

Chapter 2

MORMON CHURCH HISTORY WITHIN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT

On April 6, 1830 in a small house in Fayette, New York, Joseph Smith, Jr. and five other men organized the Church of Christ, later renamed the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This event had been preceded by several religious experiences of Joseph Smith and also the publication of *The Book of Mormon* on March 26, 1830. Within a short time of its organization, the Church had attracted a large following in the neighboring communities around Manchester and Palmyra, New York, and Kirtland, Ohio. Other communities of Mormons were also founded in the western section of Missouri.

As is usually the case with new religious movements, there were those who were skeptical of the veracity of Mormonism and who were vocal with their doubts and criticisms. The main thrust of what could be termed anti-Mormon activity was through the press. While criticism of Joseph Smith and *The Book of Mormon* had been appearing in various newspapers since the beginning of the movement, the first anti-Mormon pamphlet was published by Alexander Campbell, co-founder of the Campbellite movement. The sixteen page tract, a compilation of news articles, published in Boston in 1832, was titled *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon . . . and a Refutation of its Pretences to Divine Authority*.¹ Shortly following the publication of Campbell's tract, Ezra Booth, an apostate Mormon, published a series of nine letters on the evils of Mormonism in the *Ohio Star*.²