James Jesse Strong

A Memo of the Missourians
and Chautauqua Men.

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JAMES JESSE STRANG

A MOSES OF THE MORMONS AND A CHAUTAUQUA KING.

Prepared by Roscoe B. Martin, Forestville, N.Y., and read by him before the Chautauqua County Historical Society at their annual meeting in Mayville, N.Y. Oct. 12, 1929.

Those of you who were fortunate enough to attend the 1928 fall meeting of the Chautauqua County Historical Society will well remember the paper prepared and read by Mr. Charles M. Reed of Sinclairville, N.Y., President of the Society, "James Jesse Strang, a Chautauqua King". His fine paper covered the subject very thoroughly and I ask both your indulgence and his for my use of much of his material.

(28 pages & Introduction, total 29 pages)
James Jesse Strong stands out as one of the most romantic figures in American history and the only man in American history who was crowned a king and actually ruled a kingdom, within our borders. In this discussion of him it is well to bear in mind that his period of life was only forty-three years, and that few men have crowded more into forty-three years than he.

So closely is the story of Mormonism in Wisconsin and Michigan associated with James Strong, that its recital is largely biographical. Of his boyhood little is known, except that he was studious and ambitious - and likewise eccentric. After his death there was found among his papers the fragments of an autobiography covering the period of his life up to the age of twelve. The writing comes to a sudden stop, as if the writer had been disturbed and had never cared, or perhaps had no opportunity, to resume the story of his life. In view of the later career of this strange man, the fragment is interesting as giving an insight into the unusual elements that tinctured his life and fashioned his character.

"I was born March 21, 1813, on Popple Ridge Road, Town of Scipio, Cayuga county, New York. My infancy was a period of continual sickness and extreme suffering, and I have understood that at one time, I was so slow as to be thought dead and that
preparations were made for my burial. All my early recollections are painful, and at this day I am utterly unable to comprehend the feeling of those who look back with pleasure on their infancy and regret the rapid passing away of childhood. *When I had children of my own, happy in their infantile gambols, the recollection of those days produced a kind of creeping sensation akin to terror. *(Strang was survived by his five wives. Four of his twelve children were born after his death, one being born to each of his polygamous wives.)

My parentage was decidedly respectable. My father is a descendant of Henry de l'Estrange, who accompanied the Duke of York to the new world to conquer the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, now the State of New York, and the family has ever since retained an honorable nearly rank, and is now scattered over all the States, and branches of it are found in British American and the West Indies.

Tradition says that they originally settled at New Utrecht, on Long Island; but Henry de l'Estrange, before his death removed to the town of Rye, Westchester county, New York, where some of his descendants remained till since 1640.

Tradition also says that my great-grandfather accompanied the first English expedition to Michilimackinac, during which he contracted a dangerous sickness, that he was sent back for medical treatment, and died on the way from the residence of Sir William Johnson to Albany.

He left two sons, William and Gabriel, who were brought up among their mother's relatives, and by that means became separated from the family. They settled at a very early period at Stillwater in Saratoga county, New York and were lost sight of by the Strangs in the south part of New York, and on numerous genealogical trees.
found in that country the limb breaks off with their names.

My father, Clement Strang, is the fifth son of Gabriel Strang. Coming originally of a Norman stock who have continually intermarried with the Dutch and German families of the Hudson, he partakes (as I do) more of the German type than any other. Counting continually in the main line for ten generations back, our ancestors are Jews, but so large is the admixture of other blood that the Semitic type seems to be quite lost.

My mother is of the purest Yankee stock from Rhode Island, her father, Jesse James and her grandfather, James James, having left there about the time of her birth, and settled in Greenfield, Saratoga county, New York, where they died full of years and honors.

My father and mother are yet living (1855), with a reasonable prospect that they may remain many years. They are both small of stature, my father being only five feet three or four inches, and mother less; of comely appearance, amiable; affectionate, charitable; remarkably industrious, skillful in labor and judicious in business; and unsullied moral and religious character. I have a brother, David Strang, two years older than myself, and a sister, Myraette Loser, five years younger, and it is a great pleasure to know that there has never been a disagreement to amount to so much as a momentary coldness between any two members of the family.

I learned from many sources that in childhood I exhibited extraordinary mental imbecility. Indeed, if I may credit what is told me on the subject all who knew me, except my parents, thought me scarcely more than idiotic. Several facts remain in my recollection which support this opinion. I well recollect that school teachers not unfrequently turned me off with little or no attention, as though
I was too stupid to learn and too dull to feel neglect, and my school fellows did not forget to add their slight.

I doubt not my appearance at least justified this opinion; I remember myself as little disposed to play, seldom cheerful, and scarcely every taking the slightest interest in the plays of others. Long weary days I sat upon the floor, thinking, thinking, thinking! Occasionally asking a strange, uninfantine question and never getting an answer. My mind wandered over fields that old men shrink from, seeking rest and finding none till darkness gathered thick around and I burst into tears and cried aloud, and with a voice scarcely able to articulate told my mother that my head ached.

During the first and part of the second year of my life my father's residence was in that part of Scipio now included in Ledyard. He left for Manlius in August 1815, when I was about seventeen months old, and with the singular tenacity of memory I kept that place perfectly in memory that after twenty years absence I was able to recognize the location in riding through.

To the present time the recollections of my mother carrying me in her arms, nursing me, and conversing with her sister about me, and of the road along which they walked, and the work going on by the roadside, are as distinct as the events of yesterday. It is the brightest of the few bright spots of my childhood, the only recollection of long years not accompanied with the sensation of pain.

Until 1816 my parents remained in Manlius, my father carrying on the farm of Mr. Fleming, an extensive farmer from Maryland, who also kept a very popular tavern on the Great Western turnpike. I have very few recollections of that period beyond an ill-defined but strong attachment to several members of his family and several of the colored people he brought there, although I have seen very few of
them in forty years, and none of them in thirty two. Such are the affections of childhood; at least they are such with me.

In February, 1816, my father removed with his family to Hanover, Chautauqua county, New York where he remained twenty years. His first location was two miles northeast of Forestville, and three-fourths of a mile from Walnut creek, on the east side of the road, at the four corners, but a few years of the latter portion of that period, we lived on Walnut creek flats, in the same neighborhood.

There I grew up, and around that place cluster nearly all the recollections, pleasant and painful, of my childhood and youth.

On our journey I remember Buffalo as a small, straggling village of thirty or forty houses, occupied as taverns and drinking shops; so crowded that it was a matter of favor to get entertainment; where the same low, open, filthy room was used for barroom, dining-room and kitchen, and a few hours the latter part of the night accommodated as many drowsy, drunken and tired sleepers as could lie down upon the floor.

From Buffalo we went to the mouth of Cattaraugus creek on the ice. Father was heavy loaded and obliged to travel slow. There had been a day or two of mild weather; the snow was melted on the ice and had already thawed many a treacherous opening, and covered with water as the ice was, it was difficult for a stranger to keep the way over the thirty miles of dreary waste of ice without a landmark.

To secure a passage by daylight father got a man who was going with a two-horse sleigh and no load but his wife to take my mother and her two children as far as Cattaraugus. I only remember that the water sometimes came into the sleigh box, that the driver frequently jumped the horses across wide chasms in the ice, and sometimes found them so wide that he dare not cross them and went great distances around, and that my mother was terribly frightened, and hugged my brother and I
to her with an almost suffocating grasp.

I have since I was grown up frequently heard her speak of that passage as having terrified her almost to distraction, a terror much heightened by the continual quarrels and mutual profanity of the couple with whom we rode.

We lost sight of father immediately after starting, and next saw him at Mack's tavern, Cattaraugus. The wind got into the northwest the afternoon of the day we started, and towards night one of the worst snowstorms of that latitude came on, obliterating in a few minutes every vestige of track on the ice, filling the air so that a man could not see the length of sled and team, and rendering it utterly impossible to keep a course even for a few rods.

This storm overtook father midway in the lake, about twenty miles above Buffalo. What he suffered and how he survived none can know, only those who have experienced a similar catastrophe.

I only remember that my mother cried incessantly, and ever and anon clasped my brother and myself convulsively in her arms, till three days passed, when he came to us as one from the dead. Several reports of his death had reached us, some by persons who had seen his frozen body; whether some persons had really perished and been mistaken for him, or the reports were wholly false, I do not know, but the former is probable.

From Cattaraugus to my father's place in the same town was then two days' travel, though on an air line not six miles. The route was by Sheridan Center and Forestville.

I attended school the following summer where the most moderate qualifications for teaching were satisfactory. There were but two scholars who knew the alphabet, and none who spelled "easy words of two syllables."

From this time until I was twelve years old I attended
district school more or less every year, but the terms were
usually short, the teachers inexperienced and ill qualified to teach,
and my health such as to preclude attentive study or steady attendance.
I estimate my attendance during the whole period as equal to six months'
steady attendance with health for study.

My parents had good government. Their family were raised
without beating. I can remember being very slightly whipped by my
father twice and my mother once. My sister was raised without ever
suffering chastisement either at home or in school, and my brother's
fortune ------"

(Here the writing ends as if the writer had been disturbed, and never
afterward had opportunity to resume the work).
As he has said, his parents came into Hanover, Chautauqua county, New York in February 1816. They settled on a farm at what is now known as Dennison's Corners. The Chautauqua County records show that they bought this farm August 9, 1819, from the Holland Land Company. The deed was recorded October 20, 1824 from the Holland Land Company to Clement Strang, his father; conveying part of Lot 45, Township 6, Range 10 Hanover, bounded south by lands of Sampson Trask, west by Lot 53, north by line parallel to south line of said lot 45, east by Lot 37 containing 100 acres, consideration $356.00. Fifty acres of this farm are now (1929) owned and occupied by Walter Tanner, 42 acres by George Chesbro and 7.16 acres, opposite George Chesbro, owned and forming part of the Elizabeth Dennison farm.

On February 17, 1825 Clement Strang sold 7.16 acres of this farm to Joseph Dennison for $35.29. On May 7, 1831 Clement Strang and Abigail, his wife, sold the remaining 92.84 acres to Benjamin Pearce of Pompey, Onondaga county, New York for $1392.60. On May 17, 1831 Clement Strang took a deed from William Jones and Anna, his wife, of Buffalo on 150 acres in Hanover, Township 6, Range 10, Southwest part of Lot 53, consideration $1500.00. This farm is located near Keach's Corners and is the farm on Walnut creek flats where he says he lived the latter portion of his residence here.

His father and mother, Clement and Abigail Strang, were two of the original twenty-nine Baptists who met on November 15, 1817 and signed the Covenant and Articles and formed the Second Baptist Church of Hanover, now the First Baptist Church of Forestville, New York. His parents were active in local Baptist Church circles and work and the list of members of the Baptist Church shows that he joined the Second Baptist Church of Hanover by baptism. The church
records show that he served as clerk of the Church from September 1, 1832, to August 29, 1833. The records of the Church from its beginning are in existence and in the possession of the Church officers.

(The history of the Baptist Church in Forestville, New York published by Julius A. Parsons in 1872, erroneously give the Strang names as "Strong" in the names of members. The name is also spelled "Strong" in the Cattaraugus County histories.)

He attended Fredonia Academy for a brief term, taught school in Forestville and was admitted to the bar when twenty-three and began the practice of law in Mayville. He removed to Ellington and in 1838 was appointed post master in Ellington on the recommendation of all the judges of Chautauque county, the editor of the Mayville Sentinel, and several other leading citizens, members of that political party of which the Sentinel was the organ; and held the office till he left the place in 1843, being near two years under an administration, warmly the election of which he opposed, and when very slight reasons were sufficient to remove one from office. He edited a newspaper, The Randolph Herald, Randolph, New York for about two years until about June 1, 1843, when he sold it in anticipation of removing with his family for the West, which trip he started August 18, 1843. During this time he also took the rostrum as a temperance lecturer.

Strang's wife was Mary Perce. Her brother resided at Burlington, Racine county, Wisconsin, and it was at his solicitation that Strang moved to Burlington in 1843. There he resumed the practice of law, forming a partnership with C. P. Barnes who later became associated as a practitioner with Judge William P. Lyon.

The following incident told by Judge Lyon illustrates the peculiar bent of Strang's mind: "On one occasion he brought suit before me (I was then a justice of the peace) to recover the value of
honey, which he claimed to have been stolen from his clients apiary by the thievish bees of a neighbor. Whoever heard of a lawsuit based on such grounds? And yet Strang conducted the case with great shrewdness and made a most plausible argument. He was continually bringing up unexpected points in law cases, and using arguments that would have been thought of by no one else. I think he like the notoriety that resulted from that sort of thing."

In the year following his removal to Wisconsin, there came to Burlington several itinerant missionaries from the Mormon Church at Nauvoo, seeking proselytes. Their talk appealed with peculiar fascination to the temperament of Strang. He threw himself heart and soul into the movement. It was a field that afforded his peculiar talents full play. Before six months had expired, Strang had developed from an humble convert to the self-styled head of the church. It was in January, 1844, that his zeal was kindled. He visited Nauvoo, and on the 25th of February was baptized by the seer Joseph Smith into the communion of Latter-Day Saints. The prophet conceived a great regard for the young zealot from Wisconsin and but a week after baptism, March 3, 1844, when not quite thirty-one years old, Strang had been made an elder with authority to plant a stake of Zion in the immediate neighborhood of his Wisconsin home:

With restless energy and marvelous success, Strang began his propaganda and laid the foundation for the city of Voree. What his ideas were can only be conjectured in the light of his subsequent dream of empire. Intensely ambitious for power, versed in the arts that enable leadership of men, fired with religious fervor, keenly conscious of his own abilities, the example of Joseph Smith’s success doubtless inspired him with great ambitions. He saw in Smith an uneducated man who from the humblest origin became in the course of but a few years the unchallenged prophet of many thousands of men and women. The possibil-
ities of his own future dazzled him. Events at first conspired to bring
to immediate realization the dreams of Strang. On June 6, 1844 the pro-
phet and his brother Hyrum were riddled with bullets by a mob at Carthage,
in the State of Illinois. On whom should the mantle fall that the
martyred seer had worn? Many sought the succession; but one of them
possessed the energy or capacity to measure weapons for more than a brief
period with the masterful craft of Brigham Young. That one was Strang.
That Young feared Strang most is attested by the bitterness with
which in pamphlets and in Mormon newspapers Strang was assailed, while
the other pretenders were almost ignored as if unworthy of notice.
Of all the aspirants to Joseph Smith's mantle, Strang
and Brigham Young were the only ones who displayed any genuine qualities
of leadership. Ludlow T. Hill, who knew Strang very well and who was very
much opposed to Strang and his followers, wrote of him; "Strang was in
many respects a remarkable man. He was small and spare; but as a speaker
he towered like a giant. He was one of the most fascinating orators
imaginable. He wore a very heavy beard of reddish tinge; and his hair
was red, too. He had dark eyes, that looked at one on occasion as though
they could bore right through. There were set close together, under
wide projecting brows, from which rose a massive forehead. Add to this
a thin hatchet face, and you have a grouping of features that would
attract attention anywhere. His oratory was of the fervid, impassioned
sort that would carry his audience with him every time. His words came
out in a torrent; he could work himself into emotional spells at will,
the sincerity of his words being attested by tears when necessary to pro-
duce that effect, or by infectious laughter when his mood was merry."
He had what is known as magnetism, too, and could be one of the most companionable of men. His influence over his followers was unbounded. He was certainly a man of unusual talents in many respects. Had he chosen to use them for good, he would have left a great impress upon his country.

When I was a young lad I heard him in a debate with a Catholic speaker in Elgin, Ill. It was to have been a three days' debate. The priest brought up a number of newspaper stories to confound his adversary. In reply, Strang confined himself entirely to the Scriptures. He so thoroughly discomfited his adversary in the debate that the next evening the priest failed to appear, and the judges awarded the verdict to Strang."

In the struggle that ensued between Brigham Young and James Jesse Strang, the former had all the advantage of an entrenched position. He was one of the all powerful Council of Twelve, and at first fed the enmity of his colleagues towards outside aspirants by ingenuously suggesting to each individually, hopes of personal aggrandizement. It was a shrewd scheme to first crush outside aspirants, and then narrow down rivalry at home by cajolery or intimidation till his own elevation became possible.

Despite the hostility of the combined Council of Twelve & Strang made a vigorous and resourceful campaign to secure the prophetic succession. Joseph Smith's Nauvoo followers had not recovered from the shock of their leader's assassination before Strang was in their midst exhorting them to follow him to the city of promise in Wisconsin. He exhibited a letter purporting to have been written by the seer just before his assassination, prophesying that he would soon wear "the double crown of martyr and king in a heavenly world," and appointing James Strang as his successor.

The Council of Twelve made a furious onslaught on the pretentions of Strang: denounced his letter as a forgery, and threatened
with the thunders of the Church all who would uphold the pretender. Strang's pretensions were rejected, and with the usual formulas of the Church ritual, he was "given over the buffetings of Satan".

Strang was not so easily disposed of, however. With a body of recusant Mormons whom his remarkable powers of oratory had attached to his cause, he returned to Voree and began to build up his city of refuge, prophesying that the Mormons would be driven from Nauvoo by the Lamanites and that then the words of Joseph would be realized. In every detail he carried out the policy by which the seer Joseph had appealed to his followers. He pretended to have revelations. These he transcribed in imitation of scriptural language, teeming with vague phrases upon which he placed such interpretations as were needful to carry out his immediate purposes. He organized his church on the pattern prescribed by the sacred books of the Mormon faith, with a council of twelve and quorums of elders and priests. Over all of them he exercised supreme authority. Like Joseph, when schism threatened or murmurs of discontent came to his ears, he would silence all opposition by means of a convenient revelation.

The crowning achievement, and one which disturbed the authorities at Nauvoo considerably was the finding of buried plates near the city of Voree. These he called the Plates of Laban. The cabalistic hieroglyphics which he transcribed by means of the Urim and Thummim (The Urim and Thummim consisted, according to the statement of Lucy Smith, mother of the prophet, of two transparent stones, clear as crystals, set in the two rims of a bow) were claimed by him to be the long lost Book of the Law of the Lord, admirably supplementing the Book of Mormon which Joseph Smith had in like manner translated from the plates dug out of the hill of Cumorah, in the State of New York.

None of these artifices were original with Strang. Joseph Smith had employed them all. But there was shrewd method, rather than
lack of originality, in this imitation. Doubtless Strang's purpose was to verify his pretension that the prophetic succession had devolved upon himself. In no manner could he have appealed more forcibly to the religious delusion entertained by the followers of Joseph Smith.

The twelve apostles whom he sent as missionaries to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and elsewhere in the east encountered in bitter controversy the proselyting agents of Brigham Young. His press at Voree turned out thousands of pamphlets aiming to show the hollow-spuriousness of the doctrines enunciated by Brigham Young's followers. The "Voree Herald" contained as bitter tirades against them as did the Nauvoo "Times and Seasons" against himself. He displayed tremendous energy with tongue and pen, and the reports of conferences in the "Voree Herald" gave evidence of it. The Liverpool paper published by the Mormons also assailed Strang with great bitterness. These are the headlines of an article nearly four columns in length:

SKETCHES OF NOTORIOUS CHARACTERS.


It must be admitted that in the numerous pamphlets which he scattered broadcast, and in his newspaper rejoinders, Strang kept his temper much better than the Nauvoo disputants. In his pamphlet called "Prophetic Controversy," he sarcastically alludes to the "Saintly spirit" that could inspire such fulminations as have been quoted; but his failure to secure recognition at Nauvoo rankled deeply.
The great exodus of Mormons across the Mississippi and into the wilderness of the west began early in February, 1846. Long before this, however, the knot had been tightening around the doomed city of Nauvoo. Every man's hand was uplifted against the Mormons, and conflicts frequently occurred between the Saints and their neighbors outside the fold. Strang's prolific press at Voree turned out thousands of copies of what he termed "the first pastoral letter of James, the Prophet." It bore date of December 25, 1845, and concluded in this wise:

"Let not my call to you be in vain. The destroyer has gone forth among you, and has prevailed. You are preparing to resign country and houses and lands to him. Many of you are about to leave the haunts of civilization and of men to go into an unexplored wilderness among savages, and in trackless deserts, to seek a home in the wilds where the footprint of the white man is not found. The voice of God has not called you to this. His promise has not gone before to prepare a habitation for you. The hearts of the Lamanites are not turned unto you, and they will not regard you. When the herd comes, the savages shall pursue. The cloud which surrounds by day shall bewilder, and the pillar of fire by night shall consume and reveal you to the destroyer.

"Let the oppressed flee for safety unto Voree, and let the gathering of the people be there. * * * Let the filth of Zion be cleansed, and her garments of peace put on. Let neither gun nor sword be lifted in defiance, nor rest be taken upon arm of flesh, and the city of our God shall be saved; and the temple of His holiness be unpolluted by the hand of the Gentile."

By the exodus of the Brighamites across the Mississippi, Strang's colony at Voree alone remained in the northwest, of the thousands who had embraced the faith of Joseph Smith. Sidney Rigdon had led a small contingent into Pennsylvania; Lyman Wight a few followers to Texas;
Smith a little remnant to a corner of Illinois; these were offshoots that came to naught. At Voree the numbers constantly increased. Missionaries were sent to the east to seek converts; the press turned out pamphlets to be scattered broadcast. Regularly the "Voree Herald" was issued for distribution among the faithful. Some internal dissensions arose from time to time, but Strang easily disposed of them. The minutes of one of the conferences note that Lorenzo Dow Hickey was suspended by the prophet James for "most grossly lying and slander upon Brother G. J. Adams and Samuel Graham, and neglecting his mission to follow after the diabolical revelations of Increase McGee Van Dusen." At another conference the apostasy of John E. Page, president of the Twelve, was the subject of comment, and this resolution was spread upon the minutes:

"Resolved, That we deliver him over to the buffetings of Satan until he repent."

In spite of occasional backslidings, the city of Voree grew and flourished. The Saints at first "met in a grove," as the conference minutes state, but a splendid temple was planned. In a letter descriptive of the edifice, Geo. J. Adams wrote August 27, 1849:

"The temple is going up steadily and constantly; and a most beautiful structure it will be when finished. It covers two and one-sixth acres of ground, has twelve towers, and the great hall 200 feet square in the center. The entire walls are eight feet through, the floors and roofs are to be of marble, and when finished it will be the grandest building in the world. The strong Tower of Zion is being erected on the Hill of Promise, the walls of which are three or four feet thick, which when finished is for the carrying out of the order of Enoch in all its beauty and fullness."

It soon became apparent to Strang that the same conditions which had driven the Mormons of Nauvoo to a trans-Mississippi wilderness,
would endanger the permanency of his colony in the course of a few years. For the growth of a Mormon community isolation was essential; where Gentile influences controlled the vicinage, there the utter annihilation of Mormonism was but a question of time. In his wanderings he had caught a glimpse from a vessel's deck of the natural beauty and seeming fruitfulness of a cluster of islands near the door that divides the great inland seas of Huron and Michigan. Here was an ideal seat of power, remote from the obtrusiveness of civil officers whose view of laws might differ from his own; yet not so distant from the line of travel as to render profitable traffic impossible. The waters teemed with excellent fish; the forests would furnish an abundance of most excellent timber; the soil needed but to be scratched to yield in multiplied plenty. To this land of promise could be lead his Saints, and here would they wax fat and strong.

If this was Strang's dream of an empire, as subsequent events indicated, the beginnings were indeed humble. He fixed on the islands in Lake Michigan as a place for a Mormon community in 1846. On May 11, 1847, accompanied by four others, he arrived at Beaver Island to explore it and prepare for a settlement. Beaver Island is thirteen miles long by six and one-half miles wide containing thirty-five thousand two hundred nineteen acres. This island is the largest in Lake Michigan and one of the finest in the world. Most of the island is well adapted to agriculture and it produces all the crops usually cultivated in the neighboring states. It has all the advantages of climate which islands in broad, deep waters usually possess, less cold in winter, and less heat in summer and an exemption from extreme and sudden changes. It is well watered, having seven lakes varying from a quarter of a mile to two miles in length and brooks without number. The surface of the island is gently rolling and generally elevated from forty to eighty feet above Lake Michigan. It is worthy of remark that Strang and his four
companions on their arrival at Beaver Island were so destitute of means that they were obliged to sell their blankets to pay their passage on the little hooker that landed them there, and they went ashore with less than three days provisions and not one cent of money. There were two trading houses on the island when they arrived there but they were not well received at these houses so they went into the woods, made a camp of hemlock boughs and began a thorough exploration of the island, living principally on leeks and beech-nuts.

This perseverance, where men who would work at all were obtained with difficulty, soon got them employment - a stock of provisions and the use of a boat. After making a most thorough exploration of the island and building a cabin, Strang with two of his companions returned to Vorse. Two, Brown and Mills, remained and were the first Mormon settled on Beaver Island.

In the course of that summer several families moved to the island, but became dissatisfied with the prospects and left. At the setting in of winter the Mormon population consisted of five men and their families, in all eighteen persons. A few persons left for the winter intending to return in the spring. The following winter the Mormon population had increased to sixty-two persons of whom seventeen were men. The lands were brought into market in 1848. At the land sale was the first positive demonstration of an intention by the other inhabitants to dispossess the Mormons. Every obstacle, mostly fraudulent, was placed in the way of the Mormons acquiring land. During the summer of 1849 the Mormon emigration to Beaver Island was considerable. It was mostly of persons of the poorer class. In 1849 the Mormons commenced building a house of worship, since known as the Tabernacle. During the same winter a debating school was instituted by the Mormons. The spring of 1850 brought a large emigration of Mormons to Beaver. The
various missionaries returned, generally accompanied with a goodly number of followers. A large company came down from Vorse, and the leading men of the church removed with their families, intending to make St. James, their village and harbor, the permanent headquarters of the church. It was not long before the Mormons bade fair to control the island. They but believed that they had come in their own for this was the revelation given unto their seer and revelator long before their coming. To appreciate the spirit animating the Saints in thus taking possession, one must realize the fervor of their faith in the revelation of their seer. There were among them some who had in mind mere pelf and plunder, but the greater number were no doubt inspired by their fanatic zeal. The law of Moses was their law supplemented by the doctrines of Mormons and the vision of Strang. The Mormons manifested their sense of ownership by giving new names to the physical distinctions of Beaver Island. The beautiful land-locked harbor was called St. James. A hill in the interior received the biblical name of Mount Pisgah. The river Jordan discharged into the lake the waters that poured into it from the Sea of Galilee.

Encounters between Mormons and Gentiles became frequent. Up to this time the Mormons were more sinned against than aggressors. Drunken fishermen invaded their homes and subjected the women to indignation debating clubs were attended by uninvited guests whose boisterous conduct prevented proceedings. Men from old Michilimackinac came in boats to raid outlying farmhouses. Families sent by the missionary elders were met at the wharf and told to return to the boat as all the Mormons would soon be driven away or killed.

About the year 1850 the Saints began to retaliate in earnest. Their numbers had so increased that they could safely do so. The ambitions of Strang were about to be realized. He had reorganized
his community of Saints. The Book of the Law of the Lord, which he had translated from plates dug out of the hill at Voree, had added another sacred book to the Mormon library, ranking in the faith of the Beaver Islanders with the Bible and the Book of Mormon; "Written on metallic plates long previous to the Babylonish captivity," as Strang explained to his credulous followers, the Urim and Thummin brought to him by an angel's hand had enabled him to interpret the characters thereof. Thus had he restored to the chosen people the sacred ancient manuscript long lost to the Jewish nation. The book kept in the ark of the covenant and lost when the children of Israel were hurried into captivity came back after all these centuries by revelation given to Strang:

The Beaver Island Mormons believed what he said.

The three brazen plates discovered on September 13, 1845 were dug from the ground near Voree from under an old oak tree in the presence of four witnesses, who certified under oath: "the case (containing the record) was found imbedded in indurated clay, so closely fitted that it broke in taking out, and the earth below the soil was so hard as to be dug with difficulty even with a pick-axe. Over the case was found a flat stone, about one foot wide each way and three inches thick, which appeared to have undergone the action of fire and fell in pieces after a few minutes exposure to the air. The digging extended into the clay about eighteen inches, there being two kinds of earth of a different color and appearance above it. We examined as we dug all the way with the utmost care; and we say, with the utmost confidence, that no part of the earth through which we dug exhibited any sign or indication that it had been moved or disturbed at any time previous. The root of the tree struck down on every side very closely, extending below the case, and closely interwoven
with roots from other trees. None of these had been broken or cut away.***

Strang says "that I hold and exercise the gifts of revelation and translation was well established in the above transaction as God had revealed to him that there was an ancient record which he was required to obtain and translate, and that he took along four witnesses asking them to examine everything relating to it most critically so they could stand up as witnesses, and then dig it up."

Strang subsequently discovered eighteen plates, nine inches by seven and one half inches, the plates of Laban, also written before the Babylonish captivity, which he translated and with the previous plates and nine sections of "direct revelation" he made into the Book of the Law of the Lord.

"The Calling of the King" was the caption of chapter XX of the Book of the Law of the Lord, and therein appear these words as the sixth section: He (God') hath chosen His servant James to be King; He hath made him His Apostle to all nations: He hath established Him a Prophet above the Kings of the earth; and appointed him King in Zion: By His voice did He call him, and He sent His angels unto him to ordain him."

The Book of the Law of the Lord contains minute rules as to diet, attire, personal habits, contructions of dwellings, walks and roads, the care of forests, and similar matters of domestic and municipal economy; conservation of the forests was part of their religion. The women were compelled to wear short skirts and ample pantalets in bloomer costume. The prohibitory principal applied to tea, coffee, tobacco, and liquor. Saturday was observed as Sunday and attendance at church compulsory. Prostitution was threatened with rigorous penalties but polygamy was sanctioned although practiced by not more than twenty families.
The King had five wives - no other had more than three - and it was necessary to show proof of ability to support a large family before plural marriage was permitted.

On July 8, 1850 James Jesse Strang was crowned King, the coronation taking place in the tabernacle, a building about eighty feet long, constructed of hewn logs, and but partly completed at the time of the coronation. At one end was a platform, and towards it marched the procession of elders and other quorums, escorting the King. First came the King, dressed in a robe of bright red and accompanied by his council. Then followed the twelve elders, the seventy and the minor orders of the ministry, or quorums, as they were called. The people were permitted to occupy what space remained in the tabernacle. The chief ceremonials were performed by George A. Adams, president of the council of elders. Adams was a man of imposing presence. He was over six feet tall, and he towered over the short-statured king, who, however, made up in intellect what he lacked in frame. Adams had been an actor, and he succeeded in making the crowning of the king a very imposing ceremony. It ended by placing upon the auburn head of King Strang a crown of metal. The crown was a plain circlet, with a cluster of stars projecting in front. It was July 8th, that this ceremony occurred, and every recurring 8th of July was known as the king's day and was celebrated as a holiday with many festivities. The entire population of the island would gather at a place in the woods to go through prescribed ceremonies - the hewers of wood and drawers of water to make proper obeisance to the king. There were burnt offering to begin with. The head of each family brought a fowl, and a heifer was thereupon killed. Its body was dissected without breaking a bone. After these ceremonials there was feasting and rejoicing, and the people danced on the greensward. King's day was the same with the Islanders as the Fourth of July is with us.
King Strang was now supreme on Beaver Island and bade fair to soon control the entire groups of islands. His policy was to foster the fisheries as a source of profit to his colony. As the population of the island multiplied and the Mormons with it, the hatred of the traders and fishermen on the opposite coast became more intense. The border feud became so bitter that the newspapers of Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo and New York devoted considerable space to its incidents. As a rule, these accounts represented the Mormons as a band of pirates engaged in plunder and crimes of all kinds. The center of the hostile camp was at old Mackinac and here plans were made for discomforting the Mormons. It is difficult at this day to judge how far the Gentiles were in the wrong and in how far the Mormons. Doubtless there was much wrong on both sides. At any rate the articles in the press were very generally written with a prejudiced mind against the Mormons and were biased and untruthful. A contemporary writer writing about Strang at the time of his coronation said that he was a man of vigorous frame, light complexioned, high forehead, intellectual, fluent in speech, suave manners and very companionable. A master of a fervid variety of oratory and skilled in the art of appealing to the sensibilities of his hearers. That the faith of the mass of his subjects in his supernatural powers was implicit and his sway absolute. That the versatility of this king exceeded that of many potentates of wider realms and more durable fame, that he was the editor of a better newspaper than was published in any community of a few thousand inhabitants, that he was an intelligent student in natural history and his contributions are found in the publications of Smithsonian Institute. Literature was his chosen refuge from the vexations that proverbially disturb a crowned head. His office was king included those of apostle, prophet, seer, revelator and translator. He instituted the tithing system and the fund created paid the taxes, cared for the poor and met all general expenses. Schools for the children were established.
and debating clubs for the adults. A well equipped printing office "The Royal Press" was opened and a paper, The "Northern Islander published weekly and after a time daily.

He reigned as king for six years on Beaver Island, six years of strife and constant trouble with the neighboring Gentile inhabitants and the state and federal authorities. Looking over his reign at this time, one may well infer that right or wrong, the public and the press and state and federal officials were against Strang and his followers.

Strang and many of his followers were frequently arrested on all sorts of unfounded charges and in every case Strang and his followers came out victorious and acquitted. It was six years of constant persecution.

In 1851 Strang was elected as representative from his district with Strang and many of his followers contesting with equal force and organization. His seat was immediately contested and on his trip to Detroit his kidnapping was attempted. In the face of the utmost prejudice against him in this contest, Mr. Strang defended himself in person before the bar of the house and his defense was spoken of in the press generally as marked with great ability and an extraordinary amount of legal learning and general information. Although the legal opinions and prejudice were both against him in the outset he maintained his seat by a vote of 49 to 11. The effect of these proceedings was to give Mr. Strang a high standing in the legislature and among the public men of the state. He fully maintained that position through the session. At his close he had carried all the measures which his district, consisting of twenty-six counties, asked and was universally acknowledged to have exerted more influence than any other member, without having ever condescended to anything short of the most open and manly means.

He served two terms in the Michigan House of Representatives with great
honor and distinction.

Politics, then as now, was very much of a gamble and while the downfall of Strang's empire came from domestic sedition and conspiracy the game of politics delayed its downfall. The Governor and State authorities were Democratic, and as the Mormon vote might secure them in power, were not very vigorous in their efforts to bring Strang and his people to trial; and as the entire machinery of the county government could be and was in the hands of the Mormons, there could be no legal means to punish their crimes, unless by an armed force. And so the then Governor of Michigan appealed to the President of the United States to furnish the necessary aid in bringing to an end the disorder, riots and crimes of the Mormon people at the Beaver Islands. But President Fillmore was President by accident, and was then laying his plans; which were finally fully developed in the Whig National Convention of 1852 at Baltimore, to re-elect himself; and fully appreciating the fact that the Mormons at Beaver Island might give the casting vote at the next presidential election against him, and in favor of the Democratic candidate, and being a very cautious, cold and calculating man, hesitated and halted for a long time before he could be induced to lend the power and process of the United States to the arrest and conquest of King James the First of Beaver Islands, and his rebellious and revolting subjects. Webster was then Secretary of State, and he too was anxious and eager like all the other great men of the nation, to be the party's candidate for the presidency; and he, too, saw and felt that the Mormon vote was worth saving if it could be done, and, therefore, the best policy would be to let the Democratic State authorities reduce to subjection their Democratic Mormon brethren, and leave the Whig Presidential candidate of 1852 to have the credit, with Strang and his Christian brethren, of having declined to intermeddle with so delicate a question. Much red tape was cut,
many diplomatic notes passed; if we are creditably informed, between the Secretary of State of Michigan, and the Godlike Secretary of State of the United States as to which power should subdue this handful of Mormons in Michigan, but who, small in numbers, might by their 700 votes control the next Presidential election in the State. At that time there was in the United States Senate a young but brave and honest, outspoken man, who had dealt with Joseph Smith and his Mormon people in Illinois - Stephen A. Douglas - a gallant, true and straightforward Democrat, and who always was a pet and protege of Daniel Webster because he was an honest, straightforward, chivalric politician, and he was called into the councils of the Whig administration by Fillmore, as he was in a more trying period in 1861 by Lincoln, and then, as always, his voice was for war on anybody and everybody who resisted the constituted authorities of the nation. Strengthened by the advice of the brave Douglas orders were at once issued through the Attorney General to the United States District Attorney of Michigan to commence legal proceedings against Strang and his confederates for offenses punishable in the Federal courts, such as obstructing the mail, delaying the mail, cutting mail bags, stealing timber from the public lands, counterfeiting the coin of the United States, passing counterfeit coin, etc., all of which crimes there was evidence to convict them, and of which they had been guilty. Simultaneously orders were issued from the Navy Department to Capt. Bullis, of the U. S. naval steamship Michigan, to proceed to Detroit fully armed and equipped, and report there to the United States Marshal for orders; to transport him and his deputies and the United States District Attorney to Mackinac and the Beaver Islands in order that all processes issued by the district attorney from the Federal courts could be served with certainty, and that Strang, no matter what his force, could not resist capture, arrest and trial in the courts of Detroit, wherein all United States process must issue.
The arrest of Strang and about 100 of his followers was soon effected by the means of the United States warlike strategy, and threats of hanging from the yard arm. The prisoners were all conveyed to Detroit, where after a lengthy trial, they came out absolutely victorious and acquitted of all charges brought against them.

Strang's speech to the jury was very strong, full of bitterness and dramatic points. He compared himself to Christ, his prosecutors to the lawyers and Pharisees who persecuted Him, and really seemed to feel as he made the jury feel, "that there was a divinity that did hedge him as a king", and that he was persecuted for righteousness' sake.

After serving two terms in the Michigan Legislature, in 1856 he was assassinated by two of his rebellious objects - Thomas Bedford and Alexander Wentworth. Bedford had been whipped by order of the King for some offence; he is said to have upheld his wife in disregarding the mandate to wear bloomers. Wentworth also had a grievance. On June 15, 1856, the War Boat Michigan steamed into the harbor, and by invitation of the captain, King Strang proceeded to visit the vessel's officers. As he was about to step on the pier, two pistol shots were fired from behind, both taking effect. He turned and recognized the assassins as they fired again. As he sank to the ground they struck him over the face and head with the weapons, ran aboard the steamer and gave themselves up. They were taken to Mackinac, where the murderers were received as heroes. They were never brought to trial.

The wounds of Strang proved fatal. He called his elders to his death-bed, gave them instructions for the government of his Mormon kingdom, and as a last request asked to be taken to the city of refuge which he founded in Wisconsin. There he was tenderly taken care of by his wife of pre-Mormon days, until his death July 9, 1856.
The Kingdom fell with him. The Gentile invasion came soon after his removal to Voree. The fishermen came with torch to destroy and with ax to demolish. The printing office was sacked; the tabernacle was reduced to ashes; the Mormons were exiled, and scattered to the four points of the compass. Like that of the prophet Joseph, the life of the prophet James ended in a tragedy and the exile and dispersal of his people. He lies in an unmarked grave in Spring Prairie, near Burlington, Wisconsin.

It is interesting to know that a biography of King Strang will be published soon after New Years next, by M.M. Quaife, Managing Editor of the Mississippi Valley Historical Review and also Editor of the Burton Historical Collections in the Detroit Public Library. Mr. Quaife has been working much of the time for the last fifteen years in securing material for this work and has traced out all available sources of information in that time. His work will be written with an open mind and based entirely on fact. Almost everything written about the King has been incorrect information and from a prejudiced and biased point of view. Chautauqua county histories have always been strangely silent in regard to him.

Again I remind you to think of him as the country boy from a farm in Hanover who became a King and ruler over thousands of people at 37 and died when 43 years of age, still a King.

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