



1-1-2017

Dan Vogel, ed., *History of Joseph Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

Reviewed by Robin Scott Jensen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr2>

 Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Jensen, Reviewed by Robin Scott (2017) "Dan Vogel, ed., *History of Joseph Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*," *Mormon Studies Review*: Vol. 4 : No. 1 , Article 20.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr2/vol4/iss1/20>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mormon Studies Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Dan Vogel, ed. *History of Joseph Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. 8 vols. Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2015.

Reviewed by Robin Scott Jensen

Mormon Studies Review, vol. 4, 2017, pp. 168–74

© 2016 Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/msr.2017.0119> Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/mimsr.21568030>

FOLLOWING THE INITIAL CREATION and publication of the History of Joseph Smith in the mid-nineteenth century,¹ each generation of Mormon scholars has grappled anew with its nuances, complexities, and relative value as a source for the early history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Cyclical attention indicates not only the history's lasting importance to the LDS Church, its members, and scholars, but the general unease scholars feel in relying too heavily on a narrative written generations previously (more on this later). Several scholars have analyzed the creation of the History of Joseph Smith and portions of the History of Brigham Young, including Dean C. Jessee and Howard Searle.² Dan Vogel's eight-volume publication, *History of Joseph Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, is the latest and, in many respects, the most comprehensive effort at achieving a documentary understanding of the History of Joseph Smith.

This multivolume work shows Vogel's care and strength in documentary editing and his nuanced understanding of the complexities of the document's creation and publication. First begun in 1838 in draft, the History of Joseph Smith was eventually copied into six large manuscript volumes (A-1 through F-1) from 1839 through 1856. The volumes underwent significant revision, and a partial secondary set of volumes

1. As used herein, "History of Joseph Smith" includes the first six volumes of the larger Manuscript History of the Church, also known as the Documentary History of the Church, which includes the Manuscript History of Brigham Young.

2. See, for example, Dean C. Jessee, "The Writing of Joseph Smith's History," *BYU Studies* 11 (Summer 1971): 439–73; and Howard Searle, "Early Mormon Historiography: Writing the History of the Mormons, 1830–1858" (PhD diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1979).

was created incorporating many of those revisions. This second copy consists of five volumes (A-2 through E-2) created from 1845 through 1856. Vogel includes an introduction to each of his eight volumes that skillfully traces the creation, revision, and publication of specific portions of the history. He also provides a careful transcription of the History of Joseph Smith, which fills the first six volumes. Vogel chose as his source text the first publication as found in the LDS Church-owned *Times and Seasons* and *Deseret News* (1842–1846, 1851–1857). Two additional volumes incorporate transcriptions of rough drafts and other documents that relate to the creation of the History of Joseph Smith. Through annotation and other editorial matter, Vogel meticulously tracks the significant variation between the printed text, the earlier manuscript volumes, and the published *History of the Church*, edited by B. H. Roberts.³ Purists might argue, with some justification, for a priority of the manuscript itself over the first published iteration. Vogel's presentation, however, effectively allows users access to the content of three different versions of the history, which are all important to scholars asking questions of the sources. Perhaps most useful to scholars wishing to minimize their own dependency on the History of Joseph Smith or on *History of the Church*, Vogel, when possible, identifies the original sources from which the History of Joseph Smith was based.⁴

These volumes merit significant praise for myriad reasons. This short review allows but a few examples. The three charts at the beginning of the first volume provide an invaluable resource surveying the creation of the History of Joseph Smith. The first table presents the

3. Used throughout this review, *History of the Church* is shorthand for B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902–1932), with a revised edition published 1946–1954.

4. This adds to the work already under way by the online publication of the History of Joseph Smith by the *Joseph Smith Papers*, which offers the full transcription of the Manuscript History of the Church with sources identified when possible. Though Vogel's references are more thorough, scholars would do well to double-check the *Joseph Smith Papers* material, because at least one unidentified source in Vogel's work is identified by the *Joseph Smith Papers* (Vogel, 1:299n4). (Full disclosure: this reviewer works on the Joseph Smith Papers Project.)

handwriting of the clerks who penned A-1 through F-1, the addenda, and the secondary copies A-2 through E-2. The second chart provides a detailed chronology “that attempts to reconstruct and document when material was entered into the Manuscript History books” (p. lxxxiii). For scholars needing to know when a particular clerk penned particular passages into the history volumes, this table is essential. Relying on sources such as Willard Richards’ personal journal, the Historian’s Office journal, and a deep analysis of the manuscript itself, Vogel has unraveled a significant number of difficult threads of the Gordian knot pertaining to the production of the History of Joseph Smith. Vogel’s third chart assembles data I have personally been needing for some time: a detailed schedule of the first publication of the Joseph Smith history. Vogel provides the issues of the *Times and Seasons* and *Deseret News* in which each portion of the history was published, where that portion is located in the History of Joseph Smith, and the volume and page number of where it appears in *History of the Church*. My only wish would have been an additional column giving the same information for the more widely available published history in the *Millennial Star*.

Vogel’s editorial apparatuses and annotation are as important as they are thorough. Vogel traces three major elements throughout his volumes: handwriting, the differences between manuscripts and various publications, and the sources used for particular passages of the history. As an example: the first significant textual change to the History of Joseph Smith is the introduction of young Joseph Smith’s leg operation. Clerks appended six paragraphs to the original manuscript describing Smith’s surgery. Vogel’s annotation explains that the information was found only in an addendum to the original volume, added by Willard Richards on December 1, 1842. Because of its late introduction to the manuscript, the anecdote was not included when this portion of the manuscript was published in the March 15, 1842, issue of the *Times and Seasons*. The paragraphs were, however, copied by Charles W. Wandell on April 4–5, 1845, into the version of the history as found in the secondary copy in volume A-2. Also indicated by Vogel is the fact that when B. H. Roberts edited his volumes, he bypassed these six

paragraphs for unknown reasons and did not include them in *History of the Church*. Vogel reproduces the paragraphs, but to show that they were added to the manuscript after publication, he places them in boldface type.⁵¹ One text, one footnote, and one editorial signal (bold text) relay a significant amount of information. Vogel is to be commended for this type of work on every page.

Understandably, no project is perfect, and additional review by himself, other scholars, and a good editor would have improved Vogel's work. First, the annotation is, at times, inconsistent. The way Vogel cites the *History of Joseph Smith* itself is varied. In footnote 7 of volume 1, he uses a truncated citation ("MSHiJS, Book A-1, 1"), but on the next page, footnote 11 drops the short citation and adds additional secondary sources ("Book A-1, 8 [EMD 1:69; PJS 1:284].") The addition of the references to Vogel's own *Early Mormon Documents* and Jessee's *Papers of Joseph Smith* creates some issues, mainly because both of these editions have been supplanted by the superior transcription produced in volume 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*. The additional citations also seem unnecessary because Vogel's own work in these *History of Joseph Smith* volumes supersedes the earlier works as well. Inconsistencies also exist in how Joseph Smith's journal is cited. Vogel sometimes cites Jessee's *Papers of Joseph Smith* and Scott H. Faulring's *American Prophet's Record*, while at other times he cites *The Joseph Smith Papers*.⁶²

A few other issues exist as well. Vogel largely considers the most important scholarly studies in his analysis of the creation of the history. But he could have also benefited from the work in the first volume of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*. Page xi of volume 1 mentions the rough draft created by Howard Coray and a Dr. Miller

5. This is one of three uses therein of boldface type, perhaps straining the utility of one editorial apparatus. The other two are to signal material that appeared in the first newspaper publication but was later dropped by Roberts in *History of the Church* and to provide material from an original source that was not included in the manuscript.

6. An unfortunate timing of the publication of these volumes and the final volume of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers* did not allow Vogel to cite from volume 3 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*.

but overlooks the publication of a version of the Manuscript History in Howard Coray's handwriting presented in *The Joseph Smith Papers*.⁷ More confusing is the absence of the rough draft history created in 1839 by Mulholland and also found in volume 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*.⁸ Vogel acknowledges this source but indicates that he would not incorporate it into his "systematic comparison" (p. cxxiii). But he also fails to include it in volume 8, where other draft material is reproduced. He instead directs users to its transcription in Jessee's *Papers of Joseph Smith* and his own *Early Mormon Documents*. This is unfortunate because Vogel's transcription simply reproduces Jessee's transcription and the more recent presentation of the manuscript in the first volume of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers* significantly improves the transcription. *The Joseph Smith Papers* webpage also offers digital images of this source, something that Vogel fails to acknowledge.

Some minor additions or changes would have strengthened the volumes. Vogel presents some illustrations of the manuscript, but these seem to mainly reproduce what was published in *Times and Seasons* or *Deseret News*. Additional illustrations would have clarified complexities of the manuscript itself. Vogel's use of descriptive chapter titles as running headers throughout the pages (e.g., "Revelations on Church Government") serves minimal purposes. Readers might have benefited more had he supplied dates or some other objective navigating marker, such as chapter numbers.

Finally, the price limits the availability of these volumes. The Smith-Pettit Foundation should be congratulated for promoting and making available Vogel's impressive work. The balance between marketing books (particularly to those who collect rare or limited-print books)

7. See Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, in *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 187–465. This omission occurred despite Vogel's having cited and described this particular source in the "Sources Cited" section of the volume (p. clxx).

8. See *JSP*, H1:187, 294–452.

and making available information benefitting scholars' own work can be challenging. I can only hope (and strongly encourage) that an electronic component will eventually disseminate Vogel's work, thereby allowing more scholars access to these impressive volumes.

The above complaints should not steer users away from the importance of this monumental project. Vogel's work will stand for at least a generation within Mormon studies. But the potential longevity of this project raises important questions about the use of the History of Joseph Smith within the larger Mormon studies field.

As scholars continue contextualizing the History of Joseph Smith, users of the history should proceed with caution. The Mormon historiographical trend has moved scholars both away from and toward the History of Joseph Smith as a primary source. The history is a critical source for scholars investigating Mormonism's first generation and their approach to their own recent past. In addition, scholars seeking a tool to research the life of Joseph Smith and his activities should still turn to the history as *one* source of many. But a heavy reliance on the history perpetuates prevailing myths about the Manuscript History itself and hinders the research process.

It is important to understand—as Vogel's eight volumes clearly demonstrate—that B. H. Roberts's edition of *History of the Church* is a selection of a selection of a selection of a selection of sources begun over 150 years ago. Because of this filtering lens, *History of the Church* and the manuscript history on which it is based are not an end-all narrative history of the early church. The selection of sources by Willard Richards and his contemporaries and by Roberts is certainly not the way current scholars would approach the archival record. Vogel's eight-volume treatment of the first eleven volumes of the seventy-plus volume Manuscript History of the Church is in itself a filtered approach.⁹ Aside from the mistakes that those compiling the History of Joseph Smith sometimes made, the History is also based almost solely on sources from

9. The bulk of the nineteenth-century creation of the manuscript history, which has yet to be fully explored by scholars, has been digitized and is available from the LDS Church History Library under the call number CR 100 102.

authoritative male figures in Mormon history. When scholars use the History, they are therefore ignoring the perspectives of women, “average” members of the church, and minorities. These scholars also chose to be influenced by the narrative structure, rhetoric, and scholarship (such as it was) of how the Mormon past was portrayed by the compilers of the Manuscript History during the mid-nineteenth century. Today’s scholars fail in their archival research when they turn solely to *History of the Church*, and they fail in their comprehensive research when they assume their job is simply to deconstruct *History of the Church* and trace it back to the original source they want to quote. Scholars who make the effort will find contemporary sources that are richer, more complex, and better suited to the questions that are being asked by modern historiography.

Unquestionably, Vogel’s eight-volume *History of Joseph Smith* offers scholars a chance to understand the deconstruction of the Manuscript of Joseph Smith and makes it nearly effortless. But this ease should lead scholars not to efficiency or laziness, but with more frequency to the voices ignored, theories unexplored, and sources awaiting contextualization.

Robin Scott Jensen is an associate managing history and project archivist for the Joseph Smith Papers. He received an MA degree in American history from Brigham Young University and a second MA degree in library and information science with an archival concentration from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. He is currently pursuing a PhD in history at the University of Utah. He coedited three volumes of the Revelations and Translation series of the *Joseph Smith Papers*.