4-1-1995

An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton by George D. Smith

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The personal journals of William Clayton poignantly reflect the experiences, concerns, and attitudes of one of the many faithful Latter-day Saints who, though not leaders, were essential to the strength and success of early Mormonism. After 1842, however, Clayton was particularly close to Joseph Smith, and his journals provide some important insight into the life of the founding prophet of the LDS Church. They also shed significant light on the history of the Church in England, in Nauvoo, during the exodus from Nauvoo to the Great Basin, and during part of the early Utah period.

An Intimate Chronicle consists of abridgements of five journals written by William Clayton, the full text of another, and three appendixes. As detailed below, most of the items have been published before, but two appear here for the first time. The editor, George Smith, has written a fine introduction in which he reviews Clayton's life and accomplishments and adds several miscellaneous facts about Clayton undiscovered by previous writers (including this reviewer). Footnotes provide other important insights into Clayton and his times, and Smith has done a credible job of editing the material available to him. The main value of this publication is that it brings together in one volume significant portions of Clayton's journals, along with some other writings.

Despite its strengths, several problems are inherent in this publication. "Journal 2" is so incomplete that it cannot be relied upon to provide a full or balanced perspective. "Journal 3" is not a William Clayton journal at all, but, rather, a Heber C. Kimball journal. And the abridgements of two previously published Clayton documents, "Journal 1" and "Journal 4," are so severe that the serious student of Mormon history will want to look at the originals anyway.

"Journal 1: England and Emigration, 1840–1842" is an abridge-ment of the journal Clayton began on January 1, 1840, while
serving as a missionary in Manchester, England. The entire journal was previously published—with profuse annotation—in 1974 by this reviewer and Thomas G. Alexander as *Manchester Mormons: The Journal of William Clayton, 1840 to 1842.* It provides important information on the activities of the LDS Church in England in 1840, casts light on the emigration process, and illuminates the story of Zarahemla, an LDS settlement in Iowa that ultimately failed. The original journal is housed in the library at Brigham Young University.

Of the 273 daily entries in this journal, Smith eliminated forty-one, or 15 percent. In addition, nineteen entries are incomplete. Though editors have the right to determine what to eliminate, it is unfortunate in this case that some seemingly significant entries were excluded while some relatively insignificant passages were retained. Sunday, March 8, 1840, for example, was a very eventful Sabbath day for Clayton. In the morning, he prayed with a Sister Burgess, who had a serious infection on her breast. He also recorded where he had breakfast; who spoke at Church meetings during the day and evening; the ordination of certain men to the priesthood; some baptisms and confirmations; visits he made to members of the Church; gifts he received of oranges and money (he often recorded such things as a reflection of his gratitude for people who supplied him with food and other needs while he was working without purse or scrip); and, finally, a cryptic comment about using “liberty” toward Alice Hardman. In his abridgement, however, Smith kept only about one-sixth of the total entry: “Sister Burgess came. Her breast is very bad. I prayed with her. . . . Supper at Hardman’s. Used great liberty toward Alice Hardman” (33). By including only the somewhat titillating material and leaving out the much more important information about Clayton and what he was doing as a missionary, this “abridgement” does little but distort the day’s activity.

The most problematical document in this collection is “Journal 2: Nauvoo, Illinois, 1842-1846.” The original three volumes which comprise this journal are owned by the LDS Church and cover the period of November 27, 1842, to January 30, 1846. They constitute an immensely valuable source for understanding the life
of Joseph Smith as well as the history of the Church during its final years in Nauvoo. Clayton made significant observations, for example, on the tender relationship between Joseph and Emma Smith, as well as some of the tensions between them. He also wrote of Joseph's relationship with other people (both friends and enemies), efforts to institute plural marriage, and the recording of the revelation on plural marriage. Clayton kept the accounts related to building the temple, kept other Church records, took care of many of Joseph Smith's business transactions, was involved in the Prophet's political activities, participated in Nauvoo's cultural life, observed and helped out in the solution of the many problems that followed Joseph Smith's death, and was deeply involved in the preparations for leaving Nauvoo.  

Scholars should be wary of this "abridgement," however, for the editor did not have access to the original journals. Instead, he relied, for the most part, on highly selected excerpts compiled in 1979 by Andrew Ehat as notes for his specific research interests. Unfortunately, and through no direct fault of Ehat's, these excerpts were purloined and copied in an unauthorized way by yet another person, who illicitly shared them with friends. Like the proverbial feathers tossed to the wind, duplicates spread rapidly. The excerpts were eventually published, unapproved and with no editing, in photoduplicate form by Jerald and Sandra Tanner's Modern Microfilm Company of Salt Lake City. Smith's abridgement is based almost entirely on that source, with some additions from a few other sources.

Smith's introduction to this journal leaves some misleading impressions about its full content. He says, for example, that the Ehat excerpts comprise "approximately one-half of the original holograph journal" (ivi, note). Since he never saw the holograph, however, he had no way of knowing that there are actually 1170 daily entries in the three journals. Smith provides a full, or nearly-full, reproduction of 102 entries (8.7 percent) and partial reproductions of another 254 (21.7 percent). Considering all the omissions from the partial entries, it is safe to estimate that less than 25 percent of the whole is included in this publication. Scholars should be very cautious when they try to interpret what is there, for 75 percent of the whole is missing.
Moreover, in the case of the Nauvoo journals, George Smith took no real part in the "abridgement." All he had before him were Ehat's excerpts, which were never intended as an abridgement. They were merely verbatim notes to be used in Ehat's writing; they were not meant to be published as a collection. What was finally published by Modern Microfilm, unfortunately, was an agglomeration of unconnected (except as they related to Ehat's studies) and out-of-context excerpts that piqued the interest of the curious because they seemed somewhat sensational.

Smith correctly observes that Clayton's journals were the source for many entries in the documentary History of the Church, edited by B. H. Roberts, but he wrongly suggests that most of the 1843–45 entries are present in edited form in that History (lvii). Actually, for the period before the death of Joseph Smith, only about twenty-five of the daily History of the Church entries are clearly drawn from the Clayton journals. The same is true of the period after the Prophet's death. Clayton wrote in his journal almost daily, but only a very small number of entries in volume seven of the History of the Church are based on that source. In nearly every instance, moreover, his journals are much more extensive than the excerpts used in the History.5

The result, so far as An Intimate Chronicle is concerned, is an abridgement that leaves the worst kind of imbalance. It is not a scholarly abridgement based on a consistent rationale concerning what is important enough to include or insignificant enough to leave out. For example, Ehat's excerpts reveal some problems between Joseph and Emma, but the original journals show with equal clarity that the two were very close and very much in love. Clayton saw the problems, but he also saw the Prophet and his wife working together for a common cause in a variety of ways. The excerpts largely obscure that fact.

For example, an entry in An Intimate Chronicle for June 30, 1843, mentions a speech given by Joseph Smith after he was arrested in Dixon, Illinois, then freed on a writ of habeas corpus. Missing, however, are what Clayton must have considered the much more important parts of what he wrote that day. He reported Joseph Smith's dramatic entry into Nauvoo amid throngs of Saints grateful to see him. Part of the story, based on Clayton's
journal, is recounted in the *History of the Church*, but Clayton observed some intimate, heartwarming particulars that did not appear in the *History*. Emma was at the Prophet's side, and Clayton described in beautiful detail the love that was apparent at the reuniting of Joseph and his family: "Prest J. left the buggy and mounted old Charley he called for sister Emma & his brother Hyrum who when they came up and took him by the hand all wept Prest. took hold of the hand of his partner in sorrow and persecution. Surely it would have moved any thing but the heart of an adamantine." Clayton also commented on the non-Mormons who had accompanied Joseph Smith to Nauvoo, "who all gazed with astonishment & rapture to see the enthusiastic attachment of the Mormon people to their beloved leaders." Entries such as these cast quite a different light on Joseph Smith than do out-of-context excerpts that tend to focus on the tensions.

The excerpts bypass many personal entries that reveal the deeply spiritual nature of Clayton himself. They also say little about Clayton's multitudinous daily activities or about the vibrant social life of Nauvoo, yet the journals are filled with notations regarding business affairs, concerts, plays, parties, and other activities that rounded out the lives of Clayton and his friends. In short, the excerpts provide insights into some aspects of Nauvoo history, but they do not reveal the warm, positive image of the Church and of Joseph Smith that pervades the journals themselves. They also distort the real character of William Clayton and fail to provide some very important information about the period after the death of Joseph.

All these issues raise questions about the propriety of republishing the excerpts at all. Working without permission to study the original documents doomed their editor to the production of a manifoldly flawed volume.

"Journal 3: Nauvoo Temple, 1845–1846," in this reviewer's opinion, has no place in a publication of Clayton journals, for it is really the journal of Heber C. Kimball, as George Smith himself recognizes (lvii). The Kimball family deposited it in the Church Archives in 1903 along with several other Kimball journals. It fits exactly, chronologically, with the other journals in the set and carries a handwritten inscription on the first page indicating that it is the journal of Heber C. Kimball. Smith justifies including it with
the Clayton journals simply because the major portion of this particular volume, from December 10, 1845, to January 6, 1846, is in Clayton’s handwriting.

Anyone who has studied the keeping of journals in Church history must know that Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and other Church leaders often called on their scribes and secretaries to record their journals for them. No responsible historian presumes to publish such journals as part of the papers of the scribes who wrote them. Such journals are the journals of those for whom they were written. Smith correctly observes that when Stanley B. Kimball published the journals of Heber C. Kimball, he left this one out. That still does not legitimize publishing it here. If such a journal could be called a Clayton journal, then so could the journal Clayton wrote for Kimball while crossing the plains in 1847. That journal has been published twice—as a Heber C. Kimball journal. The temple journal is in exactly the same category. If it is to be published at all, it should be published with a Kimball collection, not a Clayton collection.

The occasion for Clayton’s involvement in writing this portion of Kimball’s journal is found in Clayton’s personal journal entry for December 10, 1845. That morning Clayton was in his office but feeling “quite unwell.” Nevertheless, he wrote, Brigham Young “said he wanted me up in the Temple and would not take no for an answer.” Accordingly, the faithful Clayton quit work and found his way to the attic of the temple, where several of the brethren were assembled. At that point, “Er Kimball requested me to write his private journal to day.” The activities that follow clearly explain why Kimball wanted Clayton (who had performed similar duties for him in England in 1840) to write his journal, for Kimball spent the rest of the day busily preparing the temple for the sacred ordinance work that was about to commence. As a Church leader, Kimball was one of the key figures in administering those ordinances to the hundreds of Saints who flocked to the temple, day and night, over the next few weeks. Sometimes working until the early morning hours, he had no time to write in his journal. Clayton, too, was busy, but during all that time he wrote in his own journal as well as Kimball’s. He continued the dual journal writing until January 6, while Kimball was in the temple daily. On
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many of those days, Clayton was also there, but after December 21, he spent most of his days working at the office. Clayton never thought of Kimball's journal as his own.

A significant difference exists between the Clayton journal and the Kimball journal for the days that Clayton was in the temple. In his own journal, Clayton told of the people who received the sacred ordinances, but he gave no details. In Kimball's journal (probably under Kimball's instruction), he gave enough detail that faithful Mormons reading it today might rightly feel uncomfortable, for it too openly reflects things they consider deeply sacred. Clayton saw no need, and perhaps even thought it improper, to place such details in his personal journal.

Nevertheless, the Kimball journal gives a heartwarming perspective on the dedication of the Saints who streamed to the temple during this crucial, hectic period just before the exodus from Nauvoo. The journal shows Church leaders working tirelessly day and night, even though they were being hounded by their enemies, to give the Saints the blessing of the temple endowment and to give husbands and wives the blessing of being sealed together for eternity. In addition, Church leaders and other high priests met regularly for fervent prayer. If the reader tries to imagine all that was happening to the Saints and all that must have been going through their minds in this time of trouble, the temple story is indeed inspiring. Unfortunately, Smith does little in his commentary to magnify this important theme.

Smith's abridgement, for the most part, eliminates long lists of names of those conducting or participating in the ordinances or of those who took part in the many prayer circles and meetings that were held in the temple during those days. In a few places, the abridgement leaves some things unclear. The entry for December 30, for example, deletes several lists of names. At the same time, however, it deletes a reference to a prayer meeting, which makes it impossible to understand to whom the journal is referring when it says that "they united in prayer, for the preservation of President Brigham Young and his Council" (244).

As in the case of "Journal 2," the Kimball journal is owned by the LDS Church, which has not given permission for its publication. Smith may have felt justified in publishing it because an
“underground” copy has been circulating for a few years. In 1983, Modern Microfilm printed a photographic reproduction, apparently taken from a microfilm that had been spirited away from the LDS Church Archives without permission. Apparently Smith worked from this “photographic copy” in making his transcription.

“Journal 4: Pioneer Trek West, 1846–1847,” is an abridgement of Clayton’s well-known pioneer journal, published by his family in 1921 and republished at least twice since then and readily available. The original manuscript is in the Clayton collection in the Church Archives. Some differences exist between the text as published by Smith and that published by the family, but they are neither extensive nor serious. In a few instances, Smith corrects some errors in the original publication. In his abridgement, however, he deleted numerous daily entries and condensed many more, resulting in the elimination of close to 50 percent of the original text. On the other hand, Smith provides a few entries at the end that, for some unknown reason, the family did not include in the 1921 publication.

“Journal 5: Visit to Utah Settlements, 1852” is the first of two documents in this collection that have not been published in some form elsewhere. It is short but interesting. Because of its brevity, Smith has not abridged it at all. Unfortunately, he only briefly explains the significance of the expedition covered by this journal. This was the occasion of Brigham Young’s second annual visit to the settlements in southern Utah, but the group’s mission also included “exploring the country, ascertaining the situation of the Indians, making roads, building bridges, killing snakes, preaching the gospel, and doing and performing all other acts and things needed to be done, as they may be led by the Good Spirit.” Clayton was assigned to go along as the official scribe. The expedition traveled over 300 miles southward, visiting all the Mormon settlements between Salt Lake City and Parowan. The journal, which begins on April 21, comments on the Native Americans the group encountered, gives Clayton’s impressions of some of the communities themselves, and provides several other interesting insights. The original manuscript is owned by the LDS Church.

“Journal 6: Polygamy Mission to England, 1852–1853,” also in the Clayton collection and owned by the Church, is the other document that has not been published previously. Clayton was one of
nearly a hundred missionaries sent out immediately after the special conference in August 1852, in which Orson Pratt made the first public announcement of the doctrine of plural marriage. These new missionaries were not just to preach the gospel as usual, but also to make the new doctrine known to the world. Clayton’s journal tells of the trip eastward across the plains; the many doctrinal discussions held around the campfire; his disappointment when, in St. Louis, he saw the doctrine of plural marriage roundly rejected by some of the Saints as well as other people; and his missionary work for the short time he was in England. Misunderstanding and some personal conflicts led to his temporary suspension as a missionary, though he was soon reinstated after an investigation by the mission president. The facts are incomplete in the diary, but on February 4, 1853, Clayton wrote a letter to Thomas Bullock explaining them in detail. The letter is in the Bullock papers in the Church Archives; unfortunately, Smith did not see fit to either reproduce or summarize it in a footnote.6

Since this journal is brief, Smith did not extensively abridge it. Nevertheless, several ellipses in the text tend to diminish the value of the publication. The entry for Saturday, September 25, 1852, for example, is gone, yet it reveals much about Clayton’s faith. It would have taken only a few more pages to reproduce the journal completely.

Smith provides three worthwhile appendixes. The source used for the first, “Extracts from William Clayton’s [Private] Book,” is a handwritten manuscript located in the papers of L. John Nuttall at Brigham Young University. Nuttall’s source was apparently a private journal kept by Clayton in which he recorded excerpts from several sermons of Joseph Smith. The extracts are interesting, but they say nothing specific about Clayton. Moreover, whether Clayton actually heard these sermons or whether he copied them from someone else’s transcription is unclear. One short entry, titled “A key by Joseph Smith Dec 1840,” deals with the “key” by which someone may determine whether a messenger is a “spirit from God” or from the devil.7 On February 9, 1843, Clayton was with the Prophet in Nauvoo when he repeated the same instructions, as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 129:4–9. That passage is actually
a word-for-word duplication (except for one minor difference) of Clayton's Nauvoo journal entry for that date. This entry was the source for the official transcription when it was prepared for the Doctrine and Covenants. The editor of An Intimate Chronicle could not have known this, since he had access only to the sketchy, highly selected excerpts from the Nauvoo journal.

The second appendix, "An Interesting Journal," is a historical essay, penned by William Clayton, on the building of the Nauvoo Temple. The original handwritten manuscript is in the Nauvoo collection in the Church Archives, but Smith's source was the Juvenile Instructor, which published the essay serially in 1886. The editors of the Instructor made numerous grammatical and punctuation changes to the original, shortened some sentences, and reconstructed others. The changes are not serious in terms of historical understanding, but some scholars would have preferred a faithful reproduction of Clayton's original account. The most disappointing thing about the Instructor version is that it does not reproduce the entire original. It stops on page 85 of a 100-page manuscript. Even though the original does not tell the story of the Nauvoo temple through its completion, it would be nice to have the full document published.

The last appendix is William Clayton's account of how he was introduced to the doctrine and practice of plural marriage and his recording of the revelation (Doctrine and Covenants 132) as it was dictated by Joseph Smith. George Smith's source is a version published by Andrew Jenson in 1887. The original handwritten manuscript is in the Clayton papers in the Church Archives. There are minor differences in terms of punctuation, but for all practical purposes both published versions are true to the original.

An Intimate Chronicle brings together, mostly in abridged fashion and often relying on secondhand sources, several documents produced by William Clayton. Most of the collection has been published elsewhere, but having it available in one volume, even though the abridgement sometimes leaves misleading impressions, provides students of Mormon history with a modest tool for studying some aspects of Clayton and his times. But it must be used with caution.
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NOTES


3In another misleading statement, Smith says that the journals contain Joseph Smith’s “translation” of ancient characters from the Kinderhook plates (xxiv). This is inaccurate. Clayton simply wrote that he had seen the plates and claimed that Joseph Smith had translated a portion of them and had described their content and author. This report appears to be based on hearsay, and no translation was ever given. See Stanley B. Kimball, “Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to Be a Nineteenth-Century Hoax,” *Ensign* 11 (August 1981): 66–74.

4Interestingly enough, Smith does not include this entry for December 10 in Clayton’s Nauvoo journal although it is among the Ehat “excerpts.”

5Andrew Jenson, *Journal History of the Church*, April 22, 1852, LDS Church Archives.

6The reader who is interested in what Clayton had to say should try to see it in the Bullock collection or see the discussion in Allen, *Trials of Discipleship*, 290–92.

7The key is that if the spirit is from God he will not offer you his hand, but if from the devil he will “either shrink from you or offer his hand, which if he does you will feel nothing, but be deceived” (514). Significantly, the same idea is recorded in Wilford Woodruff’s journal under the date June 27, 1839. It was among the instructions Joseph Smith gave to the Twelve before they left on their mission to the British Isles. It is also noted in Willard Richards’s “Pocket Companion,” a notebook that contains many of those instructions. Since Richards was in England when they were given in June 1839, it is apparent that he got his information from notes shared with him by the Apostles when they arrived in 1840. George Smith suggests that Clayton heard the idea from Joseph in Nauvoo in an otherwise unknown December 1840 sermon (514). Others have assumed that Clayton got his note either from Richards or Woodruff and recorded it in his book during the month of December. It is possible that the Prophet spoke on the subject on several occasions.