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The Maxwell Institute and the Harold B. Lee Library have announced that a new electronic database, "Book of Mormon Publications, 1829–1844," will soon be available to researchers and others interested in Mormon history. "We are excited about this collection," notes M. Gerald Bradford, executive director of the Maxwell Institute, "because it brings together for the first time everything published about the Book of Mormon during Joseph Smith's lifetime. Books, pamphlets, and articles from newspapers and periodicals are all included. This represents a major step forward for Mormon studies."

"We've done several things to make this database valuable and easy to use," says Matt Roper, resident scholar with the Maxwell Institute and head of the project. "First, we have compiled all of the publications, saving researchers the considerable time involved in identifying articles and in tracking down and obtaining microfilm or rare books. Second, we are making the database fully searchable, allowing scholars to focus on their area of interest. So, those with a particular interest in Oliver Cowdery, for example, can quickly locate all of the documents mentioning him."

This project began as a result of conversations Louis Midgley (emeritus professor of political science at BYU and associate editor of the *FARMS Review*) held with Roper and others in the mid-1990s about the possibility of FARMS (now a department of the Maxwell Institute) revising Francis W. Kirkham's monumental two-volume work, *A New Witness for Christ in America: The Book of Mormon*, first published in 1942. As Keith W. Perkins notes, "At a time when others lacked either the opportunity or the inclination to do so, [Brother Kirkham] set out to gather many early documents related to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon—source materials that were still available but in jeopardy of loss or deterioration. He analyzed these sources and compiled them into a work that has had a lasting impact on our understanding of this book of scripture."[1]

Building on the early publications—particularly newspaper articles—collected by Francis Kirkham, Roper and those assisting him began compiling additional items. As they consulted key bibliog-raphies and talked to experts, the project quickly snowballed. It was soon evident that a new volume would be necessary. As the pages multiplied, plans to publish a hard-copy version were revised in favor of an electronic publication.

Working with close to one million words of text, Maxwell Institute staff members—especially Roper, Larry Morris, and Sandra Thorne—student interns, and librarians at BYU's Harold B. Lee Library—notably Kayla Willey, metadata librarian—completed a painstaking and time-consuming process: locate copies of the original articles (usually on microfilm), scan and transcribe the originals, proofread the transcriptions against the originals, compile the "metadata" required to make the documents searchable, and convert the collection into the proper format for electronic distribution. "Researchers will be able to view the original, the typed transcription, or both," says Bradford. "They will also be able to cut and paste text from the transcriptions into their own publications, making this database particularly valuable."

The first item published about the Book of Mormon appeared in *The Wayne* [New York] *Sentinel* on June 26, 1829, about the same time that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery completed the translation, and nine months before the book was printed. "Just about in this particular region, for some time past," read the article, "much speculation has existed, concerning a pretended discovery, through superhuman means, of an ancient record, of a religious and a divine nature and origin, written in ancient characters, impossible to be interpreted by any to whom the special gift has not been imparted by inspiration." This article also quoted the title page of the Book of Mormon in its entirety.

Not surprisingly, many early articles often took a hostile stance toward Joseph Smith. "No prophet since the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, has performed half so many wonders as have been attributed to that *spindle shanked* ignoramus JO SMITH," proclaimed *The Reflector* (Palmyra, New York) on June 30, 1830.[2] By including such hostile viewpoints, "Book of Mormon Publications" echoes the thoughts of Joseph Smith, who advised the Saints to "gather up the libelous publications that are afloat . . . and present the whole concatenation of diabolical rascality" to be published "to all the world" (Doctrine and Covenants 123:4–6).

It is also true, however, that some writers and editors have been refreshingly fair minded. "I am of the opinion," wrote William Owen, "that . . . the Golden Bible will bear a very good comparison with the Holy Bible. I find nothing in the former inconsistent with the doctrines or opposed to a belief in the latter; on the contrary, the one seems to corroborate the other" (New York *Free Enquirer*, Sept. 10, 1831).

"This collection offers an important perspective on what early missionaries were hearing—and saying—about the Book of Mormon," observes Roper. "It's fascinating to see the variety of opinions expressed. The Book of Mormon was the object of considerable discussion before it was even published."

Along with being accessible and searchable, the electronic database will also be easily updated. "You can never be sure that you have everything," says Roper. "We will add new documents—and make corrections to existing ones—whenever needed."

Current plans call for "Book of Mormon Publications" to be posted as one of the Harold B.

Lee Library's digital collections beginning early autumn of this year. Other digital collections at BYU (accessible online at www.lib.byu.edu/online.html) include such diverse electronic resources as the sermons of John Donne, the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, and a collection of Mormon missionary diaries. The Harold B. Lee Library electronic collection is directed by Scott Eldredge. As noted on the library Web site, "The digital library is a combination of unique collections and services that support learning, teaching, course development, and research and are directed specifically at supporting the institutional objectives of the university through the acquisition of electronically published information, the creation of reformatted digitized resources, and by providing access points to a repository of digital materials."

Notes

1. Keith W. Perkins, "Francis W. Kirkham: A 'New Witness' for the Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, July 1984, 53.

2. Emphasis in original.

The Joseph Smith Papers Project

Editor's Note: While *The Joseph Smith Papers* will be published by the Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Maxwell Institute will benefit vastly from its volumes. Andrew H. Hedges, a volume co-editor with the Joseph Smith Papers Project and newly appointed editor of the *Journal of Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture,* indicates that the Joseph Smith Papers Project will "result in a huge amount of information about the creation and textual history of the Doctrine and Covenants" and will provide "a treasure trove of insights into other restoration scriptures." The anticipated publication of *The Joseph Smith Papers* was one of the factors the administrators at the Maxwell Institute considered when they decided to expand the format of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* to incorporate further studies on restoration scriptures. Hedges hopes *The Joseph Smith Papers* will promote studies into the development and context of the D&C and other scriptures and that scholars will consider publishing their findings in the pages of the *Journal*. (More information about the *Journal of Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* will appear later this year.)

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The Joseph Smith Papers Project seeks to do for Joseph Smith what has been done (and is being done) for George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and other important early

Americans: Make their papers easily accessible and more intelligible by publishing them in a carefully prepared, comprehensive scholarly edition. Historians rely on documents to gain insight into the facts, relationships, and other realities of the past, the raw materials from which they construct their narratives and interpretations. The task of scholars functioning as documentary editors is to help readers and other scholars understand the documents without getting too much in the way themselves, leaving others to construct their own narratives from these (and other) documentary resources.

The task of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, then, is to make available complete and reliable texts of all surviving Joseph Smith documents and present them with supporting information, including historical context, that help make them as intelligible to modern readers as they would have been to participants in the history they document. The editors are preparing and publishing not histories of Joseph Smith or early Latter-day Saint history but the "raw materials" from which such histories can be written. Our task is not to "connect the dots" or present a narrative