

for private study and contemplation, to say nothing of genealogy? Hopefully, we will not have to do what one good brother did in order to have time to work on his genealogy — he went inactive.

A Comment on Joseph Smith's Account of His First Vision and the 1820 Revival

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Since the controversy surrounding Joseph Smith's account of his first vision and the 1820 revival apparently is still alive (e.g. the Williams-Bushman exchange in letters to *Dialogue*, Autumn 1970), perhaps one further comment is not inappropriate.

Presumably all agree that some kind of revivalistic activity occurred in western New York in 1819-20. The problem, if any, that remains is whether these occurrences were big enough and near enough to be consistent with Joseph Smith's description. In this regard it would seem instructive to consider the experiences of a western New York contemporary of Joseph Smith.

David Marks lived in Junius, fifteen miles from the Smith farm, from 1815 until he began itinerant preaching in 1821. He was born in Shendaken, Ulster Co., New York, 4 November 1805, seven weeks before Joseph Smith. And at the ripe old age of 26 he published his memoirs: *The life of David Marks . . . Written by himself* (Limerick, Me., 1831). In the intervening fifteen years before his death in 1845, Marks rose to prominence among the Free-will Baptists, serving, for example, as the first director of their publishing concern and as a founder of their Home Mission Society. (Two editions of an expanded version of Marks' memoirs, edited by his wife Marilla Marks, were published in 1846 and 1847. Both his 1831 and 1846 memoirs were taken from a journal Marks kept from the time he began preaching in 1821. The parts referred to below are the same in the three editions; references are to the 1831. For an evaluation of Marks' career see *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia* (Chicago, 1889; 383ff) and *The Centennial Record of Freewill Baptists* (Dover, 1881; 29ff, 49ff and *passim*).

During his twelfth year a religious awareness sparked in Marks that grew to a driving conviction that his life should be devoted to the Lord's work. At his thirteenth birthday, his parents, impressed with his commitment and believing him fit for the ministry, sent him to Providence, Rhode Island, a distance of 368 miles, to attend a free school there. Marks walked twelve days to reach Providence, only to discover that room and board at the school were not free; so after a two-day rest, he returned to Junius, reaching his home twenty-five days after he left it. (pp. 26-27)

Before leaving for Rhode Island, Marks had applied to the Calvinistic Baptist Church in Junius for baptism, and after his return, in the spring of

1819, he was rejected because of his reservations about certain Calvinist doctrines. That July, Zabulon Dean, a Freewill Baptist who had heard of Marks and his situation, came to Junius to meet Marks; and, satisfied that he was worthy, Dean persuaded the Junius Baptists to accept Marks, and he was baptized into that congregation 11 July 1819. Six days later Marks attended the Benton Quarterly Meeting of the Freewill Baptists in Phelps, 18 miles from his home, where he witnessed five baptisms and was received as a member (pp. 28-30).

"After this, Elder Dean and brother Wire frequently preached in Junius, and a good reformation followed their labors." In the fall Dean and his associates baptized fifteen in Junius who first united with the church in Phelps and then in January 1820 formed an independent church in Junius of which Marks became a member. For several months the little congregation thrived, then dwindled as a number of its members "turned aside after Satan" (p. 30).

On the 1st of January 1821, Marks went to Benton and Milo, about 25 miles south of Junius, "where a good revival was progressing," meeting with various congregations in that area for three weeks. He returned to his home, paused there for two days, and then set out for Ontario, 30 miles to the northwest, to attend an "extra quarterly meeting." Heavy snow made this a difficult trip; after trudging 13 miles, Marks' frozen feet forced him to stop and complete his journey the following day. From Ontario Marks traveled with Zabulon Dean to Benton, Milo and Poultney, and for several days he tarried at Dean's home in Benton. (pp. 31-32) Marks' return to Junius was greeted with his parents' objections to further travel, so for some weeks he remained at home working for the family. Eventually, however, his yearning to be out proclaiming "the glad tidings of salvation" so reached his parents that they agreed to let him go once again. "At this time," Marks relates, "a great revival was progressing in Brutus and Camillus, twenty miles from Junius. [Camillus is about 30 miles to the east.] Feeling anxious to see this work, and labor in it according to my ability, I left home, walked fifteen miles to Brutus, and tarried the night among strangers" (pp. 33-35). For a month Marks moved about the Brutus-Camillus area attending some forty-four meetings, the latter part in the village of Elbridge, "where the revival was progressing powerfully." And on the 17th of April 1821 he returned to his parents' home, determined to take up itinerant preaching full time and as far away as "God's spirit should direct, or Zion's need require" (pp. 38-39). It is interesting to note that Marks refers to his travels up to this point as "confined to a few towns in the vicinity of Junius" (p. 39).

Now, of course, one can not attribute the experiences of David Marks to Joseph Smith. But Marks' narrative demonstrates that during the two years from the spring of 1819 to the spring of 1821 at least one western New York boy the age of Joseph Smith ranged over a fair-sized area in the process of participating in certain religious revivals, and that some of these revivals were publicized widely enough for him to hear of them in his home town. And it points up the fallacy in dogmatically requiring Joseph Smith's "the place where we lived" to lie within 10 or 15 miles of the Smith farm. Marks, at least, in 1831 could refer to an area including towns 30 miles to the east and to the west of his home as "the vicinity of Junius."