



Isaac Galland

1791–1858

D&C 124:78–79

Isaac had a very adventurous if not tumultuous youth. Mexican authorities confined him for a year in an adobe prison in Santa Fe. When he was released, Isaac journeyed through Ohio and Indiana, telling all who would listen that he was a physician and an attorney. At the beginning of the War of 1812, when he age twenty-one, local officials in Edgar County, Illinois, claimed he had stolen a horse and engaged in counterfeiting.

When Isaac moved on to Illinois and Iowa, his tarnished reputation did not follow him. Dr. C. E. Wahrer, former president of the Iowa Medical Association, wrote,

[Isaac Galland] was a brilliant physician and was especially successful in the treatment of cholera, as well as the prevention of the epidemic. In his contributions was a medicine chest or box about one foot cubic, on which was printed in red letters, "Dr. Isaac Galland's Family Medicines." This box contained the usual and ordinary remedies used

by the doctors in those days, and was placed in nearly every cabin in his wide field of practice.¹

Isaac was not only touted for his medical practice. By 1830 he was credited for operating a fur trade with the Native Americans in western Iowa and learning to speak their native tongue. Adding to his adulations, he was honored for setting up the first schoolhouse in the Territory of Iowa in Nashville on the west bank of Mississippi River.

When Chief Black Hawk threatened war on the settlers of Iowa, Isaac moved to Fort Edwards (later Warsaw), Illinois where he was commissioned a colonel in the Black Hawk War. Following the war, he platted the original town of Keokuk in the Territory of Iowa. With so many accolades in his favor, Isaac tossed his hat in the political arena, hoping to serve in the state legislature. It was his political opponent who brought to light Isaac's notorious past. Listening to his opponent recite a litany of his sins, Isaac said, "Yes, siree, I've been found guilty of most everything except hog stealing—and I never owned a hog."² The answer did not satisfy the conservative voters. Isaac lost the election.

Believing there was more ahead for him, Isaac turned to land speculation. He became a trustee for the New York Land Company and, as such, held claim to extensive tracts of land in Commerce, Illinois, and about 119,000 acres in Iowa referred to as the "Half-Breed Tract." In 1839 he offered to sell twenty thousand acres of the Half Breed Tract located between the Des Moines and Mississippi Rivers to Latter-day Saint leaders.

The offer was enticing to the Prophet Joseph Smith, who wrote from Liberty Jail on March 25, 1839—

It still seems to bear heavily on our minds that the Church would do well to secure to themselves the contract of the land which is proposed to them by Mr. Isaac Galland, and to cultivate the friendly feelings of that gentleman, inasmuch as he shall prove himself to be a man of honor and a friend to humanity.³

Land was purchased from Isaac on credit. Isaac later accepted Missouri lands abandoned by the Latter-day Saints in 1838–1839 as payment.

Isaac's relationship with Church leaders grew, as did his interest in their Restoration message. He was baptized on July 3, 1839, by the Prophet Joseph Smith and the same day

¹ "Keokuk's First Citizen was a Doctor!" *Keokuk (Iowa) Shoppers Free Press*, January 10, 1979, 2.

² "A Man of Conflicting Aspect—That was the Famous Dr. Galland," *Keokuk (Iowa) Daily Grate City*, April 13, 1960).

³ Letter to Edward Partridge and the Church, circa 22 March 1839, 3. Joseph Smith Papers.

ordained an elder. The Prophet Joseph called Isaac to serve as a land agent for the Church. On August 25, 1841, Joseph wrote, "I delegated my brother Hyrum and Dr. Isaac Galland to go east and negotiate for lands."⁴ On their eastward journey, Hyrum became ill and stayed in Pennsylvania to recuperate. Isaac forged ahead, believing the responsibility of land exchanges rested solely upon him. This proved awkward and embarrassing for Joseph Smith, who wrote to Isaac on January 19, 1842,

I have become embarrassed in my operations to a certain extent, and partly from a presentation of notes, which you, as my agent, had given for lands purchased in the eastern states, they having been sent to me. I have been obliged to cash them, and having no returns from you to meet those demands, or even the trifling expenses of your outfit, it has placed me in rather an unpleasant situation. ...

And now, sir, ... I think we had better have a settlement, and if I am owing you, I will pay you as soon as I can, and if you owe me, I shall only expect the same in return, for it is an old and trite maxim, that short reckonings make long friends.⁵

Isaac and Joseph never saw eye-to-eye on the financial details of the land transactions. About 1842 Isaac withdrew from Church activity. His last known letter to the Prophet Joseph Smith was dated March 11, 1843. In the letter, Isaac expressed outrage at the arrest of Orrin Porter Rockwell for the assassination attempt of former governor Lilburn W. Boggs and John C. Bennett's lectures against Mormonism and the Prophet Joseph.

From 1842 to 1853, Isaac resided in Keokuk, Iowa. During those years, he was "a firm and zealous believer in Spiritualism, and was heard to say that Joe Smith was the dupe of his own impostures; that Smith was simply a so-called spiritual medium."⁶ In April 1853 Isaac journeyed to Sacramento, California. In 1856, when he learned that a lawsuit against the New York Land Company had awarded him eleven thousand dollars, he returned to Iowa to claim his money. At this point, he claimed "the Mormons cheated him by non-payment of money owed for the land he purportedly sold them."⁷

Isaac died on September 27, 1858, in Fort Madison at age sixty-seven.

⁴ Authorization for Hyrum Smith and Isaac Galland, 15 February 1841-B, 1. Joseph Smith Papers.

⁵ History, 1838-1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838-31 July 1842], 1270. Joseph Smith Papers.

⁶ John M. Madsen, "Study of Dr. Isaac Galland," (1964), 10. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. Provo, UT.

⁷ "Keokuk's First Citizen was a Doctor!" 2.