

# The New York LDS Historian

## Joseph Smith, Now Cast in Bronze, Returns to New York City

By Claudia L. Bushman

Latter-day Saints have been closely identified with the Mountain West, particularly with Salt Lake City and Utah, for more than 150 years. Yet, they have an even longer connection with the state of New York, the place where the Smith family opened their farm after migrating to Palmyra. New York is the home of the Sacred Grove, of the visits of angels, of the Hill Cumorah, of the first publication of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the Church of Christ, as it was first called.

Although less well recognized, New York City is also a significant LDS historical site. Martin Harris traveled to New York City in 1828 to meet with the nation's foremost linguist Charles Anthon at Columbia College, a sheet of characters copied from the Golden Plates in his hand.<sup>1</sup> Later, in 1832, Smith visited New York City himself, traveling with Bishop Newel K. Whitney who was purchasing stock for his dry-goods store in Kirtland, Ohio. The two stayed at a boarding house at 88 Pearl Street, along with residents "from all parts of the world." A drive-in parking garage is now on the site. Smith planned to hold some religious meetings in New York, "to lift up my voice in this city," and may have done so. These quotations come from a letter he wrote to his wife Emma Smith. "This day I have been walking through the most splendid part of the city of New York," he wrote. "The buildings are truly great and wonderful, to the astonishing of every beholder."<sup>2</sup>

He would not return again, but in 1837 apostle Parley P. Pratt commenced missionary work in the area. The city was the Eastern States Mission headquarters, point of embarkation for apostles and

missionaries going to Europe, and the port of arrival for over 70,000 immigrants who joined the Church and were heading west. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has had an almost continual presence in the city since the late 1830s.<sup>3</sup>

The New York New York Stake recently celebrated its 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. When the stake was organized in 1934, it included New York City, all of Long Island, the northern half of New Jersey and all of Westchester County. It was the first stake of the Church east of Colorado since the western exodus, and only the third (after Los Angeles and San Francisco) to be organized in the "mission field," outside the area of LDS pioneer settlement. President Heber J. Grant formally organized the stake in a conference at 316 West 57<sup>th</sup> Street, a location just a few blocks from the present location of the stake center at West 65<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway and the Manhattan New York Temple.<sup>4</sup> The Manhattan New York Temple District, roughly contiguous with the original New York Stake boundaries now consists of 16 stakes and districts with over 100 wards and branches.

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*The Joseph Smith Statue in place*

### **The New York LDS Historian**

is the quarterly newsletter of the New York New York Stake LDS History Committee. This newsletter contains articles about and notices of the research of the Committee.

More detailed research results will be published in our monograph series. Monographs will be announced in future issues of this newsletter.

### ***Current research projects:***

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*Please let us know of any information relevant to these projects that you have.*

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## Joseph Returns to the City *(continued from previous page)*

For all this growth LDS history in New York is not generally known. For the past seven years a committee of the New York New York Stake has focused the stake on the city's Church related historical past. The committee began to publish a newsletter, *The New York LDS Historian* in 1998. The first newsletter dealt with the sailing of the Brooklyn, the LDS immigrant ship. On February 4, 1846, nearly 250 LDS men, women, and children stepped aboard a ship in New York City setting out on a perilous six-month journey, 20,000 miles down the eastern United States and South America, around Cape Horn, and back up the other side. Businessman Samuel Brannan led the group. By coincidence, that same day, the overland Saints crossed the frozen Mississippi from Nauvoo on their way west. They became the first Americans to settle what is today San Francisco.<sup>5</sup>

This incident ignited the committee's interest. Scott Tiffany created a prize-winning documentary film. Ned Thomas, a city planner, thought that a plaque commemorating the sailing of the ship Brooklyn would be a fitting addition to the cityscape. He located the filled-in dock whence the Brooklyn departed, now called Old Slip. A small park had been installed in the center of the street by the builders of an adjacent office building. This little park had plantings and benches but was an orphan, not really an official New York City park at all.

Our proposed plaque was held up for years by the Art Commission and the Department of Transportation which was constructing a fan plant and tunnel for

the subway system under the little park. After years of bureaucratic struggle, the plaque finally found a home not in the park but on an outside pillar at 32 Old Slip, a tall and handsome office building across from the park which housed some of the offices of Goldman Sachs. All those involved were thrilled to feel that they were symbolically retaking possession of some of the land where their forebears had made history.

All these things were on the minds of the Saints in New York City as the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Joseph Smith's birth approached. New York New York Stake president Brent Belnap had interested Robert S. Clark of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation in some of the New York City historical sites. Locations for additional plaques were considered, but we had already done a plaque. Shouldn't we reach for something more?

At this point New York Stake historical clerk Mark Holden mentioned that he was on his way to Salt Lake City for a brief period to watch his wife run a marathon. I asked him if he could find out how much it would cost to commission a statue of Joseph Smith, in case we could ever raise enough money to pay for one and find a place to put it. Mark returned to report a very high figure. But he had met with various people and said that a consortium of Saints who would prefer to remain anonymous would be willing to donate a full-sized statue sculpted by Dee Jay Bawden, noted for his sculptures of Joseph Smith,

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For further information contact Kent Larsen at 212-568-3909.

## Book Tells History of Mormons in New York!

The New York Stake LDS History Committee published

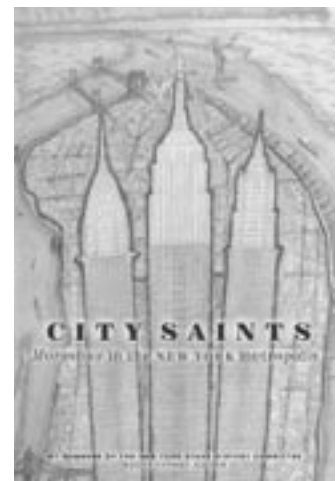
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## Text of the Statue Plaque

### Joseph Smith (1805-1844)

Founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Joseph Smith, Jr. helped his family open a farm in Manchester, New York, during the settlement of the Finger Lakes region. As a young man, he was caught up in the religious excitement of the Second Great Awakening. In March 1830 at age 24, he published the Book of Mormon and on April 6, 1830 organized the Church. In October 1832, he visited New York City and resided at 88 Pearl Street. While here, he wrote to his wife Emma Smith, “the buildings are truly great and wonderful to the astonishing of every beholder.”

On June 27, 1844 Joseph Smith was killed by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, and the Mormons were forced to leave their homes. On February 4, 1846, more than two hundred of his eastern followers embarked from Old Slip on the ship Brooklyn en route to California where they hoped to rendezvous with Brigham Young leading a party of Mormons west.

The “Frontier Prophet” was sculpted by Dee Jay Bawden in 2005 and erected to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Joseph Smith’s birth by the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation and the New York New York Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints organized in 1934.

### Joseph Returns to the City *(continued from previous page)*

for installation in New York City, if we could find a place to put it. Bawden, who works with Joseph Smith’s death mask as a model, has created many statues and busts of the prophet. Surely this was a sign that we should pursue the statue option. We chose as a design a view of the young Joseph in his New York state style, a young farmer in workers’ clothing with a long broad axe for clearing the wilderness. This tall, handsome, Joseph was titled “The Frontier Prophet.”

Now, where to put it. No one had private land that would do. Church policy did not allow for statues inside or outside of Church buildings. As we learned with the Ship Brooklyn plaque, every square foot of public New York City is contested space. Neighbors are fussy about what is installed near them. Public agencies have overlapping jurisdictions. Programs are complex, daunting, and restrictive.

A talk with the city’s director of Art and Antiquities for the Parks Department Jonathan Kuhn was instructive. New York City, he noted, already had too many statues. The Parks department was uninterested in any new statues of people whose lives had no important direct relevance to the city and its neighborhoods. Given the opportunity again, they would no longer accept statues of Joan of Arc, Robert Burns, Christopher Columbus, William Shakespeare or most of the statues currently standing. They certainly did not want any already created statues. Any subject who met the required criteria of significant importance in the city would have to be presented to a group of sculptors for a design competition. The process would take years. Besides, who was Joseph Smith?

Discouraged by that route, we considered the guidelines for temporary installa-

tions. This program has brought lots of trendy contemporary art to the city for periods of several months. The Gates, the hundreds of structures flying saffron curtains created by artists Christo and his wife Jeanne-Claude, is the most noted of recent installations under that program. Those gates flew dramatically for three months, marking a time of goodwill and enchantment for those walking in Central Park. But even that installation, with famous artists and full funding, was on the boards for 25 years before it was approved.

The application for the Temporary Public Outdoor Art program called for an extensive written description of the proposed artwork, photographs or drawings, an artist’s statement and resume, an installation budget, information on the sponsoring organization, the proposed duration of the exhibition, the

## Joseph Returns to the City *(continued from previous page)*

requested location, and ten prints of the artists' previous work. We gathered that information and solicited letters of support from a significant politician and an historian of the city as well.

For a location, we first requested a place in midtown Manhattan, in the center of a landscaped median in the middle of Broadway, just across from the new Manhattan Temple at 65<sup>th</sup> Street. The Church contributes funds annually to



*Attendees await the unveiling of the Joseph Smith Statue*

provide plants and labor to keep that particular section attractive. As a back-up, we suggested a nearby triangular park bounded by Broadway, Columbus avenue and West 66<sup>th</sup> Street named for Richard Tucker, a Metropolitan Opera tenor whose bust is erected there.

This space was also close to the Temple. We submitted an application for a temporary installation in June 2005.

After a substantial wait our application and requests were rejected. The Parks department did not want any statues on the Broadway median or any more statuary in the Richard Tucker Triangle, although they have had temporary installations there before. I feared that our project was dead.

But, she asked, would we be interested in considering a different site? When asked what she had in mind, she began to describe a small park in downtown Manhattan in the financial district near Wall Street, a place that had recently been rehabilitated by the Transit Authority after the completion of the construction of a fan plant and a tunnel under the East River. By this time, I recognized the location. It was the little park at Old Slip, the same place where I had attempted to have the ship Brooklyn plaque installed and near its current location, a place just two blocks from 88 Pearl Street where Joseph Smith stayed in 1832. I said that that location would work just fine.

The little park has a round fountain, red brick pavers with pink granite accents, and two attractive seating areas with black iron benches where people lunch and sun. The park is kept clean and attractive by the local Downtown Alliance and the plants and trees are watered by the adjacent Police Museum. The park is administered by DCAS, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services. NYC Transit has a subway ventilation structure underneath the park, the Department of Police uses it for frequent displays of historic vehicles, the Fire Department maintains the right to park fire-fighting vehicles there, the Parks department oversees it, and in all, some fourteen agencies have or claim some jurisdiction over it. With initial approval by the Parks Department and the City, we began to fulfill additional requirements. Meanwhile, back in Provo, Dee Jay Bawden began to sculpt a brand new eight foot "Frontier Prophet" for us, one with a long axe in one hand and an 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon in the other.

It was September before I was invited to the park with the program administrator Clare Weiss and Ralph Masolino, the supervisor of district parks to choose an exact site to request. We decided on a central location, right in the middle of the little park. Artistically, this was the right place. And it seemed the least likely to interfere with anyone emerging from a hatchway, escaping from some underground disaster. Clare and I marked the exact spot, measuring out feet from the various identifying landmarks and submitted it to NYC Transit.

Transit responded that they wanted more and better maps with this and alternate locations marked to the inch. I provided these. They wanted detailed information on the method of installation. How would the statue be secured? What kind of heavy equipment was required? What licenses did the installers have? They were not happy until they had the chemical formula of the adhesive and articles that described how well it worked. How much would the statue weigh? They thought that the bronze statue standing atop a marble base would be too heavy. Could we reduce the weight? A plan for a completely bronze statue design,

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## Come Walk with Us!

The Stake History Committee offers a walking tour of LDS Church history sites in lower Manhattan, including the Joseph Smith Statue. To schedule a tour, contact:

**Joanne Rowland: 212-697-0734**  
**[jrowlandnyc@msn.com](mailto:jrowlandnyc@msn.com)**

# Joseph Smith Statue Dedicatory Prayer

Friday, December 23, 2005

By *President Brent J. Belnap*

Our Father in Heaven, we, a few of Thy children, have gathered on this cold December afternoon in Lower Manhattan in New York City to dedicate unto Thee a statue honoring the life, memory, and mission of Thy chosen servant, Joseph Smith, Junior, who was born two hundred years ago today.

We marvel that this striking image of the “farm boy prophet,” who was born into poverty and sorely persecuted during his brief lifetime until his tragic martyrdom at the hands of a cursed mob, should stand here today at this prominent site in this great city---as a testament to the increasing stature of Joseph Smith as the great prophet, seer, revelator and translator of the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (see D&C 124:125), a latter-day Moses (see 2 Ne. 3; D&C 28:2), to whom was given “power to lay the foundation of [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints], and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which . . . the Lord [is] well pleased.” (D&C 1:30.)

From this site at Old Slip, a group of Latter-day Saints set sail on the “Ship Brooklyn” almost 160 years ago toward a new home in the West, as Joseph had prophesied. Just steps away Thou didst oversee the enactment of the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution, guaranteeing religious and other freedoms necessary for the development and flourishing of free peoples everywhere, thereby nurturing the rolling forth of Thy Kingdom throughout the earth. Near this site Thou didst also fulfill ancient prophecy in showing unto “the learned” certain characters from a “sealed book” translated by Joseph Smith as the Book of Mormon—Another Testament of Jesus Christ. We are mindful that Joseph himself once lodged nearby on Pearl Street, and that thousands of early members, heeding his prophetic call to build Zion, passed near here on their way West. We thank Thee for these events and all other blessings in

our lives related to this unique location. We also thank Thee for the continued growth of Thy Church in this area, and for the blessings that Thou hast seen fit to bestow upon us, including a temple here in Manhattan.

We thank Thee for the talents of the sculptor, Brother Bawden; for members of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation and the New York New York Stake History Committee; for the generous donors, city officials, and many others who have contributed so much to see this statue created, unveiled, and dedicated on this bicentennial observance of the Prophet Joseph’s birth.

We especially thank Thee this day for the marvelous and unique truths that Thou didst reveal through Thy Prophet, starting with the appearance of Thee and Thy Son to the boy Joseph in upstate New York, followed by the Book of Mormon, other revelations and inspired writings, the restoration of Thy holy priesthood, the organization of Thy Church, temples and temple ordinances, and many other precious and eternal doctrines and programs to bless and uplift Thy children.

Now, by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood and with authorization from our Area President, we present unto Thee this statue for Thine



*Choir performs at the dedication of the Joseph Smith Statue*

*Continued on next page*

## Joseph Smith Statue Dedicatory Prayer *(continued from previous page)*

approval and dedicate it unto Thee as a memorial to the Prophet Joseph Smith and as an ensign to all who will have opportunity to look upon this likeness of Brother Joseph as “The Frontier Prophet” and consider his life and the “incomparable outpouring of knowledge, gifts, and doctrine” that came through him. (Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Great Things Which God Has Revealed,” GC, Apr 2005.)

Wilt Thou shield this statue from all desecration. May no unhallowed hand harm in any way this image of him who

of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,] cost the best blood of the nineteenth century to bring them forth for the salvation of a ruined world.” (D&C 135:6.) May this larger-than-life statue symbolize that Joseph stands at the head of this last dispensation, that he stood firm in spite of ridicule and persecution, that true and living prophets once again speak Thy word to Thy children, and that “Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it.” (D&C 135:3.)

May its presence in this diverse world-class city assist in fulfilling divine prophecy made by the Angel Moroni that, as the stature of Joseph Smith grows ever larger, the “name [of Joseph Smith] should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people.” Bless this memorial, that through it, “Millions [including right here in New York City] shall know ‘Brother Joseph’ again.”

Today, may each of us better understand these words of President Gordon B. Hinckley, Joseph’s divinely appointed successor today, who said: “We do not worship the [Joseph Smith]. We worship God our Eternal Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. But we acknowledge the Prophet; we proclaim him; we respect him; we reverence him as an instrument in the hands of the Almighty in restoring to the earth the ancient truths of the divine gospel, together with the priesthood through which the authority of God is exercised in the affairs of His Church and for the blessing of His people.” (“Joseph Smith Jr.—Prophet of God, Mighty Servant,” Ensign, Dec 2005.) Surely, “Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah!”

As we close this dedication, at this special Christmas season, we honor the birth of Him whom we worship as our Savior and Thy Only Begotten Son, even Jesus Christ. May we strive today and always to live as He would have us do, we humbly ask, in the sacred name of Thy Son, our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, Amen.



*The Joseph Smith Statue shortly after it was unveiled*

himself was unjustly imprisoned, beaten, tarred and feathered, and, “like most of the Lord’s anointed in ancient times,” ultimately martyred in order to “seal his mission and his works with his own blood.” (DC& 135:3.)

May Thy Holy Spirit be felt here in abundance by all pure-in-heart who pass by. Bless those who come upon this monument, who do not yet know Joseph, with a desire to learn more concerning Thee and Thy Gospel restored through him. May this statue serve in spreading the message of Thy Gospel to growing numbers of local inhabitants and to visitors to this great city.

To those who already know Joseph as Thy prophet, wilt Thou renew in each of us a firm testimony that Joseph Smith was chosen by Thee to restore the fullness of Thy Gospel to the earth in this last dispensation. May we “be reminded that the Book of Mormon, [the] Doctrine and Covenants..., [and every good thing associated today with The Church

**Joseph Returns to the City** *(continued from page 4)*

incorporating the base into the whole, was substituted.

We next approached Community Board #1, the citizens' group that oversees land use and other issues for the neighborhood. I made an appointment with the Art and Entertainment Committee that would have to sign off on the project before it could be presented to the full board. A group of church members gathered in a downtown office building with four members of the committee. The church members were wholesome and friendly and made a good impression. After I made a brief presentation about the significance of the person for New York city and state, the significance of the place and the significance of the date, the committee discussed the pros and cons, mostly the cons. Why this person and this place? Why a representative of any religion? What about the division between church and state? Why a historical piece at all when this area—that contained the wreckage of 9/11—should have only cheerful and upbeat art works? Why not put the statue in front of the temple or one of our chapels? Enough negative talk had been generated that the proposal would surely have been voted down, but one man said that this was a temporary statue, no proselytizing involved, and that it should be approved. Others agreed and the motion passed 3-1.

One requirement was that we take the plan to the Police Museum, the nearest neighbors. A visit to the director of the Police Museum, a former cop, went well enough. He said he had no objections to the statue and liked the design. His museum had many bronze statues on display, so the art was in his style. I reported the Police Museum approval.

With all this behind us, chances of passing the full Community Board at the next meeting looked good. The full board generally ratifies the work of the committees. So this time I did not feel a need to urge other church members to come to the session. The only Latter-day Saint who came besides myself had to leave early. Our proposal was the last thing on the agenda, coming after three hours of talks, presentations, discussions, comments and other business. The group was tired, offhandedly approv-

ing everything that came before them. Until, that is, the chairman of the Art and Entertainment Committee presented a proposal for a temporary statue of Joseph Smith. Then the attention of the crowd was fully engaged. The first speaker said that this man was in no way worthy of a statue of any kind. Others asserted that the Church was founded on fake miracles. Hands shot up to make negative comments of all kinds. One man finally said that he knew little of the Church or its people but he would rather give them the benefit of the doubt than vote them down like a bigot. The chair gavelled the meeting to order and called for a vote, long before the pent up anger of the group was expended. The vote was 18 to 7 against the proposal with 4 abstentions. The chairperson's official letter to the Parks department said that "several Community Board members questioned the appropriateness of installing artwork in a City park to recognize the founder of a specific religious group. We therefore urge that you reconsider this proposal."<sup>6</sup>

I said nothing during this debate and walked out of the meeting, stunned. The chairman of the Art and Entertainment Committee told me that he was sorry, that he had tried. The man who had supported the proposal in the committee said that the vote had been illegitimate, that the committee had no right to vote against the statue on the grounds they did. They could object to the artistic quality, but not to the beliefs of the installing group. Religious discrimination was at work. He said that we should engage a lawyer and pursue the installation.

online news COMMUNITY

**CB1 Rejects Mormon Bid To Erect Statue Downtown**

By Barry Deems

If you want to make a pilgrimage through New York City's parks and public spaces, you would happen here and there upon the statue of a religious figure.



At the north end of Times Square, there is Father Francis Patrick Cully, clutching a bible and standing eight feet tall in his World War I issue combat boots and trench coat. In 1980, a bronze statue of Mahatma Gandhi was installed on a traffic island in Lower Square. And in Chinatown, a mighty statue of Confucius lords over his own patch on East Broadway.

But there's no room in the public space of Lower Manhattan for a statue of Joseph Smith, says Community Board 1.

The board last month rejected a proposal from the city's Parks Department and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to install an 8-foot tall statue of Smith, a native New Yorker and the founder of Mormonism, at Old Slip Park.

The location is significant, said church volunteer Claude Bushman, because the slip was the departure point for Mormons beginning their journey west in 1846.

The statue proposed for the site, called "The Frontier Prophet" and created by artist Douglas Swartz, depicts a rugged Smith going into the distance as he works over a field free slung with an axe in his hand.

The church and the Parks Department proposed to install the statue from Dec. 23 through next June to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Smith's birth.

"They're not proselytizing and it's temporary," said Harold Reed, chairman of the community board's Arts and Entertainment Task Force, which earlier last month had voted to approve the installation. "We live in a free country," he said. "We can honor somebody else's belief and it's okay. To me it's like free speech, first amendment, allowing people to be."

But at the full community board meeting on Oct. 18, feelings about the statue were mixed.

"The history of the gentlemen, as far as I'm concerned, is not deserving of a statue in our city," said board member George Chan.

Mary Annino, another board member, disagreed, arguing that people's personal feelings about Smith should not play into their decision on the statue. "There are people who hate Thomas Jefferson, who do not like George Washington, but they're not out there tearing the statues down," he said.

"I think that this is a major religion in the United States and it is not appropriate to take such a stand without educating yourself on it," said board member Bill Turetsky, who cautioned that the board couldn't "legally" vote if it was against the statue.

"I wouldn't vote for a statue of Moses," countered board member Bruce Chinnock, co-chair of the board's Landmarks Committee, noting that he is Jewish. "I wouldn't vote for a statue of Robert Moses."

The board rejected the statue by a vote of 18 to 7.

Claude Bushman, who is spearheading the project for the church, was at the meeting but remained silent during the debate.

"I don't know how you lose more, by fighting or submitting," Bushman said in a telephone interview adding that the church had not decided how hard to push for the location.

"There are 20,000 of us living in the vicinity and we should have the right to participate in public discourse," Bushman said.

The Parks Department is considering other sites for the statue, a spokeswoman for the agency said.

Bushman said she was not surprised that the proposal had raised eyebrows at the Community Board. The legacy of Smith, a noted bigamist, often sparks controversy.

"I know that the church has a troubled past," she said. "But a lot of churches have a troubled past. In some cases it seems to matter and in others it doesn't."

*Online version of the Tribeca Tribune's article on Community Board 1's rejection of the Joseph Smith Statue*

## Joseph Returns to the City *(continued from page 2)*

The incident was very painful to all of us involved. We had come head-on against the discrimination that Latter-day Saints and the Church seldom meet directly these days. How should we respond? A newspaper reporter called me the next day to ask about the incident. He had found it remarkable that the Board had overruled its own committee. I said I didn't know whether we lost more when we fought against such things or whether we ignored them. I made a few calls, wondering whether anything could be salvaged.

A few days later the parks administrator called to say that she had conferred with her boss and decided that the project had already moved forward a long way, and it should proceed. Community Board approval was desirable, but not required. We could still work toward our installation.

But then NYC Transit was not happy with the proposed locations of the statue. They wanted someone to go to their archives and determine for sure that the statue would not interfere with anything below ground. This necessitated a trip into the bowels of the city storage areas, access to plans all stored on microfilms and in the computer. I found the records

of the installation including a huge round tunnel about twenty feet high, like the one in *Die Hard II* and all sorts of stairways, vents, hatches and equipment. Not exactly knowing what I was looking for, I printed out and brought home a huge sheaf of plans showing many details of the underground. It was a James Bondian experience, and as I carried home the secrets of that important underground facility, I could imagine some dangerous enemy getting hold of them, planting bombs, and destroying the subway system and the City.

Back in the days of working on the Ship Brooklyn plaque, the person I visited most often was James Zethraeus, the city's chief architect in the DCAS. We had become friends, so when I needed

someone to look at the plans and interpret them for the location and the weight of the statue, I called on him. He was good enough to walk over one lunchtime and meet me at the site. He flipped through the plans, interested in looking over all the layers down there. He immediately determined that the weight of the statue would be no problem. All the construction was heavy-duty. In fact, that day a good sized truck was parked in the center of the park. It weighed much more than the 800-1,000 pounds or so of our statue. He looked over the underground equipment and recommended a couple of places that would interfere the least, including the place we had originally asked for. I submitted a report and detailed map.

All this time we had been working toward completing the requirements of the necessary and lengthy agreement with the Parks department designed to cover every contingency giving all responsibility and cost for installation, supervision, maintenance and removal to us. A significant security deposit of \$4,000 and insurance of \$3,000,000 was required. There were limitations on publicity and directions for everything. Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, with a non-profit foundation and a 401(c)3 tax exempt status was willing to be the legal entity sponsoring the statue. Robert S. Clark agreed to sign the eleven page agreement for the foundation and arranged for the security deposit and insurance.

By then, we were in a race against time. We wanted to dedicate the statue on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Prophet Joseph Smith. We had been aiming at the date since the beginning. But every little detail and document associated with the agreement had to be completed and filed in the Parks department office. The money had to be in place, the documents signed, the approvals given. The days inched on. The people in Provo were about to buy \$2,000 worth of airplane tickets. Were we on line to continue? "The Frontier Prophet," now completed and cast in bronze was about to set out. He would travel in the back of a pick up truck driven by Jack Branin. Could the journey proceed? We had to say yes. If we didn't proceed as per



*Sculptor Dee Jay Bawden with his creation.  
Photo: Hector Grillone*



plan, we would be unable to make up the time later. Mighty faith was called for. Finally, at the last minute, all the arrangements were completed and in time. Official permission for the installation of the statue for six months (through June 18, 2006) was granted.

On Friday evening, December 16, the Provo entourage arrived. On Sunday morning, December 18, we gathered again to install the statue. It was then that we had our first glance of “The Frontier Prophet,” a bronze effigy lying in the body of a truck. A person could look up his hollow base up into his feet and legs. Jack Branin, who hauled the statue the 2,200 miles from Utah in the back of his Chevy pickup, said the statue drew many curious glances along the way. People asked if the statue was for sale. He said that the farther east he got, the higher he raised the price.

At ten in the morning, having looked over the place, Steve L. Glenn who had managed the creation of the statue instructed the several strong young men who had traveled east with him to begin. Steve’s sons, his proto sons, and the sculptor lifted the bronze prophet from the truck’s bed. They put it down and urged the figure a little this way and that until all were satisfied with the position. Then the group tipped the figure up so that the bottom with its four brass flanges was visible. One man spread the adhesive on the bottom of each flange and the statue was restored to its upright position. It was installed. The parks administrator said she had never seen such an efficient operation. Artist Dee Jay Bawden said that the occasion called for some music. He pulled out his harmonica, and skillfully played a rendition of “We Thank Thee, O God, For A Prophet.” It was a magical moment. So Joseph Smith, in bronze, took up residence at Old Slip. He was in place five days before the planned event.

The weather was brutal those December days. Would people come to the dedication, a couple of days before Christmas, in the terrible weather, at the last moment’s invitation when we finally got the word out? We were likely to have at least the faithful few. During those last days I ran from official office to office to

secure the necessary permits for a public event that would have both amplified sound and artificial light, even though the financial markets would be closed, most people would have gone home early for holiday celebrations, and the streets would be empty. Then, just when all had come together, the New York City transit system, for whom we had jumped through many hoops over the past months, promised to snafu the event entirely. The transit workers walked out on strike. All the buses and subways New Yorkers depend on stopped running. Workers stayed home. Traffic was clogged. People walked. How could anyone get to Old Slip in Lower Manhattan without the subway? Well, we would walk, but would anyone else? But the strike lasted only three days, ending on the night of Thursday December 22<sup>nd</sup>. The next day the trains were up and running again.

So, on the target date, Friday December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005, the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of Joseph Smith, “The Frontier Prophet,” founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, translator of the Book of Mormon, and significant citizen of the state of New York, a heroic bronze statue was dedicated in Old Slip park. About 300 adults and many additional children made their way downtown for a 4 PM ceremony, gathering in the dusk. The weather was more moderate than before. Crews in nearby office buildings had spiffed up the little park. Boy Scouts were practicing covering up the statue with a blue tarp and taking it off. The meeting began. Area Seventy Elder A. Kim Smith made opening historical remarks. As the Boy Scouts drew the tarp from the statue, the group sang hymns of the Restoration to a brass accompaniment. President Brent J. Belnap pronounced a dedicatory prayer that made clear how the statue’s presence in New York City was, in fact, a marvel. He concluded, “Bless this memorial, that through it, ‘millions [including right here in New York City] shall know ‘Brother Joseph’ again.’” (See sidebar for full text of the dedicatory prayer.)



*Crowd attending the unveiling of the Joseph Smith Statue  
Photo: Hector Grillone*

*Continued on next page*

## Joseph Returns to the City *(continued from previous page)*

The short program was over. The statue was dedicated. The group then went to a generously offered conference room in the neighboring Goldman Sachs offices where they had refreshments and heard a brief presentation on Joseph Smith by scholar Richard Bushman, who particularly enjoyed responding to many children's questions (what was his favorite food and sport, did he have a pet, etc.). Many had their pictures taken



*Scouts prepare to unveil the Joseph Smith Statue*

with "The Frontier Prophet." Since then, local church members, tourists, and the curious in generous numbers have traveled to Old Slip to see "The Frontier Prophet." We are very happy to have him in town.

Our experience here shows us how projects that seemed impossible are accomplished. We have to have very specific goals of what we hope to do. Then we have to be tenacious. We are grateful for the groups that stand willing to help, in this case the donors of the statue and the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation that provided funding. We also had help from our guardian angels. As we patrol the boundaries where the organized Church meets the greater community, we have to try new hard things all the time. Sometimes we can bring them to fruition. When our projects do not succeed, we are better prepared for the next campaign. But that which we do not attempt to do, never gets done.

### **Postscript**

The text on the plaque on the base of the statue had to be pre-approved by the Parks department. That's a lot of text for a plaque, and the letters were small. Always engaged in some other task, I never read it myself. The statue had been in place for almost two months when I got an angry call from the Parks depart-

ment that they had received letters of complaint about the plaque wording. It turned out that the following words were on the plaque that had not been in the pre-approved text: "At the age of 14 he told of a remarkable vision in which he saw and conversed with God the Father and Jesus Christ," a fairly unremarkable comment for one of our church meetings, but one that sent some local citizens into the stratosphere. The Parks department had gone out on a limb in overruling the Community Board, and now it seemed that we had abused their good faith by trying surreptitiously to slip a proselyting message on to the statue. I said I had no idea where it had come from, somewhere between my desk and the foundry.

In any case, I was told, the words would have to go or the statue would have to come down. Then began the anguished calls. How does one unwrite in bronze? Could the plaque be removed? No, it was welded on. We finally got a maintenance man from an adjoining building to grind down the offending letters with a drill. That very afternoon the sentence was erased. The plaque looks as if someone had made a very determined effort to deface the surface. Now I get shocked calls wondering if I know about this apparent vandalism.

The handsome Joseph continues to survey the scene, serene and calm. He suffered a great deal in life. We had hoped that he could be honored in death. Maybe in the future.

### **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> New York New York Stake LDS History Committee, ed. Scott D. Tiffany. *City Saints: Mormons in the New York Metropolis*. New York, New York: New York Stake History Group, 2004, 12, 23.
- <sup>2</sup> Joseph Smith, Jr. *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*. Ed. by Dean C. Jessee. Rev. Ed. Salt Lake City Utah: Deseret Book, 2002, 278; *City Saints*, 12-13.
- <sup>3</sup> *City Saints*, 13-16.
- <sup>4</sup> *City Saints*, 35.
- <sup>5</sup> *City Saints*, 24-27.
- <sup>6</sup> Julie Menin to Clair Weiss, 1 November 2005.

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## Looking for more?

The New York New York Stake History Committee has its own website where you can find more information about the articles in this newsletter, including color versions of the photos here and additional photos we couldn't include in print.

The website also includes back issues of this newsletter, a system that allows readers to submit information, and further resources about the history of the LDS Church in New York City.

<http://www.nyldshistory.com>