William Marks’s Prescription

Medicine, Loss, and Conscience in Early Nauvoo

An illustrated documentary history • Revised research draft • 14 October 2026

Highlights

• A small medicine account records purchases in 1839 and 1840, including two entries for calomel. Its last entry is now read as “Wm Marks,” identifying William Marks.

• The account appears to charge John F. Weld. It does not identify a patient, prescribe a dose, or establish what illness was being treated.

• Newspapers and family letters reveal the burden of sickness in early Nauvoo. Later burial reports name diarrhea, flux, and ague, but cannot supply diagnoses missing from the earlier record.

• William Marks’s life carries the story beyond the sickroom: presidency at Nauvoo, the death of a son, inclusion with Rosannah in the Anointed Quorum, the crisis of 1844, and a long search for a religious home.

A paper that survived

The surviving slip has very little to say about pain. It gives dates, medicine, money, and names. Across its narrow face, someone recorded a purchase of medicine in August 1839, then two purchases of calomel. Beside the last transaction, dated April 10, 1840, the writer added that the medicine was “got by” William Marks, whose first name appears in abbreviated form. The total was five dollars and thirty-seven cents.

That ordinary act—someone obtaining medicine—opens a view into a city struggling to become habitable. Families arriving at Commerce, soon called Nauvoo, needed land, shelter, food, and work. They also needed someone who would come when the fever returned or a child could no longer keep fluids down. Confidence in a new religious gathering place did not remove the physical vulnerability of the people building it.

The name associated with this paper is William Marks, the Nauvoo stake president. Following him takes us from the practical errands of settlement to a household funeral, and from Joseph Smith’s confidence to the difficult choices after his murder. The document cannot tell that whole story. It can give us an honest place to begin.

Editorial note: “Prescription” is retained as the project title. “Medicine account” is the more precise description of the surviving document. The final name is now read as “Wm Marks,” expanded as William Marks. This revised photographic reading supersedes “Mr Marks”; the abbreviation remains open to verification against the original. [1]

The document: purchases, not a diagnosis

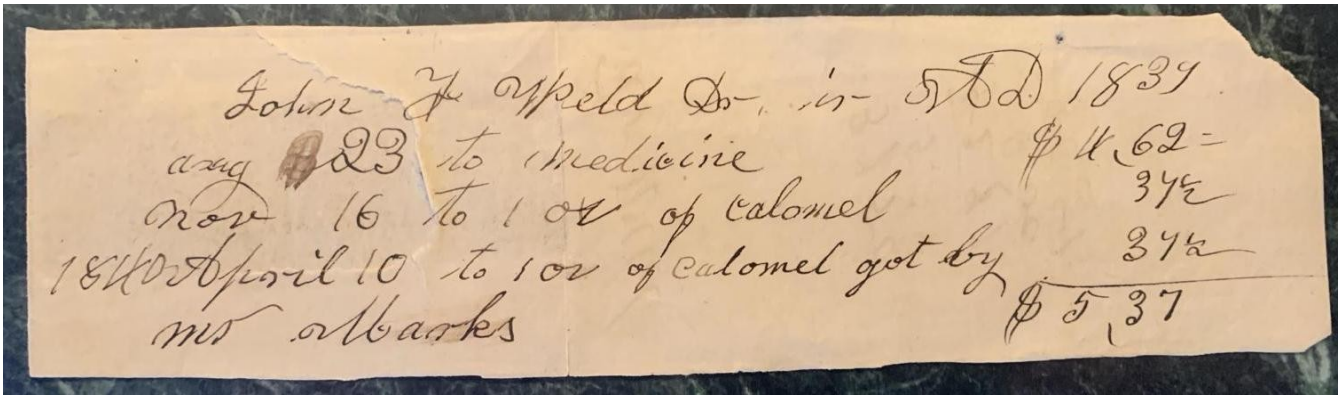


Figure 1. Front of the original account, rotated and cropped for legibility. Photographs supplied by David Larsen. No handwriting has been reconstructed. [1]

Working transcription

Capitalization and line divisions are retained where practical. Brackets mark uncertainty or physical interference; the amount columns are aligned for reading. This is a photographic reading, not an examination of the original under magnification.

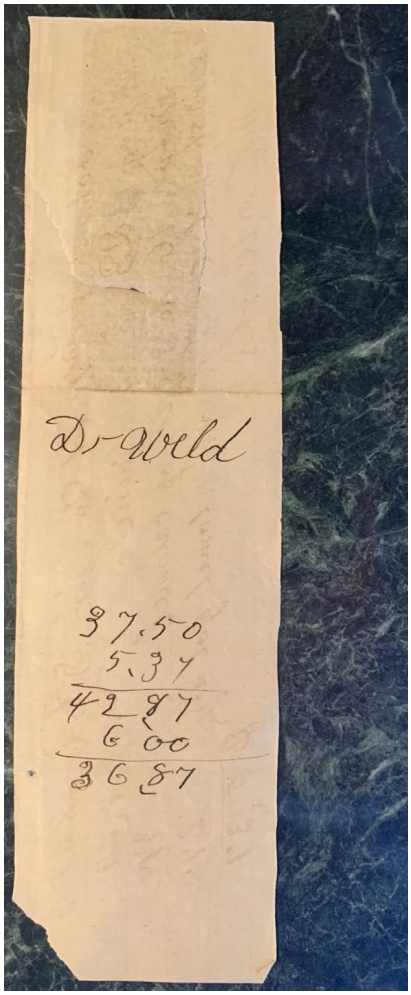
Date / heading	Entry	Amount
[Heading]	John F Weld Dr. [in?] A D 1839	
aug [blot] 23	to medicine	$4.62–
nov 16	to 1 oz of calomel	37½
1840 April 10	to 1 oz of Calomel got by Wm [William] Marks	37½
	[Total]	$5.37

The arithmetic supports the reading: $4.62 plus 37½ cents twice equals $5.37. The date on the last line reads 1840. The heading and the disturbed ink before "23" deserve comparison with a sharper photograph, but neither uncertainty changes the central observation: this is an itemized account.

"Dr." after a name is a conventional bookkeeping abbreviation for debtor. Although Weld was a physician, its position here favors the accounting meaning. The writer appears to be charging John F. Weld for goods. The name of the supplier is absent. "Got by Wm Marks" identifies a collector or intermediary, not necessarily the person who would take the drug.

Nor is "1 oz" a dosage instruction. It is the quantity entered in a purchase. It might have supplied several preparations, a household, or a physician's stock. The paper contains no patient name, symptoms, route of administration, or directions. Calling it proof that Marks swallowed an ounce of calomel would convert a purchase into an event the source never records.

On the back: an unfinished financial story



Working transcription of the reverse

[Dr?] Weld

37.50
5.37
———
42.87
6.00
———
36.87

The abbreviated name appears to identify Weld. The calculation adds the front’s $5.37 to $37.50, then subtracts $6.00 from $42.87.

The arithmetic is clear; the meaning of the surrounding sums is not. There is no label showing whether $37.50 was an earlier balance, whether $6.00 was a payment or credit, or when this calculation was made.

For that reason, “receipt” would also be premature. The slip lacks an explicit acknowledgment that the account was paid.

Figure 2. Reverse of the original account, turned upright. Faint writing visible through the paper is not treated as an additional entry. [1]

The questions that keep the story honest

The most useful unanswered question is whose medicine this was. A collector might have been obtaining it for himself, for someone at home, or for a doctor treating several people. None of those possibilities should quietly become the narrative’s premise. Similarly, the Nauvoo setting rests on the historical association of the people and the owner’s attribution, not on a place-name written on the slip.

What survives securely is a small chain of transactions extending from late summer 1839 to spring 1840. Its dates coincide with the building of a new community and a severe burden of sickness. That coincidence is a reason to investigate, not a diagnosis.

A city assembled among the sick

In 1839 the gathering at Commerce was also a work of recovery. Displaced Latter-day Saints had to establish households after the Missouri crisis. A river settlement offered land and access, but the labor of making homes began before families had secured the conditions that would keep them well. Housing, drainage, reliable food, and clean water were necessities still being worked out.

Contemporary accounts make sickness part of that work rather than a distant background. In September 1839, Joseph Smith spoke about the suffering around him. His household had taken in the sick; religious leadership included the immediate demands of caring for bodies. The point is not that every resident was stricken by one disease. It is that illness interfered with the ordinary tasks on which a new town depended. [2]

Emma Smith’s letter of December 6, 1839, brings that interference into a household. She reported sickness among the children and among neighbors. James Mulholland, Joseph’s clerk, had come to the house on October 30 and died on November 3. Work remained unfinished because the person who was doing it was dead. The letter moves between family health and practical business in a way that captures life more faithfully than a general statement that Nauvoo was unhealthy. Illness was not a separate subject; it altered everything else. [3]

Standing water mattered, but the familiar picture of a swamp drained once and thereby made safe is too simple. In July 1842, petitioners still complained about riverfront driftwood, eddies, and stagnant water. They described offensive effluvia and risks to health as well as impediments to navigation. Their language reflects an understanding of unhealthy air, not modern knowledge of mosquito transmission. The petition proves a continuing concern; it does not by itself prove that its proposed remedy was carried out. [4]

Today, malaria is understood as a parasitic infection usually transmitted by infected female Anopheles mosquitoes. Historical “ague” and recurring chills may be consistent with malaria, but the word fever alone cannot identify it. Yellow fever should not be inserted into this account merely because it is also mosquito-borne. No source examined for this paper establishes yellow fever as the explanation for these purchases or for the selected deaths of 1839–1840. [5]

Diarrheal disease demands another line of explanation. Contaminated food and water can transmit intestinal infections; severe fluid and electrolyte loss can make them fatal. Mosquitoes and unsafe water therefore belong to related environmental history without becoming the same cause. Draining a wet place might change mosquito habitat, yet it would not automatically make drinking water safe or prevent every intestinal infection. [6]

The frontier’s danger lay partly in these overlapping needs. A family might have to build a shelter, obtain food, nurse a relative, and earn money in the same week. A fever weakened the worker who was supposed to improve the household’s surroundings. A death removed a caregiver as well as a loved one. The account’s small purchase belongs within that larger struggle to keep daily life functioning.

What the early newspapers actually tell us

For the dates on this slip, the central local newspaper is the Times and Seasons. The Wasp began in 1842 and the Nauvoo Neighbor in 1843; their detailed death reports belong to a later phase. Reading those later reports helps explain the range of disease language, but moving their diagnoses backward into 1839 would create evidence that does not exist. [7]

The December 1839 Times and Seasons printed a cluster of obituaries. Their force lies in names, ages, and repeated losses within households. These notices seldom supply a medical explanation. A selection illustrates both what they preserve and what they leave unanswered. [8]

Person	Death as printed	Age as printed	Cause supplied?
Zina Huntington	July 8, 1839	53	No
Sterry Fisk	July 26, 1839	41	No
Hezekiah W. Fisk	October 7, 1839	30	No
James Mulholland	November 3, 1839	35	No
Rhoda Fisk	November 6, 1839	62	No
Hezekiah Fisk	November 9, 1839	64	No
William Fisk	November 11, 1839	35	No

These are selected notices, not a census of deaths. Even dates can conflict: the cemetery record places Zina Huntington’s death on July 7, while the newspaper gives July 8. Such differences should remain visible rather than being silently harmonized. The repeated Fisk surname is a promising route into family history, but each relationship and cause still needs its own evidence. [8–9]

In June 1840 the newspaper reported the deaths of Bishop Edward Partridge, aged forty-six, and his daughter Harriet Pamela, who died in her nineteenth year after nine months of illness. Their notices connect the community’s public history with prolonged suffering inside a family. Harriet’s reported illness also warns against turning every death into a sudden attack of the same epidemic. [10]

These pages support a story of repeated bereavement. They do not support a reliable numerical estimate of life expectancy. The population was growing and moving, records are incomplete, and ages at death are not equivalent to the expected lifespan of a person living there. An infant’s death and an adult’s death in middle age both shortened lives, but calculating their average would not solve those demographic problems.

For the narrative, one carefully documented family loss is often more powerful than a dramatic percentage. A name disappears from the town’s work, a household loses support, and a funeral interrupts the building of the city. Those are consequences the evidence can sustain.

Calomel and the promise of active treatment

Calomel was mercurous chloride, a mercury compound widely used as a purgative. Its effects were conspicuous: a medicine that provoked evacuation could appear to be acting decisively against illness. Within medical systems that associated disease with disordered bodily processes and harmful accumulations, purging offered a treatment with an intelligible purpose. The doctors using it did not need to know about microbes or malaria parasites to believe that they were intervening effectively. [11]

That belief did not make the treatment harmless. Mercury preparations could produce serious toxicity, including inflammation of the mouth, salivation, and damage to the gums and teeth. In a person already losing fluids through diarrhea, an additional purgative could compound danger. The historical task is to hold intention and consequence together: a physician could be trying to preserve life while using a remedy capable of doing harm. [11–12]

The account does not reveal how Weld intended these purchases to be used. Calomel's presence cannot identify malaria, bowel disease, or any other single diagnosis. Nor does survival prove that a medicine helped. If the collector was William Marks, his later life establishes that he lived beyond April 1840; it tells us nothing certain about the effects of this particular purchase.

Quinine offered a different therapeutic possibility. Isolated from cinchona bark in 1820, it became a treatment for intermittent fevers and had activity against malaria itself. Its history prevents us from treating every nineteenth-century remedy as equally ineffective. Yet there is no quinine entry on this slip, and no basis here for claiming Weld used it in this transaction. [31]

The availability of other treatments also matters. Physicians and families could choose among purgatives, botanical preparations, supportive nursing, and religious healing. These were not always exclusive commitments. A person might pray, seek a blessing, consult a physician, and accept a remedy within the same illness. We should not assign any particular combination to this transaction without evidence.

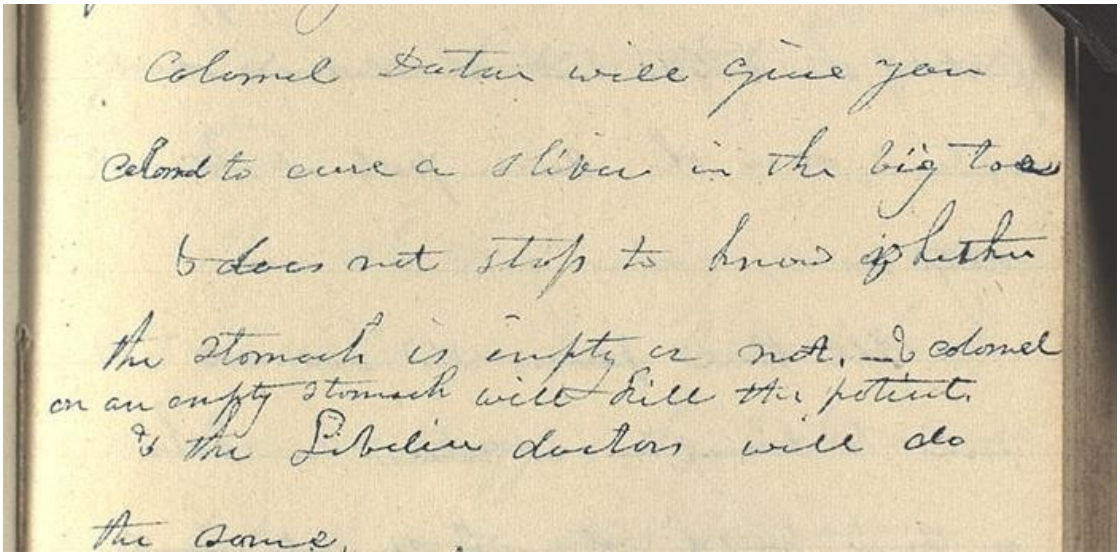


Figure 3. Willard Richards's notes of Joseph Smith's remarks on calomel and lobelia doctors, April 13, 1843. Detail from Joseph Smith's journal, p. 131; Joseph Smith Papers, Church History Library. [13]

Joseph Smith's criticism of doctors was vivid. In April 1843 he mocked the practitioner who would give calomel even for a splinter in a toe. The same passage criticized lobelia doctors. This was not a simple endorsement of every botanical alternative; it was a complaint about indiscriminate treatment and professional authority. His remarks document distrust. They should not be converted into modern medical instructions or taken as proof that all Nauvoo residents shared his judgment. [13]

Alvin's death—and another brother's funeral

The name calomel carried a painful association in the Smith family. Alvin Smith died in New York on November 19, 1823, years before the family's moves to Ohio and the later gathering in Missouri and Illinois. Lucy Mack Smith's history, dictated in 1844–1845, remembered a severe illness described as "bilious cholick," the absence of the family's usual physician, and another doctor's administration of calomel. Her account treated the medicine as a decisive part of what went wrong. [14]

Lucy's recollection is essential evidence of family experience and memory. It is not a surviving clinical record or a modern toxicological finding. The safest formulation is that she attributed Alvin's fatal decline to the treatment. Saying simply that a dose of calomel killed him would resolve the underlying illness and mechanism of death more confidently than the evidence permits. The distinction does not diminish her anguish. It makes clear whose testimony the reader is hearing.

There is a more intimate connection between William Marks and Joseph Smith's experience of bereavement. On April 7, 1842, Marks's son Ephraim died at twenty-four. Two days later, Joseph attended the funeral. The procession went from William Marks's home to the place of service, and Joseph spoke of the solemnity of the occasion. His remarks recalled the deaths of his own brothers Alvin and Don Carlos. [15]

The stake president who appears in institutional records as an officeholder was now a father accompanying his son's body. Joseph's relationship with him existed in that human setting before the bitter divisions that followed the prophet's death. Before their followers divided over succession, these households had shared the work of mourning.

No cause of Ephraim's death is established by the funeral sources cited here. It would be tempting to make him another victim of malaria, or to link him to the calomel purchase two years earlier. Neither move is justified. His death belongs in the story because it is documented and consequential, not because it can be made to complete an imagined medical pattern.

The funeral also changes how the paper's opening can be understood. At first, William Marks appears only as a name beside an errand. By 1842, the reader knows a man whose family could not be protected by office, faith, social standing, or the presence of doctors. That shared vulnerability is the bridge between the medicine account and the biography that follows.

John Fuller Weld: a physician in this world

The earlier illustrated study of Hiram Kimball and John Weld provides the foundation for this doctor's biography. Its findings should travel with their uncertainties. The Joseph Smith Papers gives John Fuller Weld's birth as December 11, 1809; other biographical and educational material used in the earlier project gives 1808. The precise birth year remains unresolved in the sources assembled for the two projects. [16–17]

Weld came from a New England family and built a professional life in western Illinois. The earlier research traces his medical education through Dartmouth and Castleton records and places him in Hancock County before his documented Nauvoo activity. His presence matters because frontier medicine was not supplied only by improvised healers. Practitioners brought training, professional ambitions, and established therapeutic habits into communities where conditions could frustrate all three.

By March 1841 Weld was associated with the Nauvoo Legion as a surgeon. He also participated in local civic and fraternal life. These connections placed a physician within the institutions through which the growing city organized itself. They do not establish that he joined the Latter-day Saint church; no baptismal evidence has been identified in the research used here. [16–17]

A malpractice dispute in 1843 offers a more revealing view of his work than a list of offices. In Dana v. Brink, Weld appeared among medical witnesses in a case arising from Margaret Dana's treatment during childbirth. The evidence brought physicians and experienced women attendants into the same courtroom. The proceedings exposed disagreement over competent practice, interpretation of injuries, and the authority to judge another practitioner. Joseph Smith sat as judge. Medicine in Nauvoo was being contested in public as well as practiced in private rooms. [18]

That episode complicates a story told only as heroic doctors battling a hostile environment. Women's experience at births and in sickrooms was indispensable. Physicians disagreed with one another. Families had to decide whom to trust while suffering the consequences of those decisions. Weld belongs in this contested medical world, not on an isolated pedestal as the bearer of unquestioned expertise.

The account discussed here catches him earlier, in the mundane business of obtaining supplies. "Dr." in the heading likely means debtor, but the man being charged was also a doctor. That overlap is suggestive: the medicine that embodied hope for a patient was also an item bought, carried, and entered into an account. Treatment required a material network before it could reach a bedside.

Weld's life continued beyond Mormon Nauvoo. The prior study documents his later family life and his death in the Sonora area of Hancock County on July 28, 1892. Claims that he removed a bullet from John Taylor after Carthage should remain labeled as later tradition unless strengthened by contemporary evidence. His service on the final jury in the Smith murder trial should not be asserted: the earlier investigation found evidence concerning jury selection, not membership in the jury that returned the verdict. [17]

William Marks: conversion and responsibility

William Marks was born at Rutland, Vermont, on November 15, 1792. He married Rosannah R. Robinson in 1813. By the time he entered the Latter-day Saint movement in New York in the mid-1830s, he was a mature married man, not a young convert just beginning adult life. His subsequent career suggests that church leaders valued his capacity to manage practical affairs as well as his commitment to the faith. [19]

Ordination records place him in the movement by April 1835. He later moved to Kirtland, Ohio, where the church's spiritual aspirations existed alongside financial strains. In September 1837 he joined the high council and took on responsibilities connected with Newel K. Whitney's business affairs. By 1838 he held the Kirtland presidency. Such appointments made him part of the machinery through which religious community was maintained: property, obligations, disputes, and the leadership of people who did not always agree. [19]

Joseph Smith's March 1838 letter to the Kirtland presidency included a striking account of a vision involving Marks. Joseph described him pursued by enemies and then delivered. Whatever a reader's religious interpretation of that account, it is evidence that Joseph publicly imagined Marks as a man under pressure who would receive divine help. It belongs beside the later disagreements because it shows a relationship initially expressed in confidence and blessing. [20]

A July 1838 revelation called Marks to leave his affairs and move toward the gathering in Missouri. It also addressed unsettled business and the need to relinquish attachment to property. The text placed him in responsibility over the Saints at Far West. On paper, that was the next stage of his service; events made the journey far less straightforward. [21]

Marks did not reach a stable Missouri Zion. While traveling west he learned of the crisis that had overtaken the Saints. He went instead to Quincy, Illinois, in 1839. This distinction matters: the history of the Missouri expulsion shaped his life, but it does not place him personally at every scene of suffering associated with it. His journey brought him into contact with the consequences of expulsion in Illinois. [19]

By October 1839 the gathering had turned toward Commerce. At the conference held October 5–7, Marks was sustained to preside over the local stake. The timing brings the life and the artifact close together. The account's first purchase falls in August, before that appointment; its November entry and the April 1840 errand fall during the early months of his presidency. [1, 22]

The paper therefore belongs to a period when Marks was becoming responsible for a community still assembling itself. If he was the collector named on the slip, the act fits a world in which leadership did not exempt a man from errands. We cannot know what he felt while obtaining the medicine. We can know what else was being asked of him.

A president, a household, a city

At Nauvoo, Marks's responsibilities extended beyond church meetings. He served in municipal government and was connected with the university, the Legion, and the city's fraternal life. These overlapping roles made him a participant in a community trying to give civic form to its religious gathering. The same man could be engaged in institutional planning while his household faced the ordinary uncertainties of health and family survival. [19]



Figure 4. House identified by BYU's Religious Education collection as the William Marks / William Smith home, on Water Street in Nauvoo. Photograph by Kenneth R. Mays, March 2004. This modern photograph does not establish where the medicine transaction occurred. [23]

A house gives the biography a physical scale. It invites the reader to think about rooms, visitors, meals, work, and the care of children. Yet a surviving building can also mislead if every event is placed inside it. The photographic catalog associates this house with Marks and with William Smith, who occupied it in 1845. The account does not name a building; the funeral sources identify Marks's home without, by themselves, proving the modern photograph's precise connection to that service. [15, 23]

Marks's independence was visible before Joseph's murder. At the October 1843 conference, amid criticism of Sidney Rigdon, Marks moved that Rigdon retain his position. Hyrum Smith seconded the motion. This was not a posthumous invention of an alternative allegiance. Marks had already demonstrated willingness to support Rigdon while Joseph was alive. [24]

The episode should not be flattened into a story of inevitable opposition. Marks also entered the Council of Fifty in March 1844, evidence of continuing inclusion in an important circle. His position combined trust, responsibility, and the capacity to disagree. That combination made the crisis after June 1844 a choice about loyalties he already possessed, not merely a choice between strangers. [19, 25]

Inside the circle of the anointed

The medicine account brings Marks into view through an errand. The ritual record places him much closer to the center of Joseph Smith's religious world. On May 4, 1842, William was among the first nine men who received the Nauvoo endowment from Joseph in the upper rooms of the red brick store. The temple was still unfinished. His inclusion in this small company is essential to understanding the trust he held: he was a participant in the development of Joseph's most intimate religious instruction. [32]

Rosannah entered that circle as well. Joseph's journal records her among the women receiving ordinances on October 1, 1843. The documentary chronology identifies this as her first anointing and endowment. On October 22, the journal records William and his wife being anointed at a prayer meeting in the Mansion House, with twenty-four present. The chronology identifies their ordinance that day as the second anointing. Together these records establish their participation in the body commonly called the Anointed Quorum. [33–35]

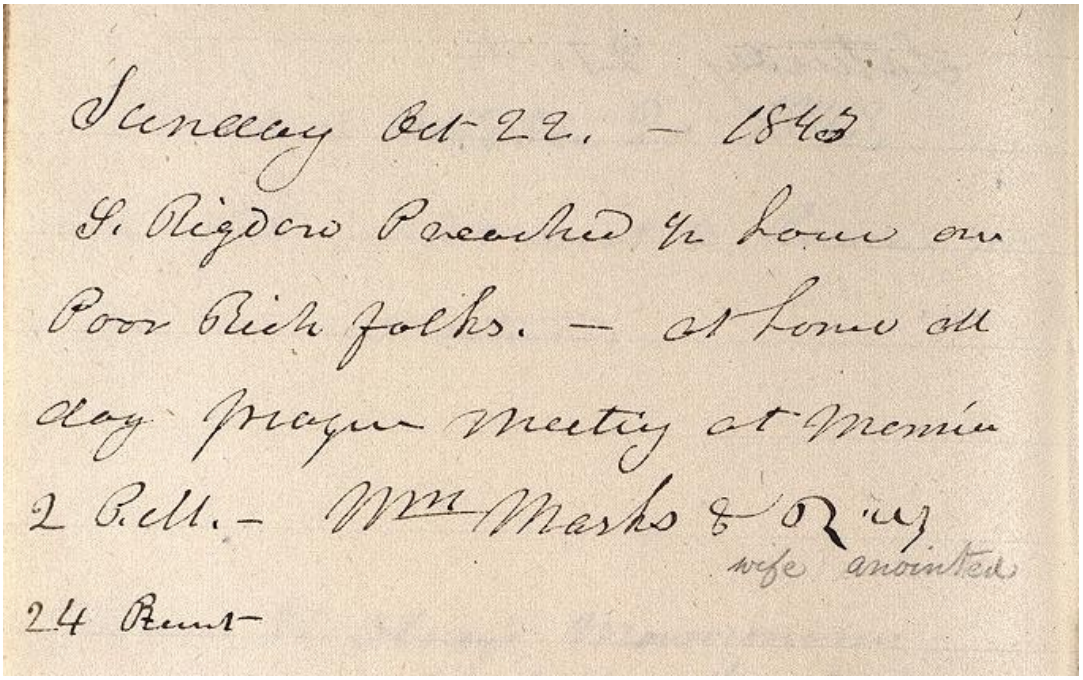

Sunday Oct 22. — 1843
S. Rigdon Preached to Some on
Poor Rich folks. — a Long all
day Prayer Meeting at Mans
2 P.M. — Wm Marks & Wife
wife anointed
24 Present

Figure 5. Joseph Smith's journal, October 22, 1843: the entry records William Marks and his wife being anointed. The Joseph Smith Papers transcribes shorthand in brackets. This is a contemporary record of their inclusion. [34]

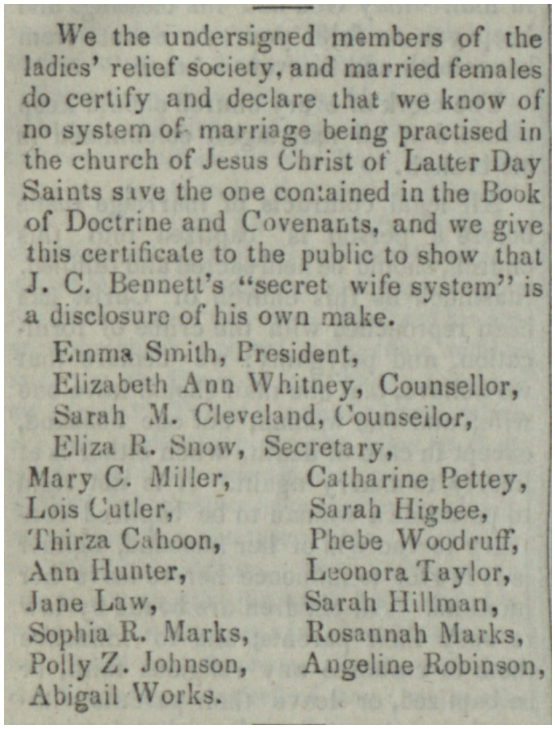
These dates complicate a simple story of estrangement. Later witnesses placed William's objection to plural marriage in August 1843. Yet William and Rosannah received further ordinances in October, and William entered the Council of Fifty in March 1844. Disagreement did not immediately erase trust or participation. His subsequent dissent came from a man who had stood within the inner circle. [25, 34–36]

The distinction between ceremonies matters. The published chronology places a question mark beside October 22, 1843 as the date of their marriage sealing. That uncertainty should remain visible: their second anointing is documented more securely than that proposed sealing date. Nor should their earlier ordinances be relocated into the completed Nauvoo Temple. [35]

Rosannah: a participant in her own right

Rosannah Robinson married William Marks in 1813. Born in Vermont in 1795, she became the mother of eleven children and joined the church about 1835. Her story shared the family's successive moves, but surviving records also identify her own public religious participation. She belongs in this account as more than the wife of a president. [37]

In the October 1, 1842 Times and Seasons, "Rosannah Marks" appeared among the women whose names accompanied a certificate defending the church against John C. Bennett's claims about a secret wife system. Emma Smith and Rosannah's daughter Sophia were also named. The statement associated these women with the Relief Society and publicly affirmed the marriage rule then printed in the Doctrine and Covenants. [38]



We the undersigned members of the ladies' relief society, and married females do certify and declare that we know of no system of marriage being practised in the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints save the one contained in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and we give this certificate to the public to show that J. C. Bennett's "secret wife system" is a disclosure of his own make.

Emma Smith, President,
Elizabeth Ann Whitney, Counsellor,
Sarah M. Cleveland, Counsellor,
Eliza R. Snow, Secretary,

Mary C. Miller,	Catharine Pettey,
Lois Cutler,	Sarah Higbee,
Thirza Cahoon,	Phebe Woodruff,
Ann Hunter,	Leonora Taylor,
Jane Law,	Sarah Hillman,
Sophia R. Marks,	Rosannah Marks,
Polly Z. Johnson,	Angeline Robinson,
Abigail Works.	

Figure 6. The women's certificate in Times and Seasons, October 1, 1842, p. 940. Rosannah and Sophia Marks appear in the printed list. Facsimile: BYU, Church Publications collection. [38]

The surviving Relief Society minutes separately list "Rosana Marks" among those received on March 16, 1844. Both records should be retained: public association in 1842 and recorded admission in 1844. They do not make her a founding officer. Sophia, however, appears among the society's founding members. [39–40]

The certificate establishes public support for the church against Bennett; it does not reveal precisely what Rosannah knew about Joseph's plural marriages. Likewise, participation in ordinances is evidence of religious commitment, not a transcript of private feelings. No personal letter or diary located for this revision explains her views of Brigham Young. Her later affiliation with the Reorganization and her death at Shabbona on October 18, 1862 belong to the family's history without requiring us to invent her voice. [37]

The disagreement over plural marriage

One specific episode gives substance to Marks's opposition. On August 12, 1843, the Nauvoo high council met in Hyrum Smith's office. Its brief contemporary minutes record teaching by Hyrum and William Marks. Later witnesses identified this as the meeting at which Hyrum read the revelation on plural marriage. The minutes themselves do not preserve the revelation or a speech of objection by Marks. [36]

David Fullmer, in an affidavit dated June 15, 1869, recalled that a question about rumors prompted Hyrum to fetch the revelation from his house. He named William Marks, Austin Cowles, and Leonard Soby as the men who rejected it. Thomas Grover's January 10, 1885 recollection named the same three. Their agreement is significant, but their dates must remain in the story: they were remembering the meeting decades afterward. We can identify the confrontation without inventing Marks's words or treating a later account as contemporary minutes. [41–42]

Marks supplied his own later testimony in 1853. He described taking a decided stand against polygamy and becoming unpopular with leading men. He also reported a conversation shortly before Joseph's death in which Joseph acknowledged error and wanted the practice stopped. This second episode is historically important as Marks's account of Joseph; it does not, by itself, prove that Joseph formally reversed the policy. The testimony should be read alongside the other surviving evidence of Joseph's plural marriages, with its retrospective character clearly stated. [26]

The sequence is the point. An objection remembered from August 1843 was followed by the couple's October ordinances and William's March 1844 admission to the Council of Fifty. His life does not divide neatly into faithful intimacy followed by instant exclusion. Trust and disagreement overlapped. The decisive institutional rupture developed through the succession struggle after the murders. [25, 34–36]

What can be said about the temple and a patriarchal blessing?

William's May 1842 endowment and the couple's October 1843 ordinances are documented. Participation inside the Nauvoo Temple during its December 1845–February 1846 endowment period has not been confirmed in this investigation. William had left Nauvoo in March 1845. That departure and his conflict with the Twelve provide context, but neither proves that he personally refused a temple invitation. The complete temple register has not been examined for this report. [19, 43]

A patriarchal blessing remains a separate, unresolved question. No dated text or verified index entry for a blessing received by William Marks has been located in the public sources searched. A date and patriarch therefore cannot responsibly be supplied. Joseph's 1838 vision concerning Marks and the promises in the July 1838 revelation are not substitutes for such a record. Absence from this search is not proof that he never received a blessing. [20–21]

One misleadingly close reference can be resolved: in May 1845, William Smith advertised patriarchal blessings from the Water Street house formerly occupied by William Marks. This identifies a location and a patriarch's activity; it does not say that Marks was a recipient. Confirmation would require an identifiable blessing manuscript, register entry, or contemporary account naming him. [44]

After Carthage: loyalty divided

Joseph and Hyrum Smith were murdered at Carthage on June 27, 1844. The loss did not leave an uncontested procedure that everyone interpreted in the same way. Offices, prior statements, family relationships, and competing understandings of authority all mattered. For Marks, who presided locally at Nauvoo, the question was immediate: who could legitimately direct a people whose founding prophet was dead?

He supported Sidney Rigdon's claim. That position brought him into conflict with the leadership that rallied around Brigham Young and the Twelve. Marks lost the Nauvoo stake presidency in the fall of 1844 and was removed from the Council of Fifty in February 1845. The institutional consequences were concrete. A man entrusted with leadership since the earliest period of settlement no longer occupied the place he had helped build. [19, 25]

His association with Emma Smith also belongs to this period. Council records refer to Emma's leasing the Mansion House to Marks after Joseph's death. That business relationship is evidence of contact and cooperation. It should not turn into a claim that every decision he made was directed by Emma, or that their views were identical on every question. The Mansion House must also be distinguished from the brick residence illustrated in this report. [25]

Plural marriage was a serious part of Marks's dissent. In an 1853 published statement he said that he had opposed it, and he described a conversation in which Joseph supposedly acknowledged that the practice had been wrong and should be stopped. The account is important because it is Marks's own testimony about his convictions and his memory of Joseph. But it was published nine years after the murder. It is not a stenographic record from 1844, nor does it independently establish a completed change of policy before Joseph died. [26]

Keeping those categories distinct makes room for a stronger biography. Marks could regard Joseph's prophetic mission as authentic while judging a practice associated with his leadership to be wrong. His later account expresses that tension. It need not be either accepted without qualification or excluded because it complicates another tradition's account of events.

The statement that he simply stayed in Nauvoo while others went west requires correction. He left Nauvoo in March 1845. He did not join the migration under Brigham Young, but remaining outside that movement was not the same as remaining permanently in the city. His subsequent years involved other leaders, other places, and repeated reconsideration. [19]

Opposition to polygamy helps explain his path. Succession, confidence in particular leaders, and the search for a church he considered properly ordered also mattered. A single motive would make the narrative easier to summarize and less faithful to the man whose letters survive.

Years of searching: Marks in his own words

The most revealing continuation of Marks's story is not a list of affiliations. It is the voice of a man who kept hoping that the next gathering would resolve the uncertainty left by Joseph's death. In 1846 he served as a counselor to James J. Strang. Later he became involved with Charles B. Thompson and associated with other seekers, including John E. Page. Those changes can look erratic from the vantage point of a settled institutional history. His letters show the emotional and practical work behind them. [19, 27]

A 1908 Journal of History article printed correspondence from Marks to James M. Adams. The letters are earlier than the article that preserves them; the editor wrote from a sympathetic Reorganized Church perspective. The originals have not been examined for this report. With that qualification, the published texts are valuable evidence of Marks's concerns in the 1850s. [27]

Writing in April 1852 about a meeting associated with Thompson, he acknowledged previous disappointment and the need for caution. His hope had not disappeared, but confidence had become conditional. The issue was more than which claimant possessed the right title. It was whether an organization could live in a way that justified another commitment of time, property, and trust.

By September 1854, after visiting Thompson's settlement at Preparation, Iowa, Marks was troubled by demands upon members' labor and possessions. He had delayed moving there. The mature man who had once been instructed to settle his affairs and leave Kirtland was again weighing the costs of gathering. This time his surviving words show hesitation informed by experience.

In June 1855 he expressed weariness with false prophets and turned toward the first principles of the faith. A July letter supplied the sentence that could serve as the biography's refrain: "My mind has never been at rest" since Joseph's death. The phrase is not evidence that he abandoned belief. It describes a believer unable to find an institutional home that satisfied him. [27]

The same correspondence returns to practical possibilities: land, association with others, and the hope of forming a community. Marks was not searching only for an abstract argument about succession. He was searching for people with whom he could live the religious life he thought he had embraced. That makes the years after Nauvoo a continuation of the earlier gathering story rather than a disconnected epilogue.

He also wrote in July 1855 that his health was very good. The remark is striking beside the medicine account, but it cannot close a medical case opened fifteen years earlier. It is self-reported health at another time, not evidence that calomel cured him or that the purchased medicine had been intended for him. It does, however, restore the living body to a correspondence otherwise read mainly for ecclesiastical meaning.

By March 1856 he was discussing further efforts to organize according to the Book of Mormon. His course was still unsettled. The eventual outcome should not make these years seem like a predetermined march toward a destination he had already chosen.

A later home—and a life beyond 1844

Marks joined the Reorganized Church in 1859. The Joseph Smith Papers chronology gives his baptism as June 10; the 1908 biographical article describes his reception on June 11. The distinction may reflect different events or a discrepancy in the sources. For the narrative, the secure point is that the affiliation preceded Joseph Smith III's assumption of leadership the following year. [19, 27]

On April 6, 1860, Marks participated in Joseph Smith III's ordination to the presidency of the Reorganized Church. He was thereby present at another decisive moment in the history of the movement he had entered a quarter-century earlier. He had known the father, presided at Nauvoo, opposed the direction taken by the Twelve, and now helped recognize the son. [28]

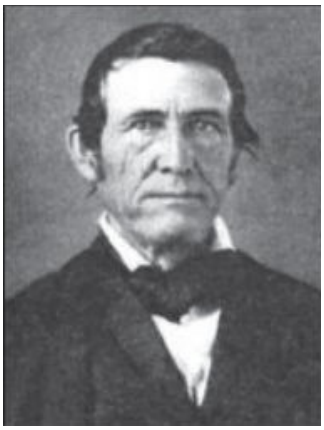


Figure 7. William Marks, date and photographer unknown. Reproduced in Richard G. Moore, "LDS Misconceptions about the Community of Christ." The source does not establish that this portrait dates to the medicine account. [29]

In April 1863 Marks became a counselor in Joseph Smith III's First Presidency. His search had brought him back into sustained leadership, although in a church distinct from the one developing in Utah. This final service is essential to his biography. Ending his story with the loss of office at Nauvoo would leave the reader with defeat as his defining achievement and omit years in which he helped build another institutional future. [19]

Family life continued through further loss and change. Rosannah died in 1862. Marks married Julia Muir in 1866. He died at Plano, Illinois, on May 22, 1872, aged seventy-nine. The convert of the 1830s had become an elderly survivor of several phases of Latter-day Saint history. [19]

His survival should not soften the account of frontier mortality. Ephraim had died at twenty-four. Other households lost infants, working adults, and grandparents within a few months. Marks's long life makes him a witness to those losses; it does not make them less severe.

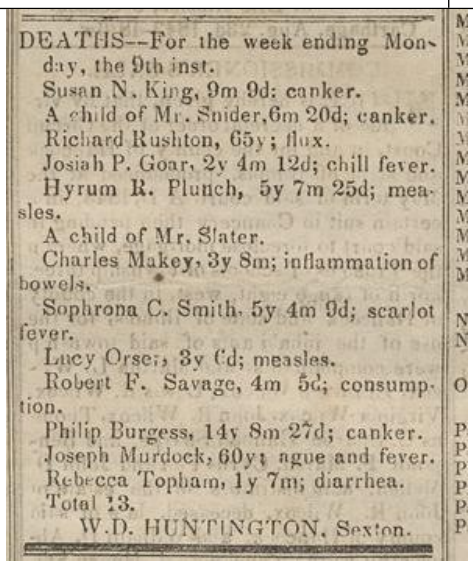
Seen across its full span, his biography is a story about the persistence of belief under changing judgments of authority. He did not follow Brigham Young west. He also did not simply stop moving, thinking, or organizing. His later letters preserve a man who could be disappointed repeatedly and still ask where a faithful community might be found.

When the death reports became more specific

Later evidence puts names to the diseases and symptoms that an early obituary often left blank. Nauvoo's sexton, William D. Huntington, was appointed in 1841; reporting requirements and newspaper publication developed thereafter. His surviving record includes retrospective entries, so an 1839 date in the book does not necessarily mean the entry was written in 1839. [7, 9]

The Nauvoo Neighbor of October 11, 1843, printed thirteen deaths for the week ending October 9. Selected entries show the range of terms used. They describe what the recorder called the cause, not diagnoses independently confirmed by modern examination. [30]

Name	Age in newspaper	Recorded cause
Richard Rushton	65	Flux
Charles Makey	3 years, 8 months	Inflammation of bowels
Lucy Orser	3 years, 6 days	Measles
Joseph Murdock	60	Ague fever
Rebecca Topham	1 year, 7 months	Diarrhea



DEATHS--For the week ending Monday, the 9th inst.
Susan N. King, 9m 9d; canker.
A child of Mr. Snider, 6m 20d; canker.
Richard Rushton, 65y; flux.
Josiah P. Goar, 2y 4m 12d; chill fever.
Hyrum R. Plunch, 5y 7m 25d; measles.
A child of Mr. Slater.
Charles Makey, 3y 8m; inflammation of bowels.
Sophrona C. Smith, 5y 4m 9d; scarlot fever.
Lucy Orser, 3y 6d; measles.
Robert F. Savage, 4m 5d; consumption.
Philip Burgess, 14y 8m 27d; canker.
Joseph Murdock, 60y; ague and fever.
Rebecca Topham, 1y 7m; diarrhea.
Total 13.
W.D. HUNTINGTON, Sexton.

Figure 8. Death report, Nauvoo Neighbor, October 11, 1843, p. 3. Detail; Joseph Smith Papers. These entries are three years later than the last purchase on the account. [30]

"Flux" described a bowel complaint; "ague" often referred to intermittent fever. Neither term should be translated automatically into a laboratory-confirmed diagnosis. The list includes measles as well as bowel disorders and fever, making it impossible to reduce the community's mortality to mosquitoes alone.

These reports also caution against exact-looking statistics. Names, ages, and dates sometimes differ between newspaper and register. A count can become useful only after sources are reconciled and the population being counted is defined. For this story, the individual entries already make the essential point: illness reached across age groups, and some of its victims were very young.

What this small paper can carry

The medicine account cannot tell us whether William Marks was feverish on April 10, 1840. It cannot place him beside a bed, describe a dose, or tell us whether anyone improved. Those absences are not defects to be repaired by imagination. They are the boundaries within which the document becomes useful.

Within those boundaries, it carries a great deal. It shows medicine entering an account and moving through another person's hands. It brings a trained physician into the economic life of a growing town. Its dates lead into letters about sick households and newspapers crowded with deaths. Its last named intermediary leads to a father at a funeral, a president displaced from office, and an older believer still searching for a trustworthy community.

The compelling story is therefore not that a famous man took a dangerous drug and survived. It is that an ordinary piece of medical business survives from a world in which the attempt to preserve life was urgent, imperfect, and inseparable from the work of building a society. Doctors acted with the knowledge and habits available to them. Patients and families bore the consequences, sometimes with gratitude and sometimes with lasting suspicion.

Return, finally, to the account's total: $5.37. The writer could balance those figures. The larger reckoning—what the medicine achieved, what it cost a body, why one person survived while another did not—remains beyond the paper. William Marks lived long enough to make other choices and endure other losses. That is why this slip can introduce his life without pretending to explain it.

Evidence still worth pursuing

A final publication would benefit most from a sharp, evenly lit photograph of both sides; the object's acquisition history; and comparison with securely identified Weld account papers. Those could settle the uncertain heading and confirm the revised reading "Wm Marks." No supplier, specific patient, or diagnosis has been identified.

The newspaper investigation here is a documented selection of early obituaries, family testimony, and later cause-of-death reporting. It is not a complete transcription of every issue or a statistical study of mortality. A larger death database would require systematic checking of issue dates, locality, duplicated notices, and conflicting entries.

The prior Weld biography has been used as a research foundation, not as proof for every inherited anecdote. The 1808/1809 birth-year discrepancy, the John Taylor treatment tradition, and any claim about Weld's religious membership remain matters for separate documentation.

Image research located an identifiable portrait of William Marks and a cataloged photograph of the Marks / William Smith house. Their captions preserve the limits of those identifications. No modern or generated scene has been substituted for a historical image.

Sources and documentary notes

Numbers in the text refer to the entries below. Primary documents are distinguished from later interpretation. Online sources consulted October 2026. Titles and URLs identify the material so the research can be checked and extended.

1. Original medicine account, 1839–1840.

Front and reverse photographs supplied by David Larsen (IMG_0711.jpeg and IMG_0712.jpeg). The final line is now read as "Wm Marks," expanded as William Marks, superseding the earlier reading "Mr Marks." The abbreviated first name favors this identification. The journal illustration in Figure 5 is a clerk's entry, not an autograph comparison; neither illustration establishes that Marks personally wrote the account. The surname is read as Marks, not Marx. Supplier, place, patient, and earlier provenance remain unestablished. The photographic transcription is provisional.

2. Joseph Smith, discourse, September 29, 1839.

Contemporary report by James Mulholland, Joseph Smith Papers; evidence of sickness and care in the early settlement. Open source

3. Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, December 6, 1839.

Joseph Smith Papers. Household sickness and the death of James Mulholland; consulted with editorial identification of persons. Open source

4. Petition from Albert P. Rockwood and others, July 18, 1842.

Joseph Smith Papers. Riverfront obstructions, stagnant water, health, and navigation. A petition is evidence of a complaint, not confirmation of completed works. Open source

5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Malaria: Causes and How It Spreads."

Modern explanation of transmission. Used to distinguish present knowledge from nineteenth-century terminology, not to diagnose an individual retrospectively. Open source

6. World Health Organization, "Diarrhoeal disease."

Modern explanation of infectious transmission and fluid loss. Open source

7. "Introduction to Nauvoo City Sexton Records."

Joseph Smith Papers editorial introduction. Appointment, reporting requirements, compilation, and publication of death records. Open source

8. Times and Seasons 1, no. 2 (December 1839), p. 32.

Primary obituary notices; consulted in the FAIR transcription. The table reproduces selected printed dates and ages, not independently reconciled vital records. Open source

9. William D. Huntington, cemetery records, 1839–1846.

Joseph Smith Papers, first page of entries. Disease fields are sparse in the early record; compilation includes retrospective information. Open source

10. Times and Seasons 1, no. 8 (June 1840), pp. 127–128.

Notices for Edward Partridge and Harriet Pamela Partridge; consulted in the FAIR transcription. Open source

11. Science Museum Group, calomel collection record.

Museum description of calomel as mercurous chloride and a purgative. Open source

12. National Park Service, "Dr. Benjamin Rush."

Historical discussion of purgative treatment, calomel, and adverse effects. Used for medical context, not evidence of Weld's exact practice. Open source

13. Joseph Smith, discourse, April 13, 1843, reported by Willard Richards.

Joseph Smith Papers, journal p. 131. Figure 3 is a crop of the manuscript facsimile, retaining the references to calomel and lobelia doctors. Open source

14. Lucy Mack Smith, history, 1844–1845, book 4.

Joseph Smith Papers, account of Alvin's illness and calomel treatment. Retrospective family testimony, not a medical determination of cause of death. See also the project's Alvin Smith biographical entry for dates. Open source

15. Ephraim Marks's death and funeral, April 1842.

Joseph Smith journal, December 1841–December 1842, p. 24; history, volume C-1 addenda, p. 43. The accounts document death, procession, and remarks, not a diagnosis. Open source

16. "John Fuller Weld," biographical directory.

Joseph Smith Papers. Used to check identifying dates and Nauvoo associations. Open source

17. Hiram Kimball and John Weld: Illustrated Edition.

Earlier research prepared for David Larsen, 11-page PDF supplied through the prior project. Used as a secondary research file; unresolved claims remain qualified in the present report.

18. Trial report, March 4–22, 1843, Dana v. Brink.

Joseph Smith Papers, primary report printed in the Wasp, March 22, 1843. Evidence includes physicians and women attendants. Open source

19. "William Marks," biographical directory.

Joseph Smith Papers. Chronological reference for family, ordinations, appointments, movements, and death. Read alongside the primary documents below. Open source

20. Joseph Smith, letter to the presidency in Kirtland, March 29, 1838.

Joseph Smith Papers, especially manuscript pp. 3–4; vision concerning Marks. Open source

21. Revelation, July 8, 1838–E (Doctrine and Covenants 117).

Joseph Smith Papers. Property, departure from Kirtland, and Marks's intended leadership at Far West. Open source

22. Minutes and discourses, October 5–7, 1839.

Joseph Smith Papers; printed in Times and Seasons, December 1839, pp. 30–31. Marks sustained to preside at Commerce. Open source

23. Kenneth R. Mays, William Marks / William Smith home, March 2004.

BYU Harold B. Lee Library, Religious Education image collection, item 6557. Catalog locates the house on Water Street and associates William Smith with it in 1845. Image credit: © Brigham Young University; licensed from Kenneth R. Mays, July 2004. Included for private study and educational use under the catalog's stated conditions. Open source

24. Minutes and discourses, October 6–9, 1843.

Joseph Smith Papers, p. 2. Marks moved to retain Rigdon; Hyrum Smith seconded. The printed issue bears an earlier nominal date than the proceedings it reports. Open source

25. Council of Fifty minutes, 1844–1845.

Joseph Smith Papers, volume 1, p. 323, concerning Marks's removal; volume 2, p. 165, concerning the Mansion House lease. Membership chronology checked against the Marks directory. Open source

26. William Marks, "Epistle," July 1853.

Zion's Harbinger and Baneemy's Organ 3, no. 7, pp. 52–53; facsimile/transcription via B. H. Roberts Foundation. Retrospective testimony concerning plural marriage and a conversation with Joseph Smith. Open source

27. H. C. S., "William Marks," Journal of History 1 (1908), pp. 24–29.

Digitized by Latter Day Truth. Prints Marks's letters to James M. Adams dated 1852–1856. Quotations and paraphrases distinguish the letters' dates from the later publication. Originals not examined. Open source

28. "Joseph Smith III Comes to the Reorganization."

Restoration Bookstore, reproducing historical accounts and correspondence from History of the Reorganized Church, volume 3. Used for Marks's participation in the 1860 transition. Open source

29. Richard G. Moore, "LDS Misconceptions about the Community of Christ."

Mormon Historical Studies, PDF p. 7. Source of the embedded historical portrait, captioned "William Marks, date unknown." Photographer and original repository not identified in that caption. Open source

30. William D. Huntington, report, circa October 9, 1843.

Nauvoo Neighbor, October 11, 1843, p. 3; Joseph Smith Papers. Figure 8 crops the printed death notice. Table follows the newspaper, including ages that differ from the cemetery register. Open source

31. G. Dennis Shanks, "Historical Review: Problematic Malaria Prophylaxis with Quinine" (2016).

American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. Historical discussion of quinine's isolation, use in fever remedies, and limitations. Used for general therapeutic context, not evidence of this patient or transaction. Open source

32. Joseph Smith, journal, May 4, 1842, p. 94.

Contemporary entry and editorial notes identify the first endowment company and the store setting. Open source

33. Joseph Smith, journal, October 1, 1843, p. 113.

Rosannah Marks named among women receiving ordinances; read with the documentary chronology in note 35. Open source

34. Joseph Smith, journal, October 22, 1843, p. 142.

Contemporary entry records William Marks and wife anointed at the Mansion House. Figure 5 reproduces a cropped manuscript facsimile from the Joseph Smith Papers. Open source

35. Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, Joseph Smith's Quorum of the Anointed, 1842–1845 (2005), pp. xxxix–xliii.

Documentary chronology reproduced by B. H. Roberts Foundation. Lists William's first anointing/endowment May 4, 1842; Rosannah's October 1, 1843; both second anointings October 22, 1843. Proposed marriage-sealing date carries a question mark. Open source

36. Nauvoo high council minutes, August 12, 1843.

Hosea Stout's brief contemporary entry records teaching by Hyrum Smith and William Marks. It does not reproduce a dispute about the revelation. Transcription at B. H. Roberts Foundation. Open source

37. "Rosannah Robinson Marks (1795–1862)."

Church Historian's Press biographical register. Family, conversion, migrations, later affiliation, and death. Open source

38. "On Marriage," Times and Seasons 3, no. 23 (October 1, 1842), pp. 939–940.

Contemporary collective certificates, with scholarly introduction at Church Historian's Press. Rosannah and Sophia Marks appear on p. 940; printed names do not constitute individual handwritten signatures. Figure 6 facsimile obtained from BYU Church Publications, item 9966, file 5058.pdf. Open source

39. Nauvoo Relief Society minutes, March 16, 1844.

"Rosana Marks" appears in names received. This formal record is distinguished from the 1842 published certificate. Open source

40. "Sophia Robinson Marks Shaw."

Church Historian's Press biographical register identifies Sophia as a founding Relief Society member. Open source

41. David Fullmer affidavit, June 15, 1869.

Retrospective account of the August 1843 high council meeting; names Marks, Cowles, and Soby as rejecting the revelation. Transcription and source identification at B. H. Roberts Foundation. Open source

42. Thomas Grover to Amos Milton Musser, January 10, 1885.

Late recollection of the same meeting. Agreement with Fullmer is distinguished from contemporary documentation. Open source

43. Nauvoo Temple endowment register: 10 December 1845 to 8 February 1846 (1974 compilation).

WorldCat catalog record establishes coverage dates. The complete register was not inspected; no claim of exhaustive negative verification for Marks is made. Open source

44. William Smith, "Patriarchal," Times and Seasons 6, no. 9 (May 15, 1845), pp. 904–905.

Public announcement of patriarchal blessings at the former William Marks residence. This is not a record of a blessing bestowed on William Marks. Open source

Additional research leads

For a later, quantitative investigation: "Deaths in Early Nauvoo, Illinois, 1839–46, and Winter Quarters, Nebraska, 1846–48," Religious Educator 10, no. 3 (2009), and its companion study of medical terminology. Their compilations are useful starting points, but a rate or life-expectancy claim requires evaluation of population denominators, coverage, and diagnostic uncertainty.

Image preparation: photographs were rotated or cropped and resized for layout. No missing manuscript text, faces, buildings, or historical scenes were generated. Original document photographs remain the controlling visual evidence.