative. The religious tension would begin to come to a climax in 1810 when control of the board of trustees of Dartmouth College shifted from a narrow Arminian to a narrow Calvinist majority.<sup>27</sup> Soon openly engaged disputation evolved into vehemently contested revivals. In the midst of this religious malaise in December 1805 Joseph Jr. was born on the Solomon Mack farm, which straddled the boundary between Royalton and Sharon, Vermont. There must have been some concern before Joseph's birth since Joseph Sr. made a twenty-four-mile round-trip to fetch Dr. Joseph Adams Denison from Bethel, Vermont, who was the best known baby doctor in the region.<sup>28</sup> Denison had been trained by his cousin Joseph Adams Gallup who had been the first graduate of the new Dartmouth Medical School, founded in 1796 by Nathan Smith.<sup>29</sup>

Nathan Smith had graduated from the Harvard Medical School in 1790 as its fourth graduate. The Harvard Medical School had been founded in 1783 and was the only medical school in New England in 1790.<sup>30</sup> The marathon journey proved to be but good insurance since the birth according to Lucy was uneventful.<sup>31</sup> After both Joseph Smith and Dr. Joseph Adams Denison made such a journey it is not difficult to guess why the new son was named Joseph. The Mack farm began failing in 1806 and Solomon Mack was forced to take additional mortgages on the property.<sup>32</sup> About this time Stephen Mack further stressed family relations when he left his family in Vermont to seek his fortune in Michigan. In 1807 the Smith family moved back to Tunbridge where Samuel Harrison was born in 1808 before moving on to Royalton where Ephraim was born in 1810 but soon died. William was born a year later in 1811.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 79.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Wheelock, *History of Dartmouth College*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Porter, "Origins of the Church," 7.

<sup>29</sup> Oliver Hubbard, *The Early History of the New Hampshire Medical Institution* (Washington, D.C.: The Globe Printing and Publishing House, 1880), 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 83.

<sup>32</sup> Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage*, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 83-84.

## The Dreams Begin

In 1811 there was also a revival in the area that strongly affected Lucy's father, Solomon Mack, and caused him to write his history and embark upon on a preaching tour from town to town.<sup>34</sup> Joseph Sr. also reacted to the revival by having his first seeker dream in which he was uncomfortable with the images of bickering that, without true religion or a plan of salvation, were represented by fierce wild animals. Yet at the same time he was comfortable with his position.<sup>35</sup> This revival focused on many of the Calvinist vs. Arminian doctrinal issues that were continuing to be fiercely contested at nearby Dartmouth College. Joseph's focus on the plan of salvation appears to reflect his growing interest in Christ's atonement.

For some reason in 1811 the Smith family moved on to Lebanon, New Hampshire, just south of Dartmouth.<sup>36</sup> Soon after arriving in Lebanon the Smith family was in sufficient financial condition to establish their second son, Hyrum, in the Moor's Academy at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire.<sup>37</sup> Joseph Smith Sr. appeared to have approached Dartmouth Hall with a degree of anxiety as he dropped Hyrum off to join his cousin Stephen Mack at Moor's Academy.<sup>38</sup> The boarding school was probably Lucy's idea as she still wanted to keep up with Stephen, her brother, and his efforts to acquire the things of this world. Students were known to sit in the windows of the upper floors of Dartmouth Hall and look out and down on those approaching the tall building. Joseph Sr.'s feelings about leaving his son in such a situation are reflected in his concurrent dream that focused on family unity both in physical and spiritual terms challenged by the perceived appearance of Babylon to separate them.

The dream dealt with his reluctant acceptance of the new situation. He appeared to be fascinated with the east-to-west-running Mascoma River behind their new home. When the guiding spirit explained that the tall building represented Babylon and that the people in the windows were the inhabitants thereof who scorn the saints of God because of their humility,<sup>39</sup> he was further concerned. In the new home, however, Joseph Sr. found the pure love of God shed abroad in the hearts of all those who love him and keep his commandments.<sup>40</sup> Also in 1812 Solomon Spaulding, who graduated from Dartmouth in 1785, completed his unpublished work on the origin of the Indians and reintroduced

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<sup>34</sup> Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage*, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 85.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>38</sup> Moor's School Attendance Records, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 88.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.



the notion of arrival by ship originally suggested by John Smith in his 1780 lecture on the origin of native-American Aborigines. Spaulding's *Manuscript Found* was widely discussed among his family, most likely including his nephew James Spaulding<sup>41</sup> who was attending the Dartmouth Medical School and his second cousin Levi Spaulding<sup>42</sup> who was attending Dartmouth College at the time.

### **Sickness and Surgery**

In the fall of 1812, however, the outbreak of typhus (typhoid) brought tragedy to the entire Connecticut River valley. Six thousand people died and 1500 died in the upper valley alone. However, only one person died in the vicinity of Dartmouth where Nathan Smith had expanded his medical school in 1811 and trained 150 new doctors in 1812.<sup>43</sup> The Smith family was stricken in the fall of 1812, and Hyrum came home sick from school in February 1813 at the end of the winter quarter.<sup>44</sup> Young Joseph had initially recovered but suffered a complication in the form of necrosis or a bone infection that threatened his leg and his very life.<sup>45</sup> Dr. Phineas Parkhurst,<sup>46</sup> a nephew of Joseph Sr.'s sister Mary and 1804 graduate of Dartmouth, failed to control the infection and called in Nathan Smith and his Dartmouth Medical School colleagues to assist.<sup>47</sup> Nathan Smith agreed to try an experimental surgery to remove infected portions of the infected tibia in young Joseph's leg.<sup>48</sup> The actual surgery, however, may have been performed by Dr. Nathan Stone,<sup>49</sup> Nathan Smith's long-time friend, a surgeon who practiced for fifty years in New Fane,<sup>50</sup> Vermont, to the south of Nathan Smith's hometown of Chester, Vermont. The surgery was performed without modern anesthetics, antiseptics, or antibiotics.

Nathan Smith, however, was known to use opiates to calm the patient and caustic agents like hydrogen peroxide to cleanse the wound after surgery. The additional area doctors trained the previous year allowed Nathan Smith to focus his attention on the more difficult cases. For example he was able to visit young Joseph eighteen times in twenty days between April 10 and April 30,

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<sup>41</sup> Charles Spear, *Dartmouth Gazette* broadside, November 1811.

<sup>42</sup> Chapman, *Sketches of the Alumni*, 178.

<sup>43</sup> Hubbard, *The Early History*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 90.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>46</sup> Porter, "Origins of the Church," 9.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 95.

<sup>48</sup> Porter, "Origins of the Church," 9.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>50</sup> Nathan Stone's Daybooks, New Fane Historical Society, New Fane, Vermont.

1813, to attend the healing and then four times in late August before he left Dartmouth to found the Yale Medical School.<sup>51</sup>

### Recovery and Reflection

At this time Joseph Sr.'s view of Dartmouth was probably much more positive. He did keep Hyrum home for over a year to attend young Joseph before allowing him to return to Moor's Academy at about the same time the family moved to Norwich, Vermont, in 1814.<sup>52</sup> About that time Uncle Jesse took Joseph to Salem to visit family of his wife, Hannah Peabody, by the sea shore in Salem, Massachusetts.<sup>53</sup> They probably also visited her cousin Dr. Nathaniel Peabody who graduated from Dartmouth in 1800 with Cyrus Perkins, Nathan Smith's partner and Professor John Smith's son-in-law, and who was practicing medicine in Salem.<sup>54</sup> John Smith was a cousin of Joseph Sr.'s parents.

Lucy had to tend two-year-old William, infant Catharine born in July 1812, and possibly her ailing mother who was living with them; she thus required Hyrum's assistance to tend to young Joseph. Young Joseph was confined to his room in 1813 and carried around. He was then on crutches until the family arrived in Palmyra by 1817.<sup>55</sup> During this long recovery Hyrum was young Joseph's principal tutor since Joseph could not attend school. At twice-daily chapel sessions Hyrum had been exposed to Dartmouth's free-agency-based Arminian Theology, developed by Professor John Smith,<sup>56</sup> cousin of his grandfather Asael Smith. The plan of salvation, the Godhead, the atonement, the Son's Church in all ages, the Melchizedek priesthood, Aaronic priesthood, and degrees of glory were only a few of the concepts to which Hyrum was exposed.<sup>57</sup> When Hyrum returned to Moor's Academy in 1814, he renewed his acquaintance with Louis Langdon, a Canadian Indian who could read the New Testament in Greek and Cicero in Latin,<sup>58</sup> as well as with two Seneca from western New York.

Hyrum also witnessed the revival of 1814-15, which Dartmouth president John Wheelock characterized as Zion arriving with the greatest outpouring of the Spirit that he had ever witnessed.<sup>59</sup> Student Benjamin Hale in letters to his father and uncle said that there had been nothing like it since apostolic times

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<sup>51</sup> Nathan Smith's Daybooks, Rauner Special Collections Library.

<sup>52</sup> Moor's School Attendance Records.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 98.

<sup>54</sup> Chapman, *Sketches of the Alumni*, 101.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 103.

<sup>56</sup> Chapman, *Sketches of the Alumni*, 15-16.

<sup>57</sup> John Smith, Theology Lectures, Rauner Special Collections Library.

<sup>58</sup> Moor's School Attendance Records.

<sup>59</sup> John Wheelock, letter to his sister, 1815, Rauner Special Collections Library.



and that the great millennial day was at hand.<sup>60</sup> Levi Spaulding, one of ninety Dartmouth students who participated in this revival, had an epiphany in which while praying in a grove of trees he looked up to see a flash of light and knew he was saved.<sup>61</sup> At about this time Elias Boudinot's resurrected Indian spiritual advisor is also introduced to guide a devout Indian seeking more knowledge of the Great Spirit.<sup>62</sup>

Thus Hyrum had much to share with both Joseph Sr. and Joseph Jr. Since both Hyrum and Joseph Sr. shared exposure to the concept of the plan of salvation, one can only speculate on whether Joseph Sr. would discuss it with his sons as Lehi in the Book of Mormon would later do with his. Whether and to what extent Hyrum discussed these concepts and events with young Joseph is not recorded. After three very cold winters, however, the Smith family moved to Palmyra, New York, by 1817.

### The Dreams Continue

About this time Joseph Sr. had another dream in anticipation of or reaction to his journey to Palmyra; in the dream twelve wooden images probably representing the twelve tribes of Israel blessed his journey to this garden spot. He awoke before his spiritual guide could explain the meaning of his dream.<sup>63</sup> Coincidentally, at about this time Nathan Smith received a letter from his son David describing the lush herbs and flowers while visiting the Genesee Valley.<sup>64</sup> Joseph Sr. probably heard this account and others that influenced his decision to go to Palmyra. Upon arriving in Palmyra Lucy set up an oil-cloth painting business while Joseph Sr., Alvin, and Hyrum worked to acquire one hundred acres of land and cleared thirty acres the first year.<sup>65</sup> A year later another dream focused on justice, mercy, and forgiveness. He was told it was necessary to plead the merits of Jesus, for he was the advocate with the Father and a mediator between God and man.<sup>66</sup> These words are identical to those Hyrum heard over and over again in the theology preached in the Dartmouth chapel sessions.<sup>67</sup> Therefore Hyrum and Joseph Sr. apparently were of like-mind when young Joseph expressed his concern for his soul at eleven years of age.

In 1818 Joseph Sr., after the required year of residence, appears to be the Joseph Smith that joined the Canandaigua Masonic Lodge before the Palmyra

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<sup>60</sup> Benjamin Hale, letters to his father and uncle, 1815, Rauner Special Collections Library.

<sup>61</sup> Hill, *College on the Hill*, 205.

<sup>62</sup> Elias Boudinot, *A Star in the West* (Trenton, N.J.: D. Fenton, S. Hutchinson and J. Dunham, 1816), 263.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 106.

<sup>64</sup> David Smith, letter to his father, Nathan Smith, 1816, Rauner Special Collections Library.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 105.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-11.

<sup>67</sup> John Smith, *Theology Lectures*.

Lodge was founded, but soon appears in the Palmyra Lodge records which Hyrum and most likely Alvin later joined along with Joseph Smith Sr.

Joseph Sr.'s last dream occurred in 1819—about the time a new revival began—when he was told this would be his last visit from his spiritual guide and that he lacked but one thing in order to secure his salvation.<sup>68</sup> Joseph Sr. went to find some paper but before the spirit could write the same he awoke. This dream was first a hand-off to Joseph Jr. and his first vision—which followed shortly thereafter and took the family spiritually to a much higher level—and second a preparation for Joseph Sr. to fully and immediately accept his son's forthcoming five additional visions.

Before the Smith family arrived in Palmyra, Dartmouth and Moor's School missionaries Davenport Phelps,<sup>69</sup> Samuel Kirkland<sup>70</sup> and James Dean<sup>71</sup> had worked closely with the Indians; but now another fascinating development began in western New York which would add substantially to the diverse mix of factors that established the rich regional community discourse. Lyndon Smith,<sup>72</sup> who spent time on campus with Hyrum as well as James and Levi Spaulding and shared many common experiences, graduated from Dartmouth in 1817. Soon after, his father, Ethan Smith<sup>73</sup>—who had graduated from Dartmouth in 1790, trained in the Dartmouth mission to the Indians and Arminian theological traditions, and served in two long New Hampshire pastorates—suddenly and abruptly moved to a small pastorate in Hebron, New York, located between the Oneida and Stockbridge reservations where he could do some missionary work with the Indians and further study their traditions.<sup>74</sup>

From 1817 to 1821 Ethan carefully studied Indian traditions first-hand before moving to a new pastorate in Poultney, Vermont, where he completed his *View of the Hebrews* in 1822. The first edition of the book was well received and widely distributed in 1823 followed by an enhanced edition in 1825.<sup>75</sup> It soon became a part of the community discourse that focused on both religious doctrine and its relation to the origin of the Indians. It is fascinating that later in September of 1823, as the community discourse had a deeper and deeper impact on the Smith family discourse, late-teenage Joseph would again approach his feelings of unworthiness in prayer. Immediately Moroni, a resurrected early American, would visit him and move him in the direction of simultaneously

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<sup>68</sup> Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 114.

<sup>69</sup> Chapman, *Sketches of the Alumni*, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Hill, *College on the Hill*, 27.

<sup>71</sup> Chapman, *Sketches of the Alumni*, 14.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

resolving the doctrinal and Indian-origin issues that were being so heatedly discussed in the community discourse.

### Conclusions

A careful integration of the three seeker themes, with initial treasure seeking leading first to Masonic rites and rituals and finally to Christ-centered spirituality, sums up the essence of the family and community discourse that pervaded and encircled the Smith family. The importance of Joseph Sr.'s dreams cannot be overstated in understanding the family dynamics that led up to Joseph Jr.'s first vision. Lucy's insertion of these dreams into her narrative seems to conform to the context of the contemporary events quite well.<sup>76</sup> The temporal setbacks the family faced and any behavior shortcomings pale in comparison to the spiritual experiences that this family shared. Efforts to dwell on weaknesses and then pronounce diagnoses of a dysfunctional family simply do not adequately deal with all the data. Joseph Smith Sr.'s temporal setbacks coupled with his searching for spirituality and Lucy Mack Smith's aggressive desire to achieve both temporal and spiritual objectives drove the growth dynamics of this family.

Hyrum's educational experiences and personal relationships on the Dartmouth campus brought additional ideas into the family discourse, which first show up in Joseph Sr.'s dreams and later in greatly enhanced form in Joseph Jr.'s doctrine. Both Hyrum and Lyndon Smith seem to have had substantial impact on their fathers and vividly demonstrate how family dynamics are integrated with outside influences. How and why such interactions produce such highly correlated results is probably due to efforts to answer the same questions. Clearly the western New York community discourse with its rich mix of religious doctrine, Indian lore, and treasure seeking further added to the enriched Smith family discourse and contributed to a uniquely stimulating environment for all members of the family, especially young Joseph. This remarkable family circumstance provided a powerful combination of stimulus and reinforcement.

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<sup>76</sup> As Jan Shipps pointed out in *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 87-108, Lucy Mack Smith's oral history was drafted and edited from a series of interviews done by Martha Jane and Howard Coray in 1844 and was originally entitled *The History of Lucy Mack Smith by Herself*. It should be used in that vein. Numerous efforts have been made to rework it as a history of the prophet Joseph Smith. This author, however, attempted to use it as a guidepost for searching out collaborating documentary evidence. Many times Lucy's 1844 recollections proved to be more accurate and at least more enlightening than subsequent redactions of her reminiscences attempted by later editors. Had the Dartmouth data not conformed to the content and timing of Joseph Sr.'s dreams this paper would not have been written.

Therefore it can be argued that Joseph Jr.'s first vision, Book of Mormon, and later doctrine all seem to follow logically from the family dynamics of his childhood. Since there are few if any elements of Joseph Sr.'s dreams or Joseph Jr.'s later visions that were not discussed in at least rudimentary form at Dartmouth before 1817, it appears that the Dartmouth community discourse and the Smith family discourse have become deeply entwined. The resurrected Indian, who appeared in a dream to instruct a praying Indian on where to find a better understanding of the Great Spirit, entered the Dartmouth community discourse in 1816 by way of Elias Boudinot's *A Star in the West* and provided another interesting parallel as did Solomon Spaulding's use of ships in *Manuscript Found*.

The believer may tend to see this complex community and family discourse as preparation primarily for his family to accept Joseph's later prophetic visions while the unbeliever may tend to see the discourse as preparation primarily for Joseph himself somehow to synthesize his later experiences. In either case the remarkable correlations demonstrated here strongly suggest that something very special was happening. We will never know why Dr. Nathan Smith chose to see young Joseph eighteen times between April 10 and April 30, 1813. Was it just an interesting case or could it be that five of his children had gone to school with Hyrum? Did the endless preaching on the atonement from Hyrum's twice-daily chapel sessions find its way into Joseph Sr.'s Palmyra dream concerning Christ as mediator and advocate and then into Joseph Jr.'s later doctrine?

Perhaps it is now possible to reach a little better understanding of the preparatory family circumstances and environmental factors that facilitated the religious experiences that propelled a boy-prophet into the forefront of new developments in the rapidly changing American religious scene of the 1830s and 40s. The father/son mirroring of dreams and visions continued in the Book of Mormon where a less-united family is used to unfold the continuing saga of obedience and rebellion.

Though many of the key building blocks of Mormon doctrine were readily available in the New Hampshire and New York environments of Joseph's childhood, his extension, expansion, and integration of ideas was truly remarkable. In many ways his construction of Mormon doctrine was as skilled as that of the classical music masters of his day who built symphonies on folk tunes and marvelous themes in variation. The inspiration of the spirit seems to have prepared Joseph for and assisted him in his prophetic role as well as any of the prophets of old.

FIGURE 1: The Prophet Joseph Smith's First Vision  
***A Nexus of Dreams, Visions, and Epiphanies***

ROSWELL SHURTLEFF	1804	<i>Arminian Methodist revival</i>
ROSWELL SHURTLEFF	1804	<i>Calvinism/Arminianism vision</i>
LUCY MACK SMITH	1804	<i>Spiritual flexibility dream</i>
ROSWELL SHURTLEFF	1810-11	<i>Calvinist revival</i>
SOLOMON MACK	1811	<i>Spiritual conversion</i>
JOSEPH SMITH SR.	1811	<i>Plan of salvation dream</i>
JOSEPH SMITH SR.	1811	<i>Family unity/tall building dream</i>
JOSEPH SMITH JR.	1813	<i>Leg operation and recovery</i>
ROSWELL SHURTLEFF	1814-15	<i>Revival</i>
LEVI SPAULDING	1814	<i>Epiphany in the grove of trees</i>
JOSEPH SMITH SR.	1816	<i>Field and flowers dream</i>
JOSEPH SMITH SR.	1818	<i>Mediator/advocate dream</i>
JOSEPH SMITH SR.	1819	<i>Last thing needed dream</i>
JOSEPH SMITH JR.	1819-20	<i>Into Methodist Arminianism</i>
JOSEPH SMITH JR.	1820	<i>Theophany or First Vision</i>

FIGURE 2: The Hyrum Smith/Oliver Cowdery Nexus

***Who Knew What, Where and When?***

