

# The Heavens Are Opened

## The New Church History Museum Exhibit

*Visiting this remarkable, highly interactive permanent exhibit makes Church history come alive.*

By Alan D. Johnson

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From watching a movie depicting the First Vision on a 220-degree circular screen to seeing the string that kept the original manuscript of the translated Book of Mormon tied together, we can be transported back in time again and again as we walk through the new exhibit in the Church History Museum in Salt Lake City (an online and mobile experience is also available at [history.lds.org/section/museum](http://history.lds.org/section/museum)).

Titled *The Heavens Are Opened*, this exhibit sets forth the revelations and events that make up the early history of the restored Church of Jesus Christ, from its beginning through the Saints' exodus from Nauvoo. It is divided into several primary areas, each with its own theme and message.

### Religious Awakenings and the Smith Family

Here we meet the Smith family and learn how the historical context of the spiritual awakenings in New York led young Joseph Smith to James 1:5 in the Bible, followed by his prayer in a grove of trees and





*Above: Experience the First Vision as if you were there. From left: Learn of the great religious awakenings during that time; see Joseph Smith's family history; share Church history with your children using interactive screens; see original documents, such as these notes for a Presbyterian minister's sermon that Joseph may have heard not long before the First Vision.*



The visions and blessings  
and angels are coming



Right: View art that captures the opening of the heavens in the Kirtland Temple in 1836. From top: Follow Joseph Smith as he receives and translates the Book of Mormon; see a replica of the golden plates and of the log where Joseph hid them (children are welcome to play); view the actual press on which the Book of Mormon was printed; learn more about 19th-century printing through transfer rubbing and other activities.

...of old are returning  
...to visit the earth.



the appearance to him of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Here we experience a dramatic reenactment of that vision in a circular theater with a 220-degree screen—certainly a highlight of our visit to this exhibit.

### The Translation of the Book of Mormon

Here we see a replica of the golden plates, a page of the original translation of the Book of Mormon, and the press upon which the first copies of the Book of Mormon were printed.

### The Restoration of the Gospel

Here we learn of the restoration and reorganization of Christ's Church on earth. We see artifacts from the Peter Whitmer home. Interactive touch screens connect us with other sites of the Restoration.

### Ohio and Missouri

Here we learn of the growth of the Church in Kirtland, Ohio, and the simultaneous attempt by the Saints to establish Zion in Independence, Missouri. The Liberty Jail exhibit is roughly the same size and height as the cell where Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Caleb Baldwin, and others were held for over four months. We can stand in that low, small space and feel the cold air blowing on our legs.

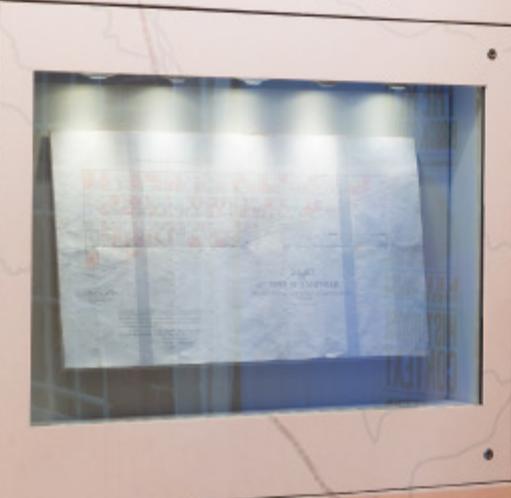
*Below (clockwise from top left): Look through the windows of the Newel K. Whitney store facade; place building models on a map of Independence, Missouri; stand in a replica of the Liberty Jail cell and discover why Joseph and others suffered there for more than four months.*



...to my name,  
...to dwell therein.

Attend Relief Society in pioneer times via a movie and hear from Emma Smith, Lucy Mack Smith, and others.

## Spokes on a Wheel: Greater Nauvoo



Find the "References"  
Section of the map. Can you find:  
Joseph Smith's home?  
The temple lot?  
The Red Brick Store?

Additional maps of Nauvoo are located in the exhibit. These maps show the city's layout and surrounding areas. They are available in both English and Spanish. The maps are located in the exhibit area.



## Nauvoo and Carthage

Here we learn of the growth of the Church, including the organization of the Relief Society. Using a touch screen, we can enter the Prophet's red brick store and attend a Relief Society meeting with Emma Smith, Lucy Mack Smith, and Mercy Thompson. We also see a magnificent mural of Nauvoo, fragments of the temple, and a replica sunstone. In connection with the events in the Carthage Jail, we see art of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Nearby we can see the death masks of the two brothers.



*Right: Examine treasured items brought to America by British Saints, including a sampler that Mary Walker made when she was 11. Below (clockwise from top left): View a replica of a Nauvoo Temple sunstone; take a close look at a map of Nauvoo, Illinois; enjoy a stunning mural of the Nauvoo Temple and surrounding area; see the red handkerchief that Joseph gave to Wilford Woodruff to use in administering to the sick.*



## Connecting Us with Church History

This new exhibit is an effort to provide more detail about and greater access to the history of the Church. While it is an exhibit rich in art and artifacts, there is an emphasis on storytelling to connect us with individual pioneers. Kiosks, interactive maps, and theater experiences are targeted to the youth of the Church and their families. The hope is that by visiting this exhibit, we will have spiritual experiences connecting us with the revelation and restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

*Right: Through dramatic art, feel the emotion of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith in Carthage Jail. Below: Reverently view the clothes Hyrum Smith wore when he died. Bottom, from left: Imagine the sacrifice of Joseph and Hyrum Smith as you view their death masks; see Nauvoo Legion items, including a pistol, sword, scabbard, cloak, and pair of epaulets owned by Joseph.*

