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Book Reviews

The Hofmann Maze

A Book Review Essay
with a Chronology and Bibliography of the Hofmann Case

David J. Whittaker

The impact of the Mark W. Hofmann murder and forgery cases will be felt in the LDS community for years to come. This is obviously true in the lives of the families he so brutally affected with his pipe bombs; it is not any less true in the lives of his own family whose love and support he betrayed so callously. But it is also true in the larger Mormon community where the shock of murder and the widespread deceit through forgeries seemingly touched the very core of Mormon history and tradition.

While it is early to fully assess the damage to either the public or the scholarly community, what follows is an attempt to provide readers of BYU Studies with a reasonably comprehensive guide to the literature and basic facts of the Hofmann case. First, we present a review essay on the three book-length studies of the Hofmann saga; next, a detailed chronology of the Hofmann case as a guide through the complexities of the various episodes and events; finally, a bibliography designed to lead readers to other source materials in addition to providing a guide to the main known Hofmann forgeries. While Hofmann's forgery activities went far beyond Mormon manuscripts, the focus here is almost entirely on the Mormon-related materials.

David J. Whittaker is associate librarian with responsibility for Mormon manuscripts in the Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, and an associate editor of BYU Studies. He expresses his thanks to the many individuals who reviewed and assisted with the chronology and the bibliography, particularly Ron Barney of the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Dean C. Jessee, William G. Hartley, and Ronald K. Esplin of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History, BYU; and Paul H. Peterson of the BYU Department of Church History and Doctrine. An abridged version of the review essay appeared as “Special Section” insert in Newsletter (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University) 3 (September 1988).


For those seeking a guide to the labyrinth that is Mark Hofmann, there are now three volumes that promise a map of his complex life and crimes as well as to the society in which these occurred. Each offers the reader a detailed reconstruction of the stories of forgeries and murders and the subsequent investigation that became such a controversial topic of discussion after the first bombs exploded in Salt Lake City on 15 October 1985. All three volumes offer new and useful bits of information about the Hofmann case, but the discerning reader will sense that some of the maps are less reliable than others, and in some cases the cartography is simply not to be trusted. None of these volumes provides the reader with source citations, and all of them suffer from the problems inherent in writing contemporary history.

The first published study, *Salamander*, appeared in April 1988. Both Sillitoe and Roberts are familiar with the culture out of which Hofmann came, and they use this knowledge to good advantage in their detailed reconstruction of the Hofmann case. Bits and pieces of this work had surfaced before the volume appeared as the authors had given talks and published essays in such places as *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* and *Utah Holiday*. But for those who have followed these presentations, there are still surprises in this volume. The authors have chosen a biographical approach, focusing on key individuals and their families. By using this approach, the authors broaden the context and humanize the impact of Hofmann’s activities. The volume itself is divided into three parts with a technical “appendix” on some of the key forgeries by forensic specialist George Throckmorton at the end. The first part, chapters 1 through 6, details the critical events from the initial bombings to the attempts to unravel the crimes by the various individuals and agencies assigned to the
case. The second section, chapters 7 through 14, takes the reader back in time into the lives of the key players as they entered and became part of the life and activities of Mark Hofmann. The third section, chapters 15 through 19, treats the preliminary hearing, the plea bargain, and the interviews with Hofmann after his imprisonment, and concludes with the parole hearing in January 1988.

The authors have structured the story like an historical novel. It generally reads well, flowing somewhat smoothly through a complex series of crimes and their partial solution. The reader is allowed to feel the fears and concerns of the people who were touched either directly or indirectly by the events discussed. One of the strengths of the book is that it never gets bogged down in the technical aspects of these crimes, for throughout the work we see and experience the human drama and pathos that this case created in Mormon country. But a close reading of the volume does reveal that two authors are at work; there are places where the prose is crisp and clear, and others where the details seem to impede the flow of the presentation.

Sillitoe and Roberts provide important information on the early life of Mark Hofmann, detail that is absent from the other two volumes. They tell of the early patterns of dishonesty and possible sociopathy (the authors argue against the report of the state-appointed psychologist on this issue). They probe Hofmann’s high school, college, and mission years to provide insight into his later criminal activities. We are introduced to a man who was fascinated with fire and explosives from a very young age; who was cheating and deceiving people during these same years; who had a cruel side to his personality, manifested by his treatment of both animals and people; and who learned very young to live two lives, one respectable and one amoral. The authors suggest at the end of the book that Hofmann was contemplating murder to obtain what he wanted (in this case a coin collection) as early as 1977.

Another strength of the Sillitoe-Roberts study is the human portraits of the two bombing victims, Steven Christensen and Kathleen Sheets. We feel the loss of these people even more because we are made aware of their human connections with families and friends. Their portraits are not cardboard ones, but the reader is invited into each of their lives to see a variety of activities and attitudes, and even their human frailties are discussed with sensitivity and tact.

Particularly valuable are the insights Sillitoe and Roberts give to the teams of investigators assigned to the case. Their professionalism as well as the office politics are discussed along with other aspects of the Hofmann case. Occasionally the reader might rightly
wonder just how the authors learned what the judge who presided over the preliminary hearing was thinking as he heard evidence presented; or further, how they managed to learn just what the conversation was between prosecutor Stott and defense attorney Yengich as they drove around town together on the eve of the plea bargaining. Clearly they gleaned information from the individuals themselves, but we must seriously ask if the various actors are to be trusted fully when, as this volume clearly shows, their public reputations were at stake from the beginning of the case. Indeed we should be especially suspicious, since there has been no end of scapegoating among those who have held the public stage for this matter.

This study also manages to recreate the world of document dealers and the money men behind the big deals, as well as the historical community that was ultimately trying to make sense of the new “finds” and relate them to what was already known about Mormon origins. It was within this matrix that Hofmann managed to play his most dangerous games, and Sillitoe and Roberts have brought to their study a good knowledge of the inner workings of this world.

The critical reader will be disappointed by the lack of source citations. While the authors claim in the Preface that their research was extensive, we are simply asked to trust the accuracy of that research. But with a case this important, centering as it does on an individual who refused to provide his sources, this is asking a good deal. In addition to the lack of documentation, two of the major actors in the story, and hence major sources of information for the authors, are given false identities; one of them is even absent from the index. “Kate Reid,” Hofmann’s first fiancée (see 116, 217–24, 226–28, 231–32, 234, 244–45, 337–39), and “Gene Taylor,” the financier for many of Hofmann’s Americana documents (see 305–11, 336–37, 339–40, 346, 423), are both important sources of information about Hofmann’s character and activities. “Kate,” no doubt still carrying deep scars, is a particularly crucial source for the early Hofmann; and “Gene” (identified by Robert Lindsey as Kenneth Woolley, a cousin of Dori Hofmann) should know something of the whereabouts of some of Hofmann’s documents, most of which are still unidentified and presumably still on the open market. Hofmann admitted in January 1988 that he had forged “hundreds of items with at least 86 different signatures.” Even allowing for the hyperbole of the con artist, it would appear that many items are still not known and presumably are in public and private collections throughout the country. While Sillitoe and Roberts undoubtedly made promises of anonymity and argue that
these individuals’ identities are not essential to the story, they are a central part of the still unfolding drama.

There remain unanswered questions, some of which the authors themselves acknowledge. For example, they argue that the public is still not fully informed as to the level of LDS church involvement with Hofmann. They even imply that President Gordon B. Hinckley did not tell the full truth to investigators regarding either the records he allegedly kept detailing his dealings with Hofmann, or his personal relationship with Steven Christensen. They also suggest that it has never been made clear just what promises were made to Steve Christensen by Elder Hugh Pinnock regarding future document acquisitions by the Church. In all of this, Sillitoe and Roberts suggest that the omnipresence of the Church was an important factor in the minds of both the investigators and the prosecutors of the case. But given the demography and history of Utah, it is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise.

There are other problems with this study, some of which relate to either unanswered or unasked questions by the authors themselves. For example, by centering their study on the life and motivations of Mark Hofmann, they ignore the actual or potential involvement of others. Hofmann’s network of “friends” surely must bear some of the responsibility for his activities. Those who fronted for his document deals, those who fed him his history, and those who helped create the paper trails for his “finds” were accomplices. One wonders why certain individuals are dismissed from this study when they had been critical partners in a number of manuscript and rare book deals. And we must seriously wonder how Hofmann could forge documents of such quality without some help.

Sillitoe and Roberts never really address the public scenario of the Hofmann case. They do not discuss the implications of how the public press used this case to punish the LDS church time and time again. Is it any wonder that some of the Church leaders became reticent after a while when the media seemed to always present the worst interpretation of events to the public? In many respects the authors end up writing more as newspaper reporters than historians. Why, for example, should we trust the letter Hofmann was supposed to have written to his mother (but never sent)? (Lindsey suggests it was not a letter but a student paper.) How do we know for sure when or why it was created? Given Hofmann’s apparent inability to tell the truth, how can we trust this item? And since he clearly lied about his access to items in the private vault of the First Presidency and about the existence of an Oliver Cowdery history,
why should we take seriously his claims of intimate association with President Hinckley? We are asked to take a lot of information on the authors’ word but are given no way to judge either the accuracy of their work or the thoroughness of their methodology.

The second volume, *The Mormon Murders*, was released in August 1988. Of the three volumes here under consideration, it is clearly the most disappointing. The narrative follows a chronological format, but even a superficial reading reveals it to be more of a novel than a serious work of history. In reading it I was reminded of Peter Bart’s *Thy Kingdom Come* (1981), a novel that applied almost all of the anti-Semitic stereotypes to the Mormons. Bart presented a portrait of the Church that transformed a supposed Jewish banking conspiracy as presented in the forged nineteenth-century *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to the operations of the LDS church hierarchy in Salt Lake City. The *Protocols* were used by Hitler and others to rationalize much of the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews. Bart presented a picture of the Mormon church as concerned only with money and power, with nothing else really mattering. In his novel, truth was a convenient commodity treasured more by the publisher of an anti-Mormon newsletter than by the leaders of the Church. Image, power, and money dictated Church policy in Bart’s novel, but that was a work of fiction. Naifeh and Smith’s book, which assumes the same perspective, claims to be a “true story.”

*The Mormon Murders* is an attack on the Church in the guise of a serious study of the Hofmann case, but its authors are grossly uninformed about the Mormon church and its history. They call the Church “a giant conglomerate” freed by its religious status from reporting and paying taxes. Its great wealth (they are not sure if it is fifteen or fifty billion dollars!) assures members of its truthfulness. Its leaders lie and deceive regularly because lying for the Lord is all right. And since the Church is continuing to grow in wealth (all that really matters), in a few hundred years the “Church wouldn’t need to convert the world, it would own the world” (22, italics in original). Armed with this perspective, the authors then weave their story of the Hofmann case around it. The money, power, and image of the Mormon church are used to explain just about every angle of the case. And, like the *Protocols*, this volume leaves the reader with a sense that the Leviathan of Mormonism is even stronger after the story is told. It is a book that anti-Mormons will like. But if people care about the truth and have a sense of the real meaning of the impact of the Nuremberg trials and their implications for the illegalities of religious persecution, it is not likely *The Mormon Murders* will be necessary reading.
Naifeh and Smith manage to work into their narrative most of the traditional anti-Mormon themes, including the legend of the Danites, the Kirtland Bank problems, polygamy, and, of course, even an account of the LDS temple ceremony. To so insensitively include such a sacred part of Mormon group life, a dimension that has no relationship to the Hofmann murder and forgery cases, can only be understood as further paralleling anti-Semitic literature, which sought to demonstrate the ties Jews supposedly had to the rites of Free Masonry. However, the authors’ knowledge of LDS history is so woefully inadequate, and their understanding of even basic Mormon beliefs and practices so absurdly inaccurate, that it is hard to see how anyone could take their work seriously. Their exaggerations are even comic, as when, for example they describe Mormon missionaries as “a pack of young lions tracking a herd” and preying “on the old, the sick, and the lame” (67). Their demeaning descriptions of Church leaders are caricatures rather than true-life portraits. President Hinckley is presented as the quintessential “bureaucrat,” who is “notoriously shrewd about people” (113). His office is compared to a funeral parlor (306) and Mormon culture is described as a “vast landscape of mashed potatoes” (109, compare 67). They portray most Church leaders as “businessmen at heart” and suggest that “any talk of religion made them uncomfortable” (118). The absurd comedy grows as they describe a certain leader as “clawing his way up through the dense, sanctimonious jungle of the Church hierarchy” (119), and reaches a peak in their portrayal of a plot by members of the First Quorum of the Seventy to oust President Hinckley! (305–306). It would seem that the authors have spent too much time reading Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and apparently none reading the Doctrine and Covenants.

As we would expect, Naifeh and Smith see conspiracies everywhere, and like Peter Bart they are sure the Mormon church is behind all of them. Jerald Tanner (clearly a key source for the authors), like Hiram Cobb of Bart’s novel, is the real hero—he seeks and sees the truth, but the Church just wants to suppress it. As we might further expect, Naifeh and Smith fail to see any contradiction in their presenting Hofmann as a thoroughgoing liar except when he is telling his tales about his relationship to President Hinckley and the Church.

If *Mormon Murders* has any merit, it is the focus it gives to the case by seeing the whole affair through the eyes of Jim Bell and Ken Farnsworth, the investigators for the Salt Lake police department. Much of the detail regarding the case no doubt came from these two individuals, as well as from Gerry D’Elia, and their
perspective is of value, even if they tend toward cynicism. Thus this volume does provide some insight into the inner workings of the police investigation, including the interdepartmental fighting, the hard work the case required, the strain on the lives of those men assigned to the case, and their perceptions of the society they worked in. Even the theories of the police psychologist would seem to have some merit for understanding Hofmann; where Salamander places more emphasis on Mark Hofmann’s relationship to his mother, The Mormon Murders gives more attention to his father and the possible transference of the problems of this relationship onto the Mormon church as a father-figure. There are insights in this volume, but the overt anti-Mormon bias of the authors, combined with their arrogance and stupidity, not to mention the crudity and coarseness of their language, must be seen as seriously distorting their perspective and judgment. One can’t help wondering if the authors cut class at Harvard Law School during the semester when the course on evidence was taught.

The third volume, Robert Lindsey’s A Gathering of Saints, appeared in September 1988. In many ways it is the best of the three books. As a story, it reads better than the others, and on balance it presents a more complete account of all the aspects of the case. Lacking the vituperative approach of The Mormon Murders, it moves deftly through the story with insight and compassion. And it is well organized. By providing several introductory chapters that survey early Mormon history, Lindsey responsibly prepares his readers to better understand the historical import of Hofmann’s “discoveries.” Thereafter the story proceeds chronologically. In general, this volume is much more evenhanded than the others in dealing with the role of the LDS church in the Hofmann story. Lindsey suggests in one place that the issues of separation of church and state could be one explanation for the hesitancy of Church leaders to readily turn over its files or the manuscripts in its possession to state investigators.

A key source for Lindsey was Michael George (see 283), an investigator for the Salt Lake County Attorney’s office. George was clearly the source for the interesting final interview with Hofmann presented at the end of the volume.

Of course there are problems: Lindsey just repeats the old, inaccurate stories of the Danites (see, for example, 204, 249–50), and no serious Mormon historian would agree with his claim that Jerald Tanner (following Fawn Brodie) gave birth to the “new Mormon history” (128). But these flaws can probably be ascribed to his status as an outsider to Mormon country and culture.
Lindsey’s volume has more detail on the documents Hofmann “found” and sold than do the other two books. Particularly valuable is his discussion of the “Oath of a Freeman,” in which he gives the full story of the one potential sale that might have solved Hofmann’s financial problems. Lindsey reprints the letters from the Library of Congress and from the American Antiquarian Society that reveal the behind-the-scenes developments. The other volumes do not present this dimension of the case as fully. Lindsey also peppers his study with ample quotes from the diaries and journals of many of the key participants in these events, material that is either summarized, hinted at, or entirely ignored in the other volumes. By using these primary sources he gives the reader a fuller picture of the thoughts and feelings of the main actors, even though we are never told where we can examine these documents.

Lindsey’s story is well told and presents realistic portraits of the key participants. Where Robert Stott, the chief prosecutor, is presented in very negative terms by Naifeh and Smith, Lindsey gives a more believable view of a man who tried to be very thorough and very cautious. Stott surely was not the political country bumpkin that comes across in The Mormon Murders. The same applies to Naifeh and Smith’s caricature of Brent Ward.

One thing that all of these volumes lack is a sense of historical perspective on forgery. Forgery is an ancient business, whether we talk about the Scriptores Historiae Augustae, the Donation of Constantine, the 1929 forgeries of Lincoln letters, the Horn diaries and papers of the 1940s and 1950s, the recent Hitler diary forgeries, or the numerous art forgeries that are periodically brought to our attention by the news media. Even in Mormon history, Hofmann is not the first forger. Consider the clear evidence that the Oliver Cowdery pamphlet Defense in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints, allegedly printed in Ohio in 1839, and even considered authentic by B. H. Roberts, is in fact a forgery. Then too, some Mormons continue to use the fraudulent Archko Volume in their New Testament studies. And recent discoveries in the Texas rare book and manuscript market surely ought to help us place Hofmann’s activities in a broader context.

Another problem stems from these volumes’ way of treating contemporary history. In telling their stories, these authors would have us believe they were in the Office of the First Presidency when Hofmann met with President Hinckley; or in the back seat of the car when Yengich and Stott drove around Salt Lake City initially discussing a possible plea bargain. Of course we know this was not the case, but by adopting a “you were there” writing style, the
authors betray their work as journalism, not history. Can we really believe that all the players in the Hofmann drama spoke in publishable dialogue, as if every sentence were accompanied by quotation marks? Mormon Murders shows this tendency at its worst. Not only are dialogues invented out of whole cloth, but the authors also manage to climb into the minds of key players so they can tell us what each person was feeling and thinking. This fantasyland approach to reconstructing historical events eliminates all serious methodological roadblocks; the narrative can go wherever the authors wish because truth and evidence are never allowed to get in the way of a good story. And since no source citations are given, the reader has no way to check up on the sources the authors used. One suspects, in fact, at least for the Naifeh and Smith volume, that sources were not identified precisely because their fictions would be found out.

Most people, as these three volumes show, get their history, not from scholarly journals or monographs, but from journalists who control the public media. As Neil Postman has pointed out in his book Amusing Ourselves to Death, the very nature of modern news media has created the idea of context-free information, the idea that the value of information need not be tied to any function it might serve, but merely to its novelty, interest, and curiosity. But more than that, modern journalism is characterized by its capacity to move information, but not to collect it, explain it, or analyze it. “Knowing the facts” in the media has come to mean knowing of things, not knowing about them. Hence the stress on images, stereotypes, and headlines, on the sensational and on the push for quick answers and conclusions without study or evaluation. The bottom line is entertainment and marketing, not education; what results is triviality, not understanding. Without a doubt, a show-business atmosphere permeated most of the newspaper and television coverage of the Hofmann case, and this approach has helped to decontextualize and sensationalize the whole case. None of these books escapes this tendency, although Mormon Murders is again the most outrageous example.

Like Sampson Avard and John C. Bennett in early Mormon history, the “salamander” and Mark Hofmann are now permanently fixed in the experience and memory of the Latter-day Saints. Like these earlier individuals, Hofmann betrayed the fundamental values of the community he claimed membership in. But unlike the earlier defectors from the Church, who left little record of their lives, with Mark Hofmann we have a better opportunity to understand the whys and hows of his defection. At least these new books
invite us to look deeper into the context of Hofmann’s activities, and provide an occasion for self-examination for those of us who hold to the values he rejected so violently.

Several elements of Mormon culture seem to have contributed to the direction Hofmann took. His domestic life was not able to deal fully and openly with its own history, which was, in turn, intermeshed with Mormon institutional history. The polygamous marriage of his maternal grandparents after the Manifesto (Mark’s mother was born in 1929 of this relationship) was treated as a deep family secret, and Mark’s questions about it only pushed the answers further into darkness. Some of his earliest research endeavors into Church history were attempts to find out the truth about his own family. And what Mark saw as institutional disingenuousness—allowing plural marriages but publically denying them—was reinforced at home. In his experience, people just were not able to deal honestly with their past, and they covered this fear with an authoritarian silence. This alone made people and institutions potential victims of his schemes, and his documents could only make their worst nightmares come true.

The Hofmann case also reveals another example of white-collar crime. As the authors of these volumes show, greed was a common denominator of many of the people who got involved with Hofmann: financial greed, political greed, historical greed. “To get gain” was one of the key motives of the actors in this case. Such “getting” has in recent decades created an active “underground” dealing with Mormon documents. One even suspects that this need to know, this lust for knowledge in the Mormon community, was the one card defense attorney Yengich had to play as his client’s guilt became more apparent. We must particularly wonder about the greed of collectors, some of whom essentially “ordered” manuscripts from Hofmann in their inordinate desire to possess a specific item. This quest for knowledge that is thought to give a certain power, and the lust for possession of the manuscripts that supposedly convey this knowledge, is another basis for the flim-flam that occasionally surfaces in our culture. We find ourselves “trafficking” in our heritage, reducing everything to a dollar price that invites crime into historical study, and error into our research.

In retrospect it is clear that our tools failed us in this instance. There is no doubt that some of the best minds in America were involved in authenticating the main Hofmann documents; thus historical responsibility was exercised. But what happens when the FBI labs, the experts at the Library of Congress, and some of the best documents people in the country are fooled? It is important to remember that traditional historical education does not include the
kinds of technical training required for detecting forgeries. Yet in this case, with so many people with specialized training and experience involved, it appears that current levels of expertise are inadequate. Then too, the techniques used to detect some of the Hofmann forgeries still have not been tested as to their admissibility into a court of law.

In some ways, our culture's very success helped create Hofmann. Consider our technical knowledge of inks, paper, writing, and printing, which is available in dozens of books and articles, not to mention vast libraries containing histories on all topics. These extensive resources were clearly used by Hofmann. Using equally available information, one could construct a pipe bomb or even (given access to the materials) an atomic bomb. Perhaps this is one price we pay for living in an open society.

The context of Hofmann's activities must be examined more carefully than it is in any of these volumes if we are to fully understand why mistakes were made. Such an examination must take account of the history of Mormon historical scholarship for at least the last thirty years. For example, it is clear that for a number of years there have been tensions within the Mormon community between the two perspectives Owen Chadwick identifies in his perceptive study of the opening of the Vatican Archives:

(1) The Ecclesiastical Statesman, who holds, "We have enemies in the world. Bad things happened in the past. If we open our archives, we let in not only neutrals who want to understand, or friends who have that sympathy which enables men to understand better, but antagonists seeking to stir up dirt. Such hostile enquiry, especially if misused, hurts the institution; and in hurting the institution, hurts the world which the institution serves."

(2) The Scholar/Historian, who argues, "The Church is committed to truth. The opening of archives is a necessary part of the quest for truth in an age of historical enquiry. Truth is an absolute good. No plea of political welfare can override the commitment. The Church wants to know what really happened. For the sake of that quest it must run the risk that fanatics misuse its documents. Misuse is of the moment, truth becomes a possession."

Both positions have truth and value, and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they do help to clarify real positions. The volumes on Hofmann deal in various ways with the scholar-statesman tensions in Mormon culture. Each book deals with this differently, but it seems clear now that Hofmann got away with some of his activities because he took advantage of the tensions that had developed during the late 1970s and into the 1980s. Hofmann might have appeared in any case, but a more open policy of access to archives would have made his impact less traumatic.
As early as his own LDS mission, Hofmann had concluded, through a study of Fawn Brodie’s biography of Joseph Smith, that Joseph was the ultimate con man who forged his revelations and then pretended sincerity. In a perverse way, Hofmann was able in his own mind to twist the life of Joseph Smith into a model for his own activities. For example, after a missionary companion (according to Sillitoe and Roberts) called him to account for his theft of an anti-Mormon work from a library in England, Hofmann justified his actions (paraphrasing Nephi) by saying, “It is better that I steal this work than even one person lose his testimony by reading it.” The irony, not to mention the dishonesty, was that Hofmann had already concluded that the Church was not true!

It was Hannah Arendt who said that one of the purposes of the past is to haunt us. Even without Hofmann, we would seem to have enough history lurking in the underbrush to plague us as a people who care so much about truth, but who, at times, care so little about history. Thus it is possible for another Hofmann to appear in our culture, for as long as there are perceived secrets and we tend to distrust each other, someone will emerge to prey upon our worst fears and needs. We care about the work of people like Hofmann because our history matters to us. We anchor our faith in the concrete experiences of times past, both personally and collectively. It is a measure of that faith that we must assess our mistakes while we continue the study of our history even more intensively.

NOTES


The Mark Hofmann Case:  
A Basic Chronology

1954

9 Jan.    Steve Christensen born in Salt Lake City, Utah.
7 Dec.    Mark William Hofmann born in Salt Lake City, Utah.

1966

At age twelve Hofmann purchases his first Mormon item: a five dollar Kirtland Safety Society Note signed by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon.

1973

June     Mark Hofmann graduates from Olympus High School, Salt Lake City.
June     *Book of Common Prayer* bought by Deseret Book Co.
27 Nov.   Hofmann called to serve a mission to the England Southwest Mission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He would served primarily in the areas of Portsmouth, Bristol, and Bath.

1976

Spring   Hofmann enrolls at Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

This chronology has been assembled from a variety of sources. I have benefited from a review by various friends and colleagues. A detailed chronology (1980–87) compiled by Mike Carter appeared in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, 1 August 1987. See also *Deseret News*, 31 July 1987, A6; and [William G. Hartley], “Fraudulent Documents: A Chronology for the BYU Symposium” (distributed on 6 August 1987).
1977

15 April Hofmann gets engaged for the first time. He later breaks off the relationship.

1978

June Hofmann gives a photocopy of an account of a second anointing ceremony in LDS temple (supposedly dated 1920) to Sandra Tanner, a professional anti-Mormon in Salt Lake City.

1979

29 April Hofmann writes a college essay in the form of a letter to his mother in which he is very critical of the historical policies of the LDS church.

Fall Hofmann and Jeff Simmonds discuss the CBS TV miniseries based on Irving Wallace’s 1972 novel *The Word* (the lost book of James), a story of ancient manuscripts, forgeries and murder.


October Hofmann sells a Second Anointing blessing to Utah State University archivist Jeff Simmonds for sixty dollars. Hofmann makes Simmonds promise he will not tell anyone where he got it. Hofmann now claims a 1912 date for this item.

1980

16 April Hofmann shows his wife a 1688 edition of the Bible and specifically points out that several pages are stuck together. Police later establish that this Bible was purchased by Hofmann in Bristol while on his mission in England.

17 April Hofmann shows Jeff Simmonds the 1688 Bible and they separate the stuck pages, discovering the “Anthon Transcript.”
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BYU Studies

18 April Danel Bachman and Mark Hofmann visit Dean Jessee at the LDS church historical department in Salt Lake City. Jessee then begins his study of the “Anthon Transcript.”

22 April The Church accepts “Anthon Transcript.”

3 May KSL-TV (Salt Lake City) interviews Hofmann in Danel Bachman’s office at the Logan, Utah, LDS Institute of Religion. Newspapers carry the story of the “Anthon Transcript” discovery. Hofmann becomes a celebrity.

1–4 May Mormon History Association annual meetings held in Canandaigua, New York. One session is devoted to the “Anthon Transcript.”

June The Church attempts to check the provenance of the “Anthon Transcript” in order to authenticate it.

27 June Hofmann visits Dorothy Dean in Carthage, Illinois. He tells her he is trying to establish the source of the 1688 Bible.

July Mark and Doralee Hofmann move to Sandy, Utah.

29 July Dorothy Dean signs affidavit, convinced by Hofmann that her mother must have been the source of the 1688 Bible.

13 Oct. The “Anthon Transcript” is sold by Hofmann to the LDS church. In exchange the Church gives him a five dollar Mormon gold coin minted in 1850, a first edition of the Book of Mormon, and several examples of pioneer Mormon Currency. Total value: $20,000.

1981

8 Jan. Hofmann is arrested for stealing a bag of sliced almonds from a grocery store in Salt Lake Valley.

12 Feb. Hofmann calls Michael Marquardt, asking for information on the 1844 succession. He specifically wants to know what Joseph Smith was doing on 17 January 1844. Two days later Marquardt tells him Joseph Smith spent the day at home.
16 Feb. Hofmann shows Church Archivist Donald Schmidt a photocopy of a faded 1844 document that appears to be the text of a blessing Joseph Smith gave to his son Joseph Smith III, 17 January 1844. Schmidt is noncommittal. Hofmann then decides to approach Richard Howard, Church Historian of the RLDS church.

24 Feb. Hofmann informs Howard of the Joseph Smith III blessing. Several days later Howard calls Hofmann, at which time Hofmann promises not to sell it before 8 March.

27 Feb. Schmidt and associates in the LDS church historical department inform President Hinckley of the Joseph Smith III blessing document. The Church decides to obtain it.

2 March The Joseph Smith III blessing is sold to LDS church for about $20,000 in trade. (The Church trades this document to the RLDS church on 18 March for an 1833 Book of Commandments.) Soon after, Hofmann donates to LDS church a Thomas Bullock letter to Brigham Young, dated 27 January 1865, to add credibility to the blessing. About the same time of the blessing transaction, LDS church purchases some “White Notes” from Hofmann. Hofmann also sells some to Al Rust, a coin dealer in Salt Lake City.

April At LDS general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley discusses the Joseph Smith III blessing.

April-May James Dibowski and Albert Somerford, forensic experts associated with the U.S. Postal Inspector's Crime Lab, authenticate Joseph Smith III blessing. The paper tests would be done by the McCrone Institute of Chicago.

May Hofmann purchases a large collection of letters from Steve Gardiner in Utah County. On 18 May he pays Gardiner $20,000; in November he borrows $25,000 from Al Rust which he pays to Gardiner. This Gardiner purchase constitutes the core of the catalogue list of Mormon manuscripts Hofmann issues about this time.
15 May  RLDS President Wallace B. Smith announces that a team of experts has tested the Joseph Smith III blessing and established its genuineness. About this time Hofmann meets Lyn Jacobs and Brent Metcalfe.

29 May  The Joseph Smith to Emma letter (dated 3 March 1833) is sold to Brent Ashworth, a Utah County lawyer-collector, for $6,000 ($4,000 in cash, $2,000 in trade).

1982

January  Hofmann orders rubber stamps from the Salt Lake Stamp Co. which he would use to make various denominations of Spanish Fork notes.

March  Hofmann tells Ashworth of a collection of nineteenth-century letters from the Palmyra area that is coming on the market; he says that a Lucy Mack Smith letter is among them.

6 March  Hofmann calls Ashworth to tell him about another “find.” He drives to Ashworth’s home in Payson and shows him a 13 January 1873 letter of Martin Harris to Walter Conrad. Ashworth wants it; the tentative selling price is established at $27,000. Ashworth offers to trade documents signed by George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Robert E. Lee.

29 July  Hofmann shows Ashworth the letter of Lucy Mack Smith to Mary Pierce, dated 23 January 1829. They agree to have Dean Jessee check the handwriting of the letter prior to final purchase by Ashworth. Selling price about $33,000 in trade.

23 Aug.  News conference held regarding the Lucy Smith letter.

17 Sept.  Hofmann interviewed by Peggy Fletcher, editor of Sunstone. The interview is published in Sunstone Review 2 (September 1982): 16–19. Hofmann admits in the interview that with the high prices being paid for Mormon documents “there may be some temptation to forge.” Later in the interview he says, “I’m in this for the money.”

20 Oct. David Whitmer to Walter Conrad letter (dated 2 April 1873) sold to LDS church for $10,000.


Nov. to Dec. Spanish Fork Co-Operative notes sold to Alvin Rust. Hofmann had prepared several sets of these undated notes, in denominations of ten cents, twenty-five cents, fifty cents, and one dollar. Hofmann sold sets to various individuals at $1,500–$2,000 per set.

1983

5 Jan. Hofmann calls G. Homer Durham, managing director of the LDS church historical department, about a letter he says he has just found. In contacting Durham, Hofmann skirts the normal Church channels for acquiring documents. Durham takes Hofmann directly to President Gordon B. Hinckley. The document is the earliest known holograph of Joseph Smith, a letter to Josiah Stowell, dated 18 June 1825. The price agreed upon is $15,000. The Church insists on establishing its authenticity.

10 Jan. Hofmann flies to New York City. He meets there with Charles Hamilton, a well known autograph dealer. Hofmann convinces Hamilton that the 1825 letter is authentic, and he signs a statement to that effect.

14 Jan. Elwyn Doubleday sells the Lounsbery Collection of Letters to William Thoman. Hofmann will claim he purchased the Harris 1830 letter from Thoman in March 1982. Police later show that this Doubleday sale to Thoman occurred on 14 January 1983.
14 Jan. Letter of Joseph Smith to Josiah Stowell (18 June 1825) sold to LDS church for $15,000. The letter is then placed in the First Presidency vault.

3 March E. B. Grandin printing contract for first printing of Book of Mormon, signed by Joseph Smith and Martin Harris (dated 17 August 1829), sold to LDS church for $25,000.

April Hofmann visits the Justin Schiller-Raymond Wapner Galleries in New York City for the first time. He introduces himself as a dealer in rare coins; he also begins to purchase rare children's books from them.

Nov. Letter of Joseph Smith to General Jonathan Dunham, 27 June 1844, sold to Dr. Richard Marks, of Phoenix, Arizona, by Hofmann, who had earlier promised it to Brent Ashworth. Ashworth would learn of the sale on 27 January 1984.

29 Nov. Hofmann calls Michael Marquardt and tells him he has just found a Martin Harris letter. He reads the letter to Marquardt.

1 Dec. Hofmann has Michael Marquardt to his home for dinner. He shows him the text of a letter of Martin Harris to William W. Phelps, dated 23 October 1830. Marquardt tells a number of people about it during the next week.

16 Dec. Lyn Jacobs, fronting for Hofmann, offers to sell LDS church an 1830 Martin Harris letter to W. W. Phelps (the "white salamander" letter). President Hinckley declines, indicating that the price is too high. Brent Ashworth also rejects the offer. Hofmann, "fronting" for Jacobs, approaches LDS Church Archivist Donald Schmidt, eventually suggesting that perhaps a wealthy Church member could be found to buy it and then donate it to the Church. This middleman idea proves to be attractive. Brent Metcalfe tells Hofmann of Steven Christensen.
6 Jan. The Harris letter is sold to Steven Christensen and Gary Sheets. Hofmann had asked $50,000 for it but had accepted an offer of $40,000 payable over eighteen months: $1,000 down, $9,000 in two weeks, and the balance in increments of $10,000 at six month intervals.

January Christensen retains BYU historians Ron Walker and Dean Jessee to study historical context of Harris letter. In a 24 January letter to his research team, he counsels them to seek the truth in their studies.

Late Jan. Hofmann tells Christensen he has a cash-flow problem; if Christensen can give him the $9,000 plus $5,000 now, Hofmann will give him a bonus: the transcript of a 1 November 1825 contract in which Joseph Smith, Sr., Josiah Stowell, and other partners agreed on the division of proceeds from a money-digging enterprise they had organized to find buried treasure. Christensen agrees to advance the money in exchange for a copy of the text and the right to buy the original for $15,000 if and when Hofmann acquires it.


February Dean Jessee’s *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* appears. It includes six Hofmann forgeries.

March Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Utah Lighthouse Ministry, though wanting to believe the Harris letter authentic, admits to “some reservations” because of its similarity to an affidavit of Willard Chase in E. D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unvailed* [sic] (1834) and to a statement by early LDS convert Joseph Knight. Tanners publish long extracts from Harris letter in the *Salt Lake Messenger*.

7 March Steven Christensen issues a press release admitting ownership of the 1830 Harris letter, but he says that he will not release it until further research is done on it. His researchers were then working on (1) *examining the physical text* (they chose Kenneth Rendell of Newton, Mass., to do this); (2) *establishing the provenance of the*
letter (Dean Jessee worked back to Elwyn Doubleday, a dealer in postal memorabilia in Alton Bay, New Hampshire); and (3) understanding the historical context of the letter (Ronald Walker, Dean Jessee, and Brent Metcalfe were working on this aspect).

18 May  “Mike Hansen” [Hofmann alias] orders printing plates from Cocks-Clark Engraving in Denver, Colorado, for Deseret currency.

June  “Mike Hansen” orders twelve zinc etchings from William Clayton’s *Latter Day Saint’s Emigrants Guide* (1848) from Heisler Engraving in Kansas City, Missouri. Part of the $389.69 order is paid with a check for $169.69 signed by Mark W. Hofmann.

August  Hofmann sells full set of Deseret currency (dated 1858) to Alvin Rust for $35,000.

21–24 August  Sunstone Theological Symposium, Hotel Utah, Salt Lake City. First public discussion of the Harris 1830 letter by Jan Shipps and Richard Bushman.


25 Aug.  *Los Angeles Times* publishes long article on the Harris letter. Other newspapers across the country follow its lead.

Sept.  Utah Lighthouse Ministry publishes copy of a circulating typescript of the 1825 Smith-Stowell letter, and questions why the 1830 Harris letter is devoid of mention of God or angels.

26 Sept.  Hofmann learns from Kenneth Rendell that forensic examiner of paper, William G. Krueger, has determined there are no indications of forgery in the 1830 Harris letter.

October  In an address at general conference, Elder Bruce R. McConkie warns members who conduct or support historical research threatening to the faith of other members. Three days later Christensen fires Brent...
Metcalfe from his research team, but gives him severance pay. Metcalfe had filled in for Christensen in giving a talk to the faculty at the LDS Institute of Religion at the University of Utah. The discussion had become very heated over Metcalfe’s refusal to bear his testimony to the group after discussing the Harris 1830 letter. Christensen writes a letter to President Hinckley shortly thereafter (16 October) in which he says he has decided to suspend research on the letter and to drop plans to publish a book about it.

30 Oct. Wilford Cardon sends Hofmann a check for $12,000 for an 1807 Betsy Ross letter.

“Mike Hansen” orders Jim Bridger notes from Utah Engraving Company.

21 Nov. “Mike Hansen” orders printing plate for Emma Smith hymnal back page from Debouzek Engraving, Salt Lake City.

28 Nov. Emma Smith hymnal sold to Brent Ashworth for $5,000 and a Brigham Young letter.

12 Dec. “Mike Hansen” leaves Mark Hofmann fingerprint, which police later find, on receipt at Salt Lake Stamp Company.

1985

2 Jan. Hofmann sells two Jim Bridger notes to Charles Hamilton for $10,000.

15 Feb. Steven Christensen receives a report from Albert H. Lyter, III, a forensic chemist in Raleigh, North Carolina. Lyter had examined the ink on the Harris 1830 letter and reported: “There is no evidence that the examined document was prepared at other than during the stated time period.”

26 Feb. Christensen again writes to President Hinckley about the Harris letter.
29 Feb. President Hinckley calls Christensen and assures him that the Church wants the Harris letter.

8 March “Mike Harris” orders plate from DeBouzek Engraving in Salt Lake City for “The Oath of a Freeman.”

11 March Hofmann flies to New York City.

13 March Hofmann purchases five items from Argosy Book Store in New York City for $51.42. One item he claimed he purchased at this time was the “Oath of a Freeman,” the oldest printed item in American history. Hofmann claimed he paid twenty-five dollars for this specific item. Several days later he returns with the “Oath of a Freeman” to Schiller’s Gallery in New York City. Various authorities are contacted by Schiller to examine the broadside. William Matheson, chief of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress accepts the item and says a battery of tests will be performed on it to determine its authenticity. In April the Library of Congress tells Schiller and Wapner, Hofmann’s agents, that it wants to buy the “Oath of a Freeman.”

15 March Thomas Wilding and Associate Syd Jensen, at Hofmann’s invitation, agree to invest $22,500 in eighteen rare books.

20 March Kenneth Rendell sends his final report to Christensen: “There is no indication that this letter [the Harris 1830 letter] is a forgery.”

21 March Wilding and Co. investors give Hofmann $22,500 to purchase rare books.

25 March “Mike Hansen” orders a second plate of the “Oath of a Freeman.”

3 April Christensen tells Salt Lake Tribune that tests show Harris letter to be authentic, that researchers are preparing it for publication, and that their findings will be announced at the Mormon History Association annual meeting in May.
8 April  Schiller sends “Oath of a Freeman” to Library of Congress. Asking price: $1.5 million.

16 April  Letter of David and Peter Whitmer to Bethell Todd (dated 12 August 1828) sold to LDS church for $1,500 by Hofmann.

18 April  First Presidency accepts Steven Christensen’s donation of the Harris 1830 letter to Church.

23 April  Alvin Rust advances Hofmann $150,000 to purchase “McLellin Collection” in New York City. Hofmann later tells Rust that he has sold the McLellin Collection to the LDS church for $300,000.

28 April  *Church News* announces Church’s acquisition of Harris letter from Christensen, and publishes the letter, with a careful statement from First Presidency acknowledging apparent authenticity.

29 April  Utah Lighthouse Ministry’s *Salt Lake Messenger* accuses LDS church of hiding a second letter that deals with early treasure hunting by the Smith family. *Salt Lake Tribune* claims 1825 Smith-Stowell letter exists, but Church spokesman denies that Church possesses it.

30 April  Rhett James questions authenticity of Harris letter based on study of word patterns of “known” Harris writings.

2 May  At Mormon History Association annual meetings in Independence, Missouri, Dean Jessee summarizes findings by experts who noted that nothing had been found indicating forgery. As Jessee would reemphasize in the months to follow, one can prove forgery but not authenticity; authenticating is a matter of reducing probability, not of proving. Ronald Walker discusses context of treasure hunting into which the letter apparently fits.

5 May  Church spokesman retracts his denial of Church having the 1825 letter, saying he was informed by President Hinckley that the letter was in First Presidency vault and perhaps would be subject of critical study as Harris letter had been.
9 May  
First Presidency releases text of 1825 Smith-Stowell letter with statement that Dean Jessee says document “appears definitely to be in hand of Joseph Smith” and is earliest document written by the Prophet. Document expert Charles Hamilton of New York had authenticated the letter earlier.

11 May  
Newspapers nationwide feature headlines claiming that the Smith-Stowell 1825 letter links Mormon church founder to the occult.

14 May  
Spokesman denies Church has hidden Oliver Cowdery history.

15 May  
Walter McCrowe Associates find the Harris letter’s paper “consistent” with period of date.

20 May  
Time magazine publishes “Challenging Mormonism’s Roots” about the documents controversy. Kenneth Rendell verifies, based on his examination and tests, and based on ink and paper tests done by others, “that there is no indication that this [Harris] letter is a forgery.”

25 May  
Ronald Vern Jackson displays forgery of Neeley court docket to support claim that Harris letter is a fake.

Early June  
Brent Metcalfe, who earlier had passed to John Dart, a reporter with the *Los Angeles Times*, information from an anonymous source [Hofmann] about the existence of an Oliver Cowdery history hidden by the First Presidency, now meets with Hofmann and Dart in Salt Lake City. Hofmann tells Dart he has seen the Oliver Cowdery history in the vault of the First Presidency, that this history contains a different account of the origins of the Church, and that it credits Alvin Smith with a key role in obtaining the Book of Mormon plates.

5 June  
Wilford Cardon wires $110,000 to Schiller-Wagner in New York City to invest in a Charles Dickens manuscript “The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s bargain.” Hofmann had told him of the investment opportunity.

9 June  
Hofmann offers the same investment opportunity to Thomas Wilding he had offered to Cardon.
13 June  Los Angeles Times cites “insider” (anonymous interview with Mark Hofmann) that LDS church presidency is hiding a Cowdery history.

14 June  Library of Congress returns “Oath of a Freeman” to Schiller-Wapner Galleries: price too high at $1.5 million.

28 June  Elder Hugh Pinnock helps arrange a loan of $185,000 from First Interstate Bank for Hofmann to help purchase McLellin papers.

6 July  Salt Lake Tribune, citing Hofmann, says McLellin Collection includes Pearl of Great Price Facsimile 2.

29 July  Letter of Joseph Smith to General Jonathan Dunham, 27 June 1844, sold to Brent Ashworth, after Hofmann bought it from Deseret Book Co., which had bought it from Dr. Richard Marks, who had bought it from Hofmann. Hofmann loses about $56,000 on this transaction, but he must keep Ashworth quiet as Ashworth is beginning to tell people how untrustworthy he is.

August  Brigham Young papers “sold” to Wilding group for $23,600.

12 Aug.  Hofmann signs contract to buy a home in Cottonwood area of Salt Lake City for $550,000. Hofmann agrees to pay $5,000 in earnest money, $195,000 at closure, and three additional annual installments of $195,000. The closing is set for 15 October, 1:00 P.M.

21–24 August  At Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, historians Michael Quinn, Marvin Hill, and Ronald Walker say that Joseph Smith’s involvement with “folk magic” can be sustained without Hofmann documents.

3 Sept.  Hofmann’s $185,000 check to First Interstate Bank bounces.

10 Sept.  Deseret Book sells Hofmann Book of Common Prayer for $50. It contains a signature of “Nathan Harris.” Several days later Hofmann returns to claim that a poem written by Martin Harris was in the back of the volume.
13 Sept. Hofmann admits to Wilding and Syd Jensen that their money had not purchased the "Oath of Freeman" or Dickens manuscript, that Brigham Young papers he had offered to sell did not exist, and that he cannot return their money. Hofmann spends the day trying to raise money. One angry investor hits Hofmann in face. Increasing pressure put on Hofmann.


25 Sept. Hofmann offers to sell papyrus piece to Ashworth.

30 Sept. Hofmann tries to use papyrus as collateral for $150,000 loan arranged by Wade Lillywhite of Deseret Book.

1 Oct. Hofmann sells Deseret currency notes to Deseret Book.

2 Oct. Christensen warns Hofmann to tell Elder Pinnock of his problems.


4 Oct. Hofmann tells Elder Pinnock he must sell "McLellin Collection" rather than donate it to Church, so Pinnock arranges for it to be purchased for $185,000 during 13–19 October. Mission President David E. Sorensen, working through his attorney, David West, is to purchase the McLellin Collection, if someone can authenticate it. Steve Christensen is chosen to do this.


7 Oct. Radio Shack outlet in Cottonwood Mall sells to "M. Hansen" a battery holder and a mercury switch.

11 Oct. Hofmann offers to sell President Hinckley a Kinderrhook plate and Joseph's translation of it. The offer is declined.
**Book Reviews**

13 Oct. Hofmann tries to sell papyrus (supposedly Facsimile 2), for $100,000. By now Hofmann’s debts are at least $1,300,000.

15 Oct. Steven Christensen and Kathleen Sheets killed by bombs. Police warn Ashworth that he may be on the same hit list. As the Ashworths hurriedly go into hiding, their son is involved in a tragic accident that proves fatal.

16 Oct. Hofmann injured by bomb in his car. Some speculate that the bomb was intended for Brent Ashworth or Christensen’s attorney.

16+ Oct. Police identify Hofmann as suspect in Christensen and Sheets murders, motive linked to dealing in fraudulent documents. Police with search warrant go through Hofmann’s house, find a green high school letterman’s jacket, and, in a locked basement room, books and manuscripts and note cards containing words from the Book of Mormon.

19 Oct. Church announces Harris letter was given to FBI to authenticate. The FBI tests did not indicate forgery. Second search of Hofmann home conducted.


30 Oct. Information from Rendell says papyrus Hofmann tried to peddle was from him, not part of any McLellin collection.

31 Oct. Hofmann released from LDS Hospital. Later in the day he is charged with illegal possession of a machine gun. He pleads innocent and posts $50,000 bail. A Daniel Boone letter (1775) is sold at a Sotheby’s auction for $29,000. The letter was a Hofmann creation. Sotheby’s later buys letter back.

13 Nov. Hofmann takes a polygraph test.

20 Nov. Hofmann’s attorney announces that Hofmann passed the polygraph test and thus did not kill Sheets and Christensen.

28 Nov. Traughber papers in Texas are found to contain some McLellin papers but are not the expected McLellin Collection.

Dec. Utah State Supreme Court rejects an appeal that would have forced a nurse to reveal what she overheard Hofmann say in hospital.

17–20 Dec. George Throckmorton and William Flynn begin their investigation of historic documents at the LDS church historical department. They discover cracked ink on documents that Hofmann handled, but they are not sure what caused it.

1986

7–20 Jan. Second examination in LDS historical department by Throckmorton and Flynn. About this time the FBI lab in Washington, D.C., reports that its tests had determined that the Harris 1830 letter was not a forgery. Neither, according to the FBI, was the 1829 printing contract for Book of Mormon.

9 Jan. Terri Christensen delivers Steven Fred Christensen, Jr., by cesarean section. It would have been Steve’s thirty-second birthday.

22 Jan. Third examination by Throckmorton and Flynn, joined by Al Lyter. Exam conducted at Utah State Crime Lab.

4 Feb. Prosecutors charge Hofmann with two murder counts, twenty-three counts of theft by deception and communications fraud involving, among others, the “Anthon Transcript,” Harris letter, and nonexistent McLellin Collection. Hofmann goes to Salt Lake County Jail.
5 Feb. Probable cause statement released, listing Hofmann documents involved in fraud counts. Investigator George Throckmorton says none of documents described are authentic.

7 Feb. Rendell says several Hofmann documents are forgeries, but he is not sure about Harris letter. Prominent LDS historians, with only media reports about case for fraud to counter earlier reports showing authenticity, maintain view that some of the documents are authentic.

9 Feb. Hofmann released on $250,000 bail.


April Prosecutors examine forty witnesses to collect evidence to build their case against Hofmann.

1 April LDS church announces it is returning court documents received from Hofmann to Hancock County, Illinois.

4 April Hofmann charged with four additional theft by deception counts.

11 April George Throckmorton examines a second copy of “Oath of a Freeman” loaned to police by Wilding. He says it is a fake printed from a negative made in Salt Lake City.

14 April Preliminary hearing in the case of The State of Utah v. Mark W. Hofmann begins.

18 April Investigators show that Hofmann used “Mike Hansen” alias and that Mike Hansen bought bomb ingredients and engraved plates used to print some documents sold by Hofmann.

Former LDS Church Archivist Don Schmidt testifies that Church took few steps to authenticate documents from Hofmann, indicating that most documents were examined solely on basis of their historical contexts.
19 April  Fourth examination of documents, conducted in a laboratory at Throckmorton’s home. At this point 688 documents including 302 Hofmann documents have been examined. Sixty-one of these are believed to have been forged by Hofmann.

20 April  LDS church announces that forty-eight documents were purchased or otherwise obtained from Hofmann. The Church paid Hofmann $57,100 for seven items; the other forty-one were acquired by donation or trade.

23 April  Hofmann reinjures his knee, falling and fracturing the kneecap. Hearing postponed until 5 May.

May  BYU Studies special issue focuses on tests the Harris and Smith letters had been subjected to and on issues raised by the letters, including treasure hunting in and before Joseph Smith’s time, based on non-Hofmann sources.

3 May  Mormon History Association annual meeting, Salt Lake City. Special session on early Mormon history. Papers by Ronald Walker and Alan Taylor later published in Dialogue 19 (Winter 1986). At the same meetings, Richard Lloyd Anderson makes a slide-lecture presentation on the Joseph Smith to Hyrum Smith Revelation-Letter (May 1838) showing the problems with the postmark.

7 May  William Flynn, investigator for Arizona State Crime Lab, announces cracked ink proves Harris letter and other Hofmann documents were forged.

22 May  Hofmann bound over to Utah Third District Court for trial on charges of murder and fraud. On 6 June he pleads not guilty to all charges. Judges rule that Hofmann would face five separate trials; the first, for murder, scheduled for 2 March 1987.

24 May  Unanswered questions, including how Hofmann passed polygraph test, remain after preliminary hearings end. Based on what public has been told, many people still reluctant to agree with prosecution’s case.
Book Reviews

Summer-Fall

Roderick McNeil uses a scanning auger microscope to examine the age of the ink on the documents Hofmann sold to the Church. He concludes that none were written before 1970.

16 Oct.

Church announces that a search of its archives and First Presidency’s vault found no Oliver Cowdery history.

28 Oct.

Jerald Tanner publishes Tracking the White Salamander: The Story of Mark Hofmann, Murder and Forged Mormon Documents.

26 Nov.

David Yocum, the recently elected Salt Lake County Attorney, removes prosecutor Gary D’Elia from the Hofmann case. Two weeks later D’Elia resigns from the county attorney’s office.

Early Dec.

Defense attorney Yengich and prosecutor Stott begin open discussions about a plea bargain.

1987

7 Jan.

Plea bargain agreed to.

7–8 Jan.

Stott and David Biggs drive to Yengich’s home in Salt Lake City. Hofmann confesses his crimes to them.

22 Jan.

Yengich forces Mark Hofmann to confront his family with his guilt.

23 Jan.

Plea bargain announced. Hofmann pleads guilty to two counts of second-degree murder and two counts of communication fraud involving the Harris letter and McLellin papers. Twenty-six other counts dismissed, and Hofmann agrees to be interviewed about the murders and documents. He goes to the Utah State Prison. Belief continues among some historians that not all Hofmann-related documents are forgeries.

11 Feb.-27 May

Interviews conducted with Hofmann in prison.
23 April At the invitation of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History and the department of history, BYU, George Throckmorton discusses the Hofmann forgeries with historians and archivists at BYU for two hours.

31 July County Attorney’s office releases 600-page transcript of interviews its staff conducted with prisoner Hofmann. Hofmann confessed that all the documents listed on statement of probable cause were forged. Some dissatisfaction is expressed in scholarly circles and in the public with the incompleteness of Hofmann’s confessions.

August D. Michael Quinn, Early Mormonism and the Magic World View published.


4 Sept. Deseret Book Company, owned by the LDS church, announces the closing of its fine and rare book department.

1988

9 Jan. Hofmann parole hearing. Citing his “callous disregard for human life and that the killings were done to cover other criminal activities,” the parole board tells Hofmann that he should spend the rest of his life in prison.

March Michael George interviews Hofmann for about seven hours. Hofmann claims to have forged documents with at least eighty-three different signatures. When asked how he felt about the people he murdered, Hofmann responds, “I don’t feel anything for them. My philosophy is that they’re dead. They’re not suffering. I think life is basically worthless. They could have died just as easily in a car accident. . . . I don’t believe in God. I don’t believe in an afterlife. They don’t know they’re dead” (see Robert Lindsey, A Gathering of Saints: A True Story of Murder and Deceit [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988], 378, italics in original).
April  Sillitoe and Roberts, *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders, with a Forensic Analysis by George J. Throckmorton* published. In the summary to his forensic analysis, Throckmorton concludes: “During the one-and-one-half-year investigation into the Mark W. Hofmann documents, more than 6,000 documents reportedly dating from between 1792 and 1929 were examined. Of that total, 443 documents came from Hofmann. Of these, 268 (or 60 percent) were found to be authentic—mostly public court records and other historically insignificant items. Another 68 documents (or 15 percent) could not be proven either genuine or forged. However, 107 documents (or 24 percent) were found to be forged” (552).

21 April The family of Kathleen Sheets awarded nearly two million dollars in a court judgment against Mark W. Hofmann.


6 Aug. *Salt Lake Tribune* reports that Hofmann was plotting to have members of the Utah Board of Pardons killed.

10 Aug. Doralee Olds Hofmann files for divorce.

19 Aug. LDS church releases official statement condemning *The Mormon Murders* for its “scurrilous descriptions, accusations, and willful misrepresentations of the actions and motives of the leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

15 Sept. Hofmann attempts suicide by way of a drug overdose. He is rushed to the University of Utah Health Sciences Center.

27 Sept. Hofmann transferred to hospital at Utah State Prison.


1 Oct. *Salt Lake Tribune* announced that Deseret Book Co. had filed a civil law suit in Utah’s Third District Court
against Wade Lillywhite, a key witness in the Hofmann forgery case. Lillywhite, a former employee in Deseret Book Company’s Fine and Rare Book Department in Salt Lake City is accused of defrauding the bookstore of $236,308. On 13 January 1989 Lillywhite pleads guilty to falsifying records and stealing rare books for his own use, and on 17 March 1989 was sentenced to ten years probation and restitution totaling almost $229,000.

16 Oct. Richard P. Lindsay, managing director of public communications for the LDS church, tells Deseret News that the Church plans to publish “a complete list of errors, misquotes and exaggerations” in The Mormon Murders.

1989

16 Feb. Salt Lake Tribune announces that the LDS church public relations department is working on a full account of the Hofmann case. Rumors also circulate that a book-length history of the Hofmann case is being researched by members of the LDS church historical department.
The Mark Hofmann Case: 
A Bibliographical Guide

Copies of most of the items referred to in this bibliography have been gathered into MSS 1571, "The Mark W. Hofmann Case Collection," Archives and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

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A. Books and Monographs

Campbell, Harry Fredrick. Hofmann Mormon Money Forgeries—Historical Aspects (Salt Lake City: Privately printed, 1988).


B. Articles/Chapters


*Brigham Young University Studies* 24 (Fall 1984) (due to delayed printing, this issue appeared in May 1986).


Jessee, Dean C. “New Documents and Mormon Beginnings,” 397-428.


Hedengren, Paul. Chaps. 11–12 of In Defense of Faith, Assessing Arguments against Latter-day Saint Belief (Provo: Bradford and Wilson, 1985), 131–94 (these chapters discuss the letters of Joseph Smith to Josiah Stowell [1825], Lucy Smith to Mary Pierce [1829], and Martin Harris to William W. Phelps [1830]).


_. Parts 1 and 2 of "The Mark Hofmann Story." Maine Antique Digest 14 (June, July 1986): 26A-31A, 1C-8C.

_. "Update on the Mark Hofmann Case." Maine Antique Digest 14 (November 1986): 9A.


_. "What Has Hofmann Faked?" Maine Antique Digest 16 (December 1988): 25C.


Russell, William M. [Allen Roberts on Mark Hofmann], John Whitmer Historical Association Newsletter, no. 23 (July 1988): 2-3 (account of Roberts’ address at the JWHA spring banquet, Independence, Missouri, 9 April 1988).


Tracy, Dawn. “Hofmann Fallout? Store [Deseret Book Co.] to Write off Rare-Book Section.” Salt Lake Tribune, 5 November 1987, B1, 2.


II. Interviews with and Articles by Mark Hofmann

A. Articles by


“Behind the Scenes: The Joseph Smith III Blessing.” Sunstone Review 2 (August 1982): 1, 6-7 (includes address Hofmann gave at Mormon History Association annual meeting, with responses by Richard P. Howard and Donald T. Schmidt).


B. Interviews with


C. The Prison Interviews

*Mark Hofmann Interviews, Transcripts, Supplements and Exhibits*. Two volumes; 537 pp. Issued by the Office of Salt Lake County Attorney (interviews conducted at Utah State Prison between 11 February and 27 May 1987).

1. Index to Selected Topics in the Prison Interviews

   a. The forgeries:

   Anthon transcript: 3-133, 506-8, 456-57
   Articles of Agreement (moneydigging): 501-2
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4. Anthon Transcript (c. 1828)


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Letter of Peter Whitmer and David Whitmer to Bithel Todd (12 August 1828)

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7. Letter of Lucy Mack Smith to Mary Pierce (23 January 1829)


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8. Joseph Smith signature in a first edition of Book of Mormon

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