Stephen Markham (1800–1878) accepted the gospel in Ohio in 1837. A prosperous farmer and faithful Saint, he sold his possessions at the counsel of Joseph Smith to help sixty people move from Kirtland to Far West, Missouri. During the Missouri Mormon War he was assigned the duties of escorting the Prophet’s family, Emma Smith and her children to safety. During the Nauvoo era he served as a bodyguard for Joseph Smith and again sacrificed a new home (moving into a tent) to help the Prophet pay legal fees. He was with the brethren in Carthage, but was refused entrance to the jail a few hours before the Martyrdom. He was one of the 42 men along with Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow that entered the Salt Lake Valley July 21, 1847. He later colonized Spanish Fork, Utah. He is buried in the Spanish Fork City Cemetery.

MARKHAM IN MISSOURI

The true convictions of this newly baptized member were demonstrated during the massive exodus of the faithful followers of Joseph Smith in Missouri. Markham was a well-to-do farmer at the time of this conversion in 1837. Upon the request of the Prophet, he sold his property, finance and led the journey of sixty saints from Kirtland, Ohio to Far West, Missouri. This proved to be the first of many such events which occurred in less than one year from the time he joined the Church.

As the saints arrived at Far West, Missouri, they discovered that conditions among Church members were not much different from the problems in Ohio. The Mormons were being driven from their homes, their women assaulted and their property confiscated. Their plight was further complicated when Joseph Smith and a number of Church leaders were arrested on October 31, 1838, at Far West and letter imprisoned in the Liberty Jail, Clay County, Missouri.

Extermination Order

In a communication to the leader of anti-Mormon forces in Missouri, Governor Lilburn W. Boggs expressed his sentiments concerning the strife between the saints and the non-Mormons. In the texts of this communiqué, Governor Boggs penned his hateful extermination order: “The Mormons must be treated as enemies and must be exterminated or driven from the state if necessary for the public good.”

The Mormons and representatives of the Governor formed several committees to investigate and work out a satisfactory solution to the “Mormon Problem.” After considerable deliberation on the matter, an equitable settlement could not be reached and the Mormons were forced to leave the state.

REMOVAL FROM MISSOURI

On January 26, 1838, a group of saints met at Far West and formed a special committee to draft a preamble and resolutions to aid the Church to (1) remove its members from the state, (2) determine the number of families destitute of means to remove, (3) ascertain how much money could be raised by the Church members. This same committee met again on January 29th and adopted the following “Covenant of Removal.”

We whose names are hereunder written, do for ourselves individually hereby covenant to stand by and assist one another, to the utmost of our abilities, in removing from this state in compliance with the authority of the state; and we do hereby acknowledge ourselves firmly bound to the extent of all our available property, to dispose of by a committee who shall be appointed for the purpose of providing means for the removing from this
state of the poor and destitute who shall be considered worthy, till there shall not be one left who desires to remove from the state: with this proviso, that no individual shall be deprived of the right of the disposal of his own property for the above purpose, or if having the control of it, or so much of it as shall be necessary for the removing of his own family, and to be entitled to the over-plus, after the work is effected; and further-more said committee shall give receipts for all property, and an account of the expenditure of the same.9

This covenant was signed by 380 members among whom was Stephen Markham.10

Markham’s Duties

The removal committee also appointed a special group of seven men to supervise the business pertaining to the exodus. On February 1, 1839, this number was extended to eleven and included Markham and three others.11 During this meeting the committee also resolved that the families of Joseph Smith and the other prisoners should be removed from the state first.

On February 7, 1839, Stephen Markham escorted Joseph Smith’s wife, Emma, and her children to Illinois.12 He then returned to Far West.

Two weeks later, February 21, 1839, the removal committee again sent Markham to Illinois to visit the saints there and obtain the power of attorney to sell the lands they left behind.13

On April 9, 1839, Stephen was dispatched to visit Joseph Smith and the other prisoners at Gallatin for the purpose of giving the Church leaders one hundred dollars. Markham also carried with him a copy of a recent statute passed by the Missouri Legislature, granting Joseph and Hyrum a change of venue.14

Markham left by assignment for Independence, Missouri on April 13, 1839 to close the business of the Church in that area.15 Nine days later, April 22, he returned to Far West.

Blakely Episode

Fearing that Joseph Smith and the other prisoners would escape from the Liberty Jail, the judge had them escorted to Daviess County to await trial. While at Gallatin, the Church leaders were visited by Stephen Markham, who had been sent by the removal committee. During his April visit a request was made to call him as a witness for the defense. This request was immediately refused. The next day, April 11, however, Stephen was allowed to testify before the court. After he had given his testimony, a guard named Blakely asked Markham to talk with him outside. Upon leaving the courthouse, Blakely called out:

_________________ you ____________ Mormon. I’ll kill you, and struck at Markham with his fist and then with a club. Markham took the club from him and threw it over the fence.

There were ten of the mob who immediately rushed upon Markham to kill him, Colonel William P. Peniston, captain of the guard, being one of the number. But
Stephen Markham

Markham told them he could kill the whole of them at one blow apiece and drove them off.16

The ten mobbers went home to get their guns, determined to shoot Markham when they returned.

During the night, April 11, 1839, the Prophet saw in vision the danger his “beloved Brother Markham” was in. Joseph awakened Stephen, telling him that if he would arise early and not wait for the judge and lawyers, he would arrive home (Far West) safely. Joseph further stated that if he did not do as counseled, the mob would shoot him on his way back.17

Early the next morning Markham did as instructed and rode rapidly toward Far West, arriving by 9:00 a.m. During his journey the mobbers pursued him but failed to catch him.18

Stephen remained in Missouri until April 24, 1839, performing his removal duties; at which time he left for Illinois, four days after the saints had left.19

SETTLING NAUVOO

As the exiled saints removed from Missouri, they left behind them real and personal property amounting to about $1,381,000.00.20 This forced exodus left them penniless, without adequate housing, and at the mercies of the citizens in Iowa and Illinois. The Church now faced the challenge of purchasing land to accommodate thousands of refugees. Any purchase would have to be made without cash or collateral. On May 1, 1839, Joseph Smith secured 135 acres from Hugh White for $5,000.00; also a farm from Dr. Isaac Galland for $9,000.00.21 Both of these transactions were made on a promissory note basis. This newly acquired property was located on a prominent bend in the Mississippi River in Western Illinois. On this sight the saints built what eventually became the largest city in the state.

The purchase of Commerce and the financial stress attached to the settlement of a new area prompted Joseph Smith to solicit the aid of various members to raise the needed revenue. In a communiqué directed to the Church membership at Quincy, Illinois, the Prophet commissioned Stephen Markham as one of these agents:

From our knowledge of the good sacrifice made by the bearer, Brother Stephen Markham, in behalf of the welfare of us, and the church generally and from the great trust which we have often times reposed in him, and as often found him trustworthy, not seeking aggrandizement, but rather that of the community, we feel warranted in commissioning him to go forth among the faithful as our agent to gather up and receive such means in money or otherwise, as shall enable us to meet our engagements which are now about to devolve upon us in consequence of our purchases here for the church; and we humbly trust that our brethren generally will enable him to come to our assistance before our credit shall suffer on this account.22

Evidently Joseph had a great deal of confidence and trust in Markham’s character and ability to fulfill such an assignment. This task could also have been an extension of his activities as a member of the Missouri Removal Committee.

MARKHAM IN NAUVOO

Nauvoo Legion

On December 16, 1840, eight months after the arrival of the Church in Nauvoo, the city was officially chartered by the state of Illinois.23 This charter contained twenty-eight sections regulating the civic affairs of the city. Section twenty-five created a military body known as the “Nauvoo Legion.”

Stephen Markham became an officer in this military
group. On February 1, 1841, he was commissioned as a Captain.23 Three months later, May 1, 1841, he as promoted was promoted to the office of Lieutenant Colonel in the first regiment, first cohort.24 On September 24, 1842, he became Colonel of the first regiment.25 His last promotion was Private Brigadier General of the first cohort which occurred December 21, 1843.26 During the time Markham served in the Nauvoo Legion, he fulfilled his responsibilities well. On numerous occasions he was involved with protecting the freedoms granted the Mormons under the Nauvoo Charter and after its repeal his involvement increased. On one occasion he and his men spent fifteen days quelling the mobs who were burning the saints’ houses, barns, and grain stacks.27 To defend against the would-be thieves in Nauvoo, members of the Legion volunteered for secret service duty. As an officer, Markham became involved in selecting these volunteers.28

Markham's commissioned title of “Colonel” was affectionately attached to him for the remainder of his life. Many knew him best as the Colonel..... (page 18)

Prophet Bodyguard
(page 20)

During the turbulent times in Nauvoo, Joseph's life became of grave concern to the saints. To insure the Prophet's safety, Stephen Markham and other members of the Nauvoo Legion were chosen to be the Prophet's special body guards….29 (page 21)

Arrest at Dixon
(page 23)

Four years after their incarceration at the Liberty Jail, John C. Bennett, an apostate Church member, was successful in convincing Governor Thomas Reynolds of Missouri, that since Joseph Smith had escaped from the Missouri authorities before being properly tried, he should be indicted again. The indictment was obtained and on June 13, 1843, Governor Reynolds issued a requisition on the Illinois State Governor, Thomas Ford, for the extradition of the Prophet. Joseph H. Reynolds was assigned as the agent of Missouri and Harmon T. Wilson, of Illinois, was given the responsibility of serving the Prophet with the warrant of arrest.30

Word of the intended arrest soon reached Nauvoo; however, Joseph had left the city to visit relatives named Wasson, near Dixon, Lee county, some distance to the north of Nauvoo. Concerned for the safety of their leader, Hyrum Smith dispatched Stephen Markham and a fellow companion, on June 18, to warn President Smith of the impending danger.31 The urgency of the message caused them to travel the 212 miles in 66 hours. When Markham and his companion delivered their information, the Prophet replied, “I have no fear. I shall not leave here: I shall find friends, and the Missourians cannot hurt me, I tell you in the name of Israel's God.”32

On June 23, Sheriff Reynolds of Missouri and Constable Wilson of Carthage, Illinois, arrived at Dixon disguised as Mormon Elders. At Dixon they hired a man and team to take them to the Wasson's to see the Prophet. Concerning this meeting, Joseph said:

I was in the yard going to the barn when Wilson stepped to the end of the house and saw me. He accosted me in a very uncouth, ungentlemanly manner, when Reynolds stepped up to me, collared me, then both of them presented cocked pistols to my breast, without
showing any writ or serving any process. Reynolds cried out, “G__ d___ you, if you stir I’ll shoot; g__ D--- if you stir one inch, I shoot you, be still, or I’ll shoot you, by G__.”

I replied, “If you have any legal process to serve, I am at all times subject to law, and shall not offer resistance.”

Reynolds replied, “G__ d___ you, if you say another word I will shoot you, by G__.”

I answered, “Shoot away; I am not afraid of your pistols.”

At this juncture, Stephen Markham walked deliberately toward the officers, whereupon they turned their pistols on him and threatened to take his life if he came closer. When Reynolds and Wilson saw that their threats went unheeded, they again turned on the Prophet, jamming their pistols into his side. They instructed Markham that Joseph would be a dead man if he advanced further.

The officers then hurriedly took the Prophet to their wagon without honoring a request that he be given time to secure his clothing and bid his family goodbye. Disturbed over the denial of Joseph's request, Markham seized the horses by their bits, and held them until Emma could bring a hat and coat to her husband. Irritated by the Colonel's action, the officers again threatened to shoot the Colonel.

As Reynolds and Wilson finally sped off in their wagon, Joseph instructed Markham to ride into Dixon and secure a writ of habeas corpus. That afternoon a writ was obtained from a Justice, charging the two officers with threatening Joseph's life; whereupon Reynolds and Wilson were taken into custody by the local constable.

On June 25, the Prophet sent Markham with a letter directing General Wilson Law, officer in the Nauvoo Legion, to meet him at Monmouth with sufficient troops to prevent his being kidnapped into Missouri. After the Colonel returned he overheard Reynolds and Wilson discuss their kidnapping plans. Their intent was to raise a company of volunteers to take Joseph Smith by force to the mouth of Rock River, on the Mississippi, where a company of men were ready to take him across the river into Missouri. Markham alerted the Sheriff of Lee County and a guard was placed outside the building to ensure that no one passed into or out of the house during the night.

Through the efforts of Stephen Markham and others, this twelve-day ordeal ended and Joseph Smith returned to Nauvoo to be among his friends.

Personal Sacrifice

Because of the many anti-Mormon forces at work in Nauvoo and the surrounding counties, the Prophet was compelled to continually hire lawyers to defend himself against their charges. These experiences were both time consuming and extremely expensive. Many of the saints contributed large sums of money to help Joseph pay for these burdensome court costs, among them was Stephen Markham. Shortly before the martyrdom, Markham sold his only house, which he had just completed, and gave the entire proceeds to the Prophet. The revenue raised through this sale amounted to $1,200.00. He then moved his family into a tent until another lodging could be constructed.

While living in Nauvoo, Stephen and Hannah lost their only daughter, Dinah, age thirteen. There were now left with three sons: Warren, Whiting, and David.
Martial Law Declared

News of the destruction of the Expositor was soon circulated throughout the state. Anti-Mormon sentiment began to increase and many non-Mormons felt that they should march into Nauvoo immediately and exterminate the Latter-day Saints. This attitude was verified by an affidavit sworn by Stephen Markham:

On the 17 day of June 1844 came Stephen Markham before me, Willard Richards, recorder of said City, and after being duly sworn, desposeth and saith that for the public papers, especially the Warsaw papers, and from reports from the various precincts a mob may be expected to make an immediate attack upon the citizens and city of Nauvoo, on account of the gatherings of the various precincts and threats exterminate the Latter-day Saints.37

To combat the information given by the Colonel, and others, Joseph called out the Nauvoo Legion to protect the citizens. Markham, the commander of the picket guard, was instructed to post a guard on all the roads leading out of the city.38 Other commanders were given similar orders to help secure the premises against possible mob attack.

The Martyrdom

While preparing to defend the city of Nauvoo, the Prophet received a letter from Governor Ford, charging the city council and the mayor, with gross misuse of their civil powers. After reading the Governor’s letter, Joseph stated, “There is no mercy – no mercy here.”39 Venting his feelings further the Prophet said:

I told Stephen Markham that if I and Hyrum were ever taken again we should be massacred, or I was not a prophet of God. I want Hyrum to live to avenge my blood, but he is determined not to leave me.40

Believing that the Church members would be safe if he were to leave Nauvoo, Joseph decided to go the Rocky Mountains. His plans were changed, however, after receiving word that Emma wanted him to submit to the law and that some of the saints were calling him a coward for leaving. Disappointed over news from Emma and the saints, Joseph elected to return and face the charges.

On the morning of June 25, 1844, the Prophet, his brother Hyrum, Stephen Markham, and those men who had been charged with “riot” over the destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor voluntarily surrendered themselves to the constable at Carthage, Illinois.

That same day the prisoners appeared before Justice Robert F. Smith. After hearing the evidence, bond was set at $500.00 for each defendant. To the surprise of those present the bond was posted. The prisoners were instructed to appear at the next term of the circuit court in Hancock County, Illinois.41

While still in Carthage, the constable arrested Joseph and Hyrum for “treason” against the state of Illinois, for declaring martial law in Nauvoo.

Justice Smith issued a warrant to jail Joseph and
Stephen Markham

The Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were murdered June 27, 1844, at the Carthage Jail. John Taylor (dark coat barring the door) is in possession of Markham’s hickory “Rascal Beater.” The Prophet is shown possessing a defensive hickory club. Moments later Hyrum would be shot in the head.

Hyrum. When the arresting officer arrived at the Hamilton Hotel with his company of Carthage Greys, the prisoners voiced concern that a transfer at that particular time would be exposing them to undue danger.

In spite of the prisoners’ concerns over the feeling of mobocracy at Carthage, the transfer was carried out. Of this experience, one of the prisoners explained:

Now the rush of heavy treads up the stairs drew our attention and the stentorian (sic) voice of an officer demanding that the prisoners, when Willard Richards met him in the door which was actually too narrow for any but myself. Mr. Reid, the consell (sic) also Mr. Taylor, Hyrum Smith, Judge Phelps, Col. Markham and all demonstrated against such an unecessary (sic) exposition of the defendants lives until they desisted. It was then that Justice Smith made out a mittimus, and the “Carthage Grays” escorted them to prison. Col. Markham (was) on one side, with a hickory club, while I was on the other, outside the guard, and Parry’d (warded) off the guns and bayonets of the drunken rabble who tried to break the ranks and stab them (Joseph and Hyrum).42

Again the following day, the Colonel helped protect the Prophet as he was escorted from the jail to the court house for trial.43

Markham stayed with Joseph during the Carthage Jail episode. He held a pass from Governor Ford which allowed him to enter and leave the jail at will. Because of this privilege, the Colonel was frequently asked to deliver messages and take care of business for the prisoners. On the morning of June 26, Joseph sent him and two companions with a message soliciting an interview with the Governor.44 At 1:30 p.m., June 27, Stephen Markham was asked by the Prophet to secure medicine for one of the prisoners. Upon leaving the jail, the Carthage Greys forced him from the city at bayonet point:

Stephen Markham being seen on the streets in the afternoon a number of Carthage Greys captured him, put him on his horse and forced him out of town at the
point of a bayonet, notwithstanding he held a pass from the Governor to go in and out of the jail at pleasure.45

Markham's legs were pierced with numerous bayonet thrusts, filling his boots with blood. The scars of this experience stayed with the Colonel the remainder of his life.46 They stood as a constant reminder of his love and devotion to Joseph Smith.

On and one-half hours after Markham was forced from Carthage, the hostile mobs broke into the jail and martyred Joseph and Hyrum Smith.

Early the next day, June 28, 1844, Emma Smith, Stephen Markham, and two other individuals in Nauvoo received official word from the surviving prisoners advising them that the Prophet and his brother had been killed. That same day the bodies of the deceased were taken from Carthage to the Mansion House in Nauvoo. Upon their arrival, Stephen Markham and six other addressed an anxious crowd of eight to ten thousand grief stricken followers.47 What these men talked about is not known; however, they must have discussed their involvement at Carthage and their feeling concerning the martyrdom of their beloved Prophet-Leader.

For the next two years, Stephen Markham would be called many times to help stop the anti-Mormon aggression in Nauvoo.

Footnotes:

7 Ibid. III, 235-238.
8 Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, January 26, 1839, located in Church Historian's Office, hereafter this collection will be referred to as Journal History.
9 Ibid., January 29, 1839
10 Ibid.
11 DHC, III, 255
12 Ibid. III, 256.
13 Ibid., III, 263
14 Ibid., III, 309.
15 Ibid., III, 319.
16 Ibid., III, 315.
17 Ibid., III, 316.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., III, 326.
Stephen Markham

his commitment to the gospel and his trustworthiness many times before.

A wealthy farmer in the Kirtland area, Stephen joined the Church in 1837. The next year, following the counsel of Joseph Smith, he sold his farm and possessions and used the funds to help Church members move from Kirtland, Ohio, to Far West, Missouri, leading this group of emigrants himself.

When Joseph and other leaders were in Liberty Jail and Church members were forced to leave Far West, Stephen was trusted to help Joseph's family escape from Missouri into Illinois.

In Nauvoo, Illinois, seeing that Joseph would need good legal counsel in several lawsuits, Stephen sold his newly built house and gave Joseph the proceeds. His family moved into a tent until a cabin could be built. Shortly before Joseph went to Carthage, Stephen told him, "I will do as you want me, whatever it may be. I will go with you, or stop here and defend the city until I die, or go and give myself up, just whatever you say I will do." Considering Stephen's absolute commitment to the Prophet, it is not surprising that Joseph refers to him in his personal journal as "my beloved Brother Markham."

Joseph went to Carthage Jail with Stephen Markham and his walking stick on one side and Dan Jones with a hickory club on the other, the two guards keeping the "drunken rabble" away from the Prophet.

When Stephen left the jail on an errand for Joseph, the mob would not let him back inside. Instead, they forced him onto his horse at the point of bayonets, stabbing his legs until his shoes were filled with blood. Gathering around him, they escorted him out of town, threatening to kill him if he returned.

Shortly afterward, a mob of men with black-painted faces stormed the jail and tried to force their guns into the room. Joseph's friends tried to hold the door shut, but some shots got through, and Joseph's brother Hyrum was shot. Outnumbered and outgunned, the prisoners tried to defend themselves as best they could. John Taylor, who later became President of the Church, recounted their efforts:

Brother Joseph ... arose, and with a firm, quick step, and a determined expression of countenance, approached the door, and pulling the six-shooter left by Brother Wheelock from his pocket, opened the door slightly, and snapped the pistol six successive times. ... I had in my hands a large, strong hickory stick, brought there by Brother Markham, and left by him, which I had seized as soon as I saw the mob approach; and while Brother Joseph was firing the pistol, I stood close behind him. As soon as he had discharged it he stepped back, and I immediately took his place next [to] the door, while he occupied the one I had done while he was shooting. ... While I was engaged in parrying the guns, Brother Joseph said, "That's right, Brother Taylor; parry them off as well as you can." These were the last words I ever heard him speak on earth.

Joseph ran to the window, where he was shot multiple times and then fell to the ground below. The mob, having achieved their purpose, soon fled. The Prophet, beloved by so many, was dead.

Enemies of the Church who hoped that Joseph's death would be the end of "Mormonism" underestimated the faith and commitment of Church members like Stephen Markham. Although he had been unable to save the Prophet's life, he remained faithful to the gospel Joseph preached. He served as a captain in Brigham
Young’s pioneer company and helped settle several areas in Utah.

Stephen Markham’s commitment to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and the gospel of Jesus Christ led a biographer to relate, “He was ... unflinching in his integrity to the cause of the great Latter-day work.”

Footnotes
3 “Markham, Stephen,” josephsmithpapers.org.
4 Jenson, Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia, 3:676.
5 Jenson, Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia, 3:676.
6 Jenson, Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia, 3:676.
7 Stephen Markham letter to Wilford Woodruff, June 20, 1856, page 1, Church History Museum, Salt Lake City; punctuation modernized.
8 Joseph Smith, in History of the Church, 3:316.
9 In Dan Jones’s account of the martyrdom, he related that he also carried a hickory club and that it was his club, not Markham’s stick, that John Taylor used. See Dan Jones, “The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith and His Brother Hyrum,” BYU Studies, vol. 24, no. 1 (1984), 97.
13 Jenson, Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia, 3:677.