
Wheeler Baldwin

1793–1887

D&C 52:31

Wheeler, a farmer and a shoemaker, was age 37 when he was baptized by Solomon Hancock on January 8, 1831. Six months later, on June 5, 1831, when walking with the Hancock brothers—Solomon and Levi— towards their home in Kirtland, each felt as if they were going to be attacked by Satan—

We walked heavily, some said that they felt as if they would be seized by Satan. Others that they felt as though the Devil and his angels were hanging about them . . . When we had got against the pond which was about fourteen rods across and very deep, [Levi Hancock] said, “Let us pray.” So we all kneeled down and prayed around a circle as soon as the last one got through about nine o’clock at night and the moon shone brightly. A sudden bray of a jackass was heard about twenty feet behind us. We looked and could see nothing and nothing in the way. It started toward the pond braying all the time. . . . This braying continued across the pond and ascended the high hills on the other side until it grew less and less distinct until it got out of hearing “There,” said Brother [Wheeler] Baldwin, “this proves to me that this work is true, for we all prayed for assistance, the Devil ran away.”¹

Two days after this most unusual experience, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation calling Wheeler to be the missionary companion of William Carter: “Let my servants Wheeler Baldwin and William Carter also take their journey” (D&C 52:31). The

¹ Autobiography of Levi Ward Hancock, typescript, 34. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

call proved problematic for Wheeler because William Carter refused the appointed mission. While Wheeler waited to learn what he should do, he strengthened the congregations in Ohio and blessed the sick:

An old lady who had been helpless for the space of eight years (was) confined to her bed. She did not belong to this church, but sent her request to the Elders—who immediately attended to her call and laid their hands on her, and she was immediately made whole and magnified and praised God.²

On October 25, 1831, Wheeler spoke at a Church conference held in the Sirenes Burnett home in Orange, Ohio. On that occasion, Wheeler spoke of “rejoic[ing] while he heard those give their testimony who had been up to the land of Zion” and that “he had many times been directed by the Spirit of God, also felt to do the will of the Lord in all things.”³

In 1832 Wheeler moved from Ohio to Independence, Missouri. In that frontier settlement, he served as the presiding elder of the Big Blue Branch. From October 5, 1832, to September 11, 1833, he attended four High Priest meetings in Independence. After being forced out of the Independence area by a mob, Wheeler settled in Clay County before moving north to Caldwell County. He endured religious persecution in Caldwell before fleeing from Missouri to Iowa. By 1839 Wheeler was a resident of Lee County, Iowa. On March 6, 1840, he was appointed to collect and forward to Washington, DC, affidavits from Latter-day Saints who suffered wrongs in the state of Missouri.

After enduring much persecution and sorrow for his faith and taking a leading role in local Church affairs, Wheeler abandoned his faith and embraced the religious teachings of apostate Alpheus Cutler. He was present at the organizational meeting of Cutler’s True Church of Jesus Christ on September 19, 1853, in Fishers Grove, Iowa. Wheeler was baptized into the Cutlerite faith by Edmund Fisher in July 1854. By spring of 1858, he had helped raise a branch of forty Cutlerites in Farm Creek, Iowa.

In October 1862 Wheeler spoke of his affiliation with the Cutlerites at a conference of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: “[Cutler] was ordained President of the High Priesthood. I baptized some forty members. . . . Well, we took the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine [and Covenants] for our guide; those . . . are the foundation

² John Whitmer, *History, 1831–circa 1847*, 33. Joseph Smith Papers.

³ Wheeler Baldwin quote, in Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 22.

upon which we built.”⁴ Wheeler concluded his remarks by promising that the remaining Cutlerites would accept Joseph Smith III’s leadership and join the Reorganized Church.

By 1863 Wheeler had not only affiliated with the Reorganized Church but was presiding over its Iowa Church branches in Mills, Fremont, and Page counties. On June 6, 1863, at the annual conference of the Reorganized North Star Iowa Branch—

Wheeler Baldwin reported that his labors had been mostly confined to the branch at Manti, in Fremont County. He had preached some at Indian Creek and Farm Creek. He bore a strong testimony to the truth of this organization, and said that he had not enjoyed the Spirit and power of God so much for the past thirty years as he had since he united with this work last March. The power of God’s Holy Spirit was with the people in the branch at Manti, and he looked to see many more united with them soon.⁵

In 1867 Wheeler was recognized as the presiding elder of the Fremont District of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. In 1871 he was residing in Manti, Iowa. He moved to Tabor and Ross, Iowa, before settling near Stewartsville, Missouri, in 1873. He died at age ninety-four.

⁴ Memories of President W. W. Blair, Ch. 3, 71.

⁵ *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 8 vols. (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1967–1976), 3:322.