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## The Historians Corner

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## The Historians Corner

Edited by James B. Allen

*BYU Studies* hopes publishing a variety of personal, firsthand documents can help the history of the Latter-day Saints more easily “come alive” for its readers. It is not just the quaint spelling, grammar, and punctuation of a century gone by that does it, though these things properly reproduced are certainly necessary to a feeling for the times. More important are the hopes, frustrations, and testimonies of the Saints involved—their deepest feelings and most interesting experiences as only they could relate them. No amount of polished retelling can ever capture the genuine experience as it was recorded by the people themselves. In reading their accounts, we seem to draw closer to them and, in a symbolic but important way, become their historic friends.

Two of the four documents presented in this issue provide such an opportunity. The first, a letter, helps us experience firsthand the trials, testimony, and excitement of a group of emigrant British Saints on a trans-Atlantic voyage in 1840. The second, a journal account, presents a personal associate’s impressions of Joseph Smith during the last years of his life.

The third document presents a different perspective: that of a non-Mormon minister in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1836. Here we see many of the common attitudes of the citizens of Ohio who were deeply disturbed by the growth of the Church in their communities. Many of the accusations were distorted, others were completely inaccurate, but knowing them is essential to our historical understanding for they portray the attitudes through which anti-Mormons perceived the Church. Also important to the student of Mormon thought, this article by Reverend Truman Coe gives us an important new insight into LDS doctrine known in the 1830s. It has been generally assumed among modern historians that the Mormon concept of God was not fully developed at least until the 1840s. This document, however, demonstrates that at least as early 1836 other people perceived that Mormons believed in a God who was a “material being, composed of body and parts.” Few, if any, Mormon documents from this

period are as explicit in their descriptions of God the Father, and this non-Mormon document provides significant confirming evidence of what the Mormons were actually teaching.

A fourth contribution is a short note on a little-known kind of missionary calling—genealogy missionaries. Before the Church had professional genealogists compiling and collecting records in Salt Lake City, many members were set apart as genealogy missionaries to go find the records and bring back the information. This movement eventually led to the organization of the Genealogical Society.