

Cuppa Joe | Historic Sites Lecture Series | Come Up Hither to Zion

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SPEAKERS

Cheryl Bruno, Wendy Eaton, John Dinger

Wendy Eaton 00:29

Welcome to Cuppa Joe, where we explore restoration history. I'm your host. Wendy Eaton, here at Cuppa Joe, we partner with Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation to interview the presenters from our recent winter book club. Our guests today are Cheryl Bruno and John Dinger. Cheryl has a BA in recreation management and did graduate work in educational psychology. She's an independent historian and a poet who's been very active in the realm of Restoration history, particularly with the John Whitmer Historical Association and the Mormon history or Historical Association. John Dinger holds degrees in political science and history and has been published in both subjects, in various law and restoration history journals. His book the Nauvoo High Council and City Council Minutes, is an award winner both with the John Whitmer Historical Association and the Mormon History Association. So welcome back, John and Cheryl. Long time. Listeners may remember that we had you not that long ago, after a lecture that you did with the Historic Sites Foundation on the Life of William Marks. So this is basically a follow up to what you presented then, and what you shared with us at that winter book club, that book that you have now had published, and I wrote it down and I skipped over it. There we go, Come Up Hither to Zion, a life of William Marks. I've not had a chance to read the book. I've had a lot going on, but I'm eager to learn more about William's early life. As you mentioned in the lecture, scholars haven't been able to uncover much of his story before joining the Restoration movement, but the two of you had some success in that area. So are there any particular stories, I know you want everybody to go out like me and get the book and read it. But are there any particular stories from that early era that you uncovered and found particularly meaningful?

Cheryl Bruno 02:51

Well, yes, I mean that usually, whenever we read the articles about William Marks, they would start with his baptism into the LDS church, and it didn't seem that many people knew more about William, but we were able to find a few, a few records that talked about his earlier life. And there's they just kind of fill out the story and make him so much more interesting. And I love the records that we have when he gets when he moves to Portage, New York, and this tells about his brother in law and his wife's sister, Polly, and brother in law, Prosper Adams and how they live, they lived in the area, and Prosper had a tavern in the town, and in 1821, he sold that tavern to William Marks. And so interesting to me to see

him as a tavern keeper. We don't think of William Marks as his tavern keeper, but that's what he was in his early when he was starting to establish a family that he had did this by being a tavern keeper.

Wendy Eaton 04:02

Really fun to think about our early church heroes and roles that we wouldn't expect them in. John, did you have anything from his early life that you liked?

John Dinger 04:12

Oh, I did. I Cheryl found some amazing stuff from the Methodist Church, Methodist church that he was a member of before.

Cheryl Bruno 04:19

Presbyterian.

John Dinger 04:20

Presbyterian, I'm sorry, Presbyterian Church, before he joined with the Latter-Day Saints, and she was actually able to find sort of an excommunication, or a charge of why they were being kicked out. And it, you know, it says, you know, kind of lists all these different charges, but the violation of their covenant obligations by joining the sect, commonly called the Mormons and some other things, belief in the following erroneous sentiments or delusions: that Mormons have the gift of tongues, that Mormons have immediate revelation from God, that some Mormons have the gift of healing, and so on. And so it was really neat to see just how in and converted they were that that, you know, they had to go through this process in their old church to show that they really bought in to Mormonism and I think that shows throughout the rest of his life. So, I really enjoyed that, that record.

Wendy Eaton 05:15

It's really interesting. You talk of William Marks as moving from one Joseph to another, indicating his service under Joseph Smith Jr, and then his son, Joseph Smith, III. For Joseph Smith Jr, William was virtually unknown to him when he joined with the church under Joseph Smith, and yet he put a lot of faith and trust in William. What all was William put in charge of? I know at least one church publication, and eventually the Kirtland Temple itself. But what else was William given trust within those early days?

John Dinger 05:56

Well, the early days, I mean, once he hit Kirtland, he kind of hit the ground running. He was very trusted, and so in Kirtland, he did. He was in charge of a newspaper. At one point, the Kirtland Temple was deeded to him. He was added to the Kirtland High Council. But I think he really, really was given responsibility in Nauvoo. In Nauvoo, as the as the Stake President, before the charter, he really was kind of like the mayor. I mean, he was setting, helping set the fees for ferries and setting up laws before they really had the ability to do it. He would sort of hold civil courts as the stake president, you know, hearing cases of slander or contract disputes, that sort of thing. And then from there he was, he was made an alderman, he was made a municipal judge, he was put on the board of health. He was just a very important, trusted person, both spiritually and civilly.

Cheryl Bruno 07:02

And I'll jump back to Kirtland for a second. He was actually the stake president in Kirtland too, at the end of the saints, kind of before they moved over to Missouri. And he I just love the stories of how he helped the saints move to Missouri, and how he kind of stayed back, and he was one of the last to leave Kirtland when they were all moving to Missouri. And he he was very instrumental in helping some of them to leave. In fact, the last big group, I can't remember what they're called, not Zion's Camp, but something camp, Kirtland Camp, I think. And there were a group of hundreds of people who finally left, some of the poorest ones who left. And he actually marched down the road with them that first day. And then when they reached their first camp for the night, blessed them. And then, you know, went back to Kirtland to finish up some of the financial, tie up some of the financial ends that needed to be done. So it's he's really, really interesting in Kirtland, that he takes a huge role that we don't really realize that we don't, you know, we haven't talked about much how influential William Marks was in Kirtland.

Wendy Eaton 08:21

Leads right into my next thought that I had when I was preparing for today. The people clearly trusted William and those examples that you shared Cheryl of him taking the effort to bless them as they're preparing to make a very difficult move. Did you come across anything that helped you understand why Joseph trusted him so quickly?

Cheryl Bruno 08:48

Well, I mean, we see so many times we see Joseph trusting him. And a lot of times, there was one incident where near the end of Joseph's life where there was some conflict, and this was with William Law and William Marks, and I think it was mostly a misunderstanding. And people think that there was kind of a split there where William Marks was no longer trusted, but we do see that that was kind of healed, and that Joseph did trust him after that, and the family trusted him. And he was actually when Joseph died, he was put in charge of helping with the burial. He was one of the trusted men that helped carry the coffin. Emma listened to him when he told her she needed to move to Fulton for a time, and she moved to up north for a little while with William and his family. Took her family there before moving back to Nauvoo. And so I think that the whole family trusted him. Joseph Smith, III knew him well as a boy, and so that laid the foundation of why he trusted him later in life.

John Dinger 09:59

Yeah, for good or bad, one of his things is he seemed to trust people somewhat quickly, and that went good and bad, right? Sometimes people turned out to be sort of scoundrels. And for whatever reason, he did really trust him. But this was a trust that went for years and years and years, because I think of two things. I think William Marks really showed absolute competence in what he was asked to do. He was a very competent leader, very good at getting things done. And then the other thing is, he was just truly a man of integrity. He really wanted to make sure that things were done right, that rules were followed, that people were treated fairly. And so, I would think that that is probably two of the big reasons why Joseph Smith continued to trust him for so long as he truly was a person that could be counted on.

Wendy Eaton 10:55

You've both alluded to Emma, and I think listening to your book club presentation and listening to other lectures you've given on William Marks, I think that Joseph Smith III trusted him because he saw how

much faith and trust his parents had in this man, and so it made William Marks a very easy person for Joseph III to know that he could count on as he was moving into leadership himself. And so, bringing up Emma, women's history is very important to me. We haven't brought up William's wife yet, Rosanna. Did you uncover anything about her life as you were looking into William's life?

Cheryl Bruno 11:39

Oh, there's very little about Rosanna. Sadly, it's so sad that we don't have more about these early women, but the first part of their life, Rosanna seems to have quite a bit of influence in the family, and I think it has to do with her extended family. For example, when they moved to Portage, and they joined that Presbyterian Church that John was talking about. It was her brother, let's see, it was Richard, her brother, Richard and his wife Charlotte, who started that Presbyterian who were one of the founding members, two of the founding members of that Presbyterian Church. And then Rosanna comes in just a couple of weeks later to join that church and raise her family. She had her children baptized in that church. And so you see the influence of Rosanna and her family right there in in New York. And then she is, of course, a member of the Quorum of the anointed in Nauvoo. So we see her briefly there. Let's see she, they were, October 1, 1843 she became a member of the Quorum of the Anointed. And then on October 22 she and William received their second anointings and were sealed together as man and wife. And so that was a really special role that she held as part of that, that quorum, and we just see her briefly in a few, just a few instances. The Relief Society, this is fascinating to me, and I'd like to Know More. But when the Relief Society first was organized., her daughter Sophia, was only 15 years old, and she joined as one of the charter members with some of Rosanna's extended family. But Rosanna did not join the Relief Society until the very end, like the last set of meetings, there were two Saturdays where the Relief Society held their meetings the last time in Nauvoo, and that's when Rosanna becomes involved. But I'm just really fascinated by why did she wait so long to become a member of the Relief Society? I That's a big mystery to me,

Wendy Eaton 13:57

Women's history mysteries. That is a really interesting one, because the Relief Society was so significant there in Nauvoo.

John Dinger 14:05

Yeah, I think we actually know about as much of his daughter, Sophia, as we do Rosanna. And she was a very early member of the Relief Society. I wish we knew more about Rosanna as well. She, she seemed like she was very intelligent, very, very aware of sort of conflict, and helped William sort of navigate what was going on after Joseph Smith's death in the succession crisis, as as he was sort of contending with the Twelve. There was a point where she suggested that he sign something that they wanted to he probably didn't, but he listened to her, and it did probably smooth things out for a little while and make things easier for the family until they could move so we don't know a lot about her, but we know that William would listen to her. Her. And that's something, you know, I don't think we can always say that about our women in Mormon history, that they were listened to by men, but she must have been pretty remarkable for William to do that.

Wendy Eaton 15:15

Just knowing that William listened to her tells us a lot, even if we don't have as many details as we wish we did. So, we've talked a little. You mentioned one of the daughters, we know that they did have a family. Did you uncover anything about William as a family man, as a father? There with their Marks household?

Cheryl Bruno 15:40

Go ahead, John, you want to start with that one.

John Dinger 15:43

Oh, boy. He, you know, he had a he had a big family, and they seemed to to kind of live together. They followed each other around, even after he left Mormonism for a time, he lived by his daughter, Sophia, for a time in Shabona Grove. I don't know, i Boy, I don't know what to say. What about you, Cheryl? What do you think?

Cheryl Bruno 16:12

I think that's very fascinating, too. That his, his even when they he moved to Missouri in 1838 the end of 1838, he his family members, who many of whom were already married, several of whom were already married, moved with him and his grown sons. They all moved with him. Some of them stayed in Missouri for a while when he went to Nauvoo. But eventually they start following him. And usually the family is you see the family very close together all the time, sort of near the end of his life, when he joined the RLDS church, he said he talks about how it's sad for him because many of his children didn't follow him in the faith. I think there was one daughter in her family who were very active in the RLDS, but others were not and but yet they lived close by. Many of them lived just right next door or very, very close by. So it was a very, very close family all throughout his life.

Wendy Eaton 17:19

You could almost argue he was a father figure to many people that weren't his direct children. Certainly, we've talked Joseph Smith, III knew him for the majority of his life, and really counted on William Marks as guidance. So what about we talked some about the first Joseph and William's life. What about this moving to this other Joseph, Joseph III. Can you tell us a little bit about what that was like as Joseph III was stepping into leadership of a church?

Cheryl Bruno 17:55

Well, we see as William Marks went to when he left the the main body of the LDS, the Brighamites, he went with the Strang group, and then he went with Charles Thompson group, and both of those groups tended to want to put him into leadership right away. And it's because he was that figure, that well known figure, that you know he people had confidence in him, and he had the church leadership ability and callings that people respected. And so you see Strang put him in very closely, and same with Charles Thompson. And I think that Joseph Smith the third wanted to do the same where he would immediately upon making William Marks his first counselor, he was actually his first and only counselor until the death of William Marks, but making him that counselor gave them the stability to bridge the early church into the Reorganization.

John Dinger 19:04

Yeah, what's interesting to me, and Cheryl correct me if, if, if I'm wrong. But I think the only evidence of Joseph III and William Marks having contact, the last time they had contact would have been in Fulton City in 1845 and they did not have contact again. That that we could show until March 5 of 1860 when there's a letter written so for 15 years, I we can't show. I mean, maybe there were letters, maybe they bumped into each other, but, but we haven't seen it anywhere, nobody. Nobody ever recorded that. Yet, somehow, Joseph III knew who he was. Somehow, he had these really good feelings and memories. And I assume kind of how you mentioned earlier, I assume he heard things from his mother. Heard things, much Emma.

Cheryl Bruno 20:01

We do see Emma talking about him when people are asking her about him, and that she does talk about how much she trusts William Marks throughout the years. So, I think that he did. Joseph Smith, III did hear from his mother thinks about William Marks that she trusted him a lot.

John Dinger 20:21

Yeah, so I mean that that says a lot. I think that says a lot about everyone, right, that that Joseph III would so trust him as judgment, that not really having that in person association with him for all those years, still trusted him so much that that it was Marks whom he wrote to when he was ready to take over the leadership of that Reorganization. I think he says a lot about Emma and and Marks how much she just must have admired him, even all those years. Again, we don't have, we don't have proof of them having an in person association. But it so, it's just so, I think interesting to me that probably, of all the people she spoke about, all the people that Joseph III learned about, that were people that they could trust, people from, you know, his father's life, it's Joseph or it's William Marks, who he he reached out to and said, I am I am now ready. And so, I think that says about a lot about all of them.

Wendy Eaton 21:25

Yeah, I think you're right. You've, you've told such an incredible story and found so many great pieces to build this story of William Marks' life together. Did you have any challenges at all when you were doing this research?

John Dinger 21:49

Yeah, I imagine we're going to say the same. Thing is records in William Mark's own hand. It was just so sparse. We do have some letters from him. We know he could write. We knew He was intelligent. It was always one of these things, like we would hope and dream that maybe a journal will pop up, maybe we can find a few more letters. But there's a lot of primary sources of him in meetings, of things he said, that way, newspaper reports, but just his actual thoughts on things, his actual letters, any journals we just didn't have. We didn't have any journals. We didn't have as many letters as we would like. Luckily, some of the letters we do did have some really important thoughts and sort of things he thought was important in Mormonism and what happened in Nauvoo and with Joseph, but, but that's the biggest, the hardest thing here is just we did not have a lot of primary sources in his own hand.

Cheryl Bruno 22:50

Yeah, it's so tantalizing. One thing that we were we had a big hole, and that was between the time he left Kirtland and the time we get to Nauvoo. We didn't know anything about that, and so it was

fascinating to find some we did find some letters or some reminiscence about people who met up with him as he was traveling from Kirtland to Missouri. And so, this fills in a little bit of that, of that hole, so we actually have a little bit from every part of his life now, so that we can make this, make this connection all across time. But as John said, it's so difficult when you don't have, I do not believe he kept a journal and his letters, which we now know that he wrote lots of letters to many different people, but none of them survived. Very few of them survived. So that was, that was probably the most difficult part, and I think the reason why we don't have a biography of William Marks up to this point is that we don't have journals. We don't have letters in his own hand.

John Dinger 24:12

That was some of the funnest stuff we found was from Kirtland to Missouri. And one of the reasons why is because LDS books, over time, would kind of attack William Marks right, because he was an apostate and didn't do what he was supposed to. And there's a revelation that said he was to go to either Farwest or Missouri. I can't remember how specific it was. And there have been books in the past, in the 60s, 70s, 80s, where it said, you know, due to his unrighteousness, he didn't follow this revelation. So it was really cool to show that, in fact, he did. He did go to Missouri like he was prophesied he would. That was one of the fun things. Y

Cheryl Bruno 24:51

Yep, and he got there almost to the day they were kicked out. Just...

John Dinger 24:55

Yep, he barely made it. But, yeah, really cool.

Wendy Eaton 25:00

Yeah, that's really exciting, so that that could be the answer to the next question I had. Has anything stuck with you with this research and exploration of his life, anything you're going to keep with you as you continue on your lives?

John Dinger 25:19

Well, for me, I think what stuck with me is what got me interested in this. When I was editing the High Council Minutes, when I got to the section on the Sydney Rigdon excommunication, William Mark's integrity just blew me away. He was in a meeting that was not being conducted properly, not following the proper rules. There were revelations that said that somebody always had to speak for the accused. And so he to be true to Joseph Smith's revelations. To be true to the revelations of God. He said, I will be that man. He stood up and spoke in behalf, and he must have known what that would do to his standing. He must have known what that would do to him and his family. But that was more important. And so as I really dug in, I think Cheryl and I found that that wasn't a one off. He was just truly a person of integrity, a person who believed in fairness, a police, a person who believed in doing right. And so the thing that stuck with me is I have to think and reflect. Where am I just letting stuff happen? Where can I be more like William Marks? Where can I stand up and do what's right, even though it's the hard thing to do? So that's what's really stuck with me in his life.

Cheryl Bruno 26:43

So for me, it was interesting. He writes later in his life that when he found out about polygamy in the church, that he didn't agree with it, and there were other things that he didn't agree with that were happening at the time, such as what he calls a kingly form of government. So, I think this is when Joseph is declared a prophet, priest and king in the Council of 50. And he didn't quite agree with that, either, but he thought that he would just wait and see. And he said that he knew that if it wasn't of God, that it would fall away, and that he just thought he'd wait and he'd wait and see what happened. He didn't fight against it. He didn't criticize his leaders, but he just waited and had faith that that what was of God would come forth in the end. And so that's what I kind of admire. A lot of times in the church, we don't, you know, we don't understand what's, you know, the maybe, the counsel that we're given or or what's happening. Why is this happening? Or why are the leaders doing this? But if we wait and see, then a lot of times things will work out. And I think that that's he did have a lot of faith, and so that's his faith stuck with me.

Wendy Eaton 27:58

I've had the opportunity to listen to both of you present on William Marks' life multiple times. I very much am on board with both your thoughts on what stuck with you, his integrity and his kindness and his patience. He was quite the individual, and it's easy to see looking back, how significant he really was to the restoration movement. So, thank you so much for joining us. Do you have any closing thoughts on William Marks before we end for the day?

Cheryl Bruno 28:33

Well, I'm just really excited that this biography has been able to be written by John and I and because William Marks was a really important character in Restoration history, and up to this point, neither branch, neither the Brighamites or the Josephites, have really known a lot about him. We've known a little bit about him, but we don't have the full story. And so I'm really excited that this biography is now available so people can learn a lot more about what happened with William Marks in the early church.

John Dinger 29:08

Yeah, I agree. I I'm honored to have written this with Cheryl. I think it is a really good book. And it, it fills a hole in Restoration history. I think both branches, all branches of the Restoration can appreciate this, because he did touch so many different groups and lives. And so, I'm just, I'm really proud of the book and glad that it's out there.

Wendy Eaton 29:35

I'm glad it's out there too. And for listeners, again, that book is *Come Up Hither to Zion*. I know I will definitely it's on my list. I will get to it as soon as I can, because I agree. I think he's an important person for all Restoration traditions, Latter Day Saint traditions to understand a little bit better. So, thanks again to John Dinger and Cheryl Bruner for writing this remarkable book and joining us today. For our listeners, we encourage you to view the lecture at HistoricSitesFoundation.org, you can find it archived there, and to go out and find a copy of this book and read it for yourself. This has been Cuppa Joe, part of the Project Zion Podcast. I'm Wendy Eaton, thanks for listening.