uniting families across generations and beyond the grave. Select associates accepted the Prophet’s private challenge to make covenants of marriage with plural wives (see PLURAL MARRIAGE), though the doctrine was not preached publicly until 1852 in Utah. In preparation for the temple, teaching of the doctrine of eternal families added a unique touch to LDS family life. SEALING ordinances for husbands and wives gave marriage and the family in Nauvoo an eternal perspective.

Just when life appeared to be back to normal after the martyrdom, the loss of Nauvoo’s charter and mob harassment in 1845 threatened the peace of Joseph Smith’s City Beautiful. Political and schismatic opponents predicted “the end of Mormonism.” Disaffected Latter-day Saints threatened religious unity and offered guardianship and new prophetic leadership in opposition to the Twelve. The Church survived, but Nauvoo’s position as the Church center ended. The governing Quorum of the Twelve announced plans at the October 1845 conference to evacuate by the following spring.

Throughout the winter, residents organized for the exodus even as they rushed to complete their temple and receive its ordinances (see WESTERN MIGRATION: PLANNING AND PROPHECY). They purchased oxen, made wagons, sold properties, and outfitted themselves for the long trek into the western wilderness as they also prepared temple clothing and did finishing work inside the temple on the hill. Brigham Young and the Twelve appointed agents to dispose of unsold property and organized emigration companies as they oversaw construction details on the temple. By December, just before departure began, thousands of the Nauvoo faithful began to receive their long-awaited temple endowments. Before winter’s end more than 6,000 received temple ordinances and thus were willing to leave. After seven eventful years, the Latter-day Saints moved on again, transplanting their covenant society to a new promised land.

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NAUVOO CHARTER

By legislation signed into law on December 16, 1840, the Illinois General Assembly granted corporate city status to Nauvoo. Among literally hundreds of Illinois settlements, only Alton, Chicago, Galena, Quincy, and Springfield shared such distinctive legal status. Expectations of what would
result ran high for both Latter-day Saints and their neighbors.

Many Illinoisans, shocked at the harsh treatment given the Latter-day Saints by the Missourians (see MISSOURI CONFLICT), sought to succor the beleaguered followers of Joseph Smith by helping them politically and providing legal safeguards. Moreover, the economic fabric of the state suffered from the deepening effects of the panic of 1837 and 1839, and many legislators saw an economic boon in the future immigration of several thousand new settlers. Encouraged by state political leaders, the Saints believed that a city charter would guarantee them a kind of security they had never yet enjoyed. Even State Supreme Court Justice Stephen A. Douglas, despite prior judicial decisions to the contrary, opined that a corporate charter was irrevocable and perpetual.

The Nauvoo document, neither the longest nor the shortest city charter, was much like the charters of other Illinois cities. More than half the sections were modeled on the Springfield charter. City status allowed governance by a council chosen by an electorate; unlike other city councils in Illinois, the Nauvoo Council contained aldermen, councillors, and a mayor. The Nauvoo instrument also differed from others in being not one but three charters, granting corporate status the city, a university, and a city militia. Previous practice was to establish schools and also militia units by separate acts. The University of the City of Nauvoo, governed by the city council, was the only city-operated university in the state.

One important provision stated that the Nauvoo Council could pass any ordinances not repugnant to the constitutions of the United States or that of Illinois. This, in effect, empowered the Nauvoo body to stand in a federated position with the Illinois General Assembly. Ordinances passed by the Nauvoo Council could be in direct violation or disregard of state law and still be valid in Nauvoo, provided they did not conflict with specific powers granted by the federal and state constitutions. Leaders of the city militia, known as the NAUVOO LEGION, and the university trustees could also pass laws, limited only by state and federal constitutions.

Almost at once this power became a focal point of misunderstanding and controversy, though the same delegation of authority was also in three of the other five city charters. Since this provision was not unique, adverse reaction to it clearly had a good deal to do with how others viewed Latter-day Saints and the implementation of the provision by Nauvoo and its leaders. The Nauvoo Municipal Court, the third such court provided for by the Illinois General Assembly, also became a point of contention. While the city courts of Chicago and Alton convened under one judge, the principal Nauvoo judge was the mayor of the city, sitting as chief justice, with the aldermen as associate justices. Adversaries argued that the way Joseph Smith, as mayor of Nauvoo, used the legislative and judicial powers granted by law resulted in “anti-republican” abuses.

In granting the charter, some legislators may have hoped to protect Latter-day Saints from PERSECUTION, but it proved to be a two-edged sword. When the Illinois majority turned against Nauvoo but lacked legal tools to curb the city’s power and influence, it turned to extralegal means. Later, after violence, it also succeeded in getting Nauvoo’s charter repealed. Although based solidly on precedents not termed “anti-republican” until Latter-day Saints obtained and used them, the Nauvoo Charter nevertheless ultimately fell short of providing the Saints the peace and protection they desired.

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NAUVOO ECONOMY

Nauvoo, for seven years the headquarters of the Church, was a river city with an agricultural hinterland set amid a preestablished, second-generation frontier society of non-Mormons. Founded in 1839 by LDS refugees from the MISSOURI CONFLICT, it existed as an LDS community only until 1846. Additions to its fast-growing population came mostly through new converts, many from England, who almost always brought skills and sometimes wealth. Though commerce in goods and services was brisk, Nauvoo’s primary import was converts (see IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION), and its primary export, MISSIONARIES.

Nauvoo was neither communal nor communitarian. Still, the influences of the corporation of the