In the months following the April 1830 organization of the Church of Christ (as the Church was then known), Emma Hale Smith began to understand more fully what her husband’s prophetic calling would mean for her and their young family. Emma, who turned 26 years old on July 10, 1830, had married Joseph three years earlier despite the objections of her parents, Isaac and Elizabeth Hale. She believed in the visions and revelations received by her husband, and those three eventful years had confirmed to her that he was indeed a prophet.

“He had neither manuscript nor book to read from. If he had had anything of the Kind he could not have concealed it from me.”

By the time of their marriage, Joseph had met with the angel Moroni once a year for three consecutive years at a hill near Palmyra, New York, to discuss the golden plates from which he would translate the Book of Mormon. In the fall of 1827, Emma went with Joseph and waited in the wagon while he received the golden plates. She soon began to assist as a scribe in the translation process. “I frequently wrote day after day,” she later recalled, “often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us. . . . He had neither manuscript nor book to read from. . . . If he had had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me. . . . The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen table cloth. . . . I once felt of the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape.”

Decades later, she marveled at what had happened. She recalled that at the time of their marriage Joseph “could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon.”

Emma’s Trials

But these spiritual experiences had been accompanied by inconvenience and pain. Joseph and Emma first lived with the Smith family in Manchester, New York, and then moved to live with the Hales in Harmony, Pennsylvania, where Emma had grown up. During their first years of marriage, the couple moved at least four times between Harmony and upstate New York, traversing approximately 300 miles each time. In June 1828, Emma gave birth to a son, who “died the same hour” of his birth. Their early years were filled with poverty. Joseph wrote that in 1829 they had become very poor—“reduced in property,” he termed it—and Emma’s father “was about to turn me out of doores & I had not where to go and I cried unto the Lord that he would provide for me to accomplish the work whereunto he had commanded me.” In their hour of need, faithful friends—such as Josiah Stowell, Martin Harris, and Oliver Cowdery—often provided Joseph and Emma with financial assistance.

Notwithstanding these challenges, Emma desired to be baptized in June 1830. Joseph and Emma traveled to Colesville, New York, where she was baptized along
with several other converts, including members of the Knight family, who had also supported them financially during the translation of the Book of Mormon. However, on the evening of Sunday, June 27, opponents of the infant church destroyed a dam built for the baptisms. Early the next morning, Joseph Smith’s history recounts, “we were on the alert, and before our enemies were aware we had repaired the dam, and proceeded to baptize.” Oliver Cowdery baptized Emma and 12 others. Before the baptismal service had ended, “the mob began again to collect, and shortly after we had retired, they amounted to about fifty men.” Joseph, Emma, and the other Church members had gone into Joseph Knight Sr.’s home, but it was soon surrounded by men “raging with anger and apparently wishful to commit violence upon us.” Joseph Smith’s history continues: “Some asked us questions, others threatened us, so that we thought it wisdom to leave and go to the house of Newel Knight.”5 Nevertheless, the Saints were followed, and the harassment continued.

The Saints planned a meeting for that evening, during which Emma and the other newly baptized individuals would receive the gift of the Holy Ghost and be confirmed members of the Church. However, as they gathered, a constable arrested Joseph Smith “on charge of being a disorderly person; of setting the country in an uproar by preaching the Book of Mormon.” The constable explained that the mob hoped to ambush Joseph after his arrest; however, the constable “was determined to save me from them, as he had found me to be a different sort of person from what I had been represented to him.” They soon encountered the mob, but to the “great disappointment” of the vigilantes, the constable “gave the horse the whip and drove me out of their reach.” After arriving in South Bainbridge in Chenango County, the constable stayed with Joseph Smith that night “in an upper room of a Tavern.” To protect Joseph, the constable “slept during the night with his feet against the door, and a loaded musket by his side.”6

Joseph Smith was tried and acquitted in South Bainbridge but then immediately arrested again to stand trial on similar charges in neighboring Broome County. The second constable initially treated Joseph harshly. When they arrived in Broome County, Joseph Smith’s history records, “He took me to a tavern, and gathered in a number of men, who used every means to abuse, ridicule, and insult me.” They spat on Joseph and demanded that he prophesy to them. Relatively close to their home now, Joseph asked that he “be allowed the privilege of spending the night with my wife at home,” but the constable denied his request.7

Following a second trial the next day, Joseph was again acquitted. The constable, according to Joseph Smith’s history, now “asked my forgiveness.”8 Learning of plans by the mob to tar and feather Joseph, the constable helped him escape. Joseph arrived safely at the nearby house of Elizabeth Hale Wasson, Emma’s sister. During her husband’s absence, Emma had been “awaiting with much anxiety the issue of those ungodly proceedings.”9 She had gathered with other women “for the purpose of praying for the deliverance” of her husband.10 Once reunited, Joseph and Emma traveled home to Harmony, Pennsylvania, in early July. Along
with Oliver Cowdery, Joseph made one more unsuccessful trip to Colesville to confirm the newly baptized Saints but quickly returned to Harmony in the face of renewed opposition.11

**Outpouring of Revelation**

Following his return to Harmony, Joseph Smith received three revelations in July 1830. The first revelation, now known as Doctrine and Covenants 24, addressed Joseph and Oliver Cowdery, “telling them concerning their Calls.” The revelation reminded them that they had been called “to write the Book of Mormon & to my ministry.” Likely referring in part to their recent opposition, the revelation continued, “I have lifted thee up out of thine afflictions & have counseled thee that thou hast been delivered from all thine enemies.”12

The revelation also spoke of Joseph Smith’s material circumstances, instructing him to visit Church members in Colesville, Fayette, and Manchester after he had “sowed [his] fields.” The revelation made clear that Joseph should be supported by Church members so he could “devote all [his] service in Zion.” Joseph was told, “In temporal [labors] thou shalt not have strength for this is not thy calling.”13 This revelation led Joseph and Emma to understand that they would struggle financially and need to rely on support from Church members because of their dedication to the ministry.

Whatever Emma’s hopes for her married life were, she could hardly have anticipated the degree to which opponents of the new church would physically intimidate and legally harass the Smiths or the way the demands of preaching and Church administration would take her husband away from their farm and family, disrupting their home life and threatening their livelihood.

In the context of these anxieties and disappointments, Joseph received a revelation for Emma, Doctrine and Covenants 25, which reiterated, “Verily I say unto thee that thou shalt lay aside the things of this world & seek for the things of a better.” Through the revelation, Emma received words of consolation and instruction. She was told, “Murmur not because of the things which thou hast not seen for they are withheld from thee & the World”—perhaps a reference to the golden plates, which Emma later recalled she had handled on one occasion but not seen. The revelation called Emma “an elect lady” and told her that the “office of thy calling shall be for a comfort unto my Servant Joseph thy husband in his afflictions with consoleing words in the spirit of meekness.” The revelation also spoke of Emma’s work in the Church, promising that she would be “ordained” by her husband “to expound Scriptures & exhort the Church.”14 Furthermore, Emma was instructed to serve as a scribe to her husband and to compile a hymnal. Joseph Smith later explained that Emma “was ordain’d at the time, the Revelation was given, to expound the scriptures to all; and to teach the female part of community; and that not she alone, but others, may attain to the same blessings.”15

The third revelation received by Joseph Smith in July 1830, now canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 26, instructed Joseph, along with Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer, to dedicate their time “to the studying [of] the Scriptures & to preaching & to confirming the
Church at Colesvill & to performing thy labours on the Land.” 16

In early August, a few weeks following these three revelations, Newel and Sally Knight traveled from Colesville, New York, to visit Joseph and Emma Smith in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Sally Knight had been baptized on the same day as Emma, but neither had been confirmed. As such, Joseph Smith’s history recounts, “It was proposed that we should confirm them, and partake together of the sacrament, before he and his wife should leave us.—In order to prepare for this; I set out to go to procure some wine for the occasion, but had gone only a short distance when I was met by a heavenly messenger, and received the following revelation.” 17

The angel warned Joseph Smith not to “Purchase Wine neither strong drink of your enemies.” 18 Joseph then returned home and “prepared some wine of our own make” for the confirmation meeting, which consisted of the Smiths, the Knights, and John Whitmer. Joseph Smith’s history records, “We partook together of the sacrament, after which we confirmed these two sisters into the church, and spent the evening in a glorious manner. The Spirit of the Lord was poured out upon us, we praised the Lord God, and rejoiced exceedingly.” 19

These four revelations, received between July and September 1830, provided crucial instructions to Joseph and Emma Smith, as well as other Church members, in the formative months following the Church’s organization.

Emma particularly treasured the revelation addressed to her. With the assistance of William W. Phelps, she followed the Lord’s instructions to compile the Church’s first hymnal. 20 In 1842, Joseph Smith read the revelation to Emma at the organizational meeting of the Relief Society. He also read 2 John 1, which references the “elect lady,” and explained that she was “called an Elect lady” because she was “elected to preside.” 21

Joseph stated that “the revelation was then fulfilled by Sister Emma’s Election to the Presidency of the Society.” 22

The revelation regarding Emma Smith, received during the tumultuous summer months of 1830, was invoked and discussed in Relief Society meetings throughout the 19th century. For example, at a jubilee celebration of the Relief Society’s 50th anniversary in 1892 held in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, “Zina Y. W. Card . . . read in a very clear and distinct voice the Revelation given to Emma Smith, through Joseph the Seer . . . wherein Sister Emma is called an Elect Lady.” 23 Early Relief Society general presidents were sometimes called “Elect Lady.” For instance, when Zina D. H. Young became Relief Society general president, Emmeline B. Wells (who herself later served as Relief Society general president) wrote to her, “I congratulate you my beloved sister on being called, to be, according to the words of Joseph the Prophet, ‘The Elect Lady.’” 24

Footnotes
10 “Some of the Remarks of John S. Reed, Esq., as Delivered before the State Convention,” Times and Seasons, vol. 5, no. 11 (June 1, 1844), 551.
11 Joseph Smith, “History, 1838–1856, volume A-1,” 47, jo-
Emma Hale Smith

Emma Remained in Nauvoo

During her 17-year marriage to the Prophet Joseph Smith, Emma moved from Pennsylvania to New York to Ohio to Missouri and then Illinois. She moved 18 times and lived in 13 houses. Of these 13 locations, only four of them could be called her own. On three of these moves she had to leave behind most or all of her furniture. On four she had to move because of disruption caused by neighbors. On two additional occasions she was driven from her home at the threat of her life.

Emma had 11 children (two were the adopted Murdock twins), and six children died in infancy. Another died young at age 26. By age 40, Emma had lost her husband, her mother and father, her father-in-law, three brothers-in-law and five children. In addition, Emma seemed to wax and wane in her acceptance of Joseph’s practice of plural marriage.

One of her grandchildren, Emma Belle Smith Kennedy, wrote: “Her eyes were brown and sad. She would smile with her lips, but to me, as small as I was, I never saw the brown eyes smile. I asked my mother one day, why don’t Grandma laugh with her eyes like you do, and my mother said because she has a deep sorrow in her heart.”

For these and other reasons, Emma remained in Nauvoo and did not travel west with the Saints.