Chapter Twelve

Gentlemen of Undoubted Veracity

Joseph Smith wrote to Governor Thomas Ford on June 14. His letter was accompanied by several statements from witnesses to the razing of the Expositor reaffirming that “The whole affair was conducted by the City Marshal and his posse in the most quiet and orderly manner, without the least noise, riot or tumult.”

Joseph’s counselor Sidney Rigdon prepared his own confidential letter to the governor. There were “difficulties in [Nauvoo] which I have had no concern,” Rigdon began. The inevitable destruction of the Expositor press “was done without tumult or disorder,” he said. “When the press was destroyed, all returned home, and everything has been perfectly quiet ever since,” Rigdon concluded. “I can see no need for executive interference in this case,” he said, but requested that the governor “disperse all uncalled for assemblies, and let the laws have their regular course, which they can have if these assemblies will disperse. If not, I fear the consequences.”

Rigdon failed to mention that much of his information about the proceedings of the anti-Mormons would have come from his son-in-law, former Nauvoo dissident George Robinson, currently chairman of the La Harpe District anti-Mormon committee. And, at about this same time, Sidney’s brother-in-law Anthony Howard Dunlevy was preparing to leave Ohio for the seat of conflict. Dunlevy’s legal partner and fellow Whig, Supreme Court Justice John McLean, was already in Springfield presiding over the proceedings of the U.S. Circuit Court. McLean was one of the few people besides the governor who had the power to put a stop to the conflict that was unfolding in Hancock County.

Little wonder, then, that Rigdon desired anonymity. “I send this to your Excellency as confidential, as I do not wish to take any part in the affair, or be known in it.” He would depart Nauvoo for the safety of Pittsburgh in less than a week. And although Rigdon was Joseph Smith’s vice presidential running mate, as far as is presently known, he never made a political speech in support of the prophet’s candidacy.

The captain of an independent Hancock County militia unit entered a home in Rocky Run and requested the use of a military drum for the duration of the

Mormon conflict. The militia expected assistance from Missouri, he said, which “had offered to send over two thousand men, to come over to assist” in the capture of Joseph Smith. To make their appearance legal in form of law, summonses would be issued for “every man who was in or would come into the county.” Skinner and Bagby were in Springfield, the captain added, to convince Governor Ford “to order the militia out” to aid them in taking Joseph Smith and other Mormon lawbreakers. “If the Governor ordered the [state] militia against [Hancock county’s independent militia] instead of in favor of them, [the captain] would turn mob, and the [local] militia would join him.” There could be no neutral stance. The local citizens “must fight either for one side or the other, or they must share the same fate as the Mormons.”

Joseph Smith addressed the Saints gathered in the grove that afternoon. “You know that of late some malicious and corrupt men have sprung up and apostatized from the Church of latter-day Saints,” he said, referring to the Laws, Higbees, and Fosters, among others, “and they declare that the Prophet believes in a plurality of gods, and, lo and behold! We have discovered a very great secret, they cry—‘The Prophet says there are many Gods, and this proves that he has fallen.’ It has been my intention for a long time to take up this subject and lay it clearly before the people, and show what my faith is in relation to this interesting matter . . . I’ll preach on the plurality of Gods . . . It has been preached by the Elders for fifteen years.”

After the meeting, cut short on account of rain, Circuit Judge Jesse B. Thomas advised the prophet to “go before some justice of the peace of the county and have an examination . . . and if acquitted or bound over, would allay all excitement answer the law and cut off all legal pretext for a mob and he would be bound to order them to keep the peace.” The prophet agreed and made arrangements to have his case heard before a friendly Nauvoo magistrate.

It was already too late. A messenger arrived in Nauvoo with urgent news. Fifteen hundred men were preparing to assemble at Warsaw on June 17. The Quincy Greys had supplied arms to the Hancock militia units. Warsaw had acquired five cannon. Once the men were assembled, the Missourians, “and others who would join them,” would be met at Carthage by units of the Quincy Greys “and other companies from Adams county.” Delegates would be dispatched to branches of the Mormon church with an ultimatum that “they must deny Joseph’s being a prophet . . . [or] leave immediately.” A demand would be made for Joseph, Hyrum, and members of the Nauvoo Municipal Council engaged in the Expositor affair. If they were not given up, the anti-Mormons would “blow up the city, and kill and exterminate all the inhabitants.”

Joseph again took the temple stand. Prepare arms for the defense of the city, he told the gathered brethren. Messengers were to be sent “to all the surrounding towns and villages, to explain the cause of the disturbance, and show them that all was

peace at Nauvoo, and that there was no cause for any mobs.” The Nauvoo Legion was to be “in readiness to suppress all illegal violence in the City.”

Joseph wrote to Governor Ford later that day. “Judge Thomas has been here and given his advice in the case, which I shall strictly follow until I hear from your Excellency, and in all cases shall adhere to the Constitution and laws. The Nauvoo Legion is at your service to quell all insurrection and support the dignity of the common weal.” In his capacity as mayor, Joseph issued a proclamation: “Our city is infested with a set of blacklegs, counterfeiters and debauchers, and that the proprietors of this press were of that class the minutes of the Municipal Court fully testify . . . Of the correctness of our conduct in this affair, we appeal to every high court in the state.”

The June 17 deadline for all Mormons in the outlying districts to return to Nauvoo was rapidly approaching. “We feel to hope for the best, and determined to prepare for the worst,” Joseph wrote to his uncle, a resident of Ramus, a Mormon settlement in northeastern Hancock County. “[W]e want this to be your motto in common with us, ‘That we will never ground our arms until we give them up by death.’ Free trade and sailor’s rights, protection of persons and property, wives and families. If a mob annoy you, defend yourselves to the very last; and if they fall upon you with a superior force, and you think you are not able to compete with them, retreat to Nauvoo.” He signed the letter, “Joseph Smith, Mayor of the City of Nauvoo, and Lieut.-General of the Nauvoo Legion.”

Hyrum prepared a letter to Brigham Young and other members of the Quorum of the Twelve and Council of Fifty, calling them home to Nauvoo. “Mass meetings are held upon mass meetings drawing up resolutions to utterly exterminate the Saints,” Hyrum reported.

The excitement has been gotten up by the Laws, Fosters and the Higbees, and they themselves have left the city and are engaged in the mob. They have sent their runners into the State of Missouri to excite them to murder and bloodshed, and the report is that a great many hundreds of them will come over to take an active part in murdering the Saints . . . It is thought best by myself and others for you to return without delay . . . Let wisdom be exercised; and whatever they do, do it without a noise . . . Communicate to the others of the Twelve with as much speed as possible, with perfect stillness and calmness. A word to the wise is sufficient; and a little powder, lead and a good rifle can be packed in your luggage very eas[i]ly without creating any suspicion.

Joseph added a hurried postscript. “Large bodies of armed men, cannon and munition of war are coming on from Missouri in steamboats. These facts are communicated to the Governor and President of the United States, and you will readily

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see that we have to prepare for the onset. JOSEPH SMITH.” The desperate letters were never sent.10

On June 17 a Nauvoo Neighbor Extra declared, “Our lives, our city, our charter and our characters are just as sacred, just as dear, and just as good as other people’s.” Hyrum issued a statement insisting that he “did not make any threats, nor offer any reward against the [Warsaw] Signal or its editor [Thomas Sharp] in the [Nauvoo] City Council.”11

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Elder William Smith (brother of Joseph and Hyrum, Mormon apostle and Council of Fifty member) addressed “a large and enthusiastic meeting of the friends of equal rights” in New York City that same day. His remarks were “a strain of flowing eloquence,” which criticized the courses that had been pursued by “the two great political parties.” The speech was met with “deafening applause.” Elder (and Council of Fifty member) Orson Hyde then “alluded to the present state of anarchy of the current government and “the impolitic movements of these who had usurped [power in] the name of Democracy.” He enjoined all those who wanted to enjoy “Liberty of Speech and conscience” to support “the Peoples Candidate,” General Joseph Smith. The resolutions of the May 17 Nauvoo political convention were read to “much applause.”

The New York City conference concluded with its own set of resolutions. “The free American citizens opposed to tyranny over mind or body, have nominated as a candidate for the Presidency, Gen. Joseph Smith of Nauvoo Ill., the friend of the oppressed, an independent man with American principles; and for the Vice Presidency, Sidney Rigdon Esq. of Pennsylvania.” All who were in favor of “Free Trade and Equal Rights” were requested to support “Gen Joseph Smith, the Philanthropist.” The meeting adjourned “with nine cheers” for General Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon.12

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By nine a.m. on June 18 the Nauvoo Legion was assembled and organized. Several boxes of arms, forty stands in all, were distributed to the men. That afternoon, the Nauvoo Legion of three to four thousand men assembled near the Mansion, then still under construction. Lieutenant General Joseph Smith, in full dress uniform, stood on the scaffolding and placed the city under martial law.

Acting Major General Dunham, with General Joseph Smith “and staff riding in front” marched up Main Street. “The number was large and inspiring,” one observer commented, “considering the number who were gone preaching.”13

Scribe William W. Phelps read the latest Warsaw Signal Extra before the military assembly. The paper called upon all of the citizens of Hancock and surrounding

counties to “assist the mob,” he said. The anti-Mormon mobocrats, Joseph Smith replied, were waging “a war of extermination upon us because of our religion.” He “called upon all the volunteers who felt to support the constitution from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic ocean to come with their arms, ammunition & provisions to defend us from the mob & defend the constitution.”

“We have taken the counsel of Judge Thomas,” he said, “and have been tried before a civil magistrate on the charge of riot—not that the law required it, but because the Judge advised it as a precautionary measure, to allay all possible pretext for excitement. We were legally acquitted . . . for we have broken no law.” When Constable Bettisworth refused them the privilege of going before the local magistrate, Joseph noted, it was he who “broke the law . . . declaring that we should go before Morrison in Carthage, and no one else, when he knew that a numerous mob was collected there who are publicly pledged to destroy our lives.

“It was under these circumstances that we availed ourselves of the writ of habeas corpus, and were brought before the Municipal Court of this city and discharged from the illegal detention under which we were held by Constable Bettisworth.” Joseph said. Even in the face of their proper actions before the law, he said, “all mob-men, priests, thieves, and bogus makers, apostates and adulterers” were claiming that Mormons refused to conform to legal authority and due process.14

Joseph drew his sword and aimed it heavenward. “I call God and angels to witness that I have unsheathed my sword with a firm and unalterable determination that this people shall have their legal rights, and be protected from mob violence, or my blood shall be spilt upon the ground like water, and my body consigned to the silent tomb . . . I call upon all friends of truth and liberty to come to our assistance.”15

Messengers arrived in Nauvoo later that evening. Governor Ford would not support the anti-Mormon militia of Hancock County, they reported. No order would be made until Ford had been able to judge the conditions in Hancock County for himself. When the news reached the anti-Mormons, they “damned the Gov as being as bad as Joe Smith.”16

The night of the June 18 was stormy. Sidney Rigdon and more than 150 other Mormons departed Nauvoo on board the steamship Osprey so that they would be out of the way when the inevitable occurred.17

Warsaw was in “a constant state of excitement.” Commercial business of the Mississippi port town was suspended. All able bodied men were placed under arms “and almost constantly in drill.” A six pounder was expected from Quincy. Additional cannon and ammunition had been secured in St. Louis.18

Nauvoo remained on high alert. The legion was reinforced by Mormon troops from Green Plains and Iowa who were reviewed and paraded on the bank of the Mississippi. A picket-guard under the command of Colonel Stephen Markham posted lookouts “on all the roads leading out of the city; and . . . in all the streets and alleys

in the city, and also on the river bank.” All the “powder and lead in the city” was to be secured, and “to see that all the arms were in use, and that all unclaimed arms be put in the hands of those who could use them.” Theodore Turley was ordered to “commence Making cannon.” No one could enter or leave the city without permission. Work on the temple was suspended. Joseph encouraged Hyrum to take his family and go to Cincinnati. Sidney Rigdon, Joseph’s vice presidential running mate, who had recently departed Nauvoo, would be safe in Pittsburgh, Joseph said. Sidney would reach his Pennsylvania home on June 27.19

Wilford Woodruff replied to James Arlington Bennet’s earlier correspondence regarding the upcoming election. “Your views about the nomination of General Smith for the presidency are correct,” he said. “We will gain popularity and external influence. But this is not all: we mean to elect him, and nothing shall be wanting on our part to accomplish it; and why? Because we are satisfied, fully satisfied, that this is the best or only method of saving our free institutions from a total overthrow.”20

Dr. Wall Southwick (“a man from Texas trying to get Joseph to go to Texas with the church”) arrived in Nauvoo mid-morning on June 20. He reported that a cannon from Quincy had reached Warsaw. On account the local U.S. mail was no longer reliable, Joseph Smith sent letters “by express . . . to the Illinois river” to members of the Quorum of the Twelve then on political missions, requesting that they return to Nauvoo immediately. Brigham Young was in Boston; Heber C. Kimball and Orson Pratt were in Washington, D.C.; Orson Hyde and William Smith were in Philadelphia; Parley P. Pratt was in New York City; Wilford Woodruff was in Portage, New York; George A. Smith was in Peterboro, Vermont; John E. Page was in Pittsburgh; and Lyman Wight was in Baltimore. Amasa Lyman in Cincinnati, and George Miller, then in Madison County, Kentucky, were also called home to Nauvoo.21

Governor Ford reached Carthage on June 21 and set up his headquarters in the Hamilton Hotel. He was greeted with the energized anticipation of a military encampment. General Minor Deming had called out the militia in Hancock, McDonough, and Schuyler counties. More than a thousand men were in arms, many encamped around (and in) the courthouse. Constables of the county had summoned men to “serve as a posse comitatus” to assist in the arrest of Joseph Smith.

Governor Ford addressed the militiamen and citizens from the steps of the Carthage courthouse. He had come, he said, “to see that the law was fully carried out.” Mr. William H. Roosevelt, a Whig anti-Mormon from Warsaw, disagreed. “[T]he law was not sufficient to carry out [our] measures,” he argued. “We have the willing minds and God Almighty has given us strength, and we will wield the sabre

and make our own laws!!” Roosevelt believed “the Governor . . . was too easy in his remarks . . . in saying that he wished a compliance with the laws.”

Onias C. Skinner, Carthage attorney and candidate for the state legislature on an independent ticket, reminded the audience that he had been “one of the delegates appointed by the people of Carthage to go to Springfield and lay before the Governor their grievances.” He believed the governor “would do what was right.”

Ford gave orders to Captain Dunn: “All the people who [were] assembled in Carthage [and elsewhere in the county], should be consolidated in the militia, under [the governor’s] command, to co-operate in maintaining the supremacy of the law.” At the conclusion of Ford’s address, “officers and men unanimously voted, with acclamation, to sustain [him] in a strictly legal course,” and that the Mormon leaders (once they were brought into custody) “should be protected from violence.” An additional one thousand men from the Fourth Brigade of the Fifth Division of the Illinois Militia were called out, bringing the total muster to over two thousand men, still only about half the size of the Nauvoo Legion. General Minor Deming commanded the Fifty-ninth Regiment (of five hundred men) to “rendezvous forthwith at Warsaw with 8 days provision.”

Governor Ford addressed a letter to “The Honorable the Mayor and Common Council of the City of Nauvoo.” “As chief magistrate,” he began, “it is my duty to

see that impartial justice shall be done, uninfluenced either by excitement here or in your city . . . I think before any decisive measure shall be adopted, that I ought to hear the allegations and defenses of all parties.” Ford requested that a committee from Nauvoo be sent to Carthage to ascertain the facts in the case. Joseph prepared to forward “affidavits and handbills” to the governor in Carthage.23

Warsaw’s parade ground was alive. Nearly three hundred men were mustered under the direction of Colonel Levi Williams, Mark Aldrich, William N. Grover, and Jacob C. Davis. Colonel Levi Williams commanded the Fifty-ninth Regiment of the Illinois Militia. Mark Aldrich was major in command of the Warsaw Independent Battalion. William N. Grover was captain of the Warsaw Cadets. Jacob C. Davis, captain of the Warsaw Rifle Company, was assisted by honorary captain John C. Elliott, of Avery Kidnap fame. Speeches by William H. Roosevelt, Thomas Sharp, and Colonel Williams kept the excitement at high pitch.24

George Rockwell, a Warsaw druggist, was dispatched to Alton, about 160 miles to the south, to secure arms for the militia. “I have been called on by the citizens of Warsaw to take an active and responsible part in [these] proceedings [against the Mormons],” he wrote to his father, “and I can assure you that I take much pleasure in lending my humble aid to expel a band of citizens from the State, the leaders of whom are deserving a thousand deaths. I have been constantly engaged for the last two weeks trying to accomplish it, and now take pleasure in saying that I have no doubt as to our ultimate success. Since I enlisted my self in this cause, I have . . . traveled on horseback more than 300 miles in various directions to raise men and means to accomplish our ends, knowing that our cause was just.” He had little confidence in the Democratic governor, “with whose party the Mormons have voted for three years past.”

Rockwell reached Alton sometime after midnight on the June 22. He had an order “from the Governor on the Quarter master General for all the Arms Cannon etc. in the arsenal [at Alton] belonging to the State,” which would be taken to Warsaw on the Die Vernon’s return voyage up river.

Rockwell was not well rewarded for his efforts. The Alton armory produced only about “one hundred yaugers, twenty muskets, and three six pounders.” Yaugers were .52 caliber model 1841 U.S. breech-loading cap-lock rifles used by sharpshooters. Parts were interchangeable, which made them a favored weapon. The remaining arms were “so out of order as to be useless.” The cannon was mainly for show, to provide a deterrent, but little more.25

Before returning to Warsaw, Rockwell met with Whig editor George T. M. Davis. Davis would accompany Rockwell on his return to Warsaw in order to report first-hand on the Mormon conflict. Without revealing Davis’s ties to the anti-Mormons in Hancock County, the Alton Telegraph announced that Davis “had made such arrangements as will enable him to procure the earliest and most authentic information” in order to keep his readers “constantly advised of the progress of affairs at

Gentlemen of Undoubted Veracity

Council of Fifty member Lucien Woodworth (together with several other Nauvoo leaders) and James W. Woods, Joseph's non-Mormon attorney, departed Nauvoo just after noon to negotiate with Governor Ford in Carthage. Woodworth carried a letter from Joseph Smith to the governor. "I would respectfully recommend the bearer, Col. [Lucien] Woodworth, as one of my aides, and a man whose testimony can be relied upon," Joseph wrote. "Our troubles are invariably brought upon us by falsehoods and misrepresentations by designing men. We have ever held ourselves amenable to the law; and, for myself, sir, I am ever ready to conform to and support the laws and Constitution, even at the expense of my life. I have never in the least offered any resistance to law or lawful process, which is a well-known fact to the general public; all of which circumstances make us the more anxious to have you come to Nauvoo and investigate the whole matter."

"In regard to the destruction of the press," Joseph offered, "the truth only needs to be presented before your Excellency to satisfy you of the justice of the proceedings. The press was established by a set of men who had already set themselves at defiance of the law and authorities of the city, and had threatened the lives of some of its principal officers, and who also made it no private matter that the press was established for the express purpose of destroying the city."Following a lengthy interrogation, Joseph's delegation returned to Nauvoo at 10 p.m. that evening. They bore a letter from the governor. Illinois's chief magistrate was forthright. "After examining carefully all the allegations on the part of the citizens of the country in Hancock county, and the defensive matters submitted to me by the committee of your citizens concerning the existing disturbances," Ford informed the Mormon prophet,

I find that there appears to be but little contradiction as to important facts, so that it may be safely assumed that the immediate cause of the existing excitement is the destruction of the press and Nauvoo Expositor, and the subsequent refusal of the individuals accused to be accountable therefor according to the general laws of this state, and the insisting on your parts to be accountable only before your own municipal court, and according to the ordinances of your city ... Many other facts have been asserted on both sides as tending to increase the excitement; but as they mostly relate to private persons, and committed by individuals, ... I will not further notice them in this communication.

"I now express to you my opinion that your conduct in the destruction of the press was a very gross outrage upon the laws and the liberties of the people," the governor continued. "It may have been full of libels, but this did not authorize you to destroy it ... You have violated the Constitution in at least four particulars."

First, the governor explained, the owners of the press were given no proper notice of the proceedings of the city council and were not permitted to defend themselves. "No jury was called or sworn, and most of the witnesses were permitted

to give their evidence, without being under oath.” Equally important, the governor stated, “there existed no general ordinance of the city, defining such a press to be a nuisance.” And, Ford stressed, “the Common Council possessed legislative authority, only; and could, under no pretense, set in judgement as a court.”

The governor’s second criticism centered on Mormon abuse of habeas corpus. Ford acknowledged that the municipal court had power to issue writs of habeas corpus “in all cases of imprisonment arising under the ordinances of the city.” However, the city council passed an ordinance giving the municipal court “jurisdiction to issue the writ in all cases of arrest and imprisonment in the city, by whatsoever authority the same might be made,” be it state or federal authority. This action made it “impossible to execute the laws there, unless permitted by the municipal court.”

Ford was blunt in his assessment of the affair. “The whole proceedings of the Mayor, the Common Council, and the Municipal Court, were irregular and illegal, and not to be endured in a free country.” He was aware that the Mormons had been “repeatedly assured by some of the best lawyers in the State, who had been candidates for office, before that people, that it had full and competent power to issue writs of habeas corpus in all cases whatever.” Nevertheless, “The Common Council violated the law in assuming the exercise of judicial power . . . The Mayor violated the law in ordering this erroneous and absurd judgment of the Common Council to be executed. And the municipal court erred in discharging them from arrest.”

Ford’s third criticism “touched the liberty of the press, which is justly dear to any republican people, it was well calculated to raise a great flame of excitement. And it may well be questioned, whether years of misrepresentation by the most profligate newspaper could have engendered such a feeling as was produced by the destruction of this one press.”

Joseph’s reply was cordial. “Yours of this date [June 22] is received . . . A part of the same delegation, Mr. Woodworth, who was detained yesterday, started for Carthage at 12 noon, this date, who, we perceive, had not arrived at your last date. Some documents conveyed by him would tend to counteract some of the views expressed in your Excellency’s communication, and we feel confident, if all the facts could be before your Excellency, you would have come to different conclusions.” He disputed the governor’s interpretation of habeas corpus, what constituted a nuisance, and the necessity of declaring martial law in Nauvoo. “Disperse the mob,” Joseph requested, “and secure to us our constitutional privileges, that our lives may not be endangered when on trial.”

Joseph considered “laying the case before President Tyler,” but decided against it after a short consultation. He resolved to go West, “and all would be well.” That night Joseph and Hyrum fled Nauvoo and crossed the Mississippi on a small skiff. The governor’s posse reached Nauvoo the next morning, June 22, intent on arresting Joseph and his brother. They returned to Carthage empty handed. Convinced that Nauvoo would be destroyed if they did not give themselves up to the authorities in Carthage, the Smith brothers returned to the Illinois shore.

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We conversed with a gentleman of undoubted veracity just from Nauvoo, who says that the church was never more united than at present—the confidence in the authorities of the church is unabated—the disaffected, who are in favor of a reorganization of the church, number twelve individuals, four of whom are doubtful—there are many tales afloat about the Mormons, in the east, which have not the slightest foundation in truth. We would advise the saints not to give ear to such reports.

“Matters at Headquarters,” The Prophet, New York, June 22, 1844

We have just issued from the press, a stereotyped edition of Gen. Smith's Political Writings, together with a copy of a Memorial to the Legislature of Missouri: the whole forming a neat octavo pamphlet of forty one pages . . . price six dollars per hundred, or one dollar per dozen copies . . . “Mormon Book Depository,” [offers for sale copies of] Gen. Jos. Smith’s views on the policy of Government; Appeal to the Green Mountain Boys; Correspondence between Gen. Smith, Col. Wentworth and J. C. Calhoun, and a Memorial to the Legislature of Missouri.

Advertisement, The Prophet, New York, June 22, 1844

On Sunday afternoon, June 23, Joseph and Hyrum wrote to Governor Ford. They agreed to proceed to Carthage the next day, with a suitable escort, accompanied by witnesses. “We will meet your posse, if this letter is satisfactory, (if not, inform me) at or near the [Carthage] Mound, at or about two o’clock tomorrow afternoon.” Theodore Turley expressed the letter to Carthage. Joseph began his search for a defense attorney.  

A large party of nearly thirty men on horseback—those indicted on charges of riot for the destruction of property belonging to the owners of the Expositor, Joseph’s attorney, James Woods, and several others—departed Nauvoo in the early morning of June 24. About four miles from Carthage they were met by Captain Dunn, who had orders from the governor to collect all of the weapons of the Nauvoo Legion. Joseph countersigned the order and returned to Nauvoo, where he disbanded the legion and assisted in collecting the weapons; in all four cannons and some one thousand stand of arms. Woods went on to Carthage to seek a pledge of safety for the arriving prisoners.

Hyrum sent a trusted observer to Carthage to “see what [was] going on.” The intelligence, gathered from Carthage residents friendly to the Mormons, was not encouraging. One person said, “that as sure as Joseph and Hyrum came to Carthage, they would be killed.” Artois Hamilton, proprietor of the Hamilton Hotel, warned

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the informant. “Those are the boys,” he said, pointing to the Carthage Greys, “that will settle you Mormons.” Hyrum was advised against going to Carthage. “Do not go another foot, for they say they will kill you, if you go to Carthage.”

Choosing to disregard the impassioned warning, and recognizing he had no other alternative, Joseph and his company headed for Carthage a second time that evening. Four miles west of the county seat, at the Carthage Mound, they were again met by Captain Dunn “and his company of dragoons.”

Joseph told his brethren not under indictment to return to Nauvoo. “Be faithful, honor the law, and keep the commandments of God,” he said. Joseph was resigned to his fate. “Nothing but the interposition of Almighty God can save us now,” he said. “We will give ourselves to the slaughter . . . I feel perfectly calm, never better—calm as a morning in spring. I shall die innocent.”

That evening a thunderstorm arose in the west.

33. Willard Richards, Journal [24 June 1844], quoted in Old Mormon Nauvoo, 188.
34. H. Herringshaw [Nauvoo] to William Smith [New York] 28 August 1844, in The Prophet 21 September 1844. The commonly accepted statement by Joseph that he was going “like a lamb to the slaughter” (e.g. Smith, History of the Church 6:555) is first found as a postscript in a letter from Willard Richards and John Taylor to Reuben Hedlock, 9 July 1844, in Smith, History of the Church 7:175. Another relatively early documented example of its usage outside of the History of the Church narrative is Doctrine and Covenants 135:4. More significant (on two fronts as noted below) is the following comment in Sarah Scott to [her in-laws], 22 July 1844 and a 9 August addendum by Isaac Scott: “You will likely hear a great deal about Joseph’s innocence such as ‘I go as a lamb to the slaughter, and if I die, I die an innocent man.’ All these statements, I believe, are false and got up for the purpose of reconciling the minds of the Church. I believe they had not the least idea that they were going to be murdered. Hyrum said the last time I heard him preach, which was only a few days before he and Joseph were taken to Carthage, that their enemies could not kill brother Joseph, for he had a great work to accomplish yet. There was also considerable said in Carthage which proves beyond dispute that they did not expect death. They blame the apostates, as they term them, with being accessory to the murder of the Smiths. This is not the case: the Laws and Fosters were not in the state at the time the murder was committed, and if they had been there, they would have been the last to stain their hands with human blood.” (Partridge, “Mormon Dictator,” 600) The letter strongly suggests that the “lamb to the slaughter” phrase was intended to preserve the image of Joseph Smith as a prophet to the very end of his life. Another important fact, again contrary to many published assertions, is that this letter confirms that the Laws and Fosters had already left Illinois at the time of the murders and were not present at Carthage jail.