
Peter Whitmer Sr.

(1773–1854)

D&C 14: Introduction; 21: Introduction; 34: Introduction; 128:21

Peter and his wife, Mary Musselman Whitmer, were the parents of eight children. Three of their sons— David, Peter Jr., and John—are mentioned by name in the Doctrine and Covenants. Five of their sons—David, Christian, Jacob, Peter Jr., and John—and two of their sons-in-law—Oliver Cowdery and Hiram Page—were Witnesses of the Book of Mormon.

In 1809 the Peter Whitmer family settled in the township of Fayette, New York. Peter not only established a prosperous farm in Fayette but also gave civic service as an overseer of district highways and as a school trustee. Among his peers, Peter was known as a hard-working, God-fearing man. He attended Sunday services at the Zion’s Church, located a mile south of his farm. His pastor, Diedrich Willers Sr., said that Peter was a quiet, unpretentious, simple-minded man. The pastor’s son wrote that Peter was a “worthy and industrious citizen.”¹

The Whitmer family lived in a one-and-a-half-story log home in Fayette. In this home in 1829 the Prophet Joseph Smith completed the translation of the Book of Mormon. In a wooded area near the home, the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon—Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer—were shown the gold plates by an angel. On April 6, 1830, the organizational meeting of what became The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was held in the home. In addition, the first three conferences of the Church were also held in the home. Latter-day Saint historians suggest that the home of Peter Whitmer surpassed in importance the owner.

In 1829 Peter accepted the Restoration message of Joseph Smith and acknowledged his prophetic calling. On April 18, 1830, twelve days after the Church was organized, Peter

¹ Diedrich Willers, *Centennial Historical Sketch of the Town of Fayette* (Geneva, NY: 1900), 49.

and his wife, Mary, were baptized in the Seneca Lake by Oliver Cowdery. In obedience to the Lord's instruction through the Prophet Joseph to gather to Ohio, the Whitmers moved with their extended family to Kirtland. By 1832 Father Whitmer, as he was called by early Latter-day Saints, was residing in Jackson County, Missouri. There he hoped to establish a Zion-type community. Unfortunately, by 1833 a mob drove Peter and his family and other Saints from Jackson County across the Missouri River to the Clay County swamplands. Through these extremities and others, the Whitmers remained faithful to the restored gospel and the Prophet Joseph Smith.

It was not until the Whitmer family were residing in Far West, Missouri, that they began to question and reject their faith. Peter joined his sons David, Jacob, and John in open rebellion against the leadership of Joseph Smith. The Prophet Joseph wrote that Peter was among those who "said I was a fallen Prophet, and they were capable of leading the people."²

In 1838 Peter and his extended family moved away from the Latter-day Saint community of Far West and the main body of the Saints. Peter and his son David located in Richmond, Missouri, in what became a hotbed of religious dissenters. Peter never returned to fellowship in the Church. He died on August 12, 1854, in Richmond at age 81.

² History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843]. Joseph Smith Papers.