

= James Strang =

James Jesse Strang ( March 21 , 1813 ? July 9 , 1856 ) was an American religious leader , politician and self @-@ proclaimed monarch . In 1844 he founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints ( Strangite ) , a faction of the Latter Day Saint movement that he claimed to be the sole legitimate continuation of the Church of Christ founded by Joseph Smith fourteen years before . A major contender for leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints during the 1844 succession crisis , Strang vied with Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon for control of the organization in Nauvoo , Illinois before his rejection there subsequently led him to start his own sect . While serving as Prophet , Seer and Revelator of his church , Strang reigned for six years as the crowned " king " of an ecclesiastical monarchy that he established on Beaver Island in the US state of Michigan . Building an organization that eventually rivaled Young 's in Utah , Strang gained nearly 12 @, @ 000 adherents prior to his murder in 1856 , which brought down his kingdom and all but extinguished his sect .

In contrast to Joseph Smith , who used the eminently republican title of " President of the Church , " Strang taught that the chief prophetic office embodied an overtly royal attribute , by which its occupant was to be not only the spiritual leader of his people , but their temporal king as well . He offered a sophisticated set of teachings that differed in many significant aspects from any other version of Mormonism , including that preached by Smith . To bolster his claims , Strang published translations of two purportedly long @-@ lost works : the Voree Record , deciphered from three metal plates reportedly unearthed in response to a vision ; and the Book of the Law of the Lord , supposedly transcribed from the Plates of Laban mentioned in the Book of Mormon . These are accepted as scripture by his followers , but not by any other Latter Day Saint church . Although his long @-@ term doctrinal influence on the Latter Day Saint movement was minimal , several early members of Strang 's organization helped to establish the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints , which became ( and remains ) the second @-@ largest Mormon sect . While most of Strang 's followers eventually disavowed him , a small but devout remnant continues to carry on his teachings and organization today .

In addition to his ecclesiastical calling , Strang served one full term and part of a second as a member of the Michigan House of Representatives , and assisted in the organization of Manitou County . He was also at various times an attorney , educator , temperance lecturer , newspaper editor , Baptist minister , correspondent for the New York Tribune , and amateur scientist . His survey of Beaver Island 's natural history was published by the Smithsonian Institution , remaining the definitive work on that subject for nearly a century , while his career in the Michigan legislature was praised even by his enemies . However , his polygamous lifestyle and sometimes abrasive personality made him many enemies inside his church and out of it , contributing to his ultimate demise .

While Strang 's organization is formally known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints , the term " Strangite " is usually added to the title to avoid confusing them with other Latter Day Saint bodies carrying this or similar names . This follows a typical nineteenth @-@ century usage where followers of Brigham Young were sometimes referred to as " Brighamites , " while those of Sidney Rigdon were called " Rigdonites , " followers of Joseph Smith III were called " Josephites " , and disciples of Strang became " Strangites " .

= = Childhood , education and conversion to Mormonism = =

James Jesse Strang was born March 21 , 1813 , in Scipio , Cayuga County , New York . He was the second of three children , and his parents had a good reputation in their community . James ' mother was very tender with him as a consequence of delicate health , yet she required him to render an account of all his actions and words while absent from her . In a brief autobiography he wrote in 1855 , Strang reported that he had attended grade school until age twelve , but that " the terms were usually short , the teachers inexperienced and ill qualified to teach , and my health such as to preclude attentive study or steady attendance . " He estimated that his time in a classroom

during those years totaled six months .

But none of this meant that Strang was illiterate or simple . Although his teachers " not unfrequently turned me off with little or no attention , as though I was too stupid to learn and too dull to feel neglect , " Strang recalled that he spent " long weary days ... upon the floor , thinking , thinking , thinking ... my mind wandered over fields that old men shrink from , seeking rest and finding none till darkness gathered thick around and I burst into tears . " He studied works by Thomas Paine and the Comte de Volney , whose book *Les Ruines* exerted a significant influence on the future prophet .

As a youth , Strang kept a rather profound personal diary , written partly in a secret code that was not deciphered until over one hundred years after it was authored ( by Strang 's own grandson Mark Strang , a banker in Long Beach , California ) . This journal contains Strang 's musings on a variety of topics , including his desire to " rival Caesar or Napoleon " and his regret that by age nineteen , he had not yet become a general or member of the state legislature , which he saw as being essential by that point in his life to his quest for fame . However , Strang 's diary equally reveals a heartfelt desire to be of service to his fellow man , together with agonized frustration at not knowing how he might do so as a penniless , unknown youth from upstate New York .

At age twelve , Strang was baptized a Baptist . He did not wish to follow his father 's calling as a farmer , so he took up the study of law . Strang was admitted to the bar in New York at age 23 and later at other places where he resided . He became county Postmaster and edited a local newspaper , the *Randolph Herald* . Later , in the midst of his myriad duties on Beaver Island , he would find time to found and publish the *Daily Northern Islander* , the first newspaper in northern Michigan .

Strang , who once described himself as a " cool philosopher " and a freethinker , became a Baptist minister but left in February 1844 to join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints . He quickly found favor with Joseph Smith , though they had known each other only a short time , and was baptized personally by him on February 25 , 1844 . On March 3 of that year he was ordained an Elder by Joseph 's brother Hyrum and sent forthwith at Smith 's request to Wisconsin , to establish a Mormon stake at Voree . Shortly after Strang 's departure , Joseph Smith was murdered by an anti-Mormon mob in Carthage , Illinois .

= = Succession claim and notable early allies = =

Following Smith 's demise , several men claimed the right to lead the Latter Day Saints . The most significant of these were Brigham Young , president of Smith 's Twelve Apostles ; Sidney Rigdon , the sole surviving member of Smith 's First Presidency ; and James Strang . A power struggle ensued , and Young eventually led the bulk of Smith 's followers to Utah while Rigdon led a smaller group to Pennsylvania . As a newcomer to the faith Strang did not possess the name recognition enjoyed by his rivals , so his prospects of assuming Smith 's prophetic mantle appeared shaky at first . But this did not dissuade him . Though the Quorum of Twelve quickly published a notice in the *Times and Seasons* of Strang 's excommunication , Strang insisted that he had never received a legitimate trial . He equally asserted that the Twelve had no right to sit in judgment on him , as he was the lawful President of the church .

To bolster his claim Strang produced a " Letter of Appointment " allegedly from Smith , carrying a Nauvoo postmark and dated June 18 , 1844 , just nine days before Smith 's murder . He furthermore testified that an angel ordained him as Joseph Smith 's successor at the time Smith died . Smith and Strang were some 225 miles ( 362 km ) apart at the time , and Strang offered witnesses to affirm that he had made his announcement before news of Smith 's demise was publicly available . Strang 's letter is held today by Yale University . Although the postmark is legitimate , some modern analysts have asserted that Joseph Smith 's signature on the third page is a forgery . One former Strangite claimed that Strang 's law partner conspired with Strang to fabricate his Letter of Appointment and the Voree Plates , though no proof of this was ever produced .

Strang 's letter convinced several eminent Mormons of his claims , including Book of Mormon witnesses John and David Whitmer , Martin Harris and Hiram Page . In addition Apostles John E. Page , William E. M 'Lellin , and William Smith , together with Nauvoo Stake President William

Marks , and Bishop George Miller , accepted Strang at first . A newspaper affiliated with Strang , the Voree Herald , claimed that Joseph Smith 's mother , Lucy Mack Smith , and three of his sisters accepted Strang 's claims , although this is disputed . The newspaper alleges that Lucy Smith wrote to one Reuben Hedlock : " I am satisfied that Joseph appointed J.J. Strang . It is verily so . " According to Joseph Smith 's brother William , all of his family ( except for Hyrum and Samuel Smith 's widows ) , initially endorsed Strang .

Also championing Strang was John C. Bennett , a physician and libertine who had enjoyed a less than stellar career as Joseph Smith 's Assistant President and mayor of Nauvoo . Invited by Strang to join him in Voree , Bennett was instrumental in establishing a so @-@ called " Halcyon Order of the Illuminati " there , with Strang as its " Imperial Primate . " Eventually Bennett 's profligate ways caught up with him , as in Nauvoo , and Strang expelled him in 1847 . His " order " fell by the wayside and has no role in Strangism today , though it did lead to conflict between Strang and some of his associates .

= = From monogamist to polygamist = =

About 12 @,@ 000 Latter Day Saints ultimately accepted Strang 's claims . However , not all of these followed him to Beaver Island in Lake Michigan , where church headquarters was moved in 1848 . Most of his initial adherents , including all of those listed above ( with the exception of George Miller , who remained loyal to Strang until death ) , would leave Strang 's church before his demise . John E. Page departed in July 1849 , accusing Strang of dictatorial tendencies and concurring with Bennett 's furtive " Illuminati " order . Martin Harris had broken with Strang by January 1847 , after a failed mission to England . Hiram Page and the Whitmers also left around this time .

Many defections , however , were due to Strang 's seemingly abrupt " about @-@ face " on the turbulent subject of polygamy . Vehemently opposed to the practice at first , Strang reversed course in 1849 to become one of its strongest advocates , marrying five wives ( including his original spouse , Mary ) and fathering fourteen children . Since many of his early disciples viewed him as a monogamous counterweight to Brigham Young 's polygamous version of Mormonism , Strang 's decision to embrace plural marriage proved costly to him and his organization . Strang defended his new tenet by claiming that , far from enslaving or demeaning women , polygamy would liberate and " elevate " them by allowing them to choose the best possible mate based upon any factors deemed important to them ? even if that mate were already married to someone else . Rather than being forced to wed " corrupt and degraded sires " due to the scarcity of more suitable men , a woman could marry the man she saw as the most compatible to herself , the best candidate to father her children and give her the finest possible life , no matter how many other wives he might have .

Strang 's first wife was Mary Perce , whom he married on November 20 , 1836 , when she was eighteen and he was twenty @-@ three . They were separated in May 1851 , though they remained legally married until Strang 's death . His second wife , married on July 13 , 1849 , was nineteen @-@ year @-@ old Elvira Eliza Field ( who disguised herself at first as " Charlie J. Douglas , " Strang 's purported nephew , before revealing her true identity in 1850 ) . Strang 's third wife was thirty @-@ one @-@ year @-@ old Betsy McNutt , whom he married on January 19 , 1852 ; his fourth was nineteen @-@ year @-@ old Sarah Adelia Wright , married on July 15 , 1855 . Ironically , decades after Strang 's death , Sarah would divorce her second husband , one Dr. Wing , due to his interest in polygamy . Strang 's last wife was eighteen @-@ year @-@ old Phoebe Wright , cousin to Sarah , whom he wed on October 27 , 1855 , less than one year before his murder .

Sarah Wright described Strang as " a very mild @-@ spoken , kind man to his family , although his word was law . " She wrote that while each wife had her own bedroom , they shared meals and devotional time together with Strang and that life in their household was " as pleasant as possible . " On the other hand , Strang and Phoebe Wright 's daughter , Eugenia , wrote in 1936 that after only eight months of marriage , her mother had " begun to feel dissatisfied with polygamy , though she loved him [ Strang ] devotedly all her life . "

= = Theological contributions = =

### == Publications ==

Like Joseph Smith , James Strang reported numerous visions , unearthed and translated allegedly ancient metal plates using what he said was the Biblical Urim and Thummim , and claimed to have restored long @-@ lost spiritual knowledge to humankind . Like Smith , he presented witnesses to authenticate the records he claimed to have received . Unlike Smith , however , Strang offered his plates to the public for examination . The non @-@ Mormon Christopher Sholes ? inventor of the typewriter and editor of a local newspaper ? perused Strang 's " Voree Plates " , a minuscule brass chronicle Strang said he had been led to by a vision in 1845 . Sholes offered no opinion on Strang 's find , but described the would @-@ be prophet as " honest and earnest " and opined that his followers ranked " among the most honest and intelligent men in the neighborhood . " Strang published his translation of these plates as the " Voree Record , " purporting to be the last testament of one " Rajah Manchou of Vorito , " who had lived in the area centuries earlier and wished to leave a brief statement for posterity . While many scoffed , Strangites assert that two modern scholars have affirmed that the text on the plates appears to represent a genuine , albeit unknown , language . This assertion has not been verified by independent sources , however . The Voree Plates disappeared around 1900 , and their current whereabouts are unknown .

Strang also claimed to have translated the " Plates of Laban " described in the Book of Mormon . This translation was published in 1851 as the Book of the Law of the Lord , said to be the original Law given to Moses and mentioned in II Chronicles 34 : 14 ? 15 . Greatly expanded and republished in 1856 , this book served as the constitution for Strang 's spiritual kingdom on Beaver Island , and is still accepted as scripture by Strangites . One distinctive feature ( besides its overtly monarchical tone ) is its restoration of a " missing " commandment to the Decalogue : " Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself . " Strang insisted that versions of the Decalogue found in Bibles used by other churches ? including other Latter Day Saint churches ? contain only nine commandments , not ten .

Strang received several other revelations , which while never formally added to his church 's Doctrine and Covenants , are nevertheless accepted as scripture by his followers . These concerned , among other things , Baptism for the Dead , the building of a temple in Voree , the standing of Sidney Rigdon , and an invitation for Joseph Smith III , eldest son of Joseph Smith , to take a position as Counselor in Strang 's First Presidency . " Young Joseph " never accepted this calling and refused to have anything to do with Strang 's organization . Strang also authored The Diamond , an attack on the claims of Sidney Rigdon and Brigham Young , and The Prophetic Controversy , ostensibly for Mrs. Martha Coray , co @-@ author with Lucy Mack Smith of The History of Joseph Smith by His Mother . Coray , a partisan of Brigham Young 's , had challenged " the vain usurper " to provide convincing evidence of his claims , and Strang attempted to oblige in this open letter addressed to her . Coray 's reaction to Strang 's missive has not been preserved .

### == Distinctive dogmas ==

Some of Strang 's teachings differed substantially from those of other Latter Day Saint leaders , including Joseph Smith . For instance , Strang rejected the traditional Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ , together with the Mormon doctrine of " plurality of gods . " A monotheist , he insisted that there was but one eternal God of all the universe , the Father , and that " progression to godhood " ( a doctrine allegedly taught by Joseph Smith toward the end of his life ) was impossible . God had always been God , said Strang , and He was but one Person and not three , as in the traditional Christian Trinity . Jesus Christ was presented as the natural @-@ born son of Mary and Joseph , who was chosen from before all time to be the Savior of mankind but who had to be born as an ordinary mortal of two human parents ( rather than being the offspring of the Father or the Holy Spirit ) to fulfill his Messianic role . Strang claimed that the earthly Christ was in essence " adopted " as God 's son at birth , and fully revealed as such during the Transfiguration . After proving himself to God by living a perfectly sinless life , he was enabled to provide an

acceptable sacrifice for the sins of men , prior to his resurrection and ascension .

Furthermore , Strang denied that God could do all things , and insisted that some things were as impossible for Him as for us . Thus , he saw no essential conflict between science and religion , and while he never openly championed evolution , he did state that God was limited in His power by the matter He was working with and by the eons of time required to " organize " and shape it . Strang spoke glowingly of a future generation who would " make religion a science , " to be " studied by as exact rules as mathematics . " " The mouth of the Seer will be opened , " he prophesied , " and the whole earth enlightened . "

Musing at length on the nature of sin and evil , Strang wrote that of all things that God could give to man , He could never give him experience . Thus , if " free agency " were to be real , said Strang , humanity must be given the opportunity to fail and to learn from its own mistakes . The ultimate goal for each human being was to willingly conform oneself to the " revealed character " of God in every respect , preferring good to evil not out of a fear of punishment or any desire for reward , but rather solely " on account of the innate loveliness of undefiled goodness ; of pure unalloyed holiness . "

= = = Practices = = =

Strang believed strongly in the seventh @-@ day Sabbath , and enjoined it in lieu of Sunday ; the Strangite church continues this tradition . He advocated baptism for the dead , and practiced it to a limited extent in Voree and on Beaver Island . He also introduced animal sacrifice ? not for sin , but as a part of Strangite celebration rituals . Animal sacrifices and baptisms for the dead are not currently practiced by the Strangite organization , though belief in each is still required . Strang attempted to construct a temple in Voree , but was prevented from completing it due to the poverty and lack of cooperation of his followers . No " endowment " rituals comparable to those in the Utah LDS and Cutlerite churches appear to have existed among his followers . Eternal marriage formed a part of Strang 's teaching , though he did not require it to be performed in a temple ( as in the LDS church ) . Thus , such marriages are still contracted in Strang 's church in the absence of any Strangite temple or " endowment " ceremony . Alcohol , tobacco , coffee and tea were prohibited , as in many Latter Day Saint denominations . Polygamy is no longer practiced by Strang 's followers , though belief in its correctness is still affirmed .

Strang allowed women to hold the Priesthood offices of Priest and Teacher , unique among all Latter Day Saint factions during his lifetime . He welcomed African Americans into his church , and ordained at least two to the eldership . Strang also mandated conservation of land and resources , requiring the building of parks and retention of large forests in his kingdom . He wrote an eloquent refutation of the " Solomon Spalding theory " of the Book of Mormon 's authorship , and defended the ministry and teachings of Joseph Smith ? as he understood them .

= = Coronation and troubled reign on Beaver Island = =

Strang claimed that he was to occupy the office of king described in the Book of the Law of the Lord . He insisted that this authority was incumbent upon all holders of the prophetic office from the beginning of time , and his followers believe that Smith himself was crowned secretly as " king " of the Kingdom of God before his murder . Strang was accordingly crowned in 1850 by his counselor and Prime Minister , an actor named George J. Adams . About 300 people witnessed his coronation , for which he wore a bright red flannel robe topped by a white collar with black speckles . His tin crown was described in one account as " a shiny metal ring with a cluster of glass stars in the front . " Strang also sported a breastplate and carried a wooden scepter . He " reigned " for six years , and the date of his coronation , July 8 , is still mandated as one of the two most important dates in the Strangite church year ( the other being April 6 , the anniversary of the founding of Joseph Smith 's church ) .

Strang never claimed to be the king of Beaver Island itself , nor of any other geographical entity . Rather , he claimed to be king over his church , which he saw as the true " Kingdom of God " prophesied in Scripture and destined to spread over all the earth . Nor did Strang ever say that his "

kingdom " supplanted United States sovereignty over Beaver Island . However , since his sect was the main religious body on the isle , claiming the allegiance of most of its inhabitants , Strang often asserted authority even over non @-@ Strangites on Beaver ? which ultimately caused him and his followers a great deal of grief . Furthermore , he and many of his disciples were accused of forcibly appropriating property and revenue on the island , which made him few friends among the non @-@ Mormon " gentiles . "

On the other hand , Strang and his people lived in apprehension of what their non @-@ member neighbors might do next . Some Strangites were beaten up while going to the post office to collect their mail , and some of their homes were robbed and even seized by " gentiles " while Strangite men were away . On July 4 , 1850 , a drunken mob of fishermen vowed to kill the " Mormons " or drive them out , only to be awed into submission when Strang fired a cannon ( which he had secretly acquired ) at them . Competition for business and jobs added to tensions on the island , as did the increasing Strangite monopoly on local government , made sure after Beaver and adjacent islands were attached first to Emmet County in 1853 , then later organized into their own insular county of Manitou in 1855 .

As a result of his coronation , together with lurid tales spread by George Adams ( who had been excommunicated by Strang a few months after the ceremony ) , Strang was accused of treason , counterfeiting , trespass on government land , and theft , among other crimes . He was brought to trial in Detroit , Michigan , after President Millard Fillmore ordered US District Attorney George Bates to investigate the rumors about Strang and his colony . Strang 's successful trial defense brought him considerable favorable press , which he leveraged to run for , and win , a seat in the Michigan state legislature as a Democrat in 1853 . Facing a determined effort to deny him this seat due to the hostility of his enemies , he was permitted to address the legislature in his defense , after which the Michigan House of Representatives voted twice ( first unanimously , then a second time by a 49 ? 11 margin ) to allow " King Strang " to join them .

In the 1853 legislative session , Strang introduced ten bills , five of which passed . The Detroit Advertiser , on February 10 , 1853 , wrote of Strang : " Mr. Strang ? s course as a member of the present Legislature , has disarmed much of the prejudices which have previously surrounded him . Whatever may be said or thought of the peculiar sect of which he is the local head , I take pleasure in stating that throughout this session he has conducted himself with the degree of decorum and propriety which have been equaled by his industry , sagacity , good temper , apparent regard for the true interests of the people , and the obligations of his official oath . " He was reelected in 1855 , and did much to organize the upper portion of Michigan 's lower peninsula into counties and townships . Strang ardently fought the illegal practice of trading liquor to local Native American tribes . This made him many enemies among those non @-@ Strangite residents of Beaver and nearby Mackinac Island who profited mightily from this illicit trade .

= = Assassination = =

James Strang made foes among his own people , too . One of these , Thomas Bedford , had been flogged for adultery on Strang 's orders , and felt considerable resentment toward the " king . " Another , Dr. H.D. McCulloch , had been excommunicated for drunkenness and other alleged misdeeds , after previously enjoying Strang 's favor and several high offices in local government . These conspired against Strang with Alexander Wentworth and Dr. J. Atkyn , who had allegedly endeavored ( unsuccessfully ) to blackmail the Strangites into paying his numerous bad debts . A decree that female Strangites must wear " bloomers " only added fuel to the fire . Pistols were procured , and the four conspirators began several days of target practice while finalizing the details of their murderous plan .

Although Strang apparently knew that Bedford and the others were gunning for him , he seems not to have taken them very seriously . " We laugh with bitter scorn at all these threats , " he wrote in the Northern Islander , just days before his murder . Strang 's refusal to employ a bodyguard or to carry a firearm or other weapon made him an easy target .

On Monday , June 16 , 1856 , Strang was waylaid around 7 : 00 PM on the dock at the harbor of St.

James , chief city of Beaver Island , by Wentworth and Bedford , who shot him in the back . All of this was carried out in full view of several officers and men of the USS Michigan , a US Naval vessel docked in the harbor . Not one person on board the ship made any effort to warn or to aid the intended victim .

Strang was hit three times : one bullet grazed his head , another lodged in his cheek and a third in his spine , paralyzing him from the waist down . One of the assassins then savagely pistol @-@ whipped the fallen prophet before running aboard the nearby vessel with his companion , where both claimed sanctuary . Some accused Captain McBlair of the Michigan of complicity in , or at least foreknowledge of , the assassination plot , though no hard evidence of this was ever forthcoming . The so @-@ called " King of Beaver Island " was taken to Voree , where he lived for three weeks , dying on July 9 , 1856 at the age of 43 . After refusing to deliver Bedford and Wentworth to the local sheriff , McBlair transported them to Mackinac Island , where they were given a mock trial , fined \$ 1 @.@ 25 , released , and then feted by the locals . None of the plotters was ever punished for his crimes .

= = Death of a kingdom = =

While Strang lingered on his deathbed in Voree , his Michigan enemies determined to extinguish his Beaver Island kingdom . On July 5 , 1856 , on what Michigan historian Byron M. Cutcheon later called " the most disgraceful day in Michigan history , " a drunken mob of " gentiles " from Mackinac and elsewhere descended upon the island and forcibly evicted every Strangite from it . Strang 's subjects on the island ? numbering approximately 2 @,@ 600 persons ? were herded onto hastily commandeered steamers , most after being robbed of their money and other personal possessions , and unceremoniously dumped onto docks along the shores of Lake Michigan . A few moved back to Voree , while the rest scattered across the country .

Strang refused to appoint a successor , telling his apostles to take care of their families as best they could , and await divine instruction . While his supporters endeavored to keep his church alive , Strang 's unique dogma requiring his successor to be ordained by angels handicapped his church in its search for a new prophet . Lorenzo Dow Hickey , the last of Strang 's apostles , emerged as an ad @-@ hoc leader until his death in 1897 , followed by Wingfield W. Watson , a High Priest in Strang 's organization ( until he died in 1922 ) . Neither of these men ever claimed Strang 's office or authority , however . Left without a prophet to guide them , most of Strang 's members ( including all of his wives ) departed his church in the years after his murder . Most later joined the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints , which was established in 1860 . A few , however , continue to carry on Strang 's mission as best they can , while awaiting a new successor to their fallen founder .

Strang 's disciples today are divided into two main factions ; one is led by a Presiding High Priest , who does not claim to have the authority or priesthood office possessed by Joseph Smith or James Strang . The other claims that the first faction is in error , and that by incorporating in 1961 , it lost its identity as a faithful continuation of Strang 's organization . This second group claims that it is the sole true remnant of James Strang 's church . Missionary work is no longer emphasized among the Strangites ( unlike the LDS and many other Latter Day Saint sects ) , as they tend to believe that after three murdered prophets ( Joseph Smith , Hyrum Smith and James Strang ) God closed His dispensation to the " gentiles " of the West . Consequently , Strang 's church has continued to dwindle until the present day . Current membership figures vary between 50 and 300 persons , depending upon the source consulted .

While proving a key player in the 1844 succession struggle , Strang 's long @-@ term influence on the Latter Day Saint movement was minimal . His doctrinal innovations had little impact outside of his church , and he was largely ignored until recent historians began to reexamine his life and career . Even the county ( Manitou ) he had fought to establish was abolished by the Michigan legislature in 1895 , removing the last tangible remnant of Strang 's temporal empire . For all his efforts , Strang 's most vital ( albeit unintended ) contribution to the Latter Day Saint religion turned out to be providing some of the impetus behind creation of the Reorganized Church , which became a major rival to the

Utah @-@ based LDS Church and other Latter Day Saint groups ? including his own .