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Guest Editor's Prologue

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Guest Editor's Prologue

TRUMAN G. MADSEN*

"This is your finest issue to date." So a preassessment by historiophiles has affirmed. Annually (this is our fourth year) the Institute of Mormon Studies has presented historical research findings in the summer issue of *BYU Studies*. This year we conclude our investigation of the Kirtland Era.

As expected we offer here some resounding firsts. One is a transliteration by Dean Jessee of a full forty pages of President Wilford Woodruff's diary from November 1836 to May 1837. With vision like Isaiah's and fervor like Paul's, Wilford Woodruff made journal entries, almost daily, for 63 years, thus creating as B. H. Roberts puts it, "an original documentary historical treasure which is priceless."¹ In this Kirtland segment one can feel the whole rich moving drama of the growing Church through the soul of a man who was in every way a modern saint.

A second first is Oliver Cowdery's "Sketch Book" for Kirtland, also transcribed by Dean Jessee and commented on by Leonard Arrington. Beginning in January 1836, it portrays many phases of the movement, the organizational unfoldings, and the drives of the early Church. It also manifests the intellectual vigor of the Hebrew School and many prime personalities of the Church. It is, of course, revelatory of Cowdery himself.

Both the Wilford Woodruff and Oliver Cowdery diaries enable us to see the importance of the House of the Lord after its dedication—interlocking authoritative keys, covenants,

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¹*A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1957), 6:354.

washings and anointings, and quorum activities. A closeup of the Kirtland Temple is contained in a piece by Lauritz Petersen. He gives us an authentic outline of the roots of Temple ordinances, showing how early and how pervasive they were in the consciousness of the Prophet Joseph Smith. More, he presents details of its physical planning, and from original manuscripts offers insight into the pulpit arrangements, the organizations they represent, and the meaning of their initials.

The recent discovery of the Kirtland Safety Society Stock Ledger Book is a catalyst of two articles on the Kirtland Safety Society. Business historian Scott H. Partridge places the bank failure in context, trying on the one hand to disentangle it from irrelevant claims and counterclaims and on the other to show what actual forces were at work in the financial matrix of the time. Economists Larry T. Wimmer and D. Paul Sampson contribute a description and analysis of the ledger itself, its entries and personalities and procedures, and the new answers and the new questions it poses.

Milton V. Backman, having researched the restorationist and Campbellite backgrounds of the Ohio area, writes with renewed clarity on the question of what was and was not Campbellite, the movement which formed much of the religious setting of the early missionary efforts of the Church to and from Kirtland. He shows how accurate and significant was the repeated missionary cry: "The field is white already to harvest!"

Davis Bitton details the aftermath of the Kirtland period as the rolling waters of Mormonism flowed toward Missouri. He helps us see who departed and who remained and some of the, until now, blurry why's.

For bibliographers, the last and best of this issue is the meticulous product of Peter Crawley, a 73-page annotated chronology of all Mormon publications (dozens of them heretofore unknown) in the period 1830 to 1838. He has spent two decades in the search.

In a special way this issue of research into the history of the Church at Kirtland stands as a memorial to President Joseph Fielding Smith, who for so many years served as the Church Historian. More than any other man in our generation, President Smith has made the history of the Church available

to its members. Under his direction as Prophet, the Historical Department of the Church was reorganized and assigned to prepare a new sesquicentennial comprehensive history of the Church. This commission gives body to the hope envisioned in our first special issue of *BYU Studies* (Spring 1969), which delves into the origins of the Church—the hope that we might help lay the groundwork for that new history. We have been commissioned by Leonard J. Arrington, the new Church Historian, to continue our research and publishing and thus to do as much of the preparatory work for the new comprehensive history as possible.

So with that charge, in our next issue of *Studies* we move on to Missouri. And we once more invite students, writers, historians, and all who have any interest in any phases of that period to contact us for lines of approach and relevant materials.