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The Man Behind the Discourse: A Biography of King Follett

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The Man Behind the Discourse: A Biography of King Follett, by Joann Follett Mortensen (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

Joann Mortensen, a third great-granddaughter of King and Louisa Follett, has long been involved in documenting the lives of her ancestors. Her book, *The Man Behind the Discourse*, is the first published biography of King Follett, the man whose funeral sermon became known as one of the Prophet Joseph Smith's greatest discourses.

The book begins with King Follett's ancestry and early life, then follows the Follett family through their conversion in Ohio and their experiences in Missouri and Illinois. Mortensen offers not only information and stories that she has collected concerning Follett and his family but also images of important documents and photographs of significant places that enrich her explanation of Follett's life. Following the chapters discussing Follett's death and the sermon that made his name famous in the Church, Mortensen closes with a brief summary of the lives of Follett's wife and children after his death.

Mortensen's work, though indeed a thorough biography of King Follett, goes beyond the scope of his life to establish the everyday way of life of the

early converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In cases where Follett's location has been confirmed but no record of his activities remains, Mortensen explores journals and reports left by Follett's friends and neighbors—those whose lives likely reflected Follett's own. With these added insights, Mortensen depicts the lives of many of the "ordinary individuals" who made up the bulk of the Church's membership and whose "lives only occasionally intercepted leaders or events that gave them brief mentions in the official record" (x).

Mortensen has structured the book to be accessible to a wide audience. For those less familiar with the Church, a short, simple introduction to the beliefs of the Saints stands at the beginning of the book, and a "brief overview of Joseph Smith's life and prophetic mission" (59) provides context for the conversion of King Follett and his family. Readers interested in more information about the events and people in the text will appreciate the copious notes accompanying each chapter. For anyone interested in learning about King Follett's life—or the lives of the early Saints in general—*The Man Behind the Discourse* is a thorough, well-written, and readable resource.

—Emily H. Bates