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Illinois offers regrets to LDS

By **Lisa Riley Roche**

Deseret Morning News

Almost 160 years after the Mormon exodus began, the Illinois Legislature is seeking "the pardon and forgiveness" of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the events that led to the death of church founder Joseph Smith in 1844 and the expulsion of his followers from Nauvoo.

Spurred by a Chicago alderman who heard the Nauvoo story from Myron Walker, husband of Utah Gov. Olene Walker, a lengthy resolution detailing the history of the LDS Church settlement in Illinois and apologizing for driving church members from the state following Smith's death has been passed by the Illinois House.

The resolution states that the "biases and prejudices of a less-enlightened age in the history of the state of Illinois caused untold hardship and trauma for the community of Latter-day Saints by the distrust, violence and inhospitable actions of a dark time in our past"

It also describes members of the LDS Church as "a people of faith and hard work" and asks them to forgive "the misguided efforts of our citizens, chief executive and the General Assembly in the expulsion of their Mormon ancestors" from Nauvoo.

Nauvoo was founded on the banks of the Mississippi River by Smith after church members were expelled from another state, Missouri, in 1839. There they built "the city beautiful" and began work on the Nauvoo Temple. After Smith's death, members of the church, led by Brigham Young, began to migrate west, eventually settling in Utah.

Next week, LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley and Gov. Olene Walker will accept a copy of the March 24 resolution from a visiting delegation of Illinois officials, including the Chicago alderman and his wife who came up with the idea.

A spokesman for the LDS Church, Dale Bills, called the resolution "a thoughtful gesture" and said the church will have more to say about the apology next week. President Hinckley and Walker are scheduled to hold a press conference with the Illinois officials on April 7.



1839 — Forced from Missouri, LDS Church members purchase land in Illinois to settle Nauvoo.

1844 — Church leaders Joseph and Hyrum Smith killed by a mob in nearby Carthage, Ill.

1846 — Nauvoo Temple completed and dedicated; the exodus from Nauvoo begins.

1847 — The first Mormon pioneers arrive in what is to become Utah.

Deseret Morning News graphic

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"I think it brings closure," the governor said Wednesday from Vancouver, British Columbia, where she is on a

trade mission. "It was certainly a very generous gesture on their part to realize historically they had really driven a whole group of people out of their state.

"Now they're saying they're sorry it happened. I think it does bring a great deal of friendship and, at least for me, warm feelings about Illinois that they would care that much and pass this resolution."

Chicago Alderman Ed Burke said he heard the story of Nauvoo from Myron Walker during a dinner party in Deer Valley just over a year ago. Myron Walker is the great-grandson of a Nauvoo survivor who made the trek to what became Salt Lake City.

"I am embarrassed to say that was the first time I learned about Nauvoo and the details of what happened," Burke said. "I thought that, No. 1, the people of Illinois ought to know more about their own history and, No. 2, it's a travesty that's gone on for too many years."

So Burke turned to his brother, Illinois State Rep. Dan Burke, D-Chicago. The resolution, he said, "has the possibility to heal some of the lingering hurt that I'm sure many descendants of the original settlers of Nauvoo feel about Illinois."

And last month, Burke and his wife, Illinois Appellate Court Judge Anne Burke, returned to Utah with a draft of the resolution that they took to President Hinckley. "He was completely surprised that anyone would undertake to do this," Burke said. "He was very emotional."

Dan Burke said there was no debate over the resolution, either in committee or on the House floor, and that it passed unanimously. The resolution also received virtually no attention in Illinois until Wednesday, when a Chicago Sun-Times columnist wrote about it.

The Burkes are Catholics, and Anne Burke is the chairwoman of the Catholic Church's national panel charged with examining allegations of sexual abuse by priests. The resolution's chief sponsor, Illinois State Rep. Jack Franks, D-Woodstock, is Jewish.

Taylor Manning of Naperville, a Chicago suburb, one of the 50,000 LDS Church members in Illinois, said the apology says a lot about Ed and Anne Burke "and the impact the Mormon story had on them. It just feels great."

Today, Nauvoo is a popular tourist destination for LDS Church members and others. The temple, gutted by arson in 1848, was rebuilt by the LDS Church and dedicated in 2002.

Read the entire resolution [here](#).

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