

Minutes, 17 February 1834

Source Note

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Minutes, Kirtland Township, Geauga Co., OH, 17 Feb. 1834. Featured version copied [ca. 17 Feb. 1834] in Minute Book 1, pp. 29–31; handwriting of Orson Hyde; CHL. For more complete source information, see the source note for Minute Book 1.

Historical Introduction

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The following minutes of a 17 February 1834 meeting record the initial organization of a standing “Presidents Church Council” in [Kirtland](#), Ohio—later known as the “[high Council of the Church of Christ](#),” or the Kirtland high council. The minutes also document the rules the council should follow when judging a church member accused of a transgression.¹ Before 17 February, such issues had been judged by “[conferences](#)” or “[councils](#)” of priesthood holders (with other church members often in attendance). Who composed these conferences and councils varied with location and the availability of potential attendees. Revelations dictated by JS in August and November 1831 also provided for a [bishop’s court](#) to hear such cases, as well as for an appellate “court of the church before the [president of the high Priesthood](#).” The November [revelation](#) also empowered the president to call twelve available [high priests](#) to assist in adjudicating a case.² The new standing council in Kirtland was to serve as “an ensample” for similar, temporary councils organized as occasions demanded in outlying areas and also as an appellate court placed between lower disciplinary councils and the presidency of the high priesthood.

According to the minutes featured here, JS stated that he organized the [Kirtland](#) high council on the same principles that governed the “order of Councils in ancient days.” Five days earlier JS had discussed this ancient order in a council of [elders](#) and [high priests](#), where he focused his remarks on the qualifications and conduct required of individual members of such councils.³ An earlier reference in [Minute Book 1](#) to educating elders on “the ancient manner of conducting meetings” indicates the topic had been on JS’s mind as early as 1831 and suggests that the 17 February 1834 meeting represents an important milestone in JS’s ongoing effort to restore the ancient gospel, as he understood it, to the earth.⁴

Pursuant to the instructions recorded near the end of the document featured here, JS “laboured . . . with all the strength and wisdom that he had” the following day to correct these minutes. On 19 February, JS presented the corrected minutes to the council, which, after hearing the [revised minutes](#) read three times and suggesting at least one additional correction, unanimously voted to accept them “for a form, and constitution of the high Council of the Church of Christ hereafter.” JS then reported that “the Council was organized according to the ancient order, and also according to the mind of the Lord.”⁵

Footnotes

[1] Minutes, 19 Feb. 1834.

[2] Revelation, 1 Aug. 1831 [D&C 58:14–18]; Revelation, 11 Nov. 1831–B [D&C 107:72, 78–80].

[3] Minutes, 12 Feb. 1834.

[4] Minutes, 11 Oct. 1831.

[5] Minutes, 19 Feb. 1834.

Document Transcript

This day, Feb. 17 1834, a [Conference of High Priests](#) assembled ~~at~~ in [Kirtla\[n\]d](#) at the House of bro. Joseph Smith Ju^r. They proceeded to organize the [Presidents Church Council](#), Consisting of twelve high priests, and this according to the law of God.¹

The names of those who were chosen as **Counsellors**, were Joseph Smith Jun^r. Sidney Rigdon and F[rederick] G. Williams Presidents. ² Joseph Smith Seigr [Sr.], John Smith, Joseph Coe, John Johnson, Martin Harris, John S Carter, Jared Carter [Carter], Oliver Cowdery, Sam¹ H. Smith, Orson Hyde, Sylvester Smith, and Luke Johnson, Counsellors. Bro. Joseph opened the Council by solemn prayer. He then arose and called upon the high priests, Elders, priests, teachers and deacons that were present who had not been nominated as Counsellors to pass their vote whether they were satisfied with the appointment or nomination of the twelve to Compose the Church Council. It was the unanimous voice of all present that those who had been nominated, as above, should compose a standing Council in **Kirtland**. It was also voted that when any one <or more> of the standing Counsellors **was** were absent, their vacancy should be filled by any high priests whom the majority of the Council should nominate or choose,

Provideing that no Council shall be held unless seven of the above named Counsellors are present, or their successors. The above named Counsellors all manifested a willingness to act according to their appointment, the Lord being their helper. Bro Hyrum Smith acted in the place of **John Smith**. There were nine high priests present and acted in the appointment of the above named Counsellors, also seventeen Elders, and four priests with thirteen private members. ³ Bro Joseph then said he would show the order of Councils in ancient days (see 27 & 28 pages) ⁴ as shown to [p. 29] him by vision. The law **and** by which to govern the Council in the **Church of Christ**. Jerusalem was the seat of the Church Council in ancient days. The apostle, Peter, was the president of the Council **in ancient days** and held the **Keys** of the Kingdom of God, <on the Earth> was appointed to this office by the voice of the Saviour and **confirmed acknowledgement** acknowledged in it by the voice of the Church. He had two men appointed as Counsellors with him, and in case Peter was absent, his Counsellors Could transact business. <or either one of them. The President could also transact business alone. > It was not the order of heaven in ancient Councils to plead for and against the guilty as in our judicial Courts (so called) but that **if** every Counsellor when he arose to speak, should speak precisely according to evidence and according to the teaching of the spirit of the Lord, that no Counsellor should attempt to screen the guilty when his guilt was manifest. That the person accused before the high council had a right to one half the memb[e]rs of the council to plead his cause, **that is six**, in order that his case might be fairly presented before the President that a decission might be rendered according to truth and righteousness. If the case was not a very difficult one to investigate, two of the Counsellors only, spoke, one **for the accused and one against** <on one side and one on the other> according to evidence. If the case was more difficult, according to the judgment of the Council, two were to speak on each side, and if more difficult, three might speak on each side, and three only. Those who spoke in Council were chosen by the council and that too by casting lots. Those who were thus chosen to speak, took their regular turn, in speaking. Bro Joseph said that this organization was an ensample to the **high priests** in their Councils abroad, and a copy of their proceedings be transmitted to the seat of the goverment of the Church to be recorded on the general record. In all cases, the accuser and the accused have a perfect right to speak for themselves before the Council. The Councils abroad, have a right and it is their duty to appoint a president for the time being for themselves. If in case the parties are not satisfied with the decission of the Council abroad, they have a right to an appeal to the **Bishops Court**, and from thence to the **presidents Council** which is an end of all strife ⁵ [p. 30]

The remaining six Counsellors who do not speak in Council, are to hear patiently the reasoning of the other and correct all errors which they may discover, and after decission is rendered by the president, if these remaining counsellors can throw any farther light upon the subject, so as to correct the decissin [decision] of the president, they have the liberty so to do, otherwise it stands and the majority of the Council must rule. It was then voted by all present that they desired to come under the present order of things which they all considered to be the will of God. Many questions have been asked during the time of the

organization of this Council and doubtless some errors have been committed, it was, therefore, voted by all present that Bro Joseph should make all necessary corrections by the spirit of inspiration ⁶ hereafter Oliver Cowdery drew no. one by lot. Joseph Coe drew No 2. Samuel H Smith drew No 3. Luke Johnson drew No 4. John S Carter drew No 5. Sylvester Smith drew No 6. Oliver Cowdery, Samuel H Smith and John S Carter speak for and on the part of the accuser. Joseph Coe, Luke Johnson and Sylvester Smith, speak for and on the part of the accused. The remaining six counsellors are to sit and hear patiently and correct errors if they discover them. **The Council** John Johnson drew No 7. Orson Hyde drew No 8, Jared Carter drew No 9, Joseph Smith Seignr drew No 10, John Smith drew No 11, Martin Harris drew No 12, ⁷ The Council adjourned then, until wednesday at 10 oclk A.M. ——

Orson Hyde Clk [p. 31]

Footnotes

[1] The “law of God” probably refers to the 11 November 1831 [revelation](#) describing the court of the [president of the high priesthood](#). ([Revelation, 11 Nov. 1831–B](#) [D&C 107:78–79].)

[2] The word “Presidents” here refers to JS, [Rigdon](#), and [Williams](#), who together constituted the [presidency of the high priesthood](#). The names that follow were the twelve members appointed to the [high council](#).

[3] According to the [revised minutes](#), twenty-four [high priests](#) attended the meeting. Since fifteen of those were appointed to the high council, nine were left to ratify the council’s formation. ([Revised Minutes, 18–19 Feb. 1834](#) [D&C 102:1].)

[4] These pages of the minute book contain the [minutes](#) of the 12 February 1834 meeting of [high priests](#) and [elders](#) at which JS spoke about the conduct and personal worthiness expected of council members in ancient and modern times. ([Minutes, 12 Feb. 1834](#).)

[5] When JS [revised](#) these minutes over the following two days, he omitted this specific explanation of an appeals process. An earlier [revelation](#) provided for a “Court of the [high priesthood](#),” composed of the [president of the high priesthood](#) and twelve other [high priests](#), whose “desision upon controvers[i]es” was final. Subsequent records indicate that by the end of April 1843, individuals dissatisfied with the decision of a high council with appellate authority were still able to appeal their case to the [First Presidency](#). ([Revelation, 11 Nov. 1831–B](#) [D&C 107:79–80]; JS, [Journal, 30 Apr. 1843](#); “Trial before the First Presidency,” 30 Apr. 1843, JS Collection, CHL.)

Comprehensive Works Cited

Smith, Joseph. Collection, 1827–1846. CHL. [MS 155](#).

[6] For JS’s revisions and corrections to the minutes featured here, see [Revised Minutes, 18–19 Feb. 1834](#) [D&C 102].

[7] That the members of the council drew lots may indicate that they originally intended to hold a disciplinary hearing that day; at disciplinary hearings, [council](#) members drew lots to determine who would speak on behalf of the accused and who would speak on behalf of the accuser. The [revised minutes](#) of this meeting, however, said that casting “lots by numbers” was the duty of the

counselors whenever a high council was “regularly organized.” Thus, the casting of lots at this meeting may have simply indicated that the council considered itself officially organized at this point. In any event, the order in which counselors were to speak, as determined by lots at this meeting, was honored in the next two meetings of the council. ([Revised Minutes, 18–19 Feb. 1834](#) [D&C 102:12]; [Minutes, 19 Feb. 1834](#); [Minutes, 20 Feb. 1834](#).)