

## PREFACE

During the last session of the 169th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President Gordon B. Hinckley said in his closing remarks: "I feel impressed to announce that among all of the temples we are constructing, we plan to rebuild the Nauvoo Temple." As he continued to speak some members began to weep with joy and others shouted with excitement. He closed his remarks on that special temple by saying: "The new building will stand as a memorial to those who built the first such structure there on the banks of the Mississippi."

For seven years Nauvoo was the headquarters and major gathering place for Latter-day Saints. This brief period served as an important interlude between their experiences in Ohio and Missouri and their historic exodus to the Rocky Mountain country. While Latter-day Saints were transforming a rugged wilderness into one of the largest communities in Illinois, they prepared themselves for a successful colonizing adventure in the intermountain west.

Opinions of these people and their community varied widely. While some visitors were impressed with the beautiful brick dwellings, stores and temple that had been built in what recently had been a wilderness and swamp near the Mississippi, others were concerned because numerous shabby temporary dwellings had been constructed there. Some saw the beauty of the gardens and others complained about the muddy streets. Some recognized the genuine power of the leader, Joseph Smith, and others could not understand how one who demonstrated a lack of formal education could inspire so many people to engage in unusual spiritual and physical pursuits.

My appreciation of Nauvoo intensified as my wife and I served as missionaries in the City of Joseph in 1992 and 1993. During those years I had an opportunity to formally discuss with missionaries and others various themes relat-

ing to the Nauvoo experience, themes that help us gain a greater insight into the people and power of Nauvoo. These essays, with additions and revisions, became the foundation of this publication.

A major theme of these discussions was that between 1839 and 1846 Nauvoo the beautiful was an unusual place of inward peace and increased spiritual commitment. One word that aptly summarizes the seven and a half year experience of Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo is the word temple. When one considers nearly every theme relating to the Nauvoo experience, such as the gathering, settlement pattern, doctrinal development, organizational development, economy and forces of oppression, the word temple dominates or is a significant aspect of the discussion.

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