Philadelphia Branch Records (1840-1854)

--original record book at EDS Research Library and Archives
--titled "Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Philadelphia"

--branch organized on December 23, 1839

pg. 2 [Reprint]

"Minutes of a Conference held at Philadelphia, January 13th 1840.

The conference was organized by appointing Brother Joseph Smith Jr President & S Bennett Sec'y. Brother Parley P. Pratt introduced the project of printing the Book of Mormon; he mentioned that at a Conference held in New York a resolution was agreed upon and a committee appointed to print the same in New York, subject however to the consent of the proprietor of the copyright and that he now submitted the matter for reconsideration. Brother Sidney Rigdon stated that he had considered the matter and that he had come to the conclusion that the most prudent course would be to print the same in the West among the brethren and thereby keep the profits in the Society and especially to nurture the new printing establishment. He was willing however to submit the will of the conference, Brother Winchester thought the delay necessarily arising out the distance between the supply & the principal source of consumption an objection to printing in the West. Brother Smith wished to ask Brother Rigdon what the expense of fitting up the establishment in the West would be. Brother P. thought it would not exceed the sum /p. 3/ of two or three hundred dollars. Brother P.P. Pratt would mention the fact that the printing could be proceeded with immediately here and delay would be injurious to the work here where it would be indispensable. Brother Smith would say that Brothers Evans /sic/ thought it would be wisest to print in the West and that he Brother S. approved of that disposition of the affair. Brother Pratt then mentioned that he wished the whole matter referred to the High Council of the Church. Brother Smith seconded the proposition. It was then put to vote and carried unanimously. Brother Rigdon then introduced the mission of the brethren to Washington and the necessary embarassments under which they were labouring. Brother P P Pratt argued the importance of the interests involved in the mission to the whole Church and every man in or out of the Church. Conference adjourned at 12½ O'clock reassembled at 1½ P.M. Brothers Nixon & Sleeper were ordained Elders. Brother Joseph Smith Jr dilated at some length on the offices of the Priesthood and on the duties of Elders, Bishops, Priests, &c and directed it should be entered on the minutes as the injunction of the Presidency that travelling Elders should be especially cautious of encroaching on the ground of stationed & presiding Elders and rather direct their efforts to breaking up and occupying new ground and that the Church generally refuse to be burthened with the support of unprofitable and dilatory labourers. It was unanimously resolved /p. 4/ that this be received as the will and wish of the Conference."

--on Nov 16, 1840, Benjamin Winchester is reinstated to his position as Presiding Elder of Philadelphia Branch, having returned from a mission in Great Britain

--on 11-12: the personal disagreements between Benjamin Winchester and Almon Babbitt were presented to a meeting of the Church on Monday evening, March 15, 1831, where the specifics of the conflict were not mentioned in the minutes, but the indication being that the conflict arose out of personal disagreements, and the decision was jointly made by the two men to forgive and forget, with the following decision by the branch on p. 12: "On a vote being taken the Church declared with uplifted hands that they also would drop the matter. Thus was the hatchet buried, peace restored, and a curse pronounced upon any wonton hand who should dare to drag it forth again."
p. 13—part of report of the Monday evening meeting, April 5, 1841, report of the branch financial committee in part:

"We also took into consideration the propriety of allowing our presiding elder the means of paying his board, that he should not be forced to depend upon the cold hand of charity for his daily food. Whilst the subject was under consideration, Elder Manchester returned from Europe, and at a meeting of the Church on the 16th of November it was on motion resolved that he again resume his station as presiding elder over this branch, it therefore became our duty to provide for his support. But in order to husband our resources as much as possible, that we might reach the object for which we were striving and to which we have had an eye in all our transactions, namely the extinguishment of the debt, we resolved that a collection should be taken for this purpose. We therefore laid the matter before the Church, stating that the collections taken on Monday nights would be for paying the board of Elder W. and wife." 

p. 14—part of same meeting report: "The Committee feel that their thanks and the thanks of the Church is due to the "members of the Church's Freedmen's Society for the aid and assistance which they have rendered. Although we have repeatedly enforced the claims of this Society upon the members of the Church, we cannot let the present opportunity pass without noticing it again. We are satisfied that the collections alone will not support the Church and that if we wish an existence as a body we must individually contribute to its support. This Society was started by persons who were not members of the Church in order that they might aid a cause which was just struggling into existence in this place, although the most of them have since openly espoused the cause the remainder have not withdrawn the assisting hand. In fact what little we have done has been effected by the aid which we have received from that Society. In proof of this the following estimate of our yearly expenses is annexed"

"For Rent 150 dollars
Pastors Board 208 "
Lights 56 "
Sexton 52 "
Fuel 16 "
Emblems and incidental expenses 25 "
Total 507 "

pp. 16-17: "Minutes of a general Conference held in Philadelphia on the 6th day of April 1841. The Conference was called to order by Elder B. Manchester. President Hyram Smith was unanimously called to the chair and B. Manchester chosen Secretary. The conference was then opened with prayer by the President. The President then made known, in part, the business of the day, which was as follows, that this branch of the Church should be more extensively organized, with necessary officers, viz. a presiding elder and two councillors to be ordained to the high priesthood to preside over the spiritual affairs of the Church in this place, also that a bishop and his councillors be ordained to take charge of the financial affairs of the Church and transact such business as the law directs. The Church was then called upon to make choice of men to fill these several stations. On motion Elder B. Manchester was chosen and ordained to preside in this branch of the church. Elders CH. Morrell and William Marton were chosen and ordained to act as assistant councillors. On motion Jacob Syfritt was chosen and ordained Bishop. Jesse Price and J. B. Nicholson were chosen and ordained to act as the Bishop's councillors. Liberty was then given for elders residing at a distance to represent the various branches of the Church. . . ."—then follows reports on the following branches: New York City, (155 members), Chester County, Pennsylvania (150 members), "'lastus Now reported on Monmouth County, (New Jersey (102 members), /p. 18/ and on Toms River, New Jersey (24 members); other reports on Linsdale, Monmouth County, New Holland, Pennsylvania (34 members),
Philadelphia--3

Georgetown, Pennsylvania (32 members), Octarra, Pennsylvania (21 members), Burlington, New Jersey (11 members), New 'ochelle, New York (9 members), Brooklyn, New York (14 members), Hempstead, Long Island (33 members), Newark, New Jersey (10 members), Greenville, New Jersey (10 members), Shrewsbury, New Jersey (15 members), Hudson River (6 members), with 2 recent baptisms on State Island, New York and 9 recent baptisms in Centerville, Delaware, /p. 19/ and in the Philadelphia branch (215 members).

--p. 19: same meeting on April 6, 1841: "The Chairman [Hymn Smith] then read a revelation of recent date in which the first Presidency and others are commanded to make a solemn proclamation to the Kings of the Earth, also a commandment for the building of a house of worship at Nauvoo. He also gave some beneficial instructions relative to the Saints gathering at Nauvoo at present instead of any other Place of Zion. And also some instructions in regard to the use of wine for the sacrament, after which the conference adjourned. At 6½ o'clock in the evening the conference reassembled. The congregation were then called upon to bring forward their donation money for the building of the Lords House at Nauvoo and put it into the hands of the chairman."

--Edward Hunter ordained an elder on April 7, 1841.

--pp. 22-24: A conference of the church at Philadelphia on April 6, 1842, at which Bratus Snow presides, in which reports are given on the following branches: Salem, Mass. (66 members), Boston, Mass (32 members), North Bridge, Mass. (30), Petersborough, New Hampshire (36 members), Lowell, Mass (x 5), Brandywine, Pa. (124), Philadelphia (275), Burlington, New Jersey (12), Centerville, Delaware (25), Wilmington, Del. (19), Christiania, Del (17), Cream Ridge, New Jersey (140), Tomas River (N. J. (52), Rockwood, New Jersey (26).

--pp. 24-25, a petition presented at the conference of April 6, 1842, requesting an investigation of the finances of the Philadelphia branch with respect to the rumors of misuse that were in circulation concerning Benjamin Winchester.

pp. 26-28 (April 6, 1842), following the presentation of the above statement:

"Elder Winchester then preferred the following charge against J.B. Nicholson. First, for threatening to spill his (Winchesters) blood upon condition. Second, for saying that he (J.B) was a liar. Also the following charges against J Syfritt. First, for telling false falsehood. Second, for opposing the order of the Church."

"The first charge against J.B. Nicholson was investigated and in substance sustained. Satisfaction was also rendered by him. The second charge against J.B. Nicholson was investigated, but the conference felt themselves unauthorised to decide for want of one positive witness.

"Conference adjourned until Tuesday morning half past 9 o'clock."


"The first and second charges against J. Syfritt where /sic/ brought forwaid, and after a candid and impartial investigation were sustained. Satisfaction was also made by J. Syfritt.

"It was then moved and carried that the difficulties that /occurred/ existed in the Church /p. 27/ respecting the conduct and teaching of Elder Winchester, should be investigated from their commencement.

"Elder Winchester arose and gave a brief history of the first difficulties that occurred in the church originating with Elder Babbit, referred to the influence of which Elder Babbit exerted against him by endeavouring in various ways..."
to excite the feelings of the saints—prejudice their minds against him, and consequently destroy his influence. Elder Winchester stated that he took a bold and decided stand against all such foul and inequitable conduct, and proved to the entire satisfaction of the conference that he acted in the discharge of his duty, and that the numerous accusations brought against him were with the reports that were put in circulation derogatory to his character and standing in the Church. He then referred to the conduct of Elder Page, stating that he came to the City Listend to the numerous reports in circulation against him joined in a conspiracy attempted with others to carry their designs into effect to destroy him, and have the influence, and remove him from the station which he held as presiding Elder of the Church; and thus destroy his influence. He further stated that Elder Page had been guilty of other acts of impropriety of being familiar with one of the sisters, and of teaching doctrine contrary to the order of the Church.

He also stated that he took a decided stand against those acts of impropriety of which Elder Page was guilty, and proved to the satisfaction of the conference that he acted in the discharge of his duty when rebuking Elder Page and others, for their improper conduct.

Elder Winchester also proved that he was entirely innocent of the charge alleged against him of trying to injure the reputation of Sister Nicholson.

The difficulties of the church being impartially investigated, the following motions were made and carried by the conference. Moved, and carried, that Miss Nicholson be exonerated from the blame imputed to her in consequence of the many existing reports concerning her.

Moved, and carried, that Elder B. Winchester acted in the discharge of his duty in rebuking Elders Page, and Babbit, for their improper conduct.

Moved, and carried, that the difficulties from their commencement in relation to the conduct, and teaching of Elder B. Winchester have been candidly investigated, and no charge whatever sustained against him. /p. 29/

Moved, and carried, that Elder B. Winchester and James, write to Pres. Smith informing him of the proceedings of the conference in order to remove the false impressions which he may have received from letters sent from this place.

Moved, and carried, that the minutes of this conference be printed in pamphlet form for the special benefit of the Saints.

Moved, and carried, that all the former organizations be annulled and that the Church be reorganized and begin anew.

Fellowship was then withdrawn from the following persons, viz: Miss Nicholson, William N. Moore, and Samuel Poulterer, Sister Banger withdrew from the Church.

Fellowship was then restored to William A. Moore.


Pres. H. Smith recommended that all former difficulties be forgotten and never more spoken of and that all the former organizations be annulled and that the Church be reorganized and begin anew.

Whereupon Elder William Harton moved that all the former organizations in this city be annulled, which carried without a dissenting vote.

Previous to this Pres. Smith said he considered this a conference of the whole Church in Philadelphia, as there had been a Public invitation to all, and he considered it but one branch.
"Elder J. H. Newton then moved, that Elder Peter Hess Jr be our Presiding Elder over the whole church in Philad.

Carried with but one dissenting vote.

"Pres. H. Smith then explained some of the duties of the Presiding Elder. He also explained what should be done when individuals were at variance with each other.

"Pres. Law then arose and said he knew of no other way to settle the difficulty in this place but by disannulling the former organizations, and reorganizing again and forgetting all former difficulties and beginning anew from this day as recommended by Pres. Smith.

"It was then moved /sic/ seconded, and carried that we occupy the House in 3rd St until a more commodious one can be obtained in a more central situation.

"Bro. Hess was then ordained to the office of a High Priest, as President of the Church in Philada by the laying on of hands by Presidents Hyrum Smith and H. Law. President Smith then moved that T. S. Green be the Clerk for the Church carried unanimously E. S. Cfr."

p. 34-35 (October 31, 1842): "The meeting then resolved itself into a special conference, wherein Elder Moses Martin was Elected President and E. S. Greene Secretary. E. S. Greene then stated the business to be transacted by the conference which will be seen by the following:

Philad Nov 2nd 1842

Masters Editors of the Baltimore Clipper

Gentlemen, you will confer a favour by publishing the following in your paper in as conspicuous a place as possible which you will please to do as soon as you recieve this yours 

E. S. Greene

Mormon Expositor

"At a Special conference of the Church of Latter Day Saints, held in Philad Oct 31 1842 whereas Samuel C Brown Elder of the aforesaid Church, has without the request or sanction of the society been spending his time in Baltimore, professing to teach the Doctrine of the above Church; and has been publishing a paper called the "Mormon Expositor" which is entirely unauthorised by the society, and published in it a total want of ability to conduct any paper. Therefore Resolved, that we disapprove of his proceedings since he came to Baltimore

"Resolved also, that we hereby express our disapprobation of the "Mormon Expositor" and hope that he will immediately discontinue it."

Signed Moses Martin Pres.

E. S. Greene Sec.

--Jedediah M. Grant sustained by church as presiding Elder on June 4, 1843

pp. 49-50

August 31, 1844: Part of a Mex conference presided at by William Smith, President, with addressed the Elders and Priests present that the privileges on the importance of traveling, and preaching the Gospel. Magnify their calling, honor the Priesthood, and bear testimony to the glorious truths that Israel's God has revealed to his people. Also on charity that the saints of God ought to abound with. After which, he took occasion to reprove Elder B. Winchester for his course against the Quorum of the Twelve in New York, Philadelphia, and other places. Elder Winchester arose before the Church and stated that the Quorum had slandered him, that he had spent 400 dollars in going and returning to Nauvoo and other places to attend to charges preferred against him and that the Twelve never explained the reason why he was suspended; and many other charges against them too ridiculous to mention. He stated as reasons why he will not go out and /sic/ preach the Gospel or sustain the authorities of the Church."
p. 51 (August 31, 1844): Same meeting, "Elder Grant then represented the Branch in Philadelphia amounting to 334 members including Officers. The standing of many members not fully known.

"A call was then made by the President [William Smith] for all the Elders present, an official member, that were willing to uphold the Twelve in their calling and authority by their faith and prayers to signify the same by rising upon their feet whereupon all present arose except Elders Winchester, Harrow and McLean. Conference then adjourned until 8 o'clock in the evening."

p. 52 (August 31, 1844): "On motion it was Resolved, That members of this Church who absent themselves from the Church and Communion Table, are not considered as in good standing with the Church."

--a notation on p. 53 that the transcript was copied from the New York Prophet.

p. 73 (Oct 6, 1844): Upon request, Adelaide Nicholson was removed from the membership of the church; also 4 others; and 1 one tried for apostasy.

p. 73 (Oct 13, 1844): Upon request, Eliza Nicholson and Susannah Grant "no longer be considered members", also two others.

p. 73 (Oct 20, 1844)--another woman by her request is removed from the church.

pp 75-75 (November 4, 1844): At a council meeting of "Officers of the Church", president by Jedediah M. Grant:

"The meeting was open by the President, with a few remarks relative to the object of the meeting and Prayer. After which he stated the reasons why certain individuals had been cut off from the Church at Nauvoo---That they had received the doctrines of Sidney Rigdon and unheld him as the Head of the Church, rejecting and speaking evil of the Quorum of the Twelve, knowing at the same time that he (Sidney) had been lawfully tried, and excommunicated from the Church---and that he considered that all who go with them and advocate their cause ought to be dealt with in the same manner; and inasmuch as there has been organized in this city, a church acknowledging Sidney Rigdon as their head and leader, and some of the members of this Branch have united with them, it becomes our duty to act upon their cases---We can try them for slander, inasmuch as they do slander the characters of the living and the dead---for givingheed to false revelations---for rejecting Nauvoo as the gathering place of the Saints---for not giving heed to the Revelation concerning the building of the Temple---for Blasphemy, for who that has heard their explanation of the Prophecy of Isaiah concerning the rod which was to grow out of the stem of Jesse, does not know that they blaspheme, in the most rigid sense of the word. It is my wish, therefore that all Elders who have gone with them, and all those who have slandered and spoken against the present authorities of the Church, be cut off and delivered over to the burnings of Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme, and I request all present to state their feelings in regard to the matter openly and freely." Whereupon the members present severally rose and stated their views and feelings, and testimony in regard to the matter in which they all concurred with President Grant."

p. 78 (Feb 7, 1845): At a meeting of the "Official members of the Church":

"Moved and seconded that this council receive the present organization of the church the Quorum of Twelve and all the authorities of the church and will endeavour as far as possible to carry out the measures of the much lamented, and late Martyr'd Prophet Joseph Carried unanimously,"--after which 2 men are cut off for supporting Sidney Rigdon.
-- July 7, 1845, a man is cut off from church for denouncing the Quorum of Twelve as corrupt men rejecting their authority.

p. 87-88 (May 13, 1846): At a conference of church, Presided over by Jesse C. Little, President of the Church in the Eastern and Middle States, a resolution:

Resolved that we will use our utmost exertions by all lawful and honorable means by our faith and prayer and the substance which God has placed in our hands to uphold and assist Bro. J.C. Little whom we cheerfully acknowledge our President here in the East and own him as such, and also those whom he has associated with him to aid in the great and glorious work assigned to them in gathering together the People of God from these Eastern lands to California where we can enjoy our rights liberties and religion unmolested. Where the Oppressors foot and the murderers of the Prophet shall never tread or desecrate the inheritance of the Saints, where the blood of Saints, the cries of the widow and the moans of fatherless orphans shall never be heard. But where we can meet with our Brethren and Sisters and enjoy the blessings and gifts of His Holy Spirit, redeem our dead and receive our endowments with no one to molest, or make us afraid. Where we can rear the Temples and Sanctuaries of our God, gather into the fold of Christ the persecuted of Jacob and where our Sisters can spread their board and welcome in the daughters of Ephraim.

p. 92 (May 14, 1846): At a council meeting of official members of the Church, presided over by William J. Amley:

Elder Bailey charged Paul H. Conick and Margaret F. Sayers with making unlawful covenants and living in adultery, which were sustained against them by their own confession and by the testimony of Bro. Charles Lutz and they were then by unanimously vote cut off from the Church, which vote was sanctioned by the church on the same day.

-- (May 21, 1848)

The following Sunday Margaret F. Sayers upon confession was rebaptized and received into full fellowship.

p. 98 (Oct 9, 1853): At a conference presided over by Samuel Harrison, it is reported the the branch consists of 135 members

--membership records begin in the middle, with numbering at 1 to 39. Of the 563 persons who were members of the Philadelphia from its inception in December 1839 to the last baptism recorded in November of 1846, the following numbers of excommunications and disfellowshipings are indicated:
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p. 99: "Record of names of Church members Baptized for their health October 1843

William Frost by Elder Geo. J. Adams April 1843
Eliza Gale by Elder Jed. M. Grant Oct 3d 1843
Julia Beattie

End of entry"