Samuel and William Smith and the Unpaid Debt

Samuel Jonas v. Samuel H. Smith and William Smith, 1841–1842

Expanded narrative and biographical edition • Prepared for David Larsen

Two brothers were named in a claim for money. One was served; the other was not found. A judgment followed, but the constable could find no property to seize. Behind those spare entries were Samuel and William Smith—brothers of Joseph and Hyrum—trying to make a living amid the demands of family, business, and religious service.

This edition follows the surviving paper through the court process and introduces the people around it. The debt and the collection effort are documented. What the note paid for, how the brothers divided responsibility, and whether the creditor eventually collected remain unknown. [1]

Highlights

Person	Why this person matters
Samuel Harrison Smith	Younger brother of Joseph and Hyrum; early Book of Mormon witness and missionary. Served in the suit, and the defendant against whom judgment was entered.
William Smith	Samuel's younger brother; apostle and Plymouth tavern keeper. Named in the suit, but not found for service. His business and debts supply context.
Samuel Jonas	The creditor, very likely the Quincy merchant. His exact identity and the original transaction still need a direct documentary link.
Marshall and Davis	Justice Samuel Marshall recorded and certified the proceedings. Circuit clerk Jacob Cunningham Davis filed the copy on January 18, 1842.

The case in three figures

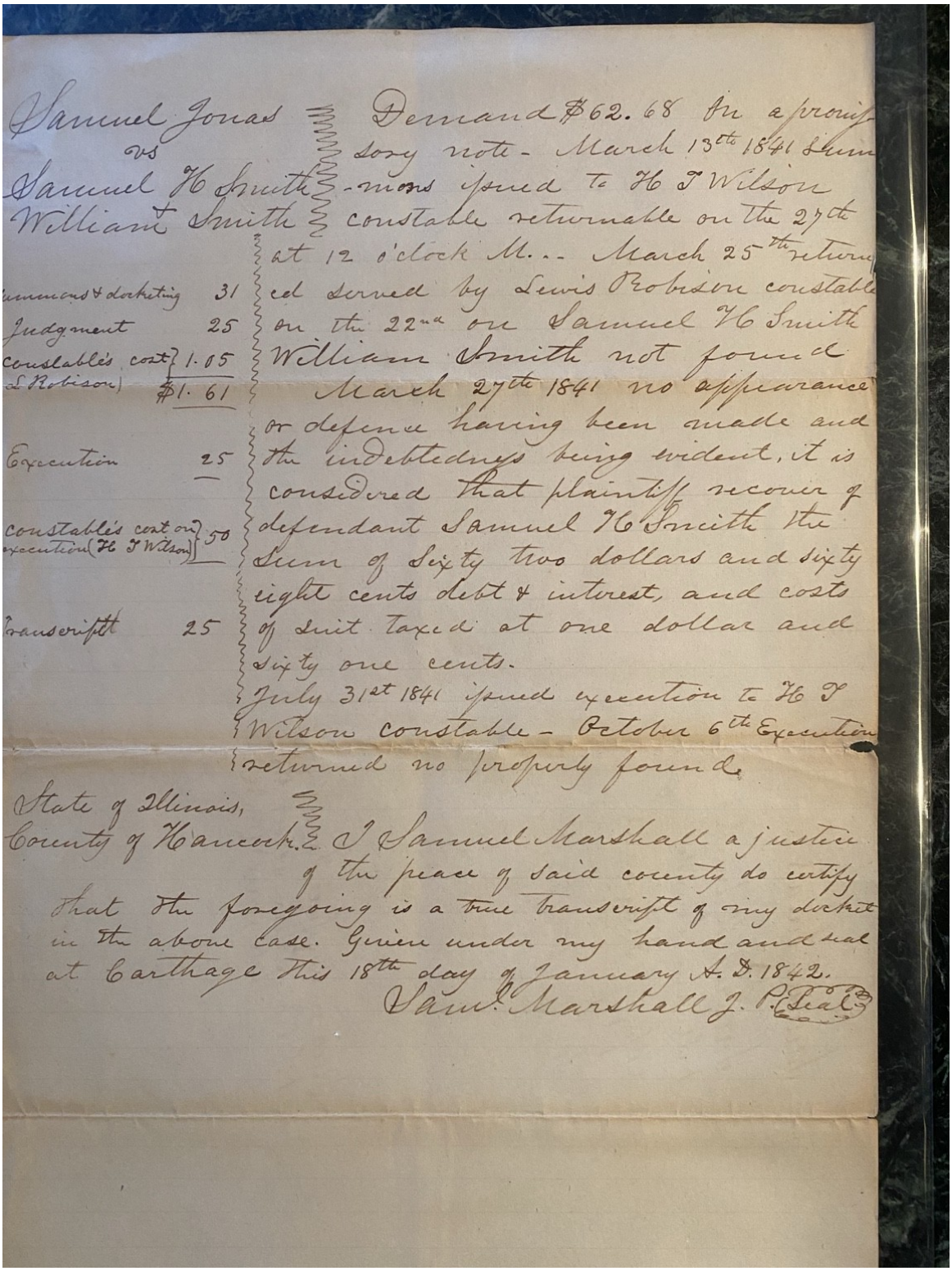
$62.68 debt and interest + $1.61 court costs = $64.29 at judgment.

Later execution and transcript fees appear separately. The judgment was against Samuel alone; the case caption names both brothers. [1]

Reading this edition

Begin with the original paper and transcription, or go directly to the story. The evidence guide, chronology, and source notes support closer reading. These links and the PDF bookmarks help with navigation on a phone.

The original document front



Certified transcript of Samuel Marshall's justice-court docket, January 18, 1842. The entries recount proceedings beginning March 13, 1841. Original project photograph IMG_3242. [1]

Transcription of the front

The two writing areas are separated below. Original wording and spelling are retained, with line breaks within each writing area. Raised letters are placed on the line; spacing is regularized. […] marks text clipped or unreadable in the photograph. The image remains the authority for fine punctuation and letter forms.

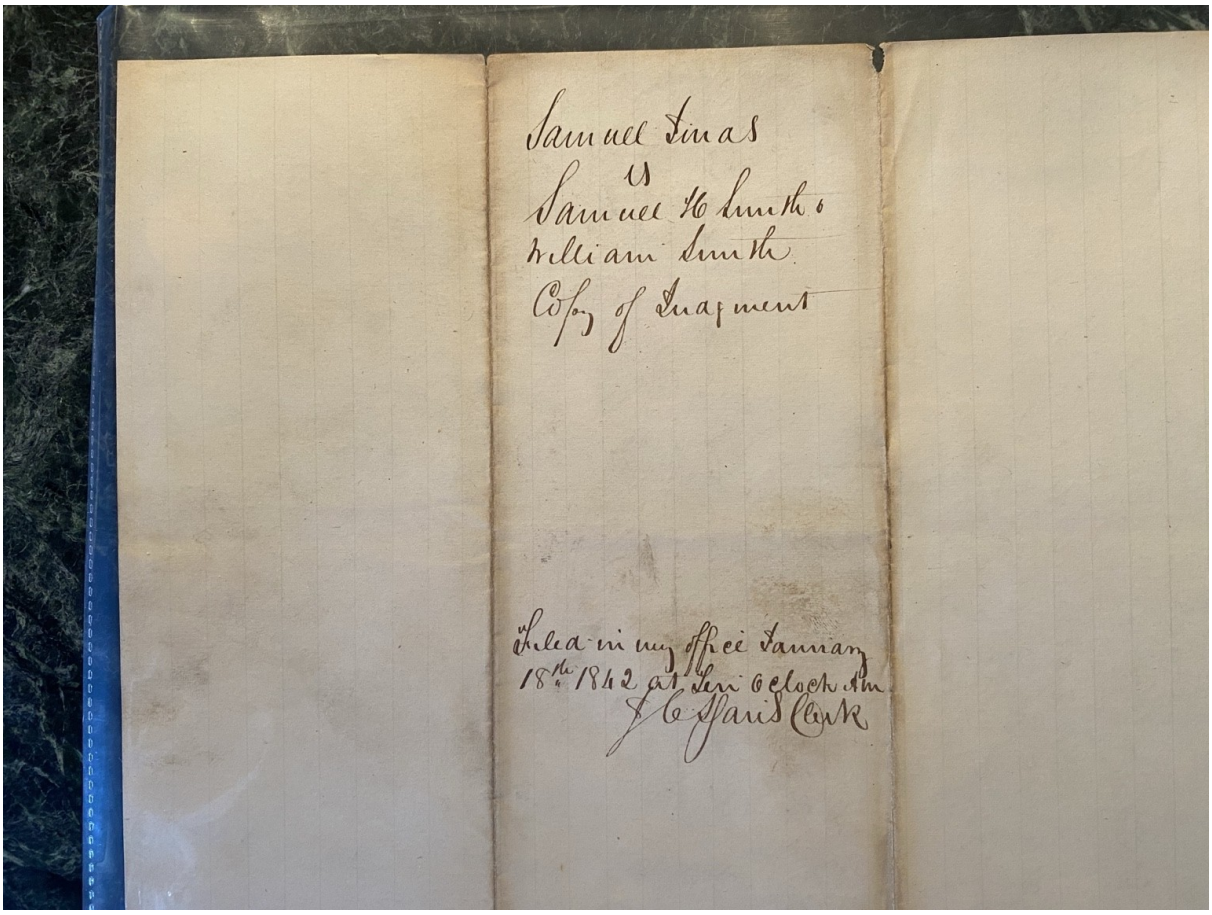
Case caption and fee column	Docket entries
Samuel Jonas vs Samuel H Smith & William Smith […]ummons & docketing 31 Judgment 25 Constables cost} 1.05 (L Robison) $1.61 Execution 25 […]constables cost on} 50 […]xecution (H T Wilson) […]ranscript 25	Demand $62.68 On a promi[…] sory note - March 13th 1841 Sum[…] -mons issued to H T Wilson constable returnable on the 27th at 12 o'clock M.. - March 25th return[…] ed served by Lewis Robison constable on the 22nd on Samuel H Smith William Smith not found March 27th 1841 no appearance or defence having been made and the indebtedness being evident, it is considered that plaintiff recover of defendant Samuel H Smith the Sum of Sixty two dollars and sixty eight cents debt & interest, and costs of suit taxed at one dollar and sixty one cents. July 31st 1841 issued execution to H T Wilson Constable - October 6th Execution returned no property found.

Certification across the foot of the sheet

State of Illinois,
County of Hancock.} I Samuel Marshall a justice
of the peace of said county do certify
That the foregoing is a true transcript of my docket
in the above case. Given under my hand and seal
at Carthage this 18th day of January A.D. 1842.
Saml. Marshall J.P. (Seal)

The left edge of several fee descriptions and the ends of some upper docket lines are clipped. Amounts are transcribed as written; the unmarked fee numerals are read as cents in the evidence guide. "(Seal)" represents the handwritten word inside the drawn seal.

The original document reverse



Reverse of the same sheet, rotated for upright reading. The case title and filing endorsement identify its later use as a Copy of Judgment. Original project photograph IMG_3243. [1]

Transcription of the reverse

Samuel Jonas
vs
Samuel H Smith &
William Smith.
Copy of Judgment

Filed in my office January
18th 1842 at ten OClock Am
J C Davis Clerk

Line divisions are retained; the filing time is read as ten in the morning. The docket identifies the clerk by initials. [1, 13]

The brothers and the unpaid debt

On March 13, 1841, Samuel Harrison Smith turned thirty-three. His younger brother William turned thirty. That same day, a justice of the peace in Carthage issued a summons naming them both in a debt suit brought by Samuel Jonas. The demand was for $62.68. Behind it lay a promissory note that has not yet been recovered—the missing beginning of a story whose court proceedings survive. [1, 10, 11]

Samuel and William belonged to one of the best-known families in the growing Latter-day Saint community. They were sons of Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, and younger brothers of Joseph Smith Jr. and Hyrum Smith. Yet their place in this case was an ordinary one: two men had been named in a claim for money, and the local court expected an answer.

That combination makes the paper worth reading closely. Religious leadership did not remove the need to earn a living, move a household, buy supplies, or obtain credit. The brothers' lives included missions and public responsibilities, but also farms, a tavern, property, bereavement, and unpaid obligations. The lawsuit catches those parts of their lives in a few tightly written lines.

Four brothers in the same family

Samuel and William should enter this story as people in their own right. Their relationship to Joseph and Hyrum explains why the names are familiar; their different lives explain why this small lawsuit matters.

Brother	Relationship to this case
Hyrum Smith	Older brother of Joseph, Samuel, and William; a central family and church figure.
Joseph Smith Jr.	Older brother of Samuel and William; leader of the Latter-day Saint movement.
Samuel Harrison Smith	Named defendant, personally served; judgment entered against him.
William Smith	Named defendant; not found for the recorded service.

The family connection is certain. The financial arrangement between Samuel and William is not. Naming both brothers in the suit does not establish which received the goods or money, whether they benefited equally, or whether one supported the other's credit. Those questions depend on the missing note or another account of the transaction.

One brother was found

Justice Samuel Marshall directed the summons to constable H. T. Wilson. It required an appearance at noon on March 27. The officer who actually served Samuel was Lewis Robison, on March 22. The transcript records the return on March 25 and then gives William's position in two words: "not found." [1]

Those words make the brothers' legal paths diverge. Samuel had received the notice. William had not been reached by the recorded service. Nothing on the page tells us where William was, whether an officer had searched more than one place, or why he could not be located. His absence from the return is not evidence that he was hiding.

March 27 came without an appearance or defense. Marshall entered judgment against Samuel H. Smith. Although William remained in the case caption, the judgment language names Samuel alone. That is the central fact a quick glance at the heading can miss.

The amount was $62.68 for "debt & interest," with $1.61 in court costs. Together they came to $64.29 at judgment. The docket also lists later execution and transcript fees separately. Because the award included interest, $62.68 cannot safely be called the original face amount of the note. [1]

A judgment was not a payment

For a creditor, winning in court and collecting money were separate events. On July 31, Marshall issued an execution—a direction to an officer to enforce the judgment—again to H. T. Wilson. On October 6, it came back with another short entry: “no property found.” [1]

The phrase is sometimes described by the Latin term nulla bona. It meant that the officer had not found property available to seize under that writ. It does not prove that Samuel owned nothing. Property could be exempt, difficult to locate, outside the officer’s reach, or held in a form that this process did not reach. The transcript does not say which difficulty arose here.

Nor does it explain the four-month interval between judgment and execution. There may have been conversations, informal collection efforts, practical delays, or none of these. The paper records the steps taken, not everything that happened between them.

The paper moved to another office

The last dated step survives on both sides of the sheet. On January 18, 1842, Marshall certified at Carthage that the writing was a true transcript of his docket. On the reverse, circuit clerk J. C. Davis recorded that he filed the “Copy of Judgment” that morning. [1]

This was more than making a keepsake of an unsuccessful suit. Illinois procedure provided a way to carry an unsatisfied justice-court judgment into the circuit-court system, where additional enforcement remedies could become available. Comparable Hancock County litigation, including Hibbard for the use of Hungerford & Livingston v. Miller and Joseph Smith, helps explain the function of such a certified copy. [2]

The Jonas paper establishes certification and filing. It does not establish that a second trial occurred, that land was actually seized, or that a sheriff’s sale followed. It also does not tell us whether Jonas eventually received his money. The surviving sequence ends with the creditor still pursuing the obligation.

Samuel moved to Plymouth in January 1842, about the time of this filing. A change in residence or property might have interested a creditor. But no recovered instruction from Jonas connects the two events, and no located levy identifies a particular parcel. The coincidence belongs among the questions, not among the answers. [10]

Samuel Smith beyond the judgment

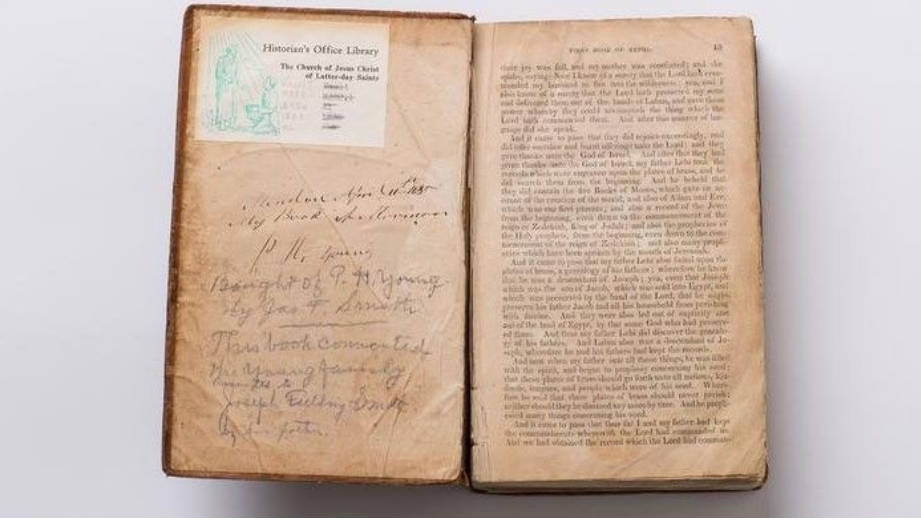
Samuel Harrison Smith is the brother against whom the judgment was entered. Knowing something of his life restores a person to the formal phrase “defendant Samuel H Smith.” In early 1841 he was a young father, recently bereaved, with years of religious service and repeated moves behind him. The lawsuit arrived during a difficult period, though the record gives no reason for his failure to appear. [10]

A witness and a traveling missionary

Samuel was born in Tunbridge, Vermont, on March 13, 1808. His childhood followed the Smith family’s movements through New England and into western New York. In May 1829, Oliver Cowdery baptized him at Harmony, Pennsylvania. That June he became one of the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, and he was among the small founding body associated with the Church’s organization in April 1830. [10]

His name therefore belongs near the beginning of the religious movement, not merely beside his more famous brother’s. He served as a missionary, worked, traveled, and accepted responsibilities in the developing church. After becoming an elder in 1830, he traveled on missions, including a journey toward Missouri with Reynolds Cahoon in 1831 and later work in the eastern United States with Orson Hyde. He became a high priest in 1831 and a member of the Kirtland high council in 1834. [10]

One of Samuel's early missionary connections also links this case with John P. Greene's story. The Church History Museum describes Samuel's 1830 distribution of copies of the Book of Mormon to Phineas Young and to the Greene household. Those encounters helped carry the book through a family and friendship network that included the Youngs and Heber C. Kimball. Their later significance was greater than the immediate response to Samuel's visits might have suggested. [18]



Book of Mormon, 1830 edition, given by Samuel Smith to Phineas Young. Church History Library; image from the Church History Museum collection page. This is a surviving artifact of Samuel's missionary work. [18]

The surviving book shown here went to Phineas Young. It is not identified as the Greene household's copy. It offers something a modern illustration cannot: a real object connected with Samuel's missionary work. No verified contemporary portrait of Samuel is included in this edition.

Work and responsibility in unsettled years

Samuel's activities also placed him in the institutional and financial life of the Kirtland church, including the Literary Firm and the Kirtland Safety Society. That background is relevant to the breadth of his experience, but it does not identify the origin of the Jonas note. A person's earlier financial associations cannot supply the missing terms of a later obligation. [10]

In 1838 Samuel moved to Missouri and took part in the clash at Crooked River during the conflict there. The expulsion of the Latter-day Saints brought another move. He reached Illinois as a refugee, and in 1839 worked for George Miller near Macomb. These were years in which work, family security, and religious commitments had to be rebuilt after displacement. [10]

The Joseph Smith Papers dates Samuel's move to Nauvoo to 1841. His wife Mary Bailey Smith died in January of that year. He married Levira Clark later in 1841. The debt case thus falls in a year of both family loss and household change. These circumstances help a reader understand the pressures around him without pretending to explain a decision the court record leaves unexplained. [10]

Samuel held ecclesiastical and civic responsibilities in the Nauvoo period, including service as a bishop, alderman, Nauvoo Legion officer, and University of Nauvoo regent. Public standing, however, was not the same as ready money. The failed execution in October can coexist with that list of offices. It tells us about an officer's unsuccessful attempt to find reachable property, not the total value of Samuel's life or service. [10]

The move to Plymouth

In January 1842 Samuel moved to Plymouth, where accounts connect him with William's tavern. That date imposes an important limit on the debt story. The lawsuit had begun ten months earlier. It should

not be described as a proven debt of a tavern the brothers were already running together in March 1841. Samuel's precise financial role before his move remains unknown. [10]

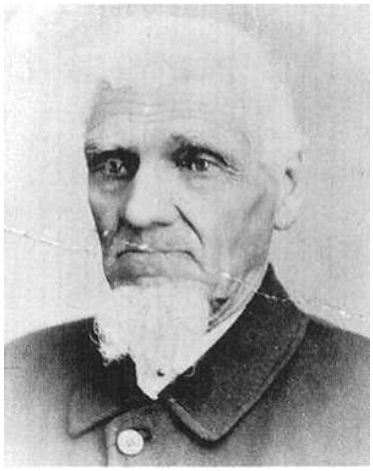
Family cooperation is a reasonable possibility. One brother might sign a note to help another obtain credit; both might have an interest in a purchase; either might be the principal borrower. But the fact that Samuel later joined William at Plymouth does not decide which arrangement existed when the note was made.

In April 1842, both brothers entered another shared association when they were initiated into Nauvoo Lodge. The earlier research records favorable action on their petitions on April 7 and their initiation as Entered Apprentices on April 9. Those dates follow the judgment and the filing of the transcript. They add to the brothers' shared history without explaining the debt's origin. [3]

Samuel died at Nauvoo on July 30, 1844, little more than a month after Joseph and Hyrum were killed. Accounts of his final illness have generated later disagreement, but nothing in the Jonas document bears on that controversy. In this story, the important Samuel is the living man of 1841 and 1842: a brother, father, worker, witness, and public servant facing an enforceable private obligation. [10]

William Smith and the business at Plymouth

William's name stands beside Samuel's at the top of the paper, then largely disappears from its procedural story because he was not served. To understand why the brothers might have shared a financial obligation, William's life deserves its own place in the narrative. He combined religious office with business and property interests, and his surviving correspondence shows that paying debts was on his mind in 1841. [5, 11]



William Smith in later life. The photograph is undated on the source page and does not depict him at age thirty. Image reproduced by the BYU Religious Studies Center. [19]

A younger brother with public responsibilities

William was born in Royalton, Vermont, on March 13, 1811. Like Samuel, he grew up within the Smith family's close and demanding religious world. He married Caroline Amanda Grant in February 1833. He had become an elder in December 1832 and a high priest in June 1833, and he participated in the Camp of Israel expedition in 1834. In February 1835 he was ordained one of the original Twelve Apostles. [11]

His relationships with other leaders could be turbulent. He was disfellowshipped in May 1839 and restored to the Twelve later that month. Such episodes belong in a full biography, but they should not become a shortcut for interpreting every financial difficulty. The Jonas case supplies no evidence of dishonesty, evasion, or a dispute over church authority. [11]

By about 1839, William had settled at Plymouth in Hancock County, where he kept a tavern. The earlier research describes a building associated with dwelling, hotel, and store uses, together with other lots, a stable, and acreage. The precise sequence and ownership of those properties remain matters for deed and local-record work. The securely relevant point is simpler: William was engaged in a business that required supplies, upkeep, and credit. [4, 11]

A letter about paying debts

William's August 5, 1841, letter to Joseph supplies the clearest contemporary glimpse of his financial concerns. He discussed property that might be sold "to Pay depts." The wording makes debt a documented part of his circumstances during the year of the lawsuit. It does not name Samuel Jonas or identify the obligation now under discussion. [5]

The distinction is small but essential. A tavern keeper might owe for food, furnishings, repairs, transport, building materials, or borrowed money. A Quincy merchant might supply some of those needs. William's letter and the probable plaintiff's commercial background make ordinary business credit a reasonable explanation. They do not tell us which item, service, or loan produced this note.

It is possible that William received most of the benefit and Samuel added his name to support the transaction. That would help explain why a debt associated with William's business could produce a judgment against Samuel when only Samuel was served. But the reverse arrangement is also possible, as is a shared household obligation or an older debt unrelated to Plymouth. The missing instrument prevents us from choosing with confidence.

The Nauvoo House connection

On April 13, 1841, William executed a $1,000 bond to Joseph Smith connected with his agency in receiving money and property for the Nauvoo House. This placed him within a much larger financial undertaking, but the bond came after the March 27 Jonas judgment. [4]

No endorsement, account, or notation presently links the Jonas note to that project. The same caution applies to the temple and general Church finances. The surviving suit names individuals; it does not identify an institutional purchase or obligation. William's agency shows the range of his responsibilities, not the purpose of this particular debt.

That separation helps make William more intelligible. A man could hold a religious commission and have private bills at the same time. His public responsibilities did not cancel his household or business needs, and his debts did not by themselves establish misconduct in an institutional role.

A life extending beyond Nauvoo

William later edited the Wasp and served in the Illinois legislature. After Joseph's death he became a prominent participant in the disputes over leadership and succession. His relationship with the main body of the Twelve ended, and his later religious career followed a contentious course. He lived until November 13, 1893, decades after Samuel, Joseph, and Hyrum. [11]

The portrait in this edition belongs to that later life. It is included so the reader can connect a face with William's name, not to suggest that he looked like an elderly man in the 1841 courtroom record. During the lawsuit he was thirty.

His long later history can easily overshadow the narrower question this paper presents. Whatever readers know of William's subsequent disputes, the transcript establishes only that Jonas named him with Samuel and that he was not reached by the recorded service. It contains neither a judgment against William nor an explanation of his absence.

The creditor named Samuel Jonas

The plaintiff presents a different kind of problem. His name is plain; his identity is not stated in full. The strongest candidate is Samuel Jonas of Quincy, a member of an English-Jewish family with commercial and civic ties in the region. Geography, chronology, and occupation make that identification persuasive. The transcript itself, however, supplies no address, occupation, or family relationship that makes the link conclusive. [1, 3, 6–9]

From Cincinnati to Quincy

Historical accounts place Samuel Jonas among the ten men who organized Congregation Bene Israel in Cincinnati on January 18, 1824. His brother Joseph Jonas was an early figure in the city's Jewish community. The family's roots lay in southwestern England, and its American history connects religious institution building with the movement of people and trade into the Ohio and Mississippi valleys. [6]

That earlier record gives Samuel a life before his name appears in this lawsuit. If the Quincy man is the plaintiff, he was not simply an unexplained creditor entering the Smith family's story for a single transaction. He had participated in western community life for many years.

Quincy histories associate Abraham, Edward, and Samuel Jonas with an iron-and-carriage enterprise at Fifth and Hampshire Streets. Accounts differ over the brothers' arrival dates and the development of the firm. It would be unsafe to take a description of the mature business and assume that every part of it was operating in precisely that form when the Smith note was made. [7]

One firmer chronological point survives in the research: Samuel Jonas appears in the history of Bodley Lodge at Quincy in 1840. He was therefore part of the city's social network before the March 1841 suit, even though the exact trade inventory of his business at that moment remains to be established. [3]

Why Quincy matters

Quincy served a market larger than the city itself. Its merchants and tradesmen dealt with people in surrounding settlements, including Hancock County. A note held by a Quincy businessman could arise from an ordinary purchase or extension of credit without requiring a special religious or political explanation.

The Jonas family's later association with iron and carriage work makes several possibilities easy to imagine: wagon repairs, hardware, transport equipment, or materials for a business property. None is identified in the court paper. Listing them helps explain the commercial setting; choosing one as the actual transaction would go beyond the evidence.

The earlier research also found Samuel in Quincy's cultural history. He was remembered as a long-serving president and supporter of the Quincy Library, including a benefaction through his will. Those accounts suggest an established civic figure whose public life extended well beyond collecting a single debt. [8]

His precise birth and death details are not fixed in this edition. The earlier report relied in part on a biographical notice about Lewin Henry Cohen and an uncle named Samuel Jonas. That relationship and chronology need checking before they can safely supply a date for the Quincy merchant. The legal interpretation does not depend on settling that genealogical issue. [9]

A name with an important qualification

Throughout this edition, "Samuel Jonas of Quincy" means the probable identification of the plaintiff. A contemporary invoice, the original note, a court index entry, or a later execution naming his residence could turn probability into a direct identification. Until then, the small qualification should stay with the name.

No verified portrait of this Samuel Jonas was located for this edition. An image of a namesake would create a false sense of certainty. The authentic Jonas-family portrait included below is of his brother Abraham, whose separate role in the surrounding history can be identified clearly.

The people who handled the paper

The docket passes through the hands of a justice, two constables, and a clerk. Their work gave a private obligation a public record. Several of these men later appeared in the bitter conflicts surrounding Nauvoo. Reading their 1841 and 1842 roles carefully keeps those later events from overwhelming what the document actually shows.

Samuel Marshall the justice

Samuel Marshall, born about 1790, was a public officer based at Carthage. His recorded responsibilities included county clerk, clerk of the county commissioners' court, bankruptcy commissioner, and justice of the peace. He was also an incorporator of the Carthage Female High School and Teachers' Seminary in 1837. [12]

In Jonas v. Smith, Marshall's role continued from beginning to end. He issued the summons, entered the judgment, issued the execution, and certified the transcript. The final certificate lets us read the sheet as his account of a connected sequence of proceedings rather than a collection of unrelated memoranda.

Marshall handled other debt cases involving Joseph Smith and his associates. The Hibbard litigation supplies a useful comparison because it likewise involved a promissory note and a certified justice-court record entering the circuit-court process. That parallel helps explain the form and purpose of this paper. [2]

Marshall later became associated with opposition to the Latter-day Saints. On June 24, 1845, he was killed in an altercation with Hancock County sheriff Miner R. Deming. Those later events matter to his biography. They do not establish a hostile purpose in his handling of Jonas's claim four years earlier. No irregularity or political motive is apparent on the face of this transcript. [12]

Jacob Cunningham Davis the clerk

The signature on the reverse belongs to Jacob Cunningham Davis. Born near Staunton, Virginia, on September 16, 1820, he moved to Warsaw in Hancock County by 1838, studied law, and entered public office while still a young man. He served as circuit clerk from 1841 to 1843. When he filed this paper in January 1842, he was twenty-one. [13]

His role here was to receive and file the certified copy. The endorsement gives the record a second official setting and an exact filing date. It does not show that Davis decided the merits of the debt or participated in the original judgment.

Davis soon became a state senator, serving in 1842–1848 and again in 1850–1856. He was a captain in the Warsaw militia in 1844. He was later indicted and tried in connection with the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and he and the other trial defendants were acquitted. He subsequently served briefly in the United States House of Representatives and died in Missouri in 1883. [13]

That later history makes his handwriting especially striking beside a case involving the victims' brothers. It must also be handled precisely: the 1842 filing is evidence of his work as clerk, not proof that this debt proceeding was part of the later conflict.

The two constables

H. T. Wilson received both the summons and the execution. His full given names have not been established securely in this project, so the initials are retained. Other Hancock County process places a

constable of that name within the same local legal system. The return of “no property found” belongs to the execution directed to him. [1, 2]

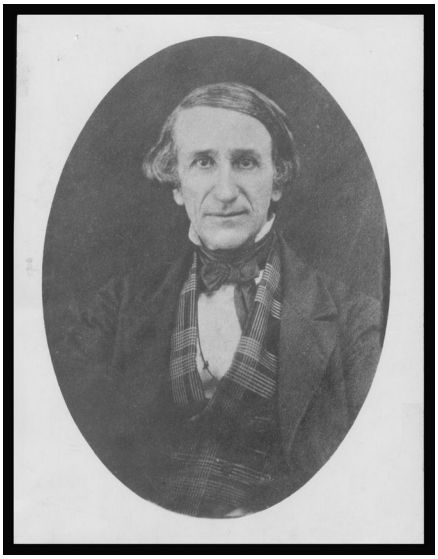
Lewis Robison was the officer who actually served Samuel on March 22. His name is therefore attached to the step that made the judgment against Samuel possible. The docket’s fee column also associates Robison with the original constable’s costs. [1]

Robison later appears as Nauvoo’s assessor and collector. A claim dated January 19, 1842, sought compensation for thirty-five days of assessment work, and a July 1842 delinquent-tax record identified him as collector. The earlier research also followed him into the later westward movement of the Saints. His church affiliation at the time of this service should not be assumed from that later history. [14]

Together these officials show how a small county’s institutions worked through overlapping personal networks. Serving a summons, assessing property, keeping a docket, and filing a transcript were practical tasks. The political or religious identities of the people involved did not make every such task a political act.

The relationships around the case

The strongest connection in the case is also the simplest: Samuel and William were brothers. That relationship could make shared credit possible. The probable identification of their creditor opens another family story, one linking Quincy commerce with Abraham Jonas and the developing Masonic world of Nauvoo.



Abraham Jonas, brother of the probable plaintiff Samuel Jonas. He helped establish Nauvoo Lodge; he is not the creditor named in this case. Quincy Public Library, item 2563. [20]

Two families in intersecting circles

Abraham Jonas was Samuel Jonas’s brother, not the plaintiff named on the paper. He became an important figure in Illinois Freemasonry. The earlier research records that he granted the dispensation for Nauvoo Lodge on October 15, 1841, and participated in its formal installation in March 1842. Samuel and William Smith were initiated the following month. [3, 7]

The dates keep the relationship in perspective. Jonas’s suit began in March 1841, before the Nauvoo dispensation and more than a year before the brothers’ initiation. Their later membership cannot, by itself, explain why the original note was made. Nor is there evidence that a lodge arranged collection, payment, forgiveness, or pressure in this case.

The Masonic connection still matters as social history. It shows that the Jonas and Smith families did not occupy wholly separate worlds. By 1842 their circles intersected through business geography, family relationships, and fraternal association. The lawsuit took place within that wider community of contacts.

The earlier research also noted marriage ties between members of the Jonas and Seixas families. Joshua Seixas, of that extended family, taught Hebrew to Joseph Smith and other Latter-day Saint leaders at Kirtland in 1836. This is a further contextual connection, not evidence of a transaction between this plaintiff and these defendants. The individual marriage links need a fuller genealogical citation before they should bear interpretive weight. [3, 6, 7]

What the relationships can explain

Relationships help explain how people could encounter one another and why credit might pass between them. They cannot replace the missing note. The family connection makes a brother's accommodation plausible; the Quincy connection makes trade plausible; the Nauvoo connections explain shared acquaintances. None identifies what was bought or borrowed.

The most defensible reading is therefore a private debt, possibly arising from ordinary commercial credit. William's Plymouth business makes him a plausible principal beneficiary, with Samuel perhaps supporting the obligation. That is one workable reconstruction, not a finding established by the judgment. A joint family purchase, Samuel's own obligation, or an earlier transaction remains possible.

What remains after the last entry

The record ends without a receipt. It does not tell us whether Jonas collected, whether the brothers settled matters between themselves, or whether another paper once completed the story. What it does preserve is unusually clear: a note-based demand, service on one brother, judgment against that brother, an unsuccessful execution, and a certified copy filed for further use. [1]

Around those steps stand people whose larger histories invite attention. Samuel was an early witness and missionary rebuilding his life after displacement and loss. William was an apostle and tavern keeper managing property and debts. The probable creditor belonged to a family active in Jewish communal life, Quincy commerce, and local institutions. The officials' later careers would place some of them in the county's most bitter disputes.

The value of the case lies in holding those stories together without making the paper say more than it does. It brings the Smith brothers into view as members of a family who also lived within the everyday economy of credit and collection. The note itself could change our understanding of their arrangement. Until it is found, the title's unpaid debt describes the failed collection recorded here; it does not claim that the obligation was never settled.

A guide to the evidence

The narrative draws on the recovered historical research report and project snapshot, with the court sequence checked against the original front and reverse photographs. Those images are the controlling source for what this particular paper says. The supporting biographies and research leads are retained below so a reader can follow the evidence beyond the story.

The amounts on the page

Entry	Amount	How to read it
Debt and interest awarded	$62.68	The judgment combines these two elements.
Summons and docketing	$0.31	Fee column.
Judgment fee	$0.25	Fee column.
Constable’s original costs	$1.05	Associated with Lewis Robison.
Original court costs total	$1.61	The preceding three cost entries total $1.61.
Total at judgment	$64.29	$62.68 plus $1.61; calculated here.
Later execution fee	$0.25	Listed separately on the docket.
Constable’s execution costs	$0.50	Associated with H. T. Wilson.
Transcript fee	$0.25	Listed separately on the docket.

The three later fee entries total $1.00 arithmetically. The transcript does not give a new consolidated balance or record who ultimately paid each fee. The $64.29 judgment total above combines only the expressly adjudged $62.68 and $1.61. No modern-dollar comparison is attempted.

What is known and what is proposed

Evidence level	What belongs here
Documented in this paper	Note-based demand; summons, service, return, default judgment against Samuel; amounts; execution, failed return, certification, and filing.
Strongly supported identification	The defendants are the Smith brothers. The plaintiff is very likely Samuel Jonas of Quincy, although a direct residence or occupation link is missing.
Procedural interpretation	Filing the certified copy fits an effort to pursue further enforcement. The actual later remedy and result are not documented here.
Possible explanations	William benefited from the credit and Samuel supported it; either brother was the principal beneficiary; or both shared a family obligation.
Context only	William’s Nauvoo House agency; the Jonas family’s commerce and Masonic connections; the Seixas family connection.
Unresolved	Note date, original principal, interest terms, consideration, signer roles, partial payments, later enforcement, and eventual satisfaction.

Explanations of the original obligation

Ordinary merchant or trade credit fits the regional setting and William's business activity. It could have involved goods, repairs, materials, furnishings, transport, or a cash loan. The general explanation is plausible; every particular item remains unproved.

William as the principal beneficiary and Samuel as a supporting signer is a coherent family-credit scenario. It should not be ranked as an established fact simply because it makes a satisfying story. The note has not been examined, and the transcript does not reproduce either signature or identify a surety.

A joint household or family obligation is also possible. So is an obligation primarily benefiting Samuel, with William supporting it. Signer order alone, even if recovered, would need to be considered with the wording of the instrument and any accompanying records.

A Church, temple, or Nauvoo House debt lacks a documentary link in the recovered material. William's April 1841 agency bond supplies context but follows the judgment. A Masonic explanation is likewise unsupported, and the key Nauvoo lodge events came later.

Words used in the court record

Term	Meaning in this case
Promissory note	A written promise to pay. The transcript identifies one, but the note itself has not been recovered.
Summons	Notice requiring a defendant to answer a claim at the stated time.
Return	The officer's report about what happened when the process was carried out.
Default judgment	Judgment entered without an appearance or defense by the defendant.
Execution	A court direction to enforce a judgment, potentially through seizure of reachable property.
Nulla bona	A term for a return reporting that no property was found for levy under the writ.
Transcript	A certified copy of the justice's docket, used here for filing in the circuit-court system.
Surety or accommodation signer	A person supporting another's credit or payment obligation. Neither role is established for either brother by this transcript.

Chronology of the case and its setting

Dates in the court sequence are read from the original photographs. Biographical and institutional dates come from the supporting research identified in the source notes. Contextual events are included to show their order, not to imply that they caused the debt.

Date	Event
About 1839	William settles at Plymouth and keeps a tavern.
1840	Samuel Jonas appears in Bodley Lodge records at Quincy.
January 1841	Samuel’s first wife, Mary Bailey Smith, dies.
March 13, 1841	Marshall issues the summons. Samuel turns 33 and William turns 30.
March 22, 1841	Lewis Robison serves Samuel H. Smith. William is not found.
March 25, 1841	The docket records the return of the summons.
March 27, 1841	No appearance or defense; judgment against Samuel for $62.68 plus $1.61 costs.
April 13, 1841	William executes a $1,000 bond connected with Nauvoo House agency.
July 31, 1841	Execution issues to H. T. Wilson.
August 5, 1841	William writes to Joseph about property that might be sold to pay debts.
October 6, 1841	Execution returns “no property found.”
October 15, 1841	Abraham Jonas grants the Nauvoo Lodge dispensation.
January 1842	Samuel moves to Plymouth.
January 18, 1842	Marshall certifies the transcript; J. C. Davis files the copy the same day.
March 1842	Abraham Jonas participates in the formal installation of Nauvoo Lodge.
April 7–9, 1842	The brothers’ lodge petitions are favorably acted on; both are initiated.
July 30, 1844	Samuel dies at Nauvoo, after the June deaths of Joseph and Hyrum.
June 24, 1845	Marshall is killed in an altercation with Sheriff Deming.
December 25, 1883	Davis dies in Missouri.
November 13, 1893	William dies after a long post-Nauvoo life.

Where another document could change the story

The most valuable next discovery would be the original note or the complete court packet associated with the January 18, 1842, filing. The present edition is complete as a reading edition of the recovered materials. These are future research leads, not documents claimed to have been examined.

Start with the court paper index

The earlier research identified the Hancock County Circuit Court Index to Court Papers, 1830–1865, volume A, cited in Joseph Smith Papers research as Family History Library microfilm 955126. The J

entries should be checked for Samuel Jonas and the S entries for Samuel H. Smith and William Smith. Any packet, file, box, or page reference should be followed into the loose papers. The current digital access route may differ from the older microfilm citation. [15]

Follow the filing into the surviving records

The Illinois Regional Archives Depository holdings associated with Western Illinois University were identified in the earlier report as including Hancock County circuit-court case files beginning in 1829, circuit clerk's miscellaneous files beginning in 1827, a circuit-court index beginning in 1830, and bound court records. A focused inquiry should use all three litigants' names and the filing date January 18, 1842. Repository holdings and access arrangements should be confirmed when making the inquiry. [16]

The L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Brigham Young University holds Hancock County legal material, including collections covering the 1838–1844 period and original or copied circuit-court papers. The earlier research did not fix a definitive collection and folder for this particular suit. A missing result in one repository would not prove that the note is lost everywhere. [17]

Ask for the complete packet, including fronts, backs, wrappers, docket entries, fee bills, executions, and attachments. The reverse of the present document demonstrates why this matters: the filing information is essential to understanding what happened after the failed execution.

Questions to take into the archive

The note could establish its date, original principal, maturity, interest terms, place of execution, and named parties. An endorsement or account could identify the consideration, partial payments, or a surety arrangement. Later court papers could show a circuit execution, lien, levy, sale, satisfaction, or release.

Deed, mortgage, and tax records could test whether Samuel's January 1842 move to Plymouth involved property relevant to collection. Quincy advertisements and business accounts from 1840–1841 could clarify Samuel Jonas's trade at the relevant time. A contemporary statement of the plaintiff's residence would resolve the identification that remains probable in this edition.

These questions keep the research open at the points where a new document could make a real difference. They do not require the reader to withhold what is already clear about the suit's recorded course.

Notes and sources

Bracketed numbers connect the narrative to the source groups below. The original project supplied several broad bibliographic references without page numbers or archival call numbers. Those references are preserved as research leads rather than supplied with invented precision. New illustration sources are identified separately. All portraits are historical images; none is a generated likeness.

1 The case document and recovered project research

Samuel Jonas v. Samuel H. Smith and William Smith, certified transcript by Samuel Marshall, January 18, 1842; filing endorsement by J. C. Davis, same date. Front photograph IMG_3242 and reverse IMG_3243, supplied in the project. Read with Samuel_Jonas_v_Smith_Project_Research_Snapshot and Samuel_Jonas_v_Smith_Historical_Research_Report, recovered versions dated August 30, 2026. This edition checks the proceedings against the photographs, including the March 25 return entry.

2 Comparable justice and circuit court procedure

Joseph Smith Papers, “Introduction to Hibbard for the use of Hungerford & Livingston v. Miller and JS,” and associated process. The comparison explains the purpose of a certified transcript; it does not establish later events in Jonas v. Smith.

Read the comparable case

3 Masonic records and the family network

John C. Reynolds, History of Masonry in Illinois, for Samuel Jonas and Bodley Lodge in 1840; the recovered project’s summary of the Nauvoo Lodge proceedings for April 7 and 9, 1842. The original report did not provide page citations for these entries. It also used Quincy historical accounts for the Jonas network. The lodge dates are retained as prior research findings; they are not entries in the debt transcript.

4 William at Plymouth and the Nauvoo House bond

Joseph Smith Papers, “William B. Smith—Biography,” and the bond dated April 13, 1841, discussed in the prior research. The $1,000 bond concerned William’s agency for the Nauvoo House and postdates the Jonas judgment. The fuller inventory of Plymouth properties in the earlier report still needs precise deed or other supporting citations.

William Smith biography

5 William’s own words about debt

Joseph Smith Papers, “Letter from William Smith, 5 August 1841,” especially page 2. The phrase “to Pay depts” is from the letter. William did not identify Jonas in that passage.

Read the August 1841 letter

6 Samuel Jonas and Cincinnati

Jewish Encyclopedia, “Cincinnati” (1901–1906); Peter Wiernik, History of the Jews in America (New York, 1912); historical accounts of Congregation Bene Israel. These were identified in the prior report for the ten founders on January 18, 1824. The report did not supply page references. Their Samuel Jonas must still be connected directly to the plaintiff named in this paper.

7 The Jonas family in Quincy

Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County, “Jonas was father of Freemasonry in Illinois,” and related Jonas-family histories, as cited in the earlier report. Accounts differ over arrival and business

chronology. Descriptions of the iron-and-carriage enterprise should not be assigned to a precise 1841 date without a contemporary directory, advertisement, or account.

8 Samuel Jonas and the Quincy Library

Reminiscences of Quincy, Illinois: Containing Historical Events, Anecdotes, Matters Concerning Old Settlers and Old Times (Quincy, 1882); Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County, “Quincy’s Jewish families helped shape the city.” The prior report cites Samuel as a long-serving library president and testamentary benefactor; page references were not supplied.

9 A genealogical point requiring another check

The History of Adams County, Illinois (Chicago: Murray, Williamson & Phelps, 1879), biographical sketch of Lewin Henry Cohen. The previous report used an uncle named Samuel Jonas in discussing Cohen’s winter 1877–1878 medical-college appointment. This edition does not treat that passage as a settled death date for the Quincy creditor. The uncle’s identity and the chronology need confirmation.

10 Samuel Harrison Smith

Joseph Smith Papers, “Samuel Harrison Smith—Biography,” with its cited contemporary and historical sources; Church History Biographical Database, as identified in the prior report. The biography supplies the March 13, 1808, birth, early church roles, Illinois movements, family changes, January 1842 move to Plymouth, and July 30, 1844, death.

Samuel Smith biography

11 William B Smith

Joseph Smith Papers, “William B. Smith—Biography,” for his March 13, 1811, birth, marriage, ordinations, Plymouth residence, public career, and later life. Wilford Woodruff Papers’ biographical entry independently gives November 13, 1893, as his death date. The narrative does not infer the character of the 1841 transaction from William’s later controversies.

William Smith biography • Wilford Woodruff Papers entry

12 Samuel Marshall

Joseph Smith Papers, “Samuel Marshall—Biography,” for his offices, educational incorporation, and death on June 24, 1845. His role in this case is established by the front photograph. The later political conflict does not establish a motive for this judgment.

Samuel Marshall biography

13 Jacob Cunningham Davis

Joseph Smith Papers, “Jacob Cunningham Davis—Biography,” for his early life, circuit clerkship, state senate and congressional service, indictment and acquittal, and death. The reverse photograph establishes his filing of this particular copy.

Jacob Cunningham Davis biography

14 Lewis Robison and the unresolved Wilson identification

Joseph Smith Papers, “Claim from Lewis Robison, 19 January 1842” and “Certification of List of Delinquent Taxes for 1841,” circa July 23, 1842, as identified in the prior report. These support Robison’s assessor and collector work. The first names represented by H. T. Wilson remain unresolved in the project; they have not been expanded by conjecture.

15 Hancock County court index

Hancock County Circuit Court, Index to Court Papers, 1830–1865, volume A, Family History Library microfilm 955126, identified through Joseph Smith Papers citations in the prior research. It is a finding aid to be pursued, not an index claimed to have yielded this packet during preparation of the present edition.

16 Illinois Regional Archives Depository

Hancock County records inventory, Illinois State Archives / IRAD at Western Illinois University, as identified in the earlier report: circuit-court case files, circuit clerk's miscellaneous files, circuit-court index, and bound circuit-court records. Holdings dates and access should be checked with the repository before ordering material.

17 BYU manuscript collections

L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Hancock County legal-document collections, including material covering 1838–1844 and original or copied circuit-court papers. The prior report identified this as a repository lead without a definitive call number for Jonas v. Smith.

18 Samuel Smith's surviving missionary book

Church History Museum, "Samuel Smith's First Edition Book of Mormon." The pictured 1830 volume is held by the Church History Library and was given by Samuel to Phineas Young. The museum discusses a separate copy connected with the Greene household. Photograph reproduced from the museum's collection page; no claim is made that this is the Greene copy.

Museum story and image source

19 William Smith portrait

Historical later-life portrait reproduced on "William Smith," in Lawrence R. Flake, Prophets and Apostles of the Last Dispensation (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 367–369. The source page does not date the photograph. It is labeled here as later life and is not presented as a portrait made in 1841.

Portrait source at BYU

20 Abraham Jonas portrait

Quincy Public Library, Quincy Area Historic Photo Collection, "Abraham Jonas," item 2563, Illinois Digital Archives. The catalog identifies Abraham, brother of the probable plaintiff. The image is included for the family and community connection, not as a likeness of Samuel Jonas.

Portrait catalog record

About this edition

Prepared for David Larsen. This narrative edition retains the recovered report's substantive biographies, competing explanations, chronology, and archival leads. The original photographs and transcriptions appear near the beginning; the reverse is rotated for upright reading.

Reading the front adds the March 25, 1841, return date to the chronology. The earlier report's proposed death chronology for Samuel Jonas is qualified pending identification of the uncle in the Cohen biography. Missing edge text has not been silently supplied.

The illustrations are identified in notes 18–20. A verified portrait of Samuel Jonas was not located. The note's terms, the brothers' respective financial roles, and the ultimate payment of the debt remain unresolved.