
Religious Persecution in Colesville, New York

D&C 12: Introduction

In May 1829, when this revelation was received by the Prophet Joseph Smith, Joseph Knight was a resident of Colesville, New York, a farming community located about twenty miles from Harmony, Pennsylvania.

The Joseph Knight home was on the south side of the Susquehanna River near the Colesville Bridge. Joseph was known as a prosperous man in town, operating four farms, a grist mill, and two carding machines. More important to the history of the Church, he attended the Colesville Branch, a branch that was personally inaugurated by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

The first resident of Colesville to be baptized and become a member of that branch was Newel Knight, the son of Joseph Knight. Other baptisms followed despite a mob element in town. On Saturday, June 26, 1830, Church members constructed a dam near the Colesville Bridge to create a pool for neighbors of the Knights who were “believing, and now anxious to be baptized.”¹ Their plans were thwarted by a mob who broke the dam Saturday night.

“The Sunday arrived and we held our meeting,” Joseph Smith said. “Oliver Cowdery preached, others bore testimony to the Book of Mormon, the doctrine of repentance, baptism for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.”² After the service, the brethren repaired the broken dam.

¹ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], 42.

² History, 1838–1856, 42.

Early on Monday morning, June 28, 1830, Oliver Cowdery proceeded to baptize about a dozen persons. Most significant was the baptism of Emma Smith, the wife of the Prophet Joseph.

Of the baptisms, Joseph Knight Jr. recorded,

When we were going from the water, we were met by many of our neighbors, pointing at us and asking if we had been washing sheep, before Joseph could confirm us he was taken by the officers to Chenango County [South Bainbridge] for trial, for saying that the Book of Mormon was revelation from God.³

It was not until two months later on Sunday, August 29, 1830, that the confirmations of those baptized on June 28, 1830, were completed. Newel Knight wrote of a miracle that occurred on that occasion:

On the 29th, Brother Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and John and David Whitmer came to fill the before-mentioned appointment to hold meeting and to confirm those who had been baptized in June previous. As they well knew the hostilities of our enemies in that quarter, and also knowing it was their duty to visit us, they called upon our Heavenly Father in mighty prayer that He would grant them an opportunity of meeting with us; that He would blind the eyes of their enemies that they might not see, and that on this occasion they might return unmolested. Their prayers were not in vain. A little distance from my house they encountered a large company of men at work upon the public road, among whom were found some of our most bitter enemies who looked earnestly at the brethren but not knowing them, the brethren passed on unmolested.

That evening the Saints assembled together and were confirmed, and partook of the sacrament. They had a happy meeting, having much reason to rejoice in the God of our salvation, and sing hosannas to his Holy name.⁴

³ Joseph Knight's *Incidents of History from 1827–1844*, 2; *History, 1838–1856*, 42–43.

⁴ "Newel Knight's Journal," *Scraps of Biography, The Tenth Book of the Faith Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), 63–64.