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From the Rumors to the Records: Historians and the Sources for Brigham Young

Ronald K. Esplin

In western New York, before he knew the Mormons, Brigham Young and a circle of friends sought earnestly for religious truth. In 1860 Hiram McKee, one of this circle and now a minister himself, wrote Brigham Young a warm letter of concern. McKee wrote to call his former friend to repentance, not for following a different path to God, but for his alleged notorious personal wickedness.

I have often thought of you. . . . I have not forgotten your advise, counsel, prayers, My confidence was great in you, in view of your deep piety, and faith in God. You was one of my early spiritual friends, and guides, and I have often enquired in my mind, I wonder if Brigham enjoys as much piety now as then, or wheather ambitious, and love of power, . . . did not hold some sway in that mind, that was once so humble, contrite and devoted.

“Now Brother Brigham,” he continued, “before the allseeing God who in the judgment will judge us can you lay your hand on your heart and say that your hope of heaven is [now] as good as then. Think before you answer. . . .” After reviewing scriptural ideas on sin and judgment, McKee arrived at the heart of what troubled him: “How can you stand in that day with the cries of your worse than murdered women rising up, your daughter murdered by your Danites . . . , how answer for the murder of the man found in the meat market” and also for “hundreds of others.”

. . .my brother don't think me unkind when I confidentially write you thus plain for you was my friend in the dark hour of sin and prayed for my conversion and gave me good counsel . . . and now . . . how important to have a plain friend to admonish and stir up your mind. . . . It is from no unkind feelings I entertain, no[r] any

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base design, that I write but purely to have you enter into an impartial examination of yourself. . . .¹

Within a few days of receiving this letter, President Young dashed off a hasty note to be carried by Captain Walter Murray Gibson, a world traveler lately visiting in Salt Lake City, who could “plainly and truthfully give you much information.” Expressing thanks for the “very welcome, and kind-hearted letter,” Young promised that at his earliest convenience he would personally reply at length “and disabuse your mind upon many points derived by you from the adverse prints of the day.”

One week later he wrote a lengthy response to the “very friendly, frank, and interesting letter,” endeavoring, he said, to reply with “at least an equal degree of kindness and frankness.”

I also vividly remember the scenes, feelings and experiences of the times to which you kindly allude, when we were fellow seekers after the truths revealed from Heaven. . . . You state that in Oswego [New York] you deemed me sincere in my efforts to secure salvation, and exemplary in my conduct and conversation. I daily examine my desires, efforts and views by the best light I can obtain. . . . I feel that I am and ever since have been as honest a seeker after truth as I was during our acquaintance. . . .

Young affirmed that he continued to keep his gaze fixed upon Salvation’s Port “to steer my bark safely to anchor in ‘heaven’s broad bay.’” and that he had not adjusted his actions to worldly ambitions:

. . . facing the storm of villification, slander, abuse, and persecution of the most vile and cruel character, [since joining the Church] until this moment, is very strong proof that I do not trim my sails to catch the popular breezes of the world’s cliques and circles.

And as for the charges against him, Young wished to

. . . further inform you that most of the crimes you mention as being charged to me were never before so much as *heard* of by me; and I can hardly persuade myself that you need my assurance, which you may implicitly rely upon, . . . that I am as innocent as a nursing babe of committing, counseling, in any way, having anything to do with such deeds—they are most excruciating and horrifying to all my feelings and natural organization.

Young then referred specifically to several of the alleged crimes, asserting that some, like the supposed murder of his daughter by the Danites, simply never occurred:

The “disclosures” you mention, as far as they have come under my

¹Hiram McKee to Brigham Young, 4 April 1860, Brigham Young Papers, Church Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as Church Archives). Some punctuation has been added.

notice, are a tissue of gross, death-designed lies, larded here and there with a little truth, when telling that truth does not militate against the effect of those lies concocted with the well known and express design to exterminate us from the earth.

In closing President Young strongly urged Brother McKee to visit him in Utah where he would have the "opportunity of learning our faith, conduct and conversation as they really are."² In a postscript Young alluded to the indictments made in anti-Mormon publications he had seen, but still maintained that many of the accusations in McKee's letter were "*entirely* new to me, I had never before heard of, and they are utterly and maliciously *false*, like the other exceedingly numerous lies that have been so widely and zealously circulated against us."³

This exchange is presented at length as a striking example of the light which a study of Brigham Young's personal papers can throw on a difficulty which he faced all his life. Few men in history have been as systematically villified in the press of their day as was Brigham Young. It is important to comprehend the reality of this problem, how it has prejudiced history's view of Brigham Young, and how it might be overcome. To begin, it is instructive to learn Brigham Young's own view of the problem from the primary sources, most of which are in the Latter-day Saint Church Archives, in Salt Lake City, Utah. His theology saw the press campaign as just one more evidence that the father of lies rails against truth, and the anti-Mormon publications were "all written at the instigation of the Spirit of the Devil." More directly, he placed the blame on politicians and editors who catered to the base emotions of the people. It made good copy, he realized, for the newspapers to charge an isolated and hated sect in the far West with the most heinous of crimes. "According to their version, I am guilty of the death of every man, woman, and child that has died between the Missouri river and the California gold mines," he remarked with characteristic hyperbole of his own. "Such are the newspaper stories. Such reports are in the bellows, and editors and politicians are blowing them out."⁴

To the question of why he and other Mormons didn't answer the stream of lies, Brigham retorted, "We might do this if we owned all the papers published in Christendom," but "who will publish a letter from me or my brethren? Who will publish the truth from us?" Even if it "gets into one paper it is slipped under

²Brigham Young to Hiram McKee, 26 April 1860 and 3 May 1860, Church Archives.

³Postscript in Young to McKee, 3 May 1860.

⁴Brigham Young, 26 July 1857 sermon in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-86), 5:77 (hereafter cited as *JD*).

the counter . . . [and] never gets into a second," he concluded, while the lies are circulated widely and repeatedly.

The old adage is that a lie will creep through the keyhole and go a thousand miles while truth is getting out of doors; and our experience has proved this. We have not the influence and power necessary to refute the falsehoods circulated about us.⁵

On an earlier occasion Young wrote that he was

often made aware of the utter uselessness and folly of seeking to vindicate my character from such foul aspersions as are occasionally raised against me, from the simple fact that, although the foul aspersions can be bruited far and wide held to the fluttering breeze by every press and rolled as a sweet under every tongue, yet when the vile slander is fairly refuted and truth appears in the most incontestible manner it is permitted to lie quietly upon the shelf to slumber the sleep of death, or if by chance it should get published in some obscure nook or corner of this great republic be most religiously suppressed as tho in fear that the truth should be known and believed.⁶

It appears clear from his papers, that Brigham Young, for the most part, was not overly sensitive about his personal reputation, and on occasion used it to advantage. In addressing California-bound emigrants in 1863, for example, with a dramatic flair he introduced himself as the "notorious Brigham Young" who nonetheless wanted only "to live in peace with all mankind, and have the privilege of teaching men the way of life and salvation." Had his personal reputation been the overriding concern, he knew the answer: "Were I to renounce my religion," he told Governor Alfred Cumming, "I could . . . be honored, I could go abroad in the World and be respected, but I love my religion above all else." He told the governor in the same meeting, "I care nothing about my character in this world, I do not care what men say about me; I want my character to stand fair in the eyes of my Heavenly Father."⁷

Young's concern about the "adverse prints of the day" stemmed mainly from a practical recognition of the liability they were to the work of the Church; and from his own sense of frustration at not having the power to counter them. And here, God was his refuge. Confident he was engaged in God's work, he found peace of mind in leaving to God what he could not personally change. He wrote a few weeks before he died to a missionary son, that rather than answer all the falsehoods, his years of experience had brought him wisdom "to trust in God. This is His

⁵JD 13:177 (29 May 1870).

⁶Young to Jefferson Davis, 8 September 1855, Church Archives.

⁷Office Journal, 19 June 1863, and Minutes, 24 April 1859, Church Archives.

work, and He will take care of it, if He does not, we cannot.”⁸ This, too, was his defense in the difficult '50s, when he frequently commented that the “fellowship of my brethren and the friendship of my God, is dearer far dearer, to me” than all the smiles of the world, or sharply reminded an associate:

Your age and experience must be badly at fault if they have not taught you, long ere this, that I neither count the favors, nor fear the frowns of man, knowing firm well that the cause in which I am enlisted will ride triumphant over all opposition.⁹

President Young firmly believed, however, that man is the instrument for carrying out God's will. Where he had the opportunity to effectively counter the defamation, it was his duty. He responded gladly to an invitation by newspaperman James Gordon Bennett to defend himself in the New York *Herald* against certain charges. President Young thanked Bennett “for the privilege of representing facts as they are,” adding that he would “furnish them gladly any time you make the request.” In 1855, in response to charges stemming from the Gunnison Massacre, “contrary to my usual custom in regard to the various false Malicious and slanderous reports set in motion against my character by wicked and designing men,” he sent a detailed letter and report to the Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis.¹⁰ “For my own satisfaction and that of my friends as well as the relatives of the lamented Gunison,” the matter was, he concluded, “one calling for reply and vindication.”

While his written responses to calumny were infrequent, President Young apparently took every opportunity in verbal exchanges to counter the unfavorable image that predominated. Numerous travelers did visit Salt Lake to learn first hand about the Mormons, and he frequently hosted them and granted lengthy interviews to them. As he explained near the end of his life to Wilford Woodruff, when such visitors were “quite a tax” on his time and strength:

I am satisfied that such visits are, as a rule, productive of good results. Many a one who comes to Utah filled with all kinds of outrageous ideas with regards to the Mormons in general and Brigham Young in particular, . . . go away with feelings greatly modified, and often afterwards have a kind word for the people of Utah when they hear them assailed, and occasionally will smooth the way of any of our missionaries whom they chance to meet. This interviewing, then,

⁸Young to Lorenzo Dow Young, 15 June 1877, Church Archives.

⁹Young to John M. Bernhisel, 27 November 1851; and Young to Henry G. Sherwood, 29 May 1856, Church Archives.

¹⁰Telegram, Young to James Gordon Bennett, 10 April 1873; and Young to Jefferson Davis, 8 September 1855, Church Archives.

though sometimes disagreeable is too valuable a means of correcting false ideas, and removing prejudice to be discontinued whilst by the blessings of the Lord I am able to meet those who call on me and extend to them courtesies to which, in some cases, they are probably entirely unworthy.¹¹

Brigham Young was understandably sensitive about the continuing adverse publicity. Historians, of course, must deal with the basic question: Was President Young correct in blaming the problem on Satan-inspired editors who catered to public clamor regardless of truth? Or were the editors and correspondents right in charging the Mormons with repeated serious crimes? For the moment it is important to note two things. First, the papers of Brigham Young demonstrate that throughout his life he soberly maintained his innocence:

“Well, have you not committed wrong?” I may have committed a great many wrongs for want of judgment or wisdom—a little here and a little there. “But have you not done great wrongs?” I have not.

He was “as innocent as a nursing babe of committing, counseling, in any way, having anything to do with such deeds,” he told his friend McKee.¹² Since neither contemporaries nor historians have ever caught him in a web of lies, his own statements must carry considerable weight.

I am accused of a thousand evils, but I have never feared but one thing with regard to myself—and that is, that I should be left to do an evil that the people may truly blame me; while they cannot speak evil of me and tell the truth, it never harms me.¹³

Let the whole world believe otherwise, Brigham Young seems always to have had a clear conscience before his God.

Secondly, there are good reasons for accepting a widespread campaign of distortion as Young charged. For most of President Young’s period of leadership, Utah remained an isolated, remote hinterland to the eastern States. And even editors who were not anti-Mormon understood that lurid anti-Mormon tales made good copy. The Mormons were far enough removed, and with few enough friends and little enough media strength, that falsehoods could not be immediately countered. As long as Brigham Young made good copy, editors published freely with little fear of being called to account. Of course eastern newspapers had few resources to check the accuracy of western dispatches had they been so inclined. Editors borrowed each other’s copy, sharing the information

¹¹Young to Wilford Woodruff, 12 June 1877, Church Archives.

¹²*JD* 13:177 (29 May 1870); and Young to McKee, 3 May 1860, Church Archives.

¹³*JD* 10:191 (31 May 1863).

from sometimes anonymous correspondents hundreds of miles away.

It is helpful to learn that Mormons were hardly alone in their exasperation over the inaccuracies of printed accounts of Utah and the Mormons. After reading extensively on the Mormons and then making his own inspection of Utah, the noted French observer Jules Remy concluded:

Of those who have written on the Mormons, by far the greater number have derived their information from sources little to be relied upon. The historians and travelers who have been their guides, have either never inspected the facts on the spot, or have looked at them from the point of view of their own foregone opinions, and too often of their passions.¹⁴

Other non-Mormons in the West also reported their surprise at the total unreliability of the news. During the Utah War period, for example, when the number of correspondents might have militated against gross distortions, Captain Jesse Gove wrote from the army camp near Fort Bridger that he had lately received several eastern newspapers with stories about the conditions of the Utah Expedition. Were they accurate? "Just about as much like it is as a church is to a slaughter house," he explained to his family. Late that spring the army escorted the new governor, Alfred Cumming, and his wife Elizabeth, to their new assignment in Salt Lake City. In July Mrs. Cumming wrote home about the "New York & other papers" just received:

The *quantity* of news about Utah—but amid all the falsehoods, it is strange that *not one single truth* should be told—yet such is the fact. . . . The chief peculiarity of all these stories lies in the fact that there is not even a *foundation* for any of them.

Mrs. Cumming noted on another occasion her astonishment at meeting a Mr. Knight, "well known *in the States* as the man the Mormons *killed*, a few months since, under circumstances of peculiar atrocity."¹⁵

The significance of all this is that the mountain of inaccurate information about Young and the Mormons continues to constitute a serious impediment to understanding Brigham Young. After carefully examining the question, most would agree with

¹⁴Jules Remy and Julius Brenchley, *A Journey to Great-Salt-Lake City*, 2 vols. (London: W. Jeffs, 1861), 1:v.

¹⁵Otis G. Hammond, ed. *The Utah Expedition, 1857-1858; Letters of Captain Jesse A. Gove . . .*, Volume 12, *New Hampshire Historical Society Collections* (Concord, N.H.: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1938), p. 148; and Elizabeth Cumming as quoted in William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons: Historic Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), pp. 312 and 315. Italics in original.

historian Dean Jessee, who concluded "So unfavorable was the popular reaction to Mormonism and its leaders . . . that the stream of historical sources . . . received a taint from which it has never been adequately purified."¹⁶ Unfortunately, until recently most writers have not recognized the pervasive distortion and have continued to use the biased sources uncritically or to quote from others who have so used them.

The challenge for historians, then, is to use other primary materials to correct the systematic distortion of many nineteenth century sources relating to Brigham Young. That this is not merely a nineteenth century problem is evidenced by the fact that the most recent book-length study of Young has been perhaps most guilty of misunderstanding and misusing the tainted stream of sources. Biographer Stanley P. Hirshson used unchecked and uncorrected newspaper accounts as the main source for his *The Lion of the Lord: A Biography of Brigham Young*. Hirshson argued in his introduction that the key to understanding Young was not in the West, but in "the files of . . . great Eastern newspapers prosperous and wise enough to . . . send their best reporters to Salt Lake City. . . ."¹⁷ Furthermore, Hirshson seems unaware who his informants are. The author of some of the articles he relies so heavily on during the Utah War period, for example, is that same Mormon critic Captain Jesse Gove, who secretly served as a correspondent while complaining that all the other dispatches were filled with lies! Fawn M. Brodie, herself no great supporter of Brigham Young and the Mormons, criticizes Hirshson for being misled by an improper reliance on these anti-Mormon sources to concentrate exclusively on Brigham Young the liar and scoundrel, while ignoring his great accomplishments as a leader.¹⁸

Once while acknowledging "regret that my mission is not better understood by the world," Brigham Young nonetheless expressed optimism that "the time will come when I will be understood and I leave to futurity the judgment of my labors and their results. . . ."¹⁹ So far he could not be greatly pleased. Not only have some, like Hirshson, continued to print as truth old and unproven charges, even those who praise him have failed to perceive his virtues or his mission as he saw it. The accolades have come

¹⁶Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), p. xxxviii.

¹⁷Stanley P. Hirshson, *The Lion of the Lord: A Biography of Brigham Young* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. x. If Jeffersonian scholars were to use this approach in writing a biography of Thomas Jefferson, that is, use Federalist newspapers as their main source, he would emerge as an anti-Christian, un-American tyrant conspiring to burn all the Bibles and corrupt all the morals of saintly New England.

¹⁸Fawn M. Brodie, *New York Times Book Review*, 9 November 1969.

¹⁹Telegram, Young to Bennett, 10 April 1873, Church Archives.

for his secular accomplishments, clearly of only secondary importance to Young. While refreshing, such applause is more reminiscent of the plaudits given him by literate travelers in his own day who acknowledged his tremendous practical skills, than it is suggestive of profound and balanced understanding of the man. This is not the kind of recognition he had in mind.

What do you suppose I think when I hear people say, "O, see what the Mormons have done in the mountains. It is Brigham Young. What a head he has got! What power he has got! . . ." It is the Lord that has done this. It is not any one man or set of men; only as we are led and guided by the spirit of truth.²⁰

Rather than such generalizations, he would have us assess his spirit, understand his guiding principles, perceive his overall vision, a task made possible by the survival of his papers. He was "making Saints," he often affirmed, not building cities or conducting migrations. His character, his honesty, his relationship with and standing before God, his keys and calling, faith and vision—these things most important to him have been largely overlooked by students of history.

It is time to rethink our approach to Brigham Young. Given full and accurate materials, the historian and biographer ought to be well-suited to assess Young on his own terms. Both within and without the Church are scholars more interested in understanding the historical past than in merely praising or condemning. When scholars probe the Mormon experience and the details of Young's leadership using the extensive manuscript collections that exist, we can expect exciting results.

Undoubtedly the most important repository in this regard is the Church Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.²¹ Archivists in the Historical Department have recently finished a major recataloging of most nineteenth century holdings, including the personal papers of Brigham Young and those dealing with his lengthy administration. Until this was done, some important materials were unidentified and many were not accessible. In Young's day the major holdings of the Historian's Office were arranged chronologically to facilitate the compilation of detailed "documentary" histories, the work of historians George A. Smith, Orson Pratt, and Wilford Woodruff. With different needs, the next generation of historians devised new arrangements of the material. Organization of the historical materials by subject assisted the men of Andrew Jenson's day in the compilation of branch

²⁰*JD* 14:81 (9 April 1871).

²¹The Church Archives is a division of the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

histories and the preparation of biographical sketches of leaders. This arrangement served a useful purpose, but dispersing the papers of their life and their office obscured the contribution of men like Brigham Young.

In the late 1960s under Church Historian Joseph Fielding Smith, professionally trained archivists began applying modern archival procedures to the holdings of the Archives. Provenance (place of origin) and original order became controlling principles as they embarked on a recataloging program. One of the milestones in this recataloging was the recent completion of the Papers of Brigham Young, along with related collections detailing his role and activities in the nineteenth century. Once a collection of materials is dispersed, it is not strictly possible to return to original order or to determine provenance in every case. But with Brigham Young's papers, clerks' handwriting and filing notations often provided the necessary clues when other means failed. By knowing which clerk worked on specific assignments in the office, and by gradually piecing together the filing systems employed, it has been possible to assemble and arrange a huge body of Brigham Young materials. This work now provides historians access to Brigham Young materials without their having to survey the entire holdings of the Archives. It also permits the identification of pieces previously unknown, and provides entirely new significance to many documents.

For example, an index to filing topics in the 1850s makes it clear that "Balderdash" on the back of some letters is more than the personal response of a clerk to the content; it is an official filing category. Indeed, "Balderdash" and "Trash" both referred to file location 68 where such nonvital papers were kept. A seemingly useless list of names takes on meaning when placed with other such lists from the President's Office of people called on missions, especially when one notes the reason for the heading in red ink: "don't tell them they are missionaries." By careful comparison of clerks' handwriting, format, file notations, and content, archivists brought together reports, notes, and working papers which the historian would otherwise have seen only in isolation. The papers of losses and expenses incident to the 1853 Indian uprisings told little when filed under the names of the hundreds of men involved, but brought together as supporting documents for Brigham Young's requests for government reimbursement, they begin to detail the story of dislocation and property loss occasioned by the violence.

The bulk of the papers once belonging to Brigham Young and his "President's Office" are now arranged in 149 boxes oc-

cupying ninety feet of shelf space. This includes nearly 14,000 pages of outgoing correspondence in nineteen letterpress copy books, with another 2,100 loose letters—retained copies or drafts. Incoming correspondence is equally impressive, with nearly 14,000 different pieces of mail preserved. There are also one fiberdex box and four bound volumes containing copies of telegrams sent or received during the last fifteen years of Young's administration.

More than one-third of the collection consists of account books and the papers detailing Young's extensive business and financial affairs. There is a wealth of important detail buried therein, including important clues to Brigham Young's own life and personality. Family expense books, for instance, provide concrete information about the needs and organization of his extensive family. Accounts can also be used to verify anecdotes and stories handed down in reminiscences and family memory. For example, non-Mormon Alexander Toponce recorded several delightful stories of his business dealings with Brigham Young. ("One of the most satisfactory men I ever did business with. There was nothing of the cheeseparing skinflint about him," he said.) One of these involved selling President Young forty mules in 1873, and extending credit for half the \$3,000 agreed price. "From first to last," Toponce reported of that transaction, "I found Brigham Young the squarest man to do business with in Utah, barring none, Mormon Jew or Gentile."²² It is useful to find a record verifying the remembered transaction, attesting that Brigham Young bought forty mules and one horse from Toponce 9 July 1873 for \$3,000.

There are many thousands of pieces in the accounts series: invoices, bills, statements, agreements, receipts, drafts, promissory notes, etc. The series also includes approximately 450 books of accounts ranging from massive ledgers and daily journals, to small memoranda books, including Brigham Young's own accounting system and general office books, along with the books of businesses that he operated. It does not include, however, an additional forty-five linear feet of financial records—now housed in the Trustee-in-Trust record group—created by Young in his role as Trustee for the Church. Nor does it include the approximately twenty linear feet of immigration records created in connection with the Perpetual Emigration Fund and immigration system that he oversaw. In all these papers one can trace the concrete details of building the Utah commonwealth. For all the recognition of Brigham Young's practical skills, we have yet to appreciate his accomplishments as a businessman and financier. His ingenious cred-

²²Alexander Toponce, *The Reminiscences of Alexander Toponce: Pioneer, 1839-1923* (Ogden, Utah: Mrs. Katie Toponce, 1923), pp. 86 and 196.

it "banking" system for organizing Mormon resources in a non-cash economy is largely unknown. The master ledgers in his office served as a central bank, a pool of credits to be drawn upon for goods and services, priming the young economy for the benefit of all and permitting the combining of resources for major capital ventures.

Utah's political and Indian affairs during Young's two terms as governor can now be studied in greater detail. Separate series bring together many of the administrative papers for these two of Young's many activities, with additional information available in other parts of the collection. The Brigham Young Papers also contain sermons, minutes, diaries, reports, petitions, family papers, etc.

The archivists have also created or recreated other collections of papers related to the administration of Brigham Young. There are important materials in the collection of general minutes, the statements collection, the ecclesiastical court papers, and the Utah Territory collection (fifteen linear feet of which deals with the Brigham Young period), and numerous smaller collections. The Historian's Office record group contains office journals for the entire period of Brigham Young's administration, providing important detail. And the massive day-by-day compilation "Manuscript History of Brigham Young," completed by historians soon after his death, occupies another sixteen feet of shelf space and contains about 48,000 pages dealing with Brigham Young and his time.

The papers of men close to Brigham Young also add to our understanding of the Mormon leader. Of his clerks we have papers of George D. Watt, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton, three of the nearly two dozen men who served at one time or another as clerks, along with some papers from many others. The papers of George A. Smith, Heber C. Kimball, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Daniel H. Wells, and other general authorities close to President Young cannot be overlooked, nor can the smaller collections of many other individuals. Dozens of diaries contain significant material about Brigham Young. And probably hundreds of the thousands of volumes of minutes of local congregations record details of Brigham Young's travels, sermons, and council meetings throughout the Territory.

Those who would understand the enigmatic pioneer must begin with these materials. They await those students of history willing to expend the time and energy necessary to master them. As we have seen, most students of Brigham Young have seen him through the eyes of a hostile press, rather than attending to thorough research in more reliable sources. Once scholars mine these sources for new answers and new insights, the twisted view of

contemporary critics will cease to dominate historical treatment of Young's life. The materials exist to bring him to life as a human being. Seeking to understand rather than apologize or attack, giving him life again with triumph and trauma, historians can perhaps come to see him as he was to his people.

Brigham Young anticipated that historians would be, in some sense, the stewards of his reputation, and he found comfort in leaving to them "the judgment of my labors and their results." He has also left many of the materials to aid in the task. Having handed to our generation the challenge and the resources, no doubt his appeal to us would be similar to the earnest request he made of his friend Hiram McKee, with whom we began: "avail yourself of so excellent an opportunity of obtaining correct information in relation to myself and those over whom I have been called to preside."²³ This issue of *BYU Studies* suggests that the appeal will be heeded, and that the future will come to know Young much better than the present through responsible, significant, insightful study of the sources. I submit that Brigham Young would be pleased to have himself and his people the subject of serious, dispassionate study and would only encourage its advance.

²³Young to McKee, 26 April 1860, Church Archives.